

<b>Report title</b>	The Reach Leaving Care Local Offer Review 2023	
<b>Cabinet member with lead responsibility</b>	Councillor Christopher Burden Children and Young People	
<b>Wards affected</b>	All wards	
<b>Accountable director</b>	Alison Hinds, Director of Children's Services	
<b>Originating service</b>	Children and Young People	
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<b>Report has been considered by</b>	Care Leavers' Forum Children and Young People in Care Team Managers Meeting Children's Social Care Leadership Meeting	13 December 2023 20 December 2023  21 December 2023

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**Recommendation for action:**

Corporate Parenting Board is recommended to:

1. Receive the Reach Leaving Care Local Offer Review 2023.

**Recommendation for noting:**

Corporate Parenting Board is recommended to note:

1. The review process undertaken of the Care Leaver Local Offer.

## **1.0 Purpose**

- 1.1 To update Corporate Parenting Board, 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 experienced young people took place to support the development of the published in the offer. This report updates Senior Leaders and Partner agencies on the review 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:
- To act in the best interests and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing of relevant children and young people.
  - To encourage those young people to express their views, wishes and feelings.
  - To take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those young people.
  - To help those children gain access to and make 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.
  - 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.
  - 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 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 2022, City of Wolverhampton Council 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:

- Access to 12 months rent support for young people who enter their first paid employment
- Creation of a Care Leavers specific Nurse, to help with the transition of Care Leavers from Childrens to Adult services.
- Access to free prescriptions for all Care Leavers from Wolverhampton
- Access for all Care Leavers, regardless of home local authority, to have access to free council tax till the age of 25.
- A weekly baby group hosted at The Oasis Hub by a Community Champion and Young Persons Advisors.

#### **4.0 Local Offer Review 2023**

- 4.1 On Wednesday, 25 October 2023, the start of Care Leavers Week 2023 at The Oasis Hub, 20 care experienced young people, an increase of five from last year, attended a workshop to look through aspects of the Local Offer and to establish the strengths and the challenges of accessing the offers available.
- 4.2 A variety of activities were used to collate the views and feedback of the young people involved, including Participation Activities, “Mood Boards”, a “Suggestion Station” and a “Star Chart” activity which also ran for the duration of the week to enable other Young People who we’re 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: Participation MentiMeter**

- 5.1 Activity One saw young people take part in a variety of activities led by the Participation and Youth Engagement Team, to raise awareness of the Care Leavers Independent Collective Forum Young people were also asked both during the session and across Care Leavers Week to answer the following via a Mentimeter link:

- 1. Do you know who Care Leavers Independent Collective are?**
- 2. What might get you involved in CLIC?**
- 3. Do you know any staff from the Participation and Youth Engagement Team?**

- 5.2 Feedback from the groups who took part in the activities during the Local Offer Review were overly positive. Additional feedback from the Meti Meter noted:

#### **Question One: Do you know who the Care Leavers Independent Collective are?**

- 5.3 Of 27 young people that responded they were, overall, mostly aware of CLIC, several respondents were able to name some of the current members of CLIC directly.



Figure one: Responses received for Question One.

**Question Two: What might get you involved in CLIC?**

- 5.4 Of the 21 respondents most felt that moving the current CLIC meeting to consider with Thursday drop-in sessions at The Oasis Hub might improve attendance. Several also added that making sessions fun and providing food may also increase attendance.



Figure Two: Responses received for Question Two

**Question Three: Have you met any staff from the Participation Team?**

- 5.5 Of the 27 responses received equal numbers they had and had not met a member of the Participation Team. Several respondents were able to name a team member, however it was noted that some young people named the Corporate Parenting Officer, while the officer does work with CLIC they are not a member of the Participation Team.

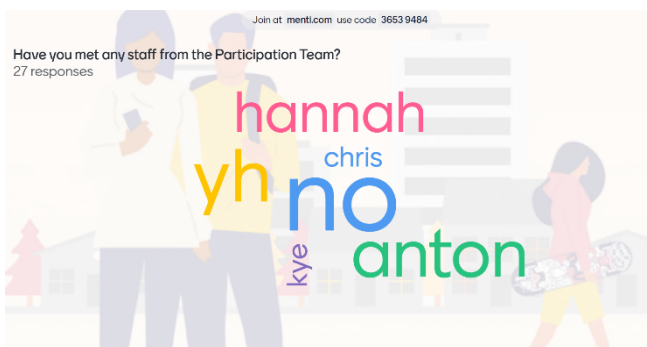


Figure Three: Responses received for Question Three

## **6.0 Activity Two: Families Working Together**

- 6.1 In this activity groups worked directly with members of the Families Working Together (FWT) Team to look at the offer available for Care Leavers and how they could best make this a bespoke service, as previously requested.
- 6.2 Respondents were asked to think of who was important to them in their lives, what people they felt Care Leavers might wish to make contact with and how best for the FTW team to communicate this.
- 6.3 On the whole young people felt that:
- They would like to have a wider offer of support from FWT, to help them trace and locate important individuals to them such as previous Social Workers, Foster Parents, Residential Home staff, Teachers etc.
  - Young people reported that FWT staff would need to ensure, from the initial meeting with a potential link that the person is fully committed to working with them and the young person to maintain a relationship.
  - The first meeting of a FWT staff member and a potential link should provide an update on how the young person is doing, what they have achieved in their life and a personal message from the young person. They would also like to see potential links doing the same and sharing information with the young person about their own lives before an official “meeting”.
  - Young people also felt that some counselling support during reconnection with important individuals would be very important, especially if they reconnection did not go how the young person initially envisaged.
  - Connections with people that young people had never met, such as absent parents should also be taken into consideration.
  - Connections could be made via phone call, email, facetime, letter etc Young People did not feel connections should be “physically seeing someone” only.
  - Young people felt that the offer from FWT needed clearer explanation, including what the steps might look like to access FWT, what support FWT can provide them if they are successful in finding an important person or if they are unable to find them.
  - Young people felt that a pilot with one or two young people, working directly with an FWT worker and their YPA would enable the team to work on a more personalised plan for Care Leavers accessing the service and this should then be reviewed by CLIC and Senior Managers.

