

Report to: Corporate Parenting Panel

Date of meeting: 21 January 2022

By: Director of Children's Services

Title: Strengthening the Local Offer for care leavers in East Sussex

Purpose: To update the Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP) on progress on the Local Offer for Care Leavers and consider options for next steps, including further development of the CPP.

RECOMMENDATIONS

CPP is asked to agree the proposed approach to reviewing both our offer and our approach to corporate parenting as set out in paragraphs 2.1 and 2.2 below.

1. Background

1.1 All local authorities have a range of statutory obligations to young people who have been in their care, with ongoing support until either age 21 or 25 depending on the needs of the young person. This group is recognised as being highly vulnerable to a range of challenges, with a greater prevalence in prisons, homeless and suffering from mental health difficulties for example. Legislation sets out that care leavers should expect to receive the same level of care and support as others would receive from a reasonable parent. As of December 2021, East Sussex County Council (ESCC) is responsible for 333 care leavers aged 18-21, 87 of whom are Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking young people. The service is also working with an additional 100 young people aged 21-25.

1.2 In February 2018 the Department for Education issued statutory guidance that mandated all local authorities to develop and publish a Care Leaver Local Offer (the offer) and to consult with and involve care leavers in the development of the offer. ESCC met its statutory duty by publishing an offer in 2019, and key elements of the wider offer were condensed into a leaflet that was distributed amongst care leavers. The full offer is attached as Appendix 2.

1.3 During 2018 the results of the Coram Brightspots survey (feedback from ESCC care leavers about their views and experiences) were presented to the CPP. In 2019 an audit tool was developed by Catch 22 and the National Care Leaver Benchmarking Forum and in ESCC this was used in combination with the results of the earlier Brightspots survey to review options for strengthening our offer still further.

2. Proposed approach

2.1 It is proposed that ESCC uses the analysis referenced at 1.3 above as the basis for a series of meetings over the next six months both with other departments in the council and with key partner agencies to review how, in an affordable and sustainable way, we might strengthen our offer. There are a number of no cost/low-cost options that could be pursued and, given the pressures on the Children's Services Department's budget, there may be a need to focus on these. Through the meetings hopefully colleagues might also have ideas, again potentially at low or no cost.

2.2 Such meetings would include a review with colleagues and partners of whether there are ways in which they could contribute on an on-going basis to a broader approach to corporate parenting for the county. At present the CPP rightfully hold the Children's Services Department Looked After Children Service to account for its performance but given that corporate parenting is a whole council responsibility and also a significant area of responsibility for a number of partner agencies, it would be helpful to explore how the membership of the panel might be broadened and how its focus could be widened to look at a broader range of issues affecting this group of young people.

2.3 A summary of the areas of development of the Care Leavers Offer is attached as appendix 1, based on the analysis set out at 1.3. The developments are divided into four groups: a group of developments since the initial offer was published which have already been achieved; a group which

are potentially within the gift of CSD depending on budget choices; a group for consideration by wider colleagues in the council and a group which would need buy-in from partners.

2.4 A presentation is attached at appendix 3 setting out the background, development so far and potential next steps.

3. Conclusion and recommendations

3.1 Considerable progress has already been made on the offer to care leavers in East Sussex but there are still areas that would benefit from a renewed 'push', some of which could be low cost. In that the current budget for the service is under pressure it may be that ESCC has to moderate its aspirations for this group or phase future development. Our proposal is to review options through a series of meetings with other council departments and with partner agencies over the next six months.

3.2 Future development of the offer would be complemented by consideration of a development plan for the CPP to broaden its reach.

