

**Children, Families and Skills Scrutiny Committee**  
Meeting to be held on Wednesday, 18 December 2024

Electoral Division affected:  
(All Divisions);

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

**Further Developing Care Leavers Offer and Support (New Ofsted Judgement)  
(Appendices 'A' – 'C' refers)**

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**Brief Summary**

This report relates to the offer of leaving care support for Lancashire's care experienced young people. It details the current offer, recent service developments, and our aspirations for how to develop the service further.

As of October 2024, Lancashire's Children's Social Care supports 1,543 Care Leavers aged 16-25. The service offers tailored support to all care leavers specific to their circumstances developed the Pathway to Excellence Plan in April 2024 to prepare for future inspections under the new ILACS framework.

This report covers:

1. Introduction with general background information
2. Key Performance Indicators
3. Making good decisions for care leavers and support into adulthood (incl. support for care leavers in specific circumstances and housing)
4. Education, Employment Training (see separate report)
5. Helping and Protecting
6. Health and Emotional Wellbeing
7. Relationships and Participation
8. Local Offer for Care Leavers
9. Next Steps

Further information about Education, Employment and Training is provided in detail in the subsequent Children, Families and Skills Scrutiny Committee report titled: Increasing the offer for Care Leavers EET.



## Recommendation

The Children, Families and Skills Scrutiny Committee is asked to:

- (i) Note and comment on the details contained in the report and appendixes,
- (ii) Consider ways in which scrutiny can support this work going forward and identify any potential recommendations

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Children's Social Care supports 1543 Care Leavers aged 16-25 years old as of October 2024. Since a remodel of the Leaving Care service in January 2021, there have been considerable developments in the way in which we deliver services to Care Leavers in Lancashire. The re-model included substantial investment in the service structure with several new posts to improve management oversight and align the function with others in Children's Services. In November 2022 during Lancashire's last Children's Services full inspection, Ofsted rated the Leaving Care service as Good, reflecting the distance travelled from a previous position of Requires Improvement in 2018.

Since 2023, the Framework for Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) has changed to include a specific evaluation criterion for the Experience and Progress of Care Leavers (**Appendix 'A'**). Ofsted introduced a separate judgement to give Care Leavers a more prominent voice in inspections, with the framework focusing on the following areas:

- Making Good Decisions for Care Leavers
- Support into Adulthood
- Employment, Education and Training
- Helping and Protecting
- Health and Emotional Wellbeing
- Relationships and Participation
- Local Offer for Care Leavers



It is anticipated that a Leaving Care inspection under this new framework will be undertaken in Lancashire between now and March 2026. In preparation for this, and as part of our continued efforts to strengthen our service offer, in April 2024 the service developed a Pathway to Excellence action plan. The formulation of the plan involved a benchmarking exercise in which 30 other Local Authority Leaving Care inspection reports were evaluated.

This report provides an overview of the current support provided to Care Leavers under the sub-headings of the ILACS evaluation criteria for the Experience and Progress of Care Leavers. It includes an update on the progress of current projects to improve our offer and ensure it remains strong.

## 2 KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

### 2.1 Care Leavers in suitable accommodation

Age Bands	Oct 2024
17–18-year-olds	91.8%
19–21-year-olds	92.8%
21+ year olds	89.2%

la_name	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
England	88.00	90.00	91.00	90.00	91.00
Lancashire	92.00	93.00	95.00	95.00	92.00
North West	88.00	93.00	93.00	91.00	92.00

la_name	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
England	85.00	85.00	88.00	88.00	88.00
Lancashire	94.00	93.00	88.00	89.00	88.00
North West	88.00	89.00	91.00	90.00	90.00

Suitable accommodation performance in Lancashire is in line with comparators but remains a key focus for the Leaving Care service. Ensuring all our young people have safe, stable and suitable housing can be a challenge and is the area our officers tend to focus most of their time. Young people in custody are classified as being in unsuitable accommodation and account for some of this cohort. Outside of this we support young people with no fixed abode, who tend to have more complex needs and have experienced the loss of suitable accommodation.

