

Report to the Cabinet

Meeting to be held on Thursday, 6 July 2023

Report of the Executive Director of Education and Children's Services

Part I

Electoral Division affected:
(All Divisions);

Corporate Priorities:
Caring for the vulnerable;
Delivering better services;

Care Leaver Covenant - Whole Council Approach

Contact for further information:

Brendan Lee, Tel: (01772) 532356, Head of Permanence Service and Corporate Parenting,
brendan.lee@lancashire.gov.uk;

Andreas Feldhaar, Tel: (01524) 586571, Senior Development Lead, Permanence Service,
andreas.feldhaar@lancashire.gov.uk

Brief Summary

The Care Leaver Covenant is a national inclusion programme that supports care leavers aged 16 to 25 to live independently. The scheme is funded by the Department for Education and encourages local authorities and partners to sign up and make pledges to support care leavers.

This report outlines the proposal to sign up to and adopt the Care Leaver Covenant's 'whole council approach', in order to improve the services provided to and opportunities for care leavers (i.e. Local Offer) with the county council's partners in Lancashire.

Recommendation

Cabinet is asked to:

- (i) Approve that the county council signs up to the Care Leaver Covenant's 'whole council approach' and adopts the five-part strategy.
- (ii) Subject to (i) above, agree that the responsibility for overseeing the county council's adoption and implementation of the Care Leavers Covenant 'whole council approach' be added to the Terms of Reference of the Corporate Parenting Board.



Detail

The Care Leaver Covenant is a Department for Education initiative established in 2018 and works with private, public and voluntary organisations nationally to improve opportunities, choice and independence for care leavers. The link to its webpage is provided here: <https://mycovenant.org.uk/>. The Covenant has over 250 signatories nationally to promote five core outcomes for care leavers:

- 1) Independent Living;
- 2) Employment, Education, Training;
- 3) Safety & Security;
- 4) Health; and
- 5) Finance.

The Care Leaver Covenant's 'whole council approach' is a five-part strategy that specifically supports Local Authorities to improve the Local Offer and opportunities for care leavers locally focusing on:

- 1) Raising Awareness;
- 2) Training & Employment;
- 3) Policy Partnerships;
- 4) Social Value; and
- 5) Economic Development.

It is a commitment a Local Authority makes as a whole council, to identify how existing structures, processes and partnerships can create new and more opportunities and choices for care leavers under the five parts of the strategy. The implementation is assisted through free expertise from Spectra, the social enterprise delivering the Care Leaver Covenant nationally on behalf of the Department for Education.

The county council's Education and Children's Service has already established good practice in some of the five strategy areas, and the implementation of the 'whole council approach' will enable this work to continue more effectively across the county council. It will also enable the service to evidence its achievements and commitment to care leavers in Lancashire, partners and Ofsted, within a framework supported and recognised by the Department for Education.

Education and Children's Service's good practice examples against the five-part strategy so far:

Raising awareness of the covenant to promote the benefits it offers for care leavers. Children's Services have promoted the general benefits of the Care Leaver Covenant since it was established in 2018, utilised relevant offers such as free mobile data for care leavers in 2022 and linked its webpage to Lancashire's Local Offer page. The county council will continue promoting the benefits of the Covenant, both internally and with external partners.

Training & Employment opportunities within the council to lead by example. The county council has supported care-experienced apprentices since 2018, and 30 care leavers have completed their apprenticeship with Lancashire County Council since



2019. The county council also provides funding to small businesses, to support care-experienced apprenticeships, if needed. This work will continue by reviewing the county council's recruitment process, to make it care-experienced friendly and increase the county council's focus on establishing care-experienced apprenticeships and employment opportunities across the whole council, from within existing staffing structures.

Policy Partnerships providing additional benefits to care leavers. The county council has worked with the Integrated Care Board to implement a dental pathway for children in our care and is continuing this work to include care leavers, and also working with the Board to commit to free prescriptions for care leavers in Lancashire. The county council is also supporting Lancashire's Police & Crime Commissioner alongside other partners, to improve the experience of care leavers in custody. Work will continue with partners to improve the offer to care leavers, and elected members are invited to support this with their expertise and networks as part of the 'whole council approach'.

Social Value opportunities for commissioning partners to improve outcomes for care leavers. The explicit benefits to care leavers have not yet been included across all commissioning activity of the county council. The county council will therefore review its social value policy supported by the social value toolkit of the Care Leaver Covenant, to include opportunities and meaningful offers for care leavers from procurement practice.

Economic Development creating education, employment and training opportunities for care leavers. The county council's virtual school has established a strong network with small and medium sized enterprise and training providers, to support care leavers into education, employment or training. Our Local House Project facilitated an Education, Employment and Training network event in June 2023, with over 30 employers and education providers offering opportunities for care leavers. The county council works with Lancashire's Police and Crime Commissioner and partners on a project to support care-experienced young people who have been in custody, into employment; this work will continue.

Over 60 Local Authorities have committed to the 'whole council approach' of the Care Leaver Covenant, Blackpool Council has adopted the 'whole council approach' and Blackburn with Darwen Council is currently considering the adoption of the Covenant. This gives Lancashire the opportunity to be one of the first areas in England to work towards a regional approach, which can achieve further benefits for care leavers.

The 'whole council approach' provides a five-part strategy to support the county council to meet its Corporate Parenting duties, and is aligned to the county council's Corporate Priorities. The approach also supports the county council in implementing recommendations for care-experienced young people from the care review: Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation, Children's Social Care Reform 2023. The Department for Education has identified six missions from the care review which are, in short:

- 1) loving relationships;
- 2) stable and loving homes;



- 3) extending corporate parenting responsibilities;
- 4) increase education, employment and training;
- 5) reduce homelessness; and
- 6) improving mental and physical health.

There is no cost associated with the implementation of the 'whole council approach', and the identified resource demand can be covered from existing resources within Children's Services, as a continuation of the work already in progress.

The control of priorities and pace for the implementation of each part of the strategy remains with Lancashire County Council.

Improved efficiency and effectiveness of existing structures, processes and partnerships through the 'whole council approach' will create long-term benefits to care-experienced young people in Lancashire, and reduce demand on Children's Services.

Consultations

The Corporate Parenting Board considered the Care Leaver Covenant's 'whole council approach' and recommended it be adopted by Cabinet.

Implications:

This item has the following implications, as indicated:

Risk management

Resource demand: The proposal contained within this report requires time and commitment from staff to complete specific pieces of work within the five parts of the strategy. This work can be covered from existing resources as a continuation of current work, as most aspects of the proposal link to existing work and projects in Children's Services. The likelihood and impact of the identified risks are therefore considered to be low.

Ineffective partnerships: The successful implementation of the proposal relies on effective partnerships. The county council and Children's Services have established strong and effective partnerships; the county council has effective processes to promote and challenge partnerships and therefore the likelihood and impact of the identified risks are considered to be low.

Financial

The proposal does not have any direct financial implications.

Legal

The proposal does not have any direct legal implications. The social value aspect of the proposal has some implication on future procurement and commissioning. Any associated legal implications of this will be addressed as part of that particular work at the time and, if appropriate, be presented to Cabinet for further decision making.



Equality and Cohesion

The proposal will particularly impact care leavers who are included amongst children and young people and therefore included within the age protected characteristics groups. The proposal will, if approved, contribute positively towards the Public Sector Equality Duty's general aims of advancing equality of opportunity and fostering good relations between communities. It also supports the Council's policy to consider the impact of care experience when reviewing relevant strategy and / or policies alongside protected characteristics and its priority to care for the vulnerable.

List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact/Tel
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None

Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate

N/A

