



Dorset
Council

The Care Leaver Offer

2022 – 2023

Introduction



Context

Historically, many of our care leavers are children who come into our care and have remained in care beyond their 16th birthday. As a result of this, we are now seeing an increasing number of young people with care leaver entitlements. We expect these numbers to grow as responsibilities for care leavers were amended in the Children & Social Work Act 2017, extending corporate parenting responsibilities to all local authorities, and extending support to the age of 25. As of 30 October 2021, we are supporting 277 young people as care leavers and there are a further 197 young people who we are not actively involved with but can request services as they are over 21 (177) or qualifying care leavers (20).

Young people leaving care are one of the most vulnerable groups in our society. Research shows they face greater health problems, lower educational attainment than their peers and higher levels of unemployment. In common with other leaving care services, we know that many young people struggle to access support for emotional wellbeing and mental health.

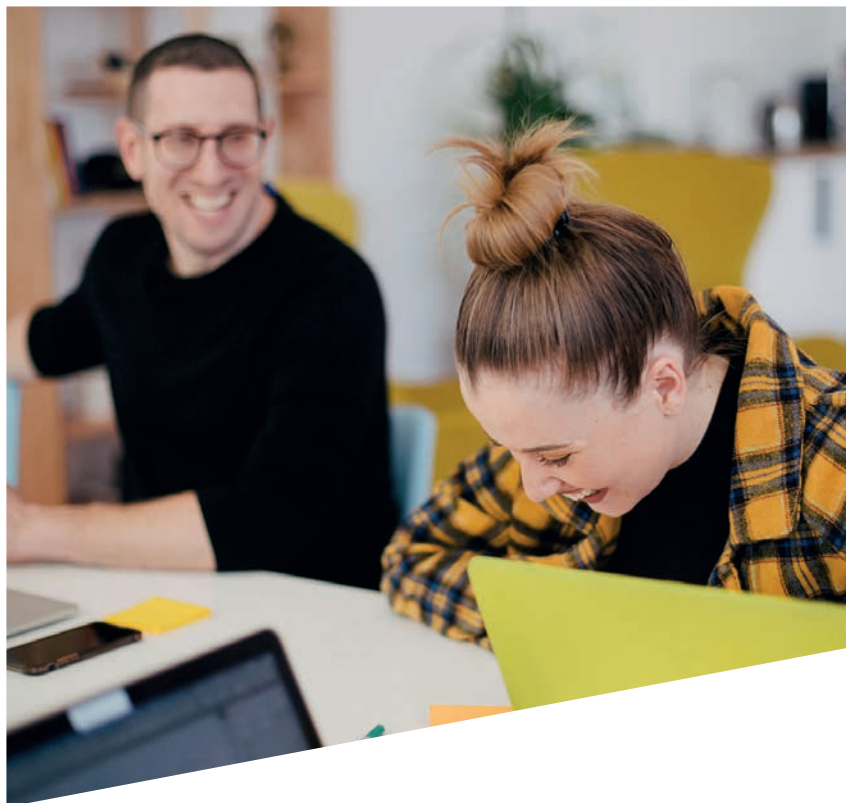
The Care Leaver Offer sets out the importance of providing Dorset care leavers with access to the same level of care and support that other young people get from their parents, holding in mind our corporate parenting objectives to ensure services

are 'good enough for my child.' Our ambition is to be the best Corporate Parents in the country. The below offer looks to support that ambition.

Accessibility and visibility of the Care Leaver Offer

Dorset Council Care Leaver offer is currently published on Dorset Council's website and is accessed by the young person via their Personal Adviser. Having a published offer ensures there is a consistent and equitable offer for our care leavers and that this is known and understood.

Through the New Belongings programme, care leavers have identified ways in which the digital presentation of the Care Leaver Offer can be published in a way that meets the accessibility code of practice but is also user friendly and attractive to the care leavers who are the primary audience.



