

# Corporate Parenting Board

## 20 June 2024

### Care Leaver Service Annual report 2023-2024

Choose an item.

**Portfolio Holder:** Cllr C Sutton, Children's Services, Education & Skills

**Local Councillor(s):**

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

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**Report Status:** Public

#### 1. Brief Summary:

1.1 The purpose of this annual report is to provide Dorset Council's Corporate Parenting Board with information on the activity of the Care Leavers Service from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024. This will ensure that the Board has an overview of the achievements, progress, and challenges in meeting the needs of Dorset's Care Leavers over the last 12 months. The report has been drawn together to highlight key developments and performance of the Care Leavers Service in exercising their duty to our care experienced young people.

#### 2. Recommendation:

2.1 That the Board notes and welcomes the positive outcomes that are being achieved by Dorset's care leavers and the plans of the Care Leaver Service to continue to improve outcomes throughout 2024/2025.

2.2 That the Board continue to promote the corporate parenting responsibility across all of Dorset Council.

3. **Reason for Recommendation:** That the Board continues to offer support and challenge to the Care Leaver Service in maximising the offer for care leavers.

## **4. Background:**

- 4.1 Protecting and looking after children and young people is one of the most important jobs that councils do when a child or young person, for whatever reason, cannot safely stay at home or with relatives or friends. Being a corporate parent means doing everything that can be done for every care experienced young person to give them the opportunities that other children and young people have.
- 4.2 Despite the ongoing focus within legislation and policy, children and young people who are care experienced have poorer outcomes compared to their peers. For example, care leavers are less likely to be in employment, education, or training post 18, four times more likely to be involved in the criminal justice system and four times more likely to have a mental health condition. It is Dorset's responsibility to ensure all our young people reach their potential and are supported to develop into independent, self-confident adults.
- 4.3 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 inter-dependence to assist them to deal with adult responsibilities.
- 4.4 In May 2023, we welcomed Ofsted for a focused visit on our Care Leaver Service. This recognised the progress we had made in developing our Care Leaver Local Offer and the strength of our relationships with Care Leavers. We continue to build on this to address the area identified for improvement.
- 4.5 In September 2023, Dorset Council agreed to make care experience a protected characteristic. It's recognition that young people's experience of being in the care system can be a potential source of discrimination similar to other protected characteristics such as race or disability.
- 4.6 We continue to deliver on our aspiration to ensure that Dorset is the best place to be a child; where communities thrive, and families are supported to be the best they can be. This report will outline the work of Dorset's Care Leaver service between April 2023 and March 2024.

## **5. Introduction**

- 5.1 We have high expectations and aspirations for all our care leavers. When young people are preparing to leave care, we want to ensure that they feel as ready as possible and know what to expect. We recognise they may not be fully equipped with practical independence skills or have the knowledge to access the range of services that they may need.
- 5.2 Our model of interdependence aims to ensure that our young people have the support of the Personal Advisor (PA) to guide them around key areas including

housing, health, employment, education, leisure, benefits, and other community services.

- 5.3 The Ofsted full ILACS inspection in September-October 2021, had one recommendation which was to improve *“Oversight of arrangements when care leavers move in and out of emergency or temporary accommodation.”*
- 5.4 On 17 and 18 May 2023, HMI Ofsted inspectors undertook a focussed visit to Dorset Children’s Services, considering the arrangements for care leavers. The visit was carried out in line with the inspection of local authority children’s services (ILACS) framework.
- 5.5 The headline finding from the visits was that *“Leaders have significantly strengthened support and services for care leavers and have made notable improvements in the quality and standard of their accommodation.”* This was an area for development at the last inspection.
- 5.6 The views and opinions of our young people are central to the planning we do for them as Corporate Parents. Together with care leavers we have helped staff, partners, and elected members to understand their corporate parenting responsibilities. This approach to development and delivery of support and services for care leavers puts children and young people at the heart practice.

