Northamptonshire County Council

Leaving Care Strategy

2017 to 2020
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1. Summary

The vision
We want young people leaving care in Northamptonshire to be:

- Aspirant
- Resilient and confident
- Physically and emotionally healthy
- Financially stable
- Educated, trained and employed
- Housed suitably
- Responsible citizens.

Young people become aspirational by believing that they can achieve. Our remit as a good corporate parent should be to help them to set high targets and standards and support them to reach their goals.

To achieve these aims we need to help them be strong enough to weather disappointments and rejections and to support them to ‘bounce back’ and learn from their experiences.

We need to help young people learn to manage their own money and look after their affairs. We must help them to understand that financial independence and security is empowering and liberating.

Our expectation is that young people emerge into the world of work, further training and higher education with a plan, even if that is subject to change over time. Our staff will be able to advise and support actions aimed at reaching the desired goal.

Young people need to understand how to maintain stable and secure suitable accommodation. This requires an understanding of their responsibilities to themselves and to others.
Young people need to have an understanding of their health histories and an awareness of how to maintain their general well-being.

**The history**

In 2012 the Government drew up a Care Leavers’ Charter, a list of promises to care leavers for which local authorities as corporate parents, would be accountable. In Northamptonshire, young people regularly review the Charter through the Children in Care Council (CICC) and the newly launched Leaving Care Council (LCC), and have agreed that it remains a standard to which we will work as corporate parents. In summary, the Charter sets out the following promises to young people leaving care on behalf of Northamptonshire County Council:

- To respect and honour your identity;
- To believe in you;
- To listen to you;
- To inform you;
- To be a lifelong champion;
- To support you;
- To find you a home.
In 2016 the Government published a more detailed strategy, ‘Keep on Caring: Supporting Young People from Care to Independence’ setting out in law for the first time what it means for a local authority to be a good corporate parent, organised into five outcomes. Northamptonshire will deliver against these outcomes for young people who are leaving care, and they form the backbone of our strategy:

1. All young people leaving care will be better prepared and supported to live independently;
2. Our care leavers will have improved access to education, employment and training opportunities;
3. Our care leavers will experience stability in their lives, and feel safe and secure;
4. Our care leavers will have improved access to health support; and
5. Our care leavers should achieve financial stability.

The last Ofsted Inspection of Northamptonshire in February 2016 said care leavers have frequent contact with personal advisers and other professionals. Ofsted said that care leavers in Northamptonshire develop good relationships with personal advisers. They receive health passports on reaching the age of 18 years and this provides them with information about their needs and history. Pathway plans are produced at regular intervals, though there were concerns that the action plans did not sufficiently challenge young people nor were aspirational enough.

Care leavers in Northamptonshire were seen as well informed about their rights and entitlements, assisted by information about finance and a leaving care guide. The inspection identified concerns in respect of the relatively small numbers of young people who continued living with their foster carers post 18 (Staying Put), the numbers of young people who were not in employment, education or training and the absence of specialist accommodation.
2. **What do we need to improve?**

**Workforce**

All young people should be better prepared and supported to live independently. Our support should be focused on training our staff to better support and develop additional skills in young people at the right time in their lives. Personal advisers need to be able help prompt young people to change their lives. This is done through learning new skills of working with young people but also through tenacity and persistence. We also need to have an open mind to the personal adviser model, as described in the Keep on Caring strategy and consider ways in which the role could be further developed.

**Systems**

We need to ensure that our plans and processes for young people are meaningful and fit for purpose. The Ofsted inspection identified positives in the infrastructure we had developed for care leavers but had concerns about our success in challenging and helping young people to make changes. Care leavers have echoed these views and told us that our Personal Advisers need to focus on the basics of somewhere stable and safe to live. They also need them to be knowledgable about opportunities for advancement through career and educational choices and to be able to prepare young people at critical points such as job interviews and for when things have go wrong.

**Resources**

We need to ensure that we maximise our use of existing resources and identify a means by which new and additional resources can be sourced.