### 2.2 Care Leavers in education, employment or training

Age Bands	Oct 2024
17–18-year-olds	63.6%
19–21-year-olds	44.4%
21+ year olds	39.2%



la_name	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
England	64.00	64.00	65.00	66.00	66.00
Lancashire	59.00	50.00	54.00	53.00	54.00
North West	59.00	61.00	60.00	62.00	62.00

la_name	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
England	52.00	53.00	52.00	55.00	56.00
Lancashire	50.00	44.00	44.00	48.00	46.00
North West	51.00	49.00	50.00	52.00	54.00

The percentage of Care Leavers in Employment, Education and Training aged 17-18 demonstrates stability but below target and national benchmarks at the end of September 24 at 61.9%. We have however seen gradual sustained performance in this age range over the last 6 months. When we exclude young people who are Pregnant/Parenting and those Care Leavers not able to work due to illness/disability, the figure improves to 67.5%.

The percentage of Care Leavers in Employment, Education and Training aged 19-21 remains below target and benchmarks at the end of September 2024 at 46.2%. The difficulties affecting this group are often multi-faceted, and despite extensive support, the service is experiencing this as a stubborn area to improve. When we exclude young people who are Pregnant/Parenting and those Care Leavers not able work due to illness/disability, the figure improves to 57.7%. However, we have some way to go in moving from this position. The EET report prepared for Scrutiny alongside this report sets out the plans and ambitions in this regard.

Care Leavers aged 21 and older can request for their support to be stepped down to universal services and for Leaving Care to cease their involvement. Those who have a stable home and secure employment are most likely to request for support to be stepped down and therefore are no longer included in this data. This leaves a disproportionate number of young people aged 21 and older open for support who do not have a stable home or secure employment in comparison to the other age groups. This accounts for the lower percentage of care leavers aged 21+ in suitable accommodation and education, employment or training.

### 2.3 Care Leavers in contact within the last 2 months

Age Bands	Oct 2024
17-18-year-olds	72.4%
19-21-year-olds	92.8%



21+ year olds	90.6%
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Care Leavers in Touch 17-18- by Year End					
la_name	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
England	93.0	94.0	94.0	94.0	93.0
Lancashire	96.0	99.0	95.0	97.0	95.0
North West	94.0	97.0	96.0	94.0	94.0

Care Leavers in Touch 19-21- by Year End					
la_name	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
England	89.0	90.0	91.0	92.0	92.0
Lancashire	98.0	97.0	94.0	95.0	96.0
North West	93.0	94.0	95.0	95.0	94.0

All 17-year-old eligible care leavers have an allocated social worker who visits at least at statutory frequency (usually no less than once every 6 weeks). That information is not included in this data. This data only refers to the additional visits undertaken by Personal Advisors whilst co-allocated alongside the social worker. This explains the lower percentage of keeping in touch for the 17-18 age group.

## 2.4 Local Offer

Lancashire's offer and support for Care Leavers' is published in the Care Leavers' Local Offer (**Appendix 'C'**). It is a statutory requirement for Local Authorities to publish a Care Leavers' Local Offer (**Appendix 'B'**) and the offer must be specific to the following areas:

- Health & Wellbeing
- Relationships
- Education, Employment and Training
- Accommodation
- Participation in Society

## 3 MAKING GOOD DECISIONS FOR CARE LEAVERS & SUPPORT INTO ADULTHOOD

*These areas of the inspection framework focus on early and good planning for adulthood with young people in care including accommodation and housing provisions.*



### **3.1 Needs Assessments, Pathway Plans and Personal Advisors**

Needs Assessments and Pathway Plans are completed for all young people in our care from the age of 16 in line with statutory guidance and to ensure early planning. The Needs Assessment template was revised with the involvement of young people and practitioners in 2021 to strengthen how we gather key information and the young person's views on all aspects to develop a plan for adulthood (Pathway Plan). Needs Assessments and Pathway Plans are co-produced with young people and their views are clearly recorded. The revised Needs Assessment was also developed with the involvement of our Children with Disability service to ensure it is an inclusive document. Audit feedback from April 2024 to date tells us that 64% of pathway plans are assessed as Good, with the remaining 36% Requiring Improvement to be Good. Supporting the workforce to improve the quality of pathway plans is an area of focus, with targeted whole workforce learning and development in place.

Personal Advisors provide guidance, advice and support to care leavers between the ages of 18 and 25 years. We provide a strong service in Lancashire by co-allocating a Personal Advisor (PA) to young people in our care alongside their social worker 12 months before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. This allows our young people to form a supportive and trusting relationship with their Personal Advisor while they continue to have the support from their carers and social workers. Joint planning meetings between Children in our Care teams and Leaving Care teams are held for all young people in our care aged 17 providing early and effective care and pathway planning.

