



Leaving Care Strategy

2014- 17

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1. Introduction

Lancashire County Council strives to ensure that all young people leaving care are provided with the very best support to ensure a smooth transition into adulthood and independent living. All young people leaving care will be provided with the necessary support and skills to thrive as adults once they leave our care. This will include children and young people leaving residential or foster care and the small number of young people looked after and cared for by their parents.

This strategy links to the priorities set out in the new Children and Young People's Plan 2014- 17 which seeks to improve outcomes for all children and young people.

This strategy links to;

- The Children Looked After Strategy 2014- 17 which clearly states our aspirations for children and young people.
- The Sufficiency Strategy which is focused on developing placement choice and services for CLA and Care Leavers.

Detailed actions have been identified throughout the strategy, particularly in relation to the Key Priorities section. These actions have been based on new Government recommendations, in addition to feedback presented by young people who recently attended a Care Leavers event. Their suggestions were mature and insightful and have been attached as an appendix. Actions within the Strategy will also directly contribute to improving outcomes specified in the Children and Young People's Plan 2014- 17.

The Strategy will be used to ensure progress is monitored and evaluated on an annual basis and the County Council and its partners can be held to account. Our Corporate Pledge will be a key part of this evaluation.

A key feature of the strategy will be the participation and engagement of children and young people. Children and young people's wishes and feelings will be gathered on an individual basis and through LINX (our Children in Care Council). The Corporate Parenting Board and LINX will be actively involved in the monitoring and progress of this action plan.

2. Leaving Care Service Values

- The quality of the planning and preparation for independence and the after care provided will profoundly affect the rest of a young person's life.
- Young people's transition from childhood to adulthood is a gradual process. Young people leaving care should receive positive preparation and support so that they are enabled to participate fully as active citizens once they reach adulthood. Significant attention should always be given to preparing and implementing Pathway Plans with young people.
- All preparations for leaving care and throughout after care, must consider ethnic, linguistic and cultural background, language needs and any additional support that may be required in relation to religion or belief, sexual orientation or gender.
- Care leavers with special educational needs or disabilities will be fully supported to ensure that the above principles are applied equally to them.
- Young people will play a full and active part in decision making and will be encouraged to fully participate in decisions that affect them.

3. Strategy Aims and Objective

The key objectives of the Leaving Care Strategy are as follows;

- Provide placement choice from the outset of the care experience.
- Stable placements, continuity of carers and the maintenance of positive relationships.
- Look after young people until they are prepared and ready to leave care.
- Where appropriate, promote and maintain relationships with carers and families, after young people leave care.
- Prepare young people on an ongoing basis and as soon as appropriate in preparation for independence.
- Enable young people leaving care to fulfil their potential in education, training and employment.
- Ensure young people leaving care have access to a choice of independent and semi independent accommodation and the support and skills to maintain themselves in their accommodation.
- Ensure there is a contingency plan to support care leavers in the event of a crisis.
- Provide ongoing personal support via personal advisors, Social Workers, carers and mentors.
- Support young people to access benefits when necessary.
- Fully involve young people in their assessments, planning, review and decision-making for leaving care.

4. Who are young people leaving care?

Leaving Care legislation identifies four distinct categories for young people leaving, or who have left the care of Lancashire County Council.

These broadly, are as follows;

- Eligible children are those aged 16 and 17 who have been looked after for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and are still looked after.
- Relevant children are those who are aged 16 and 17 who have been looked after for at least 13 weeks since the aged of 14 and have left care following their 16th birthday.
- Former relevant children are aged 18- 21 who have been eligible and/ or relevant children. If at 21, the young person is still being supported by the authority with education or training; he or she remains a former relevant child until the end of the agreed programme of education and/ or training, even if that exceeds the age of 21.
- Qualifying children are any children who are aged 21 or below and cease to be looked after in other settings (education/ health) or are privately fostered after the age of 16. This includes young people leaving care after 16 but not qualifying as eligible children.

Lancashire County Council has differing duties and powers in relation to each status, but all are entitled to expert advice and assessment of needs and support.

