

Report To:	Warwickshire Service Delivery and Recovery Forum
Report Title:	Warwickshire Care Leaver Offer
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Date:	26 th April 2022

Decisions Required	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Endorse Recommendations	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	For Information	<input type="checkbox"/>
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No.	Contents:
1.	Recommendations
2.	Purpose of Report
3.	Executive Summary
4.	Conclusions
5.	Environmental Implications
6.	Financial Implications
7.	Analysis
8.	Appendix and background reading

1. The Recommendations of this report are:	
a.	CEO's from District and Borough Councils to comment on the report and are asked to agree the proposed direction of travel with to establish a District & Borough Council Pledge for Care Leavers who live in their area, who have been in care in Warwickshire.
b.	CEO's agree to take forward the report to ensure the five pledges are deliverable for their District/Borough Council and to take this report through their organisation governance process to formally agree the pledge.
c.	If agreed by each District and Borough Council, the pledge will be signed by the Leader of each District/Borough Council and Chief Executive. We recommend the pledge is published on each Councils website. Providing a copy to the County Council who will publish the pledge upon the Warwickshire Care Leaver webpages.
d.	CEO's will delegate to an appropriate senior officer to ensure all elements of the pledge are implemented in their organisation by 31.12.2022 and the appropriate senior officer assures themselves annually that they are meeting all elements of the pledge.

2. Purpose of Report

- 2.1 To seek agreement from Chief Executive Officers from each of the District and Borough Councils to confirm agreement to a Care Leaver Offer, as required under the Children and Social Work Act 2017. Chief Executive Officers are asked to agree:
- the pledge and commit to the five pledges for Warwickshire Care Leavers.
 - to seek appropriate agreements from elected members by taking the pledge through their governance process.
 - to ensure that officers within each district/borough Council ensure their organisation has completed and fulfilled all elements of the pledge by 31.12.2022, including any financial impact, particularly regarding the leisure passes.

- to ensure continued compliance of the pledge on an annual basis.

3. Executive Summary

- 3.1 Looking after and protecting children and young people is one of the most important jobs that Local Authorities do. Corporate parenting principles are about embedding a positive culture in the Local Authority towards Children in Care and Care Leavers. Being a Corporate Parent means doing everything possible to ensure children and young people have opportunities. We need to be ambitious for our children, supporting them to achieve and provide them with secure, nurturing, and positive experiences.
- 3.2 We have been working with District and Borough Councils in Warwickshire since 2018 regarding Corporate Parenting responsibilities implemented by the Children and Social Work Act 2017 and we know each district and borough are committed to helping our children and young people reach their full potential. District and Borough Councils agreed previously their commitment, but some elements of the offer have not come to full fruition and have not been consistent across each area of the county, which leads to differing offers for care leavers. In addition, none of the district and boroughs have published their own offer for care leavers which is requirement of the 2017 Act.
- 3.3 We have been considering further how, with your support we can together enhance the life chances of our young people. It is imperative that we work collaboratively, working together towards a shared goal of supporting our young people. We believe that we can identify common interests and shared goals, improve the co-ordination, effectiveness and efficiency of services, and increase responsiveness to the needs of young people. Engagement and discussions have occurred between Officers over the last eight months. This has resulted in some successes and some areas that have become slightly stuck. Involvement and support from Chief Executives to take forward and publish a clear offer from district and boroughs would strengthen our collective offer to our young people.
- 3.4 We have together built a simple pledge which sets out five areas that would make a significant difference to Warwickshire Care Leavers. The pledge has been established in consultation with young people and with district, borough and county officers.
- 3.5 The pledge, detailed below (appendix a) focusses on housing, training & employment and health and wellbeing. In brief the pledge seeks to improve outcomes for care experienced young people who have been in the care of Warwickshire County Council. Three areas of focus are:
- **Housing** will reduce the need for young people leaving care at 18 years old having to enter B&B or temporary accommodation and support our House Project scheme which is well regarded at supporting young people to leave care.
 - **Training and employment** opportunities within district and borough councils, seeking a commitment to offering apprenticeships to care experienced young people and provide a guaranteed interview if the young person meets the essential criteria
 - **Health and wellbeing** will provide free access to gym and discounted access to swimming, leisure classes and other activities at leisure centres. This is an area that is particularly beneficial to physical and mental health of young people, particularly as care experienced young people are overrepresented in health inequalities, mental health issues and experiencing loneliness. This area has proven difficult to completely implement previously and support is needed to fund this or work with commissioned providers to ensure the offer is implemented.

