



Department
for Education

National Implementation Adviser for Care Leavers' second report: the decade of the care leaver

Foreword from Secretary of State

Many young people who leave care face a daunting transition to adulthood, without the security of a family to fall back on if times become tough. Never has this been more true than during the last 6 months, when care leavers have had to deal with the added challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic. As a society, it is incumbent on us to make sure that we don't let down some of our most vulnerable young people, who have already faced hurdles that few of us could imagine.



Ensuring care leavers receive the right support needs to be a joint effort, with both central and local government, as well as wider civil society, all playing their part. That is why the government has launched the care leaver covenant, to provide a way for any organisation to set out its offer to care leavers.

All government departments have signed the covenant and agreed to take part in the Civil Service care leaver internship scheme. Last year we offered internships to 160 care leavers across 25 government departments and their agencies. This year we are offering over 500 new internships and I want to continue to expand this scheme and replicate it in other large public sector employers such as the NHS. I have also set up a cross-government ministerial board to ensure each Department is playing its full role in helping care leavers to succeed.

Through the care leaver covenant delivery partner - Spectra First - we are also unlocking opportunities from businesses and wider public bodies, such as universities. So far, around 250 organisations have signed the covenant and about half of them have developed and published their bespoke offer to care leavers on the 'mycovenant' website.

While it is important to maximise the role that central government and wider civil society can play in supporting care leavers, local authorities are care leavers' primary corporate parents, co-ordinating the day-to-day support that care leavers need in order to thrive.

Driving up the quality of support that local authorities provide is, therefore, critical. With that in mind, in September 2017 we appointed Mark Riddell MBE to help local authorities to implement the new duties introduced through the Children and Social Work Act; and to secure senior managers' buy in to improve their local offer. Mark has visited over 60 local authorities in England since he took up post and this, his second report, provides examples of good practice from across the sector.

The examples included in this report show how individual local authorities are going the extra mile to improve their local offer, responding to the issues that young people have said are important to them. It also includes examples of how local authorities have adapted to the unique challenges the COVID-19 pandemic presented this year, whilst prioritising the safety and wellbeing of their care leavers. I encourage you to read Mark's report and consider whether the examples in it are initiatives that you could replicate in your own local area.

Improving care leavers' outcomes is one of my key priorities and I am sure that you share that ambition. I hope the examples contained in the report inspire you to deliver the very best support that you can – using the question 'Would it be good enough for my child?' to guide your decision-making.

Gavin Williamson
Secretary of State for Education

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Reflections from the National Implementation Adviser for Care Leavers



I am pleased to be publishing my second report, albeit at a time of unprecedented difficulty for all of us but especially for care leavers. I have titled this year's report 'The decade of the care leaver' as I want to set an ambition that over the next 10 years both central and local government continue to prioritise the needs of care leavers and achieve a step change in care leavers' outcomes. During my visits to local authorities prior to lockdown, I saw amazing examples of local authorities going the extra mile for the young people they support, but this passion and energy needs to be embedded across the whole of the local authority, in every government department and across public sector bodies such as FE colleges and universities. And through the care leaver covenant, we also need to see how we can maximise the contribution that the voluntary and private sectors can make.

In the first section of the report, I have highlighted the progress that has been made with the implementation of the care leaver strategy - Keep on Caring - since it was published in 2016.

In section two, I pay particular attention to implementation of the duties introduced through the Children and Social Work Act, including:

- how local authorities have embedded the Corporate Parenting Duties across all of their services;
- how they have used consultations with care leavers to develop an improved 'local offer', which draws in support from key partner agencies; and
- how local authorities have got to grips with the new requirement to offer Personal Adviser support to age 25 for those care leavers who want it.

In section three, I have included my view on what a 'good' local offer looks like, with examples from local authorities who have gone over and above the statutory offer. Many of these examples have come from local authorities who have secured an improved Ofsted judgement in their most recent inspection report. Whilst it is not the focus of the report, I have included some examples of how local authorities have dynamically adapted to address the unique challenges the COVID-19 pandemic presented for care leavers.

In the final section, I set out my ambitions for the next year and my commitment to working with local authorities to make these ambitions a reality: I intend to find ways to work more closely with key partner agencies at local level, such as health,

jobcentre plus, housing, adult services, business and the HE sector to ensure that care leavers have the best local offer.

During the visits I conducted last year, it was heartening to see how positively local authorities have responded to the feedback and recommendations I put forward to improve their local offer to care leavers following my two day visits. I have seen some excellent examples of local authorities who are improving their local offer to care leavers, which I have pulled together in this report.

The report celebrates what has worked well and shows the difference local authorities have been making to the lives of care leavers. However, there is still a long way to go before every care leaver receives the level of support that we would consider good enough for our own children. I have set out my thoughts on the key challenges ahead at the end of the report.

Progress on implementing Keep on Caring

Improving the quality of support that care leavers receive from their local authority

A key aspect of the Care Leaver Strategy¹ was a set of new duties on local authorities to strengthen the support that care leavers receive, including:

- a set of corporate parenting principles to guide how local authorities deliver their services to children in care and care leavers;
- a new duty to consult on and publish their local offer to care leavers; and
- the offer of support from a Personal Adviser to all care leavers to age 25.

Supporting local authorities to deliver these new duties has been the key focus of my work and I have provided an assessment of progress and examples of best practice on these new duties in sections two and three of the report. However, the Care Leaver Strategy also provided extra funding to individual local authorities to:

- strengthen the support they provide to particular groups of care leavers (through the Staying Close pilots and rough sleeping initiative); and
- give extra support to care leavers on specific aspects of their lives (such as the care leaver Social Impact Bonds (SIBs) – which give care leavers extra support to engage in education, employment or training).

