

<b>Report title</b>	The Reach Leaving Care Local Offer Review 2022	
<b>Cabinet member with lead responsibility</b>	Councillor Beverley Momenabadi Children and Young People	
<b>Wards affected</b>	All wards	
<b>Accountable director</b>	Emma Bennett, Executive Director of Families	
<b>Originating service</b>	Children and Young People in Care	
<b>Accountable employees</b>	Hannah Finch Email:	Corporate Parenting Officer <a href="mailto:Hannah.Finch@wolverhampton.gov.uk">Hannah.Finch@wolverhampton.gov.uk</a>
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<b>Report to has been considered by</b>	Children’s Social Care Leadership Team Meeting	22 December 2022

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**Recommendation for action:**

The Corporate Parenting Board is recommended to:

1. Receive an update on the review process undertaken of the Care Leaver Local Offer.

## **1.0 Purpose**

1.1 To update Senior Leaders and Partner agencies on the review of the Care Leaver Offer.

## **2.0 Background**

- 2.1 It has been 12 months since the REACH Local Offer for Care Leavers has been reviewed. Therefore, a comprehensive review including Care Leavers took place to support the development of the services published in the offer. This report updates Senior Leaders and Partner agencies on the review of the Care Leaver Offer and seeks Partner Agencies' support to further enhance the offer.
- 2.2 Following the 'Children's Social Care Reform – A Vision for Change' document published in January 2016, the government produced the Children and Social Work Bill which subsequently received Royal Assent on 27 April 2017. Implicit in the Children and Social Work Act 2017, it is the requirement to improve support for children in care in England and Wales, especially for those leaving care.
- 2.3 The Act introduced seven corporate parenting principles to which local authorities must have regard. These are:
1. To act in the best interests and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing of relevant children and young people
  2. To encourage those young people to express their views, wishes and feelings
  3. To take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those young people
  4. To help those children gain access to and make best use of services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners
  5. To promote high aspirations and seek to secure the best outcomes for those children and young people
  6. To have regard to the need for those children and young people to be safe and have stability in their home lives, relationships, education or work
  7. To prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living
- 2.4 As of September 2018, all local authorities in England are required to publish a Local Offer for care leavers, providing information about services within the local authority that may assist care leavers in, or in preparing for, adulthood and independent living. This includes services relating to health and wellbeing, relationships, education, training and employment accommodation, and participation in society.

## **3.0 Additions to the Local Offer**

- 3.1 Since the previous Local Offer Review in 2021, the City of Wolverhampton has continued to regularly update and increase its Local Offer in line with the needs and requests of the care experienced young people it supports. Notable additions to the offer in the last twelve months include:
- An increase in Setting Up Home Grant (SUHG) from £2,000 to £2,483.

- Access to the Ask Jan app, which entitles young people to a variety of support options 24 hours a day including:
  - A 24-hour counselling helpline with direct and immediate access to an accredited counsellor
  - Up to eight face to face counselling sessions per issue with an accredited counsellor
  - Personal finance advice – mortgages, pensions, insurance, debt, and savings
  - Nutrition, exercise, stress and wellbeing advice
  - Specialist helplines including housing, legal and citizens advice 8am-8pm
  - Access to an enhanced wellbeing app My Possible Self
  - Cognitive behavioural therapy – available online on via the App
  - Discounts and special offers on days out and activities with The Max Card
  
- The launch of a regular Thursday afternoon drop-in session at The Oasis Hub with access to:
  - Young People’s Advisors
  - Benefits Advisors
  - Education, Employment and Training Advisors
  - Wolverhampton Homes Advisors
  - Nurse Specialists.
  - Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Young Persons Champion
  
- A weekly baby group hosted at The Oasis Hub by a Community Champion and Young Persons Advisor
  
- Access to Household Support Grant:
  - £40 per month for individual Care Leaver
  - £80 per month for Care Leaver with children

#### **4.0 Local Offer Review 2022**

- 4.1 On Monday 24 October 2022, the start of Care Leavers’ Week 2022 at The Oasis Hub, 15 care experienced young people attended a workshop to look through aspects of the Local Offer and to establish the strengths and the challenges of accessing the offers.
- 4.2 A variety of activities were used to collate the views and feedback of the young people involved, including “Mood Boards”, “The Offer in Numbers” and a “Menti Meter” ranking system. Alongside this a “Suggestion Station” and a “Star Chart” activity ran for the duration of the week to enable other Young People who were unable to attend the event the opportunity to provide feedback on the areas of the Local Offer that meant the most to them.