## 6. Context

- 6.1 Care Leavers are young people aged 18 years to 25 years of age who have been in care as a child. There are four different categories, and each category has an associated entitlement status:
- 6.2 **Eligible child** - 16 or 17 years old in care and have been in care for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14, will meet the criteria as an ‘eligible child’.
- 6.3 **Relevant child** - 16 or 17 years old, have left care, but were in care on or after their 16th birthday and have been in care for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14. This applies if they have been part of the youth justice system or hospitalised on or after their 16th birthday.
- 6.4 **Former relevant child** - 18 to 21 years old and if they were previously either an eligible or relevant child.
- 6.5 **Qualifying child** - 16 to 21 years old and have been in care or, if disabled, have been privately fostered after reaching 16, but do not qualify as eligible, relevant, or former relevant (have spent less than 13 weeks in care). May also qualify if subject to a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) and were looked after immediately before the SGO was made, or, if previously an eligible child, but returned to live with someone with parental responsibility (PR) for more than six months before 18th birthday.

- 6.6 From April 2018 the Children & Social Work Act 2017 introduced a new duty on local authorities, to provide Personal Advisor (PA) support to all Care Leavers up to age 25 (if they want this support). Under previous legislation, local authorities were required to only provide Care Leaver with support from a PA until they reach age 21, continuing up to age 25 only if a Care Leaver was engaged in education or training.
- 6.7 Dorset Council has a Care Leaver Strategy in place for the period from 2021 to 2023. The strategy focuses on young people who are preparing to leave care between the ages of 16 and 17, or who have already left care and are between the ages of 16 and 25.
- 6.8 Various legislation and policies have influenced the development of this strategy, including the Children Act (1989), Housing Act (1996), and the Children and Social Work Act (2017). The strategy outlines several outcomes to improve care leavers' lives:
- 6.9 **Outcome 1:** Enhance access to education, employment, and training.
- Outcome 2:** Ensure care leavers experience stability in their lives and feel safe and secure.
- Outcome 3:** Improve access to health support.
- Outcome 4:** Help care leavers achieve financial stability and independence.
- Outcome 5:** Foster strong family networks and support them in reaching their full potential
- 6.10 Dorset Council aims to provide care leavers with the same level of care and support that other young people receive from their parents. The goal is to ensure services are "good enough for my child" and to be the best Corporate Parents in the country.
- 6.11 We strongly believe that it is everyone's responsibility to help those who have been in care to overcome the difficulties that they experienced in their childhoods, so that they can lead successful adult lives.
- 6.12 We are partners with Bright spots, together with 7 other Local Authorities, to deliver the New Belongings programme. New Belongings aims to better understand what makes life good for care leavers and how we can improve our support by co-producing solutions with them. With our New Belongings partners, we have undertaken a self-assessment of our services and developed an action plan for improvement. This is overseen and monitored from our Care Leaver Delivery Group (CLDG) which reports to the Corporate Parenting Board. Through New Belongings, we also have opportunities to come together with other Local Authorities for peer and practice learning.

- 6.13 Dorset Council make a promise to all care leavers to share responsibilities by working with people who can help make a difference to the lives of care experienced children and young people. Details of the promise can be accessed via the internet: [The Dorset Promise - Dorset Council](#)
- 6.14 We have consulted with care leavers and stakeholders and also developed a 'local offer' which provides detailed information about the service and support available to care leavers, including information about both their statutory entitlements as well as any discretionary support we provide. This is provided to young people leaving care at age 16 and can be accessed via the internet: [Local Offer for care leavers - Dorset Council](#).
- 6.15 Ofsted considered our local offer as strong and were supportive of the plans to continue to grow and develop commenting in their focussed visit in May 2023 *"Personal advisers are proud to be able to deliver a plethora of services to help and support young people. There is a determination to make the offer even stronger."*

## **7. Dorset Demographic**

- 7.1 At the end of March 2024, we had 592 care leavers in our family. 298 were former relevant care leavers (aged 18-25 and previously an eligible child) and were receiving a service.
- 7.2 53% (313) are male care leavers and 46% (274) are female with 1% (5) reporting as non-binary.
- 7.3 80% of our care leaver population is white, 8% black/British, 7% other ethnic group, 3% mixed ethnicity and 2% Asian/British. The 2021 Census (ONS) records Dorset's diverse population as being 93.1% white British, 6.1% BME and only 1.8% of the population recorded English as not their main language.
- 7.4 62 young people who were still in care (age 16/17) had an allocated personal advisor, supporting the young person and their social worker to make plans and reassure the young person of the arrangements for when they turned 18 and technically "left care".
- 7.5 Our care leavers who were unaccompanied children in care have also risen over the last 12 months, from 44 to 49 in March 2024. This is an area of our care leaver family we know will increase over the next 12-18 months. This is in response to the national requirement for Dorset to have up to 67 (0.1% of the population) unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UAS) in their care at any one time. 22 young people were still waiting for a decision on their asylum application which meant they continued to be dependent on Dorset council for financial and practical support (providing funding for housing/accommodation costs and a weekly living allowance in line with Universal Credit allowances).