Staying Close

To provide greater support and a more gradual transition to independence, the government is piloting Staying Close to replicate the benefits available to young people who Stay Put, for those care leavers leaving residential care.

Staying Close represents a new offer for this group of care leavers, helping them to avoid a cliff-edge of support when they leave their children's home. At its core, Staying Close provides for continuity of the trusted relationship between the young person and the members of staff who were involved in their care before they left the children's home, along with an offer of suitable and sustainable accommodation.

The Staying Close pilots are very exciting and I have heard and seen a good mix of different approaches. At a recent Staying Close learning event I attended, I met staff and young people from across the pilots who were experiencing a more supported

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keep-on-caring-supporting-young-people-from-care-to-independence>

transition, with a focus not just on moving into a new property, but on supporting them on all the other aspects of their lives.

There has been positive feedback from the young people involved in these pilots. Examples include: reduced isolation and loneliness, stability around mental health issues, more secure housing and increased engagement in employment; as well as softer outcomes, such as a young person getting up on time and having a shower, engaging with professionals for the first time, or reducing their drug and alcohol intake.

I was therefore delighted to hear in October 2019 that the Department confirmed that funding will be available in 2020/21 to continue the pilots; and that the government has reiterated its commitment to roll out Staying Close nationally.

Care Leaver Social Impact Bonds (SIBs)

The Department is providing over £5 million to test the use of SIBs as a way of helping care leavers into education, employment or training (EET). Each pilot works with a cohort of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) or at risk of being NEET. All care leavers are allocated a job coach who provides intensive support to help the young person to overcome the barriers that are preventing them getting into education or employment. Individual projects also have unique features – for example, the Sheffield SIB provides extra support on speech and language skills.

I attended the launch of the 3 SIBs in the Houses of Parliament in January 2019 and I was overwhelmed by the positivity among the participating local authorities, their partners and some of the young people who helped to co-design the projects. They are all now operational and early findings look positive. I look forward to seeing the formal evaluation findings when they are published.

Rough Sleeping

Although it wasn't part of the Keep on Caring strategy, all government departments were asked to support the government's efforts to eradicate rough sleeping. The Department's contribution included providing extra funding to local authorities to support intensive work with care leavers who are at highest risk of homelessness and rough sleeping. The Department has also employed specialist advisers to provide consultancy support to local authorities on how to develop accommodation pathways for care leavers, which ensure that care leavers can secure and sustain suitable accommodation when they leave care.

Improving the wider offer to care leavers from central government, other public bodies and the voluntary and community sector

One of the key messages I get from my visits to local areas is that local authorities cannot do it all on their own. They need:

- wider government policies to be designed and implemented in a way that recognise the unique challenges that care leavers face;
- other public bodies such as the NHS, the Police and educational institutions to recognise care leavers' vulnerabilities and provide the extra support that they need; and
- businesses to give care leavers a chance to get on the employment ladder so that they can show what they have to offer.

The Care Leaver Covenant

The Care Leaver Covenant was launched during Care Leavers' Week in 2018.² On that day, all government departments published their offers to care leavers and agreed to participate in the Civil Service Care Leaver Internship Scheme. This provides 12-month paid internships across government, with the possibility of posts being made permanent at the end of the placement. Nearly 250 care leavers have been offered posts on the scheme so far and DfE is currently interviewing applicants for this year's scheme, which is offering over 500 placements across Government.

As well as participating in the internship scheme, many departments also set out wider offers to care leavers. For example, the Department for Work and Pensions committed to appoint Single Points of Contact (SPOCs) in every Jobcentre, who will help care leavers to access the support they need. The Department for Work and Pensions has also amended its guidance on Sanctions to say that Jobcentre Plus staff should always speak to the young person's Personal Adviser before applying a sanction.

The Department for Education and Spectra First (the government's covenant delivery partner) have had a strong focus on working with the Higher Education (HE) sector to improve the support that care leaver's receive when they go to university. In March 2019, the Department published a set of principles to guide HE institutions on improving care leavers' access and participation in HE³.

The Principles encourage universities to work with Spectra First to develop their offer to care leavers and sign the Care Leaver Covenant. Over 30 HE providers have

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/care-leaver-covenant--2>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/principles-to-guide-he-providers-on-improving-care-leavers-access-and-participation-in-he/principles-to-guide-higher-education-providers-on-improving-care-leavers-access-and-participation-in-he>

already signed the Covenant and published their offers on their website⁴. The packages of support for care leavers offered by HE providers include dedicated pastoral support, care leaver bursaries, all year round accommodation and bespoke learning support.

Spectra has also worked with businesses to develop offers for care leavers. In particular, they have encouraged businesses to provide employment related opportunities such as work experience, apprenticeships and internships. Signatories of the Covenant include major employers such as SKY, Amazon, Heathrow Airport, Accor, Metro Bank and the London Fire Service, which is offering a two-day bespoke course to help care leavers develop general life and employability skills.

Organisations can offer more than jobs to care leavers and Spectra has also secured offers that support other aspects of care leavers' lives, such as support with managing their money or help to move into their new home.

Overall, around 250 organisations have signed a 'statement of intent' and, of these, around 130 have published their offers on Spectra's website.

