



Care Leavers and Corporate Parenting Update Cllr Tristan Robinson, Cabinet Member for Homes and Families

Report to	Community, Environment and Partnerships Committee
Ward(s):	All
Key Decision:	No
Papers relied on:	Council Tax Care Leavers Discount Scheme – report to Cabinet 13 th November 2018

Foreword - Cllr Tristan Robinson, Cabinet Member for Homes and Families

I welcome this report into the corporate parenting and care leaver responsibilities across Basingstoke and Deane. This piece of work stems from a committee work programme request, where members rightly wanted to understand more about the responsibilities we have to care leavers across our Borough.

While Hampshire County Council have primary responsibility for children in care and care leavers, this report details the council's role in relation to care leavers and how we work in partnership with HCC to ensure we are doing what we can to support those young people in care or leaving care.

The Basingstoke and Deane support offer sits alongside that of Hampshire County Council and includes Council Tax relief, grant funding, tailored housing support and employment/ skills assistance.

I look forward to hearing the views of the committee in terms of our role supporting care leavers, the level of support already provided and actions proposed to further enhance that support.

The committee is invited to note:

- **The council's role in relation to corporate parenting principles, particularly in relation to care leavers; and**
- **The level of support currently provided to care leavers in Basingstoke and Deane.**

- **The actions that are underway to further enhance the support to care leavers in Basingstoke and Deane.**

Views of the committee are sought on:

- **Whether, based on their experience, there are additional areas they believe should be explored.**

Background, corporate objectives and priorities

The corporate parenting duty was introduced by the Children and Social Work Act 2017 and sets out the council's role in supporting young people who are either in care or leaving the care system up to the age of 25.

Hampshire County Council (HCC) has the statutory duty for providing services for children and young people but the Act places an additional duty on district and borough councils to act as a 'Corporate Parent' and have regard to the seven needs identified in the Act when exercising their functions in relation to looked-after children and care leavers. Statutory guidance for local authorities published by the Department for Education in February 2018 entitled 'Applying corporate parenting principles to looked-after children and care leavers' (the Guidance) encourages councils to ask themselves 'would this be good enough for my children?' and to use this as a guide to help identify actions

A corporate parenting board has been established at a county level to provide governance for the actions being taken by HCC to fulfil their corporate parenting duty. The board has recently reached out to borough and district councils seeking a partnership approach.

Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council (BDBC) has already taken actions to help meet its corporate parenting responsibility, including introducing a council tax discount scheme for care leavers, concessionary leisure rates for children in care and liaising with HCC to identify further opportunities for greater collaboration around housing, community based support, community safety and employability.

Corporate parenting and support for care leavers falls under two of the three priorities of the Council Plan:

- Improving residents quality of life
- Supporting those who need it

Glossary of terms

Term	Definition
BDBC	Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council
HCC	Hampshire County Council
The Act	Children and Social Work Act 2017

HRA	Homelessness Reduction Act 2017
The Guidance	Statutory guidance published by the Department for Education in February 2018 entitled Applying corporate parenting principles to looked-after children and care leavers

Main considerations

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report outlines the council's role in relation to the corporate parenting principles, particularly in relation to HCC care leavers living in the borough.
- 1.2 A care leaver is defined as a young person leaving the care of the local authority aged up to 25 who has been looked after for at least 13 weeks in total since the age of 14.
- 1.1 At the time of writing this report, according to information provided by HCC, there are currently 46 care leavers aged 18-21 living in Basingstoke and Deane who are receiving a service from HCC plus a further 6 who are aged 22-25 years.
- 1.2 The numbers of individuals at any given time do fluctuate due to people turning 18 or 21 and more recently due to the change in legislation meaning that some services now being available to up to 25s. However, based on the current number of looked after children between the ages of 15-17 living within the borough, it is not anticipated that the number of care leavers will significantly increase over the coming years.
- 1.3 There is already a great deal of support available through HCC, BDBC and partner organisations but there are still opportunities to enhance the offer and better connect young people leaving care to advice and support to help those young people become independent and build a positive future.
- 1.4 Discussions have taken place with HCC in relation to strengthening partnership arrangements around care leavers, including improvements to information sharing about local services, seeking opportunities for greater collaboration and earlier notification of young people likely to have a housing need.
- 1.5 The committee is invited to note:
 - the council's role in relation to corporate parenting principles, particularly in relation to care leavers;
 - the level of support currently provided to care leavers in Basingstoke and Deane; and
 - actions underway to further enhance the council's support to care leavers.

1.6 Views of the committee are sought on:

- Whether, based on their experience, there are additional areas they believe should be explored.

2 Key issues for consideration

2.1 Corporate Parenting

2.1.1 The Children and Social Work Act 2017 introduced corporate parenting principles, which local authorities within England and Wales must have regard to. HCC has the primary statutory responsibility for children in care and care leavers in Hampshire but the relevant guidance also highlights the role of district councils due to some of the services they deliver, such as homelessness prevention, council tax collection and leisure services.

2.1.2 The corporate parenting principle that local authorities must have regard to are:

- to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people;
- to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings;
- to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people;
- to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners;
- to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people;
- for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work, and;
- to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

2.2 Care Leavers

2.2.1 This report focusses primarily on support for care leavers as this is when young people often leave their long-term placement and have less support and guidance available to them than when they are in care. This is also where the services provided by BDBC are most relevant and therefore where the greatest opportunity exists for the council to fulfil its corporate parenting role.