- 3.6 No one agency can meet the needs of young people and so we recognise the need for the leaving care team to support this pledge and work with district and boroughs to improve outcomes for young people. The pledge by the District and Borough Councils, if agreed will provide a clear commitment and consistent offer for care experienced young people. The pledge will complement the county offer, which includes elements we are not asking the district and boroughs to cover, such as Council Tax which the County Council have agreed to cover. The publishing of the pledge will demonstrate a clear offer, when this is tested by external bodies, including OFSTED and the National Advisor for Care Leavers during future, quality, impact and outcome inspections and audits. This will ensure we are all compliant with the regulations and requirements of the 2017 Act.

4. Conclusions

- 4.1 Most importantly, the care leaver pledge will improve the experiences of young people accessing housing, employment and their health and wellbeing. We know young people who have been in care are overrepresented with issues such as homelessness, exploitation, poverty, not engaged in employment, training or education, mental health, and physical health issues. The simple pledge of five areas that each district and borough can provide, will help our young people in Warwickshire to improve their outcomes, so they can transition positively into adulthood.

5. Analysis

Background and the journey to date

- 5.1 In 2018, Chief Executives in each district and borough agreed to contribute to the care leaver offer by funding leisure passes, with the agreement the county council will fund council tax for care leavers, as expected as a minimal offer by the Department of Education. This has progressed, although with some differences and challenges. More recently, the County Council, through the Corporate Parenting Panel have sought to work with Districts and Boroughs to review and update the offer. Including looking at how we can ensure Districts and Boroughs are supported to publish their offer as required within the Children and Social Work Act 2017. A letter was sent to Chief Executives of each of the Districts and Boroughs on 26.07.2021 setting out the issues detailed in this report. A meeting was held with representatives from each district and borough council on 22.09.21 and a dedicated Corporate Parenting Panel was held on 18.10.2021. Since this time there have been further meetings with the Heads of Housing and separately with Heads/leads for Leisure Services. The Heads of Housing have been very helpful and have agreed the direction of travel and ambition. This opened engagement with other colleagues where there has been limited progress with leisure passes. Assistance from Chief Executives is needed to resolve this and achieve an effective and consistent offer. This report and engagement has led to the development to a more simple pledge which has prioritised particular areas where have clear evidence base of need and we believe are areas that are achievable and proportionate pledges for the District and Borough Council to make to young people leaving care.

Legislation requirements.

- 5.2 The Children and Social Work Act 2017 introduces Corporate Parenting Principles which are intended to change local authority culture so that all staff and departments consider the impact of their work on children and young people for whom the local authority is the corporate parent, as well as on those under 25 who were previously in the care of a local authority.

5.3 **The Corporate Parenting Principles state that English local authorities (including county, district, borough and combined authorities) must ‘have regard to the need’ to take certain actions in their work for children in care and care leavers.** These are:

(a) to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people;

(b) to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings;

(c) to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people;

(d) to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners;

(e) to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people;

(f) for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work;