5. Legislation

1. Care Leavers Strategy 2013

New guidance was issued by the Department for Education in October 2013. It sets out their expectations and principles in relation to what care leavers should expect at this critical part of their lives. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/care-leaver-strategy>

2. Children Leaving Care Act

The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 was introduced in England and Wales in October 2001.

To meet these aims, the key responsibilities are:

- A duty to assist YP until they are 21, or up to the age of 24 if they are in approved programmes of education or training
- A duty to assess and meet the needs of young people in and leaving care
- Pathway Planning
- Financial support
- Maintenance in suitable accommodation and
- A duty to keep in touch by the responsible authority.

6. How are we doing?

In the first nine months of 2013/14, 84% of young people leaving care were considered to be in suitable accommodation. This is lower than two years ago, when the figure was 93% but it is still below the target of 89%.

Performance

In addition to the actions identified in the Children and Young People's Plan and in the accompanying action plan, Lancashire County Council is also obliged to gather information based on the National Performance Indicators;

- NI 147 Care Leavers in suitable accommodation
- NI 148 Care Leavers in education, employment and training

For NI 147, care leavers in suitable accommodation aged 19, is currently 71.6% compared to 2013 which showed an overall performance of 88%.

For NI 148, care leavers in EET aged 19 is currently 32.5%, compared to the overall performance in 2011 was at 51.6%. The previous year, neither of the PIs met the target set.

Care Leavers attending university has also increased. In 2011/12- 25 care leavers attended university. This has risen to 37 in 2012/13 and 36 in 2013/14.

The number of care leavers with a Pathway Plan at age 19, is currently standing at 89.2%. Ensuring that all care leavers have a Pathway Plan in place has been highlighted as a priority.

Lancashire County Council was successful in securing funding through the Home Offices' Vulnerable and Disengaged Young People's Fund to help address the need for increased support to care leavers. It includes the extended remit of the existing ACERS Outreach Service through the appointment of a Care Leavers Outreach Coordinator.

The project offers support, over and above that being offered through Personal Advisers, to those young people age 17 years and above leaving care. Local hubs are to be created to provide support out of hours and weekends around transition into independent living with a particular focus upon reducing feelings of isolation.

The project also includes the extension of the existing CLA texting and website service to care leavers. In addition, care leavers will be helped to identify specific needs and request the support of a volunteer. This element of the project has strong links with the existing Lancashire County Council's volunteering service; with young people encouraged to work as volunteers at the hubs, delivering support on a 'peer to peer' basis.

A Leaving Care Guide has also been published, aimed at young people moving into independent and semi independent living. This is attached at Appendix Bi.

7. Children and Young People's Plan 2014- 17

There has been significant progress made for children and young people, including those who are looked after or leaving care. These successes have been summarised in the new Children and Young People's Plan. <http://www.lancashirechildrenstrust.org.uk/CYPPlan/>

The new plan for 2014- 17 sets out how we want to work alongside children, young people and families and in doing so, the outcomes we want them to achieve. It is a statement of our collective ambition for how services, teams and individuals involved in improving the wellbeing of children and young people will work together in a way that provides the best support. It articulates our aspirations for children and young people and the families and carers that support them.

There are still some challenges that need to be overcome. These include;

- Limited choice of accommodation particularly for those care leavers with complex needs.
- The potential impact on reduced financial support to for care leavers attending university.
- The numbers of care leavers accessing apprenticeship opportunities.

The recently approved plan re-emphasises the vision of what all organisations and partnerships would like to achieve in delivering positive outcomes for the County Council's children and young people. There are significant challenges not least the rise in demand for children's services at a time when budgets are being further reduced.

Within the plan, the 5 key outcomes and measures relevant to CLA and care leavers are:

1. To feel safe – Performance measure - Numbers of CLA

- To ensure that the right children and young people become looked after.
- To ensure that Lancashire County Council can manage the increase in demand whilst ensuring that children and young people remain safe.

