

Children and Young People’s Services Scrutiny Committee

13 September 2023

The Care Leavers Service in West Sussex

Report by the Director of Children, Young People and Learning

Summary

This report provides an overview of the support and services provided to Care Leavers in West Sussex as well as the response to the areas identified for improvement in the Inspection of Local Authority Children’s Services (ILACS) that took place in March 2023. The report sets out the following:

- a) An overview of the current service, including the legislative framework (section 1)
- b) The support for care leavers over the age of 21 (paragraphs 2.1 – 2.6)
- c) Transitions to adulthood and leaving care (paragraphs 2.7 – 2.15)
- d) Work to support Care Leavers into Education, Employment and Training (paragraphs 2.16 – 2.24).
- e) The participation of young people in shaping services
- f) Priority actions for the service moving forward (section 3)

Focus for Scrutiny

The Committee is asked to assess the support and services provided to care leavers, as set out in this report, including the work being progressed in response to the ILACS report, to meet the needs of West Sussex Care Leavers.

Key Lines of Enquiry

1. The work undertaken and plans identified to increase the number of care leavers over the age of 21 being supported by the County Council and whether these are sufficient.
2. The plans in place to support children we care for transitioning to adulthood and leaving care.
3. The ambitions to increase the number care leavers in Education, Employment and Training and the timescales for this.
4. How well the voices and feedback of young people are used to shape and improve services for care leavers.

The Chairman will summarise the output of the debate for consideration by the Committee.

1. Service Overview

- 1.1 The Care Leavers Service in West Sussex supports young people to exit care successfully as they move towards independence. It operates under a clear legislative framework provided by the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 and the Children and Social Work Act 2017.
- 1.2 The Children and Social Work Act 2017 introduces corporate parenting principles, which comprise of seven needs that local authorities in England must have regard to whenever they exercise a function in relation to looked-after children or care leavers. Our service, and increasingly our partners, operate in line with these principles which are:
 - to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, of those children and young people
 - to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings
 - to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people
 - to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners
 - to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people
 - for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and
 - to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living
- 1.3 The service currently has, as of the end of June 2023, 600 young people with an allocated Personal Adviser (PA), though this number does not include the significant number of requests received in respect of extended duties where support is being provided but an allocated PA is not required. The service has a responsibility to maintain contact and undertake Pathway Planning with all care leavers up until the age of at least 21, with the Children and Social Work Act 2017 introducing a new duty on local authorities to provide Personal Adviser (PA) support to all care leavers up to age 25, if they request this support.
- 1.4 The Service as a whole has made significant strides primarily in the last 2½ years. In the 2019 OFSTED inspection, services for care leavers were deemed inadequate, and there were well-known deficits in respect of assessment, planning and support.
- 1.5 Our feedback from OFSTED from the inspection held in March 2023 was generally positive in respect of our work with Care Leavers, with achievable improvements required to get to 'Good' though we aspire to 'Outstanding'. In terms of specific OFSTED feedback, we have devised a Practice Action Plan around two specific areas:

- the accessibility and clarity of our work in Triple Planning and transition for asylum seeking young people.
- ensuring consistency, clarity, and universality of our offer to Care Leavers up to 25.

These actions plans sit under a wider whole-service plan, which in turn feeds up to the overarching Practice Improvement Plan.

- 1.6 In terms of overall performance, our reporting dashboards illustrate that our pathway plans are completed in a timely way at consistently over 90%, and visits over 80% (both above local and national comparators including other local authorities with Care Leaver services rated as 'Good' or above), with care experienced children's views and voices captured well. As noted we need to improve our use of aspirational language; however this an area we were already aware of and are undertaking work to address in conjunction with our young people.

2. Key Lines of Enquiry

The key lines of enquiry for this report were identified as noted above and will be addressed subsequently in turn.

KLOE 1: -The work undertaken, and plans identified to increase the number of care leavers over the age of 21 being supported by the County Council and whether these are sufficient.

