

Corporate Parenting Board

25 May 2023

Leaving Care Service Annual report 2022-2023

Choose an item.

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 annual report has been drawn together to highlight to the Corporate Parenting Board members key development and performance of the Leaving Care Service in exercising their duty to our care experienced young people.

The Leaving Care Service has over the past 12 months significantly invested in staffing by increasing management capacity and personal advisor capacity as well as creating two senior personal advisor roles. The service has also opened 10 Kirtleton Avenue which has increased local housing provision for our young people and created a hub space for professional to meet with our young people.

The service has also had significant improvement in key performance areas:

- In touch: 17-18 (99%) and 19-21 (96%)
- Pathway plans completed in time (91.03%)
- In education, employment and training 17-18 (63%) and 19-21 (58%)
- Living in suitable accommodation (97.24%)

Recommendation:

Recommendation is for members to note this report.

Reason for Recommendation:

The report highlights the past 12 months for the Leaving Care Service and the impact for our care experienced young people.

1. Report

1.1 Introduction

- 1.2** Dorset Councils aims to ensure all our young people reach their potential, develop into independent, self-confident adults. We strongly believe that all Care Leavers should have a positive experience of leaving care and should continue to receive on-going support based on a model of interdependence to assist them to deal with adult responsibilities.
- 1.3** When young people are ready to leave care, we will ensure that they feel as ready as possible. We recognise they may not be fully equipped with practical independence skills or have the knowledge to access a range of services that they may need. Our model of interdependence aims to ensure that our young people have the support of the Personal Advisor to support and guide them around key areas including housing, health, employment, education, leisure, benefits and other community services. We recognise that leaving care can trigger feelings of isolation and loneliness and at this time the young person's life may become unstable or disrupted, therefore we will ensure that the services offered are approachable, accessible and treat all our young people with respect and dignity.
- 1.4** We will ensure high expectations for our Care Leavers are shared widely by involving our partners through our Care Leaver Delivery Group, we will ensure coordinated services are provided so that our young people feel safe in their homes and in the community, are able to have or maintain a trusted relationship, achieve at higher education or college, gain and sustain employment and generally have a positive experience of adult life.
- 1.5** The views and opinions of our young people are central to the planning we do for them as Corporate Parents, we will ensure that we listen to what they say and review our practice accordingly and shape the service we deliver to meet the needs of our young people. Decisions about young people's lives and future are collaborative and made with them, not for them. We aim that all our young people feel listened to and valued.
- 1.6** In the last 12 months the service has seen significant investment and has had several developments. As of the 1st of May 2023, the service will sit under a Head of Service for Leaving Care and Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children. We have increased staffing capacity of personal advisors and created two additional senior personal advisor roles.
- 1.7** We have accessed funding to facilitate Staying Close to support our young people stepping out of residential provision as young adults. We have seen an increase in Staying Put arrangements for our Care Leavers remaining in their foster placement post 18.
- 1.8** In addition, we have successfully opened 10 Kirtleton Avenue in Weymouth which provides local accommodation for up to 12 young people who are Dorset Care Leavers. This premises also offers a hub for Care Leavers to

drop in to see professionals such as the Leaving Care nurse. The Care Leaver Joint Housing Protocol has also been agreed and implemented.

- 1.9** Performance with service delivery has noticeably improved in key areas such as education employment and training, increased percentage of completed pathway plans in time and percentage of our young people in suitable accommodation.
- 1.10** The Care Leaver Delivery Group meets monthly and is chaired by an elected member Cllr Kerby. The Care Leavers Delivery Group is now well embedded and holds to account the council and its partners for their role in the delivery of services and statutory responsibilities to Care Leavers. The group have access to good qualitative and quantitative management information from the council and its partners, to monitor performance effectively against outcomes and track delivery of promises and commitments.

