



Hertfordshire County Council

Care Leaver Strategy

2019 - 2022

Introduction

Welcome to the Hertfordshire County Council Care Leaver Strategy. This strategy relates to young people who are preparing to leave care between the ages of 16 and 17, or who have left care and continue to require services between the ages of 16 and 25.

We believe that it is everyone's responsibility to help those who have been in care to overcome the difficulties that they experienced in their childhoods, so that they can lead successful adult lives. More than anything else we recognise that the local help and support that Care Leavers receive from the local authority leaving care service and other partner agencies are critical to whether Care Leavers make the transition from care to independence successfully.

For our Children Looked After and Care Leavers we strive to be excellent Corporate Parents, having high aspirations for them and encouraging them to achieve their goals and potential. We do this by creating a culture where all professionals working with Care Leavers share our high aspirations and ensure that our Children Looked After and Care Leavers have all the opportunities we would give our own children through good access to high quality education, health and social care services.

This Strategy focuses on how we are going to work with all of our partners to meet the needs of Care Leavers. The strategy also identifies how we are promoting better outcomes for Care Leavers by ensuring that they achieve a sense of belonging and stability, and that they are involved in the planning and delivery of services through co-production.

We recognise this is only the start of the journey. It will be the delivery of this strategy in real terms that will make the difference to the lives of Care Leavers. To deliver our strategy requires coordinated and sustained effort with our partners to continue to improve service standards and everyday practice.

This strategy will be further developed as the needs of care leavers and legislation change and is therefore a document that will be regularly reviewed and refreshed.

Overview of Strategy

Continuing to review and refresh how Children's Services and other agencies support care leavers is crucial to improving the lives of vulnerable young people. Care leavers need services which are integrated, easy to access, embedded within local communities, and which treat them with respect and understanding of their needs.

The Care Leaver Strategy is based on the principles of good corporate parenting to ensure the holistic needs of care leavers are integrated, young person friendly and deliver good outcomes.

The priorities of the strategy are aligned with the Outcome Bees and promises that Hertfordshire County Council has committed to our care leavers. This document also outlines the current means of delivery for meeting our priorities.

The Strategy has been updated following publication of the Children & Social Work Act 2017 and subsequent guidance. This includes the extension of the Care Leaver service to 21-25 year olds and the launch of our Local Offer to Care Leavers.

Corporate Parents

All young people are likely to need support during the transition to adulthood. Young people leaving care are likely to be particularly vulnerable due to their previous life experiences and often more limited immediate family support. Hertfordshire does not see leaving care as a process driven by the age of the young person, rather that plans for each young person will be based on an assessment of their emotional maturity and coping skills.

Transition to adulthood is often a turbulent time: transitions are not always sequential. Young people can be regarded as an adult in some areas but not in others. For many young people, their transition to adulthood can be extended and delayed until they are emotionally and financially ready and they have the qualifications they need and aspire to, so that they have the opportunity to achieve their economic potential.

Young people from care may not have this option. Whilst most young people know they can call on the support of their families to help them through unforeseen difficulties, care leavers may not be able to rely on family support if things do not work out as they make their journey into adulthood.

With this in mind and following the 'spirit' of the Leaving Care Act 2000 and associated Regulations, we aim to act as a 'good' Corporate Parent to offer support to our children who have left care so they feel that they can turn to us as their support. We want our children and young people to have everything that good parents want for their children, and to get the same level of care and support that other young people receive from their parents. We will treat Care Leavers with respect and dignity by understanding their experiences and listening to their voices.

This may be in the form of advice and assistance or more pragmatic support as any other good parent would offer.

All care leavers should have access to services which are appropriate to their needs, including those which arise from their gender, racial origin, cultural and linguistic background, sexual orientation and disability.

Children's Services, in partnership with others, will act as a 'good parent'. This means accepting that the transition to adulthood can include more than one change of direction or breakdown in arrangements, during which the young person will need support and encouragement to learn from what has happened and restart their journey.

Hertfordshire County Council recognises that to be good corporate parents we need to put children and young people first, be powerful advocates for them to receive the best services and



opportunities, to help and support them to be ambitious and make a successful transition to adulthood.

Our Corporate Parenting Strategy can be found at:

<https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/childrens-social-care/in-care/corporate-parenting-board.aspx>

The National Context

The Hertfordshire Care Leaver Strategy sits within a national and local context and is determined and driven by legislation and guidance. It also aligns with other strategies and plans of our partner agencies and local Boards.