- 7.6 Most of our care leavers remained in care until their 18 birthday (94%) which is above the % of good local authorities (71%). Whilst the picture is improving, we know not as many of our young people are benefiting from 'staying put' or supported lodging arrangements as we would like.
- 7.7 On 31 March 2024, 30 care leavers were in a staying put arrangement with their previous foster carers and a similar number (21) were in a supported lodgings home. 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 are actively recruiting supported lodging hosts as we know this is an area of growing need for our care experienced young people.

## **8. Workforce**

- 8.1 The Care Leaver Service in Dorset has had significant investment from senior leaders through to operational staff. The Care Leaver Service now has a dedicated Head of Service and since November 2023 a team manager, 3 personal advisors and 3 social workers delivering a specific service to our unaccompanied children and young people.
- 8.2 The Care Leaver team is run operationally by the Service Manager for care leavers, and we have 3 team managers (2.5 FTE) and 17.64 x FTE Personal Advisers in the service. The team also benefit from 2 senior personal advisors with a focus on staying close and engaging care leavers with education, employment, and training (EET).
- 8.3 Over the last 12 months we have developed a strong and collaborative relationship with our housing partners. This has included their support in recruiting 2 housing officers with a specific focus to support care leavers living in Dorset. 1 officer has a focus to support those living in care leaver accommodation (Kirtleton, Leon and Clarence which provides affordable housing for up to 21 care leavers) and the other is funded through DLUHC (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities) which supports care leavers to maintain housing tenancies, reduce homelessness and the need for unsuitable or emergency accommodation. We have also welcomed a permanent business support officer (BSO) who provides administrative support to the care leaver team and social workers within the unaccompanied children and young people team.
- 8.4 We have retained a fairly stable workforce over the last 12 months, with successful recruitment to cover maternity leave and just one personal advisor leaving the team.
- 8.5 Personal Advisers are secondary allocated to young people as soon as possible after their 16 birthday, to provide a smooth transition from their social worker to the Care Leaver 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 that they feel ready and confident with the plans and know what to expect as the milestone of leaving care approaches.

8.6 Over the last 12 months we have seen the impact of the Transitions Panel in ensuring all young people over 17 have a clear plan for post 18 which includes housing, education, health, and social support needs. Where there is early identification of complexity/challenge the panel has provided a multi-agency approach to solutions. The Panel ensures that Pathway Plans are ambitious and support our young people to move towards increased independence creating maximum opportunities for living, loving, learning, and working.

## **9. The role of a PA in Dorset:**

- Complete timely pathway plans, co-produced with young people and reviewed every 6 months or more frequently depending on need.
- Keep in touch with our care leaving young people.
- Support our care leavers to access relevant services e.g. Health Services
- Support care leavers in preparing for adulthood and independent living.
- Support care leavers to access suitable housing.
- Support care leavers in accessing Education, Employment or Training
- Support care leavers in budget planning finances where appropriate.
- Support care leavers who are becoming or are a parent

9.1 We are proud that we have continued to be in touch with 98% of our care leavers throughout 2023/24.

9.2 The Head of Service reports weekly to the Senior Leadership Team to identify those care leavers who are not in touch with the service and consider creative ways we can re-engage. We continue to contact all our care leavers at least annually to share information on what they are entitled to and the support we are able to offer them, at any point until they are 25.

## **10. Workforce Development:**

10.1 Through our Workforce Development Team the personal advisors, new and experienced, 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.

10.2 We have developed resources available on the Children’s Hub or The Academy (our virtual learning and development platform) to support personal advisors and team managers that are working with our young people who use substances, are struggling with their mental health, are victim or perpetrators of domestic abuse, facing homelessness becoming a parent and are supporting care leavers in reviewing pathway plans. This includes tool kits such as the

Graded Care Profile, Contextual Safeguarding, Domestic Abuse, Sexual Abuse and Engaging Families.

