

For general release

REPORT TO:	Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee Date: 3rd March 2020
SUBJECT:	Croydon's Commitment to Children in Care, National Pledge and the refreshed Local Offer for Care Leavers
LEAD OFFICER:	Rob Henderson, Executive Director, Children, Families & Education
CABINET MEMBER:	Cllr Alisa Flemming, Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Learning
PERSON LEADING AT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING:	Rob Henderson, Executive Director, Children, Families & Education

CORPORATE PRIORITY/POLICY CONTEXT/ AMBITIOUS FOR CROYDON To offer a clear commitment to children in care and our young adults leaving care is fully aligned to our Corporate Plan for Croydon (2018-2022) in the following areas <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Our children and young people thrive and reach their full potential• Everyone feels safer in their street, neighbourhood and home• Everyone has the opportunity to work and build their career. Corporate Plan for Croydon 2018-2022

ORIGIN OF ITEM:	This item forms part of the Sub-Committee's work programme.
BRIEF FOR THE COMMITTEE:	To scrutinise proposals to strengthen Croydon's corporate parenting role through adopting the National Pledge for children in care and care leavers, making a commitment to Croydon's children in care and refreshing the local offer for care leavers.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 The Committee is asked to scrutinise and provide views on the proposals that Croydon Council and its partners:

- adopt the National Pledge for children in care and care leavers;
- make a Croydon Commitment to children in care;
- provide a refreshed the local offer for Croydon's care leavers.

2. National Pledge to Children in Care and Care Leavers

- 2.1 The inaugural national conference for care experienced people, held in April 2019, resulted in an invitation to all local authorities to pledge their commitment to a set of principles and messages to improve the support for children in care and young people leaving care in their local area. A copy of the pledge is included at appendix 1.

The principles

- 2.2 It is proposed that Croydon Council and its partners commit to the following principles:

We will listen to our children/ young people and ensure they have access to all legal entitlements. We understand they are experts in their own lives who deserve love and respect as individuals (within the context of their own experience). We recognise relationships are at the core of all we do and we must ensure the emotional wellbeing of our children/young people are prioritised.

The top ten messages

- 2.3 Alongside the principles local authorities are asked to pledge that in their written policies, procedures and practices they take clear steps to ensure that all services delivered demonstrably:
1. Promote more love in the care system including displays of positive physical affection;
 2. Ensure care experience people are regarded and treated as individuals worthy of respect and to promote that respect wherever we can;
 3. Ensure that relationships are seen as central to all our policies and procedures to support children in care and care experienced people;
 4. Take clear steps to improve stability and continuity in the lived experiences of people in care;
 5. Work with our partners and young people to raise awareness of need and improve support for the mental health and well-being of children in care and care experienced people in our local area;
 6. Recognise in our daily work that the impact of care experience does not end at 18 or 21 or even 25, and review our practice to remove age restrictions on support wherever we can;
 7. Protect, promote and where necessary rebuild family and community connections and help those young people for whom we are responsible to understand their personal history;
 8. Make sure that young people in our care are routinely engaged, consulted and have a real have a say in their own lives
 9. Ensure that young people in our care are properly and fully informed of their rights and offer advocacy to ensure they receive them;

10. Listen to the voice of children in care and care experience people of all ages and always consult them about changes to services and support.

A copy of the top ten messages in poster format is included at appendix 2.

3. The Croydon commitment to children in care

- 3.1 Following engagement and discussions with some members of EMPIRE, it is further proposed that the following commitment is made to children in care in Croydon:

1. We will help you build up your social life and keep in touch with your family & friends.
2. We will help you do the things you love.
3. We will make sure you are happy with where you live and listen to your needs
4. We will help you with your education and whatever you choose to do in life.
5. We will make sure you have someone to talk to and get good advice
6. We will listen to your thoughts and feelings
7. We will understand you as a person not just a child in care
8. We will give you all the support you need to go home, if this is the right option
9. We will make sure you have a good relationship with your social worker and personal adviser
10. We will be there for you in the future and give you the skills you need to live alone.
11. You can have access your records if you wish
12. We will love you for who you are and welcome you always.

4. The Local Offer to Care Leavers

- 4.1 Croydon would like to adopt the following proposed local offer, subject to further discussions around securing funding to deliver and in accordance with the leaving care financial policy, which is currently being finalised
- 4.2 This has been refreshed since 2018 to ensure we can provide for our young people leaving care in a way that makes them feel supported financially, emotionally and practically. We seek to ensure our young people feel part of the 'Croydon Family'.
- 4.3 Key updates include an increase in the setting up allowance and assistance with moving home, so our young people are supported at this crucial time of moving into independence. All care leavers will be

exempt from paying council tax up to age 25, those living out of borough will be covered up to the equivalent band of a similar property type in Croydon. To increase stability and emotional security /wellbeing for our care leavers, we propose that Housing services in Croydon will not issue a decision of 'intentionally homeless' for any of our care leavers under the age of 25.