### **3.2 Preparation for Adulthood**

Care and pathway planning always includes relevant multi-agency partners. This can be increasingly challenging for young people aged 18 and above as they may have fewer professionals supporting them or do not wish for professionals to be involved. However, the Leaving Care service has strong partnerships with the virtual school and health to liaise with on specific matters.

We have identified the need to strengthen the joint working between the Permanence Service, Transitions Service and Adult Social Care. We refer young people in our care to the Transitions Service for assessment between the ages of 14



and 17 years old and the Transitions Service is involved in care and pathway planning meetings where the referral has been accepted.

Foster carers, residential childcare workers, support workers in core supported accommodation and support workers in agency semi-independent living provisions prepare young people in our care for independent living. The support is individual to each young person and the experience of the carer/worker. We have an ASDAN short course subscription from the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network education charity which is an accredited independence preparation programme and carers/workers can access this for additional resources.

As part of our Pathway to Excellence plan, we have reviewed how we prepare young people to leave care and are now developing a new model and framework for this support which will be called the Leaving Well model. The model will be built on shared values and practice ethos, promoting social connections and a sense of belonging while preparing for independent living and ensuring preparation starts early as part of a child's journey through care. The model will outline key milestones to measure progress against, providing an improved mechanism for expectation setting and consistency in outcomes. We intend to launch the new model in 2025, subject to appropriate approval.

All young people leave our care with relevant ID such as birth certificates and photo ID cards. Care leavers aged 16/17 years old living in supported living arrangements are provided with a Leaving Care Allowance as they are unable to claim a living allowance under universal credit. The Leaving Care Allowance rate is set at Universal Credit rate which is currently £71.70 per week. The Leaving Care Allowance is to cover the young person's personal expenses such as food, personal hygiene, general household expenses, utilities, pocket money etc. In addition, they receive a clothing allowance of £25 per month and can request financial assistance for hobbies and travel to see family and friends. We provide a birthday allowance of £50 and a festival allowance equivalent to a Leaving Care Allowance.

We have increased our Setting Up Home Allowance (SUHA) from £2250 (+£200 refurbishment costs in social housing) to £3000 in line with statutory



recommendations. SUHA provides financial assistance to a young person to paint, decorate and furnish their home. Young people can also access financial assistance for their education, employment or training (EET) and there are other needs based financial assistance available to young people in some circumstances. Care Leavers aged 18 and above continue to have access to most of this financial assistance, but do not receive a Leaving Care Allowance or clothing allowance and receive reduced birthday and festival allowances.

We have a joint protocol with the Department for Work & Pension to support care leavers making their first universal credit claim and to access support from their work coach to access education or find employment. The next report on this agenda titled, "Increasing Care Leavers Offer who are in EET" discusses in depth how we support care leavers into education, employment and training.

### **3.3 Support into adulthood for young people in specific circumstances**

Support into adulthood is specific to the individual needs of each young person:

- *Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC):*  
Unaccompanied migrant young people aged 16/17 are directly supported by Leaving Care following assessment instead of transferring through the different functions in Children's Social Care. This is to ensure they are provided with specialist and consistent support from the outset of what is usually a relatively short period of time in Local Authority care before turning 18 and becoming a care leaver. They are provided with homes that promote their cultural identity wherever possible and the Leaving Care service provides assistance to connect with local communities and faith groups. We have established a good partnership with Lancashire's Resettlement Team and support young people through their immigration process, including support to appeal decisions.

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people who turn 18 do not have the right to benefit support until they have Leave To Remain (LTR) and the Home Office does not always conclude decisions prior to the young person's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. We continue to provide these young people with a safe and stable





home and financial support until the outcome of their asylum claim. We continue our work with the Resettlement Team to further strengthen the cultural diversity of our offer.

- *Care Leavers who are pregnant or young parents:*

We provide advice and support immediately after being informed that a care leaver is pregnant. This includes advice on healthy eating, attending medical appointments, applying for maternity grants, discretionary financial assistance and housing applications. We also offer a parent and little one group in our hubs, which is available to expecting care leavers. We allocate a Leaving Care Social Worker and work closely across other functions in Early Help and Children's Social Care to ensure the young person receives the best possible support for them and their child. We encourage care leavers to make use of our Family Group Conferencing service to strengthen their support network.