(g) to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

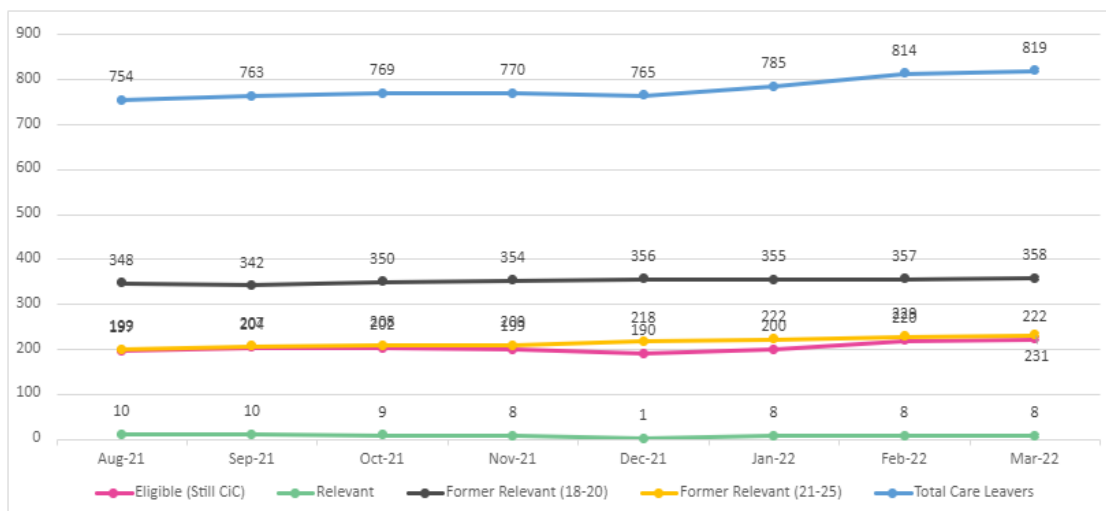
5.4 English local authorities must publish a ‘Local Offer’ for care leavers, informing care leavers about services they provide under the [Children Act 1989](#), plus anything else they or others offer that ‘may assist care leavers in, or in preparing for, adulthood and independent living’. To date we have included district and borough offer within the whole county offer and we will continue to do this but there is a requirement for the district and boroughs to publish their own offer too. The legislation states that the areas are likely to include services related to health and well-being, relationships, education and training, employment, accommodation and participation in society.

5.5 The final element relates to the provision of a Personal Advisor up to the age of 25. This adds a new provision to the Children Act 1989, extending the entitlement to a Personal Advisor (PA) beyond the age of 21 to all care leavers up to 25 years old, whether or not they are in education or training. Local authorities now have a responsibility to make the offer of a PA at least once a year to care leavers, and for them to carry out a needs assessment and to prepare a pathway plan for the care leaver. To date we have found almost all our young people want to engage, in the support until the age of 25 years old. Not all elements of the offer have to be available for all ages and generally we target the offer and extend areas between 21-25 years depending on need, as we wish to encourage young people to become independent and not dependent upon the offer or support. However, there is growing trend with local authorities like North Yorkshire offering life long advice and support to care experienced young people if they require this. Usually from 21 years this is predominantly advice, information and assistance, with access to targeted financial and other support if required.

Data, volume of young people, their needs and experiences.

5.6 The number of young people receiving a care leaving service as at 31st March 2022 has increased slightly to 819. Of the 819 leaving care young people, 239 are currently looked

after (allocated to the Children in Care 14-18 Team) but will be 'Eligible' for a service. In addition on 31st March 2022, there were 231 care leavers receiving a service aged 21-25, but this is predominantly advice, information and assistance when required. The type and level of service is determined by whether children were in care on their 16th birthday and the length of time in care, the different groups are referred to as eligible, relevant and former relevant.