3.3 CPP is asked to agree to the proposed approach to reviewing both our offer and our approach to corporate parenting.

ALISON JEFFERY
Director of Children's Services

Contact

Liz Rugg, Assistant Director Early Help and Social Care
Email: liz.rugg@eastsussex.gov.uk

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Developing the Care Leaver Offer, based on initial self-assessment in Autumn 2021

Appendix 2 – Local Offer to Care Leavers 2019

Appendix 3 - Strengthening the Local Offer for Care Leavers in East Sussex Presentation

Appendix 1: Developing the Care Leaver Offer, based on initial self-assessment in Autumn 2021

The self- assessment highlights four broad groups of developments:

1. Those that have been achieved and are in place

- Health Passport fully embedded
- Project manager appointed as Health & Wellbeing lead, with NHS funding in place to support personalised health budgets.
- The Young People's Substance Misuse service has been extended to age 25.
- 2 Months free membership at all freedom leisure sites for Care Leavers & 1 month free for their 'plus one'.
- Links established with Active Sussex to promote & develop healthy living lifestyles projects for Care Leavers across the County.
- An Independent Social Worker has been commissioned to support Care Leavers gaining access to their records
- Laptop/tablet supplied to all Care Leavers including wi-fi access
- Pupil Premium+ pilot scheme underway to support young people 16+ in further education including English Language provision for UASC.
- Embedded education specialist from Virtual School within the Care Leavers & UASC Services.
- Care Leaver housing protocol has been developed between ESCC & the Districts and Boroughs. All Care Leavers are now categorised as in priority need. Joint housing pathway planning is completed in partnership with housing officers. Range of supported housing options available as a stepping-stone to independent living and tenancy management.
- Established links with Rough Sleepers initiative to provide funding/support for permanent housing solutions for those young people with complex needs and/or at risk of intentional homelessness.
- Council tax exemptions now in place for all ESCC care leavers up to the age of 25 years living within East Sussex.
- Dedicated participation worker embedded within the service to develop strategy & policy and a range of participation events & activities established
- Care Leaver Council established
- Designated worker lead on all benefits related advice in place
- Established named links in all DWP/Job Centres
- Improved Corporate Grandparenting offer in place.

2. Those that could be achieved and are in the 'gift' of CSD but which may have cost implications for a budget under pressure.

- Resource to be increased for Care Leavers to access their records and reduce waiting lists plus provide age appropriate Life Story work for Care Leavers
- Use of Family Group Conference Service to be refocussed for the use of older LAC and Care Leavers and to complement the Lifelong Links development work that is underway.
- To mirror the West Sussex offer and extend clothing allowance to £800 pa for under 18 year olds from the present rate of £200.
- Re-establish a multiagency group to focus on work experience, apprenticeships and employment opportunities for Care Leavers.
- Creation of a Rent Guarantor Scheme to extend housing options in the private rental market.
- Weekend and out of hours support to be funded for young people aged 18 +

3. Those that could be delivered within the wider corporate structure of ESCC

- A whole Council' approach to Corporate Parenting to be developed led by elected members and CMT.
- Each ESCC department to make a pledge to Care Leavers specific to their area of service- ASC&H have already agreed to support young people who want to join care settings.
- Protocols to be developed to enable Care Leavers to access wider Corporate services as a priority eg mental health support.
- Introduce prepaid debit cards to reduce demands on the current petty cash systems
- Develop digital and social media support to Care Leavers
- Redesign of the Local Offer on the ESCC website

4. Those that would need support and sign-up from partners

- Free Prescriptions- negotiations started with the CCG in 2020 based on an existing model from Oldham with ballpark costs etc no timescale as yet for a decision
- Extension of equal access to leisure facilities across the county- this would need the support of the Districts and Boroughs
- Council Tax waiver to be extended to all Care Leavers resident in ESCC and across housing borders- this would need support from the districts and boroughs and from other LAs.
- Development of a training flat to be explored to support tenancy management. Step down accommodation for 18+ to support the transition into mainstream accommodation from High Intensive supported accommodation- would need the support of the Districts and Boroughs.
- Discounted travel options- this would need the support of Communities Economy and Transport dept. within ESCC and of the bus/train companies.