Leaving Care Social Workers provide additional advocacy for care leavers in their rights as a parent where statutory support is provided to the child. Where appropriate, we refer care leavers to the Breathing Space project. Breathing Space forms part of an Early Help offer in Lancashire within the Children and Family Wellbeing Service and aims to listen, support and work alongside parents who have experienced a child being removed from their care, to give them a chance to take control over their lives.

- *Care Leavers in contact with criminal justice or in custody:*

For care leavers aged 16/17 years old we have strong and effective partnerships with EmPower (Children's Social Care multi-agency exploitation team) and the Child and Youth Justice Service. Our early co-allocation of a Personal Advisor enables effective joint planning for young people in Youth Offending Institutions including effective release planning and securing a suitable and stable home for the young person. Care Leavers aged 18 and older are regularly visited by their Personal Advisor who also liaises with the Offender Manager Unit about any welfare or safeguarding concerns. We provide financial assistance for phone contact with family and friends based on the individual circumstances of the young person. We have a pan-



Lancashire joint protocol for young people in prison and liaise with designated Leaving Care Champions in Lancashire's prisons to continuously improve the support for care leavers in prison and ensure they have an advocate.

- *Care Leavers living outside of Lancashire (Out Of Area/OOA):*

Care Leavers living outside of Lancashire receive the same support from the Leaving Care Service and their Personal Advisor as those living in Lancashire. We provide financial assistance to enable them to attend events and groups in Lancashire and our council tax grant ensures none of our care leavers pay council tax regardless of whether they live inside or outside of Lancashire. We work in partnership with services and professionals from the local area to support our care leavers individual needs in the same way as we work with partners across Lancashire. We apply a flexible and bespoke approach to support care leavers into suitable and stable homes outside of Lancashire which can include additional funding. A Lancashire care leaver does not lose their local connection to any of the 12 districts even if residing outside of Lancashire and for those care leavers who are unable to secure housing outside of Lancashire, our core supported accommodation provisions continue to be available for them up to their 25<sup>th</sup> birthday which is a reliable contingency plan.

Care Leavers over the age of 21 can request for their service to be stepped down to universal services and for Leaving Care to cease their involvement. We have a clear management process in place to balance a young person's right to privacy and for services to cease, with our professional safeguarding duties. We currently support 679 care leavers aged 18-20 years old and 446 care leavers aged 21 and older.

We have improved the support available for care leavers when accessing their records. Young people can request for their Personal Advisor to be notified when they make this request, and their Personal Advisor will then assist them to read through their record. The service will identify another person who is agreeable to the young person where this is not possible.



### 3.4 Accommodation and Housing Support

We offer a wide variety of accommodation provisions to care leavers in Lancashire.

These are:

- Staying Put (for a young person to remain with their foster carer post 18)
- Lancashire House Project (young people are prepared over a 6-month period before moving into a social housing tenancy offered by a Registered Social Landlord)
- Core Supported Accommodation (these include group living, bedsits/flats in a managed block of flats, dispersed housing with floating support, supported lodgings and mother and baby provisions provided by voluntary sector organisations)
- Spot Commissioning (semi-independent provisions similar to our core supported accommodation provided by private agencies)

We have 91 care leavers in Staying Put arrangements (October 2024) which reflects a slight increase of Staying Put in recent years. However, we know that not every young person in a foster home is offered Staying Put as an option. Young people who Stay Put are most likely to achieve the best possible outcomes in comparison to any other care leaver. Hence, we are currently reviewing our Staying Put policy to ensure this does all it can to make Staying Put appealing to carers and young people.

Lancashire's House Project is now in its third year and started supporting 15 young people as part of their third group in September 2024. All young people already living in social housing homes have continued to successfully manage their tenancies and achieve good outcomes. Lancashire House Project was recently visited by the DfE Regional Improvement Lead and was recognised for the outstanding achievement of young people in the project. We have been able to increase the number of properties offered by Registered Social Landlords to the project, though numbers are limited due to wider pressures on the housing market. We continue our work with Registered Social Landlords to further expand Lancashire's House Project.

