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Corporate Parenting Specialist Advisory Group

Wednesday, 7th October, 2020
6.00 pm
Virtual Meeting
Join Meeting Here

AGENDA

1. Welcome and Apologies

2. Declaration of Interest

A form is attached for completion by Members declaring an interest in items on the agenda.

Declarations of Interest	**3**

3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

For the Group to agree the Minutes of the Corporate Parenting Specialist Advisory Group meeting held on 23rd July 2020.

Minutes - 23rd July 2020	**4 - 10**

4. Corporate Parenting Dashboard

To review and consider the latest monitoring reports on Looked After Children in the Borough.

Corporate Parenting Dashboard - September 2020	**11**

5. Participation Update

For the Group to be provided with an update on Participation.

6. Foster Carers Update

For the Group to receive an update from Foster Carers

7. Health Assessment - Interim Update

For the Group to receive an interim update on the findings from the Health Audit that took place on 16th January 2020.

8. COVID-19 Update

A look at how we have dealt with Children in Care and their Carers during COVID-19.

9. Children in Care OFSTED Inspection

For the Group to receive an update of the focus visit and an outline of the recommendations.

10. Leaving Care Strategy

For the Group to receive an update on the Leaving Care Strategy.

Draft Leaving Care Action Plan **Leaving Care Strategy v1 070820**	**12 - 34**

Date Published: 30th September 2020
Denise Park, Chief Executive

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST IN

ITEMS ON THIS AGENDA

Members attending a Council, Committee, Board or other meeting with a personal interest in a matter on the Agenda must disclose the existence and nature of the interest and, if it is a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest or an Other Interest under paragraph 16.1 of the Code of Conduct, should leave the meeting during discussion and voting on the item.

Members declaring an interest(s) should complete this form and hand it to the Democratic Services Officer at the commencement of the meeting and declare such an interest at the appropriate point on the agenda.

MEETING:

DATE:

AGENDA ITEM NO.**:**

DESCRIPTION (BRIEF):

NATURE OF INTEREST:

DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY/OTHER (delete as appropriate)

SIGNED :

PRINT NAME:

(Paragraphs 8 to 17 of the Code of Conduct for Members of the Council refer)

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CORPORATE PARENTING SPECIALIST ADVISORY GROUP
Thursday 23rd July 2020

PRESENT – *Councillors: Whittle (In the Chair), Afzal, Batan, Bateson, Connor, Daley, Davies, Gee, Gunn, Akhtar Hussain, Jan-Virmani, Kay, Zamir Khan, Khonat, Liddle, Mahmood, McGurk, Oates, Patel, Jean Rigby, Smith and Taylor.*

OFFICERS –
Alyson Hanson – Head of Permanence
Jaffer Hussain - Participation Officer
Charlotte Hesketh – LAC Virtual Head & Assessment Officer
Caroline Waldron – Deputy Designated Nurse for Safeguarding Children and LAC
Janette Clarke – Strategic Head of Social Care
Paula Quinn – FCA Committee
Sam Briggs – FCA Secretary

RESOLUTIONS

1 Welcome and Apologies

The Chair Cllr Ron Whittle, welcomed all present to the virtual meeting. Apologies were received from the following Councillors: Damian Talbot, John Slater, Pat McFall, Lilian Salton, Mohammed Khan, Stephanie Brookfield and Julie Slater. Apologies were also received from Jayne Ivory, Claire Richardson, Angela Allen, Paul Lee and Aldo Staffa.

2 Declaration of Interest in item on this Agenda

There were no Declarations of Interest received.

3 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED – The Minutes of the previous meeting held on Thursday 23rd July 2020 were approved as a correct record.

4 Vice Chair Update

RESOLVED – That the item be deferred to a future meeting.

5 Corporate Parenting Dashboard

The Group was presented with an update on the latest monitoring report of Children in Our Care as of 29th June 2020 and heard that the number of children in care was 409. Of those, 45% were female and 55% were male. The Age profile had changed slightly since December 2019, in that there were fewer in the 0-2 age range. This had reduced from 86 to 71, which was a significant difference. There had been an increase in the 3-5 age range from 56 to 64, an increase in the 6-8 age range from 45-52 and an increase in 12-14 age range from 71 to 77.

The Group heard that the increase in older children entering care was mainly due to sibling groups shifting the spread of ages of children that had needed to

come into care. However the majority of children entering care were under 6 years old.

Looking at the Age of children entering care, the Group heard that there had been a reduction in the number of babies entering care. In December 2019 this had been 48% compared to 39% as of the end of June 2020. For the other age ranges, the Group noted that 3-6 year olds had stayed the same at 21%, 7-10 year olds were now at 15% compared to 11% in December, 11-15 year olds were now at 19% compared to 15% in December, and 16+ was now at 6% compared to 11% in December. The Group heard that the figures were subject to peaks and troughs.

In terms of where children had been placed, there had been some changes to note. In-house foster care had stayed very much the same, with a high proportion of children being in in-house foster care placements. The number of children Placed with Parents on care orders at home had risen quite significantly from December 2019, from 58 to 79 now. This was a concern and Alyson informed the Group that they would be carrying out some work around that.

Agency placements were down significantly which was good news for the commissioning budget as these were high cost placements. There were now 22 children in agency residential, and these were placements for children with the most complex needs. The number of children in Agency foster placements had also reduced from 62 to 50 which was also good news. There had also been a reduction in young people, mostly care leavers in residential accommodation that weren't subject to regulation, from 18 to 12. Overall, the reduction in those three categories of placements was very positive.

There had been an increase in number of children in adoptive placements from 13- 24, which was probably a result of the high number of babies coming in to care earlier this year.

Overall, the Group heard that in total 56 children had entered care and 41 children had left care, which was a net increase of 15 children so far this year.

It was highlighted that in terms of performance, we had 63% of children in foster care which was lower compared to regional and national averages. Of that we had 51% children in in-house foster care compared to a 46% national average which was very good. Only 12% of our children were in independent foster agency placements compared to the national average which was 26%.

