

Support for care leavers

Purpose of Report

For discussion

Summary

The Chair of the Local Government Association (LGA), Councillor Shaun Davies, has announced that one of his priorities for 2023-24 is corporate parenting, in particular support for care leavers. Recognising that all councillors are corporate parents to children in care and care leavers, all policy boards are being asked to share their own ideas for this priority area, to shape the LGA's work in relation to supporting care leavers. This report outlines current ideas for this programme and next steps, and is an opportunity for Board members to put forward their own ideas and good practice.

LGA Plan Theme: Putting people first

Recommendation(s)

That the Board comments on the current plans for this programme of work and suggest any additional ideas as to how the LGA can promote positive outcomes for care leavers, including those based on their own councils' work.

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Support for care leavers

Background

1. The Chair of the LGA, Councillor Shaun Davies, announced at the LGA Annual Conference that one of his priorities for 2023-24 is corporate parenting, and in particular how the LGA can support improved outcomes for care leavers and others with care experience. This was also discussed at Executive Advisory Board on 20 July 2023.
2. The Children and Young People Board will lead on this work, with regular updates also going to Informal Group Leaders and the Executive Advisory Board for organisation-wide oversight and join-up.
3. All policy boards at the LGA are being asked to consider how services within their remit could improve outcomes for care leavers, including potential policy positions and sharing of good practice. This reflects the fact that all councillors and council officers are corporate parents to children in care and care leavers.
4. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 outlines the following corporate parenting principles that all local authorities must have regard to when carrying out functions in relation to children in care and care leavers:
 - 4.1. To act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, of those children and young people;
 - 4.2. To encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings;
 - 4.3. To take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people;
 - 4.4. 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;
 - 4.5. To promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people;
 - 4.6. For those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their homes lives, relationships and education or work;
 - 4.7. To prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

Outcomes for those with care experience

5. Many people with care experience leave care and go on to happy, fulfilling lives. Care experienced people told the Independent Review of Children's Social Care

that it was important to recognise that, while a lot of policy and media attention is given to the disproportionate numbers of care experienced people who experience negative outcomes, such outcomes are not inevitable and care can be a “positive, transformational and lifesaving experience”¹. For example, there is [evidence](#) that longer-term care can be a protective factor in children’s educational outcomes. One of the aims of the LGA’s campaign is to emphasise a more positive narrative around those with care experience.

6. However, by understanding where those with care experience are more likely to experience negative outcomes than their peers, it is possible to identify opportunities to address these issues. The Care Review highlights several key areas where government, business and society can play a role in supporting care experienced people:
 - 6.1. An estimated 26 per cent of the homeless population have care experience.
 - 6.2. Almost a quarter (24 per cent) of the prison population in England have spent time in care.
 - 6.3. Four in ten (41 per cent) of care leavers aged 19-21 are not in education, employment or training (NEET) compared to 12 per cent of all other young people of the same age.
 - 6.4. Adults who spent time in care between 1971-2001 were 70 per cent more likely to die prematurely than those who did not.
 - 6.5. Six per cent of care leavers report having no-one at all to provide emotional support, and nearly one in ten only had support from their leaving care worker.

Current work programme

7. Colleagues across policy, improvement, leadership and communications have been working to develop a programme of work to support the Chair’s priority.
8. Partner organisations are being engaged in this work, including Spectra which runs the Care Leaver Covenant, Become (the national charity for children in care and care leavers) and the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum (NLCBF) which connects local authority leaving care teams.
9. Ensuring that the voices of those with care experience directly influence this work is vital to ensure the impact and relevance of the programme. Become and the NLCBF have provided advice on engaging those with care experience, as well as evidence from their own work with care experienced people on key priorities.

¹ [Independent Review of Children’s Social Care 2022](#)

10. Work is being considered across three strands:

- 10.1. The LGA as an employer: including training for all staff, guaranteed interviews where minimum criteria are met for roles (subject to legal advice) and ring-fenced apprenticeship positions.
- 10.2. The LGA as a convener: working with the Care Leaver Covenant to promote their work and encourage sign ups; communications campaign to raise awareness; Work with LAMIT (Local Authorities' Mutual Investment Trust) and CCLA (Churches, Charities and Local Authorities Investment Management) to publicise their work to support care leavers.
- 10.3. The LGA's work to support and improve local government: dedicated outreach and support for care experienced graduates applying to the National Graduate Development Scheme; guidance and case studies for councils; lobbying government in relation to funding for children's social care and to support care leavers who were formerly unaccompanied asylum-seeking children; training for councillors and officers on corporate parenting, including across the 'corporate core'.

What care leavers say is important to them

11. The following list has been compiled from a variety of organisations (including the [National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum](#), the [Care Leavers National Movement](#), [Barnardo's](#) and the [Children's Commissioner](#)) that have worked with care leavers to identify key support that they would like to see, noting that young people would like to see support offered to all care leavers, including those who are living outside of their local authority area.