We have 378 homes available in our core supported accommodation provision. The re-commissioning process has just been finalised and new contracts apply from



November 2024. We have been able to increase the diversity of the offer and provide greater consistency across Lancashire. Admission to this accommodation is via priority groups: Care Leavers aged 16/17 years old are high priority, aged 18-21 medium priority and 21 and older low priority. For care leavers whose needs cannot be met within these provisions, spot commissioning is used to provide a suitable and stable home to the young person.

Staying Close is a practice model that is to provide support, continuity and connection for young people who move from residential children's homes to (semi)independent living. We do not yet have a formal Staying Close offer in Lancashire, and this is neither a statutory requirement nor part of the ILACS inspection framework. However, we recognise how valuable this support is and are currently scoping out the possibility of developing a Staying Close offer in Lancashire. We already have several key elements of Staying Close available to our care leavers in Lancashire such as the early allocation of a Personal Advisor, the general commitment of residential childcare workers to remain involved in a young person's life once they have moved on, our core supported accommodation offer and Leaving Care Hubs.

We have a Joint Housing Protocol with the 12 district councils which sets out our joint commitment to support care leavers into housing. There are Choice Based Letting Schemes across Lancashire through which care leavers access social housing. We support young people to register on the Housing Needs Register at the earliest opportunity following their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday (not all Housing Needs Registers accept pre 18 registrations) which enables them to access the relevant Choice Based Letting Scheme.

The Joint Housing Protocol ensures that all care leavers are given priority banding when they leave our care. However, most care leavers will access core supported accommodation at that point and priority banding is only offered by district councils to care leavers aged 18 years and older on a case-by-case basis instead of being a standardised offer. This can limit moving on options or to more affordable and suitable accommodation in adulthood. We continue to work with district councils about this as part of the Housing Reference Group. Our ambition is to strengthen the



offer and commitment to care leavers as a priority vulnerable group to ensure no care leaver experiences homelessness.

Our two dedicated Leaving Care Housing Advisors provide advice and support for over 60 care leavers a year and challenge any intentional homelessness decision. Where care leavers become homeless, we provide discretionary support to ensure safe accommodation is available to them on a temporary basis while we work with the young person and partners to secure suitable and stable accommodation. We recognise that good practice includes joint decision making between Children's Social Care and District Councils regarding 'intentional homelessness' decisions which has not yet been agreed by district councils. We continue our work on this with the aim to include this as part of the annual review of our Joint Housing Protocol.

#### **4 EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING**

This area will be discussed in more depth in the next report on this agenda titled, "Increasing Care Leavers Offer who are in EET".

#### **5 HELPING AND PROTECTING**

*This area of the inspection framework focuses on preventing discrimination, healthy lifestyle choices and safeguarding.*

Personal Advisors provide advice on healthy living, harm reduction services and assist young people to attend harm reduction services. Young people's pathway plans contain relevant information of the services that can support them, and Personal Advisors develop safety plans with young people. We also contribute to detox and rehabilitation plans and offer higher levels of support for young people struggling with health-related needs that increase risks to their safety or well-being such as mental health or substance abuse. Lancashire's Care Leavers can access independent advocacy from National Youth Advocacy Services (NYAS) up to the age of 25 years.



Personal Advisors keep in touch with young people at least every other month and more frequently based on need. It can be difficult to establish whether a young person is having trouble or simply choosing not to stay in contact with their Personal Advisor. However, where we are concerned that contact has been lost, increased efforts are made by the Personal Advisor to re-establish contact and locate the young person which includes multi-agency enquiries. Where we are concerned that a young person aged 18 to 25 is missing, we apply the same process as for young people under the age of 18 and expect the same from our partners.

We work closely with EmPower and the Child and Youth Justice Service for young people under the age of 18 and continue liaising with them for general advice and support for young people aged 18 and older. We work with partners including the Police and Probation Service, attend Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) meetings, make Adult Safeguarding referrals where appropriate and chair multi-agency safeguarding meetings where we are concerned about risk of significant harm to care leavers up to the age of 25. Internally we use a notification system for management oversight and escalation of concerns for well-being of care leavers to senior leaders in the same way as we do for children. Care leavers we are most worried about have Head of Service and Director oversight of their care plan to monitor their progress and experiences and review the actions being taken to support them to be safer.

We recognise the importance of effective partnership working to keep care leavers safe in Lancashire and how risks to some young people do increase when they leave care and lose some of the support network they had as a child in our care. Therefore, we are keen to develop a multi-agency safeguarding protocol for Leaving Care and are in the process of scoping out the viability of such protocol with our key partners.