## 5.0 Activity One: Local Offer in Numbers

5.1 In four groups young people were presented with five measurable activities, shown in figure one, from the current Local Offer and were asked:

1. Do the number of young people accessing this offer seem too low/too high or just about right?
2. How might we increase engagement with this offer?

The Offer	The Numbers
<b>ASDAN Award</b>	10 Young People completed the award in 2021 - 2022
<b>REACH Café weekly attendance</b>	Eight attendees per week
<b>WV Active Membership</b>	82 active members
<b>Grand Mentors</b>	26 Young People matched with a Mentor
<b>Family Group Conferencing (FGC)</b>	Four Young People successfully took part in FCG

Figure One: Local Offer in Numbers

5.2 Feedback from the groups was for the most part positive, looking specifically at the five focus areas it was noted:

### **ASDAN Award**

5.3 Young people did not fully feel they understood the award but did feel independence skills for young people should be started at an earlier age (around 15) to prepare children in care for the transition to becoming a care leaver. Young people suggested the ASDAN award could be completed prior to accessing your first time flat or while you take up your first tenancy and an incentive, such as a financial reward, that could be used setting up your first home, might encourage young people to engage with the ASDAN scheme.

### **The Reach Cafe**

5.4 Young people reported favourably about the Reach Café drop in; they were aware of it even if they hadn't attended. Young people suggested cooking sessions and regular hot meals might encourage more attendance. Likewise, young people reported they would attend more regularly if monthly "Special Nights" with Young Person's Advisors were arranged, examples of this included food nights and pamper sessions.

5.5 Transport to the Reach Café was a factor in some reluctance to attend, however this was felt as something that needed to be tackled at a regional level rather than focused on a local one.

### **WV Active Membership**

- 5.6 All young people reported they were aware of the WV Active membership offer, they also felt that 82 active members of the scheme was a fair uptake. It was noted the promotion of classes at WV Active might encourage other Care Leavers to take part. Care Leavers also suggested memberships to be “auto renewed” and have a reminder sent when their membership is due for renewal.
- 5.7 Transport to WV Active locations was mentioned as a potential barrier to some young people. However, it was suggested by the young people that this was a regional concern that needed greater joint working across the West Midlands Combined Authority. Access to baby swimming classes may also encourage those with children to attend more regularly.

### **Grand Mentors**

- 5.8 Young people noted they had heard of the Grand Mentors Scheme; however, they were unsure as to what, in terms of support, they were able to offer and as a result suggested this might be the reason that more young people had not been matched with a mentor. Young people suggested Grand Mentors are invited to attend the REACH Café.

### **Families Working Together**

- 5.9 When asked about Families Working Together (FWT) all young people mentioned they were unclear as to what FWT would be able to offer them and felt this was not well explained by YPAs. Further group discussions highlighted that young people would prefer FWT’s scope to be wider, outside of family links, to include important individuals such as past Social Workers, Teachers, or Neighbours etc. Young people suggested FWT might conduct “Family Strength Days” where important people to the young person might be invited to engage in informal activities to promote better communication and potential prepare them for undertaking FWT.

## 6.0 Activity Two: Menti Meter

6.1 In this activity, groups ranked 10 sections of the Wolverhampton Local Offer, highlighted as areas of importance from the last review, from most important to least important to them today.



Figure Two: Menti Meter

6.2 Figure Two outlines the completed “ranking” figures from all four groups taking part in the activity. Young people reported overwhelmingly that having access to Band 1 Housing within Wolverhampton Homes and being exempt from Council Tax within the City until they are 25 were the most popular and utilised aspects of the offer.

6.3 However, it was clear from the ranking that access to FWT and the ASDAN award appeared significantly lower in young people’s interests. Taking into consideration the findings from Activity One, it may be suggested that a lack of understanding around ASDAN and FWT may account for their lower places in the ranking.

