

# **Worcestershire's Care Leaver Strategy**

**2017 - 2019**

*'Start earlier, stay longer and join up'*

*(Worcestershire Care Leaver 2016)*

## **1. Purpose of this Strategy**

*Care is what we receive from our family and friends. Sometimes, we can forget that it can be as simple as having supportive and healthy relationships with people who care about us. As corporate parents we try to replicate that relationship as closely as possible, so that care leavers get the same support that many of their peers get as they begin adulthood.*

Eleanor Schooling, Ofsted National Director of Social Care, December 2016

This Strategy is a whole system joined up approach to supporting our Care Leavers. It provides a framework for the County Council, District Councils, Elected Members, Officers and Partners to fulfil our duties and responsibilities as Corporate Parents for Care Leavers. It sets out what must be done by whom, to ensure that our care leavers receive the support, help and guidance they may need to live independently and to be able to support themselves.

This strategy has been developed with our care leavers.

## **2. Who are our Care Leavers?**

*Children looked after are among the most vulnerable children in our community. They are unable to live at home with their immediate family, for any number of reasons... This may be through a voluntary agreement with the child's parents or through a court order. Whatever their journey into care looks like, most children looked after will have experienced some form of neglect, harm or emotional distress in their lives before becoming looked after.*

*Outcomes for children and young people who are in, or have left care, remain stubbornly worse than for other children and is something for which we must take collective responsibility. They do not do as well at school, are less likely to go on to higher education, more likely to be not in education, employment or training (NEET) and are over-represented in youth offending institutions. There is also a long term impact when children looked after become parents themselves.*

Catherine Driscoll, DCS, Briefing Note for County Councillors, January 2017

Care leavers are young people who were previously looked after (The Children (Care Leavers) Act 2000). To become a care leaver the young person must be:

- *Eligible:* aged 16-17 and still in care and has been 'looked after' for a total of 13 weeks from the age of 14 up to and after their 16th birthday;

- *Relevant*: aged 16 and 17 and has left care, but was looked after for at least 13 weeks from the age of 14 and looked after at some point while they were 16 or 17;
- *Former Relevant*: aged between 18 and 21 (and up to 25 if in further or higher education) who were eligible and/or relevant.

Care Leavers can also be classified as '*qualifying*' care leaver. This category applies to young people who:

- Left care after 1st October 2001, after they had turned 16, but who are not 'eligible' or 'relevant' because they did not fulfil the 13 week criteria.
- Were accommodated, but in residential education, health or mental health provision, private fostering or Special Guardianship.

### **3. The picture nationally and locally**

Nationally:

- Around a 25% of those homeless, living on the streets have a background in care
- The average age to leave home is 22 (1 in 10 still live at home at 30), but 33% of young people aged 16 or over that left care in 2013-14 did so before their 18th birthday
- 7% of care leavers were in higher education in 2015/16 compared with around one-third of all 19-year-olds
- 49% of young men under the age of 21 who had come into contact with the criminal justice system had a care experience
- in 2014, 22% of female care leavers became teenage parents
- in 2012, it was reported that looked-after children and care leavers were between four and five times more likely to self-harm in adulthood
- 63.1% (77/122) of Care Leaver Services inspected by Ofsted were judged as Inadequate or Requiring Improvement

Locally there are at any one time about 315 Care Leavers. Of these:

- 52% are in Education, Employment or Training
  - 20% are in Employment
  - 2.8% on an Apprenticeship
  - 22.3% in College/Training
  - 5.4% at University
- 77% in 'suitable' accommodation
- 16.9% are parents, and of these half have their children living with them
- We have lost contact with 4 (1.2%) of our care leavers
- 8.6% of our young people do not want a care leaver service and are non-engagers

*Worcestershire Figures October 2016*

#### **4. What are our Care Leavers telling us?**

Our own care leavers are clear what makes the difference for them:

- *'Start earlier, stay longer and join up'*: Making plans as early as possible, provide help and support for as long as is needed, making sure services and support are joined up, and young people get the specialist help they need when they need it.
- *Relationships are key*: Having a Personal Advisor who knows them, who they can trust, and who is there when they are needed.
- *Avoiding the 'cliff edge'* that can occur at 18 and at 21
- Having *access to good quality information* and knowing where to go for help.
- *Everyone has a role in preparing young people for independence*: making sure carers know what to do to help young people to prepare for leaving care
- *Better use of mentors*: knowing there are people who can help with practical problems and can provide additional support
- *Being better prepared*: more Educational Support, better training such as ASDAN Personal Finance training
- *Mental Health support* is important, especially when over 18. Don't stop asking how you feel just because you're over 18.

