



Derby City Council

**Corporate Parenting Committee
20 February 2018**

Report of the Strategic Director of Peoples
Services

ITEM 6

Leaving Care Service and Care Leavers Forum Report

- 1.1 This report is an update of the Leaving Care Service and Care Leavers forum Report that is submitted to Corporate Parenting Committee.

RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 To note the content of this report updating the Corporate Parenting Committee on the Leaving Care Service, the issues that Care Leavers Forum are raising and how the Service is responding to these issues and how this is helping to shape and improve the service.
- 2.2 To note the issues raised by Care Leavers with regards to their finances, Independence and isolation.
- 2.3 To note the continued challenges faced by the Leaving Care Service to ensure that attendance at the forum is healthy, diverse and representative. That the forum is facilitated effectively and that the current format is able to meet the needs of Derby's Care Leavers.
- 2.4 A dynamic response is taken to improve the quality of consultation and participation of Care Leavers.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 It is important to recognise the continued attempts to seek the views of Care Leavers via the forum and how this also continues to influence and shape the service offered to them and directly affect the improvements being made.

It is important to recognise that there continue be real challenges in maintaining momentum with the forum. Attendance at the forums continues to be sporadic and extremely low.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 4.1 At present the Care Leavers forum has no independence and is being facilitated by the service itself. The forum is currently chaired by the Deputy Head of Service for Children In Care and Leaving Care Service. Prior to this the forum was run by Personal Advisors and the Team Manager, which Forum members considered inappropriate.

Unlike the Children in Care Council, there is neither an independent facilitator nor resource available to the forum in order to ensure that the forum functions as well as it possibly could.

There are significant issues facing Care Leavers and their experiences matter and shape our service. Key themes raised by Care Leavers in visits with Personal Advisor's and from the forum suggest that the following issues are of key note: financial hardship, isolation, independent living skills, limited support networks and general support and advice issues. There is some additional information as to how we propose to respond to some of these issues below.

Forum members have spoken about their limited social networks, their loneliness and how not being able to contact people or access information significantly limits how they integrate with the world and become more independent. Care Leavers feel that any support that could be offered would assist in reducing their loneliness and help them to develop their own networks.

4.2 **Analysis**

The Care Leavers forum struggles to attract a healthy attendance at its meetings. Currently it is dependent upon Personal Advisers promoting the sessions to Care Leavers and at present despite their best efforts this does not result in a high turnout, ranging from one young person to three or four on a good night. To ensure regular and high attendance the forum would benefit from some dedicated time from a Participation Officer as is the case with Children In Care Council. It is felt that Corporately that we should be able to provide a continuation of support for this group of young people as they turn 18 years of age and have the challenges of making the transition to adulthood. There are questions as to why should participation support cease when young people reach adulthood and corporately, could we approach the forum differently and more dynamically?

Attendance is clearly evidencing that the current approach is not attractive enough to encourage Care Leavers to engage with the service development in the numbers we would like to see and that is truly representative of all Care Leavers.

We are currently going to explore alternative ways by which we can engage more meaningfully with Care Leavers and attract greater numbers. For example we will consult with Care Leavers to see if they would be more willing to engage in a more activity based format. We could exploit services currently available through the

Council in sport and leisure for example.

4.3 **Six Month Update**

Since August 2017, four Care Leaver forums have been planned and two (August and December 17) were cancelled by the service due to holiday periods/logistics. The two forums that have gone ahead in October 2017 and January 2018 were only attended by one Care Leaver and so the forum cannot be considered representative or diverse.

The forum as previously highlighted in reports provided to the Corporate Parenting Committee, is not resourced adequately to ensure it maximises the participation and engagement of Care leavers. Managing the forum within the service and within the existing resource does not allow for dynamism or creativity and as such with the current format it is unlikely to capture the attention of Care Leavers.

A more creative approach to the format of the forum could also help us to encourage more to attend and provide them with an avenue by which to meet up and provide them with the opportunity to get out more and participate.

It is of note that an additional consultation opportunity took place at the Annual Care Leavers Celebration Event on the 30th of November. I took the opportunity to speak with a number of Care Leavers at the event, canvassing their views around wellbeing, post 21 support and isolation. The anecdotal issues taken from these discussions mirror what we have identified in the Care Leavers Forum and consultation so far.

We have spoken within the service about ways in which the forum could be improved and reshaped to promote and enhance its standing and status with Care Leavers.