The importance of effective partnership working – at both local and national levels – cannot be understated. That is why I'm delighted that the Secretary of State for Education has established a cross-government Ministerial Group, jointly chaired by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, to consider how collectively Government can improve the support it provides for care leavers and ensure that policies recognise their unique circumstances.

There is clearly a commitment across local authorities, government and wider civil society to improve care leavers' outcomes. However, much more needs to be done to give care leavers the support they need to reach their full potential. The next sections of my report focus on examples of positive practice that can be replicated elsewhere and serve to raise the bar overall.

⁴ <https://mycovenant.org.uk/featured-signatories/>

Key messages from local authority visits and good practice examples from across the sector

Corporate Parenting Boards

One of the most encouraging things I have seen during my visits is the way in which local authorities are responding to their new Corporate Parenting duties. In all of my visits, I get a real sense that the culture of traditional Corporate Parenting Boards is changing to an approach which is ‘less Corporate and more Parenting’. This has also helped local authorities to engage with key partner agencies and stakeholders, especially at a leadership and strategic level. Again, in this report I have provided some examples of what this means in practice for local authorities.

Having a strong Corporate Parenting ethos is the bedrock for good services for children in care and care leavers. Strong leadership from the Chief Executive and the Leader of the Council should go hand in hand with ensuring that the right people are on the Corporate Parenting Board.

Most local authorities I have visited have a traditional Corporate Parenting Board. These Boards have elected members, senior officers and children in care councils who come together to discuss particular themes affecting children in care and care leavers and to review whether statutory duties are being delivered and review their local data. An alternative approach I have been advising local authorities to adopt is the ‘Champion’ model, where elected members champion a particular area, such as fostering, placements/accommodation/housing, EET, transitions or health. They also meet operational staff, children in care and care leavers to hear their stories and use them to fully understand their journey and to inform policy so that it fully meets the needs of care leavers.

Membership of the Board and key partner agencies

With the new statutory corporate parenting duties in place, it is an ideal opportunity to ask *‘have we got the right people in the room?’*. My visits to local authorities and discussions with Board members indicate that in-house and key partner agencies are often not represented on Corporate Parenting Boards, such as adult services, mental health and probation. This inhibits multi-agency responses to the challenges children in care and care leavers face and often promotes a policy response to them that we would not accept for our own children. For example, this could be placing children hundreds of miles away from home or making care leavers ‘intentionally homeless’ or imposing benefit sanctions of up to 3 years. My recommendation to one local authority I visited summarises the approach I am recommending:

'The membership of the Board should be extended to all partners i.e. LAC, CAMHS, the Department for Work and Pensions, Health, Probation, Adult Social Care, Housing, Regeneration, Leisure Services, Police etc, so there is a consistent offer/approach across the whole local authority and to ensure that any policy decisions do not place children in care or care leavers at additional risk. The local authority should adopt protocols and an agreed escalation process at senior management level in each agency that focusses on vulnerabilities/needs/risk once the statutory processes have been undertaken i.e. if a benefit sanction is to be imposed that the risks are mitigated and continued support is offered by both leaving care and jobcentre plus'.

The local offer for Care Leavers

In December 2018, it became a legal duty for all local authorities to have in place a local offer that was co-produced with care leavers. In most - but not all - local authorities I have visited, there is clear evidence that this has been undertaken, with each part of the local authority and their key partner agencies contributing to their offer to care leavers, which is then signed off by the CEO and Leader of the Council. Taking a whole council/key partner approach will strengthen the local offer and make it more likely that children in care and care leavers will make a successful transition to independence. Below I have set out two examples of feedback I have given to local authorities I have visited:

1. 'The local offer has been produced by the local authority but I was unsure if key partners had agreed their offer to care leavers as part of the local offer development. The example is the housing offer which is based on their statutory processes. This means that 'intentionality' is still applied to care leavers so as Corporate Parents you are making your own children homeless. Each partner agency should be asked to produce their offer to care leavers and for the test to be applied by CEO and the leader 'is this offer good enough for my child?'.

2. 'It is clear that the local offer has been developed, co-produced and published and is a good offer to care leavers. The CEO and Leader have overseen the offer and have signed it off. The offer from housing and health is very strong and their offer to care leavers has translated into a change in policy, with specialist workers now embedded in the leaving care service to support care leavers quickly with housing or health related issues'.

Extending support from a Personal Adviser to all care leavers to age 25

In most of the local authorities I have visited, they have taken a proactive approach to the new duty to extend support from a Personal Adviser to all care leavers to age 25. In these cases, they inform care leavers before they turn 21 years old about

these new duties and ask whether they would like the local authority to keep their case open. For the care leavers whose cases have been closed under the previous legislation when they reached 21, there has been a mixed approach to how that cohort are reached and tracked. Many have written to all of their care leavers via recorded delivery informing them that ongoing support is available if needed.

I have seen some really good examples where local authorities have used a number of flexible approaches for keeping in touch with care leavers who don't necessarily need or want a full service from the Leaving Care team. Here is an example of a local authority that has kept all care leavers cases open post 21 years old:

'The new extended duties were discussed at the Corporate Parenting Board by all officers and it was agreed that all of our care leavers would be kept open unless they had specifically demanded the case be closed. This was agreed as we wanted to ensure that our care leavers could just pop in for a coffee or go for lunch without having to be re-referred. In all cases, we will ensure that the case is held by the same PA as long as this is agreed by the care leaver and in the best interest of both. Although we were initially concerned about the impact this would have on caseloads this has not proven so and a relationship with a care leaver does not necessarily mean it is labour intensive but is the right thing to do'.