- 2.1 The Children & Social Work Act 2017 introduced a new duty on local authorities to provide Personal Adviser (PA) support to all care leavers up to age 25, if they request this support. Under previous legislation, local authorities were required to only provide care leavers with support from a PA until they reach age 21, with that support continuing up to age 25 if a care leaver was engaged in education or training; however, this support was not available to care leavers aged over 21 who were not in education, training, or employment. Section 3 of the Children & Social Work Act 2017 has changed this, introducing a new duty on local authorities, which requires them to offer PA support to all care leavers towards whom the local authority had duties under the Children Act 1989, up to age 25 - irrespective of whether they are engaged in education or training. This includes care leavers who return to the local authority at any point after the age of 21 up to age 25 and request PA support.
- 2.2 It is also noted in government guidance that the ultimate aim of leaving care services is to support care leavers so that they can live successful independent lives. Each care leaver will reach that point at a different age and there should be no assumption that the new duty means that all care leavers will require statutory support until the age of 25. Where care leavers have been effectively supported to develop a positive social network around them during and after they have left care, they are likely to be less reliant on PA support after the age of 21. Although each individual case will be different, in broad terms we would expect the level of support that care leavers receive to taper away over time, in recognition of their growing maturity and independence. This is in line with the decreasing support that is provided by parents of young people in the general population as their

children get older. The way in which the legislation applies to care leavers reflects this approach.

- 2.3 Historically in West Sussex we had not been effectively undertaking our statutory duties in this area, as up to the end of 2020 there was a presumption that young people could be 'closed' if they were not in education at 21. As noted above, this was fundamentally in opposition to the legislation. Across the last 2 years, we have sought to address this issue, and set out clearly within the service our legislative duty. We currently have 140 young people aged 21 or over open to the service with an allocated Personal Adviser. These young people are supported via the statutory pathway planning process, where they are subject to the same support as those care leavers under 21, namely visiting at a similar frequency and reviews of their Pathway plan every 6 months (or in the event of a significant change), as well as access to the Local Offer.
- 2.4 As part of previous practice, we understood that we had young people who had been closed erroneously, or at least closed having not been made fully aware of their entitlements. We have upon completion of the refreshed Local Offer for Care Leavers, using the means at our disposal (including writing/ emailing/ calling), attempted to make contact with the cohort of young people who are entitled to a service to ensure that they can take up this offer. We are currently tracking on a monthly basis how many young people have made contact with us in terms of what are called 'extended duties', with 40 more young people having made contact since April 2023, who whilst not subsequently all allocated have received some degree of service.
- 2.5 We have also been undertaking a review of documentation, and now where any young person is closed to the service before they turn 25, this is both with their clear agreement and with a closure record and letter which records that they know how they can make requests for further support; this ensures that we have up to date contact details, as for those young people who are 'closed' we will still continue to make yearly contact to remind them of the support available.
- 2.6 Additionally to the above, we have also taken the decision to continue to offer a duty advice line to care leavers over the age of 25 where we can provide advice and signposting, again as we seek to replicate more closely what a 'good parent' would do for their child well into adulthood.

KLOE 2: The plans in place to support children we care for transitioning to adulthood and leaving care

- 2.7 Transitions for our children as they get older and move into adulthood is a key consideration. The move to make Children We Care For and Care Leavers one service has supported improvements in our work on transitions, as set out within our service plan. In April 2022 we began the process of increasing the resource in the service as we started to unpick historical practice issues such as closing young people not in education at 21 which was not in line with the Children and Social Work Act 2017. We have increased resources for our Care Leavers service by 5 Pas; however we are now completing a business case to further increase capacity to move forward the age of allocation, reduce caseloads and allow personal advisers to undertake more positive and proactive work in line with the recommendations of the OFSTED