It was also highlighted that we had more children in adoptive placements than the national and regional average, and fewer children in residential schools and secure provisions than national averages which was good. Members noted that children placed at home with parents was higher than the national average. It was identified that Placement stability was an area of improvement for us, and that work to understand this better would be carried out.

The number of Care Leavers still in touch with us was 100% which was fantastic.

Adoption performance was very good compared to national average with the number of days from entering into care to adoption placement being 433 days which was slightly better than the national average.

The Group then discussed the impact on children with the court system being shut down due to the pandemic. The delays meant children were sitting in foster placements much longer, which had creating a pressure in terms of placements. It was confirmed that it was being managed and risk assessment tools were being developed which would enable us to start moving children into their adoptive placements or rehabilitated home. It was confirmed that the Courts were now re-opening and prioritising in order of date.

RESOLVED – That the update be noted.

7 COVID-19 Update

Alyson provided the Group with an update on the impact that COVID-19 had had on services.

The Group heard that at the start of COVID-19, concerns were raised about placement stability being affected by COVID-19 as it was big ask for carers in terms of looking after children 24/7, home-schooling and all the pressures that came with that. During April and May placement stability was good with only one disruption. In June and July it became evident that a few more placements had become fragile as children had started to struggle. As a result of this, children were RAG rated in order to prioritise them for various levels of support. The reds were for children who were struggling the most and the number of reds had started to increase the longer this went on. The Group were informed that currently there were 6 placement searches ongoing, this was where foster placements had become so fragile that the children needed to move.

Another challenge was placement sufficiency, with the in-house fostering at capacity. In June there was an increase in demand, which proved very challenging to find anything. This was very much replicated across the North West and the Country, which meant agencies had been inundated with demand and were unfortunately unable to offer very little when a placement was needed. The Group were informed that it had been a struggle to meet demand, with in-house carers being stretched. It had been managed, with all children having been taken care of but it was starting to be strain. An initial concern was the ability to recruit new foster carers and adopters but the position of that was that we had received more registrations of interest in quarter 1 this year than the year before, so it hadn’t been badly impacted as anticipated.

Care leavers had been remarkably resilient with only a small increase in the red RAG rating from June to July. Some care leavers had struggled not having family time with birth parents and as such a risk assessment for them had been developed. Some Care Leavers had struggled with mental health and received additional support from Child Action North West who offered some of their capacity to work with care leavers at no cost.

Children with Disabilities had been the most vulnerable in terms of their health. They were difficult to support as families didn’t want people going into their homes as they were shielding, so there had been pressures on families to

cope with that. Again, children were RAG rated and ten children were prioritised for a short break at Appletrees.

In addition to RAG rating children, Alyson informed the Group of the additional support that had been provided, some of those highlighted were;

- Virtual contact with families, garden visits
- Virtual contact with professionals and agencies
- Pupil premium payments
- Financial support to some care leavers
- Extra payments to foster carers
- Laptops to help children who were digitally deprived

Janette updated the Group that at the onset of COVID-19 they reached out to the public via the shuttle, social media and billboards, that if they had any concerns about a child's welfare they knew exactly who to contact in the Borough. Janette informed the Group that they had seen an 11% increase in the number of referrals from the NSPCC and also a solid number of referrals from members of the public. There was some evidence to suggest that the campaign had worked quite well.

During the first month of lockdown contacts were low with only 120 contacts into children's social care, of those only 8 referrals were generated. This was about 50% lower in terms of numbers of contacts. This gradually increased to pre COVID-19 rates by early May with 200 contacts per week and around 25 referrals. Since then, contacts had remained at around 220, but the number of referrals had increased to 57, which was a significant increase. The complexity of the numbers of contacts meant there was a need to intervene, and this would continually be monitored going forward. Regionally similar patterns of referrals were being noted.

With regards to the Safeguarding Teams, the Group heard that all children referred were RAG rated as red until an initial assessment visit had been carried out. It was noted that a red RAG rating meant a face to face visit, amber rating was a mix of face to face and virtual visits, and a green rating was primarily virtual visits and monitoring.

Janette informed the Group that Child Protection conferences had been held virtually but were now progressing towards a blended approach to these meetings, looking towards a socially distanced face to face meeting which was more meaningful and the often the best approach.

Janette added that the team had worked extremely hard during this difficult period and expressed her thanks to staff.

Paula Quinn, on behalf of the Foster Carers Association, also added that it had been extremely difficult for foster carers, for many different reasons during this time. Issues around being able to contact social workers during COVID-19 and also the distribution of laptops were also raised and it was agreed that this would be followed up outside of the meeting. Charlotte Hesketh clarified that social workers were able to request laptops for any child with a social worker and could continue to do so if a laptop had not yet been received.

Councillor Gunn expressed her sincere thanks to the unstinting dedication that foster carers have showed.

RESOLVED – That the update be noted.

8 Virtual School

The Chair invited Charlotte Hesketh to provide an update to the Group on the attainment data figures for Children in Our Care. Members were provided with a presentation which gave an insight into the attainment data for Blackburn with Darwen Children in Our Care compared to the national averages.

Charlotte explained that the Virtual School were required to report on educational performance of Children in Our Care who were in care for 12 months or more on the 31st March in the year in which they would sit their exams. The results provided at the meeting were obtained in the academic year 2018/19.

The Group heard that the Early Years Foundation Stage was teacher assessed. Within the cohort, there were 6 children in total, 33% of which were boys. Of the 6 children 50% were Special Educational Needs (SEN) and 83% were educated in Blackburn with Darwen schools. Overall 50% achieved a good level of development which was slightly above the national figure of 48%.

Within the Year 1 phonics cohort, the Group heard that pupils undertook a screening test which sought to test whether children had learned to decode words using phonics to the required level. There were 9 children in cohort, 44% of which were boys. Despite high SEN figures of 33% and 22% for children with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), the cohort had delivered good outcomes. 77.8% worked at the expected standard which was only marginally lower than the national average of 82.0%. This was a really good outcome for the cohort.