## **7.0 Activity Three: Health Mood Boards**

- 7.1 Young people, with the support of Rebecca Grainger, Designated Nurse for CYPIC and Specialist Dentist Team were asked to consider the upcoming Care Leavers Nurse role and using this develop a group “Wants” and “Needs” mood board to reflect what they felt was most important to them in terms of the support the Care Leavers Nurse could provide to them as they transition into adult health services.

7.2 In addition young people met with members of the Specialist Dentist Service to hear about what options might be available to them to help access emergency dentistry services within Wolverhampton.

### **Needs**

7.3 All young people felt that any Care Experienced Nurse should have their “full medical history”, with their consent, so they do not need to repeat themselves when trying to access support and should be a consistent person to better develop relationships with young people. In addition, all young people felt that support from the Nurse needed to be timely and not limited to a specific length of time, as all young peoples’ needs might be different and require longer or shorter periods of contact. They also reported the need for the Nurse to be able to explain the discharge to adult health services some young people encounter when under 18.

7.4 It was also felt that the Nurse needed to be trauma informed, with a level of understanding of how trauma can impact a care experienced young person well into their adult life and beyond. They would also need to help young people tackle the perceived stigma of being care experienced and how this can in some cases, impact access to health services.

### **Wants**

7.5 Across the session, young people reported they would want additional support from the Care Experienced Nurse to access GP appointments, especially longer appointment slots as young people reported this was often very difficult to access. Further to this young people felt the Care Experienced Nurse would have to be informed and able to support with aspects of sexual health, substance misuse and self-harm.

## **8.0 Activity Four: Star Wall**

8.1 Across Care Leavers Week 2023 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 5 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.

8.2 Challenges highlighted were:

<b>Challenge:</b>	<b>Star count</b>
Access to a dentist	13
Access to an optician	8
Access to cooking sessions at The Oasis Hub	4
Learning independence skills earlier in life	4
Reduced or Free Transport across the region	10
<b>Total Responses</b>	<b>39</b>

Figure 3: Star Wall

## 9.0 Comparison to Regional Care Leaver Offers

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 fourteen local authority 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 below.

Local Authority	Priority for Social Housing	Offers Work Experience	Council Tax Exception (within LA)	Access to Free Leisure
<b>Wolverhampton</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>YES</b>
<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 &amp; 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

9.2 Of the 14 local authorities to take part only seven including 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

**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 two areas not included in our current offer:

- Discounted utility bills, including wi-fi.
- Free travel across the West Midlands

9.5 Since the last Local Offer review in 2022 City of Wolverhampton Council have implemented council tax exemption arrangements for Care Leavers regardless of their local authority. This offer is not widespread to the other local regional local authorities as outlined here:

<b>Local Authority</b>	<b>Council Tax arrangement</b>
<b>Birmingham</b>	Exception for care experienced young people to the age of 25 from Birmingham only. They will also support their own young people who live out of city.
<b>Coventry</b>	Exception for care experienced young people to the age of 25 only. Coventry will also support their own young people who live out of city.
<b>Dudley</b>	Exception for any young person so is care experienced up to the age of 25.
<b>Walsall</b>	Exemption for care experienced young people to the age of 25 from Walsall only. They will also support their own young people who live out of city.
<b>Sandwell</b>	Exemption for care experienced young people to the age of 25 from Sandwell only.
<b>Telford and Wrekin</b>	Exception for care experienced young people to the age of 25 from Telford and Wrekin only.



9.6 We recognise that reciprocal council tax arrangements, discounts to utilities and discounted travel 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 suggested 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 include:

- Better access to Opticians and Dentists in Wolverhampton, however young people felt this was a national crisis and not focused on one area alone.
- REACH Team to work with Specialist Dentist Service to establish if young people would meet the service criteria for emergency dentistry support.
- CLIC meetings to be moved to a Thursday evening to work alongside regular Drop-In sessions at The Oasis Hub
- CLIC meetings to work in conjunction with REACH Team “special evenings” to encourage attendance and “fun” element of CLIC.
- For FWT to pilot a specific offer to Care Leavers looking to make meaningful life links with people other than close family relations, including how connections are made, maintained and grown for young people.
- Care Experienced Nurse to be a regular feature at The Oasis Drop in on Thursday afternoons.
- For the Care Experienced Nurse to be aware of the specific needs of Care Experienced young people, including trauma and attachment.
- Free travel across the West Midlands

## **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 budget for 2023-2024 for the Children and Young People in Care Service.

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 2023-2024.

[JG/22122023/P]

## **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/02012024/X]

### **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 In line with the Equality Act 2010 and the recent motion to recognise Care Experience as a protected characteristic within City of Wolverhampton Council, the Local Authority have a duty to eliminate discrimination and promote equality of opportunity for all Children and Young People in Care and Care Leavers. Care leavers are asked to begin their journey into adulthood earlier than most young people.
- 13.3 Outcomes for care leavers as a result of their pre-care and in care experience are poorer than their peers. Traumatic experiences before entry into care can 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.
- 13.4 The Reach Care Leaver offer 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.