inspection. We are requesting an additional Team manager and 6 Personal advisors, as well as some additional housing support workers. This case is being completed in direct response to two issues that heavily influenced the service being graded as 'Requires Improvement' as opposed to 'Good', namely the fact that young people are being allocated a personal adviser too close to their 18th birthday, and that PA caseloads are meaning they are at times focused on managing crisis and are unable to always find the time to undertake positive and proactive work with young people: this is an issue young people have told us is very important to them and congruent with what one would expect from a 'good parent'. Based on our data, should the business case be approved and then the resource agreed, we would be able to allocate each child in care a personal adviser at 16-16 ½yrs whilst also being able to reduce the caseloads for our PAs to a maximum of 23 (currently 25). There would be significant positive outcomes for young people and the wider service, including:

- More time for PAs to establish relationships with Care Leavers and support them in the ending of their relationship with their social worker.
- More time for PAs to provide expertise in aspirational pathway planning and providing intervention in preparation for leaving care.
- More time for PAs to establish professional/family/friend networks who, along with the PA continue to support care leavers post 18.
- More Time to support Care Leavers in understanding their housing choices and to have an agreed post-18 housing pathway in place at 17½ years of age. This would also for the local authority reduce the need for us to use funded placements for care leavers past 18 where this is not necessary.
- Significantly earlier step down from residential children's homes for a cohort of children. Whilst this type of placement will be appropriate for a group of young people, for a significant proportion this has been caused by drift in move on planning which earlier PA allocation would address, this would also align with what care leavers have told us about wanting to be better prepared for the 'reality' of post-18 life.
- Time for the identification of care leavers who may require adult services that have not yet been identified and who would otherwise not receive the necessary assessments/intervention planning in their 17th year.
- Time for Personal Advisors to provide additional support as any reasonable parent would do.
- Reduction of crisis management and increase in positive direct work time for PA's and supporting staff retention/ consistency of PAs for young people.
- Increased support for PA's supporting staff retention and wellbeing
- Increase PA capacity would also enable significant improvements in respect of the transition of children with disabilities with a care leaver entitlement, this is currently a risk in terms of the PA function being completed appropriately for young people with significant disability.

2.8 In terms of practice improvement, we have this year our needs assessment and pathway planning, and a new joint Needs Assessment and Pathway Plan document is going live in September 2023 with the final form and guidance having been agreed by our policy and practice group. This document has been entirely co-produced with our care leavers, including utilising an Outcome Star tool which will also allow us to better prioritise what is important to young people. This tool will allow us to visually represent

progress and also to use data to identify needs across different cohorts or in different placement types. An area of development across the service is to ensure that Pathway Planning focuses on children's and young people's long-term needs and aspirations to ensure that we are not leaving our young people at risk of 'cliff edges,' for example at 18 or 21, but instead focusing on providing what young people need from 16 to 25.

- 2.9 We have also designated a worker from our Permanence Team to support in the reviewing process for all children in care over 16 residing in residential children's homes to ensure that plans to develop independence skills are being appropriately progressed and that children are in the right placements to meet their needs, this is in response to children and young people clearly articulating the need to have the opportunity to 'test' their increasing independence before turning 18
- 2.10 Where we have identified an ongoing need for our young people as they move into adulthood, we have a multi-agency Transitions Panel to consider this, and progress Care Act assessments as required. Tracking is now being put in place via both the new Pathway Plan and via our PowerBi system to ensure that young people in care with potential adult care needs are referred for assessments in a timely way.
- 2.11 The service operates a monthly high-risk referral meeting where young people of concern over 18 years are reviewed, risks understood, and safety plans put in place, and we have a transitional safeguarding protocol to escalate concerns and attend the local Multi Agency Child Exploitation meeting to ensure that where appropriate care leavers are considered. We have also reached an agreement to be able to refer to the Child Exploitation Team for advice and guidance in respect of our young people.
- 2.12 We have included in our action plans a programme of training being conducted with all staff involved in creating and implementing pathway plans. Training sessions will be service wide and are being held 4-6 weekly. The training will directly address the need to enhance the quality of pathway plans, with good practice examples being shared and critiques and individual areas being focused on in different sessions.
- 2.13 The vast majority of West Sussex young people who have left care are in suitable accommodation. Our statutory return for the end of the 2022/23 year identified that 93% of 18-21 years olds were in suitable accommodation, compared with the average nationally and of our statistical neighbours being 88%. We have 83 young people over 18 in 'Staying Put' arrangements (where they have remained with their foster carers post 18), 97 young people in social housing and 50 young people in private rented accommodation; all of these number show increases of at least 50% in the last two years.
- 2.14 West Sussex has commissioned provision for independent living for 18+ care experienced children who are not quite ready for independence, and we have also launched the National House Project in West Sussex, whereby in mid-to-late 2023 we are in the process of moving up to 12 young people into accommodation which could become a long-term tenancy, with a second and potentially third cohort of children being identified.

