

Report title	Support for Care Leavers Over Christmas 2021	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Beverley Momenabadi Children and Young People	
Wards affected	All wards	
Accountable director	Emma Bennett, Executive Director of Families	
Originating service	Children's Services	
Accountable employee	Samantha Grainger	Team manager
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Report has been considered by	Children in Care Managers Meeting	4 November 2021
	Children's Social Care Leadership Team	2 December 2021

Recommendation for action:

The Corporate Parenting Board is recommended to:

1. Receive the Support for Care Leavers Over Christmas 2021 report.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to outline the support provided to Care Leavers during Christmas 2021 through the continued COVID-19 pandemic. This period has impacted on the vulnerabilities of Wolverhampton's young people who have left Wolverhampton's care, leaving them more isolated, struggling financially and at risk of exploitation.
- 1.2 The following report sets out how the service took steps to mitigate against this, whilst maintaining current COVID-19 guidelines and protecting the health and safety of this group of young people.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Currently in Wolverhampton, the Reach Leaving Care Team supports 377 Care Leavers across the UK ranging from 16 -25 who actively work with and receive support from the service. Of this group of young people, there are a range of different needs and circumstances, in evaluating these needs the service highlighted around 115 young people who are living independently who would require additional support.
- 2.2 The majority of these young people are on universal credit. The COVID uplift provided by the government has recently been removed which has left Wolverhampton's most vulnerable just over £20 per week worse off.
- 2.3 In previous years, the service has worked with partners and charitable organisations to support this vulnerable group over the festivities.
- 2.4 This support has included:
 - Christmas meal in partnership with the University of Wolverhampton
 - Christmas Gifts donated by colleagues, the local community, and Mission Christmas
 - Christmas Party hosted and support by Cllr Kaur
 - Advent Calendar to all Care Leavers
 - Gifts to the children of the City Care Leavers, as their Corporate Grandparents
- 2.5 In 2021, due to the restrictions and limitations set out to protect residents from COVID 19, gathering of groups of young people were limited. In addition, feedback received from Young Persons' Advisors was that the vast majority of care experienced young people did not want to attend large gatherings with other Care Leavers.
- 2.6 Therefore, the service had to think very differently and innovatively to support this group and achieve the same outcomes for the young people in order that young people felt supported by their Corporate Parents and valued by them.

3.0 Progress, options, discussion, etc.

- 3.1 The service was involved in contingency planning, with the Co-Production and Youth Engagement Team during October and November 2021 and reached out to partners to seek support.
- 3.2 For Christmas 2021 the service managed to secure the following:
- advent calendars for all Care Leavers. Morrison's supermarket provided these at reduced cost.
 - Selection Boxes for all Care Leavers from funds donated by Councillor Kaur and her constituency.
 - 26 gifts were provided for all Young people on the House Project from Reconomy.
 - Personalised Christmas card from the Young Person Advisor (YPA) for all Care Leavers
 - Gifts for Care Leavers children were secured through the Simple Acts of kindness Charity Appeal.
 - The 115 young people identified as vulnerable, each received additional financial support per month for support with food utility costs for November, December, January, and February via the COVID Winter Fund Offer.
 - 45 just eat vouchers for Wolverhampton's most vulnerable young people to be able to order a meal for Christmas of their choice. By using vouchers young people living or staying out of city were equally supported. Not all of Wolverhampton's young people like traditional Christmas meals so this catered for all tastes. This was funded via the Household support fund.
- 3.3 To mitigate against the sense of isolation over this period activities were planned, these included:
- The Co-Production and Youth Engagement Team were planning to host with the Care Leavers Independent Collective (CLIC) an end of year event at Bilston Town Hall. Unfortunately, due to COVID restrictions this has been postponed.
 - The Grandmentor Project continued to support young people over Christmas. The 21 young people currently supported by the project were provided with a Christmas goody pack.
 - The Reach Leaving Care Team emailed, and hand delivered to all Care Leavers a survival guide with strategies to help them cope over the holiday period.
- 3.4 In evaluating the current progress, the service highlighted a gap in support from last year's provision; this was the opportunity for Wolverhampton's most vulnerable Care

Leavers to have a substantial gift. This provision as highlighted above has been supported by partners in previous years.

Option 1

3.5 Children's Leadership Team agreed to support with purchasing Christmas presents for Wolverhampton's most vulnerable care leavers who would not be receiving gifts from elsewhere. Each of these young people had a personal gift to the value of £10 purchased by their Young Persons Advisor. This equated to 80 Care Leavers who required a £10 present. The costs for were met from the Reach Care Leavers Team budget from an underspend in other areas.

4.0 Financial implications

4.1 The costs of measures detailed within the body of this report were all met from existing approved budgets within children's services.
[JB/13012022/P]

5.0 Legal implications

5.1 The legal implications for this report is set out in the Children and Social Work Act 2017 in section 1 Corporate Parenting Principles for children and young people in and leaving care.
[SB/13012022/P]

6.0 Equalities implications

6.1 This report covers the Council's support to local Care Leavers provided during the Christmas holidays. At no time has the Council made any assumptions about a care leaver's religious views or practices but has sought to offer support that recognises this as a national holiday in the UK but recognises that, in line with the wider population, Wolverhampton's care leavers are from diverse backgrounds. Consequently, the food vouchers offered for example allowed people to choose their own meal from a range of different suppliers that would meet individual and diverse appetites.

6.2 Additionally, all gifts were made to individual care leavers by Young Persons' Advisers who have personal knowledge of the care leavers they work with and were able to offer gifts based in personal knowledge of the recipient.

7.0 All other Implications

As detailed in the report, due to COVID -19, plans for supporting Care Leavers at Christmas have been amended and no longer include large face to face gatherings.