Other good practice examples from across the sector

In this section, I have provided some good practice examples from local areas that cover health, EET, housing, Youth Offending Service and probation, a local offer providing a dedicated space for care leavers, a very strong cross-borough approach and a few other ones that are making a difference to local care leavers.

Middlesbrough: health offer

In 2014, Middlesbrough local authority identified that young people were getting "lost" in the transition between CAMHS and adult mental health services or did not meet the criteria for Adult Mental Health provision. Care leavers also reported that they still had unresolved emotional issues and required further therapeutic interventions.

Following a meeting with the local Child Adolescent Mental Health Service, it was agreed that Middlesbrough would advertise for a Therapeutic Practitioner and appoint the worker to be based within the Leaving Care Service. It was agreed the worker would work with care leavers up to 25 years old.

The purpose and functions of the Therapeutic Practitioner post included:

- promoting effective links between Pathways Leaving Care Service, CAMHS and Adult Services
- increasing support for looked after children and care leavers regarding their emotional wellbeing and mental health
- providing a flexible and immediate response to young people in crisis
- providing guidance to Social Workers and Personal Advisers to ensure they are appropriately supporting young people, taking into consideration their early life trauma and attachment issues
- delivering Tier 2 therapeutic interventions to support young people to better understand their emotional wellbeing and develop coping strategies
- working with young people aged from 16 to 25 open to the Pathways Leaving Care Service
- delivering Attachment Training to Residential Staff, Foster Carers and Supported Lodgings Providers
- monitoring SDQ completion scores to ensure young people receive appropriate support in relation to their emotional well-being
- delivering Kickstart group, which consists of four sessions covering any topics that the young people requested including obsessive-compulsive disorder and psychosis
- delivering Fresh Start, which offers taster sessions to care leavers with the aim of promoting emotional health and well-being.

Below are some of the comments made by young people on the outcomes:

- “I have stopped self-harming and reduced my anger”
- “It’s helped to know there are people who feel the same ...it’s great help for people to understand they’re not alone”
- “It made me feel like I am able to be around new people and understand how to be with people...I have learned about mental illnesses”
- “[I learned] how to deal with my anxiety”
- “I learned a lot and found it fun, could not be improved”.
- “I liked the ‘bucket’ [model for understanding stress and coping strategies]”
- “All of it has been useful to me cos I needed every part of it. I’ve changed how to control cutting my wrists. I more chuck things at my door instead”
- “She [therapeutic practitioner] has more experience with teenagers and I don’t get talked down to. She is more on my wavelength and has more of an understanding and more experience with life”
- “My moods have changed knowing I can speak to someone I can trust”
- “Will make me more prepared for work”

The Therapeutic Practitioner post is funded by Middlesbrough Council Children’s Services, however they remain a Tees, Esk and Wear Valley NHS Trust employee. The Therapeutic Practitioner costs Middlesbrough Council Children’s Services £40,000 per annum.

Suffolk: education, employment and training

Suffolk County Council arranged a Leaving Care Offer launch event in June 2018, in order to promote and inspire members of the voluntary, private, and public sectors to develop opportunities for care leavers.

They welcomed in excess of 40 delegates to join care leavers to share their experiences in care and to promote the local offer, as well as provide baked goods they had made for the event.

Through the 'pledge' cards, attendees were encouraged to offer a pledge. Suffolk County Council was able to identify specific areas of skills and expertise that could be matched with the needs of care leavers. There have been numerous opportunities created as a direct result of the event, and the momentum behind it continues to grow with individuals now approaching the service to offer their support.

Following this, Suffolk created five ring-fenced apprenticeships for care leavers within Suffolk County Council and within the parks teams within Ipswich Borough Council; and rolling work placements have been developed with one of Britain's largest department stores.

Through the networking event, it was important to address the needs of care leavers that extend beyond work opportunities. Many are not yet ready for the world of work and so Suffolk looked at how they could address this. After consultation with young people they secured funding to provide outdoor educational pursuits and activities with two local companies. In total, 68 care experienced young people have benefited from bush craft and activity centre residentials which promote team building, self-esteem, improved mental health, and encourage risk-taking. These have provided Suffolk with valuable platforms to discuss EET with young people individually and the conversations continue upon their return.

South Tyneside: housing and extending the Shared Lives model to care leavers at 16 years

Shared Lives is a viable alternative for care experienced young people who may not want to access supported accommodation, or live independently. It provides an environment that supports young people with their practical and emotional needs and equips them with the necessary skills to move on to live more independently at a time that is right for the young person.

It enables young people to focus and concentrate on important aspects of their life, without the worries and additional pressures of managing a tenancy and allow for a more graduated transition to adulthood.

South Tyneside: housing and the four week free rent offer and Training Flats

When care leavers are offered a training flat or a tenancy, the local authority housing department covers the first four weeks of rent to ensure that there are no complications with rent payments and housing benefits.

The offer of a trainer flat provides an incremental step on the ladder prior to a young person taking responsibility for their own tenancy, and is available to all care leavers up to the age of 25. The infrastructure of a trainer flat provides the necessary support and safety nets without the potential risks of a young person having responsibility for their own tenancy at an earlier stage.

The provision of trainer flats helps develop the existing relationships between the Housing and the Leaving Care teams in the local authority providing more co-ordinated support for the young person, in order to significantly reduce the potential for tenancy breakdown.