2. Context

- 2.1** At the end of March 2023, we had 516 Care Leavers in our family, 287 of these are “active” Care Leavers 44 of which are unaccompanied young people. We have 71 (16-17 years old) being supported through transition by a Personal Advisor alongside their social worker.
- 2.2** Most of our Care Leavers remained in care until their 18th birthday. Whilst the picture is improving, we know not as many of our young people are benefiting from Staying Put arrangements as we would like. As of March 2023 (7.6%) of our Care Leavers were in staying-put arrangements up from (4.88%) in April 2022. We continue to look at how we are supporting foster carers to continue to provide a safe and stable home for our young people after they turn 18 and into adulthood.
- 2.3** Personal Advisers are secondary allocated to young people on their 16th birthday secondary to provide a smooth transition from their social worker to the Leaving Care Service once they are 18. The Personal Adviser works alongside the young person’s social worker, building a relationship before they “leave care,” this enables us to support young people with their independence readiness/skills as they move into adulthood, so they are ready and confident when they leave care. We continue our focus to ensure that all our young people have current Pathway Plans that are ambitious and support our young people to move towards independence.
- 2.4** The National Transfer Scheme for unaccompanied minors is 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. The rise in the quota for Dorset represents a rise from 47 young in people in 2022 to 67 young people in 2023. This has been a 400% increase in this calendar year. 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. Dorset council as of March 2023 has 44 Care Leavers who are unaccompanied

asylum-seeking children. The majority of which are in suitable accommodation with 1 in bed and breakfast and 1 in custody. Of these young people 33 live outside of Dorset Local authority area.

- 2.5** Dorset Council remains involved and working with the Care Leaver Covenant and have been recognised by the Care Leaver Covenant as a Trailblazer Authority. The Care Leaver Covenant is a national inclusion programme that supports Care Leavers aged 16-25 to live independently. Supporting meaningful opportunities for Care Leavers to access.
- 2.6** We are working with the Care Leaver Covenant through the Care Leaver to Delivery Group to use best practice and as we continuously build on our Care Leaver offers across the Council and the partnership.
- 2.7** Via the Care Leaver Covenant, we have piloted the Sky Spectra Tech Up Grants to young people. Sky Up is a new programme from Sky launched in 2022 which sets out the goal of tackling digital inequality. It is supporting our Care Leavers aged 18 to 25 from all backgrounds to succeed in a digital age, ensuring that those who are most at risk of being digitally excluded are given access to the right connectivity, skills, and technology. Providing them with connectivity, devices, and access to skills training. We are also in the early stages of working with NHS Dorset to support the NHS Care Leaver Covenant Pathfinder, which will support 25 Care Leavers into NHS scholarships/apprenticeships across Dorset.
- 2.8** The New Belongings Programme ran from 2019-2022 and worked with eight local authorities using the Your Life Beyond Care survey from our Bright Spots programme and the Baker Dixon self-assessment-framework to better understand what makes life good for their Care Leavers and how to improve the support they are offering. Using this information Dorset worked with our young people to co-produce solutions to the issues they have identified. Whilst the programme has ended in Dorset its ethos is echoed in all that we do and forms the bases of our Care Leaver Delivery Group action plan. The Leaving Care Service continues to work closely with colleagues in social care, health, education and housing to strengthen our current transitions pathway. Feedback from New Belongings and national research indicated that young people did not always feel ready or equipped to leave care at 18 years old.
- 2.9** We have reviewed our transitions pathway and we have improved our practice in working with our young people as they turn 16. To facilitate this there has been increased staffing capacity in the Leaving Care Service, enabling us to reduce caseloads, Personal Advisors are secondary allocated as the young person reaches their 16th birthday, joint planning processes take place with a clear role for the Personal Advisor, including:
 - Facilitated introduction to the young person and those caring for them.
 - Invitation and attendance at all key meetings
 - Overseeing independence planning/readiness

- Feeding into post 18 accommodation plans
- Ensuring benefit claims are in place prior to 18th birthday.
- Handover meeting prior to young person's 18th birthday
- Robust management oversight via the Transitions Panel

2.10 The ability to reach down to 16-year-olds, enables the Personal Adviser to build a trusting relationship with the young person to promote a smooth transition reaching 18 years old and leaving care. The Personal Advisor have a good knowledge of the young person's level of independence readiness and will be able to support the young person to develop the skills and confidence they need as they move into adulthood, so they confident and ready to leave care, whilst recognising that young people are not expected to be fully independent at this stage and we continue to work on a model of interdependence to support the on-going development of independence skills/resilience.

2.11 Our Transitions Panel reviews all young people aged 16+ to ensure transitions plans are progressing. Where there is early identification of complexity/challenge the panel as a multi-agency team can provide a multi-agency approach to solutions. The Panel ensures that Pathway Plans that are ambitious and support our young people to move towards increased independence creating maximum opportunities for living, loving, learning and working.