- 10.3 We promote the learning and development offer through our 'Workforce Wordout' newsletter and have a robust process in place to evaluate the impact of the learning and development activity.

## **11. The Independent Visiting Service for Care Leavers**

- 11.1 The children's Independent Visiting service provides volunteers to visit, befriend and support children who are in our care and more recently it has been agreed for this to be extended to care leavers beyond 18 and up to 21. This recognises the importance of trusted and lasting relationships. An Independent Visitor is an adult who has volunteered to spend time with children/young people in care. The role of the independent visitor is to visit at least once a month, so the young person will see them regularly. They plan for whatever the young person wants to do and the time they spend will be all about the young person. This service is currently commissioned through NYAS (National Youth Advocacy Service).

## **12. Young People Feedback**

- 12.1 We had high rates of participation in last Care Leaver's Bright Spots survey undertaken in February 2024, with 79% return rate from Dorset care leavers who are receiving a service from us (237 young people). We continue to work with young people on their identified top 10 key priorities which include the top 5:
- Being safe and settled in accommodation.
  - Having good health and well-being.
  - Relationships: having people for emotional support.
  - Making sure support works for all care leavers.
  - Entitlements: knowing your rights as a care leaver.
- 12.2 The New Belongings your life beyond care, bright spots survey provided by coram voice, has successfully been implemented within Dorset. Senior Leaders from Dorset have committed to providing funding to facilitate two-yearly surveys with young people which will enable us to truly assess the impact of the interventions put into place.
- 12.3 The outcomes and findings of the bright spots survey are considered by Children's Senior Leadership Team, Corporate Parenting Board, other relevant service areas and explored deeper in workshops across the workforce. Care leavers have prioritised the areas of work to be a focus and to shape the Care Leaver Delivery Group action plan. We are currently waiting for the outcome of the February 2024 bright spots care leaver survey which is due to be published



in July/August 2024. We had a fantastic response rate of 78% this year (an increase of 18% from 2 years ago).

- 12.4 The care leaver team works closely with the Youth Voice Team, who use a variety of tools to hear feedback from young people. They 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.
- 12.5 In response to the bright spots survey in 2022, 60% of care leavers contributed to share with us what was important to them. Over the last 12 months we have been working with our care leavers and partners to respond and develop support and services to meet this need. The outcome of this has also been shared with care leavers in February 2024 *“you said and together we have achieved”*.
- 12.6 27% said they were having financial difficulties. Over the last 12 months we have: arranged for regular meetings with DWP at the hub to talk and have support with benefits. Care leavers are exempt from council tax if living in Dorset and if living outside of Dorset (up to 21) the care leaver team will financially support the payment of this. We will also help financially to pay for prescription charges.
- 12.7 27% of our care leavers did not feel positive about their future so together we have increased opportunities through the pathway to employment, increased the number and variety of apprenticeships available for care leavers within Dorset Council, worked with the NHS to offer pathway to employment and training and have supported with work experience and opportunities to meet with local businesses and employers with a view to exploring work opportunities.
- 12.8 33% of care leavers said they had high anxiety levels. To help with this we have a dedicated care leaver nurse, 126 care leavers have signed up and 66 have accessed *“Ask Jan”* (counselling support and finance support) and worked with Everyone Active so care leavers can have free gym membership.
- 12.9 66% of care leavers who responded to the Bright spots survey shared they did not feel they were living in the right place. Together we have increased housing options for care leavers (Kirtleton Avenue, Clarence Road, and the Leon Centre), revised our financial support to offer rent deposits, act as a guarantor, recruited 2 housing officers and meet with the housing team to look at what temporary housing options we are able to access for care leavers across Dorset, supporting a move out of B&B as soon as we are able and is right for the young person.

12.10 89% felt they had a trusted adult in their life so together we have made sure that all children in care at 16 have a PA, we continue to strengthen our staying close programme, increase the number of staying put arrangements and through funding from the DfE have started to establish a new mentoring programme.

12.11 The mentoring programme is to support care leavers to create new and enduring relationships and support networks within their communities. Through the successful bid and grant awarded we have been able to employ a programme lead and 2 care experienced young people in an apprenticeship role to help establish and deliver the programme. We aim to have at least 30 care leavers linked with a mentor by 31 March 2025.