As well as support from their Personal Adviser, residents receive wraparound support from Housing Support workers who are part of the Leaving Care Team and work from 8am until 11pm, Monday to Sunday inclusive. Trainer flats allow young people to develop their practical and emotional skills in order to live independently with the security of knowing that the trainer flat they are living in will be transferred to their name when they are ready and equipped.

Medway Council: YOS and Probation Joint Offer

Medway Council's Leaving Care service engages with local Probation and Youth Offending teams to improve support for care-experienced young people in custody in Medway. This work has led to the development of effective joint working protocols between the Council's Leaving Care, Probation and Youth Offending Teams. Each service has a contact lead which supports effective communication with partners. This enables support to the cohort of young people in prison and those soon to be released in a planned way.

The Leaving Care team and the Youth Offending team have dedicated members of staff who support young people through the transition period from the Youth Offending team to the Probation Service. This has enabled the Leaving Care team to monitor and maintain contact with all its care leavers in custody, coupled with collaboratively working with partners for their release into suitable accommodation.

Coventry: the local offer

There is an African proverb that says '*It takes a village to raise a child*'. In Coventry, the Council sees residents, businesses and service-providers as the villagers; and are asking each what they will do to give care leavers the life opportunities they deserve.

Developing its local offer was a key opportunity to ensure that changes were made to support care leavers and key partners were brought on board. Care leavers were involved at every step from being on the working group, to making sure other care leavers were involved and telling directors across the authority what was needed.

The result is a really strong local offer, which demonstrates the 'village' approach. Some great in-house examples of good practice include the paying of the National Living Wage to all care leavers doing apprenticeships within the City Council as well as jobs available at the end of successful completion. Coventry has launched a 'Go CV card' for all residents, but care leavers can use this to get free access for themselves and a friend to all sports facilities in the city. The aim is that this card will eventually lead to discounts in shops and transport as well.

The Council held a fantastic launch event aimed at engaging partners and businesses to see what they could do for care-experienced young people. The event was hosted by the Chief Executive and a massive range of attendees from Universities, Health and Police to Severn Trent, E.ON and Cadent.

Off the back of the event, Coventry has secured a range of commercial sponsorship for their annual care leaver awards, as well as built some amazing links with businesses. The Coventry and Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce now has the Through Care service as a strategic partner and opportunities have varied from free pizza for care leavers to careers weeks with priority for jobs at big employers.

Warwickshire: dedicated space for care leavers

Warwickshire County Council's Asylum and Leaving Care team recognises that moving from care to living independently is a big change and can be challenging for young people. To ensure those leaving care and others who have claimed asylum in the UK feel supported, drop-in centres in the north and south of the county have been set up.

The drop-ins offer practical, emotional and social support through a wide range of activities designed to help young people integrate, have a sense of belonging and break down barriers. The centres have areas for young people to relax, wash and clean their clothes and meeting rooms for them to talk to their workers about issues they may be facing or just catch-up with each other. Social events also take place

such as cultural celebrations and creative opportunities as well as workshops on topics such as relationships, education, skills and employment.

Prior to lockdown each Monday young people could come for breakfast, meet up and access clothes, toiletries, and household items from the pop up shop run by care leaver apprentices. Young people are also encouraged to learn to advocate for themselves through the Care Leavers' Forum, which runs alongside the Children in Care Council.

The council plans to extend the use of the drop-ins further and has commissioned Volunteer Matters to recruit and support mentors for young people. The Council is currently identifying ways it can work with the REES foundation in order to evaluate the model.

Gloucestershire County Council: free travel and e-card

Care leavers are able to access a travel card that allows them to have 100 free journeys in Gloucestershire (or further if there is good reason, such as for EET or family contact). Care leavers can apply online through the County Council's website as part of the assisted travel scheme: if they indicate they are a care leaver a card is issued after checks are completed. The most common request is for a bus card that allows travel anywhere in Gloucestershire, however, this can also be for train travel.

All care leavers are also offered an E-Wallet Card Account which gives them a debit card with their name on. The local authority can then instantaneously add funds to the card when needed. The cards are used to support setting up home purchases, emergency assistance, allowances and university bursaries. Care leavers can withdraw cash and use it to purchase goods in shops, online or by phone. Care leavers can only spend money that is in their account.

Somerset

Somerset has a clear working protocol with Jobcentre Plus where sanctions are no longer applied in most cases and, if one is appropriate, it is escalated to a senior officer in both agencies to discuss the risks and vulnerabilities if a sanction is imposed.

Wolverhampton

In Wolverhampton, the Council is piloting a SWIFT Card that gives care leavers free access to gym membership and transport. They have also introduced a Guaranteed Interview Scheme for care leavers when applying for any posts in the council 'family business'.

Herefordshire

In Herefordshire, the Council has five units of accommodation for care leavers that are controlled by the Leaving Care team which is responsible for matching the young person to the right sort of accommodation, offering floating support, agreeing the length of tenancy and determining when care leavers move on and where they move on to.

Liverpool: revenue and benefits offer and credit union

Liverpool City Council's Children's Services asked their Revenue and Benefits Service to help improve the offer to young people leaving care with all the expense of setting up and managing a home. This led to:

- Liverpool Citizens Support Scheme providing a package of furniture and essential domestic appliances to care leavers setting up home. They agreed that the young people could have a fast track process to ensure that items were provided without delay. This has allowed the young person's £2,000 setting up home allowance to go much further.
- The offer of a 100% Council Tax exemption to provide immediate financial assistance and help reduce the risk of debt.
- The offer of a comprehensive benefits check for any Care Leaver requiring this, from their Benefits Maximisation team.