Issue and asks from care leavers	Examples of good practice
<p>Finance: support managing household bills; cold weather allowance; council tax exemptions; savings; higher rate of universal credit for under 25s</p>	<p>Winter fuel payments in Gateshead; paying council tax for those living out of authority in Doncaster</p>
<p>Housing: priority access to housing; Staying Put and Staying Close; access to a 'handyman' service and a maintenance fund.</p>	<p>Rent guarantor schemes (e.g. in Devon); home improvements via EQUANS</p>
<p>Travel: support with the cost of getting to appointments, work and staying connected with family and friends; driving lessons.</p>	<p>Greater Manchester free bus travel; Cornwall free bus travel; free driving lessons and paid for licenses in Medway; bicycle packages in Reading</p>

<p>Health: timely access to mental health services; access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services until 25 where necessary to avoid moving into adult support too early; paid-for prescriptions; NHS dentists; optician appointments.</p>	<p>Dedicated mental health worker in Lincolnshire; paid prescriptions in Oldham</p>
<p>Digital connection: devices and access to WiFi and data to connect with health services, apply for jobs and stay connected to friends and family.</p>	<p>TalkTalk free broadband and data for active job seekers; Greater Manchester free data, devices and digital skills training</p>
<p>Leisure: gym passes, including for a friend to go with them; funds for leisure activities.</p>	<p>Cornwall Culture Card; free activities in leisure centres in Dudley; Christmas/festival allowance in Cheshire West and Chester</p>
<p>Education, employment and training: guaranteed interviews for apprenticeship roles; “work wardrobes”; financial support until a first pay check clears; education bursaries up to the age of 25 (these are currently available for those aged 16-19).</p>	<p>Year-round accommodation at the University of Kent; interview clothing through Smart Works or Suited and Booted; financial support between benefits ending and first wage payment in Cheshire West and Chester;</p>
<p>Practical support: starter packs for new homes or going to university; mentoring or buddying schemes; clothing allowance; passports.</p>	<p>Clothing allowances in Kent; setting up home start packs and TV licences in Northamptonshire; coaching for care leavers in Southwark</p>
<p>Offers for specific groups of care leavers: including care experienced parents, former unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, young people with additional needs, those involved with the criminal justice system and the LGBTQ+ community</p>	<p>Support for care experienced parents in Hertfordshire; building community for former unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in Leeds;</p>
<p>Accessing records: including support through the process.</p>	<p>Access to Records training by the Rees Foundation</p>
<p>Post 25 support: to avoid a ‘cliff edge’ or support.</p>	<p>“Always here” support for those with care experience beyond 25 in North Yorkshire</p>

Issues for the Economy and Resources Board to consider

12. Board members will be aware of the significant pressure that children's social care budgets are under, and the increasing proportion of budgets that are spent on placements for children in care, reducing available funding for wider support including additional support for care leavers. The LGA is working with the Department for Education to identify ways to reduce placement costs and ensure that children and young people receive the support they need. This includes work around foster carer recruitment and retention; oversight of large providers of placements; and understanding of placement costs. Members may wish to highlight any action that their councils have taken to reduce placement costs, or to ensure the availability of suitable homes for care leavers.
13. A specific challenge in relation to funding and support for care leavers is the rate paid by the Home Office to support care leavers who were formerly unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC). These young people now make up 26 per cent of all care leavers aged 19-21. The Home Office pays councils between £41,610 and £52,195 per year to support UAS children, but this drops to £14,040 per year when the young person turns 18. Many councils have raised that this does not cover the cost of supporting former-UASC care leavers, and we continue to lobby the Government on the need for funding to cover the costs of the support young people need.
14. A key issue raised by charities and campaigners in relation to care leavers is in relation to Universal Credit. The housing element of Universal Credit – the shared accommodation rate – is lower for under 35s, however care leavers under 25 are exempt which is helpful in recognising specific challenges faced by care leavers. However, the standard allowance for Universal Credit is lower for those under the age of 25 (£265.31 per month, compared to £334.91 for those over 25) and care leavers are not exempt from this. In its recent report, "[No Bank of Mum and Dad: The impact of the cost-of-living crisis on care-experienced young people](#)", Barnardo's called on the Department for Work and Pensions to ensure that all care-experienced young people calling Universal Credit should receive the over 25 rate in recognition of the fact that the cost of essentials such as food, energy and transport cost the same for under 25s, yet these young people are far less likely to have access to financial support from their own family. The Board may wish to consider if it would like to support this recommendation from Barnardo's, including whether the recommendation should be extended further, for example to vulnerable groups such as homeless young people and young parents under the age of 25.
15. [Most councils](#) offer council tax discounts (including 100 per cent discounts), exemptions or refunds for care leavers, though these [vary across the country](#) according to the Children's Society. In some areas, care leavers aged 18-20 are

eligible, while in others the exemption applies up to 25, or discounts may become lower over time. Some councils pay the council tax of their care leavers regardless of which council area they live in, while for others this is only if the young person lives in their “home” council area. Care leavers report frustration at this “postcode lottery” of support available and it is a [key area of lobbying for campaigners](#). Councillors may wish to consider whether they believe the LGA should seek a funded national exemption for care leavers to the age of 25, or if there are other policies they would like to ask the Government for.

16. The Workforce Team continues to argue for additional flexibility in the Apprenticeship Levy for councils to use their levy funds for specific projects, for example targeting apprenticeship support at care leavers. Some councils have done that but have had to use funds from other sources to resource it whereas there would be greater scope if councils were able to use some of the £3 million a month that is returned to HMRC for this purpose.

Implications for Wales

17. Children’s social care is devolved in Wales however learning from the programme can be shared with the Welsh Local Government Association.

Financial Implications

18. This programme will be delivered within existing budgets.

Equalities Implications

19. This programme is focussed on reducing inequalities for those with care experience.
20. Around one quarter of care leavers are former unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. Specific consideration will be given to how the specific needs of this group are recognised in the programme of work.

Next steps

21. Feedback from the Board today will be taken forward by LGA officers and reported to the Children and Young People Board as part of ongoing oversight of the programme.