

Item No. 28.	Classification: Open	Date: 19 September 2017	Meeting Name: Cabinet
Report title:		Response to Review of Local Offer for Care Leavers	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		None	
Cabinet Member:		Councillor Victoria Mills, Children and Schools	

FOREWORD – COUNCILLOR VICTORIA MILLS, CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN AND SCHOOLS

In April 2017, the council's Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Sub-Committee completed a report about Southwark's local offer for care leavers following work over the previous year. It set out 15 recommendations around 5 key themes. The sub-committee heard a comprehensive range of evidence from a wide range of stakeholders as well as most importantly the thoughts and feelings of a number of young people.

Good services for care leavers play a vital role in enabling the council to be the best corporate parent it can be. Young people who have experienced care deserve to be provided with the best possible support to help them access new opportunities and experience safety and stability in their lives. It is important that the council, as a corporate parent, evolve its services, in collaboration with its key partners, to improve the life chances of care leavers.

This subcommittee report is welcomed at a time of new legislation and a number of new initiatives. These include:

- March 2017 DfE announces funding for the development of a Care Leaver Partnership with Southwark and Catch 22.
- April 2017 The Children and Social Work 2017 receives Royal assent. Its planned implementation date is understood to be April 2018.
- May 2017 The Care Leaver Partnership (CLP) with Catch 22 commences its *designing our model* phase.
- July 2017 Council Cabinet agrees a renewed approach to transform support and housing for looked after children and care leavers over 16 years.

Ofsted published its inspection into Children's Services, including the experiences of care leavers.

DfE announces innovation funding for Regional Commissioning of residential and fostering placements for children in care.

Many of the above were known to the sub-committee during their evidence gathering, and are referenced in the report. However they had not reached their full development and agreement when considered by the sub-committee. This response benefits from being able to consider how these have progressed and they inform many of the responses.

Section 5 *what Southwark care leavers want* is particularly noted. The views of our care leavers are highly important and we remain firmly committed to placing children and young people at the heart of all services.

RECOMMENDATION

1. That the response to the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Sub-committee report, Review of Local Offer for Care Leavers, be approved.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. This report responds to the recommendations made by the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Sub-Committee in their report that was completed in April 2017. The report sets out the context for this scrutiny exercise and evidence it found.
3. In 2016 the council had recognised the need to improve its approach to working with care leavers. While good outcomes were and are being achieved, our aspirations for care leavers could and should be higher. It was considered this might be undertaken through exploring the potential to transform the service by co-designing something better with young people, and working with recognised experts in the field of working with young people. The council formed a partnership with Catch 22, a national charity with expertise in working with care leavers and innovation, which ultimately led to the successful award of innovation funding to fundamentally transform service delivery for care leavers. This is an exciting and unique opportunity and the project formally commenced on 1 May 2017 and is planned to take 15 months.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

Each of the Scrutiny Sub-Committee's themes and recommendations are set out below followed by the lead cabinet member's response:

4. The local offer

4.1 Recommendations

The council should begin its consultation on its implementation of the Care Leaver Covenant with all the relevant partners in the children's workforce, local economy and local businesses and health

A new Care Leaver Offer as amended in line with the new legislation and attached recommendations must be communicated to children and young people in care and leaving care.

The Local Offer for Care Leavers should be published so that both young people and agencies know their rights, entitlements and the range of support service available to meet their needs, and include both specialised and generic services that they are likely to make use of. This should include: housing entitlements; accommodation & housing support services; higher education grants; employment, training, education support services; apprenticeships programs; counselling, mental health and emotional support; personal advisers; advocacy & mentoring; accesses to practical and relational courses to prepare young people for independent living.

4.2 Response:

The council's commitment to care leavers is set out in the *Southwark Pledge to Children and Young People in and Leaving Care*. The pledge aims to ensure

that children and young people have equal access to the same range of key services and support wherever they live go to school or access employment or training opportunities. This pledge was developed with young people and the lead member for Children's Services in 2010.

There is no requirement for councils or other organisations to have a Care Leaver Covenant. It is understood that this was anticipated to be a key part of the Children and Social Work Act 2017, having been mentioned in the Queens Speech (June 2016) and Keep on Caring (July 2016).