There were 10 children who formed Key Stage 1 with 70% being boys. Again this cohort had high percentages for SEN and EHCP. Members were informed that teachers used assessment judgements to report on the attainment, which took into account the pupil's performance in national curriculum tests in mathematics, English reading and grammar, punctuation and spelling. The data shown was slightly under the national figure for reading but with writing and maths the data was slightly above the national average. Again, given the high rate of SEN within this cohort, this was quite a positive outcome.

Within Key Stage 2 there were 15 children, 40% of which were SEN. Attainment was based on tests and teacher assessments. Referring to the combined measure (Reading, Writing, Maths), the group were informed that 40% achieved the expected standard in all of those areas which was slightly higher than the national average. It was highlighted that of the 9 that didn't achieve, 7 of those were boys.

Within Key Stage 4 there were 23 pupils in the cohort. 56.5% were boys, 26% had SEN, and 13% had an EHCP and just over half were educated within Blackburn with Darwen Schools. In recent years attainment measures had

changed. Charlotte explained that for Key Stage 4, the measures were now based on Attainment 8 which measured the average achievement of pupils in up to 8 qualifications, and Progress 8 which was a measure that aimed to capture the progress a pupil made from the end of KS2 to the end of KS4.

Charlotte informed the Group that GCSE's grades were now in the process of transitioning to being measured as 9-1, with 9 being the highest. Grade 4 would be considered as a 'standard' pass.

Lastly, the Group heard that last year was a really impressive year for the Year 11's. Grades were significantly higher than the national average in all the measures, with girls having out-performed the boys. There was also a first Grade 9 which was celebrated.

RESOLVED – That the update be noted.

9 Participation Report

The Chair invited Jaffer Hussain to update the Group on Participation.

Jaffer gave a verbal update to the Group about work that he had been concentrating on since the last meeting. COVID-19 had had a knock on effect on VOICE and had to be moved online. Young people felt that meeting on a weekly basis was too often and it was agreed to meet monthly instead. It was hoped that VOICE would begin to meet more regularly as soon as it was safe to do so. In the 4 sessions that have been held virtually, post cards had been developed and sent out to all young people in the Borough (via schools, social workers) highlighting key positive messages about staying safe and looking out for each other during the pandemic. It also included key contact numbers for them to contact.

In conjunction with Charlotte, Jaffer had carried out a piece of work which explored the educational impact of COVID-19 on children and young people. This brought about some interesting findings in relation to children missing being in school alongside their friends and being a structured space for learning.

Jaffer also highlighted that he had delivered a session for practice week with children and young people where views were obtained in relation to experiences with social workers and other key professionals and how communication could be improved going forward.

The Group learnt that Junior Voice unfortunately hadn't taken off due to the current circumstances but it was still a priority with work still ongoing. Jaffer had been working with the care leaver team to develop a mechanism where care leavers could be a part of shaping the direction of the services that they receive. Interviews, recruitment and selection of key personnel had continued, with young people having a pivotal role in making sure the right people be appointed. Young People had thoroughly enjoyed being part of that process.

Jaffer informed the Group that he had been tasked to do some research around digital engagement tools which would mean the continuation of engagement with children and young people going forward. Jaffer had been liaising with colleagues across the Country, and was in the process of

developing an internal mechanism through Microsoft Teams that would allow us to engage with as many young people as possible.

The Group heard that Jaffer had also been linking in with regional and national initiatives to see how best practice could be brought to Blackburn with Darwen, and in particular how Blackburn with Darwen could shape and influence programmes being delivered in other parts of the Country. One of the elements around that was a Young Inspectors Model which was in the initial stages of being developed. This would enable children, young people and key professionals to evaluate services.

Jaffer informed the Group that the champions had been continuing to do great work during the pandemic. Jaffer was in process of developing an annual report of what activities had been successfully delivered during the last year and what the plans were for the coming year.

RESOLVED – That the update be noted and that the annual report be delivered to a future meeting.

Signed: …….

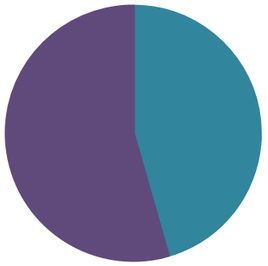
Date: …….

Chair of the meeting
at which the minutes were confirmed

Corporate Parenting

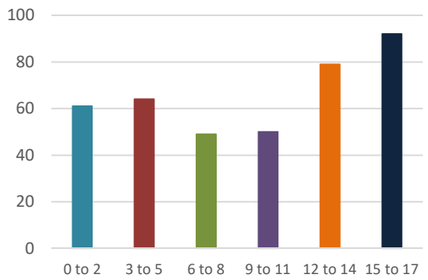
Children in Our Care - 28th September 2020

Gender of Children in Our Care



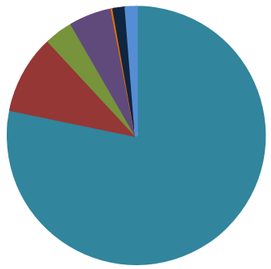
Female	180	46%
Male	215	54%
Total CIOC	395	

Age Profile of Children in Care



0 to 2	61	9 to 11	50
3 to 5	64	12 to 14	79
6 to 8	49	15 to 17	92

Ethnicity of Children in Our Care



White/UK	309	78%
Asian Pakistani	39	10%
Other	14	4%
Mixed	21	5%
Black	1	0%
White Other	6	2%
Asian Other, incl Indian	5	1%

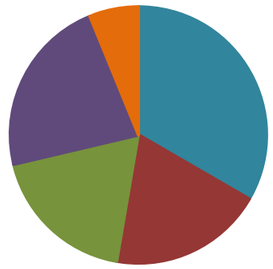
Where are children in care placed?