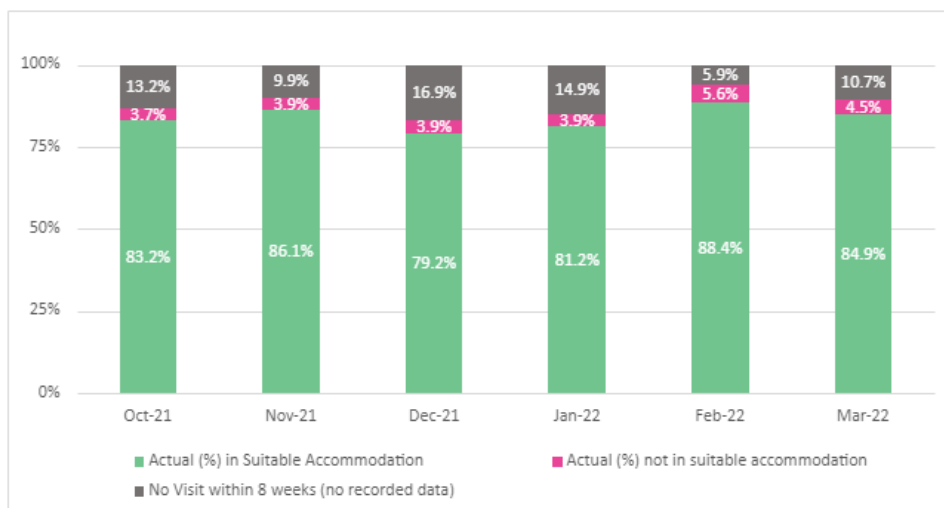
5.7 The location of our care experienced young people obviously does change each year but data suggests the majority at 18-25 year olds tend to live outside Warwickshire. The table below breaks down the number young people aged 18-25 accessing care leaving services was 580, with the smallest number living in the county. This information is vital as it shows the commitment needed from each of the district and boroughs varies but shows the impact of prioritising this group is much smaller for the district and borough Councils.

Area that Care Leaver currently lives in	Total Care Leavers at 30th April 2022	% Living in each area
North Warwickshire	16	2.8%
Nuneaton and Bedworth	91	15.7%
Rugby	42	7.2%
Stratford-on-Avon	20	3.4%
Warwick	76	13.1%
Out of County	335	57.8%
Grand Total	580	100%

5.8 The government expect local authorities to determine whether care experienced young people live in suitable accommodation. Temporary accommodation, bed & breakfast, being homeless or in prison is not deemed as suitable accommodation. The experience of young people is that when they reach 18 years old, we try to get foster carers to agree to keep children in their care. Increasing numbers of young people stay with their foster carers, this is called "staying put". However, most foster carers do not offer staying put arrangements and we need foster carers to care for other children too. Therefore, we will support young people to look at a range of options, including House Project (detailed below), supported accommodation or apply for their own tenancy. We will make applications in advance of a young person's 18th birthday but it is to common young people on their 18th birthday, leave their home (foster carers) and end up being required to present as homeless to be

prioritised. They then enter temporary accommodation or a B&B until they become a priority or a property is available. The different housing priority policies in each district and borough council then means that the priority given to care leavers can vary across the county. These experiences, particularly the use of B&B's for care experienced young people is widely recognised as not good enough for young people and is one of the reasons why we have in March 2022 4.5% of young people living in unsuitable accommodation.

5.9 A lot of focused work by all councils has improved other housing issues. Our House Project is an example of this. The House Project was established by Warwickshire, on behalf of the DfE in 2018. A model that originated from Stoke on Trent. Young people leave care and move to their own accommodation. Prior to this they become part of small community of other young people who prepare and plan their move out of care to maintain their own tenancy. The house project community provide practical and emotional support to young people. As a result, in Warwickshire all young people have been supported to maintain their tenancy to date. All councils in Warwickshire have supported this project and agree it is successful. However, the difficulty is access to suitable accommodation. We have a strategy to source accommodation that includes from private landlords, through our Warwickshire Property Company and a request that each district and borough commit to provide five properties every 12 months to the house project. It is through these schemes we have been able to improve housing for young people but there is more we can do to reduce the number if young people who experience homelessness.



The District and Borough Offer

5.10 Through discussions with officers and young people the use of a simple pledge has been established, which mirrors a number other County Councils, where the full offer is published by the County and district/boroughs have a clear commitment to care experienced young people. Details of each area of the pledge and reasons to include this in the pledge are detailed below.