- 2.15 For our asylum-seeking young people, we have taken into consideration the OFSTED feedback in respect of accessibility of documentation and planning. In order to address this issue, we are, with the Voice and Participation Team, starting the process of setting up a specific voice and participation group for asylum-seeking young people so we can take their feedback on our current process and use it to inform a more young person friendly approach. By implementing these modifications to the triple planning process, we can ensure that care leavers awaiting immigration decisions are provided with a user-friendly version that facilitates their understanding, active involvement, and overall wellbeing throughout the process.

KLOE 3: The ambitions to increase the number care leavers in Education, Employment and Training and the timescales for this

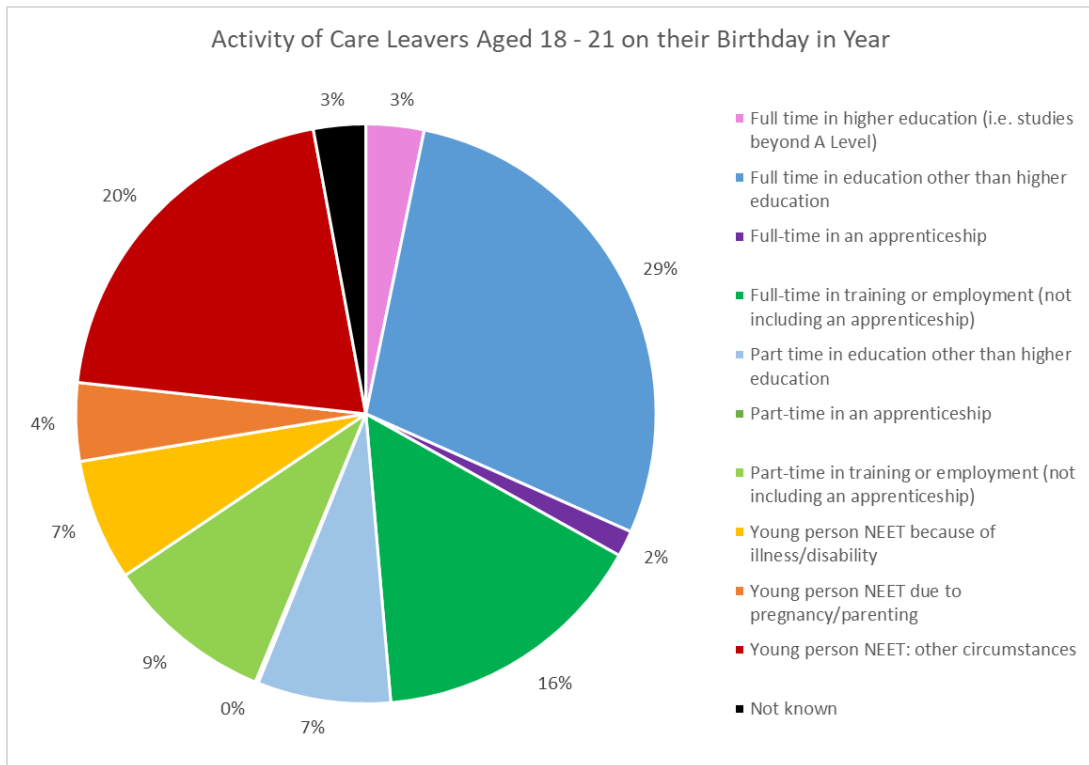
- 2.16 We are working in a number of ways on supporting young people to access employment, education, and training. It is important to note that like Pathway Planning, the key to effective outcomes is prioritising this work early. In respect of young people aged between 16 and 18 who have care leaver status but have not yet left care, there are currently 207 young people who are post-16 and known to the Virtual School; 46 of these are recorded as NEET (22%); however, 8 of them are new to care and information regarding EET is still being confirmed.

