

Care Leavers Overview Report

Report of	Head of Corporate Parenting
Report to	Corporate Parenting Board
Report Originator	Ophelia Rix
Date of Report	30 th January 2022

1. Introduction

- 1.1 As Corporate parents it is our role to ensure that children who are looked after children and young people leaving care are supported to achieve their goals and have the same opportunities to reach their full potential, enjoy leisure and cultural activities as any other child. In Kirklees we strive to ensure that
- Care Leavers pathway plans consistently and comprehensively address their needs and experiences.
 - Care Leavers plans are thoroughly and independently reviewed with the involvement, as appropriate, of parents, carers, residential staff, and other adults who know them.
 - Plans for their futures continue to be appropriate and ambitious, reflecting Care Leaver's wishes, goals, and aspirations.
 - All Care Leavers will have a pathway plan into independence in a timely manner.
 - An inclusive service where Care Leavers feel safe and confident about their future, care leavers are fully supported to achieve their full potential to the best of their abilities,
 - A modern service that makes use of innovation and technology to improve the lives of care leavers

2. Context

- 2.1 The aim of Care Leaver service is to ensure that each young person receives quality high level of support so that they can live successful independent lives. Each young person is unique, and it would be anticipated that their support needs will reduce over time, in recognition of their growing maturity and independence
- 2.2 The Personal Advisor is required to visit or be in contact with the Care Leaver aged up to 20 and to keep in touch with all young people aged over 21 up to age 25 throughout the year. The visiting pattern will be dependent on the wishes and needs of the individual care leaver
- 2.3 All eligible, relevant, and former relevant children should have a Pathway Plan, which will set out the support that will be provided to the care leaver once they have left care. This must be based on the Needs Assessment carried out. The Plan should be prepared before the young person leaves care.
- 2.4 The Pathway Plan should set objectives and include how and when these should be achieved. It should be reviewed when a young person requests this and/or the Personal Advisor thinks it is necessary or at a minimum of every 6 months.

- 2.5 Preparation to leave care starts when a young person is 16. In Kirklees when the young person is 16 the social worker undertakes the Personal Advisors duties until they are allocated a Personal Advisor from the Care Leavers Service and the support they receive can be in place until they turn 25.
- 2.6 Personal Advisors provide the care, advice and encouragement young people need to have the foundations for success in place to help them go on to achieve their full potential. We want our young people to develop the skills and resilience needed to grow into well-adjusted adults like we would our own children or children we have attachments with. Alongside the young person the Personal Advisor will develop a plan which sets out how they may achieve their goals.
- 2.7 We have a duty to ensure all Eligible, Relevant, and Former Relevant children are provided with a Personal Advisor. These include Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) who acquire former relevant status and who have been accommodated under S20 of the Children Act 1989 without necessarily meeting the criteria for eligible or relevant.
- 2.8 Young People with Qualifying status do not have a Personal Advisor allocated to them but are supported by having access to our Commitment to Care Leavers protocol, receive encouragement, advice, and support and receive a maintenance allowance if they are taking part in education or training and not in receipt of Universal Credit.
- 2.9 All children who are over 16 and leaving care fall within one of the following categories (Fig 1).

Fig 1

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eligible child is a child aged 16 and 17 who has been looked after for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and were looked after on their 16th birthday and who is still being looked after.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevant child is a child aged 16 and 17 who has been looked after for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and who has left care. This also includes young people who were detained (e.g. in a youth offending institution or hospital) when they turned 16, but who were looked after immediately before being detained
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Former relevant child is a young person over 18 who was previously 'eligible' or 'relevant'. Councils support this group until aged 21, or longer if they are in education or training
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qualifying child is any young person under 21 (or 24 if in education or training) who stops being looked after or accommodated in a variety of other settings, or being privately fostered, after the age of 16. This also includes young people who are under a special guardianship order
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Former relevant child pursuing education is any former relevant child whose case was closed, for any reason. If we're informed that they're planning to continue education or training, they can ask the council for support. If eligible, any help would last until their 25th birthday

3. Care Leavers

3.1 There are currently 283 care leavers. **9** who are aged between 16 and 17 years of age, **211** between the ages of 18 and 20 and **63** that are post 21. **23** of the Care Leavers were Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) and to support these young people we:

- Have linked with a GP in Huddersfield, who has developed project that supports the emotional and mental health of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children.
- We are liaising with Migration Yorkshire to access training in relation to triple planning and the process to follow if appealing a right to remain is exhausted.

3.2 We recognise that it takes time to develop trusting relationships, and this may particularly be more difficult for our young people due to many instances of early childhood trauma they have suffered.

3.3 To support the development of a positive relationship, we are currently allocating Personal Advisor from the Leaving Care Service from the age of 17. This will allow for early planning and joint working between Social Workers and Personal Advisors to offer more robust support for the young person as they move into adulthood.