12.12 The objectives of the programme are:

- More care leavers are supported to identify a trusted relationship in their life.
- Care leavers are supported to build a network of support, friendships, and trusted relationships.
- Feelings of loneliness are reduced and more care leavers report feeling positive about their future.
- Care leavers develop knowledge of local communities and get support with engaging and contributing to the community.
- Care leavers confidence and self-esteem increases isolation reduces.
- There is a reduction in offending
- There is a reduction in attendance to A&E
- There is an increase in engagement with education, employment, and training.

12.13 The outcome of the Bright spots survey completed by 78% of care leavers in February 2024 will be available by July 2024. These outcomes and findings will highlight our bright spots of practice and inform the revised priorities for the care leaver service for 2024 to 2026.

**13. Performance (Key performance Indicators):** The Business Intelligence Dashboard is embedded into management practice with the leaving care team being the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest user across children's services. This is used daily 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.

13.1 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 Leaving Care service.

13.2 We provide weekly performance oversight to corporate director for care & protection, monthly performance reports to CLDG and monthly reporting on

exceptions to corporate parenting board. We are confident in the changes made to the service and delivery and can easily see this through the improved performance over the last 12 months. The high level of scrutiny and oversight enables us to quickly spot areas where greater focus or support is required so that we are able to maintain our continuous improvement journey.

- 14. In touch:** We are consistently in touch with 98% of our care leavers. Relational practice is at the heart of our work with young people, building trusting, supportive relationships. Our care leavers consistently tell us that they have a positive relationship with their PA which is evidenced through the records of visits, calls, and communication. This was highlighted as an area of strength in the feedback from HM Ofsted inspectors in May 2023. This remains one of our bright spots of practice.
- 15. Pathway plans:** Over the last 12 months we have continued our focus on pathway planning. On 31 March 2024 91% of care leavers had an up-to-date Pathway Plan. This is a continuing area of focus for the team as we need to ensure that all our young people have an up-to-date Pathway Plan that is ambitious and supports our young people to move towards independence.

  - 15.1 We have updated our practice standards to ensure we have a greater focus on the quality and impact of Pathway Plans. We are confident that most of our plans are in line with the young person's circumstances and updated when situations change.
  - 15.2 In March 2023, 90% of pathway plans were completed within timescales. There is a focus on the value and importance of a pathway plan and for this to be undertaken in consultation with the young person.
  - 15.3 For those young people in unsuitable accommodation (such as B&B, custody or staying with friends on a temporary basis), their pathway plan is updated and there is a higher frequency of visits by the PA, an offer of practical support and exit planning. Consistency in the quality & timeliness of supervision has improved over the last year, ensuring our management oversight is driving forward our planning for children. We are consistently at 100% for supervision held every 4 weeks to review and reflect on the impact of unsuitable housing or circumstances for these young people.
  - 15.4 We have further strengthened our reflective supervision so our PAs know their young people well and can talk confidently about the work and expected outcomes for care leavers. Supervision frequency has seen a month-on-month improvement since May 2023 (70%) to consistently over 90% within Q4 (Jan to March 2024).
- 16. Employment Education and Training (EET):** We continue to have high expectations for our care leavers to access education, employment, or training

once they turn 18. During the academic year 2023/24, we were supporting 21 care leavers at university.

- 16.1 70% of 17/18-year-olds (above the National benchmark of good+) and 57% of 19-21-year-old care leavers were accessing education, employment, or training (slightly below National benchmarking of good+) at the end of March 2024. Overall (active 18-25 care leavers) 54% (159) of our care leavers are in education, employment, or training.
- 16.2 Over the last year we have developed a senior PA to lead on EET, link closely with our young and thriving partners to help deliver the EET strategy and have oversight through CLDG for challenge and scrutiny with regard to what we collectively need to do to strengthen this area of our work and offer to our care leavers.
- 16.3 Our pathway to employment for care leavers has grown significantly over the last 12 months. They now support 9 care leavers who are undertaking an apprenticeship within Dorset Council. This continues to be an area of focus offering work experience opportunities, support with application forms, interviews and what to expect when starting work. The apprenticeships across the council provide a flexible and higher-level of support and nurturing that we know our care leavers need.
- 16.4. Our vision for the next 12 months is to increase the number of care leavers engaging with a council apprenticeship and having the mentoring support in place to enable them to maintain and be successful in the employment.
- 16.5 46% (135) of our active care leavers are not in education, employment, or training (NEET). We know that there are 19 care leavers who are NEET due to pregnancy/parenting, 39 due to illness and 76 recorded as "other reasons". This does include those care leavers who are being supported with work experience, voluntary work or actively seeking employment. This an area in which we are making progress and are committed to further strengthen EET opportunities for our care leavers.
- 16.6 We are working closely with Dorset Youth Voice & our Young and Thriving teams to help us better understand the barriers and challenges that impact our care leavers in accessing EET.
- 16.7 The Leaving Care Senior Personal Advisor with a lead on Education, Employment and Training, has supported the development of opportunities internally through our Pathways to Employment Apprenticeship/Trainee scheme and working with local businesses to consider opportunities for care leavers. Joint ventures between the local authority and employers are