6.4 Other notable rankings include access to the Ask Jan app. As this is a fairly recent addition to the Local Offer, it was pleasing to see so many young people expressing that they had used the app or knew someone who had.

## 7.0 Activity Three: Health Mood Boards

7.1 Young people, with the support of Rebecca Grainger, Designated Nurse for CYPIC, were asked to consider the current health local offer and use it to develop a group “Wants” and “Needs” mood board to reflect what they felt was most important to the in terms of the health offer.

## Needs

- 7.2 All young people strongly reported the need for a Nurse, Health Support Worker, or a Young Person’s Advisor with a specialism in Health to be available to them. All groups were aware of the support available to CYPIC from designated nurses and school nurses however felt this “dropped off” when turning 18. They also suggested adult services were not prepared for care experienced young people to access their services and often felt they did not understand their story. Further to this, access to free sanitary products and contraception were a key need noted by respondents.
- 7.3 The Reach Café does provide both sanitary products and contraception free of charge, however young people felt this needed to be better advertised to make others aware. Alongside this young people reported the need for greater access to dentists and GPs in their local areas, however felt this was a national issue and not just focused on Wolverhampton alone.

## Wants

- 7.4 Young people felt care experienced people who work should be entitled to free prescriptions, however they felt this should be means tested.
- 7.5 Young people were informed that current work by the Black Country Integrated Care Board (BICB) was taking place to allow Wolverhampton Care Leavers access to free prescriptions, but this work was ongoing. Groups reported they felt this was taking some time and due to the rise in the cost of living, this needed to be expedited.

## 8.0 Activity Four: Star Wall

- 8.1 Across Care Leavers’ Week, young people were encouraged to provide feedback and suggestions around the local offer and what they would like to see added or developed. The “Star Wall” asked young people to look at five challenges highlighted by them during the previous review and to add their own star to the challenge they still think is important to them today. Challenges highlighted were:

<b>Challenge:</b>	<b>Star count</b>
Access to a dentist/optician	3
Access to Mental Health support	5
Keeping in touch with your YPA or other special people	7
Rent discounts for working Care Leavers	7
Reduced or Free Transport across the region	15
<b>Total Responses</b>	<b>37</b>

Figure 3: Star Wall

## 9.0 Regional Care Leaver Offer

9.1 In June 2022, a review of local authority care leaver offers in the West Midlands took place as part of the development of the Regional Care Leaver Offer Blueprint. As part of this review, a comparison of the 14 local authorities and their offers was completed, looking at the four key areas of housing, work experience, council tax exemptions and access to free leisure, as outlined in Figure 4.

Local Authority	Priority for Social Housing	Offers Work Experience	Council Tax Exception (within LA)	Access to Free Leisure
<b>Wolverhampton</b>	YES	YES	YES	YES
<b>Dudley</b>	YES	NO	YES	NO
<b>Birmingham</b>	YES	YES	YES	NO
<b>Sandwell</b>	YES	YES	YES	YES
<b>Walsall</b>	NO	NO	YES	NO
<b>Solihull</b>	YES	YES	YES	YES
<b>Coventry</b>	YES	YES	YES	YES
<b>Telford and Wrekin</b>	NO	NO	YES	YES
<b>Shropshire</b>	YES	YES	YES	YES
<b>Stoke on Trent</b>	YES	YES	YES	YES
<b>Staffordshire</b>	NO	YES	YES	YES
<b>Warwickshire</b>	YES	YES	YES	YES
<b>Worcestershire</b>	YES	NO	YES	NO
<b>Herefordshire</b>	YES	NO	YES	YES

Figure 4: Regional Offers

9.2 Of the 14 local authorities to take part, only seven (which includes Wolverhampton) were able to demonstrate their local offer met the four key areas outlined by the review.