The work developing the Care Leaver Partnership (CLP) with young people and partner organisations, will give an opportunity to review the current pledge, and those of other organisations, as well as integrate the corporate parenting principles set out in section 1 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017.

The CLP is comprehensively reviewing the Care Leaver Offer and has commenced working with all agencies involved with care leavers. Once reviewed it will be communicated to young people including those who may be entitled to such under increased duties through the Children and Social Work Act 2017. It is anticipated this will be in good time for the implementation of the Act, expected in April 2018.

As well as clearly communicating the proposals and ideas in the review, the CLP should review and clearly communicate key council wide commitments such as free gym and swim.

5. Personal advisers

5.1 Recommendations

The extension of support from a personal adviser to all care leavers to age 25 must be communicated to those who have already left our services but will now be eligible for a 'retrospective personal adviser' service provision.

A plan is required to get in touch with care leavers retrospectively on the extended support arrangements.

A capability review of personal advisers could be made, so that the council and its partners can meet the expectations of the care leavers requiring services

5.2 Response

The report notes the Children and Social Work Act 2017 has extended personal adviser support until the age of 25 years for those not in education, employment or training. It is not expected that the duties to implement this part of the Act will be effective until April 2018. They are not effective currently. It is expected that statutory guidance will be updated to include changes in the law in January 2018. It should be noted that the extension of duties relates to those not in employment, education or training will result in a significant increase in demand for council services. It is expected that the council will receive increased funding for this but this has yet to be confirmed. In line with other increases in statutory duties, it is not expected that any increase in funding if given will be sufficient to cover the increase in demand.

Scoping work has already begun on the numbers and profile of care leavers that may be included in this increase in duties. A plan will be developed to communicate with those who are affected by this, at a time when the Children and Social Work Act 2017 is implemented, and the council has prepared for the increase in demand.

The CLP, in collaboration with young people, is fundamentally reappraising the qualities and characteristics of the workforce who work with them, to design an improved model of working, aiming to ensure the right workforce is in place to support this. The role of personal advisor is central to this, thus the need for a capability review is superseded by this work which is central to building a better model of service delivery for care leavers.

6. **Housing**

6.1 Recommendations

A joint commissioning strategy for care leavers must be drafted about housing and children's services

The commissioning strategy should consider examples of innovative accommodation commissioning featured in this report, with a view to commissioning accommodation for care leavers in Southwark

The corporate parenting committee should review the commissioning strategy and its implementation.

6.2 Response

On 9 May 2017 Cabinet agreed a strategy and plan to transform support and housing for looked after children and care leavers over 16 years, as well as young people at risk of homelessness. Corporate Parenting Committee reviewed the strategy on 25 April 2017.

This is a joint initiative between Children's Social Care, Housing and Commissioning. It is led by a director-level steering group and the Operational Group will look in detail at innovative accommodation ideas. The work with Catch 22 will be strongly linked to this as a national charity with expertise in working with care leavers and innovation, as well as challenging social issues around young people. The timing of this work is well suited to working together on the transformation of support and housing for looked after children leaving care.

The approach is also consistent with Southwark's Looked After Children and Care Leavers Strategy. The work in this area will be incorporated into the council's Sufficiency Strategy for Children in Care and Care Leavers which is currently being renewed. It is accepted that the corporate parenting committee should review the strategy and its implementation through the agreed Delivery Plan.

7. **Mental health**

7.1 Recommendations

Mental health assessments to be made available for every child in care and care leaver in Southwark.

A joint commissioning strategy for care leavers services is urgently needed to find innovative solutions to find local placements for care leavers close to local mental health services.

7.2 Response

It is important that mental health assessments are available for those children in care and care leavers who are in need of such. The report positively notes how Carelink will assess all children referred but also how children placed

further away from Southwark often find it less easy to access the services they need. This is an area that the council will be focusing on through its Ofsted Improvement Plan as this issue was a recommended improvement area.

The council jointly commissions mental health services with NHS Southwark CCG, including in the area of services for children and young people. A key priority in the partnership is improving health outcomes for looked after children and care leavers. Looked after children and care leavers are nationally recognised as a vulnerable group with poorer health outcomes in later life.

