

**REPORT TITLE: THE RE-DESIGN OF THE LEAVING CARE SERVICE**

<b>Meeting:</b>	<b>Children’s Scrutiny Panel</b>
<b>Date:</b>	<b>19<sup>th</sup> March 2026</b>
<b>Cabinet Member (if applicable)</b>	<b>Cllr V Kendrick</b>
<b>Key Decision Eligible for Call In</b>	<b>No No Planned report to Children’s Scrutiny</b>
<b>Purpose of Report</b> To support Children’s Scrutiny Panel oversight on the work to deliver improvements and the re-design of the leaving care service.	
<b>Recommendations</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The scrutiny panel note the report and raise any questions arising from the report.</li> </ul>	
<b>Reasons for Recommendations</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure transparency and accountability</li> </ul>	
<b>Resource Implications:</b>  There is no resource implications associated with this report.	
<b>Date signed off by <u>Executive Director</u> &amp; name</b>	Tom Brailsford 4.3.26
<b>Is it also signed off by the Service Director for Finance?</b>	N/A
<b>Is it also signed off by the Service Director for Legal Governance and Commissioning (Monitoring Officer)?</b>	N/A

**Electoral wards affected:** All

**Ward councillors consulted:** Not Applicable

**Public or private:** Public

**Has GDPR been considered?** YES - no risk associated

**1. Executive Summary**

1.0 Prior to the inspection of Kirklees local authority children’s services in July 2024 by the children’s services regulator (Ofsted), children’s services had undertaken extensive work to self-assess our services for care leavers and had put into effect a Continuous Service Improvement Plan to improve our service and support for Care Leavers. In February 2024, the lead member for children’s services put a motion to full council to recognise care experience as a ‘protected characteristic’. There has been extensive efforts and achievements since 2024 in building a collaboration with a range of partners to enhance

our care leaver offer and the support and experiences available to care leavers in our authority. Given the increase in support being provided by the service, together with an increase in the number for young people entitled to statutory support as care leaver, children services approved a re-design of services to increase capacity for allocating Personal Advisors to support care leavers, a review and regrade of the job roles within the service and increase in management and supervisory capacity to support risk and vulnerability management. The service has also worked together with the local authority's homes and neighbourhood teams to reduce the risks of care experienced young adults requiring temporary accommodation and to increase the experiences for care leavers moving into their own homes. This work has been overseen and supported through the Kirklees Parenting Strategy 2024 – 2027, which sets out a number of linked priorities including our priority to 'Develop our Care Leavers Partnership to deliver success for life'.

1.1 The report below provides an overview of this work.

## **2. Information required to take a decision**

2.0 In July 2024 Kirklees children services was inspected by Ofsted who assessed the experiences and progress of care leavers to require improvement to be good. At the time of the inspection, it was noted that the service had already made significant progress and held a clear plan for further embedding and extending the improvements already acknowledged by the inspectors.

2.1 Underpinning the progress identified at the time of the inspection and since, is our continuous Care Leavers Service Improvement Plan which was initially informed by our work with North Yorkshire as our partners in practice and Mark Riddell, the National Government Advisor for Care Leavers. We have embedded a range of opportunities for our care leavers and developed a robust local offer supported by our growing community of partners which embrace our corporate parenting commitment to care experienced young adults in Kirklees.

2.2 We have committed additional investment to support timely allocation capacity for Care Leavers who require a Personal Advisor and increased management capacity to provide additional oversight. This will maximise oversight of risk and vulnerability to our care leavers and enhance Personal Advisors capacity to support effective planning and support with our care leavers. We have also created an Advanced Personal Advisor role providing progression within the service. We are confident that our increased capacity and working culture will further embed and drive our vision for care leavers throughout our service and wider partnership.

