

Corporate Parenting Board

30 November 2022

Policy Change – Better care and education for unaccompanied minors and Leaving Care service development.

For Review and Consultation

Portfolio Holder: Cllr A Parry, Children, Education, Skills and Early Help

Local Councillor(s):

Executive Director: T Leavy, Executive Director of People - Children

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Report Status: Public

Brief Summary:

The aim of this paper is to outline the national and local context which has led to an increase in need. The paper sets out plans to increase our capacity to care for and support our care leavers and unaccompanied minors and outline the policy change that is required to do so. To respond effectively to the needs of our young people we are proposing to do the following:

- Develop an operating model for unaccompanied minors that uses capacity in good or outstanding boarding schools to provide education and term time accommodation and uses school communities to host unaccompanied minors in school holidays as ‘connected persons’.
- Seek easement of specific regulations and guidance.

- Create a Head of Service to provide dedicated leadership to a specialised service for care leavers and unaccompanied minors alongside the Resettlement Team.
- Create the role of Senior Personal Adviser within the Leaving Care Service to champion key areas of service delivery for young people and offer a career pathway within the team.

Recommendation: That the Board supports this policy change and service developments presented in this report.

Reason for Recommendation: To progress work to deliver a specialised service according to need for our care leavers and unaccompanied minors.

1. National Landscape

- 1.1. In November 2021, HM Government decided that the National Transfer Scheme for unaccompanied minors would become mandatory. Under this change all local authorities have been given legal notice to accept transfers of children into their care, providing crucial placements to unaccompanied children.
- 1.2. The scheme sets a quota for all local authorities to be required to accommodate a number of children equivalent to 0.07% of the local child population. This was revised upwards in a letter from the Minister for Safe and Legal Migration on 24 August to 0.1% of the local child population. In the case of Dorset, this represents a rise from 47 young people to 67 young people. We are currently looking after 40 young people and are responsible for 33 care leavers who were formerly unaccompanied minors. This has been a 400% increase in this calendar year.
- 1.3. Originally, local authorities were set a deadline of 10 days to transfer children to their care. The letter from the Minister reduced this to 5 days.
- 1.4. The National Transfer Scheme has had immediate effects on Dorset Council with a sharp rise in the number of unaccompanied children in our care, and supported by us as care leavers.
- 1.5. Dorset Council has sought to engage constructively with the National Transfer Scheme throughout, but this has proved difficult due to the state of the social care placements market. We were successful in placing children in Dorset initially, but over time we have struggled with a number of factors:

- We have not always been able to source accommodation for children in Dorset, so although we have responsibility and arranged accommodation, we have an associated efficiency issue because these are out of area placements and the full local offer of care, education and health cannot be delivered to these children.
- A number of young people have been unwilling to transfer to Dorset and have expressed a preference to be housed in urban centres.

1.6. In March 2022, the Competition and Marketing Authority (CMA) published the final report of the market study of children's social care. Key findings and recommendations included:

- A judgement that the market is dysfunctional
- Profits are excessive in private sector, and there are concerns about financial resilience particularly those companies financed through private equity
- Foster care is better and more cheaply delivered by local authorities and more work should be undertaken to bring fostering "in house"
- Regional and national bodies should be set up to help local authorities improve their leverage in the market place

1.7. On Monday 23 May 2022 the independent review of children's social care published its final report 'The independent review of children's social care: final report'. HM Government will publish an implementation strategy on children's social care before the end of 2022. Key areas are likely to include:

- Changes to the child protection system
- Changes to family support and early help systems
- Support for foster carer recruitment
- Regional commissioning arrangements

1.8. The findings of both the CMA study and the independent review resonated with local experience, particularly in respect of the difficulties we face in the social care marketplace. The detail of next steps from HM Government will become clearer towards the end of the year.

2. **Update to Inspection Framework**

2.1. In June 2022, Ofsted consultation was launched to consider a specific judgement within the ILACS framework re the experience of care leavers.

2.2. Research has identified that there is more to do to improve the outcomes and experiences of care leavers:

- Ofsted “Ready or Not” report (Jan 22),
- Coram Voice, “What Makes Life Good Report”, (Nov 20),
- Social Care Review Recommendations, (May 22).
- National/Local New Belongings feedback

2.3. The new care leaver judgement is expected to be incorporated into the ILACS framework by January 2023 and we anticipate inspectors will focus on key areas of service delivery:

- Transitions/Independence Planning
- Accommodation and Housing
- Mental Health & Emotional Well-Being Support
- Local Offer
- Diversity

2.4. Following the full Ofsted Inspection last year we are also anticipating a Focused Visit for Leaving Care before the end of the year.

2.5. Inspectors will evaluate the effectiveness of:

- performance management
- management oversight
- supervision
- quality assurance
- continuous professional development of the workforce.