3. Work force

3.1 The Leaving Care Service in Dorset has had significant investment from senior leaders through to operational staff. The Leaving Care service will now sit under a newly created Head of Service for Care Leavers and unaccompanied asylum-seeking Children as of April 2023

3.2 The Leaving Care Service is run operationally by the Service Manager for Corporate Parenting, Permanence and Care Leavers. There are now 2.5 x FTE Team Managers in the service with the recent addition of additional 0.5 FTE Team manager post. This additional post has been created to increase management capacity in response to the growing service.

3.3 We currently have 17.64 x FTE Personal Advisers in the service, which includes the additional capacity of a further 3 FTE Personal Advisors. This does not include the addition of 2 x FTE Senior Personal Advisors, which will reduce caseload numbers and increase management oversight. The service has an additional 1 x FTE Housing Project Officer.

3.4 We have retained an overall stable workforce over the past 12 months, with some staff exiting the service in the previous 6 months and increased the staffing complement. We identified the need to develop Senior Personal

Advisor roles in the Leaving Care Service, to lead the delivery of Staying Close and employer engagement. These lead areas correlate with those identified by young people in the New Belongings Life Beyond Care survey and offer a career development pathway in the Leaving Care Team.

4. Work force development

4.1 Dorset Council subscribes to the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum which provides at least 3 training events for leaving care professionals and 3 manager events per year which are well attended by staff in the service. Team Managers hold monthly workshops with Personal Advisers, delivered either by internal or external staff.

4.2 Through our Workforce Development Team all Personal Advisors have access to a broad and comprehensive learning and development offer including access to research tools such as Research in Practice and Community Care Inform. We have developed resources that are available on the Children's Hub or The Academy (our virtual learning and development platform) to support employees that are working with children, young people and families. This includes tool kits including Contextual Safeguarding, Domestic Abuse, Sexual Abuse. Practice Launch events are held with Managers and practitioners to launch new practice resources and we continue with our Stop the Clock programme of reflective sessions within teams which have a set resource on a particular theme identified through our quality assurance processes.

5. Young people Feedback

5.1 The voice of young people who are care experienced continues to provide us with learning and opportunities to make things better together. The council have worked with Coram Voice on their New Belongings Programme using the 'My Life Beyond Care' survey. The surveys have been conducted bi-annually since 2019 and this has given the whole council a significant opportunity to understand how young people feel about the services they receive, where there are 'Bright Spots' of practice and where there are areas for improvement. Their feedback has provided a structure and plan for service development as Care Leavers ranked their priorities.

5.2 The reports are considered by CSLT, Corporate Parenting Board, other relevant service areas and explored deeper in workshops across the workforce. Care leavers have prioritised some areas of work to be focussed on and shaped the Care Leaver Delivery Group action plan.

5.3 The Youth Voice Team use a variety of tools to hear feedback from young people and continue to explore and check the inclusivity and accessibility of this. There is not one preferred way for young people to share their voice and so a range of options is required. The team have several tools that help with digital interaction and undertake 1-1 phone calls or in person visits where this is preferred.

- 5.4 A Business Intelligence dashboard is currently being developed specifically for The Youth Voice Team to support them in working smarter; to hear from Care Leavers across the country and the county. This piece of work should begin in January 2023.
- 5.5 Dorset Council has commissioned Coram for a further 2 years to carry out the Your Life Beyond Care surveys.

What is most important to you?



- 5.6 In response to New Belongings feedback, the following service improvements have been delivered:

- access to the Rees Foundation “Ask Jan” membership which provides access to comprehensive, practical advice, additional benefits and access to a 24-hour counselling helpline and counselling sessions,
- young people in custody have access to a debit card.
- Revised financial policy.
- Created a personal budget for all young people.
- Increased capacity of the Designated Leaving Care Nurse
- Developed Kirtleton Avenue
- Increased capacity of the staff team
- Council tax exemption
- Ring fenced apprenticeship opportunities.

6. How we Know:

6.1 Business intelligence dashboard

- 6.2 We have an excellent suite of performance data and dashboards accessible to managers and all staff through our intranet pages and through MOSAIC, our electronic social care record.

- 6.3** Our Children’s Services Monthly Performance Report is published and shared with all managers to inform performance conversations and pulls together performance indicators across a wide range of services, including Leaving Care. This report is interactive and available to all staff and provides one version of the truth. This report is used extensively to review performances on a monthly basis and support our Performance Management Framework, providing good visibility of performance across all services.
- 6.4** Our Leaving Care Business Intelligence Dashboard provides detailed management information to all managers and senior leaders on key areas of performance including suitability of accommodation, education, employment and training, pathway plan completion, Care Leaver contacts and management supervision rates. There is regular supervision of staff and management meetings to monitor performance within the team.