2.3 Our Kirklees Parenting Partnership has grown in strength and effectiveness and has harnessed and capitalised on the resources of wider partners. Progress of this work has been presented to, and supported by, the Kirklees Parenting Board which is jointly chaired by the local authority Chief Executive Officer and Lead Member for Children's Services. There is a wide representation of partners on the board including colleagues from Probation Services, the local college, the University of Huddersfield and a broad range of health partners and others. Our partnership supports the delivery of our Kirklees Parenting Strategic priorities which were revised to reflect the achievements and progress made in a re-published strategy in November 2025.

2.4 Our Board's most significant development in the past year has been to establish our care experienced young adult board members. This has enhanced our capacity to understand

the lived experience of children in care and care leavers which is at the centre of our decision making.

- 2.5 The board held its second annual 'Take Over' event in November 2025 which brought together a wider group of care experienced adults and children from our Care Leavers Forum who, supported by our care experienced young adult board members, delivered a fantastic evening board meeting and engaged a host of our strategic partners. Our care experienced board members ensure that they provide direct feedback from board meetings through visiting the Care Leavers Forum and Children in Care Council or through a feedback video they now record following each board meeting.
- 2.6 Our priorities are supported by the Children's Services Data and Insight Team, and we have developed key data reporting which informs service delivery, management oversight and effective reporting to our senior leadership and Corporate Parenting governance structures. This assures us that our quality assurance activity is effectively providing leaders with an accurate line of sight and that our improvement steps are well informed. We remain ambitious for our care leavers and our refreshed Kirklees Parenting Strategy sets out aspirations which is building a Care Leaver Partnership to 'deliver success for life.'
- 2.7 The quality of our pathway plans is steadily improving largely due to our redesigned 'My Pathway plan' which was co-produced to support better ownership for our young care leaver adults. We know that we have more to do to ensure consistent practice for our 15- to 18-year-olds so that they are supported to take greater control of their plans as we seek to incorporate their goals, dreams and plans.
- 2.8 We have at times experienced higher caseloads than desired, which has inhibited the time to focus on establishing children's voices consistently within 'My Pathway' plans. Our plans have greatly benefited from the work done across our services to ensure that the language and 'voice to the child' is embedded in records and plans.
- 2.9 In October 2025 we undertook a 'deep dive' to consider the quality of 'My Pathway' plans for 15 to 25-year-olds. This showed us that the planned improvements in both the quality and timeliness of our pathway planning for Looked After Children was evident within our Looked After Children's Team.
- 2.10 As with our neighbouring authorities, identifying timely suitable independent accommodation for care leavers remains a challenge. Care leavers experiences are greatly improved as a result of our enhanced collaboration with our Homes and Neighbourhoods colleagues. Local Authority accommodation is consistently being provided as the first move to independent accommodation for most of our young people moving to their first tenancy.
- 2.11 Care leavers benefit from a 'landlord' who is also their corporate parent. We have also seen an improved letting standard for care leavers with access to housing revenue grant being used to supplement tenancy ready standards to support our young people as they move to their first homes. Work continues in partnership with our housing services to further consolidate our mutually agreed standards. We are working closely with other accommodation providers so that we can establish the same standard for other forms of new tenancies with wider social landlords. This has meant that care leavers have more to flexibility to utilise their setting up home allowance to purchase additional items to furnish and personalise their first home.