We are working with the Digital Strategy and Design team, young people and Youth Voice Service through a series of co-production workshops to ensure the offer is presented in a way which takes account of our young people's feedback:

- Have a contents page with clear headings throughout the document.
- Keep it simple - use relevant animated pictures and info graphs where possible.
- Use drop-down boxes and less links to other pages.
- Have QR codes and links in emails to the offer when emailing care leavers.
- Use of Instagram to publicise our Care Leaver offer.
- Availability of PDF format.

We aim to be able to launch the new website in January 2021.

Co-production with our Care Leavers

Through the support of the Youth Voice Team, we continue to work with young people to co-produce our care leaver offer and update this annually.

We are also developing a Charter for our Corporate Parenting Board which is designed by Care Leavers and the Children in Care Council for corporate parents to sign up to. The charter will outline how children and young people would like members to be involved with their groups, hear their voice and support their campaign for change.

Care Leaver Offer

The current care leaver offer covers a wide range of support which is provided for by the Care Leaver budget. The offer is designed to cover all aspects of our care leavers lives as they transition into adult life.



Housing and living independently

Care leavers receive support in a number of ways, for example payments may include a contribution to help a young person to set up home, which they can use to purchase electrical goods, kitchen equipment and utensils, bedding and furniture.

The most significant provision within the framework is a £2,000 setting up home allowance. This allowance will cover the key costs of setting up home and young people will be able to draw this as a one-off payment or spread it out over several payments according to their needs.

In addition, Dorset Council may also provide the young person with rent in advance and a deposit where they move into independent tenancies or Housing Authority properties. It may also include help with short term storage and removal costs. Dorset Council has also agreed that care leavers are exempt from council tax where they are the sole tenant and receive a 25% contribution to council tax where they live in a shared property within the Dorset Council boundary.

The development of a joint protocol with housing colleagues is nearing completion. This sets out the arrangements for young people to ensure that they have access to the full range of accommodation at the appropriate time and proposes that no care experienced young person is placed in Bed and Breakfast accommodation or deemed intentionally homeless.

All care leavers living in Dorset are placed on "Band B" which is similar to previous 'Gold Banding' on the housing register. Young people may also be supported by the local authority as a guarantor to secure accommodation for those seeking private rented accommodation. The impact of this will see young people being able to access a greater range of better-quality accommodation in the private sector.

As a council we are actively exploring opportunities to identify more affordable housing. This includes access to the private rented sector, use of capital assets or borrowing capacity and developing new partnerships with providers.

10 Kirtleton Avenue is an example of Dorset Council's commitment to increase the availability of suitable accommodation for care experienced young people. Planning permission was awarded on 4th November 2021 by Dorset Council's Area Planning Committee for 7 self-contained flatlets which will be single or multiple occupancy. In addition, the property has an additional training flatlet that can be used on a short-term basis, a separate training kitchen and communal engagement space for visitors including friends, family and professionals. We continue to engage with our young people in the interior and exterior design and anticipate residents commencing their tenancies in March 2022.



Access to learning, training, including university and employment

Dorset Council provides financial support to support care leavers to access employment, education and training.

This academic year we have 28 care experienced young people enrolled on university courses, all supported by specialist Personal Advisers. All care leavers at University are provided with a bursary of £2,000 over their degree course. The national recommendation, and the offer from most local authorities is a £2,000 bursary over the whole of the degree course.

Dorset Council may also fund specific courses or training, including online courses, on a full-time or part-time basis. We offer support towards the cost of specific equipment or resources such as a laptop, specialist clothing or safety boots and with travel and childcare costs where required.

Dorset Council currently offers four apprenticeship opportunities across the directorate through the Pathways to Employment scheme. These opportunities are open to care leavers, young people with SEN and young carers

Care leavers are guaranteed an interview should they apply for any Dorset Council apprenticeship and where they meet the essential criteria. This is an offer we are looking to expand upon across all job roles within the council.