- 2.17 All the young people in this cohort have a termly Personal Education Plan (PEP) meeting and the completion rate for post-16 PEPs is 100%. Where possible, we hold PEP meetings for all young people remaining in education until the end of year 13 or 14 to ensure continuity of support, which for a number of young people takes us past 18. There is a bespoke PEP for those young people who are currently NEET which focuses on the reasons for their current status and supports them to take small steps to improve their engagement with education and employment opportunities. All young people can access additional support via the PEPs and in this academic year we have provided:

- Access to technology such as laptops and tablets
- Individual tuition in Maths and English to support access to level 2 qualifications
- PPE and work kits for apprenticeships
- Funding for training and CSC registration
- Access to personalised careers advice and guidance

The Virtual School is also registered as an open award exam centre for functional skills. This will allow us to further support our young people in gaining their level 2 qualifications in advance of beginning further education courses.

- 2.18 The table below highlights the spread of different EET options being undertaken by our care leavers aged 18-21 up to the end of June 2023:



2.19 The Care Leavers Service promotes engagement with education, employment, and training for all care leavers, and within the team there is a manager and PA who lead on building opportunities for care leavers. They are also responsible for sharing information with the wider service.

2.20 Our Care Leavers are encouraged to become members of the Care Leavers Advisory Board (CLAB) which informs the priorities and practice of the Care Leavers Service. As of 2022/23 we have allocated £5,000 to develop a leadership training programme for CLAB members. Care Leavers living outside the county are sent the Care Leavers newsletter updating them on Care Leaver Advisory Board activities and news for care leavers.

2.21 Opportunities currently shared with our young people include:

- A guaranteed interview scheme for apprenticeships with West Sussex.
- Job opportunities for care leavers within West Sussex; for example: 2 care leavers roles as voice and participation officers within the Voice and Participation team.
- Bridging the gap through Chichester University. 2 young people completed this last year and will be starting social work apprenticeship with West Sussex.
- ESOL courses for UASC.
- Local Offer providing information and guidance on EET including support to get a job, complete CV's and careers advice and job centre support.
- Careers advise services are in the in Local Offer and offered by West Sussex if NEET. The Think Futures Project has supported 95 16+ Children We Care For and Care Leavers in the last year, with 19 supported into Education; 15 supported into employment; 2 supported into a Traineeship; 2 into apprenticeships and 41 still being worked with.
- Local Offer providing information on financial support to attend university and an educational allowance. We currently have 31 young people

attending higher education, all of whom receive the additional bursary (which has as of July 2023 been increased from £2,000 to £3,000) and are supported with accommodation costs.

- Support to access resources such as the Princes Trust and Camelia Botnar foundation.
- Opportunities are also currently being explored via direct liaison with John Lewis and Gatwick Airport.

The Director of HR and Organisational Development is also overseeing the Careers and Skills Executive Task and Finish Group as part of the West Sussex County Council Employment and Skills Reset. With the reset plan the service has identified some key areas which are being progressed to further strengthen and develop our local offer to our Care Leavers.

