

REPORT TO:	Corporate Parenting Panel 3 March 2021
SUBJECT:	Care Leavers and Support for Care Leavers Care Leavers' Local Offer
LEAD OFFICER:	Hannah Doughty Head of Service –Social Work with Children Looked After and Care Leavers
CABINET MEMBER:	Cllr Alisa Flemming Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Learning
WARDS:	All
PUBLIC/EXEMPT:	

SUMMARY OF REPORT:

This report describes the current position regarding the levels of support for care leavers in the key areas of housing; education, training and employment; health; involvement and the transition from being a looked after child to young adulthood. The report also refers to the revised local offer and the new Care Leavers' financial policy and guidance.

POLICY CONTEXT/AMBITIOUS FOR CROYDON:

To offer a clear commitment to children in care and offer to our young adults leaving care is fully aligned to our Corporate Plan for Croydon (2018-2022) in the following areas

- 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](#)

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

Contained within the body of the report

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Contained within the body of the report.

1. Care Leavers and Support for Care Leavers - Care Leavers' Local Offer

1.1. *Demographics*

1.2. The care leavers monthly report of January 2021 informs us that:

Gender			Age			UASC		
Male	573	75%	18-20	501	65%	18-20	285	57%
Female	192	25%	21-25	264	35%	21-25	144	55%
Total	765	100%	Total	765	100%	Total	429	56%

1.3 The total number of young people open to the Service has reduced from 848 in March 2020 to 765 in January 2021. We had seen a dramatic rise in numbers due to the implementation in 2018 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017. Section 3 of the Act extends services to former relevant children up to the age of 25, even if they are not in education or training. A review of our young people aged 21+ carried out during 2020 demonstrated that a high number had remained open to us without active involvement so this was closed but can be re-opened should a new need arise. This has enabled the Service to work towards fulfilling our commitment to become involved with young people, with joint allocation of a social worker and personal adviser from 16.5 years old. Presently there is joint allocation from age 17 but this will be extended within the next 6 – 12 months. This enables joint working to ensure that planning and preparation for adulthood begins much earlier.

1.4 56% of all care leavers are former unaccompanied children; two thirds of these young people are male. The Home Office has recently consulted with local authorities on changes to the National Transfer Scheme (NTS). Currently the NTS voluntary agreement is that each local authority accepts up to 0.07% of their child population as UASC. This would mean that Croydon would have 66 UASC; as of 22nd February 2021 we have 210. In order for the scheme to function efficiently it ought to be made mandatory, with other Local Authorities accepting more unaccompanied children, which would mean a reduction for Croydon. If the recommended changes are approved we would see a gradual reduction of the number of care leavers over time, with an aim for the full effect to be seen by 2031/32

1.5 The Council is introducing Human Rights Assessments to determine whether young people who have all their Appeal Rights Exhausted (ARE), and have no legal right to remain in the UK should continue to receive a leaving care service. If it is assessed that they should not be provided with a service then they will be referred to the Home Office who will provide accommodation and to charities who will be able to support them whilst repatriation is considered. Approximately 66 young people aged 21-25 have this status at present, with an average cost of £11,500 per annum to the Service. It is likely that the introduction of these assessments will result in a further reduction to the care leaver population.

2. Accommodation and Housing

Age 18-21		
Independent Living (Guaranteed rent scheme/block purchase)	427	73%
Staying Put	69	12%
With parents or relatives	18	15%
Semi-independent, transitional accommodation	21	
Supported lodgings	3	
Social Housing (RSL/LBC)	12	
Residence not known	2	
No fixed abode / homeless	2	
Foyers	3	
In custody	14	
Other accommodation	10	
Total	581	

2.1 The majority of our young people live in private sector accommodation which is procured by housing. Historically Children's Services also commissioned some private landlords to provide accommodation through block purchase arrangements for young people with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF). This is part of the review that is being undertaken by our Commissioning Department with Housing to find a better solution. It is estimated that this review will be completed, with recommendations and actions, within the next 12 months.

Age 18-25			
Procured by		Children's Services cost	Housing Dept Costs
Housing	412	£1,868,835	TBC
Children's services	168	£1,480,500	
Total	580	£3,265,969	

2.2 The cost to Children's Services for young people in accommodation procured by Housing is due to a surcharge of the equivalent of 25% of the rent of each young person with Recourse to Public Funds (£875,605). This charge was agreed to offset non-payment of rent, mainly due to a shortfall in housing benefit claims. Part of the reason for this is the type of work that many care leavers acquire such as casual work like deliveries, which are problematic when making benefit claims because of their nature, with no guaranteed stable income. This is an area of work that the new service manager will be taking forward, looking at how best to advise and support young people in their search for work that will sustain them in the longer term.