We value apprenticeships as these provide opportunities for young people to gain a qualification alongside developing important work experience. We continue to work with partner agencies and local businesses as we develop the Care Leaver Covenant and welcome the opportunities this may create regarding apprenticeships, work experience and mentoring.

Typically, anyone on the first year of an apprenticeship will receive £4.15 per hour which is insufficient to live independently, so a top up payment would be provided during the first year for those who are living independently.

In 2022, we are planning annual business and partner engagement events within localities which will offer young people the opportunity to showcase their talents, skills and expertise to local businesses for the purpose of work experience, apprenticeships and employment.

We recognise the importance of young people gaining experience which will promote future employment opportunities. All care experienced young people who remain in contact with us up to their 25th birthdays may receive up to £30 a week if they are participating for 12 or more hours per week in training, voluntary work, internship, or a traineeship.

This is to support with travel costs and suitable clothing needed for the given activity.



The Care Leaver Covenant

The Care Leaver service is working with the national Care Leaver Covenant on two fronts.

Firstly, to expand the internal offer across all Council departments to offer services and/or experiences to care leavers. This includes identifying a care leaver champion in each directorate. This work is being overseen by the Care Leaver Service Delivery Group chaired by Cllr Kerby.

Secondly, the Covenant are working with us to engage and encourage local business, charities and organisations to consider what they may be able to contribute to the development and opportunities for care leavers.

Documentation and Identity

Most young people on leaving care, will have all the documentation they need for adult life prior to turning 18. Where required, support is available to cover the cost of a passport, driving licence or other documents as required.

Support with pregnancy and maternity and paternity

Financial support is provided to ensure the mother has access to maternity clothing and can attend key appointments and maternity classes. Support is also extended to the father where they are a care leaver.

Keeping in Touch

Dorset Council provides financial support to care leavers to remain in touch. This includes provision of a Dorset Council SIM card with free calls, text and up to 10GB of data per month. Young people may also choose to use their personal budget to pay towards transport to visit family members and significant others.



Emergency Financial Assistance

There are inevitably times when additional assistance is needed. These are responded to promptly by the team either via a bank transfer, or through the purchases such as small supermarket shop.

The key change is that there is now a framework in place which allows for each young person, between the ages of 18 and 25, to have a personal budget which they are able to draw down from this when they need to.

This ensures there is an equitable response with the right support in place for young people to manage their finances with the flexibility to provide financial assistance where necessary.

Birthday and Festive Gifts - Implemented 1 April 2021

As any parent, we celebrate birthdays and festive events that are significant to young people.

Young people from the age of 18+ receive a gift on their birthday to the value of £25 and on their 21st birthday £50.

All young people will also receive a festive gift voucher of £20.

Beyond the direct financial provision to care leavers.

The Care Leaver service works in partnership with a range of services and organisations to access the help and support young people are entitled including benefits and grants as well as advice and guidance into education, employment and training.





The Rees Foundation "Ask Jan Membership" for care leavers - Implemented 1 June 2021