- Engage with the Care Leavers Service and Lead in Education & Skills for careers advice to school leavers to better understand the existing offer.
- Recognise the proposal in the *Independent Review of Children's Social Care* headed by Josh McCallister that the Government should make care experience a protected characteristic and new legislation should be passed which broadens responsibilities across a wider set of public bodies and organisations.
- Identify and utilise job communication channels which target care leavers.
- Promote apprenticeship job opportunities to care leavers alongside promotion of a guaranteed interview scheme.
- Identify if funding is available to support the creation of a work readiness package of support.
- Ensure the Apprenticeship Team maximises opportunity to promote the Government Bursary for care leavers taking up apprenticeships (which rises to £3K in August 2023).

2.22 There are a small number of young people who are not yet ready for engagement in Education, employment and training and support is given to raise self-esteem and build confidence. We provide free access to Everyone active Gyms and reduced rate membership to others. Young people are also encouraged to engage with social prescribing across West Sussex as well as taking up the extended offer through Job Centre Plus.

2.23 There continues to be an increase in the number of our care leavers attending university and higher education: we now have 30 young people attending University at the end of June 2023 compared with 25 in June 2022 and 63% of 18+ care leavers are engaged in EET which is in line with the national picture, though we of course aspire to improve this. Some of our older care leavers are doing their master's degree and returning for extended duties to support them with their education.

2.24 The role of the Virtual School for 18+ care leavers has already been referenced. As noted, the Virtual School does support young people through to the end of Year 13 and 14, however does not have a remit currently to work with care leavers. There is a recommendation in 'Stable homes built on love' to extend the remit of the Virtual School to 25; however whilst this has been consulted on, we have not yet had any guidance or direction from national policy-makers. Once this is agreed and we receive guidance, we will be working with CLAB and the care leavers service to look at how this area of work can be developed.

KLOE 4: - How well the voices and feedback of young people are used to shape and improve services for care leavers.

- 2.25 We have over the last two years made participation a significant focus of the service. A peer review from Hampshire fed back well in this regard, noting how aligned our service plans and priorities were with young people's wishes. One of the main vehicles for participation/co-production has been the Journey to Independence sub-group of the Corporate Parenting Panel. This sub-group is attended by a multi-agency group, with representatives from the Care Leavers Service, Health, the DWP, Chichester University, Careers Advisors, Housing, and young people; notably, the group is now chaired by care leavers to give power over the agenda. The group was initially set up to work on refreshing the local offer which is now available to view online and has been complimented by partners such as Hampshire, the Care Leaders as well as Ofsted; however, it is now a key forum for young people to inform ongoing service development. Local authorities are now required by the Children and Social Work Act 2017 to develop a local offer for care leavers in partnership with their young people. The local offer should provide information about all the services and support that is available to care leavers from the Local Authority; it now comprehensively covers statutory entitlements and other discretionary support. We were also supported in this work by an organisation called the 'Care Leaders' who noted our offer as one of the most comprehensive in the country.
- 2.26 The Journey to Independence group now functions by taking 'challenges' from the Care Leavers Advisory Board about issues they wish to see addressed, and the group as a whole then works to address such gaps. There has been a huge amount of positive work that has come out of the group, including but not limited to:
- Free prescriptions for care leavers
 - A £1,000 increase in the University bursary offered to care leavers.
 - Free and reduced gym memberships
 - The implementation of the 'Bridging the Gap' university preparedness course
 - Initiation of a review of the joint housing protocol with a task group set up with multiple young people
 - A '5 for 5' offer in respect of driving lessons
 - Initiation of a care leaver peer mentoring scheme
 - The co-production and implementation of the new Pathway Plan
 - A yearly clothing allowance for all care leavers
 - Changes to policy to enable PA's so support care leavers to access finance for necessary items in way that reduced delay and bureaucracy
 - Implementation of West Sussex acting as a guarantor and a rent deposit scheme
 - An agreement with the DWP that benefits will not be sanctioned without a joint discussion with the care leavers service
 - We are currently working with young people and a professional group to devise an independence preparation programme, with the idea this is then consistently used across supported accommodation providers, residential homes, and foster carers. This would mean a consistent approach to this issue for young people and ensure they do not have to 'start again' if they move to a new home

- Setting in train a programme of work around support staff and partners to use appropriate language when talking to and about children and families, including training being delivered directly by young people including this being a theme of the staff conference in October 2023.