*Speak Out Consultations on 8 December 2016 and 16 February 2017*

#### **5. What is corporate parenting?**

When a child becomes looked after by Worcestershire County Council for whatever reason, the tasks that would normally be the responsibility of their parents become the responsibility of everyone at the county council and partners.

Worcestershire County Council and all 6 District Councils share Corporate Parenting responsibility for all looked after children and care leavers.

*This means that we have a legal and moral responsibility to improve the lives of all of those we look after and who leave our care. Just as we would with our own children, we must prioritise their needs and create the right conditions for them to thrive and have happy and fulfilling lives. This is a priority across the whole council and not just for those working in children's services.*

Catherine Driscoll, DCS, Briefing Note for County Councillors, January 2017

Being a good corporate parent means:

- Seeking the same outcomes any good parent would want for their own child
- Making their needs a priority and acting appropriately with clarity
- Accepting responsibility for all children in the Council's Care
- Listening to the views of children and young people and taking account of them
- Giving young people the support they need as they move into adulthood
- Working with partners to provide joined up and seamless services

## 6. Our Promise to our Care Leavers

Working with our care leavers we have developed a pledge that is our contract with our young people. This Pledge was launched in October 2016:

1. *I will provide different ways for you to get in touch with me and endeavour to get back to you as soon as possible. I will try to be flexible with when we meet and ensure that the time is suitable for you.*
2. *I will tell you what you need to know, straight as adults. I will try to make sure we are both on the same level.*
3. *I will work with you to involve you in decisions and not make them for you, and provide the necessary information to help you make these decisions.*
4. *I will always try to be aware of your individual situation*
5. *I will have a working knowledge of relevant topics for you and will be honest about whether I know something or not, but do my best to find out or point you in the right direction.*

## 7. Our Vision

We want every Care Leaver to be happy, healthy and safe and to achieve their full potential. By working with our care leavers we will give them the opportunities to develop the necessary life-skills, confidence and experience they need to enable them to thrive.

We want to ensure our care leavers have the same level of help and support we provide to our own children. The question we therefore need to keep asking ourselves is:

***“Would this be good enough for my own child?”***

We want to provide our care leavers with a good service, and we know from Ofsted that the elements of a *good* service are:

<b><i>What Ofsted says is a good service</i></b>	<b><i>How we are going to do this</i></b>
<i>Building trusting relationships by co-working with social workers</i>	<i>We will work with all eligible young people from the age of 16 and allocate a personal adviser at 16½ and ensure they have a PEP from 14. We will ensure that personal advisors, social workers, education, careers, schools, housing, DWP and other partners all work together to effectively support care leavers</i>
<i>Parents help their children to plan their future and care leavers need the same. This is why pathway planning is so important from as early as possible as it provides a</i>	<i>We are introducing a Practice Lead role who will ensure that all eligible young people have a pathway plan by the time they are 16, and that this enables us to make sure a</i>

<i>focus and continual challenge</i>	<i>young person is as prepared as they can be for adult life.</i>
<i>Pathway plans that consider the key aspects of a young person's life, such as their health, future job prospects, social support network and hobbies or passions, as well as financial planning.</i>	<i>We want all care leavers to have a realistic plan for how they are going to be helped to live independently. We have introduced a new Pathway Plan that covers all of the things a young person needs help with in order to live independently. This was developed with care leavers</i>
<i>Practical help such as filling in job or university applications, accessing benefits, opening a bank account or helping to sort out a leaking tap</i>	<i>We are increasing the number of personal advisors by over 60% so that they will have smaller caseloads and be able to spend more time with care leavers</i>
<i>Ensure that where it is what the young person wants, that they can remain with their foster carer under a 'Staying Put' arrangement, and that this is planned early, so that both care leavers and foster carers understand and can have input into how care continues beyond 18.</i>	<i>We already have some staying put arrangements in place but want to extend this to all young people in foster care. We will be talking to all of our foster carers to ensure that wherever possible all young people stay with their foster carers in a staying put arrangement until they are 21.</i>
<i>Develop 'Staying Close' arrangements for young people leaving residential care so they are able to maintain links with, and get support from, children's homes.</i>	<i>We will develop this once we have further details from the DfE</i>
<i>Ensuring that all young people has someone consistent who can fight their corner for them, whether this is their ex-foster carer, a personal adviser, a mentor or a youth worker</i>	<i>Having more personal advisors will mean that all care leavers will have their own PA at least to they reach 21 and in some instances up until they are 25</i>
<i>Effective corporate parenting means that planning and care leaver support is everyone's responsibility and services (e.g. the county council, housing services, the Department for work and Pensions, Health and Mental Health Services and Employers) work together so that care leavers receive a seamless and joined up service.</i>	<i>A Corporate Parenting Pledge will be developed. We will ensure that all foster carers, residential workers, social workers and other support workers within Worcestershire County Council and the 6 District Councils receive training about their corporate parenting responsibilities. This way young people will be confident that any professional they are in contact with will understand what it means to be a care leaver</i>