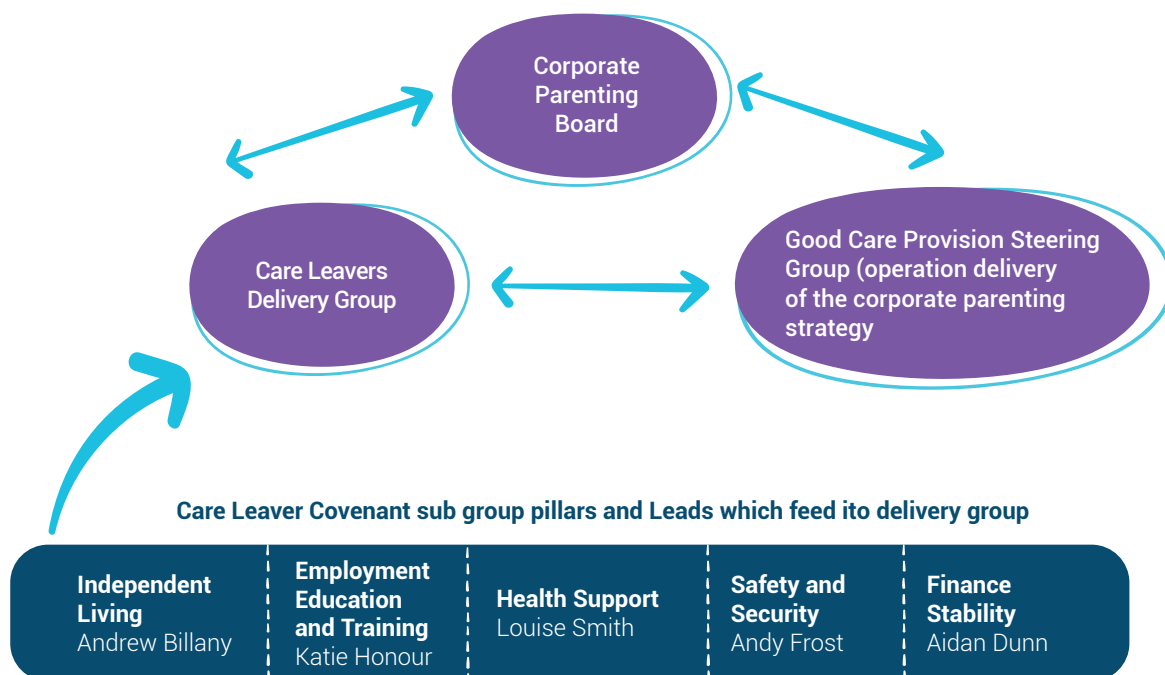
The 'Ask Jan Membership' has been developed to assist care experienced young people of all ages by providing access comprehensive, practical advice and support and additional benefits.

This is a good example of how Dorset Council have looked to lead the way nationally by reaching out to other agencies to support our care leavers. Dorset Council is the first Local Authority to have a service level agreement with the Rees Foundation's Ask Jan Membership for our care leavers.

The membership is for up to 150 care leavers at £60 per membership, costing a total of £9,000 annually. The Ask Jan Membership is promoted via our Children's hub and our Personal Advisers to the young people they are working with. The membership offers a wide variety of supports as detailed below:

- A 24-hour counselling helpline with access to a BACP accredited counsellor
- Up to 8 face to face counselling sessions where assessed and agreed by the counsellor
- Personal finance advice – mortgages, pensions, insurance, debt, and savings
- Nutrition, exercise, stress and wellbeing advice
- Specialist advice helplines including housing, legal and citizens advice 8am to 8pm
- Access to an enhanced wellbeing App -My Possible Self
- Cognitive behavioural therapy – available online or via the App
- Discounts and special offers on days out and activities with The Max Card
- Access to all other Rees Foundation projects





The Care Leaver Delivery Group was formed on the 21st June 2021 and includes representation from Dorset Council and key partner stakeholders. Membership will include a care experienced apprentice once in post.

The delivery group is chaired by Cllr Andrew Kerby and is held a minimum of seven times a year. The group holds Dorset Council and its partners to account in delivery of services and dispensing of their duties, promises and commitments to our care experienced young people.

The delivery group, as detailed below, feeds into the Good Care Provision steering group and feeds up into the Corporate Parenting Board which drives the priorities of Dorset Council's Corporate Parenting Strategy.

The Care Leavers Delivery Group has outlined the following five outcomes which anchor all of our activity:

- Independent Living – Care leavers are better prepared and supported to live independently
- Employment, Education, Training – Care leavers have improved access to employment education and training
- Safety and Security – Care Leavers experience stability in life and feeling safe and secure
- Health Support – Care Leavers have improved access to health and emotional support
- Financial Stability - Care leavers achieve financial stability.

Work to achieve these outcomes is being undertaken within task and finish groups and progress reported to the Care Leaver Delivery Group.





Annual National Care Leavers' Week

National Care Leavers' week was started in 2002 by an independent charity which aimed to bring together other charities and interest groups working with our care leavers campaign.