Foster Placements (in-house)	130
Placed with Parents	79
Friends & Family	67
Foster Placements (agency)	51
Adoptive Placements	19
Children's Homes (agency)	19
Res Accom Not Subject to CH Regs	11
Other	9
Children's Homes (in-house)	5
Prison/HMYOI	3
NHS	2
Residential School	0
Independent Living	0
Secure	0

# Children in Our Care with a Disability	16
% Children in Our Care with a Disability	4%

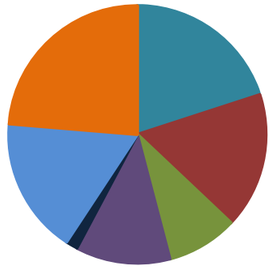
Entering Care Sep 19 to Aug 20

Age of children entering care



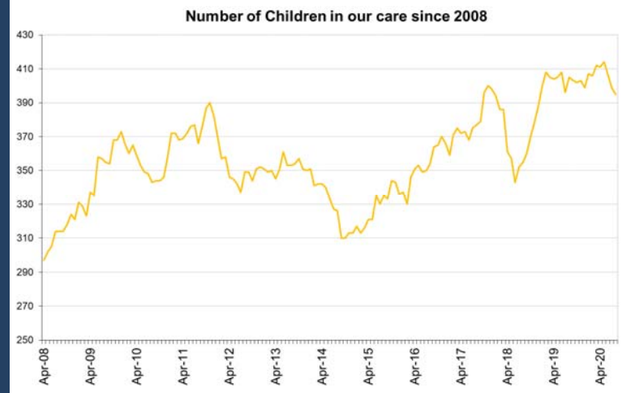
0 to 2	43 (33%)	11 to 15	29 (22%)
3 to 6	25 (19%)	16+	8 (6%)
7 to 10	24 (19%)		

Destinations of Care Leavers



Reached 18	27 (20%)
Returned to parents	23 (17%)
Moved in with relatives	12 (9%)
Other reason	16 (12%)
Child Arrangement Order	2 (1%)
Adopted	23 (17%)
Special guardianship	32 (24%)

Children in Our Care since 2008



Entering/Leaving Care since 2001

	Entering	Leaving	Net
Total in 2001	111	95	16
Total in 2002	103	117	-14
Total in 2003	131	134	-3
Total in 2004	102	104	-2
Total in 2005	119	100	19
Total in 2006	94	104	-10
Total in 2007	97	92	5
Total in 2008	114	104	10
Total in 2009	151	94	57
Total in 2010	112	123	-11
Total in 2011	155	128	27
Total in 2012	125	149	-24
Total in 2013	123	120	3
Total in 2014	89	125	-36
Total in 2015	163	139	24
Total in 2016	170	139	31
Total in 2017	161	143	18
Total in 2018	162	153	9
Total in 2019	155	144	11
Total in 2020	76	79	-3

**Please note this table is calculated by calendar years*

CLA as at 31st March

	2019/20	2018/19
CLA as at 31st March	**411**	**403**
Male	228 (55%)	229 (57%)
Female	183 (45%)	174 (43%)
0 to 2	73 (18%)	88 (22%)
3 to 5	63 (15%)	45 (11%)
6 to 8	52 (13%)	47 (12%)
9 to 11	52 (13%)	58 (14%)
12 to 14	77 (19%)	79 (20%)
15 to 17	94 (23%)	86 (21%)
White/UK	327 (80%)	318 (79%)
Asian Pakistani	42 (10%)	32 (8%)
Other	13 (3%)	16 (4%)
Mixed	18 (4%)	19 (5%)
Black	1 (0%)	3 (1%)
White Other	4 (1%)	7 (2%)
Asian Other, incl Indian	6 (2%)	8 (2%)

Entering Care / Destinations of Care Leavers

	2019/20	2018/19
Age of children entering care		
0 to 2	57 (38%)	80 (47%)
3 to 6	35 (23%)	25 (15%)
7 to 10	20 (13%)	24 (14%)
11 to15	31 (21%)	26 (15%)
16+	8 (5%)	16 (9%)
Destinations of Care Leavers		
Reached 18	34 (24%)	27 (19%)
Returned to parents	32 (23%)	19 (13%)
Moved in with relatives	10 (7%)	14 (10%)
Other Reason	19 (13%)	19 (13%)
Child Arrangement Order	3 (2%)	5 (4%)
Adopted	21 (15%)	26 (18%)
Special guardianship	23 (16%)	33 (23%)

Performance compared with national, regional and comparator averages

	Current - BwD***	Comparator Average*	Regional Average*	National Average*
Number of children in our care (CIOC) per 10,000 0-18 year old population	102	104	94	65
% in foster care	63%	73%	67%	72%
Of which - in-house provider or family and friends approved care	50%			46%
Of which - Other provider	13%			26%
% in adoption placements	5%	4%	3%	3%
% in residential/resi schools/secure/other residential provision	9%	13%	12%	13%
% placed at home with parents	20%	9%	13%	7%
Placement Stability (% of CIOC with 3 placements or more in a yr)	8%	10%	10%	10%
Placement Stability (% of CIOC in same placement for past 2 yrs & in care for 2.5 yrs+	65%	69%	69%	69%
% of Care Leavers aged 19-21 in touch with the LA	98%			
% of Care Leavers aged 19-21 years old in Education, Employment or Training	45%	51%	51%	52%
% of Care Leavers aged 19-21 years old in suitable accommodation	98%	88%	88%	85%
Adoption Scorecard (rolling 3 yrs) - entry into care to adoption placement (days)	431			486
Adoption Scorecard (rolling 3 yrs) - Placement Order to matching (days)	162			201
% of children in our care aged 10-17, in care for over 12 months, who have offended	0.6%			
Number of unaccompanied asylum seekers in care	2			

**Comparable information as at March 2019 **CIOC offending data for Q1 2020/21 only ***Current BwD data as at 28th September 2020*