One Warwickshire way to prioritise care experienced young people for housing

5.11 As you are aware applicants under the age of 21 years who were in the care of the Local Authority while aged 16/17 years have a priority need for housing. We fully appreciate that there are several other priority groups that also have to be considered and provided with accommodation, however we are keen to ensure that there is a consistent approach across the county when our care experienced young people have a need for housing. We think by working together we could improve our joint approach so that we do not experience a situation where our young people are either homeless or residing in

inappropriate/unsuitable accommodation.

Reduce the need for emergency accommodation at 18 years.

- 5.12 Local systems should not involve care leavers routinely being treated as homeless when care placements come to an end at 18 years. By working together housing authorities and children's services can better ensure that as a corporate parent appropriate accommodation and support is available to care leavers. We are aware and welcome that the Joint Housing Protocol has recently been updated and there are plans to offer training across agencies in respect of this. We wonder if this is a real opportunity for the county council, districts and borough to fully embrace the joint protocol, working together as corporate parents to ensure the needs of our young people are met, enabling them to plan for their future with a sense of security.

Commitment to providing accommodation to the House Project

- 5.13 Since we established and joined the National House Project in 2018, we have had great success in supporting our young people to move into their own properties with peer and professional support. Initially we worked closely with Nuneaton and Bedworth who have supported us by offering properties for several our young people. This has expanded and we have worked alongside Rugby & Warwick to support young people moving into their accommodation. This proven programme of work and support is an area that we are keen to see develop across the county and we would ask for your support to develop this further by considering the allocation of properties. We would encourage you to visit the house project, hear about the great work that they do and meet the young people who are a part of this. We promise that you will leave feeling inspired and wanting to be a part of something that can help young people meet their full potential.

Commit to providing apprenticeships for care experienced young people, guaranteeing an interview.

- 5.14 We have been very successful in the County Council in promoting apprenticeship opportunities for our care experienced young people. Three care experienced young people who successfully completed apprenticeships with social care have gone on to gain full time employment within the County Council. A further two young people who have nearly completed their apprenticeships with The House Project have secured offers at university for the coming academic year. We are very proud of what our young people have achieved, which has been helped by care leavers having a guarantee of an interview, within Warwickshire County Council. We would respectfully request that this is extended across the districts and borough councils, so that we can continue to support our young people to gain meaningful employment and take the first steps on the career ladder. We have excellent careers officers within the Corporate Parenting Service who can support our young people throughout their apprenticeships, so you won't be alone in offering support.

Commit to fund free gym passes for young people and provide a discount for swimming and other leisure classes.

- 5.15 There have over the years been many discussions with leisure lead officers and the third party leisure provider in each areas. It was agreed that concessionary membership rates for care leavers up to the age of 21 would be provided, but these were different in each district/borough.
- Stratford – Everyone Active provide full years membership use of the Fitness Suite, Swimming Pools and group exercise at £199.90 per year. This is required to be paid in full on application.
 - Warwick - Everyone Active provide full years membership use of the Fitness Suite, Swimming Pools and group exercise at £199.90 per year. This is required to be paid in full on application.

- Nuneaton & Bedworth - Everyone Active provide swim pass only at £20 per month, or swim & gym £25.25 (duplicating the student rate).
- Rugby – Better provide package at £26.80 per month (full access to gym, swim, & sauna).
- North Warks Borough Council – Lifetimes provide gym and swim & classes, free of charge for care experienced young people for 12 months.

5.16 A meeting was held in January 2022 with officers responsible for leisure but overall they felt without agreement from Chief Executives they were unable to provide the same service. At this time, funding for these concessionary memberships for 4/5 district and boroughs has been covered by the County Council as we were unable to achieve full free provision as intended in 2018. We can not continue this and fund the Council Tax, which in many other areas is also provided by district and borough Councils. We would ask district and borough Councils to discuss with their leisure provider to cover these costs for Warwickshire care experienced young people.