## **6 HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING**

*This area of the inspection framework focuses on physical and mental health, and effective work with partners.*



We have bi-monthly liaison meetings with the Children in Care Nurses (who also offer a service to care leavers up to 25 years), Lead Nurse for Children in Care from HCRG and the Nurse for Children in Care and Care Leavers from the Integrated Care Board (ICB). Within these we progress our joint action plan for children in care and care leavers. The ICB also has a Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy that supports our partnership working. We have worked with the Integrated Care Board (ICB) to launch a new Health Passport process to ensure all care leavers receive an overview of their health history when they leave care.

We support care leavers to register with a GP, for example when they move areas. We do not provide financial assistance for transport to attend health appointments or pay for prescriptions unless in exceptional circumstances. We recognise that this may impact on care leavers' ability to access health services in a timely way and does not reflect common practice in good and outstanding leaving care services. Hence, we are reviewing our financial procedure and working with the ICB to consider additional support offers in this context.

Access to mental health services continues to be a challenge for care leavers due to the general demand for and pressure on mental health services nationally. We raise this regularly during our bi-monthly liaison meetings with the ICB. Personal Advisors provide as much support as they can to care leavers including assisting with referrals, attending appointments and safety plans. We commission a mental health support service called Ask Jan from the Rees Foundation which allows care leavers to access advice for a variety of aspects of their life as well as online and face to face counselling services.

Our Leaving Care Walking Group, activities at our Leaving Care Hubs and the participation events we facilitate throughout the year offer emotional wellbeing opportunities.

## **7 RELATIONSHIPS AND PARTICIPATION**

*This area of the inspection framework focuses on positive, trusting, stable and supportive relationships with carers/professionals, maintaining relationships with*



*people who are important to them, access to social, cultural and recreational opportunities, participation and advocacy.*

We revised our practice principles to ensure our value of a kind and caring service were well reflected. All Personal Advisors are trained in and apply relational and strength-based practice to form strong and supportive relationships with our care leavers. We promote corporate parenting principles across our partnerships and ask our workforce, wider council and partners to recognise care experience in line with any other protected characteristic.

The Lifelong Links offer has been extended to all care leavers this year which supports our care leavers to re-connect with significant people in their life and maintain lasting relationships. 13 care leavers have already accessed this support of which some have been able to reconnect with former carers, family members and professionals and a further 16 are currently working with Lifelong Links. Care leavers can also access our Family Group Conferencing service up to the age of 25 years old to strengthen family connections and their support network.

We provide financial assistance to care leavers up to the age of 21 to see family members or significant others and to access hobbies based on assessed need. We know how important personal relationships are for our care leavers' wellbeing and although we expect care leavers are to gain greater financial independence with age, we recognise that a significant number of care leavers aged 21 and older still struggle financially. Hence, we provide discretionary support to ensure young people can see family and friends. We are currently reviewing our financial procedure to achieve greater consistency for our young people on this matter.

This year we established three new Care Leaver Hubs in Preston, Burnley and Lancaster. The hubs are designed to serve several purposes, but the main aim is for this to be a safe place to go, whether to meet socially or to access support. We want young people to enjoy these spaces and have fun there, but also to access help in times of difficulty from a duty team who base themselves there. The range of activities and supports on offer is growing as we listen to what young people want. From dance and fitness sessions, board games and cooking, to specific support from





specialists such as health drop ins and employment advice. We have seen the benefits of this kind of support already, with successful college applications made, online learning organised, housing issues resolved, and specialist appointments progressed for health matters for some of our young people. The Leaving Care service will be working to increase the numbers of young people who use the hubs as well as the range of activities on offer to make sure this is varied and helpful and offers new opportunities and experiences.

The Care Leavers' Forum meets fortnightly to contribute to our service development (for example the current review of our Local Offer or the planning of Care Leavers' Week and PROUD) and representatives of the Care Leavers' Forum attend the Corporate Parenting Board which takes place bi-monthly.

Our Care Leavers have been involved in the review and development of the following recent initiatives/policies/procedures.