3. **Local context and key data**

3.1. There are currently 457 children in care in Dorset.

3.2. Since the beginning of 2022 we have seen an increase in the number of children in care in Dorset. (Fig 1)

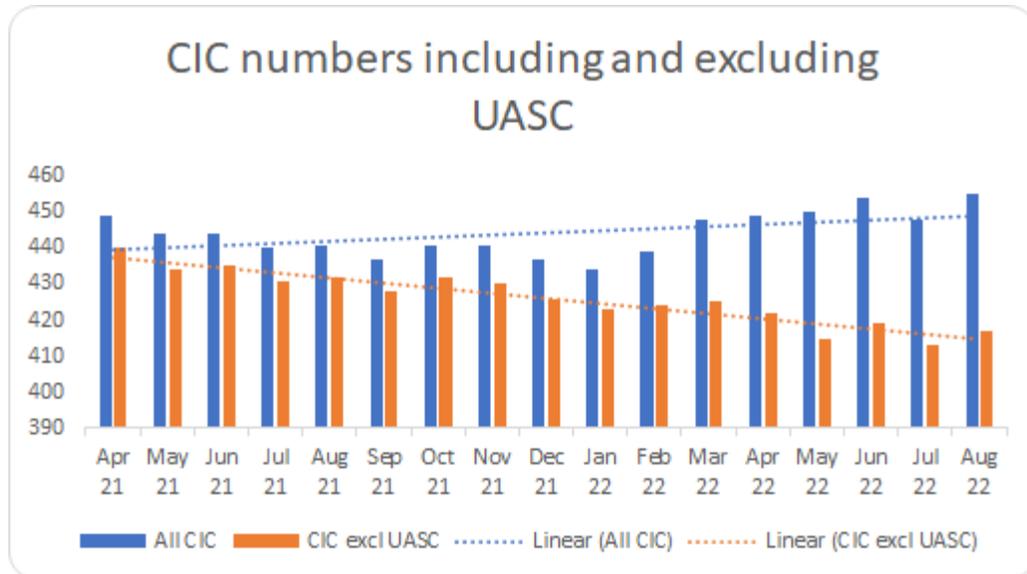


Fig 1

- 3.3. The greatest influence of this increase has been through the National Transfer Scheme, which has had more immediate effects on Dorset Council. The rise in numbers of unaccompanied minors can obscure the fact that our underlying numbers of children in care have begun to reduce.
- 3.4. Within the current locality team structures and approach for unaccompanied minors the increase in numbers of children in care through the National Transfer Scheme require an increase in the number of social workers and Independent Reviewing Officers, to ensure that caseloads remain within agreed limits.
- 3.5. The Children & Social Work Act, 2017 extended the service offer for young people leaving care up to their 25th birthday. In Dorset there are 512 young people aged between 18-25yrs who have left our care, of these 289 young people are receiving a service from the leaving care team.
- 3.6. We anticipate that current number of care leavers receiving a service from the Leaving Care Team will increase from 289 to 441 by July 31st 2024.

Social Stories

- 3.7. *One of our 17 year old girls originally from Vietnam has had her asylum application granted. She is over the moon as it gives permission for her to work/ which means apprenticeship. She also would like to drive and now she can apply for a provisional licence. She is excelling at college and all*

aspects of her life. She spends time by agreement in London but lives happily in Dorchester with foster carers.

- 3.8. *MI is 16 and travelled from Sudan. He has witnessed members of his family being killed and has been imprisoned, and experienced physical abuse. When it became unsafe in Sudan, his mother gave smugglers her wedding ring to get him out of the country and into a safe place. He was imprisoned in Libya for 2 months, because he was caught travelling by boat to Italy. He was hit and still has some marks on his back. He eventually made it to France, and stayed there for 12 days, then jumped on top of a lorry to get to the UK. He wants to learn English first, that's his priority. He wants to settle in the UK, where he feels happy and safe. He would like to be a famous footballer – like a Liverpool player although he supports Real Madrid! If he cannot become a football player, he wants to become a doctor and support people in need and through the hard times.*

4. Operating Model for Unaccompanied Minors

- 4.1. The operating model has been developed in response to it not being possible to accommodate unaccompanied children in the numbers required within the current children's social care marketplace, and within the current regulatory framework.
- 4.2. We believe that the flexibilities that were extended to facilitate the increase in offers of accommodation for unaccompanied Ukrainian children shows a promising way forward. We wish to take forward an initiative to provide more accommodation for unaccompanied children using boarding schools and host families. This will require some easement in Children Act regulations and the regulatory framework.
- 4.3. We have had early conversations with independent boarding schools within Dorset which have evidenced a willingness to work together in a more imaginative way. We also have a confident business case from a local social enterprise which sets out steps to recruit hosts from the school communities.
- 4.4. The DfE supports the Broadening Educational Pathways bursaries scheme for looked after and vulnerable children attending independent day/boarding schools for children in care in place which is delivered by the Royal Springboard Foundation. This provides a useful precedent and evidence of the benefits to the young people who have been educated in independent schools. These include:

- 98% of pupils achieving five or more GCSEs at grade 4 – 9, and
- 99% of pupils achieving two or more A Levels.