4. Pathway Plans

4.1 All eligible, relevant, and former relevant children should have a Pathway Plan, which will set out the support that will be provided to the care leaver once they have left care. This must be based on the Needs Assessment carried out. The Plan should be prepared before the young person leaves care.

The Pathway Plan should include:

- the nature of and level of contact and personal support to be provided.
- the young person's health needs and how these should be met.
- arrangements to support the young person in further education or employment.
- arrangements to support the young person in sustaining and developing family relationships.
- arrangements to ensure the young person is properly equipped for taking greater responsibility towards their independence.
- an assessment of the young person's financial needs and capacity and any financial assistance provided.
- arrangements to ensure the young person is living in suitable accommodation.
- Any 'Staying Put' arrangements.

4.2 The Pathway Plan should set objectives and include how and when these should be achieved. It should be reviewed when a young person requests this and/or the Personal Advisor thinks it is necessary or at a minimum of every 6 months.

Pathway Plans must reflect the young person’s developing level of maturity and independence and always reflect the young people’s voice.

4.3 The initial Pathway Plan is undertaken by the Social Worker and good practice is that if there is an allocated Personal Advisor from the Leaving Care Team then reviews undertaken prior to their 18th birthday will be done jointly. The PA from the Leaving Care Team takes sole ownership when the young person is 18.

4.4 The Care Leavers Service are responsible for completing the pathway plans for young people post 18. Out of the 283 care leavers, 240 have a current up to date plan, 34 are overdue and 9 have no plan in place. Out of the 9 where no plan is in place 4 are qualifying young people so not eligible for a Pathway Plan, 4 are pre 18 and 1 who has a Personal Advisor is in custody. This has resulted in a delay in completing a plan due to him not having looked after status prior his remand into custody.

Up to date plan	Overdue plan	No Plan
240	34	9

4.5 On further exploration of the data we identified that

- 8 of those showing as overdue had a review but there was a delay in recording.
- 7 are overdue as a result, of staff sickness.
- On occasion there has been a delay in authorisation of the plans due to manager absence. In order, to address these clear expectations have been set that the duty manager will authorisation these plans in the manager’s absence.
- Not all staff are fully confident in their ability to use Liquid Logic and are not following the correct procedure when generating pathway plans which has impacted on the data. In order, to address this specific training is planned to take place with all staff.

4.6 In order to further improve practice, we aim to learn from good practice in other service areas and alongside the training the quality of plans will be explored to ensure that they are reflecting specific individual needs of the young person.

They must address how the young person will:

- Live independently and ensure the young person is living in suitable accommodation including supporting them in staying put arrangements.
- Aspire & achieve which will look at education, training, and employment.

- That the young person is healthy & well and any concerns that may prevent this are addressed within the plan – e.g., support at the emotional wellbeing clinic. We also have a Care Experienced Parents working group.
- Keeping in touch with Personal Advisor and the nature of and level of contact and personal support to be provided.
- Young people’s needs regarding financial support should be assessed within the pathway along with areas of support, amounts to be paid and the frequency of payments to be made.

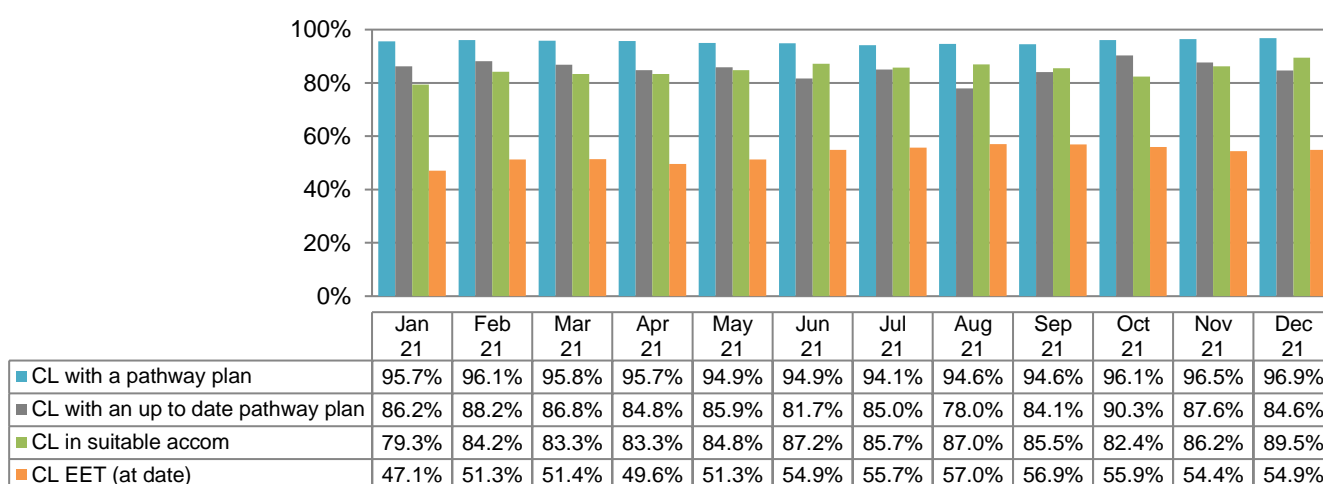
4.7 The expected components of a pathway plan are laid out in the Support & Financial Guidance Policy which is currently being embedded across the Childrens directorate. In relation to this we are:

- Delivering a series of briefing
- Encouraging staff to familiarise themselves with the financial payments available for supporting our young people.
- Devising an easy read guide for staff and young people
- Revising our commitment to care leavers.

5. Education, Training and Employment

5.1 The policy outlines several financial incentives to support our young people to aspire and achieve and actively engage in Education, Employment and Training (EET). The following sets out the numbers engaged and Not in Education, Employment and Training (NEET). Fig 2

Fig 2 Care Leaver Pathway Plans, Suitable Accommodation and EET Outcomes



5.2 The number of young people not engaged in Education, Employment and Training has reduced. The contributory factor for some is due to the impact and disruption

of COVID, but this should not be a barrier to us facilitating and providing opportunities for our young people to be engaged in purposeful activity that supports their transition to adulthood. For them to achieve this we need to explore and create opportunities by building our links with communities, businesses, and Kirklees Council as the Corporate Parent.

5.3 The number of young people not in Education, Employment and Training (NEET) needs to improve. To address this, we will ensure that:

- Personal Advisor's will attend all Personal Education Planning (PEP) meetings to ensure they have a greater understanding of a young person transitioning into the Leaving Care Team. This will enable them to have a greater understanding of strengths of the young person and understanding of what type of Education, Employment and Training (EET) provision is compatible and the opportunities for them to achieve are available.
- We will work with virtual school to establish how they can support young people post 18 in education.
- We plan to develop an EET panel to explore and match young people to available opportunities.
- We are working with data integrity colleagues to rectify issues including being able to update records in real time to ensure that data is a true reflection of the circumstances and no young person's records have information not updated in a timely manner.
- Regular joint program delivery of the 4-4-2 program between leaving care staff and Huddersfield Town Football Club (HTFC) which support our young people developing their independence skills and supports them into voluntary work which could potentially lead to employment opportunities.
- Activities are recorded for young people aged between 16-17 open to the social work teams.

6. Accommodation

6.1 Early planning is paramount and will provide security and stability for our young people to ensure that they live in suitable accommodation.

6.2 To support the pathway into independence in relation to accommodation we have a dedicated senior Personal Advisors as part of the Rough Sleepers Initiative and funded by the department for levelling up, housing and communities. This role is a consultative role with an overview of all young people who are threatened with homelessness in the leaving care service. This also includes the Prison Protocol which allows early preventative work to be undertaken between the senior Personal Advisor and Kirklees Housing to ensure that no Care Leaver is released from custody without a clear plan for quality accommodation.

Suitable accommodation	Unsuitable accommodation	Accommodation not recorded
254	19	10

- 6.3 The data highlights that we have 254 young people assessed to be residing in suitable/approved placements. 19 are currently in accommodation deemed unsuitable. However out of these, 14 are in custody. 4 out of the remaining 5 are deemed to be in unsuitable accommodation following returning to reside with parents and overcrowding. There is one young person who is recorded as homeless, but we are aware they are staying with her partners parents and are working to rectify this.
- 6.4 There are 10 young people whose accommodation status is not recorded. Out of these 7 are not known to the Care Leavers Service. Teams in the wider Childrens services will be reminded of the importance to update accommodation to enable us to provide a true reflection of a young person's accommodation status.
- 6.5 We are also embedding the Staying Put Policy In relation to this we are:
- Delivering a series of briefing
 - Devising an easy read guide
 - We are in the process of transferring some off the existing young people on a staying put arrangement onto the new policy.

7. Keeping in Touch

- 7.1 The Personal Advisor is required to visit or be in contact with the Care Leaver aged up to 20 and to keep in touch with all young people aged over 21 up to age 25 throughout the year as set out in The Leaving Care Act 2000.
- 7.2 The visiting pattern will be dependent on the wishes and needs of the individual care leaver. Contact with Care Leavers has seen a slight increase from 90.8% in November 2021 to 92.7% in November 2021. This equates to the Service being in touch with 262 of our 283 Care Leavers.
- 7.3 A review of the 21 young people highlighted as not been seen, was undertaken and identified that 8 of the young people were in a custodial setting and had encountered difficulties in undertaking visits within timescale and 13 had been seen by the allocated Social Worker.
- 7.4 As a care leaver service, we want to ensure that those with the highest level of support needs due to individual vulnerabilities are seen on a more regular basis which potentially could mean weekly dependent on need.
- 7.5 The frequency of visits and contact will be individually needs led. It will influence how we allocate cases to allow the Personal Advisors to manage and deliver high quality work with each young person and have time to build those all-important relationships.