7. Audits

7.1 The Leaving Care Management team have established key data collection methods that support focus on key areas of the service. The Leaving Care Service benefits from regular dip sampling auditing with key findings being shared with the Care Leaving staff team, wider staffing group and the senior leadership team in a number of formats.

7.2 Audit themes from March 2022:

Care Leavers Health Passport	Mar 22
Supervision Records	Jun 22
Young people in unsuitable accommodation	Oct 22
Transitions Plans (Rising 18’s)	Dec 22
Transitions Plans (18 -19-year-olds)	Dec 22
Case Recording	Jan 23
Supervision Records (revisit)	Jan 23
Young people in unsuitable accommodation (revisit)	Feb 23
PA Supervision (Eligible Children)	Feb 23
Accommodation Seen (18 -20-year-olds)	Feb 23

7.3 The Quality of Practice and Action Group, which is held monthly and attended by senior managers, oversees the performance of the services, which informs thematic reviews.

7.4 To ensure we obtain an accurate representation of the quality of practice; audits are selected at random and thematic audit is scheduled as part of testing the impact of improvements or where data and audit highlight the need for dip sampling to determine if a detailed thematic review is required.

7.5 In December 2022, 77% of the audits completed for Leaving Care were good/outstanding, this highlighted some good practice in supporting transitions pathways for young people; these audits reviewed rising 18’s and

demonstrated good transitions planning, this was reinforced with an audit of 18-19 year olds, to review if their plan had been stable and they had remained in their post accommodation of which almost all young people had remained in their accommodation as planned.

7.6 The audits completed in January /February 2023 have highlighted some principal areas to strengthen practice, these is in relation to supervision and ensuring the newly revised practice standards are fully embedded in team practice.

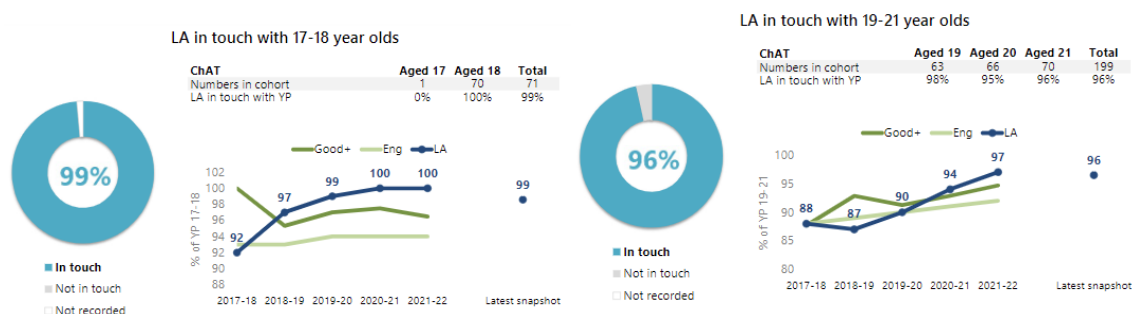
8. Key performance Indicators Performance

8.1 In touch

8.2 The Leaving Care Service is in Touch with our young people (Active aged 17-18) - March to 99% and (active 19-21) in touch at 96%. Relational practice is at the heart of our work with young people, building trusting, supportive relationships, this is echoed in the New Belongings findings, which found that 97% of young people found it easy to get in contact with their leaving care worker. Significantly more Care Leavers (86%) in Dorset trusted their leaving care worker 'all or most of the time' compared to Care Leavers (78%) nationally. This is one of our Bright Spot of practice.

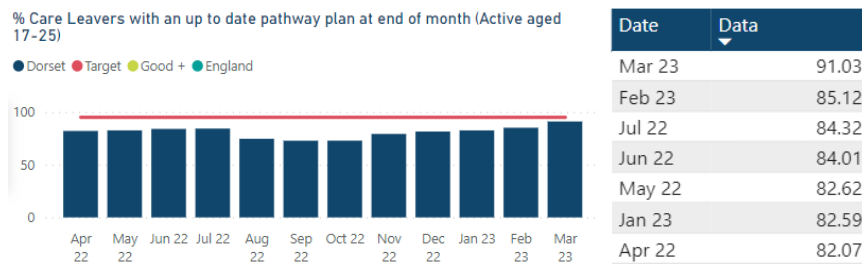
8.3 Personal Advisors use a variety of methods to maintain contact with young people, including minimum 8 weekly contacts with at least one face to face visit, telephone contact, WhatsApp contact, email and video contact. The team respond flexibly to young people, with a telephone duty service available Monday–Friday. Our duty service will be delivered from Kirtleton Avenue offering more face-to-face contact for young people.