The legislation and policies which primarily impact on Care Leavers and Care Leaver services that have influenced the development of the strategy are as follows:

- Children Act (1989)
- Raising Participation Age (2013)
- Future of Apprenticeships in England (2013)
- Care Leavers Strategy (2013)
- Working Together to Safeguard Children (2013)
- Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation (2013)
- The Children and Families Act (2014)
- Care Act (2014)
- Promoting the education of Looked After Children - Statutory guidance for local authorities (2014)
- Children and Families Act (2014)
- Future in mind – promoting, protecting and improving our children and young people’s mental health and wellbeing (2015)
- Promoting the health and wellbeing of Looked After Children (2015)
- Children’s social care reform: a vision for change (2016)
- Putting children first: delivering our vision for excellent children’s social care (2016)
- Residential Care in England: Report of Sir Martin Narey’s independent review of children’s residential care (2016)
- Keep on Caring – Supporting Young People from Care to Independence (2016)
- Ending Gang Violence and Exploitation (2016)
- Rights of the Child – European Commission -encouraging the right to a family life
- In Care, Out of Trouble (2016) Lord Laming report on behalf of the Prison Reform Trust
- Children & Social Work Act 2017

Who are 'Care Leavers'?

A Care Leaver is someone who has spent time in the care of the Local Authority.

The following young people, who are statutorily entitled to support, are part of this group:

- **Eligible** – children aged 16-17 who are still in care, and who have been in care for 13 weeks or more from the age of 14 and have been in care at some point when they were between the ages of 16 and 17.
- **Relevant** – children aged between 16 and 17 who have left care. This category of Care Leaver also includes children who are detained in institutions such as prisons or hospitals.
- **Former Relevant** – young people who are between the ages of 18 and 21 and who were previously eligible and/or relevant, and who are entitled to ongoing support to enable their successful transition to independence.
- **Qualifying** – A young person who has been a CLA for at least 24 hours, post his/her 16th birthday. Young people covered by the fact that they were being privately fostered or subject to a special guardianship order. A young person who has had a number of planned short term breaks no longer than 4 weeks, and after each one they returned to their parents/or someone with parental responsibility. This will particularly apply to disabled young people who have regular periods of short-term breaks. Under the 2010 regulations this group is deemed to be qualifying
- Young people aged between the ages of 21 and 25 and who were previously eligible and/or relevant, who are in education training or employment and who wish to receive an ongoing service.
- Young people aged 21-25 who are current or returning care leavers requesting a service under the Children & Social Work Act 2017 guidelines.

Outcome Bees

A single-vision Outcome Framework known as the ‘Six Outcome Bees’ has been developed to enable us to:

- Create a vision that all members of the children’s workforce are inspired by and signed up to
- Drive forward an outcomes focused approach in the delivery of Children’s Services
- Ensure consistency in the way we monitor and deliver outcomes for families
- Create a common language within the workforce
- Engage our partners and develop a multi-agency outcomes focused approach.



Below is detail of how each of the six Outcome Bees link with the desired outcomes for our Care Leavers:

Be Safe

- Support to settle in accommodation
- Ensuring minimal changes of worker (i.e. only changes where unavoidable circumstances)
- Ensuring accommodation is felt to be safe and suitable
- Extending foster placements by way of Staying Put
- Broadening the range of housing provision through commissioning activity
- Ensuring floating support is accessible

Be Healthy

- Strengthening Mental Health support to young people through a multi-agency response
- Supporting young people with dual diagnosis
- The physical and emotional health of care leavers will be supported by a range of appropriate services and support will be in place for young people transitioning from children to adult services
- Every care leaver will have their Health Records (health information whilst being CLA)
- Ensure care leavers have the skills and knowledge to eat healthily and live a healthy lifestyle
- Developing peer mentoring services

Be Ambitious

- Ensuring skills and strengths are promoted and support care leavers to have ambitions
- Encouraging and supporting all care leavers to remain engaged in education, take up training opportunities and undertake activities aimed at improving employability

- Ensure good access to further and higher education as well as better support whilst in further education, at college or university
- Ensure access to relevant additional adviser support, work experience, apprenticeships. Working with Jobcentre Plus or other relevant providers to access direct personalised employment support to those care leavers who face greater difficulties in finding work, including support to help them volunteer, train or undertake work experience