**Identify additional capacity**

There are some young people who, through their previous experiences, have additional needs. To meet these needs personal advisers have to deliver proportionately more time to these young people. If personal advisers have to provide more input with one young person rather than another there will need to be changes to the way in which business is delivered.
3. What we will do.

Workforce development and systems

- Further develop our model for teaching young people new skills and knowledge in caring for themselves. This will mean consideration as to the independent accreditation of the Daily Living Programme which has been refined already. The programme seeks to equip young people with a basic grounding in independence skills involving, finance, health, benefits, housing, cooking, drugs and alcohol advice. The current model provides young people with learning concentrated into a course over a period of one week.

- Develop pathway plans with young people that encourage and reflect their aspirations. As part of this planning our personal advisors will learn new skills to promote change in young people such as life coaching. They will also be trained in welfare benefits advice so as to assist young people in obtaining what they are due. Where this becomes a more significant problem, they will have the necessary skills and knowledge to advocate for them or obtain that advocacy elsewhere.

- Care leavers are over represented in statistics concerning mental health. In December 2016 we delivered a multi-agency conference in Northamptonshire on emotional well-being. We need to now ensure that our staff are identifying those young people at risk, providing appropriate inputs and networking with other agencies in health and the third sector to meet need.

- Develop the care leavers’ centre in Northampton, Russell House, as a site to further promote skills for independence. We will also explore building resources within the local authority’s estate in other parts of the county.

- Further investigate a peer mentoring model to provide young people with relevant experience and support. This would be in the form of telephone support from someone who had been a care leaver and was therefore capable of offering appropriate empathy and advice. We also intend to recruit a Development Officer at Russell House whose role will be to develop further apprenticeships in semi-skilled employment and develop partnerships in the private sector.
• Working with our colleagues in the Prospects Team, we will work to ensure that the Pupil Premium Plus is utilised for the benefit of maximising young people’s attainment.

Accommodation

Young people need to have accommodation options as they move on into independence. These accommodation options should be of good quality, and enable all young people to have choice over their accommodation pathway to independence. Also these options should offer continuity of care with providers young people know, and with whom they have built positive relationships.

Systems: Through our commissioning process with current and new providers we will be requesting that providers use the Young People’s Outcomes Star framework, which we are embedding within our pathway plans. This allows for a joined up assessment and review process which clearly identifies each young person’s level of need, areas to be improved, and impact of support and interventions. There will also be the development of a Leaving Care
Accommodation Multi-Agency Panel, which will review all young people’s leaving care accommodation applications.

**Resources:** We have already secured cabinet approval in March 2017 for a number of accommodation initiatives, which include:

- Implementing a new funding model for foster parents who offer Staying Put arrangements to young people post 18 years.
- Tendering for the new training flats development in central Northampton
- Developing new supported lodgings services so young people can choose to stay within a family home
- Improving the current Independent Supported Accommodation framework to ensure quality and best value.

In addition to all this, we will pilot Staying Close arrangements for young people, in residential homes with our block purchase provider.

**Identify additional capacity:** Through our current contracts and frameworks for leaving care accommodation, there needs to be a clear emphasis to improve quality and best value. The support hours offered to young people will be needs led, which will be supported by the new Young People’s Outcomes Star framework, to allow young people the right level of support when they need it. We will continue with the recruitment of foster carers, to ensure there is no reduction in foster carer placements as young people choose Staying Put arrangements. The pilot Staying Close programme will give more flexibility and throughput with block purchase placements, as well as offering young people a mixed property portfolio of accommodation options as they move on to independence.

**Accommodation developments and systems**

- Increase the number of Staying Put arrangements for young people within foster placements by providing a new payment scheme to incentivise Staying Put options, as agreed by Cabinet.
- Recruit foster carers so that our stock of carers does not decrease
• Pilot Staying Close arrangements for young people in residential homes with our block purchase provider Homes2inspire. This pilot will develop a staying close model for Northamptonshire, which will inform and drive future commissioning intentions for both Northamptonshire and the East Midlands Regional Children’s Framework.

• Increase the number of training flats for young people leaving care which will include the 20 new flats being commissioned at Belinda Ferrison House.