16–25 Care Leavers Strategy: Twelve-month 2020/21 Action Plan

Action	By whom	By when	Impact - how can we tell
To ensure Care Leavers have a current Health passport and that support to attend appointments is given.	• LAC Nurse • Personal Advisors • Social workers • Support workers	September 2020	• Health information recorded. • Care Leavers feedback evidencing improved support for accessing health appointments. • Support being provided from Revive Service.
Care Leavers to have the resources to undertake home learning as part of college courses and/or training.	• New Directions • Blackburn College • Leaving Care Team	September 2020	• Numbers of Care Leavers having College experience. • Care Leavers feedback regarding confidence and readiness for applying for jobs, apprenticeships, or further training. • EET Steering Group – New Directions & Leaving Care Service to monitor.
To ensure that all Care Leavers live in suitable accommodation.	• Leaving Care Team Manager • Head of Service/Service Lead • Housing Support Manager • Housing providers	September 2020	• Data regarding Care Leavers living in suitable accommodation. • Feedback from Care Leavers regarding satisfaction with their accommodation.
Seek approval for an annual clothing allowance for Care Leavers aged 18-25.	• Service Leader to submit a paper to the Corporate Parenting Executive Board and Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education	September 2020	• All care leavers over 18 have essential/seasonal clothing twice yearly
Care Leavers are supported in applying for apprenticeships within the Council.	• Leaving Care Team • H.R. Service • New Directions • Training providers	October 2020	• Increase in number of Care Leavers being successful in gaining apprenticeships. • EET Steering group to monitor.

16–25 Care Leavers Strategy: Twelve-month 2020/21 Action Plan

Action	By whom	By when	Impact - how can we tell
Continue to consult with Care Leavers and involve them in service development.	• Participation Officer • Participation Champions • Young People	November 2020	• Better outcomes evidenced by Care Leavers' feedback.
Digital resources are developed to improve communication with Care Leavers (e.g. app)	• Participation Officer • Participation Champion • Young People • Service Lead/managers	December 2020	• Better communication and outcomes for Care Leavers. • Increased communication with young people in their decisions.
Traineeship programme to be developed for Care Leavers.	• Leaving Care Team • HR • Training providers	December 2020	• Numbers of Care leavers completing traineeship and successful in gaining apprenticeships.
Care Leavers to have opportunities of gaining work experience.	• All departments • Health Providers • Partners • New Directions	March 2021	• Numbers of Care Leavers having work experience opportunities • Care Leavers feedback regarding confidence and readiness for applying for jobs, apprenticeships, or further training. • EET Steering Group – New Directions / Leaving Care Service to monitor
To introduce the "Moving on, Moving up" programme with care leavers to support their preparation for adulthood.	• Personal Advisors • Social Workers • Foster Carers • Support Workers	March 2021	• Feedback from Young People regarding their views of being prepared for independence.
To regularly review the finances of Care Leavers.	• Head of Service • Director of Children Services • Corporate Parenting Executive Board	March 2021	• Young people are financially stable.

Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council

Care Leavers Strategy

2020-2022

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Introduction

In this introduction, our Director of Children's Services sets out our vision for care leavers in Blackburn with Darwen, and our next steps.

Making sure that we are ambitious Corporate Parents for our Care Leavers is one of our department's top priorities. I am pleased that we have set out our commitments to our Care Leavers in this updated strategy which we have developed over the last few months with Care Leavers, staff and carers.

Our next steps will be to make sure that every aspect of this strategy is implemented in order that every Care Leaver gets the support that they need to transition successfully into adulthood, and for every young person in Blackburn with Darwen to achieve their potential. This is what all parents want for their children, and we should expect nothing less of ourselves and of you.

Our Corporate Parenting Executive Board will continue to monitor the impact of this strategy and action plan with our Care Leavers. We will continue to ensure that we work together as a Council and with our partners to understand the positive difference we are making.

Jayne Ivory,
Director of Children's Services

Overview of Strategy

This strategy reflects a 'whole' system integrated approach to support our Care Leavers and it provides a framework for the council, elected members, officers and partners to fulfil our duties and responsibilities as corporate parents.

The document outlines what we have achieved and areas that we would like to develop further. The successful implementation of this strategy will result in the following benefits:

- Improved health and well-being of our Care Leavers
- Emotional resilience
- Improved placement stability, safety and quality
- Better attainment at school / college / university for our young people
- Young people leaving care on an educational or work route that meets their ambitions
- The best use of available resources

This strategy sets out how we will deliver our commitment to Care Leavers over the next three years. Delivering this strategy requires a coordinated and sustained effort across Children's Services, other council departments and partner agencies.

This effort will be focused on improving service standards and everyday practice, to be able to meet the challenges that the current economic climate brings. The Strategy will be reviewed every six months and an update against our vision and key priorities within this document will be provided.

Corporate Parents

When children and young people cannot safely stay at home, it is up to us to and give them the care, support and stability that they deserve.

All young people are likely to need support during the transition to adulthood. Young people leaving care are likely to be particularly vulnerable due to their previous life experiences and often more limited immediate family support.

Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council does not see leaving care as a process driven by the age of the young person, rather that plans for each young person will be based on an assessment of their emotional maturity and coping skills.

Transition to adulthood is often a turbulent time: transitions are not always sequential. Young people can be regarded as an adult in some areas but not in others. For many young people, their transition to adulthood can be extended and delayed until they are emotionally and financially ready and they have the qualifications they need and aspire to, so that they have the opportunity to achieve their economic potential.

Young people from care may not have this option. Whilst most young people know they can call on the support of their families to help them through unforeseen difficulties, care leavers may not be able to rely on family support if things do not work out as they make their journey into adulthood.

With this in mind and following the 'spirit' of the Leaving Care Act 2000 and associated Regulations, we aim to act as a 'good' Corporate Parent to offer support to our children who have left care so they feel that they can turn to us as their support. We want our children and young people to have everything that good parents want for their children, and to get the same level of care and support that other young people receive from their parents. We will treat Care Leavers with respect and dignity by understanding their experiences and listening to their voices.

Corporate Parents

This may be in the form of advice and assistance or more pragmatic support as any other good parent would offer.

All care leavers should have access to services which are appropriate to their needs, including those which arise from their gender, racial origin, cultural and linguistic background, sexual orientation and disability.

Children's Services, in partnership with others, will act as a 'good parent'. This means accepting that the transition to adulthood can include more than one change of direction or breakdown in arrangements, during which the young person will need support and encouragement to learn from what has happened and restart their journey.

Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council recognises that to be good corporate parents we need to put children and young people first, be powerful advocates for them to receive the best services and opportunities, to help and support them to be ambitious and make a successful transition to adulthood.

Who are Care Leavers?

A Care Leaver is someone who has spent time in the care of the local authority. The following young people, who are statutorily entitled to support, are part of this group:

- **Eligible** – children aged 16-17 who are still in care, and who have been in care for 13 weeks or more from the age of 14 and have been in care at some point when they were between the ages of 16 and 17.

- **Relevant** – children aged between 16 and 17 who have left care. This category of Care Leaver also includes children who are detained in institutions such as prisons or hospitals.

- **Former Relevant** – young people who are between the ages of 18 and 21 and who were previously eligible and/or relevant, and who are entitled to ongoing support to enable their successful transition to independence.

- **Qualifying** – a young person who has been a CLA for at least 24 hours, post his/her 16th birthday. Young people covered by the fact that they were being privately fostered or subject to a special guardianship order. A young person who has had a number of planned short term breaks no longer than 4 weeks, and after each one they returned to their parents/or someone with parental responsibility. This will particularly apply to disabled young people who have regular periods of short-term breaks. Under the 2010 regulations this group is deemed to be qualifying.

- Young people aged between the ages of 21 and 25 and who were previously eligible and/or relevant, who are in education training or employment and who wish to receive an ongoing service.

- Young people aged 21-25 who are current or returning care leavers requesting a service under the Children & Social Work Act 2017 guidelines.

Our Pledges

In 2019, senior leaders from across the council came together to explore their responsibilities to our Care Leavers and make pledges to you.

These pledges are now being used by the Corporate Parenting Executive Board to monitor how well we are meeting the needs of care leavers in Blackburn with Darwen. Whilst some of these pledges are listed below, we all have a duty of care towards our care experienced young people and to our care leavers.

1. I promise to listen to what our children want and to meet with those that want to meet me
Denise Park, Chief Executive

2. I'll support our children to grow to have a happy, healthy life and experience success and overcome challenges
Jayne Ivory, Director of Children's Services

3. Help to lift aspirations by linking young people to new employment/business growth opportunities
Martin Kelly, Director of Growth and Development

4. I promise to raise awareness and develop a targeted offer around 19+ learning and careers support
Heather Taylor, Head of Service (Adults & Prevention)

5. I pledge to provide opportunities for apprenticeships so that Care Leavers can gain skills and qualifications
Dwayne Lowe, Head of Service (Environment & Operations)

6. I will review what Public Health and Wellbeing can do to give more access for Looked After Children to leisure, culture and sports facilities in Blackburn with Darwen
Claire Ramwell, Head of Service (Public Health & Wellbeing)

The Local Picture

Key statistics from our Corporate Parenting Dashboard and other sources - April 2020.

60

Number of Care Leavers aged 16 to 18

155

Number of Care Leavers aged 18 to 25

97%

Percentage of Care Leavers aged 19 to 21 in suitable accomodation
compared to national average of 84%

48%

Percentage of Care Leavers aged 19 to 21 in education, employment or training

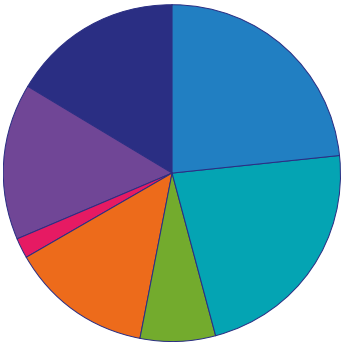
100%

Percentage of Care Leavers aged 19 to 21 in touch with the council

Where are Children in Our Care placed?
0-18 years only

Foster Placements (in-house)	143
Placed with Parents	70
Friends & Family	68
Foster Placements (agency)	60
Children's Homes (agency)	24
Adoptive Placements	17
Res. Accom. (not subject to CH regs)	12
Other	6
Children's Homes (in-house)	4
Prison/HMYOI	2
NHS	2
Residential School	1
Independent Living	1
Secure	0

Destinations of Care Leavers



Reached 18	33	23%
Returned to parents	32	23%
Moved in with relatives	10	7%
Other reason	19	14%
Child Arrangement Order	3	2%
Adopted	21	15%
Special Guardianship	23	16%

Our Vision & Priorities

A vision has been developed based on six key areas to enable us to drive an outcome based approach to help support our Care Leavers.

Our Vision & Priorities

Be Happy

Objectives

- Care leavers feel that they belong, have a sense of purpose and are part of the community.
- Care leavers have a voice and their opinions are heard and valued
- They have a choice of activities and are given opportunities to give back to the community they live in.
- Promote support networks for young people leaving care.

You said...

- You want to feel listened to and be involved in decisions about you.

We will...

- Include you in decisions about you and planning for your future
- Promote your wellbeing and support you to make friendships
- Help you to be involved in activities

Our Vision & Priorities

Be Healthy

Objectives

- Strengthening Mental Health support to young people through a multi-agency response.
- Supporting young people with dual diagnosis.
- The physical and emotional health of care leavers will be supported by a range of appropriate services and support will be in place for young people transitioning from children to adult services.
- Every care leaver will have their Health Records (health information whilst being CLA).
- Ensure care leavers have the skills and knowledge to eat healthily and live a healthy lifestyle.
- Developing peer mentoring services.

You said...

- The Leaving Care Service should provide access to interpreters to improve access to health services for those who English is not their first language.
- The Revive Team and CAMHS should support young people after 18.

We will...

- Ensure that you have a health passport.
- Provide you with current Pathway Plan that identifies any health needs.
- Support you to attend any medical appointments.

Our Vision & Priorities

Be Ambitious

Objectives

- Ensuring skills and strengths are promoted and support care leavers to have ambitions.
- Encouraging and supporting all care leavers to remain engaged in education, take up training opportunities and undertake activities aimed at improving employability.
- Ensure good access to further and higher education as well as better support whilst in further education, at college or university.
- Ensure access to relevant additional adviser support, work experience, apprenticeships. Working with Job Centre Plus or other relevant providers to access direct personalised employment support to those care leavers who face greater difficulties in finding work, including support to help them volunteer, train or undertake work experience.

You said...

- There are not enough opportunities for asylum seeking young people.
- Travel passes for university students are needed.
- Driving lessons should be offered to increase employability.
- Apprenticeships are not paid enough.
- Free WiFi would help care leavers who are in education.
- Laptops should be given to those in full time education.

We will...

- Continue to offer apprenticeships across the council.
- Look into offering a Traineeship course with Training 2000.
- Look at providing work experience within the council.

Our Vision & Priorities

Be Safe

Objectives

- Support to settle in accommodation.
- Ensuring minimal changes of worker (i.e. only changes where unavoidable circumstances).
- Ensuring accommodation is felt to be safe and suitable.
- Extending foster placements by way of Staying Put.
- Broadening the range of housing provision through commissioning activity.
- Ensuring floating support is accessible.

You said...

- That property needs to be clean and liveable.

We will...

- Continue to make sure accommodation is of good standard.
- Ensure we provide a choice of accommodation where possible.

Our Vision & Priorities

Be Independent

Objectives

- Care leavers leave care at a time when they are ready.
- Care leavers receive high quality on-going support so that they do not feel lonely and isolated.
- Care leavers have been equipped with the skills to live independently.
- Care leavers have someone they can contact for help when they need it.
- Care leavers with complex needs have a supported transition plan.

You said...

- You need practical support to help set up your new home e.g. DIY skills.
- You need access finances to heat your homes and feed yourselves.
- The £2,000 Leaving Care Grant is not enough to buy everything that is needed to furnish a new house or flat.
- A clothing allowance is needed for college/university and interviews.
- The current weekly allowance of £59 is not enough to live off.

We will...

- Provide a one-off 'Setting up Home' allowance of up to £2,000.
- Provide additional support when required e.g. cold weather payments.
- Provide Care Leavers with a Higher Education Bursary of £2,000 if they are studying towards a degree.

Our Vision & Priorities

Be Resilient

Objectives

- Care leavers are supported to identify positive relationships and make good community links.
- Care leavers are aware of their rights and responsibilities.
- Talents are nurtured, recognised and celebrated. Individual's identity is also promoted as positive and again, recognised and celebrated.
- Care leavers are confident and able to deal with life's challenges.

You said...

- Care leavers need to be given support that is more practical.
- You need access to more advice on your rights and entitlements.

We will...

- Provide information to Care Leavers so they understand how to access support from our assigned Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) worker. DWP will ensure that Care Leavers who claim Universal Credit, and are in need of help to manage their money and pay bills, have access to personal budgeting support.
- Support our Care Leavers in making an advance claim to ensure early release of benefits, one month prior to their 18th birthday.

Means of Delivery

Participation & Voice

> Participation is the process by which individuals and groups of individuals can influence decision making and bring about change
> **Adapted from Treseder P. 1997**

> Participation enables young people to come together and make decisions that have a positive influence, by using their energy and passion to change the world for a better place
> **BwD Voice Group, March 2020**

> It's important we get involved because adults don't know how we feel or what we need, they just think they do!
> **Young person, Blackburn with Darwen**

All children and young people have the right to have their views, wishes and feelings taken into account, when decisions are being taken about their life. These decisions could be about their family, school or life in the community.

This right is protected under Article 12 in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. This has been adopted into United Kingdom legislation, such as the Children's Act 2004, and all services and agencies have a duty to comply with this right.

It's important that we acknowledge the role children and young people can play in shaping service delivery and design. This strategy highlights the way that we ensure that we are listening to and championing the voices of our Care Leavers. Care Leavers are supported to participate in the Leaving Care Forum (LCF) which meets monthly. The LCF provides Care Leavers with an opportunity to inform the Local Authority of what is working well, what we could do better and how they as service users would like to be involved in the development of key services.

In addition, Care Leavers support with the training of interview skills so that their younger peers can be involved in the recruitment and selection of key personnel. A representative from the Care Leavers community is also a member

Means of Delivery

of the Corporate Parenting Specialist Advisory Group and the Corporate Parenting Executive Board. Through these high level decision making bodies, the representative ensures that the community is being supported as fully as possibly by everyone who works in the council.

Personal Advisers

All care leavers are assigned a Personal Adviser when they turn 16 3/4 years old and have an allocated case worker post-18. Personal advisers review pathway plans (PWP) with young people to ensure they are getting the right support, particularly in relation to financial entitlements and planning as well as accommodation and accessing services.

Children in Care Council

CHICC's Care Leaver Group represents the views of care leavers, aged 18 onwards. They meet monthly to discuss issues related to leaving care. Members of the group are keen to ensure that young people are supported through transition to adulthood. The group also runs an annual event for all care leavers in Blackburn with Darwen.

Staying Put Policy

Our Staying Put Policy provides detail of the process to support young people to remain with their foster carers beyond 18 years of age where both the young person and foster carer would like the arrangement to continue.

Joint Housing Protocol

The Joint Housing Protocol, whilst also having a remit beyond care leavers including vulnerable families and young people, outlines how Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council enables care leavers to move to social housing in a planned manner, avoiding the need to present as homeless. When a young person leaving care wishes to be prioritised for accomodation, they will be referred to our Housing Needs team by their Personal Adviser. You will then be invited to a housing options interview with a Housing Needs Officer during

Means of Delivery

which they will check if you meet the criteria for priority housing. They will also request a supporting letter or email from your Personal Adviser and a copy of your Pathway Plan. Once received, a meeting will be arranged for you and your Personal Adviser to meet a landlord. If eligible for priority housing, the Housing Needs team will then award this to you and provide advice and assistance.