- 2.12 Our Local Offer is now published and well embedded, and care leavers and our practitioners are clear about accessing information about entitlements through our digital offer. We have also established access to the national Care Leaver Offer webpages to ensure that our offer is available and accessible as widely as possible.
- 2.13 Our increased investment into our Care Leavers Service has been designed to maximise and promote care leavers to develop and maintain positive, trusting and stable relationships with their Personal Advisers. We have invested in promoting the use of staying put arrangements where this is assessed as right for the young person and their carers. We recognise the significance of supporting our young adult care leavers to maintain relationships with carers, to support a personal and individual approach to them moving towards independence.
- 2.14 We have further developed opportunities through our two hubs with a focus on supporting care leavers to establish, develop and maintain strong social networks. In addition to our regular focussed drop-in sessions, such as stay and play sessions for care leaver parents and their children, our craft sessions supported by the Meltham Quilters and our emotional health and wellbeing drop-ins, we also provide social events. These take place across the year and bring our young adult care leavers into a space co-designed and supported by Personal Advisors where they can access cooking, laundrette and washing facilities. We have care leavers accessing these services with their families and we promote an atmosphere where trusted adults are available to support and help in a safe space.
- 2.15 The rise in the numbers of care leavers working with the Care Leavers Service correlates with our commitment to provide ongoing supportive relationships and the opportunity to be an active part of the "Kirklees Family". We are delighted that our deliberate intention to support our older care leavers to maintain their relationships with their trusted Personal Advisors and to access ongoing support is an approach that our care leavers are choosing to engage with.
- 2.16 Young adult Care Leavers over the age of 21 now represent a quarter of all care leavers with an allocated Personal Advisor. Increasing the opportunity for continued engagement for adult care leavers over 21 years has been a specific focus over the past year. In addition to those with a named Personal Advisor we provide support through our hubs to care leavers who access support for specific issues and are seeking help with advocacy and signposting.
- 2.17 We currently have 358 Care Leavers with a named Personal Advisor of which 86 are aged between 21 and 25. Our data tells us that we are in touch with 96% of our care leavers, 86% of our 18-year-old care leavers and 98% of our 19 – 22-year-old care leavers. We recognise there has been some data inconsistencies with the recording of visits, and we continue to work with our data team to reflect our revised practice standards on maintaining and reporting engagement and contact.
- 2.18 We have deliberately based our Personal Advisors in our two hubs to provide both a duty service to assure access and as an effective way to give care leavers practical support and access to resources where needed. We have worked with partners to expand our offer in developing a broader range of sessions including with the DWP and Calderdale and Kirklees Careers to support employment groups.
- 2.19 Following the successful engagement with our care leavers football activities in 2024 we sought sponsorship to develop and equip our team 'The Kirklees Kickers' with a kit they

wanted to wear. They were provided with a fantastic opportunity engaging with the national care leavers football tournament staged at the Molineux stadium in Wolverhampton. This has led to an increased group of care leavers from very different backgrounds coming together, developing their social networks supported by our Personal Advisors.

- 2.20 The extent of our partnership contributions has continued. We were overwhelmed with volunteers offering to support our care leavers Christmas dinner which proved to be a fantastic day for the third year running. In addition to the direct support and benefits these activities and opportunities provide for our care leavers; they also support our efforts to raise awareness and build our community of support for care experienced adults living in Kirklees.
- 2.21 Through our priority group we have ensured that we have the right accommodation arrangements for care leavers, including those in housing crisis. We have undertaken focussed work to reduce the risk of use of temporary accommodation for young adult care leavers. Our Strategic Director for Housing 'sponsored' this work retaining oversight and supporting joint work with our services. As a result, we have established joint tracking of crisis accommodation arrangements on a weekly basis and have seen a significant reduction in care leavers experiencing temporary accommodation. We only use temporary accommodation in a crisis and emergency. A significant factor in our success in reducing the use of temporary accommodation has been our joint project. We have developed shared accommodation provision which provides short term supported self-contained flats for young adults.
- 2.22 Our Kirklees Parenting Strategy sets out our ambition to support and promote the health of our care leavers in Kirklees. This priority is jointly led by our Designated Safeguarding, Children looked After and Care Leavers Nurse employed by the Integrated Care Board alongside our Service Manager for our Emotional Health and Wellbeing Services. The priority group has driven our performance in ensuring that all our care leavers received their 'health passports' as they reach adulthood, secured arrangements to support care leavers access to free prescriptions up to their 25<sup>th</sup> birthday and embedded emotional health and wellbeing drop-in sessions as an established core offer at our hubs. This significant improvement to our care leaver offer was developed through direct feedback and support from our young adult care leaver board members.
- 2.23 Our previous 'independence programme', which was to support young adult care leavers to prepare for managing their own tenancy, came to an end of grant funding in August 2025. Following a review of the impact of the programme we agreed that this approach had achieved limited buy in. We have instead taken an individual approach to support our young people to develop the skills, confidence and knowledge of navigating their own tenancy as an individual approach which is complemented by the ranges of drop ins and partners working with our services and in our hubs supporting our care leavers.
- 2.24 Supporting our care leavers to engage in education, training and employment remains one of the key priorities within our Kirklees Parenting Strategy. We have celebrated some significant achievements of individual care leavers including one of our previous young adult care leaver board members who has secured a residential children's home job in our authority which has been a life ambition for her. This year we have supported 10 care experienced young adults to begin their university journey and seen four complete their degrees.