• Through the commissioning of Belinda Ferrison House, further floating support options for young people moving on to independence will be created by the new provider.

• Our intention is for all new commissioned services to be required to implement the Young People Outcomes Star framework, as the tool for assessment and reviews.

• The re-tendering of the Independent Supported Accommodation framework will be brought forward as agreed by Cabinet in March 2017 to ensure accommodation is of the best quality, achieves value for money, and delivers good outcomes.

• Build staffing capacity in provision so that support staff are at the same level as personal advisors, and where agreed, carry out similar duties.

• To develop in-county residential provision with block purchase providers, to enable more young people, where appropriate, to move back into the county.

Improved access to health support.

• In view of research (NICE indicate that 60 per cent of care leavers have emotional or mental health problems) showing a higher proportion of both physical and emotional health difficulties among care leavers, we will ensure that health assessments for young people (aged 16 and 17) happen when they should, and that those young people aged 18 plus also have support to address their health needs with a focus on their emotional well-being and mental health, drugs and alcohol. This support should also provide an equitable access to unaccompanied asylum seeking children to health services.

• We will continue to focus on providing positive transitions for young people with a learning disability or mental health diagnosis through the Transitions Steering Group supported by Safeguarding Childrens Services, Adult Services and the Named Nurse.
for Looked After Children. Historically there had been a difficulty in Northamptonshire with Adults and Children’s Services not talking to each other effectively. We have now established good communication between agencies using the Transitions Panel as a means of joining provision. This panel effectively builds on the ATLAS panel that is in place for looked after children and serves a similar purpose for those with additional emotional and behavioural needs.

- There are now strong relationships between Child, Adolescent and Mental Health Services and this has assisted us in planning transition arrangements longer term.
- The Health Passport is given to young people at the last Looked After Review before they reach 18 years and provides background information to young people so that they can understand salient health history. This is particularly important to young people as they enter the wider world. Young people who have moved placements may not have an understanding of their past history and information including health issues can go astray.
Citizenship

Young people who are or have been involved in the criminal justice system can face multiple disadvantages in accessing services, and this is particularly true for those who are leaving care. This group may need additional support to achieve at the same level as other care leavers. Workers within the leaving care system and the Youth Offending Service should form a strong partnership approach to meeting the assessed needs of these young people, ensuring that activity and intervention supports and develops the young people whilst also preventing further offending. Specific work will be needed to ensure that this group of young people are integrated into their local communities and, being accepted, can develop into happy and productive citizens.

How will we deliver the change?

We will deliver the changes by engaging with care leavers and finding out what works for them and to involve them in the process of change. To achieve this we need to establish strong feedback mechanisms with opportunities built into all our processes and services. In a practical sense we will circulate questionnaires to get feedback on young people’s housing, the service from their personal adviser and their perception of what blockages prevent them achieving a good outcome. In a national context we will use the Government’s ‘What Works Centre’ when this is available.

We will ensure our services are robustly assessed and tested for their effectiveness and look for ways in which to increase the capacity of the service using former foster carers or Staying Put hosts, acting as personal advisers.

Our goal will be to target, in particular, those young people with additional needs concerning mental health, drugs/alcohol misuse, learning needs and those that are socially isolated.

Our service will be flexible and responsive so that young people who need contact two and three times per week will receive it. We will engage young people leaving care as peer mentors with appropriate training in order to maximise our capacity to reach those most in need of support.
This strategy will be accompanied by a plan for how and when we are going to implement these changes and this is currently underway.

**How will we know?**

- By establishing proper feedback loops between our care leavers and the service that drives service change. This will include meeting with users at established intervals and by ‘exit’ feedback at the end of our involvement.
- Using robust data that identifies the young people who are homeless and without employment, education and training.
- By work with providers and commissioners to establish the effectiveness of our workers.
- By establishing strong and stable networks with all agencies that are able to provide detailed feedback on the difference we have made. This will include recommendations as to the need for change in specific areas.
- By the feedback of our staff on what has worked and what needs to change.
- By robust scrutiny and oversight from our Corporate Parenting Board containing senior managers, elected members and foster carers.