2.3 Children's Services cover the rent of those who are NRPF (£909,684), and fund two members of housing staff for these young people (£83,546). The Home Office grant does not cover the cost of all young people who are former unaccompanied children and those who are NRPF, and not engaged in education or training, or ARE are not included in our claim to them.

- 2.4 All care leavers are offered accommodation on or shortly after their 18th birthday. Three to six months prior to their birthday, their social worker will present their situation to a panel of housing and leaving care management. Accommodation is allocated in keeping with an assessment which includes the views of the young person. Should a young person require independent accommodation, they will be allocated a room in a shared house. In situations where it is agreed that shared accommodation is not appropriate then a self-contained studio accommodation is made available. However, these are in short supply. Young people with NRPF will normally only be offered shared accommodation.
- 2.5 From consultation that has taken place with care leavers and our own observations, we know there is still work to be done to ensure that our housing offer is good enough for our young people. This is an area that the Head of Service is working on with housing and commissioning colleagues and it will form part of an improvement plan that is being developed and will be in place within the next month.
- 2.6 69 young people are currently living with their former foster carers under a Staying Put arrangement (remaining in foster care after the age 18). The fostering service manager is reviewing the current policy and procedures with a view to encouraging carers, young people and social workers to consider Staying Put as the preferred first step towards independence. The revised policy will be completed within the next three months. Work is needed to raise the profile of Staying Put to ensure that young people do not leave the security and support of their carers until they are better prepared to manage the responsibilities of independent living.
- 2.7 It is an issue for us that the majority of our care leavers do not live in affordable, permanent accommodation which they can maintain themselves once our support ends, or after the housing element of their welfare benefit payments drops at age 22 (single room rate of £878 pm to shared rate of £448 pm). The cost of private sector housing in Croydon prohibits young people in education or low wage employment from managing well financially. Monthly rent in the accommodation we provide can range from £600 - £1200 pm. The majority of young people are liable for a rent of approximately £800. As we know social housing is much more affordable at £378 for self-contained accommodation but hard to secure. These issues of affordability will form part of the accommodation review.
- 2.8 The review of accommodation options for care leavers began during the summer of 2020 and is concentrating on:
- Commissioning that is effectively informed by the voice of our care leavers, along with data analysis
 - Sustainable long-term affordable housing options for independence
 - Effective, outcome focussed and value for money supported accommodation options and community support options, with clearer exit strategies
 - More effective transition work, and tenancy training to from age 16 to prepare young people for adulthood

- Processes which are as simple as possible, supported by the correct services and resources that are clear to our care leavers

2.9 The work since the summer has identified the need to better prepare young people for the rigours of living independently. The following steps have been agreed but yet to be implemented:

- A recommendation that Money House, a charitable organisation be commissioned to provide tenancy management training to young people. This requires an initial set up cost of £15,000 and the provision of a venue.
- Workshops for personal advisers, social workers and carers run by Housing and Children’s Services on tenancy management, including managing rent arrears
- A drive to increase the number of young people in Staying Put arrangements

3 Education, Training and Employment

Full time education	301	46.5%
Full time employment with/without training	36	5%
Part time employment	68	9.5%
Training	2	1%
Unemployed as a result of ill-health or disability	24	4%
Unemployed for other reason	219	34%
Total	650	
Total in EET		62%
Total NEET		38%

3.1 The overall percentage of young people in ETE has risen from 60% to 62% which is a slight increase since the last report to the CPP in November 2020. Progress can be attributed to:

- A NEET prevention officer was appointed in May 2020 to the Post 16 Participation & NEET Service. She is based in leaving care and is the conduit with external providers and employers and personal advisers. She also carries out direct work with young people to link them with opportunities.
- A new group – CLIPP (Care Leavers in Poverty Prevention) was established with representatives from the DWP, Youth Engagement and NEET services, leaving care and educational establishments. It has not met since lockdown and will be resumed once this is lifted.
- Five apprentices have been in post since October 2020, two are based in the Virtual School and will be championing mentoring schemes for young people which will promote education and mentoring opportunities. One is working with the NEET prevention officer and actively supporting care leavers to maintain their ETE.

- As part of the new local offer, incentives such as driving lessons are available to young people if they remain in education.

Supporting our young people to remain in education or to find suitable employment remains a priority for the Council.

4 Next Steps and Future Plans

- 4.1 Establish a NEET panel for 16+ to support young people while they transition to leaving care with internal and external stakeholders by 01.04.21.
- 4.2 Strengthen the role and influence of personal advisers for young people aged 16+ through earlier joint allocation. This will improve post 18 planning, including access to education, training and employment, by 01.07.21.
- 4.3 Work with care leavers to look at how to gain employment that is sustainable and long term to avoid falling into a 'benefit trap', by 01.04.21.
- 4.4 Work and support care leavers with skills to help them to maintain accommodation, including budgeting, maintenance and understanding commitments, by 01.04.21.
- 4.5 Plan to develop an Educational Championship Scheme across Croydon Council's senior leadership team and members by 01.07.21.
- 4.6 We believe that young people are more likely to achieve if they remain with their foster carers beyond age 18. As a result we are revising our Staying Put policy and procedures, alongside providing a package of training to foster carers and their staff support with a view to increasing the number of young people Staying Put. This revision will be completed by 01.05.21, with training provided over the following six months.
- 4.7 Accommodation strategy to be completed by the end of March 2021.

5 Transition from CLA to Leaving Care Service

- 5.1 Our 'Pathways to Independence' is now available and outlines the roles and responsibilities of the social worker and personal advisor in the transition to adulthood for children looked after and care leavers (appendix 1).
- 5.2 Discussions have been taking place with Adult Services/Transitions Team to determine the roles and responsibilities of respective services as we want to ensure that young people are receiving the support they are entitled to under the Care Act 2014 and the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000. This will be reported back at the next CPP as to progress.

6. Recommendation

- 6.1 That the CPP is presented with the arrangements confirming the role of Adult

Services at the next panel meeting.

7. Health and Well being

- 7.1 As a matter of policy, young people can now expect a copy of their health history when they turn 18.
- 7.2 With the support of DfE funding there have been staff appointed within the Virtual School to complete direct work around emotional and mental health for previously unaccompanied children. Funding from the same source has also been allocated to Off the Record to increase the number of counselling sessions to care leavers. Further information will be available on this at the next CPP.

8. Local Offer (appendix 2)

- 8.1 The local Offer has now been revised and is available on our website <https://new.croydon.gov.uk/children-young-people-and-families/children-looked-after-and-care-leavers/local-offer-care-leavers-support-children-looked-after-and-young-people>
- 8.2 A group of young people from E.M.P.I.R.E. and the care leavers' forum were consulted and contributed to the revision.
- 8.3 A request has been to have the revised local offer to be translated into five languages including Albanian, Pashto, Tigrinyan, Dari and Arabic.

9. Financial Policy and Procedures (appendix 3)

- 9.1 A financial policy to guide and oversee expenditure and entitlements to young people has now been implemented. The policy is accompanied by guides for young people and a comprehensive quick guide to ensure that young people and staff are aware of entitlements.
- 9.2 The policy was approved in 2020 and funding made available within the base budget.
- 9.3 The revised entitlements improve the financial circumstances of young people. Some of the highlights are:
- Support to young people in education, training and employment has increased with payments for stationery and IT equipment
 - A grant to cover HE graduation costs and support to set up in accommodation locally
 - Leaving care maintenance allowance for 16/17 year olds living semi-independently has increased and any payments made post 18, while waiting for benefits, will no longer be deducted from setting up home allowance
 - A clothing allowance is now available
 - Driving lessons will now be funded for those in education or training

- Birthday and festival allowances are now available to young people aged 19 - 21
- Young people on remand will now receive an allowance
- Setting up home allowance is now £2000

9.4 A group of young people from E.M.P.I.R.E. and the care leavers' forum were consulted and contributed to the final versions.

10 CONSULTATION

10.1 Young people from E.M.P.I.R.E. have been involved in the key areas outlined in this report. The service manager attends monthly care leavers' forum meetings to give progress reports against an action plan devised by the young people.

11 FINANCIAL AND RISK ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS

Revenue and Capital consequences of report recommendations
N/A

12 LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS
N/A

13 HUMAN RESOURCES IMPACT
N/A

14 EQUALITIES IMPACT
N/A

15 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT
N/A

16 CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPACT
N/A

17 DATA PROTECTION IMPLICATIONS

WILL THE SUBJECT OF THE REPORT INVOLVE THE PROCESSING OF 'PERSONAL DATA'?

NO

HAS A DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT (DPIA) BEEN COMPLETED?

NO

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APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT

1. Local Offer
2. Leaving Care Finance Policy and Procedures