

JOINT STRATEGIC NEEDS ASSESSMENT

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

CHAPTER: Key Groups

TOPIC: Care Leavers

Why is this important?

Care leavers (those children and young people who have been looked after by the Local Authority) should expect the same level of care and support that other children and young people get from their parents or guardians.

The Government's Care Leaver Strategy (HM Government, 2013) sets out a cross-departmental strategy for young people leaving care.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/care-leaver-strategy>

Around 10,000 young people leave care in England each year aged between 16-18 years old. They leave home at a younger age and have more abrupt transitions to adulthood than their peers. Unlike their peers who normally remain in the family home, care leavers will often be living independently by the age of 18. Information from the Children Right's Director's surveys on care leavers and Children in Care Council (CICC) show that many care leavers feel that they leave care too early and often feel isolated and lonely.

Research and inspection reports show that the quality of support care leavers receive is patchy and that their journey through the first decade of adult life is often disrupted, unstable and troubled. They often struggle to cope and this can lead to social exclusion, long term unemployment or involvement in crime. For example, 34% of all care leavers were not in education, employment or training (NEET) at age 19 in 2013 compared to 15.5% of 18 year olds in the general population.

Care leavers come into contact with a range of services including housing, health, employment, and education, yet they are often not recognised as a priority group for services. Improving how local authorities, health authorities and other agencies support them is crucial to improving the lives of this vulnerable group of people. Care leavers need services which are integrated, easy to access, embedded within local communities, and which treat them with respect.

The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 makes provision for children and young persons who are being, or have been, looked after by a local authority.

http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130107105354/http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/@dh/@en/documents/digitalasset/dh_4058600.pdf

The main purpose of the legislation is to help young people who have been looked after by a local authority move from care into living independently in as stable a fashion as possible. To do this it amends the Children Act to place a duty on local authorities to assess and meet need. The responsible local authority is under a duty to assess and meet the care and support needs of eligible and relevant children and young people and to assist former relevant children, in particular in respect of their accommodation, employment, education and training.

In December 2013, following pilot work and voluntary policies in a number of local authorities, a new legal duty was placed on local authorities to provide financial support to every person who wants to stay with their foster parents until their 21st birthday – known as a ‘staying put arrangement’ (rather than a placement). This is in addition to a wider package of support for care leavers that includes changes to the rules so that 16 and 17 year olds remain in care until they are ready to move out, and greater financial support for young people leaving care at 18. In addition, a duty has been placed on local authorities to provide care leavers with a Personal Adviser where they wish to resume education and training up to the age of 25.

Key features and definitions are:

a) **Eligible children** are those in care aged 16 and 17 who have been looked after for a period to be prescribed. The age at which spells in care start to count towards eligibility will also be prescribed.

b) **Relevant children** are those aged 16 and 17 who meet the criteria for eligible children but who leave care. Regulations may exclude certain groups, such as children who return home permanently and children who receive respite care. Local authorities may, for example, take highly dependent children for short periods to give their carers a break. This group would remain the responsibility of their families and would not be eligible for the new arrangements even if their periods of respite care added up to the prescribed period for eligibility.

c) **Former relevant children** are those who before reaching the age of 18 were either eligible or relevant children.

d) **The responsible local authority** to be whichever one last looked after an eligible or relevant young person. That local authority will retain its responsibility wherever the young person may be living in England or Wales. At present responsibility falls to the authority in whose area they live. This has given rise to disputes over responsibility between authorities which the new arrangements are intended to avoid.

e) **A duty to keep in touch.** The responsible local authority to be under a duty to keep in touch with all its care leavers who qualify for these new support arrangements, including those aged 18-21 and beyond in some cases.

f) **Pathway Plans.** All eligible and relevant and former relevant children and

young people must have a Pathway Plan. This will take over from the existing care plan and will run at least until they are 21, covering education, training, career plans and support needed, for example to move into supported lodgings. Regulations may be made about Pathway Plans and their review. It is envisaged that they will be reviewed every six months or more frequently as needed.

g) **Personal Adviser.** All eligible, relevant and former relevant children and young people must have a Young Person's Adviser (referred to in the Act as a personal adviser) who will help to draw up the Pathway Plan and to make sure that it develops with the young person's changing needs and that it is implemented. When the young person leaves care and until they are at least 21 the Young Person's Adviser will be responsible for keeping in touch with them and ensuring that they receive the advice and support to which they are entitled. Regulations may provide that children in other groups might also have Young Person's Advisors.

h) **Vacation support.** The responsible local authority must assist care leavers in higher education, or in residential further education, with vacation accommodation where this is needed.

i) **Assistance with employment.** The responsible local authority must assist a former relevant child (and may assist other care leavers) with the costs associated with employment to the extent that his welfare requires it.

j) **Education and training support.** The responsible local authority must assist a former relevant child (and may assist other care leavers) with the costs of education and training up to the end of the agreed programme, even if that takes the young person past the age of 21, to the extent that his welfare and educational and training needs require it.

k) **Health.** Care leavers need to have timely access to mainstream and specialist health services, which meet their physical and mental health needs. Children often enter the care system with a poorer level of physical and mental health than their peers, and their longer-term outcomes remain worse. Two thirds of looked after children have at least one physical health complaint, and nearly half have a mental health disorder. Care leavers need to have clarity around the transition from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) to adult mental health services.

l) **General assistance.** The responsible local authority must assist a former relevant child (and may assist other care leavers) to the extent that his welfare requires it, either in kind or, exceptionally, in cash.