2. To do well – Performance measure - Care leavers, their numbers and percentages in education, employment and training

- Young people leaving care are in suitable accommodation.
- All children and young people who are looked after perform well in education

3. To be happy – Permanence measure – the numbers of children adopted

- Children and young people wherever possible will live at home with their families and where this is not possible they will be found permanent homes and families without unnecessary delay and with minimum disruption.
- To ensure the social and emotional wellbeing of vulnerable children

4. To be healthy –

- Children and young people can access a range of sports activities

5. To be listened to – Inform service delivery and decision making.

- Support for CLA is driven by what they tell us.
 - Children and young people are the focal point for how needs are assessed. Their views are recorded and acted on.

Children and Young People's Partnership Boards

The Children's Partnership Board (CPB) is a means by which local agencies come together to ensure effective collaboration in the development and delivery of services to children and their families. It provides a means by which local priorities can be influenced by local people and is a sub-group of the county-wide Children and Young People's Trust.

The purpose of the Children's Trust Partnership Boards is to drive and deliver effective multi-agency working that safeguards and promotes the well-being of children and young people and improves outcomes for families.

8. What do children and young people say?

In July 2014, a consultation event took place with a wide audience of care leavers, strategic leaders of the County Council and County Councillors with responsibility for Corporate Parenting. The feedback can be found in the attached appendix.

The event was held to celebrate the wide and varied achievements of children and young people who are currently looked after or who are now living independently. In addition to the activities and celebrations, there were a range of presentations focusing on various topics, including finance, further education, pathway planning and new guidance such as the Staying Put policy. The event gave young people the opportunity to have their say and influence key decision makers. The event evaluation is included in the appendices.

Lancashire Young Inspectors (YI) is a group of young people, supported by the Lancashire Participation Network, who inspect services across Lancashire and put forward recommendations about how each service could be improved from a children and young people's perspective. These recommendations are based on speaking to staff and CYP in the service and are revisited by the Young Inspectors at an agreed future date to see how successfully they have been implemented.

Funding has been secured to utilise the YI programme to support the monitoring of fostering and residential provision. During 2014/15, providers will be approached to see whether they would wish to be involved. It is hoped that both in house and agency providers will participate. CLA will be invited and supported to become Young Inspectors.

9. Key Priorities

a) Improving Preparation for Leaving Care

Young people leaving care face many challenges in their transition to independence. Pathway Plans play a key role in ensuring that young people leaving care have the support and skills to participate fully within the community and maximise their opportunities. It is important that care leavers feel ready and prepared for independent living.

The preparation process aims to mirror the transition to independence experienced by young people who benefit from effective parenting and will be part of a continuous process of personal development.

Fostering services and children's homes are required to ensure that their services help children and young people to develop skills and competences and knowledge necessary for adult living.

The Fostering National Standards (14.4) require that foster carers understand that they need to provide all children in their care with age and developmentally appropriate opportunities for learning independence skills.

Children's homes are subject to National Minimum Standards. Standard 12 states that Children's Homes should promote independence and moves to adulthood and leaving care.

b) Tailoring Individual Support for Care Leavers

It is vital that support is given to young people when they are preparing for independence. Lancashire will enable care leavers to 'find their feet' at their own pace. The support delivered will be consistent and continuous, mirroring what a good parent would provide. This will also involve, if possible, the young person's immediate and extended family.

HOW?

1. A 'Staying Put' Policy has been developed which will allow some young people to remain with their carers beyond their 18th birthday to ensure that those young people are appropriately prepared for independent living.
2. Lancashire will engage with other services to ensure appropriate support is available for care leavers who need additional support for their health needs including their emotional and mental health.
3. A Leaving Care Grant is available for all care leavers to assist in the setting up of the young person's home.
4. A Care Leavers Guide has been published to support young people transitioning to independent and semi independent living. (See Appendix Bi)

c) Pathway Planning

Pathway Plans are a statutory requirement and fulfils the requirement for assessing the young person's needs and planning future services.

HOW?

1. Review of quality of pathway plans as part of the new audit process.
2. Young people will be actively involved in this key assessment and planning process.
3. A consultation document is being developed to support young people's involvement.
4. Pathway Plans will be developed by the Young Person with assistance from his/ her social worker and the identified Young Person's Advisor (YPA). The

YPA will continue to contribute to and review the young person's Pathway Plan after 18 with the young person.