*Continued access to help and support, particularly mental health support, when a young person reaches 18.*

*The transition to adulthood can mean that services a young person receives can disappear once they reach 18. We want to avoid this 'cliff' by working with Adult Social Care, CAMHS and Adult Mental Health Services to ensure there are smoother transition routes for services*

## **8. What needs to be done?**

The Care Leavers Strategic Plan sets out 7 priorities (See the Care Leavers Strategic Plan for more details):

### **1. Corporate Parenting Responsibilities**

- We will produce a Care Leavers Contract that sets out what help and support a young people can expect when they reach 18. This Contract will be the Local Offer of services from the local authority and partners for care leavers
- The Corporate Parenting Board has a crucial role in overseeing the effectiveness of help and support for care leavers and for holding partners to account. They will oversee the effectiveness of the Care Leavers Action Plan and hold the county council and partners to account for their part in implementing this
- We will develop a Corporate Parenting Pledge that all partners will be asked to sign up to
- The Setting Up Home Grant increased to £2,000 in April 2017, enabling Worcestershire and its partners to sign up to the national Care Leavers Charter

### **2. Developing the Care Leavers Service**

- Currently Personal Advisors are allocated at 17.5 years. This is too late and results in very late planning and potentially poorer outcomes for some young people.
- Currently Personal Advisors have caseloads of 28, which is too high and these need to reduce
- The county council recognises that the service is under-resourced and is providing funding for up to 8 additional Personal Advisors to address this

### **3. Improving Pathway Planning**

- The transition to adulthood is a time of increased vulnerability, and too many care leavers are ill-prepared for this.
- Pathway planning needs to start earlier, be more comprehensive and identify what needs to be done, by whom to help a young person be ready for adult life.
- In consultation with young people, we are introducing a more grounded pathway plan process that is much clearer about what has to be done, by whom, with timescales, to prepare a young person for adulthood.

### **4. Ensuring all care leavers have suitable accommodation**

- Due to their particular vulnerabilities some care leavers are unable to maintain their own accommodation and this can lead them to become homeless or in B&B. We do

not place young people in B&B, but some young people end up being placed by housing providers in an emergency. We will work with the local housing providers to prevent this happening.

- We will develop Safe Base and Crash Pad facilities to avoid the need to use B&B
- Most young people do not leave home when they reach 18, and care leavers should be given the same opportunity if they want this. Therefore for many care leavers remaining with their previous foster carer until they are 21 is much the best plan. We will take a much more proactive approach to Staying Put, by speaking to foster carers much earlier and reviewing our current scheme.
- Many young people are supported into independence through the in-house independent living accommodation provided by the outreach service. Some care leavers are in externally provided accommodation. The in-house provision has a good track record of preparing young people for independence and is very cost effective. This however ends when the young person reaches 18, and for some young people this is too soon. We are extending our in-house provision of independent living for our more vulnerable care leavers and increasing the age range up to 19
- Supported Lodgings provision has been declining and has not been available for care leavers over the age of 18. The age range is being extended to 21
- The DfE has stated that they will be introducing Staying Close provision to enable young people to live near to the residential home they were previously in. We welcome this and intend to develop local staying close arrangements once the DfE announce more details

## **5. Health and Emotional Wellbeing**

- All young people need to have a comprehensive Health Assessments prior to leaving care and be given a Health Passport which provides them with information about their own health history and key contacts for help with any physical, sexual, general wellbeing and substance misuse
- We have re-introduced a 16+ and Transitions Nurse to provide additional health and wellbeing support to care leavers

## **6. Education, Employment or Training (EET)**

- Work needs to be done to increase the number of care leavers in education, employment and training. Too many care leavers do not sustain their post 16 learning and/or make a successful transition into employment. To address this we are putting together a proactive strategy for supporting those young people in care from 14 years old, which includes working with a range of partners to extend the provision of work experience opportunities, apprenticeships and training courses within the County
- Better information sharing between schools and post 16 learning providers will ensure that the right level of support is in place so that care leavers sustain and achieve in further education.
- Care leavers who leave their post 16 provision early need to be identified quickly and supported to re-engage in education, employment or training.

- Better partnership working across key agencies, education and training providers is needed to support care leavers; we are working with a range of partners to extend the provision of work experience opportunities, apprenticeships and training.
- The establishment of the Virtual College will also support this area of work.

## **7. Transitions**

- Some care leavers require additional support as adults and may be eligible for adult social care services. We are working with Adult Mental Health Services and Adult Social care to improve the pathways into their services and to ensure that care leavers have a smoother transition into adult services

March 2017