

To: Executive
10 November 2020

**Care Leavers Overview and Scrutiny Review Report
Cllr Mrs Birch, Chair Education, Skills and Growth Panel**

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To present to the Executive the findings of the Education, Skills and Growth Overview & Scrutiny Panel's review into Care Leavers and ask them to consider their recommendations.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 **Review the Housing Allocation Policy 2015 to include consideration of priority being awarded to care leavers where the authority has a Corporate Parenting role, particularly those who opt to 'stay put' with their foster family.**
- 2.2 **Review life skills and money management information to ensure consistency of provision; information available on the Local Offer Care Leavers website and consider frequency of visits to prepare care leavers for independence.**
- 2.3 **Revise the Staying Put Policy using plain English; develop an easy-read version with foster carers and care leavers and consider extending the three-month time limit when a care leaver can return to their foster family.**
- 2.4 **Review the joint protocol between Children's Social Care (CSC) and Housing Team for assessing and meeting the needs of homeless young people.**
- 2.5 **Enable care leavers' achievements to be acknowledged and give them the opportunity to participate by replicating the offer to Children Looked After. To be reviewed and any policy changes implemented within agreed timeframes with the housing team.**
- 2.6 **That the timescales for implementing the above recommendations are agreed as per the attached report.**
- 2.7 **That the Overview & Scrutiny Commission will review the implementation of the recommendations above within six months and host a focus group of care leavers to understand the impact of the pandemic on care leavers specifically.**

3 Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1 The Education, Skills and Growth Overview & Scrutiny Panel concluded their findings based on the evidence considered and review that was undertaken.

4 Alternative Options Considered

- 4.1 The Education, Skills and Growth Overview & Scrutiny Panel's assessed several options which are detailed in the attached Review report.

5 Supporting Information

- 5.1 As Corporate Parents it is the duty of the local authority to ensure care leavers in the Borough benefit from accommodation, education and life skills that ensure they have the best possible chance in life.
- 5.2 The Education, Skills and Growth Overview & Scrutiny Panel was commissioned to undertake a review into Care Leavers as part of the Overview and Scrutiny work programme. This review activity was undertaken on 22 January 2020. The methodology undertaken, findings and recommendations are set out in the attached report.

6 Commentary from Education, Skills and Growth Overview & Scrutiny Panel Chair, Councillor Mrs Birch

- 6.1 During this review we found there was a wealth of good practice taking place in the Council and by its partners such as the support service, Look Ahead. It was particularly heartening to see evidence of officers working in housing, children's social care and the education team working towards shared outcomes for care leavers. The support given to care leavers by members of the Life Chances Team was thought to work particularly well and one care leaver was very complimentary about his Personal Advisor. The care leavers we spoke to were open and honest about what worked and what they thought could be improved. Specifically, they wanted more assistance the closer they got to leaving care and better information about what was available to them. They also wanted to keep the name 'Care Leavers' as they felt it allowed them to access support more easily. Councillors recognised there was a need to embed this work more fully and that protocols and strategies required updating to capture new ways of working. I would also like to draw attention to the new format of this report which highlights findings, information about how we investigated to arrive at these findings and the list of all members and officers that took part. It is an example of how scrutiny reports will be presented in the future.
- 6.2 Due to the pandemic the final Care Leavers Review report was delayed. The Vice-Chair and I would like to understand the impact the pandemic has had on care leavers. In addition to the recommendations arising from the review we'd like to suggest that the Executive endorse the Overview & Scrutiny Commission hosting a focus group of care leavers to understand the impact of the pandemic on care leavers specifically when it reviews the implementation of its recommendations in six months' time.

7 Response from Assistant Director: Children's Social Care

- 7.1 I am happy to support the findings and endorse the recommendations of the Care Leavers Review. I consider that there were no financial implications arising from the above recommendations except some additional officer resource, which is acceptable, as the recommendations largely concern protocols and strategies which I agree require revision within these reasonable timescales.

8 Consultation and Other Considerations

Legal Advice

- 8.1 The recommendations are consistent with the Council's overarching duty towards care leavers as set out in Section 2 of the Children's Social Work Act 2017 which requires it to publish information about—
- (a) services which it offers for care leavers as a result of its functions under the Children Act 1989;
- (b) other services which it offers that may assist care leavers in, or in preparing for, adulthood and independent living."

Financial Advice

- 8.2 There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 8.3 An Equalities Impact Assessment initial screening has been completed and is attached at Appendix B.

As part of this review Councillors requested the Life Chances Team pull together a group of care leavers for them to speak to privately. They spoke to three care leavers in total. One care leaver was a refugee and two were white, British. One of these was female and two were male. During the visits to accommodation for care leavers, Holly House and Rainforest Walk, Councillors spoke to a number of residents who varied in age, ethnicity and gender.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 8.4 As Corporate Parents it is the duty of the local authority to ensure care leavers in the Borough benefit from accommodation, education and life skills that ensure they have the best possible chance in life.

Background Papers

Care Leavers Review Report attached.

Contact for further information

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