underway that have helped some of our young people into employment that is right for them and with employers who understand them and the possible challenges they face. As a result, care leavers are being provided with successful tailored employment opportunities.

- 16.8 We continue to closely monitor the situation for all care leavers through our business intelligence dashboard and weekly reporting to the corporate director & monthly reports to the care leavers delivery group. (Good+ statistical neighbours are Cornwall, East Sussex, Norfolk, Shropshire, Somerset, Suffolk, Wiltshire & Worcestershire.)
- 16.9 We have a protocol in place with two of our Job Centres Plus which provides:
- co-ordinated support to engage young people into Education, Employment, Apprenticeships, Voluntary Work or Training.
  - an early entry system and a smooth transition for those young people leaving care and needing to claim benefits.
  - prompt and accurate payment of benefits where these are required.
  - young people are empowered and enabled to gain sustainable paid employment through individual route ways.
- 16.10 Personal advisers help care leavers to access education, employment, or training. When young people are not engaged, they have input from the headteacher of the virtual school and from other agencies. Young people are encouraged to undertake other educational activities while looking for employment or waiting for the academic year to begin. Strong collaboration between partner agencies ensures that these young people are tracked and monitored so that they can be supported to make future choices that are right for them.
- 17. Suitable Accommodation:** The majority of our care leavers have suitable accommodation (96%). 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. This was the number one priority identified by our care leavers participating in the bright spots – New Belongings Survey.
- 17.1 We are able to evidence that our care leavers are benefiting from a focused management and corporate approach to ensure that they live in suitable housing. Very few live in unsuitable accommodation and if, (or when) they do, there are systems to ensure that additional management oversight is in place. This helps to ensure that more appropriate housing is provided as quickly as possible.

- 17.2 Improved relationships and joint working with partner agencies alongside working agreements with housing services and organisations means that our young people receive timely services should they become homeless or be at risk of homelessness.
- 17.3 We have been able to further support our care leavers through the appointment of 2 housing officers. 1 with a focus of supporting those care leavers in Dorset council accommodation and the other with a focus on supporting care leavers living independently to maintain their tenancies, working closely with private rental landlords and providing housing advice. We are anticipating the impact of these posts to reduce the number of care leavers needing emergency accommodation, facing eviction and homelessness, and maintaining their own stable housing. Both of these posts are joint funded between housing and children's services which further strengthens the collaborative approach to meeting our care leavers housing needs.
- 17.4 One of our Strategic Priorities (6) is to increase the quantity and range of high-quality care leaver accommodation and support to promote stability, safety, and emotional wellbeing.
- 17.5 We have 23 carers offering Supported Lodgings carers to a total of 21 young people aged between 17 and 23 years old. We forecast that we need an additional 5 places in supported lodgings for unaccompanied young people.
- 17.6 Dorset Council commissions 87 local supported accommodation places (up to 18 months duration) for young people aged 16-25 through its Supported Accommodation Framework, of which 15 are for unaccompanied young people seeking asylum who are in care; 30 places are for children in care or care leavers and 40 are for young people aged 16-21 who are at risk of homelessness. We predict that we may need a further 30 places in line with anticipated increase of care leavers in 2025.
- 17.7 In 2022 Dorset was successful in being awarded a 3-year DfE grant to pilot 'Staying Close', which can help young people stay in touch with and get ongoing support from Children's Home carers after they move on. Our Staying Close project has seen young people retain links through formalised support arrangements. We are actively supporting 12 young people under Staying Close arrangements. We are anticipating an additional 12 care leavers accessing staying close over the next 12 months.
- 17.8 We know that we need to increase the number and range of Dorset Council properties available for our care leavers. In addition to the 12 flats in Weymouth, we have converted 2 properties which will offer accommodation for a further 9 young people in the Portland and Weymouth areas.