8.4 As young people progress into adulthood, we are led by their preference for type and frequency of contact, however we will persist in maintaining open lines of communication for all our young people aged up to 21; for those young people who choose to exit the service at 21 years, we continue to contact them annually to keep in touch and remind them that the service is still able to offer support if needed up until the age of 25 years.



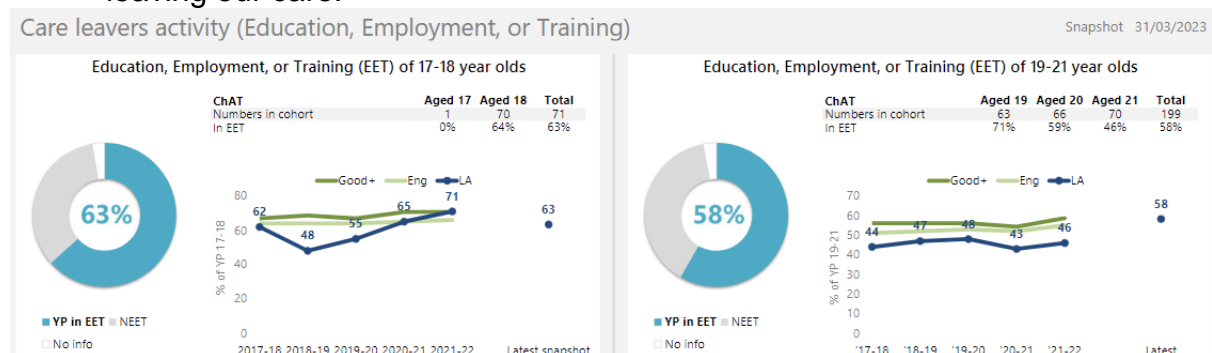
9. Pathway plans

9.1 Pathway plans for our young people are a valuable tool in planning for our young people's future including what actions need to be taken in the short medium and long term to support the young people we are working with. As such the Care Leaving service have prioritised this and developed our staffing resource to improve performance as shown below performance has increased from April 2022 82.07% to March 2023 91.03%). We aim for 95%+ performance in this regarding recognising the importance for our young people and planning.



10. Employment Education and Training (EET)

10.1 We have high aspirations for all Care Leavers and encourage them to achieve their goals and potential. 63% of our young people aged 17-18 years old are in EET and 51% of our 19 -21-year-olds, which compares favourably with national statistics and an improvement from 60% 17-18 year old and 43% 19-21 year olds in March 2022, however we remain ambitious for our young people and we recognise the need to continue to further strengthen practice and work with our partners to continue to improve our offer for young people leaving our care.



10.2 The Leaving Care Service is working with our Young & Thriving Team and internal/external partners to deliver an overarching Education Employment Training strategy as we continue to strive to increase the numbers of young people accessing education, employment and training.

10.3 The Leaving Care Service has recruited a Senior Personal Advisor to lead on Education, Employment and Training, the focus of the role will be to

increase/maximise EET opportunities for young people, leading on supporting the development of opportunities internally through our Pathways to Employment Apprenticeship/Trainee scheme and working with local businesses to consider opportunities for Care Leavers; increasing opportunities for employment and enrichment via the Care Leaver Covenant.

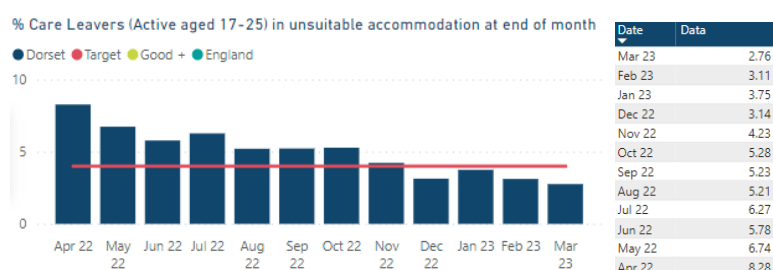
10.4 Dorset Council has underlined its commitment to Care Leavers through its HR procedures: all Children in Care and Care Leavers who apply for Dorset Council apprenticeships are guaranteed an interview; we are working with our HR colleagues to extend this commitment to all positions advertised by the council.

