

Corporate parenting and support for care leavers

Purpose of Report

For information.

Is this report confidential? No

Summary

This paper provides an update on the LGA's corporate priority around corporate parenting and support for care leavers.

LGA Plan Theme: Putting people first

Recommendation(s)

That the Executive Advisory Board considers the update and makes comments and recommendations as it sees fit.

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Background

1. At the LGA Conference on 4 July 2023, the Chair of the LGA Councillor Shaun Davies announced that corporate parenting, and in particular support for care leavers, would be one of his priorities for the year. At the subsequent Executive Advisory Board meeting on 20 July 2023, members of the Board commented on the proposed programme of work, which was then taken forward by officers with oversight by the Chair and Children and Young People (CYP) Board.

Progress

2. Work is taking place across three strands, with progress on each outlined below.
3. The LGA as an employer:
 - 3.1. Work has been undertaken with the Drive Forward Foundation, a charity dedicated to enabling care-experienced young people to achieve their full potential through sustainable and fulfilling employment. Drive Forward ran a well-attended training session for all staff in December to help them to understand the experiences and potential needs of those with care experience.
 - 3.2. We are launching a trial internship programme for those with care experience this month, which is supported by Drive Forward. This scheme will draw on learning from the Civil Service Care Leavers Internship Scheme.
 - 3.3. Care leavers who apply to meet the minimum criteria for roles at the LGA will now be offered a guaranteed interview. We are also creating a special point of contact for those with care experience during the recruitment process and gathering optional data from job applicants on whether they have care experience to improve our understanding of whether we are effectively attracting applications from those with care experience.
4. The LGA as a convener:
 - 4.1. The LGA worked with the Care Leaver Covenant team to promote its work around Care Leavers' Week in October 2023. This included publishing a letter from the Chair in the Daily Express on 25 October calling on small businesses to sign up to the Covenant, and calling on councils to light up civic buildings in the Care Leaver Covenant colours to mark the start of the week.
 - 4.2. During Care Leavers' Week, the LGA launched its #StepAhead campaign, which focuses on sharing good practice and promoting positive outcomes for

and narratives about young people in care and care leavers. The campaign also provides councils with branding to promote their own offers for care leavers, providing a unified brand across local government to highlight this work.

4.3. We have worked with LAMIT (Local Authorities' Mutual Investment Trust) and CCLA (Churches, Charities and Local Authorities Investment Management) to publicise their work to support care leavers, including arranging a fringe event at the National Children and Adult Services Conference in Bournemouth in November 2023.

4.4. We are arranging a Smith Square Debate to consider "How can we take a whole-system approach to improving support for care leavers?" This is expected to take place in April 2024.

5. The LGA's work to support and improve local government:

5.1. Care-experienced graduates are now being offered dedicated support when they apply to the National Graduate Development Scheme, with some councils particularly keen to offer placements to care-experienced applicants.

5.2. The Chair of the CYP Board, Councillor Louise Gittins, joined a roundtable with Johnny Mercer MP, the Cross-Government Minister for Care Leavers, in October 2023 to highlight areas of good practice in supporting care leavers and to raise those areas of challenge where support from the government could help to improve outcomes.

5.3. We are refreshing our guidance for all councillors on corporate parenting and support for care leavers; these documents will be published in the coming months. We are also seeking updated case studies to promote good practice.

5.4. The Children's Improvement Team delivers a programme of support aimed at political and officer leadership, including peer led diagnostics, training, workshops and facilitated conversations. We have delivered support to 16 councils so far and the programme has been well received. We have developed a Must Know: Children's Services Guide to Effective Cross Council Working to strengthen the development of a whole council approach to delivering effective services for children, including those for children looked after and care leavers. We are planning to extend this to support greater joint working between top and second tier authorities, particularly in relation to housing and leisure.

- 5.5. We are planning a webinar for councillors to highlight key issues care leavers face and best practice support for care leavers. We expect this to be held in April.
- 5.6. We have been lobbying government for additional funding for children's social care to ensure that children in care and care leavers receive the best possible support, with an additional £500 million awarded through the social care grant in the Local Government Finance Settlement 2024/25 and specific reference to children's social care in the accompanying statement. We continue to call on government to address the challenge of children's services (and wider council) funding, including fully funding support for care leavers who were formerly unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, to ensure that these young people get the full support that they need.