Young people leaving care in Liverpool were made a priority group for Discretionary Housing Payments, where they suffered a shortfall in benefits. This was particularly helpful in assisting young people at age 22 when the housing element of their benefit reduced to the "shared accommodation rate."

Liverpool Children's Service wanted to encourage care leavers to avoid "bad debt" and instead develop a good credit history. The Mayoral Hardship Fund in Liverpool identified some money to be used to offer loans of up to £300 to care leavers from Riverside, a local Credit Union. Making use of a credit union helped some young people establish a good credit history and understand "responsible borrowing".

South Gloucestershire: setting up a charity for care leavers

South Gloucestershire organised a Christmas Day dinner for care leavers. The Head of Service and lead member attended and staff across the council assisted in organising the event, donating money and gifts, making Christmas stockings, providing transport and attending on Christmas Day. The council decided to ensure this happens every year for young people who have left care and want to celebrate together as a South Gloucestershire Family. They also wanted to widen its ambition by opening up opportunities for all young people who have experienced care.

A project team is in place to set up a charity to raise funds for this annual event and to fund a wider range of opportunities for care leavers. This is in its initial stages of setting out their aims and objectives and making the application to the Charity Commission. There is no lack of enthusiasm or volunteers for the project and to be on the Board of Trustees from members, operational staff and senior leaders.

Slough: clinical offer for care leavers

The role of the clinical team

Two clinicians are embedded within the Looked-after children's and Care Leaver's teams. The advantage of this is that clinicians will have had contact with young people while in care and this early relationship helps facilitate Care Leavers' engagement.

The role of the clinicians is to model and work with practitioners to implement systemic approaches and to assess emotional wellbeing/mental health issues. In the Care Leavers Service systemic work may include:

- reviewing the care leavers genogram and assessing where relationships can be re-established
- exploring the young person's ecosystem and ensuring a range of social support and activities
- reviewing the care leavers narrative of their reasons for being in care, helping to establish alternative, hopeful narratives that contribute to resilience
- enabling those working with care leavers to understand their relationship dynamics (interactions) and to make best use of every day relationships to address problem patterns.

Clinicians offer a tiered or 'stepped-care' approach of advice, including: impromptu and formal consultation, case discussion in team meetings, joint assessments with personal advisers and direct interventions.

Application of clinician role for Care Leavers

Clinicians are able to offer a responsive intervention, particularly where the care leaver is initially not willing to engage in formal services. For example:

- A young woman has been helped to address depression through a Behavioural Activation approach. The Residential care staff have engaged in assisting the young person to engage with the plan.
- A young person struggling with excessive anxiety and past trauma was linked with Adult Mental Health Services, and accompanied to see GP and advocating for an urgent referral.

- Clinicians (together with Care Leaver team) offer a drop-in service for emotional and mental health support.
- Facilitated transfer between CAMHS and Adult Mental Health, offering emotion regulation support in a transition period and also support for children and young people placed out of area.

Thus, where young people meet criteria for Talking Therapies, Secondary Mental Health Services or Substance Misuse services, they are helped to engage with these services.

What is in a 'good' local offer?

In this section, I want to showcase some of the other things that local authorities are either doing or considering as part of their local offer.

I have seen two approaches to the way in which local offers are presented. The first uses the headings set out in the Pathway Plan domains, whilst the second describes the offer across three age bands – an offer to 16 and 17 year olds, 18 to 20 year olds and 21 to 25 year olds. I tend to favour the age bands approach as each offer is slightly different.

I hope that local authorities will use the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Local Offer Toolkit as a way of benchmarking themselves against what other local authorities are offering and also use the list below that gives a flavour of the creativity I have seen in local offers, which can make a huge difference to the relationships with local authority workers and outcomes for care leavers:

- setting a target for EET of between 70% to 80%
- setting a ring-fenced amount of jobs/apprenticeships/internships for care leavers in the LA (the family business!) and paying National Living Wage
- employing a Care Leaver Ambassador to engage 'lesser heard' care leavers
- using care leavers' stories to inform the Corporate Parenting Board and members
- Independent Reviewing Officers reviewing Pathway Plans up to 25 years using a RAG approach
- Aspiration Audits undertaken and linked to a business event to match children in care and care leavers to local opportunities
- transitions starting in care planning at around 14 years
- engagement with Public health around a health offer to care leavers
- offers from each department in the council - 'the family business' such as internships, apprenticeships, work taster/shadow the boss and the setting of a ring-fenced target for care leaver apprenticeships
- the Pathway Plan to be the one referral document that is used to refer to housing, health, adult services and more, to reduce the amount of paperwork, referrals and duplication of information
- resources in the council being better utilised i.e. the greater use of council vans/direct works to assist care Leavers when moving instead of paying removal costs
- driving lessons and test paid for
- TV license for the first year paid for
- personalised budgets/crisis fund of £350 per year for care leaver to access
- birthday and Christmas Allowances up to 25 years

- National Living Wage for care leavers on apprenticeships within the council
- providing an enhanced HE bursary
- full Council Tax Exemption to care leavers in the authority and if they move out of authority, and for care leavers from other local authorities
- a Cookbook developed for care leavers to maximise spend on food
- generous Financial Policy that tops up benefits and offers incentives
- wifi paid for the first year in own tenancy
- home insurance in first year paid for
- Rent Guarantor Scheme
- Credit Union accounts for all care leavers
- corporate offers from Tesco, Asda, Sainsbury's and other retailers for white goods, starter packs for new tenancies

Collaboration at regional level

I want to highlight the work that I was involved in with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority and senior managers across the 10 local authorities - referred to as the GM10; and the Care Leaver Guarantee Offer. There are 12 Guarantees that the GM10, in consultation with care leavers, agreed to push forward, which I have listed below. The GM10 are hoping that most can be achieved over the next year or so. Some are already in place, such as the Council Tax Exemption across the 10 local authorities for any care leaver. I intend to share this model with the Regional Mayors and to explore establishing a similar set of guarantees in all regions across the country, so that when a care leaver moves across a local authority boundary they know exactly what they are going to get from that region.