Levelling Up

5.17 Our approach to the care leaver offer is to address the inequalities experienced by care experienced young people, which fits well with the levelling up agenda. We also seek to support care experienced young people learn to budget and live independently. For example, we reduce funding and support as young people become older. We provide an incentive of £25 for care leavers up to the age of 21 who complete a full year of accessing the gym or leisure centre and this then helps and encourages young people to continue to budget and pay for this themselves. This model is working to relieve the financial burden of living independently at such a young age and helping young people learn new skills to live independently.

Getting ahead of the curve- Should we offer the pledge to all young people or just Warwickshire young people?

5.18 Many district and borough Councils are widening their offer further. For example, there is work being undertaken across the West Midlands to establish a regional offer for care experienced young people. Through this work and examples in other areas some Councils as part of their commitment to care experienced young people are extending their offer and approach to all care experienced young people living in their area, regardless of whether they originated from being in care in Warwickshire or from another local authority. It is likely in the future this may be a requirement, but this is not currently the case. There is no known reliable data on how many care experienced young people live in Warwickshire from other areas.

Publishing each district and borough councils care experienced offer.

5.17 Warwickshire have a reputation for their excellent “Local Offer” for care experienced young people. We are committed to ensuring that young people know their entitlements. It can be easy to assume that they have been made aware of these and along with the Warwickshire County Council “Local Offer” we hope you will share your own care experienced offer for our young people via your website. We have a website and social media pages for care experienced young people and if agreed we will publish the pledge upon these pages.

6. Environmental Implications

6.1 No environmental implications have been identified.

7. Financial Implications

- 7.1 Overall the cost of these proposals is predominantly free but asking that care experienced young people are prioritised by revises policy and processes. However, there is a financial impact, particularly by the leisure passes as this reduces the income for leisure providers. Through contract management or through funding the indication is this will need to be resolved by each district and borough not providing free access to leisure services already.

9. Appendix and other links

You may also find the following links useful ahead of the meeting -

[Care Leavers - Local Offer \(warwickshire.gov.uk\)](http://warwickshire.gov.uk)

[Care Leavers - Local Offer \(Nottinghamshire county council\) - Good Practice Example](#)

[LGA Corporate Parenting Resource Pack](#)

Appendix A – Proposed Draft.

The Warwickshire District & Borough Council Pledge

We understand that being in care and leaving care isn't always easy and that it can bring extra challenges and pressures for children and young people.

If we are going to get it right for you we need to make a real difference to help you do your best and have success in your life.

Our pledge to you includes several things we will do that will help make sure that your time in care and leaving care is a positive experience.

North Warwickshire Borough Council, Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council, Stratford-upon-Avon District Council, Warwick District Council and Rugby Borough Council, in partnership with Warwickshire County Council all agree, as champions for children in care and care experienced young people pledge to:

- 1. Provide one Warwickshire way to prioritise care experienced young people for housing.**
- 2. Reduce the need for emergency accommodation at 18 years, in partnership with Leaving Care Team.**
- 3. Provide a set quota of social housing accommodation to the House Project on an annual rolling basis.**
- 4. Provide apprenticeships for care experienced young people, guaranteeing an interview.**
- 5. Provide free leisure activities for care experienced young people living within the Borough/District for 12 months.**

Elected Members and Senior Officers within the District and Borough Council will act as your champion. We will.....

- be the best Corporate Parents we can be;
- keep a check on and test to see if the promises in the Pledge are being kept
- take action where we are not doing good enough
- use the Corporate Parenting Panel to improve circumstances for children looked after and care experienced young people
- support Elected Members to lead the way and make life better for children who are looked after in Warwickshire

There is a commitment to fulfil this pledge by 31.12.2022 and sustain the pledge thereafter until further reviews which will be undertaken annually.

Endorsed by Full Council and signed by the Lead Elected Member and Chief Executive Officer.