The group continues to be very well attended and will take a role in reviewing and adding to the local offer on a regular basis and will continue to mean that the service and local offer development will be led and monitored by our care leavers.

- 2.27 We continue to have a robust financial offer for care leavers which is at least in line and generally superior to other local authorities. Every care leaver has access to a 'Setting Up Home Allowance' of £3,000 to support their move to independence, as well as £500 for educational aspects and £300 for health. On top of this we have a yearly £100 clothing allowance (highly rare in comparison to other LAs); we fund council tax for our young people; we offer to pay for each five driving lessons after a young person has paid for 5; we ensure each young person has a driving licence and passport and will fund driving tests; we support with clothing costs for interviews/employment; we fund social visits up to three times a year to ensure connectedness; we provide rent in advance for young people moving into private rented accommodation and have also where necessary supported significant rent in advance in lieu of being able to act as guarantors. Alongside this we have accessed over £150,000 from the communities fund to support care leavers with clothing, white goods and general assistance. We are currently starting to explore the possibility of free bus travel and how we can ensure Wi-Fi access for all young people.
- 2.28 As noted above in respect of the Journey to Independence group, service design and improvement is heavily informed by the views and experiences of young people. Since February 2021, care experienced children who run and manage a newly formed Care Leavers Advisory Board also since April 2023 chair the Journey to Independence Subgroup of the Corporate Parenting Panel, and have a direct connection with the Director, Assistant Director and Lead Member for Children and Young People. Challenges are provided on a monthly basis to Heads of Service as well as at Corporate Parenting Panel, to ensure young people's needs and views are prioritised and responded to.
- 2.29 Children We Care For and Care Leavers have a joint service plan indicative of how we have attempted to align the services; this plan is being revised post OFSTED and the implementation of the PIP and is being scrutinised by young people; it continues to be based around four 'pillars' we established as important for young people:
- *You will know why you are or were in our care and what people are doing to help you*
 - *We will support you to be safe, settled, and happy.*
 - *We will continue to support you as you move into adulthood. We will give you the tools to help you thrive and achieve your goals.*
 - *We will listen to the things you are happy with so we can do more. We will take action when things are not going well and make plans based on what is important to you.*

These pillars will continue to be adhered to, as we seek the best possible service and outcomes for our care leavers.

3. Priority Actions

3.1 In light of the foregoing analysis, the priority actions for the service can be summarised as follows:

- The Journey to Independence subgroup will continue to drive service development based on the challenges posed by our young people, and we will strive for co-production in our responses- this group will continue to meet every 6 weeks and review the local offer yearly.
- A programme of training and resources in respect of the use of positive, supportive, and aspirational language will be rolled out across the second half of 2023 across Children's Social Care - project initiation was August 2023.
- Enquiry forms from care leavers will be used to gather monthly data on the number of care leavers aged 21 and above who contact the service to access advice, support, and extended duties. This approach will enable informed decisions making on and facilitate continuous improvement in addressing the specific needs of this group of care leavers - initiated August 2023.
- Team managers will ensure that closure records and last pathway plan will explicitly outline the entitlements of care leavers, including the provision of PA service until the age of 25. Post the age of 25, care leavers will have access to support through a designated duty service. This will facilitate a smooth transition and continuity of support for care leavers until the age of 25 with further assistance through the designated duty service after they have reached that milestone - initiated August 2023.
- We will embed the co-produced Needs Assessment and Pathway Plan document and ensuring that post 18 planning is embedded from the start of pathway planning - September 2023.
- We will continue the training package for workers around high quality pathway planning and embedding this planning for Children from the age of 16 and across the Children We Care For and Care Leavers Services - initiated July 2023.
- We aim to bring forward the age of Personal Advisor allocation to where young people turn 16.5 in line with increasing capacity of the new starters in the service (pending internal sign off and subsequent financial approval of a revised business case- it is expected given recruitment timescales that this will be across 2023/24) - business case to be considered August/September 2023.
- We are undertaking a review of the Joint Housing Protocol for Care Leavers in West Sussex between Children's Services and the district and borough councils (D&Bs), with the aim of a stronger, clearer offer which embodies the spirit and understanding of corporate parenting within our partnership - a working group has met regularly, and the draft will be ready to be shared with the D&Bs in September 2023.
- The planned in-house emotional and mental wellbeing service will be expected to encompass care leavers up to 25 to ensure there us an offer available to young people and those supporting them - December 2023.