The GM offer

1. GM Housing Project is seeking to review whether a National House Model can be adopted
2. GM Health & Social Care Partnership
3. considering the use of a 'Local Offer' app such as Focus.Gov App
4. no intentional homelessness and appropriate accommodation and support across the 10 local authorities
5. free prescriptions for all care leavers up to 25 years
6. priority pathways to mental health provision
7. Clinical Commissioning Groups to work with Personal Advisers to access health services
8. free travel across GM for Care Leavers up to 25 years – an offer to 21 years has been agreed with an ambition to raise it to 25 moving forward.
9. all care leavers to have access to a mentor should they want it

10. opportunities for all Care Leavers to become work-ready and an education, employment or training offer that meets needs
11. Council Tax Exemption to 25 years across GM – this has been achieved

All of the above will be overseen by the establishment of the Greater Manchester Care Leaver Trust Board, which offers a unique opportunity to positively change the lives of the circa 2,000 care leavers living in the 10 local authority areas. The GM Care Leaver Trust Board will ensure delivery of a collective Corporate Parenting Approach and manage the delivery of the GM Care Leavers' Covenant/Common Core Offer (guarantee) which will result in specific and measurable opportunities.

The 10 local authorities will also offer specific opportunities around employment and skills, housing and health support, plus improved cross-border collaboration, multi-agency working and sharing of best practice.

COVID-19 responses

Whilst this report was originally based on the visits I undertook prior to the COVID-19 Pandemic, I am also taking the opportunity to highlight examples of how LAs have responded to the additional challenges that COVID-19 has brought, based on the experiences of around 20 LAs that I have been speaking to on a weekly basis since my LA visits were paused.

Isolation and mental health:

Increased isolation and loneliness among care leavers has been one of the biggest difficulties LAs have faced over recent months. They have been working at pace to identify those most vulnerable at this time, including those who are in temporary accommodation, those who are pregnant or young parents, young people who have underlying health conditions or live outside the local area, and those who are being released from custody as well as anyone who may have limited wider support networks.

LAs have been maintaining contact with young people as much as possible, via phone, skype, facetime and, where necessary, undertaking visits. This has highlighted the importance of digital access for this cohort and the priority access care leavers have been given for governmental laptops and internet packages has gone some way in addressing this.

It has also been positive to see some local authorities have taken it upon themselves to extend technology hand-outs, providing phones and data packages to care leavers so that they can remain in contact with their Personal Advisers and wider support systems. Many authorities have planned digital events and activities to help combat isolation and sent out weekly updates with health advice and guidance for their young people. Looking to the future, continuing to incorporate digital access into care leaver offers could be a positive step in maintaining connections between care leavers and LA as we transition out of the pandemic.

This period has also served to highlight the importance of schemes, such as Staying Close, which offer Care Leavers additional personal support in addition to the support from their PA.

As a result of isolation and loneliness, many LAs are reporting that care leavers are contacting them due to poor mental health and that their needs have become more complex during the pandemic. Some LAs have been holding well-being sessions online and/or running virtual yoga sessions, or just giving young people opportunities to interact virtually online and share their experiences of lockdown. However, creating specialist pathways to mental health support, such as those in Greater Manchester and Slough's care leaver offer, may become increasingly necessary for care leavers as we exit out of this turbulent time.

Finance and practical support:

Access to basics such as food came out as a challenge for many care leavers, but in some LAs arrangements were made with local supermarkets that meant that Personal Advisers were allocated specific times to shop for care leavers and 'multi-buy' policies at supermarkets were relaxed. Bury, Oldham and Stockport provided care leavers who are young parents with nappies and baby food. Other LAs changed the way in which they paid maintenance allowances to care leavers aged 16 or 17 who do not qualify for benefits, for example providing allowances by bank transfer rather than in cash.

I have seen how the additional £20 a week introduced for universal credit claimants has made a significant difference to many care leavers who currently receive the lower under 25 rate. I hope going forward we can work together with LAs on options that might address the ongoing financial difficulties that care leavers faced prior to COVID-19, building on what has worked during the pandemic.

Accommodation:

Many LAs adapted quickly to the pandemic, to ensure young people did not have to move placements unless it was appropriate and in the young person's best interests to do so. This has included working with social and private landlords to try to extend tenancies where they had been due to come to an end; and keeping in close contact with their local housing providers so they know what services they are providing.

Rochdale and Trafford have continued their funding for Staying Put placements for those aged over 21 whose placement would have otherwise come to an end and Trafford has also sourced alternative accommodation for those who have been unable to remain in university accommodation.

At a national level, I have been heartened to see that care leavers were prioritised for the laptops and routers that Government distributed to LAs to allocate to vulnerable children and young people. DfE also provided funding to 3 care leaver charities to increase their capacity to support care leavers affected by the pandemic.