The joint Council-CCG commissioning partnership will be helping to shape future 16+ support and housing services to ensure that good health outcomes are embedded in service provision – and that there is a holistic approach across health, support and housing in the delivery of support for care leavers and other young people in Southwark.

8. Employment, education and training

8.1 Recommendations

A programme of training for care leavers must be refreshed, published and widely advertised.

All care leavers must be supported to manage their finances, find safe and stable accommodation and not find themselves falling into debt.

In the absence of a good further education offer Southwark should look at ways to increase the number of care leavers attending university. This should include lobbying government to waive tuition fees for care leavers or guarantee access to apprenticeships.

To fully understand the impact of the local offer for care leavers, performance information should be collected on the above points. In addition, the Council should collect statistics on every care leaver accessing services like Inspire and St Giles and collect information on the outcomes in education and employment.

8.2 Response

The CLP work will embrace all these recommendations as they form central parts of the service development work.

In relation to training for care leavers and managing finances, these are fundamentals of preparation for living more independently. The new, co-designed model will engage at a greater depth with young people about what works for them and build this into its core offer. The response to the Housing recommendations above, notes the ambition to help care leavers find safe, stable accommodation with the right support building on what works well already in Southwark, as well as exploring innovative and best practice elsewhere.

In relation to education, the report notes the good educational outcomes for Southwark looked after children and it should be noted the service has good numbers of care leavers attending university. Building on this success and maximising opportunities in both higher and further education will be an important part of service development work. We want all of young people, including care leavers, to make the very best decisions about whether they find work, an apprenticeship or go on to further or higher education according to their aspirations and abilities, rather than the poor performance of one FE College.

Work continues within and beyond this division to improve Southwark's further education offer, in line with Area Based Review activity and Southwark's Skills Strategy development. It is envisaged that care leavers are key group to benefit from the council's work to develop the education and skills of young people in the borough.

In relation to performance information, the CLP is reappraising all performance information around care leavers with the intention to develop more meaningful and effective outcome and performance measures. National best practice and expertise is being accessed through Catch 22's National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum for this purpose.

Policy implications

9. The report notes the increased provision for groups of care leavers previously not entitled to such through the Children and Social Work Act 2017. This is anticipated to be implemented in April 2018. All policies relating to care leavers will be reviewed once the statutory guidance is available in January 2018.

Community impact statement

10. The recommendations contained within this report will help provide an improved service to care leavers. A strengthened care leaver offer will benefit the families and communities of those young people, both who live in Southwark, and those placed outside who remain strongly connected with their families and friends resident in the borough.

Resource implications

11. The report notes the Children and Social Work Act 2017 has extended personal adviser support until the age of 25 years for those not in education, employment or training. The extension of duties relates to those not in employment, education or training will result in a significant increase in demand for council services. It is expected that the council will receive increased funding for this but this has yet to be confirmed. In line with other increases in statutory duties, it is not expected that any increase in funding if given will be sufficient to cover the increase in demand.
12. As stated above, scoping work has already begun on the numbers and profile of care leavers that may be included in this increase in duties so an accurate estimate of increased resource demand can be made well in advance of the statutory duties being implemented to allow for effective provision. This will coincide with the new model of service delivery for care leavers so there will be an opportunity to think creatively about how these duties are delivered most cost effectively.

Legal implications

13. The legal implications of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 are set out well within this report.

Human Resource Implications

14. There are no human resource implications directly from this report aside from recommendations about personal advisors being aligned with the planned

transformation work within the service.

Consultation

15. This does not affect existing council employees.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
None		

APPENDICES

No.	Title
None	

AUDIT TRAIL

Cabinet Member	Councillor Victoria Mills, Children and Schools	
Lead Officer	Alasdair Smith, Director of Children and Families	
Report Author	Alasdair Smith, Director of Children and Families	
Version	Final	
Dated	11 September 2017	
Key Decision?	Yes	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments Included
Director of Law and Democracy	No	No
Strategic Director of Finance and Governance	No	No
Procurement	No	No
Cabinet Member	Yes	Yes
Date final report sent to Constitutional Team	11 September 2017	