- Along with the Choice and Participation service we are working towards the forming of a specific Asylum Seeking Children and Young People’s participation group to inform the required work on making the triple planning/ transition process for asylum seekers more clear and accessible - October 2023.
- We will continue to explore offer opportunities to work in partnership with both professional colleagues and private organisations to try and develop a shared understanding of West Sussex-wide corporate parenting responsibilities - a focus now and on a continuing basis.

4. Resources

4.1 The service is delivered within the approved budget envelope.

5. Consultation

5.1 Not applicable – this is a report for information.

6. Risk Implications and Mitigations

Risk	Mitigating Action (in place or planned)
To bring forward PA allocation to 16.5years through recruitment of additional PAs to improve the transition experience for young people.	The Service has produced a business case which is progressing through internal processes with regard to increasing the number of PAs. The service has also put in place various targeted measures to promote recruitment opportunities in West Sussex.
Maintaining the continued improvement and delivering the priority actions identified.	The recent Ofsted report formally acknowledges the improvements made to the leaving care service since 2019. Service management, human resources, professional practice, infrastructure and culture are being transformed in a manner that is expected to be fully sustainable and the determination to deliver good services for care leavers in West Sussex continues.

7. Equality Duty

7.1 The service recognises the primary importance of child safeguarding, sound family relationships, good parenting, and the nurture of children to fulfil their potential, as well as safe transition to adulthood. The provision of the service is based on need, as determined through formal assessment protocols. This need is not explicitly related to formally protected characteristics, but any such characteristic is and will continue (as now) to be respected in compliance with equality principles and taken into account in the way in which the service is delivered.

7.2 In terms of those with a protected characteristic, the service will ensure enablement and support across all relevant categories, and this will both continue and be enhanced through the Children First agenda.

8. Social Value

- 8.1 The Children First agenda and services for Care Leavers discussed in this report will directly support improved delivery of the West Sussex Plan priority to give every child the Best Start in Life. Enhancing the protection of young lives and support for family life will continue to build resilience and social capital and contribute towards stronger and more effective communities. The implementation of the service improvements will also respect sustainability principles in accordance with the County Council's strategic policies.

9. Crime and Disorder Implications

- 9.1 There are positive implications for Sections 17, 37 and 39 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 in the prevention and reduction of crime and anti-social behaviour, and in reducing offending and re-offending by young people, all of which are affected by the progress activity discussed in this report.

10. Human Rights Implications

- 10.1 The County Council has an overriding duty to safeguard the Human Rights of children and young persons in its area, and this has been recognised in the Children First agenda. The County Council is mindful of Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights – The Right to Respect for Family and Private Life - and has taken relevant factors into consideration in preparing this report. The processing of personal and special category data is subject to the County Council's Data Protection Act policies and procedures in relation to discharging the County Council's and its partners' legal responsibilities.
- 10.2 The County Council is also mindful of Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child - which states that all children have the right to be consulted and to have their opinions heard on any decision that affects them. Hearing, understanding, and acting upon the voice and experiences of the child is a key design principle of the Children First service improvements. The County Council will continue to ensure it fulfils all its statutory duties regarding meeting the needs of children and young persons in its area during the Children First service transformation programme.

Lucy Butler

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Background Papers - None