Be Resilient

- Care leavers are supported to identify positive relationships and make good community links.
- Care leavers are aware of their rights and responsibilities
- Talents are nurtured, recognised and celebrated. Individual's identity is also promoted as positive and again, recognised and celebrated
- Care leavers are confident and able to deal with life's challenges

Be Independent

- Care leavers leave care at a time when they are ready
- Care leavers receive high quality on-going support so that they do not feel lonely and isolated
- Care leavers have been equipped with the skills to live independently
- Care leavers have someone they can contact for help when they need it
- Care leavers with complex needs have a supported transition plan

Be Happy

- Care leavers feel that they belong, have a sense of purpose and are part of the community
- Care leavers have a voice and their opinions are heard and valued
- They have a choice of activities and are given opportunities to give back to the community they live in
- Promote support networks for young people leaving care.

Means of Delivery

Personal Advisers

All care leavers are assigned a Personal Adviser when they turn 17.5 years old and can continue to receive support up until they are 25 years old. They review pathway plans (PWP) with individuals to ensure they are getting the right support, particularly in relation to financial entitlements and planning; support with accommodation and support accessing services such as health.

Voice of Young Person

Care leavers themselves are involved in co-producing the Care Leavers' Offer primarily through the Children in Care Council. Our young people have been integral to plans around the 21-25 care leavers service; Care Leavers Local Offer; welfare reforms/council tax exemption; transitions between services; pathway plans; attempting to engage non-engaging care leavers and innovative projects.

A Care Leavers Survey, conducted by telephone, takes place annually, where senior managers and Care Leavers involved in the Children in Care Council speak to care leavers about the service they are receiving. The feedback is incorporated into action plans for continuous improvement of the service.

Children in Care Council (CHICC)

CHICC's Care Leaver Group represents the views of care leavers, aged 18 onwards. They meet monthly to discuss issues related to leaving care. Members of the group are keen to ensure that young people are supported through transition to adulthood.

The group also runs an annual event for all care leavers in Hertfordshire.

More information about the Care Leavers CHICC group can be found at:

<https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/childrens-social-care/in-care/chicc/children-in-care-council-chicc.aspx>

Staying Put Policy

Our Staying Put Policy provides detail of the process to support young people to remain with their foster carers beyond 18 years of age where both the young person and foster carer would like the arrangement to continue.

Joint Housing Protocol

The Joint Housing Protocol, whilst also having a remit beyond care leavers including vulnerable families and young people, also outlines how Hertfordshire County Council and the ten housing districts within the county will work together to enable care leavers to move to social housing in a planned manner, avoiding the need to present as homeless.

The protocol also ensures all care leavers are being placed on the relevant local authority housing register at age 16 or 17 supported by the Brokerage Team who will also track progress.

Furthermore, there is a tenancy sign-up document used when care leavers are allocated accommodation to ensure that the care leavers' Personal Adviser or Herts Young Homeless worker are there to support and guide individuals through the process.

Project Positive

Project Positive aims to raise the aspirations of children in care and reduce the stigma associated with care leavers applying for jobs. The idea for the campaign came from a care leaver who was frustrated by the negative stereotype that she felt followed her around.

Initially the project was about encouraging Councillors, Hertfordshire County Council employees, educational representatives and local employers to make a pledge to say how they will support care leavers and challenge stereotypes of care leavers.

The project has developed and now includes the introduction of 'Positive Parcels.' These are wellbeing boxes for care leavers who need help with their mental wellbeing and who may be waiting to access support services.

Project Positive is continuing to develop, with plans for a two-day pilot workshop for care leavers in Summer 2019, to support preparation for employment with practical tips and support.

Care Leavers Action Group (CLAG)

The Care Leaver Action Group meets quarterly to provide strategic oversight of services to care leavers and the development of activities which build upon and maintain the good practice of the Service. This includes overseeing a number of initiatives and developments including the Care Leaver Local Offer and Covenant, Job Centre Plus Protocol and initiatives to support education, employment and training.

Transition to Adulthood Panel

The Transition to Adulthood Panel is multi-agency, comprising of partner representation at a level that allows decision making and accountability on behalf of their organisation.

The Panel is in place to support the effective delivery of appropriate services to reduce risk for young people, particularly those transitioning from Children's to Adult Services where they are not meeting service criteria.

The Panel is available for the escalation of cases where a young person is considered to have a high level of risk or complex needs and there are either barriers to delivering an effective risk management

plan; risks are not reducing; or where there are difficulties in the transition pathway for the young person leaving care or having left care.