Voice of those with care experience

6. Both Executive Advisory Board and the Children and Young People Board were clear that the programme should be informed by those with care experience.
7. Officers have been working with a range of organisations representing those with care experience, including Become, the Care Leavers' Association and the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum. Information has also been gathered from reports developed with care leavers outlining key priority areas and experiences, while CYP Board members have attended meetings with care leavers to speak with them directly. Care leavers will attend the meeting of the CYP Board on 12 March to share their views.
8. Information gathered is informing the LGA's work programme and policy work. Some people with care experience have reported having a negative experience when engaging with councils and other organisations to share their expertise by experience, for example being the only unpaid member on a conference panel, or expectations of being asked to relive traumatic experiences in front of others. To support more positive experiences, the LGA is commissioning a short, good practice guide to support all organisations engaging with those with care experience. This will be developed by or with those with care experience.

Feedback from policy boards

9. All of the LGA's policy boards have been asked to provide views on this programme of work, recognising that all councillors are corporate parents and that good support for care leavers is the responsibility of all council services, not only children's services. Several themes have arisen from these discussions, as outlined below.
10. **Care experience as a protected characteristic.** The Independent Review of Children's Social Care recommended that care experience be made a protected characteristic, recognising that care experienced people can face significant barriers throughout their lifetimes including direct and indirect discrimination and

inconsistent support. While the Government decided against taking this recommendation forward, at least 80 councils in the UK have now passed motions committing to treat care experience as a protected characteristic. Councillors across the LGA boards have signalled that their councils have passed this motion and recommended that the LGA considers doing so itself, or providing support to those councils which have; the CYP Board is also keen to do this. The Office of the Children's Commissioner is currently analysing responses from care experienced people to its survey on the issue, and we will use this information to inform LGA guidance. We are also planning to speak with councils that have passed this motion to understand the impact it has made and what support might be helpful, and will be doing this in discussion with the campaigner Terry Galloway who has supported many councils in this process.

11. **Good practice.** We have heard a lot of good practice from the boards, including free leisure passes for care leavers, housing support (including giving care leavers priority for social housing and developing joint housing protocols for care leavers); council tax exemptions; free prescriptions; creative skills bootcamps; paid work placements; support for care leavers post-25; support to attend further education and university; and work with partners and businesses to ensure understanding of care leavers' needs.
12. **Consistency of support.** Councillors have raised the challenge that support is not consistent across the country, with some questions around whether there should be a nationally agreed minimum offer. This is also an issue that those with care experience have highlighted as a challenge, especially where care leavers live out of area or move to a new area. To address this, a Pan-London Compact for Care Leavers has recently been launched in London to improve the consistency and standard of the care leavers offer across London, and similar work has taken place in Manchester.
13. **Councillors as corporate parents.** Concerns were raised about some district councillors being unclear on their role as corporate parents. This is being considered as part of the LGA's children's improvement offer and we are raising awareness of all councillors' corporate parenting responsibilities through communications with councils as part of the 'Step Ahead' campaign. Some Boards reported challenges in engaging all councillors in the corporate parenting offer, including low attendance at training sessions.
14. Key issues for care leavers raised across the boards include access to suitable and affordable accommodation; supporting care leavers to remain in work; the potential end of the Household Support Fund which many councils have used to support care leavers; support for care leavers who were formerly unaccompanied asylum-seeking children; the importance of sharing positive narratives about care experience to challenge negative views; and supporting care leavers with life skills.

Implications for Wales

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

Financial Implications

16. This programme is being delivered within existing budgets and prioritised within the Children & Young People work programme.

Equalities implications

17. This programme is focussed on reducing inequalities for those with care experience.

18. Around one quarter of care leavers aged 19-21 are former unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. Specific consideration is being given as to how the specific needs of this group are recognised in the programme of work.

Next steps

19. Feedback from the Board today will be taken forward by LGA officers as part of the ongoing programme of work.