5. Young people with special needs, particularly where there are greater dependency needs through disability, may require agreed funding arrangements which extend beyond their 18th birthday. Transitional arrangements will require agreement with Adult Social Care through the Transition protocol arrangements. This includes health and education provisions for the commissioning and managing of services for care leavers with disabilities.
6. Review and develop the role of the PA.

d) Accessing Education, Training and Employment

Performance at school or college and a young person's skill and potential should be a key aspect of individual Pathway Plans.

HOW?

1. Lancashire will support its looked after children and care leavers to achieve their potential at school and to access a range of education, training and employment opportunities.
2. Comprehensive EPEPs will be completed.
3. Effective Virtual school team
4. Effective use of pupil premium
5. Improve the number of care leavers gaining 5 A*- C GCSEs
6. The service will act as a parental advocate in order to ensure that young people feel that someone has a continuing interest in their achievements.
7. Links between colleges and training providers will be maintained and enhanced to ensure the provision of appropriate education and training opportunities are available for care leavers.
8. A range of employment support programmes will be offered to all young people who are looked after or leaving care. This will be based on an opt system. Varied experiences will be offered alongside education or as an employment route. Details of the Programme are set out in the following document:



9. Appropriate apprenticeships opportunities will be sought and the needs of our young people are promoted to ensure that our care leavers have the same employment opportunities as other young people

10. Some financial support will be available for those care leavers who wish to attend a further education course.

e) Health

1. Care leavers have timely access to specialist/ universal health provision (Govt target).

2. Explore with health providers, the development of a dedicated care leavers CAMHS worker who can provide levels of support for young people leaving care.

f) Suitable Accommodation

1. Reduce numbers of homeless young people.

2. Review and refresh the Lancashire Housing Strategy.

3. Explore the possibility of utilising existing Lancashire County Council properties with a view to convert into additional accommodation for care leavers.

Between 2013 and 2014, the majority of care leavers were in independent living with 42.6% across the age range either living in a flat, house, bedsit or accommodation provided by a college or university, with an average across the age range of 13.5% living with a parent or relative. 17 young people were living in semi-independent transitional accommodation, for example supportive hostel/training flat or self-contained accommodation with either specialist personal assistance support or floating support. There were a total of 46 young people across the age range whose residency was unknown with 4 young people aged 19 years and 2 young people aged 21 reported as having no fixed abode/homeless. There were a total of 6 young people across the age range of young people living in other accommodation (including homeless and temporary stays with friends/relatives as an emergency measure), with only one young person aged 20 years receiving emergency accommodation (e.g. night shelter, direct access, emergency hostel).

The statutory guidance suggests that best practice in securing sufficiency includes CYP Partnership Board stakeholders, including housing, working together to secure a range of provision to meet the needs of those who become looked after at the age of 16 and 17 and support the continuity of accommodation beyond the age of 18.

As identified earlier within this strategy, stakeholders have identified that it can be challenging to find appropriate placements for young people who are aged 16 to 17 years old. Stakeholders have also reported that there is a need to develop the

market to build capacity to support care leavers with more complex needs, particularly those aged 18 and over. The provision of vacation accommodation for university students was also identified.

The need for increased support and provision to aid transition into independence, including semi-independent living was identified through consultation with Children's Social Care staff and providers.

Children and young people also requested improved support and more information on the transition to becoming independent including education and accommodation options.

10. Monitoring and Evaluation

The strategy should be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure that it is up to date and still meeting the needs of care leavers, Lancashire County Council and its partners. The Action Plan will be reviewed on a quarterly basis by Children's Social Care Senior Management Team, the Children in Care Council and the Corporate Parenting Board.

The Children and Young People's Plan is reviewed annually and all actions related to care leavers and children and young people who are looked after will be updated via the attached action plan. It is vital that care leavers are given the opportunity to feedback their thoughts and opinions about the strategy and action plan and this can be achieved by LINX.