Pledge to Care Leavers

The Pledge is our promise to all our young people leaving care in Hertfordshire. It is based on what young people leaving care have told us about their individual experiences and moving into adulthood.

Our Pledge to Care Leavers can be found at:

<https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/childrens-social-care/in-care/rights-responsibilities-and-entitlements/our-pledge.aspx>

Local Offer for Care Leavers

A comprehensive Care Leavers Local Offer, co-produced with our care leavers and following discussions with relevant stakeholders, has been launched. The comprehensive Local Offer provides young people with information to enable them to understand their entitlements, access appropriate services and utilise any offers unique to care leavers.

The Local Offer includes information on:

- Housing and accommodation
- A full guide to available financial support and guidance on managing money
- Education, training and employment opportunities with links to schemes, programmes and jobs
- Health and wellbeing including a comprehensive guide on the Health Service for Care Leavers, physical health, mental health, sexual health, young parents, smoking, drugs and alcohol and staying safe services
- Relationships with immediate and extended family, building appropriate relationships, relationships with professionals and developing a good support network.
- Participating and contributing in the wider community through volunteering, membership of groups and opportunities to influence and make services better
- Support available to Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)
- How young people can have their say on their experience of our Children's Services.

The Local Offer to Care Leavers can be found at:

<https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/childrens-social-care/leaving-care/care-leavers.aspx>

YC Hertfordshire

It is vital that support is given to young people when they are preparing for independence and that we tailor individual support for our Care Leavers. YC Hertfordshire delivers an Independent Living Skills programme that is proving popular and effective. They also provided a bespoke employability programme in partnership with the Job Centre Plus.

The support delivered will be consistent and continuous, mirroring what a good parent would provide. This will also involve, if possible and appropriate, the young person's immediate and extended family.

Furthermore, YC Herts are in the process of developing a peer mentoring offer which will match young people together to provide meaningful and sustainable contact primarily over the phone.

There are two separate elements to this project:

- A be-friending service to reduce the feelings of isolation, loneliness and despair offering routine catch ups and telephone calls;
- A signposting service to other services and to the local deliverer of advocacy service for Hertfordshire.

More information will be published on the Care Leavers Local Offer once fully operational.

Care Leavers Dashboard

Our care leaver performance data is analysed on a monthly basis following which actions are put in place where performance improvement is required.

We monitor key data including care leavers in suitable accommodation, changes in placement and worker to promote stability for care leavers, care leaver engagement in their pathway planning, the frequency of contact with their leaving care personal adviser and that pathway plans are up to date. Being ambitious for our care leavers is important to us and we are seeking improvements in the number of care leavers being in Education, Employment or Training.

This dashboard informs the Care Leaver Action Plan which is overseen by CLAG. Regular reporting on progress and performance is made to the Corporate Parenting Board.

Virtual School

The Virtual School brings together information about children and young people who are looked after by Hertfordshire as if they attended a single school. They continue to support care leavers with further education, training and employment up to the age of 19, or 25 if they attend further or higher education.

Further information about the support offered can be found at:

<https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/childrens-social-care/leaving-care/education-training-and-employment.aspx>

University Links

University Links is a new initiative in place to support care leavers who are in higher education. As part of our role as Corporate Parents, and following feedback from care leavers at University, this project sees senior members of staff within the council providing tailored mentoring support to those wishing to have additional support during the course of their studies.

Welfare Reforms

As part of the commitment to ensuring continuous development of our care leaver service, we are pro-actively and positively working to meet some changes within new legislation.

A multi-agency strategic group is working on a countywide response to changes in welfare benefits and how this impacts on care leavers. This work stream includes:

- Data gathering & analysis to look at housing stock against potential need. Homeless hub data adapted to measure improvements regarding 16/17 year olds.
- Training between housing and children's services to be adapted for new processes.
- Complete update of leaving care finance framework, including systems to identify support required for benefits, finance and accommodation skills.
- Clear accommodation pathway.
- Benefit entitlement and financial support.
- Supporting care leavers with housing deposits and payment of debts.
- Council tax exemption for care leavers.

Multi-Agency Working

Our aim is to work in partnership with other organisations to deliver holistic support to our care leavers, ensuring they are receiving the appropriate support for their individual needs.

We will continue to work with partner agencies and support them in their roles to ensure that care leavers are able to achieve happy and fulfilling lives.

Alongside our own Children's Services practitioners there is a dedicated team of multi-agency professionals all seeking to ensure that the needs of our care leavers are met:

