Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council

Care Leavers Strategy

2020-2022

Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council

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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

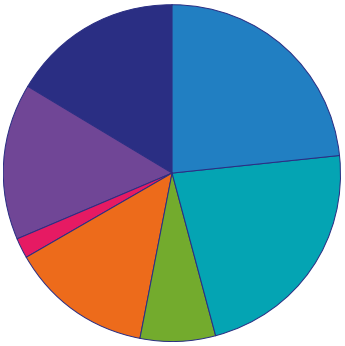
100%

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.