The Manchester Picture

Key Facts (2015) – Manchester

Total Numbers care leavers

- 718 at the end of September 2015

Gender

- The gender split of young people receiving leaving care services is fairly even Male 52% Female 48%

Age

- The largest age group receiving leaving care services are those aged 18 to 21 which together comprise 65% of those receiving a service.
- Age 17 and under comprise 31% of those receiving leaving care

Disability

- 20% of care leavers receiving a service have a disability or impairment recorded, the most common being a learning difficulty (8% of all care leavers) followed by an autistic spectrum disorder (4% of all care leavers)

Ethnicity

- 68% of care leavers are 'White British'

Legal status

- 'Formerly Relevant' (66%) and Eligible (29%) [see earlier for definitions] are the most common legal statuses of young people who were in care receiving a service.

Education, Employment and Training

- 63% of those receiving a service were in Education, Employment or Training (EET). 37% were Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET).
- 8% of those classified as EET were in Higher Education
- Of those care leavers classified as NEET, 78% are in the 18-20 age bracket

Care leavers with parenting responsibilities

- 14.1% of care leavers are parents with care responsibility and 88% of those are female
- 65% of care leavers with parenting responsibilities are NEET

History of Offending

- 32% of care leavers have a history of offending

Housing

- Residing in a private flat or residing with parents are the most common housing statuses for care leavers at 13% in each case
- 6.7% of care leavers were living in supported housing / foyer accommodation
- 22% of care leavers were living in housing of multiple occupancy

Area of Residence

- 64% of care leavers lived in Manchester
- 12% lived in other Greater Manchester boroughs
- 5% lived in Lancashire and the North West with the remainder living in other parts of the UK.

Responsible Locality

- Slightly more care leavers fall under the responsibility of East and North Localities (23%) and (22%) with the remainder spread evenly across Central (17%), South (18%) and Wythenshawe (18%)

What would we like to achieve?

Research (A report on behalf of the Dept of Health, The Social Work R&D Unit, York University/Dept of Health - Helping Care Leavers: Problems and Strategic Responses Stein, M. & Wade, J. 2000) has shown that there can be no single blueprint for a best practice model given the diversity of local authority contexts, but stresses that leaving care services should be built upon the solid foundation of a stable and positive care experience during which YP can be adequately prepared for adult life.

<http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/spru/pubs/pdf/helpingCL.pdf>

In Manchester the aspiration is to embrace the following characteristics of best practice in leaving care which will include:

(i) Preparation for Adult Life

- To have effective assessment which identifies a young person's needs and how those needs will be met.
- The aim is always to have the full participation of the young person - including discussions, negotiations, risk taking.
- There will be rounded preparation attaching equal importance to practical, emotional and inter-personal skills.

(ii) Planning review and monitoring: a policy and practice framework for leaving care

- There will be clear and accessible leaving care policies, procedures and practice guidance
- A model of service delivery appropriate to the numbers and diversity of

young people leaving care, including ethnicity, disability and relevant to the geographic area where situated

- Improved arrangements for the systematic monitoring of individual and service outcomes – EET, finance, accommodation, life and social skills.
- Improved monitoring of care leaver progress including target setting and review – could be supported by the development of an authority wide database.
- Ongoing consultation with young people about evaluation and development of services,

(iii) Individual Planning and Review

- Early planning with improved links between social workers and personal advisers.
- Involvement of all those with an interest in the support of the young person (if young person agrees) and early involvement of specialist services - where these are applicable to the young person.
- Process to run at young person's pace and explore all dimensions of young person's life
- Young person is aware of future sources of support and how to access them and of contingency plans in the event of a crisis
- Leaving care planning is written to facilitate review of progress and identify ownership of tasks

(iv) Helping YP maintain existing relationships, community ties and develop new ones

- Maintain/create links with families/friends while still looked after
- Making best use of young person's existing informal support and their ability to make/sustain relationships should form part of leaving care planning
- Continuing links with carers and social worker's through transition

(v) Ensuring young people receive their full income entitlement

- Having clear accessible information for social worker's, young people and substitute carers
- Ensuring formal links and protocols with other relevant agencies and designated link officers
- Ensuring that assessment of financial needs should form part of the leaving and aftercare planning and review process

(vi) Promoting a healthy and stable lifestyle

- Built on the foundations provided while YP are looked after and evidenced through health assessment and maintenance of health records

(vii) Contingency Planning

- Leaving care planning foresees potential for future crisis
- Young person's need for support reassessed at regular intervals
- Contingency plans capable of responding to problems in core areas – e.g. social relationships, financial, accommodation, employment
- Option to return to supported accommodation available in acute crisis

(viii) EET

- Improving career chances of care leavers needs to be built upon educational progress while looked after. Evidence suggest that placement stability, positive encouragement, proactive placement, school and education service links and compensatory assistance are helpful;
- Assessment of current skills and career planning to be a central part of leaving care planning and review. Young people should be signposted to future entitlements to support and financial assistance should they wish to access FE/HE some time after leaving care;
- Inter-agency links needed to provide access to opportunities and to plan service developments – careers/connexions, FE/HE, employers, benefits services etc.