8. Quality Assurance and Performance Oversight

- 8.1 We are currently in process of revising and updating our reporting systems to reflect the types of contacts and visit frequency across the age range 16-17, 18-20 and 21 plus.
- 8.2 As a service we aim to improve our quality and timeliness of work with a view to improving the outcomes for our Care Leavers. We will do this by:
- Continuing to address the timeliness of practice by monitoring and reviewing the performance data and quality assurance of practice at the performance meeting that will take place every fortnight between the service manager and the team leaders.
 - We are in the process of revising our practice standards for the service
 - We will undertake regular Practice Learning Days
 - Practice Learning Days are quality assurance activities that will take place across the entire of children's services. These are about learning for the individual practitioner and the service, enabling a learning culture to flourish.
 - The purpose of Practice Learning Days is to maximise impact and learning opportunities, ensuring that all areas of children's services have, the opportunity to engage and influence good quality practice embedded throughout the child's journey.
- 8.3 The first practice learning days with the relatively new service manager and team leaders was undertaken on 20th and 21st January 2022.
- 8.4 The key line of enquiry was regarding the quality of both pre and post 18 pathway planning with a particular focus on supporting transitions between children and adult services for young people/adults with identified learning, behavioural and emotional support needs.
- 8.5 Areas of good practice identified included:
- Targeted support to develop independent living skills
 - Evidence of liaison with health services and assurance of access to ongoing support
 - Identification of, and agreement for access to ongoing specialist care provision (funding for specialist residential placement / shared lives agreement/ extension to semi-independent living arrangements / pursuit of agreement for supported board and lodgings)
 - Timely referrals to adults' mental health and learning disability teams
- 8.6 Areas for development included:
- Limited exploration of the impact of the young person's diagnosis or their accompanying needs
 - Lack of robust exploration of likely support in cases where young people had expressed a determination to return to the care of their birth family post 18
 - Significant delay in updating plans
 - In some instances, it was identified where pathway plans had not been completed until post 18 by which time the Personal Advisor was the lead worker

8.7 To address the areas for development we will ensure:

- That robust induction plans are in place for new members of staff with opportunities to shadow other services.
- Service Managers from Children in Care and Care Leaver Teams will identify roles and responsibilities of the teams and identify areas where joint working will improve outcomes for our young people. This involves early planning.
- Pathways to adult services and with the Children with disabilities team will be explored and developed where necessary.
- We will ensure that all new Personal Advisor's attend and complete the BECOME programme and existing Personal Advisors are encouraged to attend has part of their personal development.

The BECOME programme is a 6-month accredited customised qualification which aims to develop PA's professional knowledge and understanding and improve their practice. We currently have four PAs on the current cohort, and we will be promoting the benefits of attendance moving forward.

8.8 Quality Assurance and Practice framework will focus on:

- Are we getting the practice basics right for our Care Leavers.
- Is assessment work being planned, are the right people involved in this and is this leading to meaningful change for our care leavers.
- Aspire all our Care Leavers are in employment, education, or training.
- Are PA's planning their work effectively.
- Are clear actions being generated not just from day to day work with the Care Leaver but through supervision and management oversight and at points of change or crisis.
- Are plans and actions being followed up and reviewed.
- Are Care Leaver's plans meeting their needs and are these being used to inform day to day support and intervention in their lives.
- Do our processes and procedures support effective planning.

9. Summary

9.1 Overall, there are several changes and expectations moving forward for the team. This will bring, some challenges, but we are confident that we can embed the changes and a consistent approach to provide a needs led service resulting in better outcomes for our young people as they grow to be young adults.

9.2 As a service, we are confident that as we further embed Performance Management and Quality Assurance processes this will enable us to continue to identify, challenge and improve things for children and young people to avoid care arrangements and care plans drifting. There has been an improvement in relation to identifying poor practice and outcomes for our young people with timely resolution.

- 9.3 Stability in leadership, management and decision-making are helping to improve the quality of planning and engagement from a strength and relational based approach, but we recognise there is still more to do.
- 9.4 There has been some improvement noted in relation to the scrutiny of performance data and quality of practice that occurs at all levels to ensure timely and effective care planning. It is recognised that further embedding of utilising the data to inform practice is required.
- 9.5 The relationship with partners and Corporate Parenting Board who provide independent scrutiny of Children Looked After and Care Leaver service has been strengthened. There is a clear process for escalation of concerns, and this provides assurances that any delay on planning is escalated timely.