Aims and ambitions for 2020-21

Aims

My overarching aims for 2020-21 are:

- to continue to promote the implementation of the care leaver-related provisions in the Children and Social Work Act 2017, so that care leavers receive the best possible help and support from their local authority Corporate Parents
- to work across government to ensure there remains a continued and committed approach to care leavers and to explore how the role of the State in supporting care leavers can be strengthened

I will do this by:

- subject to COVID-19 restrictions, continuing to offer consultancy support to local authorities who wish to take up the offer (see Annex 1)
- engaging with leaving care national and regional forums
- sharing good practice across the sector by attending seminars and conferences
- reviewing local authority local offers
- engaging with care leavers through their regional forums
- continued dialogue with ministers and other government departments
- extending the GM10 Model to other regions with support from the regional mayors

Ambitions

The personal ambitions I would like to set, which are shared by the local authorities I have visited, are as follows:

- for local authorities to aspire to a target of between 70%-80% of their young people engaged in EET
- local authorities to offer ring-fenced apprenticeship opportunities to care leavers in the 'family business' (at national living wage) and, in particular, to employ a care leaver ambassador in their leaving care team
- for all local authorities to exempt care leavers from Council tax up to 25 years to ensure that no care leaver is made homeless and that any accommodation offered by the local authority is of a high standard that would be good enough for your own child

- that local authorities have clear pathways for care leavers who need to transition through to adult social care or health services, with one referral pathway
- to seek an improved offer from all universities, which includes 52-week free accommodation
- to develop effective local protocols between LAs and Jobcentre Plus that seek to reduce the use of sanctions and ensure that care leavers receive extra support to engage in EET.

Challenges

I want to use this section to acknowledge a few of the challenges that local authorities have highlighted to me during my visits and in the regular conversations I have had with LAs since the pandemic started.

Many local authorities expressed concerns about high caseloads and the increasing complexity of the challenges faced by the young people they are supporting. This is in part driven by the changing nature of the cohort, with many more not entering care until 15 to 17 year olds or presented as homeless aged 16 or 17. Since lockdown LAs have also reported that a much higher proportion of care leavers aged 22-25 are taking up the offer of Personal Adviser support to age 25, introduced in 2018.

The role of the Personal Adviser continues to change and they are expected to be experts in adult transitions, mental health, commissioning processes, immigration and benefits, whilst developing and maintaining relationship-based practice, which is the primary role of the Personal Adviser and also what care leavers have said is the most important thing to them.

In almost all local authorities I visited, I was unable to see a specific offer to care leavers from local health services that went beyond universal/public health services. Local authorities described complex commissioning processes, high thresholds which for the majority of care leavers did not meet, leaving them with unmet mental health needs.

I also recognise that the transition out of the current pandemic will be a difficult one for many LAs. However, I am encouraged by how creatively LAs have adapted and kept the needs of their care leavers at the forefront of all their decisions.

Final Remarks

In conclusion, I hope you have enjoyed my second report and I hope that many of the examples I have shown will encourage local authorities to incorporate these into

their local offer. I am hugely ambitious and passionate for our 'kids' and optimistic that we can get every local authority in the country to have an offer to their 'kids' that is good enough for their own children.

Annex 1: outline of consultation offers available for local authorities

NB LA visits have been suspended during the pandemic, but will resume when lockdown eases

Brief outline for two days.

Day one

<u>Time</u>	<u>Sessions</u>
9am – 10.30am	CEO, Executive member, Leader of Council and Director and Senior officers to discuss the progress from last Ofsted, what 'good' looks like, new statutory duties, the development of the 'local offer' for all 16 to 25 year olds, Corporate Parenting Strategy and the extended Personal Adviser support to all care leavers up to 25 years.
11am – 12.30pm	Heads of Services for children in care and care leavers and team managers to discuss the operational model for leaving care for 16 to 25 year olds, Pathway planning processes, the impact on a strengthened 'local offer', the Personal Adviser duty to 25 years, what works well in practice and how Corporate Parenting is disseminated across the service.
1.30pm – 3pm	Team manager and Personal Advisers to discuss how the leaving care service is delivered operationally with a focus on strengths and challenges, caseloads and the new statutory duties.
3.30pm – 5pm	Meeting a group of care leavers to discuss the existing Corporate Parenting offer, new care leavers strategy and how it feels to be a care leaver.

Day two

<u>Time</u>	<u>Sessions</u>
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9.30am – 10.30am	Diagnostic discussion and agreements on way forward with Head of Service, Team manager and Personal Advisor representatives.
11am – 12pm	Feedback discussion and recommendations from diagnostic discussion with CEO, Leader, Director, Head of Service, Team manager and Personal Advisor representatives.
12pm	End of formal visit. Follow up visit in 6 months.

Brief outline for three hour roundtable

<u>Time</u>	<u>Sessions</u>
10am – 1pm	<p>This is a 3 hour roundtable discussion. The first session – about an hour or so and is with Corporate Parenting Board Members, DCS, Senior Managers, the leaving care manager and a few Personal Advisers on what ‘good’ looks like with ideas being shared about good practice, interpreting data and the new statutory duties. The second session also for about an hour is focused on the ‘local offer’, the delivery model for leaving care and resources. At the end of the visit you will be asked to set some goals/aspirations that you would like to achieve for care leavers that can then be ratified by your Corporate Parenting Board and CiC Council/Care Leavers Forum.</p> <p>The timing of these meeting are usually 10am to 1pm with a break in the middle.</p>



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