(ix) Arrangements for staying in touch

- At the point of leaving care, YP should be fully aware of their future entitlement to support and who will provide it
- YP should have a clear link person responsible for co-ordinating support and resources for them – YP should have a say in who this person is
- Recording and monitoring of contracts – to provide consistency where mobility of staff is an issue

(x) Safe, affordable and supported accommodation

- A diversity of accommodation to suit diversity of needs that can vary according to care experience, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, contact with their families, disability, accessibility of supportive relationships, services, etc
- Such diversity will require formal agreements with statutory and voluntary housing providers to establish a range of supported accommodation options;
- Planning accommodation with YP should include:
 - Involving YP in planning and decision making
 - Assessing needs and preparing YP
 - Offering a choice in type and location of accommodation.
 - Setting up a package of support and a clear financial plan for the accommodation;
 - Having a contingency plan in case proposed accommodation breaks down.

What do we need to do to achieve this?

The City Council is currently working closely with Barnardo's, the provider of our Leaving Care Service, to ensure that the best possible service for care leavers is available in Manchester. Some of the important work is addressing

- Staff capacity
- Improving the collection and use of feedback from care leavers
- Making sure those care leavers living outside the city receive access to a good service
- Increasing the ways in which care leavers can keep in touch with their personal adviser
- Addressing the fact that such a high number of care leavers are not accessing education, employment or training
- Making sure that the pathway plans are as effective as possible
- Ensuring that 'drop-in' opportunities are better used
- Improving the clarity regarding the offer to care leavers in custody
- Improving consistency around involvement of social workers
- Improving the recording systems
- Better consistency around links with accommodation services

What are we currently doing?

Our Looked After Children and Care Leavers Strategy has one of its six priority objectives focused on care leavers; **'Children and Young People achieve independence as successful and responsible adults'**.

A strategy sub-group of multi-agency professionals has been formed with the specific aim to maintain oversight of the implementation of the strategic and operational actions required to achieve what is set out above. The sub group meets on a monthly basis and is accountable to the overarching LAC Strategy Group which, itself, reports to the Corporate Parenting Panel.

Manchester City Council has for some years discharged its statutory duty to have a service for care leavers by commissioning this service from Barnardo's (a national children's charity). The service base is located in Moss Side, South Manchester. Services are also offered from other sites across the city.

Strategic oversight;

- Corporate Parenting Panel, made up of elected members of Manchester City Council.

Contract and performance monitoring with commissioned provider – Barnardo's

- Monthly Monitoring Meetings

Multi-Agency activity through the following fora;

- LAC Health led by the Designated Nurse
- Manchester Safeguarding Children's Board (MSCB) Learning Sub-group
- Multi-agency Care Leavers Group

Partnership Working with

- Department for Work and Pensions
- Career Connect
- Young People's Support Foundation (Accommodation)
- The Manchester College
- MyTime – counselling and mentoring service offering group work and a drop-in facility. Directly linked through to
 - Social care Permanence and Locality Teams
 - SIU
 - Managers of Residential Children's Homes
 - Supported Lodging Schemes
 - Fostering services
- LAC Nurse – weekly sessions with appointments
- Manchester City Council Housing
- Women's Group – weekly at the Zion Centre

Care leaver needs for sufficient and suitable accommodation are addressed within the 'Looked After Children Care Leavers Placement Sufficiency Strategy'.

Community and Stakeholder Views

The Change Participation Group, a sub group of the Care to Change Council (a representative group comprising young people in the care system) recently participated in a consultation session to ascertain their views on what is offered. 10 young people participated

Some of the points highlighted included

- Whilst some were happy with where they were living, others felt that there was a lack of suitable affordable accommodation.
- Those accessing education were positive about the experience
- Two of the group were NEET but being supported to find an apprenticeship by Career Connect. None of the young people had been given laptops to support their studies
- Feedback from the young people with regard to their personal advisers was very positive but they commented that the staff had limited time to work with them on their pathway plans.
- There was some concern expressed about a lack of getting proper ID – one young person hadn't got a passport until they were 19.

- It was difficult to get references for housing or jobs

References and Links

Care Leaver Strategy, HM Government 2013

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/care-leaver-strategy>

Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, Department of Health

http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130107105354/http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/@dh/@en/documents/digitalasset/dh_4058600.pdf

Helping Care Leavers: Problems and Strategic Responses, M Stein and J Wade, The Social Work R&D Unit

York University and Department of Health (2000)

<http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/spru/pubs/pdf/helpingCL.pdf>

Promoting the Health and Wellbeing of Looked After Children, Department for Education and department of Health (2015)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/promoting-the-health-and-wellbeing-of-looked-after-children>

Other related JSNA topics

Looked After Children

Safeguarding