11 Suitable Accommodation

11.1 The majority of our young people have suitable accommodation. This remains a priority for Dorset Council, and we continue to work at pace to ensure that all our Care Leavers have safe, stable and permanent homes that meet their needs as this was the number one priority identified by our Care Leavers participating in the Coram Voice – New Belongings Survey. To this end, Dorset Council purchased accommodation in Kirtleton Avenue, Weymouth which has the capacity to house 12 young people in their own or shared flat. There is also a training flat for children in our care that will support development of independent skills in preparation for leaving our care.

11.2 The residents are supported by two peer landlords who also run the residents committee. At the time of writing this report there are 6 young people living in Kirtleton and we envisage being at capacity in the next 4 to 6 weeks. Feedback from residence have been positive with residence settling in quickly.

11.3 The Care Leaving team have enhanced practice standards and refined process for those young people in unsuitable accommodation that are now embedding into the team to ensure continues improving performance in this regard. As shown in the diagram below performance has been better than our target for the year for % of 17–25-year-olds in unsuitable accommodation with March 2023 being 2.76%. In April 2022, the percentage was 8.28%.



11.4 The Care Leaver Housing Protocol has been approved this year and was co-created between housing and the Care Leaving Service, both of whom are

delivering training to staff, which will come to an end in June 2023. This protocol looks to reduce homelessness for our Care Leavers and provide early access to suitable accommodation.

12. Conclusion

- 12.1** The Care Leaver Delivery Group as well as the Corporate Parenting Board oversee the service development and improvements to the Local Offer based on the priorities identified by young people. We have strong partnerships to ensure we are improving our offer to young people: Housing, Education, Employment & Training, Health & Well Being, Financial Entitlements and opportunities for enrichment and development. We have invested in staffing in the Care Leaving Service to strengthen the capacity in the team and reduce caseload numbers to enable us to deliver a high-quality service to our young people.
- 12.2** We have worked to reduce the number of Care Leavers in unsuitable accommodation. We have revised practice standards to have a greater focus on the quality and impact of support and planning for those that are in unsuitable accommodation including pathway plans, visiting arrangements, offer of practical support, exit planning and increased management oversight. We are ensuring these are embedded in practice by regularly auditing with QARO's supporting this process.
- 12.3** We have strengthened our Care Leaver Business Intelligence Dashboard to provide management information to all managers and senior leaders on key areas of performance including suitability of accommodation and management oversight of those young people living in temporary or unsuitable accommodation. The Business Intelligence Dashboard is embedded into management practice including operational management meetings within the Leaving Care Service to review areas of practice including suitability of accommodation, education, employment and training and activity status, but also to support with caseload allocation and management, monitoring of timely/completed supervision rates and pathway plans. The Dashboard provides up to date information for reporting purposes to senior management, via exception reports for unsuitability of accommodation, monitoring of transitions from Children in Care-to-Care Leavers Service.

13. Financial Implications

- 13.1** There are financial implications from this report – The investment in increased staffing capacity and the senior Personal Advisor roles have been funded through the Personal Advisor to 25 Grant and the Staying Close Grant. There has also been an uplift of 15% in supported lodgings allowance. The care leaver allowance has also been increased in line with inflation. All have been provided within 2023/2024 budget.

14. Environmental Implications

- 14.1** There are environmental factors to consider for those young people living out of the area, Personal Advisors meeting face to face with young people requiring at times long travel times.
- 14.2** We as a service try reducing our carbon footprint by using trains and linking Personal Advisors to young people near one another reducing the number of Personal Advisors traveling.

15. Wellbeing and Health Implications

- 15.1** The investment in staff within the service will support our Care Leavers wellbeing and health as staff will have the time to develop and maintain working relationships with our young people. This is highlighted by our young people feedback as there second and third highest priority (Life beyond care survey)

16. Other Implications

Not applicable

17. Risk Assessment

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

Current Risk: Low

Residual Risk: Low

18. Equalities Impact Assessment

There are no Equality implications for this report.

19. Appendices

Not applicable

20. Background Paper

Not applicable.