4.4 **Leaving Care Service Development Update.**

Care Leavers have identified that they can experience significant financial challenges especially when they become fully independent. This was noted in the previous report to the Corporate Parenting Committee.

Council Tax

Work has been undertaken and a report produced with regard to several proposals that would seek to support Care Leavers and the hardship that they are exposed to. A report was taken to first to DMT and then COG and was subsequently approved in December 2017. A specific report with regards to Care Leavers being exempted from Council Tax has been prepared and is expected to be presented at Council Cabinet in February or March 2018.

Communication Allowance and White Goods Package

A further proposal to provide Care Leavers with a communication allowance was also agreed at COG in December 2017, along with an enhanced Leaving Care equipment package. Work is currently being undertaken in these two areas to look at implementation in mid-2018.

Local Area Co-ordinators

New links are being established between the Leaving Care Service and with the Local Area Co-ordinators (LAC) in Derby City. This is an innovative approach whereby the LAC Team will specifically work with a number of CIC and Care Leavers that are identified. Local Area Co-ordinators will be able to signpost and enable Care Leavers to local resources and networks, which will promote community engagement and reduce loneliness and isolation. Local Area Co-ordinators have already started working with several Care Leavers as part of their pilot project.

Independent Living

Care leavers also said they needed to gain more skills and knowledge for when they did move into their own accommodation. As a result, Derby Homes Tenancy Sustainment Manager and Leaving Care Team Manager have met to discuss a short training course which addresses the key issues about having a tenancy. As a result a short course will be provided, the first of which took place on the 18th January 2018. Those Care Leavers approaching 18, or who are about to move into their first tenancy will be given the opportunity to attend the course.

We had two young men take up this opportunity and so far the feedback from them has been positive and it is hoped that we will be able to provide them with the confidence they will need to successfully secure their first tenancy.

Celebration Event

A Care Leavers Celebration event took place in November 2017. This was a successful event that took place at the Derby Conference centre and was well attended by Care Leavers. It was also a good opportunity to celebrate their achievements in all aspects of their lives and present them with a certificate of achievement and recognise the hard work that they had displayed over the past 12 months. It also gave them an opportunity to meet up with each other and develop some additional support networks.

Local Offer to Care Leavers

The service is currently undertaking preparatory work in relation to the Local Offer for Care Leavers to bring Derby City Council in line and compliant with the changes made as a result of the Children and Social Work Act 2017.

The small cohort engaged with the Care Leavers Forum fully support these proposals and feels that it will go some way to helping them and in meeting the council's corporate parenting responsibility to them.

Horizon Planning

Support for Care Leavers

An idea raised by one of our forum members that requires some further consideration

was whether we could explore befrienders/mentors/respite for Care Leavers to help reduce isolation. This is still in its early stages and logistically could be quite difficult. I have attached the initial proposal put forward by the Care Leaver and will update you all if I am able to progress this any further.

Consultations - Social media.

How we consult with a wider range of Care Leavers, including those living outside of Derby City is an on-going challenge. It was noted in the previous report that we would be establishing a communications group to explore what options could be open to us with regards to social media.

We have now made contact with the Communications Team and a meeting is being arranged to take this issue forward. A forum member will form part of this group in order that the voice of Care Leavers is heard.

One of the first things we will be looking at is consulting with Care Leavers about their health histories. (This was the one recommendation that resulted from the Ofsted inspection). We aim to consult with Care Leavers utilising Social Media/ digital communications.

We are also looking to meet up with those Care Leavers who have now left the service to form part of a working group which will help to design how this offer is progressed. This will help us to utilise their personal experiences of being a Care Leaver and what approach is more likely to work

OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

5.1 None – update report.

This report has been approved by the following officers:

Legal officer Financial officer Human Resources officer Estates/Property officer Service Director(s) Other(s)	Update report Suanne Lim
For more information contact: Background papers: List of appendices:	Gareth Dakin 01332 640302 - Gareth.dakin@derby.gov.uk None Appendix 1 – Implications.

IMPLICATIONS

Financial and Value for Money

1.1 N/A

Legal

2.1 The Leaving Care Service is a statutory service as outlined in the Children Act, 1989

Personnel

3.1 N/A

IT

4.1 N/A

Equalities Impact

5.1 N/A

Health and Safety

6.1 N/A

Environmental Sustainability

7.1 N/A

Property and Asset Management

8.1 N/A

Risk Management

9.1 N/A

Corporate objectives and priorities for change

10.1 Protecting Vulnerable Children and Adults