- *The Lasting Home process review*
- *The implementation of Virtual Memory box*
- *Welcome/Comfort Boxes' concept*
- *The Get Involved process*
- *Development of SDQ practice guidance, the health assessment and health passport processes and the launch of these*

We also made a pledge this year that our children and young people would be involved in and shape our whole service learning and development. They have been involved in 3 Whole Service Development days in 2024, where we have had groups of young people attend in person to work with us as a service to develop practice through the sharing of their experiences.

Our Participation Programme over the summer this year involved over 60 Young people attending events including Grease the Musical, Co-Production sessions, Outdoor activities, a 3-day residential at Tower Wood, Young Advisors Training, Corporate Parenting Board Youth Takeover, Independent Skills workshops and much more.



## 8 LOCAL OFFER FOR CARE LEAVERS

*This area of the inspection framework focuses on the quality of the offer to care leavers, the contribution from partners and how easily young people can access the offer.*

Information about all aspects of the support outlined in this report is available in a young person friendly version on our Local Offer webpage. This is updated regularly, with input from young people to ensure it looks and feels accessible. We are confident that the offer provided by Children's Social Care is strong. However, we have identified that the contribution from partners, both from within the county council and outside, is not yet strong enough. Partly, because some of the recent developments have not yet been included formally in the Local Offer (for example the Children in Care and Care Leavers' Strategy of the ICB, the Joint Housing Protocol or the Joint Protocol between Cumbria/Lancashire Prison Group, Lancashire Probation Service and Cumbria/Lancashire Local Authorities) and partly as partners have not made any specific offer for care leavers in Lancashire.

To increase partnership commitment, we promote our Corporate Parenting principles with partners at all levels and share the Care Leaver Covenant which brings together pledges of support to care leavers from public, private and voluntary sector organisations. We have already secured great commitment for employment opportunities across all Directorates of the Council as part of our work on the Covenant. We intend to build on this to strengthen the wider partnership offer for care leavers in 2025.

Lancashire's Local Offer was recognised by the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum as an example of good practice when it was launched as a webpage in 2018. Young people's requirements and expectations on the accessibility of information have changed since and we have identified that an app-based offer will improve young people's ability to access information and services through the functions available within the app. The app will help to modernise the offer, improve our reach to a large cohort of young people and enable us to engage



with young people in a smarter and more accessible way. Therefore, we are in the process of commissioning a Leaving Care App which will be launched in 2025.

## 9 NEXT STEPS

- Continue to progress service action plan covering a wide range of service specific improvement plans
- Development of Leaving Well model in 2025
- Integrate the Leaving Care app into the service offer in 2025
- Embed the Care Leaver hubs building on current offer
- Finalise formal review of Local Offer and financial procedure
- Present review of Staying Put procedure to CSC SMT
- Coordinate a review of the Joint Housing Protocol with Executive level officers across all responsible Councils

## Appendices

Appendices 'A' – 'C' are attached to this report. For clarification they are summarised below and referenced at relevant points within this report.

Appendix	Title
Appendix 'A'	Ofsted Evaluation Criteria for Leaving Care
Appendix 'B'	Local Offer Guidance from DfE, 2018
Appendix 'C'	Lancashire's Local Offer for Care Leavers (extract)

## Consultations

In developing the service offer to Care Leavers, we have considered information from over 30 Ofsted reports provided by the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum, the views of our care leavers reported via their Personal Advisors, a recent survey, audits and consultation with the Care Leaver Forum. We know that Lancashire's offer for Care Leavers up to the age of 25 years old is strong and most of our care leavers feel well supported by their Personal Advisor. However, we know that in the context of financial and housing support, young people will consistently tell us that they do not feel adequately supported. This must be balanced with supporting young people to interpret and understand what can reasonably be expected from this service in the offer of finances and housing.



## **Implications:**

This item has the following implications, as indicated:

### **Legal**

This report shows how the council meets its legal responsibilities towards care leavers under the new Ofsted evaluation criteria for leaving care. The report does not contain new proposals and therefore has no new legal implications for the council.

### **Financial**

There are no financial implications as a result of this report, the details outlined are being delivered within existing budget for Education and Children's Services.

### **Risk management**

This report does not contain new proposals and therefore has no new risk management implications.

The continued support to and continued development of the offer of support for care leavers is crucial in order for the county council to achieve its key priorities of delivering a better service, supporting economic growth and caring for the vulnerable as well as its statutory obligations to care experienced children and young people.

## **Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985**

### **List of Background Papers**

Paper	Date	Contact/Tel
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N/A

Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate

N/A