9.3 Alongside a local authority-led survey, an additional regional survey of care experienced young people took place. The survey received 179 responses and from this, the Regional Care Leaver Offer Blueprint outlined the following suggested recommendations for all local offers in the West Midlands:

### Health:

- Free prescriptions (up to 25 years)
- Better mental health support
- Free leisure passes

### Housing:

- Specific Housing Offer for Care Leavers
- Homelessness protocol in place
- Council Tax exemption up to 25 (in LA)
- Reciprocal arrangement outside of LA for Council Tax exemption



**Finance:**

- Discounted utility bills, including Wi-Fi.

**Mentoring:**

- Mentoring opportunities up to 25

**Education, Employment and Training:**

- Ring fenced apprenticeships within LA
- Public Sector opportunities
- Skills and Pre-Employment programmes

**Transport:**

- Free travel across the West Midlands

9.4 Comparing the City of Wolverhampton's own local offer to the feedback from the Regional Offer, it can be noted that Wolverhampton offers many of these support requirements. There were only three areas not included in our current offer:

- Free prescriptions (up to 25 years)
- Reciprocal arrangement outside of LA for Council Tax exemption
- Free travel across the West Midlands

9.5 We recognise that these areas will require a regional approach to achieving progress and will continue to work with the Regional Care Leaver Offer workstream to achieve these elements for all care leavers in the West Midlands.

## **10.0 Development Areas**

10.1 The Local Offer Review event and Care Leavers' Week feedback suggests overall that our care experienced young people feel positive about what is currently available to them within the local authority. However, some suggestions for improvement included:

- A Nurse, Health Worker, or Young Persons Advisor with a focus on health specifically for care leavers would be greatly welcomed
- Families Working Together and what it can offer young people needs to be more clearly explained
- ASDAN Award needs more flexibility and to be better explained to young people at an earlier age
- The Reach Café would benefit from a once a month "special" evening event for care leavers to attend
- Cooking sessions during The Reach Café to enable young people to have a hot meal
- Better access to GPs and Dentists in Wolverhampton, however young people felt this was a national crisis and not focused on one area alone.

## **11.0 Financial implications**

11.1 Any costs associated with developments and additions made to the REACH Local Offer for Care Leavers will be contained within the overall budgets for Children and Young

People in Care Service and separate decision papers for any additions will be processed through Children's Social Care Leadership Team as required.

- 11.2 Other Services within City of Wolverhampton Council and external partner organisations are working in partnership with the Children and Young People in Care Service to support the REACH Local Offer for Care Leavers. Any costs incurred by other Services within City of Wolverhampton Council and external partner organisations will be contained within their existing approved budgets for 2022-2023.  
[JG/22122022/M]

## **12.0 Legal implications**

- 12.1 The publishing of a Local Offer for Care Leavers is a legal requirement as set out in the Children and Social Work Act 2017 to improve support for looked after children in England and Wales, especially for those leaving care.  
[SB/18122022/Y]

## **13.0 Equalities implications**

- 13.1 Care leavers are asked to begin their journey into adulthood earlier than most young people. This can make them more vulnerable, isolated and unsure how to ask for help. The REACH Local Offer for Care Leavers aims to mitigate against the challenges faced by care leavers in the community.
- 13.2 Outcomes for care leavers as a result of their pre-care and in-care experience are poorer than their peers. Unfortunately, sometimes being in care can have a negative impact on children's education. Frequent placement and school moves will all impact on a child's confidence and ability to learn. Traumatic experiences before entry into care can also cause difficulties, which may affect a child's behaviour, self-esteem, self-regulation, or trust in authority figures. This experience means that nationally compared to the general population care leavers are (DoE, Published 12 August 2019):
- less likely to be in education, employment, or training - over a third of 19-year-old care leavers are not in education, employment, or training
  - more likely to be attempting to live independently - some are unable to remain in their placements beyond the age of 18. They are therefore likely to experience compressed and accelerated transitions to independence.
  - impact of childhood trauma means they are more likely to suffer with issues relating to emotional health and well being
  - more likely to have a criminal conviction and may have experienced unnecessary criminalisation. Care leavers are estimated to represent between 24% and 27% of the adult prison population.
- 13.3 The Reach Care Leaver offer's sole purpose is to mitigate against the negative impact of being in care and the inequality they can face in society.

## **14.0 All other Implications**

14.1 There are no other implications as a result of this report.