- 4.4 All care leavers in employment or undertaking regular education will be supported with the cost of 10 driving lessons, plus cost of theory and practical test. We offer to give young people the best opportunity to be independent and increase their social capital via increased geographical access to work and social opportunities.
- 4.5 Additionally Croydon council are committed to offering apprenticeship opportunities. Applications will be available for care leavers for one position in each part of the council other than children's services which will offer three per year. We plan to link this to our staff volunteering scheme where employees can 'buddy' or mentor young people entering council employment, to ensure they have the best experience possible and are supported to become part of the workforce, the 'family business'.

4.6 **Overview**

- You will have a Personal Advisor by the time you are 16½ years who visits regularly and in line with their individual needs
- At 16 years old you will have a 'pathway plan', which plainly sets out all you needs, ambitions, goals, including where you will live, study and work.
- You will be provided with somewhere safe to live.
- You will receive assistance to develop a clear financial plan and financial assessment. If you have an assessed need for emergency additional income Croydon may offer you 'one off' financial support.
- We will ensure all your health needs are met and you leave care with a 'health passport'.
- We will ensure you have a photo ID (such as passport, biometric card or provisional driving license), national insurance number and a copy of your birth certificate.
- We will ensure you are listened to you and know how to access external support or advocacy services and you are aware of the complaints procedure.

Housing

- Housing services in Croydon will not issue a decision of 'intentionally homeless' for any of our care leavers under the age of 25.
- As a looked after child your housing needs will be considered by the housing panel by aged 17½. to ensure you have a clear housing options pathway plan by the date of your last looked after review, prior to you turning 18.

- You will be placed on the housing register at 18 years old, and receive priority Band B. This includes the option to bid on properties if this is stated in your Pathway Plan.
- You will be entitled to social housing (unless you are an asylum seeker with no recourse to public funds)

Education Employment and training

- If you are a care leaver in education post 19 (or 18 if at university) you will have access to tutor hours for additional learning to support you if needed through your exams. These will be offered in conjunction with a clear Pathway Plan setting out education goals.
- If you are in education, employment or training you will be supported with the costs towards driving lessons, this means a maximum of 10 driving lessons and the cost of 1 theory and 1 practical test.
- As a Care Leaver you will be able to apply for apprentice opportunities within Croydon Council. This will be at least 1 apprenticeship place in each part of the council (except children's services where we would offer 3 per year).

Money

- The Leaving Care Service will provide young people with up to 6 weeks subsistence payments, mirrored to the current benefit rate (to assist you while waiting for initial benefits claim to be processed which needs to be backdated to your 18th birthday). This will be repaid via the setting up home grant.

Birthday gifts

- A gift and a contribution towards the cost of celebrations will be paid to you until your 21st birthday.
- You will only receive this allowance if you are in contact with us.

Setting up home allowance

- You will receive a setting up home allowance in accordance with Croydon's leaving care financial policy to help with getting essentials for your first home. The allowance is accessed as part of planned process alongside the pathway plan

Council Tax exemption

- As a care leaver you will be exempt from paying council tax in Croydon until the age of 25. If you live outside of Croydon, your council tax will be covered up to the equivalent band of a similar property type in Croydon.

Local offer for care leavers living outside of Croydon.

- Your personal adviser will liaise with the local care leaver's service as a matter of routine to see what services or opportunities could be on offer for you. This will be clearly stated in your Pathway Plan.

Moving in to a new home

- You will have help with costs of hiring a van or moving service
- You will receive assistance on moving day from your personal advisor

Rent until benefit in place

- Housing (both within Croydon and other areas) and the Care leavers service have an agreement in place that allows the care leavers service and housing to liaise with each other to avoid rent arrears in most cases.

Health

- We will pay travel for all care leavers to attend hospital appointments for non-routine health concerns, such as surgery.
- You will receive a Health Passport upon turning 18.
- You will be fully supported by your personal adviser to register with a GP, Dentist and Optician.

Participation in Society

- We will support you to engage with community activities such as, religious groups, art groups, support groups, gyms, social groups, etc.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 Croydon would like to adopt the refreshed Local Offer for care leavers, subject to further discussions around securing funding to deliver this and in accordance with the leaving care financial policy, to be finalised Spring 2020.

6. Implementation

- 6.1 When the principles, pledge children in care commitments and local offer have been reviewed and agreed a substantial programme of engagement and communication with children and young people, foster carers and care providers and staff at all levels across the Council and its partner agencies will take place, to coincide with their launch, to ensure these become part of our everyday business.
- 6.2 Regular feedback from EMPIRE (the children in care council), the care leavers' forum and through close monitoring of complaints and compliments from children and young people will ensure children and young people can comment directly on how these are being implemented, and what difference is being made.

Appendix 1: Care Experienced Conference 2019 National Pledge

Appendix 2: Top Ten Messages, Care Experienced Conference Pledge 2019

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