- 17.9 The housing market in Dorset is challenging and more local supported and independent housing is needed for former unaccompanied young people seeking asylum and care-experienced young adults. There is an estimated need for housing for young adults exiting supported accommodation of 50 places per year (25-30 for care leavers and 20 for vulnerable young adults at risk of homelessness).
- 17.10 The information packs, created to support young people requiring emergency accommodation, a recommendation from ILACS inspection in 2021 are fully embedded in practice. Further accommodation to support young people has been provided through Kirtleton Avenue, providing accommodation for 11 young people and provides a base to provide support to care leavers on the ground floor, with personal advisors, care leaver nurse and other professional regularly providing drop-ins for care leavers.
- 17.11 As a team we have reviewed our financial support available to care leavers when they are needing to privately rent. We will provide rent deposit, rent in advance, act as a guarantor and in some situations “top up” rent so they are able to maintain employment or further education.

## **18. Next steps:**

- 18.1 We need to ensure that care leavers have access to the right support both within and outside Dorset, including financial support such as council tax and prescription exemptions.
- 18.2 We need to focus on the provision of more high-quality accommodation that feels safe and is affordable in Dorset. This needs to include increasing our supported lodgings providers that come from a diverse range of backgrounds to meet the needs of our growing Black and Minority Ethnic groups.
- 18.3 We need to work with colleagues and partners to support our care leavers with their mental health and wellbeing.
- 18.4 We need to be able to offer the right support to overcome the challenges and barriers care leavers feel they face and to offer a wide range of education training and work opportunities for our care experienced young people.

## **19. Conclusion**

- 19.1 The Corporate Parenting Board continues to deliver improved outcomes for Care Leavers through its established working sub-group, the Care Leaver Delivery Group. The Care Leaver Delivery Group has ensured that we have addressed the area for development (timeliness of supervision) outlined during

the focused visit in May 2023 and has also driven forward the adoption of care experience as a protected characteristic by Dorset Council in September 2023.

- 19.2 We have increased the number of care leavers who are accessing apprenticeships within the council and work closely with our housing colleagues to support our care leavers to access accommodation that meet their needs.
- 19.3 The Care Leaver service has progressed approaches to support young people develop lifelong links to tackle loneliness and isolation through staying close, staying in touch and more recently the mentoring programme which started in January 2024.
- 19.4 The Business Intelligence Dashboard is embedded into management practice including operational management meetings within the Care Leavers 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.
- 19.5 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 Leaving Care service.
- 19.6 Positive strides have been taken in respect of housing and accommodation for care leavers. Our young people are benefiting from a focused management and corporate approach to ensure that they live in suitable housing. Very few live in unsuitable accommodation and if, or when, they do, there are systems to ensure that additional management oversight is in place. Improved relationships and joint working with partner agencies alongside working agreements with housing services and organisations means that young people receive timely services should they become homeless or be at risk of homelessness.
- 19.7 We have worked to reduce the number of care leavers in temporary accommodation. However, in March 2024, we had 9 young people in unsuitable accommodation.
- 19.8 As a care leaver team, we know the strengths and challenges of the service well. We have focused on improving the help and support that our care leavers receive, and this was highlighted in the Ofsted focussed visit and letter in May 2023. These improvements are underpinned by ongoing consultation with young people. We have listened to young people about their experiences and acted to improve practice and services.



**20. Financial Implications**

There are no financial implications from this report and all have been provided within budget of the service.

**21. Environmental Implications**

There are no environmental factors to consider other than young people living out of the area, Personal Advisors meeting face to face with young people requiring at times long travel times.

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.

**22. Wellbeing and Health Implications**

Not applicable.

**23. Other Implications**

Not applicable

**24. Risk Assessment**

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

Current Risk: Low

Residual Risk: Low

**25. Equalities Impact Assessment**

There are no Equality implications for this report.

**26. Appendices**

Not applicable

**27. Background Papers**

Not applicable.

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