- 4.5. The 2022 evaluation of Broadening Educational Pathways also cites various other benefits, including:
- 4.6. ‘The human capital acquired through attending a boarding school was considered to give the child a set of personal skills and characteristics they can transfer into a range of life circumstances including interviews, attending social events going to university...’
(p.18(royalspringboard.org.uk))
- 4.7. Key principles in our model are:
- The unaccompanied minors continue to be children in care.
 - Better Care and Education provision for our allocation is through a shared arrangement with a number of independent schools, voluntary organisations and specially recruited hosts. Children are matched to independent schools in the Dorset area (conversations are presently underway with Bryanston and Independent School and Shaftesbury a State Boarding School) and the extended school community then becomes a source of potential hosts.
 - Unaccompanied minors are allocated to the scheme through identification by virtual school heads and their teams in Kent and other authorities. In the first instance, the scheme will establish proof of concept by improving the offer to minors who are already here, rather than new arrivals.
 - This approach will be developed in partnership with neighbouring authorities, and we have started these discussions.
 - We undertake express assessments of a household or households who can act as hosts and out of school destinations for those young people during the school breaks using the model of our supported lodgings scheme.
 - The case management and support offer to the young people is not necessarily limited to qualified social workers but includes education /health /youth support roles. We can recruit to these roles from vacant post funding.

5. Easement of specific regulations and guidance

- 5.1. We require flexibility in the following areas of regulation:

- Placement of children in care in ‘other arrangements’ – many of the assumptions which underpin the Children Act do not apply to unaccompanied children, particularly around local connections and links with family. We believe the use of boarding schools can be a suitable living arrangement for unaccompanied children, and not just for 16 and 17 year olds, and the use of hosts can complement the boarding experience with the chance to live in a family based setting out of term time.
- Assessment of hosts using the supported lodgings assessment framework would follow the precedent set by the Ukrainian minors scheme in unblocking access to suitable homes for these children, while still maintaining checks and safeguards for these children.
- Lead professionals for these children could be drawn from a wider professional pool than social workers – the decision-making process around the children entering the care system is determined by their immigration status and age assessment, and their care plan is about support in their progress to settled adulthood. We believe that issues around support needs, safety, and educational progress can be reasonably managed by professionals other than qualified social workers, although we accept that it will be diligent to have social work represented in the support team management. We would initially intend upon a much more intensive level of support from education and youth work colleagues to assure the success of the placements.
- Regulation and inspection of these settings – this is an innovative plan, and we are working alongside colleagues in Ofsted to ensure that there is suitable oversight and challenge of these arrangements, however we do not believe that any existing inspection fits these arrangements.

5.3 The children would continue to be children in care with the usual reviewing arrangement for care plans, PEPs and pathway plans. This would ensure oversight and challenge from Independent Reviewing Officers and ensure that we adhered to the same framework of standards and aspiration as for the other children in our care.

6. Head of Service

6.1. To meet the needs of our growing population of young people leaving care and our unaccompanied minors we believe that we require a new

approach for our unaccompanied minors led by dedicated Head of Service role which brings together skills and expertise with the Refugee and Resettlement Service, Leaving Care Service, Lifelong Links and Unaccompanied Minors Service (Fig 2). In doing so this will ensure sufficient capacity for the existing Head of Service for Children in Care to drive outstanding service delivery for children in care.