- 2.25 One of those who started university this year is an adult separated young person who despite the instability of their immigration application was able to achieve GCSEs in English and in digital infrastructure. Alongside their studies they volunteer as well as being a part of a football team. They have continued to be a huge support for some of our separated young adults to promote their attendance at activities and events. They are now studying at university as well as being one of our Kirklees Parenting Board members.
- 2.26 Our December 2025 data shows that 65% of young adult care leavers who were available to the labour market and supported by the services were engaged in education, training or employment which though below our aspiration is above the national average.
- 2.27 We have considered and evaluated our strengths and areas for development and have the following improvement activities set for the next 12 months.
- We plan closer work with our Adult Services to enhance transition arrangements.
  - Embed our commissioned training and development programme across our Care Leavers Service.
  - Expand and build on the success of our joint work with housing services delivering accommodation offers for former Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children who are adult care leavers awaiting home office decisions to remain and those care leavers requiring accommodation crisis.
  - Ensure Pathway Plans are consistent in quality with clear actions and timescales and co-produced with the young person across all service areas.
  - Increase the number of care leavers engaged in higher education and employment with training.
  - Further embed a culture of 'The Family Business' across the authority and our wider partners and through our Virtual School and local authority's Employment and Skills service to develop greater employment, apprentice and work experience opportunities.

### **3. Implications for the Council**

Providing services to care leavers is a statutory responsibility for the council which is monitoring and subject to inspection by Ofsted.

#### **3.0 Council Plan**

Our Kirklees Parenting Strategy aligns closely with the principles and priorities of the Kirklees Council plan most notably to work in partnership, protecting the vulnerable and achieving inclusion.

#### **3.1 Financial Implications**

Our plan and services for care leavers has maximised opportunities to enhance our services through working with partners and developing our relationships with third sector and independent stakeholders. Without these relationships many of our activities, projects and programmes would be significantly limited.

## 3.2 Legal Implications

Many of the services provided through our care leavers services are statutory requirements of the authority and subject to external oversight and inspection through our inspectorate.

## 3.3 Climate Change and Air Quality

Not applicable

## 3.5 Risk, Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) or Human Resources

Not applicable

## 4. Consultation

Not applicable

## 5. Engagement

Not applicable

## 6. Options

Not applicable

### 6.0 Options considered

Not applicable

### 6.1 Reasons for recommended option

Not applicable

## 7. Next steps and timelines

Not applicable

## 8. Contact officers

Joel Hanna Head of Service for Corporate Parenting [Joel.Hanna@Kirklees.gov.uk](mailto:Joel.Hanna@Kirklees.gov.uk)

Lauren Stephenson Service Manager Care Leavers Service

[Lauren.Stephenson@Kirklees.gov.uk](mailto:Lauren.Stephenson@Kirklees.gov.uk)

## 9. Background Papers and History of Decisions

- Ofsted Report on: Inspection of Kirklees local authority children's services (available Online)  
Inspection dates: 8 to 19 July 2024  
Lead inspector: Rachel Griffiths, His Majesty's Inspector
- Kirklees Parenting Strategy 2024 – 2027 (available Online)

## 10. Appendices

None

## 11. Service Director responsible

Vicky Metherringham Service Director for Family help, Safeguarding and Performance  
[Vicky.Metherringham@Kirklees.gov.uk](mailto:Vicky.Metherringham@Kirklees.gov.uk)