

APPENDIX B - Outline Care Leavers Strategy for consultation

Our vision is for Haringey to be a borough that supports young people who have been in care to make successful transitions to adulthood and to achieve positive outcomes

Outcomes

A coherent local response to addressing the needs of a vulnerable group of young adults from an earlier stage has the potential to improve a range of outcomes that are critical to both their life chances and the best use of resources in local services. The outcomes that this Strategy seeks to achieve include:

- Improved planning and coordination of support
- Earlier move-on to independent living
- Reduced tenancy breakdown and debt
- More sustained employment, education and training
- Increased participation in volunteering and community activities
- Reduced demand on other services, including health, criminal justice and welfare

Care leavers share many of the same challenges as other young people and aspire to many of the same goals in life. As well as specific entitlements to services, we aim to be a borough that enables and encourages young people in their situation to make positive choices and take confident steps towards adulthood.

Draft strategic priorities

The Children & Social Work Act 2017 re-emphasises the collective nature of the Corporate Parenting duty for local authorities, and in Haringey we are seeking to reflect that across Council departments and in the way we involve a range of partners locally as part of a wider 'corporate family'.

Working closely with service users, officers and other stakeholders, we have identified a set of wider strategic priorities that will ensure Haringey as a borough maximises the life chances of all our care leavers.

Informed by consultation with stakeholders, operational plans to implement the priorities set out below will be developed and implemented.

1) Raising awareness of 'corporate parenting' and working together for care leavers

As the Children and Social Work Act 2017 makes clear, the responsibility of being a corporate parent extends beyond the remit of the Lead Member for Children and Families and the Director of Children's Services. Members and officers across the local authority need to be familiar with the concept of 'corporate parenting' and recognise how they may have the opportunity to provide or enable support for a child

in care or a care leaver in their day-to-day role, as well as how the unique status of children in care and care leavers can influence strategic decisions and activities.

In addition to the statutory role of the council, work with partners and stakeholders from across the borough has identified a lack of awareness of the needs of children in care and care leavers, but also a great willingness to provide or tailor support for them. As such, there is a role for further extending and deepening the sense of a “corporate family” into these other organisations.

How can we increase the awareness of the unique status of children in care and care leavers and strengthen working relationships around them as service users?

2) Starting to help children in care prepare for independence from an earlier stage of their journey

The process of becoming an adult and being able to live independently cannot start at 18, it needs to be developed from an earlier stage in a child’s life and this is particularly true of children in care, who may lack the ongoing family support that many young people rely on. As our corporate parenting responsibility to care leavers extends to the age of 25 from 2018, the council must also do more to prepare children in care for independent living before they reach their 18th birthday, so that the transition can be smoother and the intensity and duration of formal support they require can taper over time.

Care leavers have told us that the focus on ‘life skills’ in fostering placements is patchy and that social workers tend to focus more on immediate safeguarding and care needs than on helping them take steps along the pathway to adulthood, even at the ages of 16 and 17 when this is supposed to be a higher priority. We need to make preparing children in care for adulthood a shared responsibility and invest in the infrastructure to do this consistently. While the preparation for independence needs to cover a broad range of capabilities, many of the benefits relate to the ability to take-on and sustain independent housing and with a more assertive approach we can increase the rate of move-on from semi-independent living and reduce the rates of evictions and rent arrears.

How can we ensure that wherever a child in care is living they are helped to prepare for independent living in a planned and gradual way?

3) Improving access to services for young adults up to 25

Both care leavers and operational staff highlighted the challenges of accessing the services young people need in a way and at a time that is most likely to improve their outcomes. There are a range of reasons for this, including the variability of the knowledge and experience of frontline practitioners; the lack of a single resource that includes all relevant information; the different referral processes and eligibility criteria for services, which are different for adults than for children; and other organisational barriers that can reinforce silos such as data protection laws.

As Department for Education guidance stresses, children in care and care leavers have a unique status as a group, and proportionate measures to prioritise and facilitate their access to services may be required. This could include reduced

maximum waiting times or increased use of 'outreach' when engagement is limited. For those over 18, this is likely to rely on voluntary disclosure of their leaving care status and the knowledge of professionals to ask if they have care experience.

What reasonable adjustments should be made to services provided within the borough to ensure care leavers are best able to take-up the support they need?

4) Making care leavers feel part of our communities

The Council recognises that part of living a healthy, long and fulfilling life is active participation in one's community and a sense of belonging and positive social contact. Given the early experiences of many children who come into the care system, these stabilising influences take on an increased significance for those leaving care, but they can feel difficult to attain, particularly for those whose care journeys involved multiple moves and significant time outside of the borough. National research and local engagement identified loneliness and social isolation as a persistent concern for care leavers, and one that cannot be addressed sufficiently through statutory support from a Personal Adviser.

Addressing the participation of care leavers in our communities requires both a 'reaching out' from community groups and those with opportunities such as volunteering that can be tailored to appeal to care leavers, and an assertive approach to encouraging and supporting young people to take up opportunities, including building their self-esteem and giving opportunities to participate from an earlier age.

How can community groups and voluntary organisations tailor their activities to encourage and support involvement from care leavers?

5) Helping care leavers to gain skills and get into work

Haringey has some of the best educational results for Looked After Children in the country at GCSE, and a number of care leavers start university courses each year. However, locally as nationally, the overall rate of care leavers in Education, Employment and Training between 19 and 21 is far too low and being out of work at these ages is highly correlated with long-term unemployment. One barrier remains the often disrupted education journeys of children in care and particularly for those who come into care later and with poor attendance records or exclusion from mainstream schooling. Providing opportunities to return to education and to re-sit qualifications in core subjects such as Maths and English is an important part of the educational offer from our Virtual School, but support to access employment needs to go further than this.

Working across different sectors locally, the Council needs to identify and encourage care leavers to take up opportunities that will help them build the skills, experience and self-confidence to access employment. As an employer, the council's staff and departments may have a direct role to play in providing experience and coaching to our children in care and care leavers, as may other employers in the borough. Whatever we provide must recognise both the high aspirations that many of our

children in care and care leavers have for themselves and the potential for low self-esteem and previous negative experiences may undermine these ambitions.

How can educational institutions, employers and leaving care services in Haringey work together to provide a relevant and interesting range of opportunities for care leavers to develop their careers?

6) Staying in touch with our care leavers and celebrating their success

Many young people's lives can be busy and chaotic and for some care leavers they look forward to a time when there are fewer services and professionals involved in their lives. As a result, it can be difficult to maintain the contact that is necessary to continue to support a care leaver into a successful independent life, and to find out about their successes and experiences after care. As with a birth family, we want young people to stay in touch with the council as they grow up because they know that we are interested in how things turn out for them and because they want us to be proud when they succeed or give them a helping hand when they find things hard.

Under our new duties we will need to improve the infrastructure available to get in touch with young people aged 21 to 24 whose cases have closed but who will now be entitled to request support until the age of 25. In doing so, the service will have an opportunity to find out more about these young people and to invite them not just to receive services themselves but also to use their experiences to help improve our services or to give advice and encouragement to a younger person who may be going through an experience similar to their own. From our research with care leavers, we identified that real-life examples of young adults who had been in care in Haringey and could "tell it as it is" was something that young people in care would find helpful.

What would encourage and enable care leavers to stay in touch with the council and to offer their experience and insight for the benefit of others on their care journey?