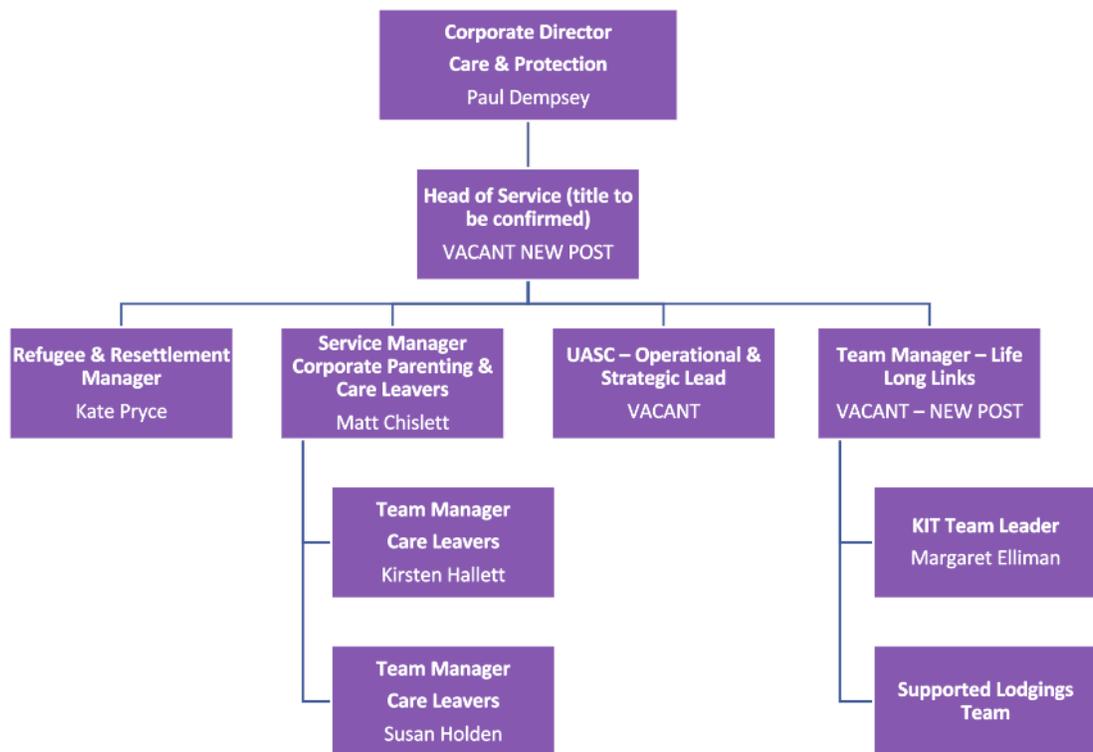


Fig .2

7. Senior Personal Advisors

- 7.1. We have also identified the need to develop two senior personal advisor roles in the Leaving Care Service, one to lead delivery of Staying Close which is outlined below, and the other to lead employer engagement. These lead areas correlate with those identified by young people through the New Belongings Survey and also offer a career development pathway in the Leaving Care Team. An additional three personal adviser roles are required if we are to ensure that case loads within the service support best practice.

8. Future Developments – Staying Close

8.1. Dorset Council have been awarded a grant of £627,802 which runs over 3 years to deliver Staying Close. Staying Close is a model which provides enhanced support for young people leaving care from children's homes and is designed to be a comparable offer to the option to Stay Put, which supports young people in foster care to remain with their former foster carers until age 21. Staying Close focuses on the following areas:

- Accommodation stability: including access to improved housing options, reduced rates of evictions and fewer placement moves.
- Wellbeing: positive changes in both mental and physical health and reductions in antisocial behaviour, episodes of going missing and criminal activity for young people at risk of these behaviours.
- EET: increasing numbers of young people in employment, education and training, including through support gaining work experience, with application forms and advice and guidance.
- Strong relationships and support network: an increase in social connectedness and developing healthy relationships.
- Independent living skills: including improvements in cooking, budgeting, time management and practical skills.

9. Financial Implications

	£		Funding source
1x Head of Service	312,000	Three years	1 x 'Leaving Care service development' identified in the Medium-Term Financial Plan as a pressure
2x Senior Personal Advisors	312,733	Three years	Staying Close grant (627,802) *
3x Personal Advisors	132,570	Per annum	1 x 'Leaving Care service development' and 2x 'Impact of the National Transfer Scheme for Unaccompanied Minors' identified in the Medium-Term Financial Plan as a pressure

*Funding ceases at the end three years. This may cause a recruitment, retention, and future year pressure

Care and education costs for unaccompanied minors:

	£ annum	Funding source
Term time boarding place	2,500,000	DfE and Home Office (TBC)
Holiday hosting	345,600	
LA support team	348,347	
Host recruitment and training	100,000	
Co-ordination/ management costs/set up and evaluation costs – assumes co-ordinator and business support roles, plus in kind contribution from existing LA staffing	93,978	
Clothing and pocket money	104,280	
Translation services – 1 hour per week for 13 weeks	32,500	
Training for school staff – awareness and orientation	2,000	
Total	3,526,705	

10. Environmental Implications

Local services and communities are able to support children which will reduce carbon footprint

11. Well-being and Health Implications

Children are matched with local families for weekends and holidays, children are kept safe and benefit from a holistic, rounded learning experience.

Career Pathway is developed in Leaving Care Service to support recruitment and retention.

12. Other Implications

No other implications have been identified.

13. Risk Assessment

HAVING CONSIDERED: the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Medium/Low
Residual Risk: Medium/Low

14. Equalities Impact Assessment

This report does not relate to new working arrangements and therefore an Equalities Impact Assessment has not been undertaken.

15. Appendices

[Appendix 1 Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2020 - 2023.pdf \(dorsetcouncil.gov.uk\)](#)

16. Background Papers

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-social-care-market-study-final-report>

<https://childrensocialcare.independent-review.uk/final-report/>