



Date of Meeting: 9 December 2019

Lead Member: Cllr Andrew Parry - Children, Education and Early Help

Lead Officer: Sarah Parker- Executive Director for People – Childrens

Executive Summary:

This report gives an update on the Leaving Care Service over the past year, the current number of care experienced young people receiving support and the types of accommodation in which they are living. Service development work undertaken in this period is also detailed in this report

Equalities Impact Assessment:

N/A

Budget: n/a

Risk Assessment:

Having considered the risks associated with this decision, the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: LOW

Residual Risk LOW

Other Implications: n/a

Recommendation:

1. Members of the corporate parenting board are asked to note the information in this report

Reason for Recommendation:

Appendices:

Background Papers:

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## 1. Background

**1.1:** The Care and Support 13-25 Team within Children's Services provides support to looked after children aged 13-18 and care experienced young people who are entitled to a leaving care support and for whom Dorset Council is their corporate parent. The 13-25 service was reconfigured in 2019 into 2 teams for looked after children and 2 for leaving care to provide an improved focus on service delivery and in recognition of the differing legislative requirements and support needs for the two groups of young people.

**1.2:** The Leaving Care Teams consist of 2 FTE Team Managers and 9 substantive FTE Personal Advisors (PAs). Additionally, there are 2 FTE fixed term PAs utilising two separate grant funding streams (PA to 25 grant and Rough Sleeping grant) which brings the service establishment up to 11 FTE PAs

**1.3:** Care experienced young people are young people who have been in the care of the local authority and are defined within the legislation as being part of 3 distinct groups of care leavers. This report specifically focusses on Relevant and Former Relevant young people.

**1.4:** **Relevant** young people are aged 16 or 17 and have been looked after for at least 13 weeks since their 14th birthday and, at some point, after their 16th birthday, but who left care before their 18th birthday.

**1.5:** Looked after children and Relevant care leavers become **Former Relevant** care leavers at the age of 18. There is a further category of care leaver who are described as **Qualifiers** and entitled to limited leaving care support.

**1.6:** Under previous legislation, local authorities were required to provide young people leaving care with support from a PA until they reached age 21, with that support continuing up to age 25 if a care leaver was engaged in education or training. This support was not available to care leavers aged over 21 who were not in education or training. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 introduced a new duty on local authorities, to support all Former Relevant care leavers up to age 25, if they want this wish for this support to be provided.

**1.7:** Alongside the extended PA duty, there is a further duty on local authorities to consult on and publish their 'local offer' for care leavers. The local offer must set out care leavers legal entitlements, plus the additional discretionary support which the local authority provides. Dorset's Local Offer continues to be developed and is available through the following link: <https://www.dorsetforyou.gov.uk/children-families/childrens-social-care/children-in-care/local-offer-for-care-leavers/local-offer-for-care-leavers.aspx>

**1.8:** The new duties under The Children and Social Work Act commenced on 1 April 2018.

## 2. Care Leaver population

**2.1:** The total number of care leavers receiving support from a PA from the Leaving Care Service as reported in our most recent SSDA903 return to the Department for Education, for the period 1 April 2018 – 31 March 2019, was 278 Current case load within the Leaving Care allocated to a PA is 241 as of 19 November 2019.

**2.2:** To ensure that we track care leavers who are not currently accessing PA support we have two "virtual" caseloads on Mosaic named "Care Leaver Qualifier Virtual" and "Care

Leaver PA to 25 Virtual". These enable us to have visibility for those young people who are not seeking nor requiring PA support but who may require this at a later date as their circumstances change.

**2.3:** There are 24 and 96 care leavers in these two virtual caseloads who may request a service at some point in the future. The latter number has increased significantly since last year's report to Corporate Parenting Board when the figure was 26. This reflects the increasing number of care leavers who are turning 21 and eligible to request a leaving care service up to the age of 25. This number will continue to increase for the next three years.

### **3: Accommodation**

**3.1:** The majority of Dorset care leavers are confirmed to be living in suitable accommodation which meets their needs, across a range of housing provision.

**3.2:** Accommodation is considered suitable if it is safe, secure and affordable. It generally includes short-term accommodation designed to move care leavers on to stable long-term accommodation and support them in developing independence and living skills.

**3.3:** Accommodation which exposes the care leaver to risk of harm or social exclusion by reason of its location or other factors would be considered as unsuitable, as would any temporary living arrangements. This would include bed and breakfast, custody or where the care leaver is living in an environment which could place them at risk.