The week provides an opportunity for Dorset Council and young people to raise awareness and shine a bright light on our young people.

Dorset Council celebrated National Care Leaver Week from the 21st – 28th October 2021. Over the course of the week there was a series of workshops and events that have been co-produced with our care leavers. Examples of workshops and events covered include a Business Event – co-hosted with the Care Leaver Covenant - and a co-produced workshop of recognising care leavers achievements.

There are a number of proactive actions which have arisen in Dorset's participation in National Care leavers week. The below is not an exhaustive list but for illustrative purposes:

- Young people would like their achievements to be recognised on an individual basis, preferably by their Personal Adviser's, but not exclusively if a 3rd party wants us to do this e.g. housing provider.
- Young people would like to be involved in organising the annual Epic Awards, to 'showcase' their achievements and to be aspirational for younger children.
- The leaving care team to host an annual 'social gathering' which is planned with young people who have received recognition awards over the year. This will be their 'together' celebration.





Personal advisers' role in the Care Leaver Offer

The following is not an exhaustive list but is intended to give an insight into the range of activity that Personal Advisers might be involved to support our young people.

- A Personal Adviser is secondary allocated to a child in care from the age of 16 and will attend key meetings until the young person turns 18. Their keeping in touch with the young person will gradually increase as the young person approaches 18. This is to promote working relationships with the young person, supporting smooth transition between services. As well as supporting the young person transitioning into adulthood as any good parent would.
- Support to claim Universal Credit: The team have agreed a joint working protocol with the Bridport and Weymouth Job Centre Plus teams to achieve advance claims for Care Leavers; for any proposed sanctions to be discussed with the Personal Adviser before being applied and identifying additional support in finding work. Our young people living out of area may not have access to this as this requires voluntary agreement with the Job centre based in the area where they reside. The Care Leaver Team make this request where appropriate for our children out of area.
- Support in access to grants and bursaries: Personal Advisers will help young people with applications to any which are available.
- Many colleges and universities have schemes which provide additional financial support to care experienced young people, and there are also charities, local community groups and businesses which do this too.
- Support with access to work experience and voluntary work for young people who may have an interest in a specific field of work, or currently unable to undertake paid work.
- Access to a business mentor under a scheme run by the Chamber of Commerce.



Home start box

Personal advisers provide a home start box with essentials for a new home.

Contents include:

- Collapsible storage box
- Shampoo, Conditioner and Shower gel
- Toothpaste and Toothbrush
- Toilet rolls Washing up liquid and powder, Bleach & multi surface cleaner
- Cleaning cloths, sponges and Tea towel
- Bin bags, compostable bags and kitchen roll
- Cling film and Foil
- Vinegar Salt, Pepper, Ketchup & Brown Sauce
- Cooking oil
- Teabags, coffee and sugar
- Care Leaver Cook Book
- New home card with £10 food voucher for first meal shop

Aspirational Financial Provision

Within the developed framework, there are financial provisions which Dorset may want to consider going forward. These costs are not obligations and fit within the spirit of a Corporate Parent role. These include providing, for example, Cold Weather payments.



Next steps

To embed the principles of services being designed by young people, for young people, through the recruitment, training and recognition of the time and expertise that our young people can give.

Development of clear pathways for young people to access timely help with mental health and low emotional wellbeing, providing a clear direction for our young people to work towards. The Care Leavers Team are listening to young people and working with the Clinical Commissioning Group and the Child in Care Health Service to provide a more responsive and earlier intervention to promote wellbeing and positive emotional health.

To expand the current offer to our Care Leaver regarding apprenticeships and guaranteed interview to include all appropriate vacancies across the council and key partners.

To ensure that on publication, The Care Leaver Offer is available digitally on an accessible and inviting web page and available in PDF format. The target date for this is the 30 January 2022.

Recommendations

For CSLT to support the 2021-2022 offer as detailed above.

For CSLT to support the development of the Charter.