Transition to Adulthood Panel

The Transition to Adulthood Panel is multi-agency, comprising of partner representation at a level that allows decision making and accountability on behalf of their organisation. The Panel is in place to support the effective delivery of appropriate services to reduce risk for young people, particularly those transitioning from Children's to Adult Services where they are not meeting service criteria.

Corporate Parenting Dashboard

Our performance data is analysed on a monthly basis, following which actions are put in place where performance improvement is required. We monitor key data including the percentage of care leavers in suitable accommodation, care leaver destinations, the number of care leavers that remain in touch with the council, and the number of care leavers in education, employment or training. Being ambitious for our care leavers is an important part of our vision and we are seeking to increase the number in education, employment or training.

This dashboard informs the Leaving Care team's development plan which is overseen by the Corporate Parenting Special Advisory Group. Regular reporting on progress and performance is made to the Corporate Parenting Exec Board.

Virtual School

The Virtual School brings together information about children and young people who are looked after by Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council as if they attended a single school. They continue to support care leavers with further education, training and employment up to the age of 19, or 25 if they attend further or higher education.

Multi-agency Working

Our aim is to work in partnership with other organisations to deliver holistic support to our care leavers, ensuring they are receiving the appropriate support for their individual needs.

We will continue to work with partner agencies and support them in their roles to ensure that care leavers are able to achieve happy and fulfilling lives. Alongside Children's Services there is a dedicated team of multi-agency professionals all seeking to ensure that the needs of our care leavers are met:

16–25 Care Leavers Strategy: Twelve-month 2020/21 Strategy on a Page

Our Vision

Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council and our partners are working together to support, advise and guide young people to live their lives to the full potential giving them every opportunity to:

1. **Be Happy**
   Belonging, a sense of purpose and having your voice heard.
2. **Be Healthy**
   Physical and emotional health and access to your health records.
3. **Be Ambitious**
   Being engaged in work, study or training and learning new skills.
4. **Be Safe**
   Safe housing, extension of foster placements and floating support.
5. **Be Independent**
   Quality, ongoing support to help you leave care when you are ready to.
6. **Be Resilient**
   Positive relationships and links to your community, to build your confidence.

Our Priorities

Be Happy
- Care leavers feel that they belong and have a sense of purpose.
- Care leavers have a voice and their opinions are heard.
- They are given opportunities to give back to the community.
- Young people leaving care have support networks.

Be Healthy
- Mental health support given to young people is strengthened.
- Young people with a dual diagnosis are supported.
- The physical and emotional health of care leavers is supported.
- Support in place for the transition from children's to adult services.
- Care leavers are given access to their health records/passport.
- Care leavers able to eat healthily and lead a healthy lifestyle.
- Peer mentoring services are developed further.

Be Ambitious
- The skills and strengths of care leavers are promoted/supported.
- Care leavers are encouraged and supported to remain engaged with education and/or training and to improve their employability.
- Access to further and higher education is good, and support for care leavers studying at college and university is improved.
- Care leavers have access to work experience and apprenticeships.

Be Safe
- Care leavers are given support to settle into their accommodation.
- A smooth transition from the 16+ to the 18+ teams is delivered.
- Accommodation is felt to be safe and suitable by the care leaver.
- The range of housing provision is broadened.
- Foster placements are extended by way of the Staying Put scheme.

Be Independent
- Care leavers leave care at a time when they are ready.
- They receive ongoing support and do not feel lonely or isolated.
- Care leavers have been equipped with skills to live independently.
- They have someone they can contact for help when they need it.

Be Resilient
- Care leavers are supported to identify positive relationships.
- Care leavers are aware of their rights and responsibilities.
- Their talents are nurtured, recognised and celebrated.
- Care leavers are confident and able to deal with life challenges.
- Their identity is promoted, recognised and celebrated.

You Said...

1. You want to feel listened to and be involved in decisions about you
2. The Leaving Care Service should provide access to interpreters to improve access to health services to health services for those whom English is not their first language.
3. The Revive Team and CAMHS should support young people after the age of 18.
4. There are not enough opportunities for asylum seeking young people.
5. University students need travel passes.
6. Driving lessons should be offered to increase employability.
7. Apprenticeships are not paid enough.
8. Free WiFi would help care leavers in education.
9. Laptops should be given to care leavers in full time education.
10. Property needs to be clean and liveable.
11. Care leavers need practical support to help set up your new home.
12. Care leavers need access to finances to heat your homes and feed yourselves.
13. The £2,000 Leaving Care grant is not enough to buy everything that is needed to furnish a new house or flat.
14. A clothing allowance is needed for college, university and job interviews.
15. The current weekly allowance of £59 is not enough to live off.
16. Care leavers need to be more support that is practical.
17. Care leavers need access to more advice about their rights and entitlements.

We Will...

Be Happy
- Include Care Leavers in decisions and planning their future.
- Promote wellbeing and support young people to make friendships.
- Help you be involved in activities.

Be Healthy
- Ensure young people have a health passport.
- Provide current pathway plan that identifies any health needs.
- Provide support to attend any medical appointments.

Be Ambitious
- Continue to offer apprenticeships across the council.
- Traineeship course with Training 2000.
- Provide work experience within the council.

Be Safe
- Continue to make sure accommodation provided is of a good standard.
- Ensure we provide a choice of accommodation where possible.

Be Independent
- Provide a one off 'Setting up Home' allowance of up to £2,000.
- Provide additional support when required e.g. cold weather payments.
- Provide Care Leavers with a Higher Education Bursary of £2,000 if they are studying towards a degree.
- Develop and have the knowledge, skills to live independently.

Be Resilient
- Provide information to care leavers to live independently.
- Guidance and support with their finances.
- Personal Budgeting Support.
- Guidance with benefits and advance claims.