**3.4:** Dorset Council's 2018-19 annual return reported that of the 280 care leavers that were in receipt of a leaving care service, 88.6% were living in accommodation judged as suitable. There are some young people who we are not in touch with and so were unable to confirm their living arrangements. This meant that they cannot be counted as being in suitable accommodation in the annual return. For that small number of care leavers with whom we are not in touch, efforts continue to be made by PA's to locate them and offer a service. For the return in March 2019, this was a total of 18 care leavers

**3.5: Independent tenancy:** A total of 104 care leavers were living in independent rented properties. This is a mix of private and housing association accommodation.

**3.6: Living at home with parents:** A total of 38 care leavers were living at home.

**3.7: Supported lodgings:** Our in house supported lodgings scheme had 16 care leavers placed at the end of March 2019. The small supported lodgings team continues to consider new ways of attracting potential supported lodgings providers. As of 19 November 2019 we had 22 supported lodgings providers with 28 beds. Not all of these are available at any one time as providers need to take breaks for various reasons.

**3.8: Staying Put:** A total of 18 care leavers were in staying put arrangements, mainly with family and friends' carers. Currently (as of 19.11.19) there are 17 care leavers in staying put arrangements. Of these, 6 are at University returning to their ex foster carers for the holidays and occasional weekends.

**3.9: Unsuitable accommodation:** Very few Dorset care leavers were living in accommodation considered to be unsuitable. This will include care leavers in custody, no fixed abode and B&B. PA's will seek to work positively with such young people to improve their housing arrangements and enable them to live in stable, secure arrangements. Our annual return reported 6 such young people (2.2%) of which 2 were in custody and 4 were recorded as no fixed abode/ homeless

#### **4: Service development**

**4.1:** There have been a number of workstreams focussing on service development and strategic planning for care leavers that have taken place over the past year.

**4.2: Partnering with Coram Voice to deliver the "New Belongings" programme.** Dorset was one of 8 authorities selected to partner with Coram Voice over 2019 and 2020. This partnership will develop a model for improving support for care leavers based on engagement and involvement of young people as experts in their own experience. As part of this work The Bright Spots' "Your Life Beyond Care" survey will be used alongside a self-assessment tool to provide a baseline and inform action planning in a coproduction model with care experienced young people. The initial set up meeting will take place on 20.11.19

**4.3: Becoming part of the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum.** Dorset joined this forum in 2018 and through this network we now have access to 3 x yearly national peer manager learning events as well as on line forums around leaving care. This enables us to share best practice and learn from other authorities as well as share our successes.

**4.4: Care leavers in Custody Project.** Dorset is working alongside Barnardo's and HMP Portland to identify and provide support to care leavers in custody. Links have been made with the Offender Management Unit at HMP Portland and a group work programme developed. The group, comprising young offenders who are care leavers is facilitated by a worker from Barnardo's and 2 PA's from our service. The aim is to support care leavers in custody to develop the skills they will need on release.

**4.5: Agreement by Dorset Council to exempt care leavers from paying Council tax:** Corporate Parenting Board members will be aware that the full Council has agreed that Dorset care leavers, living in the Dorset Council area and who are in receipt of a leaving care service, will be exempt from paying Council Tax from 1 April 2020.

**4.6: Creation of specialist fixed term PA post using the Homelessness Reduction Initiative Grant.** A specialist PA post has been created using the Rough Sleeping Initiative grant. This funding is intended to enable local authorities to continue to employ one or more specialist Personal Advisers to provide intensive support to a small caseload of care leavers who the LA judges to be at highest risk of homelessness/rough sleeping with the intention of preventing homelessness as well as strengthening and developing housing opportunities for care leavers. This post will enable us to capitalise on the opportunities present following the creation of the new Dorset Council

**4.7: Identification of specialist nurse within LAC Health team with focus on care leavers.** Through funding identified through Health partners our LAC Health team now has a post that specialises in health advice and support to care leavers

**4.8: Partnership working with Friends of Dorset Care Leavers:** The Leaving Care Service is actively working with this separate charitable organisation set up this year to support Dorset care leavers through agreeing PA time to support activities and by

representation on the FoDCL committee

## **5: Challenges**

5.1: As the profile of children in care and the level of needs has become more complex, this more complex needs profile is present within the young people supported by the Leaving Care Service. The creation of the dedicated post detailed in section 4.7 will assist the Service in ensuring that all health needs, including those linked to emotional wellbeing and mental health are better met

5.2: Increasing the range of suitable housing remains an area for further development in terms of available local housing options that enable care experienced young people to remain local and maintain existing links. There is opportunity through the new Dorset Council to develop those links and develop a strong housing offer to our care leavers. The use of the Rough Sleeping grant to create a specialist PA post to provide specialist advice and expertise is a positive development and the post holder has recently started

5.3: PA caseloads remain higher than would be wished and this is a national picture. The creation of a fixed term PA post through the PA to 25 grant will assist with this however this remains an area that requires further consideration given the growing complexity of needs within our care experienced population and the more intensive levels of support that some of our care leavers now require