2.2.2 Care leavers are defined as young people leaving the care system up to the aged of 25 who has been looked after by the local authority for at least 13 weeks in total since the age of 14.

- 2.2.3 Information provided by HCC in January 2020 states that there are currently 46 care leavers aged 18-21 years plus a further 6 aged 22-25 years living in the BDBC area who receive a service from HCC. Although numbers do fluctuate due to a variety of factors making it difficult to predict the volume in the future, based on recent years and the current number of looked after children within the borough aged 15-17, it is not anticipated that this will change significantly over the coming years.
- 2.2.4 When a child is in care, in addition to the support available through their placement, they also have a dedicated social worker to help them access further support. When they leave care, the support package changes as they are encouraged to live independently.
- 2.2.5 Evidence shows that care leavers run a greater risk of social isolation, street homelessness, unemployment, health inequalities and contact with the criminal justice system, as well as having their own children removed. Therefore, interventions focussed on this small group have the potential to create a positive outcome for both the individuals and the wider community.

2.3 HCC Support Offer

- 2.3.1 HCC ensures that all young people leaving care have access to a tailored support package co-ordinated by allocated Personal Advisors to help them with the challenges young people face when moving towards adulthood and independent living, such as budgeting, housing, education, training and employment as well as social and emotional support.
- 2.3.2 Traditionally the support package for care leavers focussed on 18 to 21 year olds but as a result of the 2017 Act, some services have now been extended up to the age of 25.
- 2.3.3 The focus of the support offered is around helping prepare young people for independence. Not all take up the help on offer and that is their choice but the majority maintain some level of contact.
- 2.3.4 In order to extend the offer and improve the chance of care leavers moving into stable accommodation, HCC are also introducing 'homelessness prevention personal advisors' and 'group workers' to further help young people access a wider range of support and advice available within the community via a range of partner and community based organisations.

2.4 BDBC Support Offer

- 2.4.1 **Council tax** - In November 2018, Cabinet agreed to a council tax exemption arrangement for care leavers. This applies to young people leaving care who apply for council tax support. The relief tapers off between the ages of 21 to 25 to help prepare recipients for the move to the full rate post 25. There are currently 5 care leavers receiving council tax relief from BDBC. Individuals are identified by HCC and contacted by the council tax team to encourage them to access the relief and explain what they need to do. The team also provides wider assistance to these individuals, signposting them to other relevant services, particularly where in some circumstances they are no longer supported by HCC services.

2.4.2 **Grants programme** - BDBC provides support through the grants programme to a number of voluntary sector organisations, some of which provide services to care leavers. The below is not an exclusive list but a small selection of those who report that they provide support to care leavers:

- YPI Young Persons Counselling receives strategic funding from BDBC towards their core counselling service. In addition, they have been successful in attracting external funding to develop a new Mentoring Programme for young parents and care leavers aged 17 to 25, which is designed to provide mentoring will help provide earlier interventions.
- YMCA is in receipt of programme funding from BDBC for the 'Y Pass' programme, which is designed to provide a modular course of life skills, coaching, and mentoring to vulnerable young people. The programme also supports young people to access education, training and employment and proactively engage in society through a range of citizenship activities. The project is aimed at young people between 18 and 25 and includes care leavers.
- Citizens Advice receives strategic funding from BDBC. Although they do not offer a specific programme for care leavers, they do offer them support and advice as part of their core service, which is particularly relevant for the types of challenges they are likely to face. They are also actively seeking opportunities to further directly promote their services to HCC teams in order to encourage care leavers to access the support they offer.

2.4.3 **Housing** - There has been a joint working protocol between district housing authorities and HCC in place since April 2015, which has been recently revised. This details the pathways and options of housing support for young people in care and transitioning to having care leaver status. HCC continue to commission a range of supported housing options for young people from 16 to 22 (which can go up to 25 in some circumstances).

2.4.4 Discussions are ongoing in relation to ensuring that advice and support around housing options is provided at the earliest possible stage to children in care to prevent them from experiencing unsettled accommodation or homelessness. This includes encouraging HCC to notify BDBC of young people likely to have a housing need at an earlier stage than the legal requirement.

2.4.5 BDBC support these schemes through partnership working, e.g. giving timely advice and options to those wanting to move on from the accommodation, officers are involved in case conferences and multi-agency meetings to support individuals and prevent homelessness. It is crucial with any housing situation, particularly for children in care, that housing professionals are involved, when necessary, as early as possible in mapping their housing needs. A strengths-based approach, focusing on what the person wants as well as needs is taken when assessing the options available in relation to support and housing. Upstream, targeted support and planning is key in the prevention of homelessness, and BDBC continues to strengthen processes and relationships at HCC to ensure this can happen.

- 2.4.6 As a housing service it is vital that we work in strong partnership with HCC and the service providers to ensure a smooth transition for children leaving care and beyond. Step By Step (support provider for young people service in Basingstoke and Deane), are part of the Social Inclusion Partnership, which brings opportunity for them to share in best practice across the homelessness sector locally, and benefit from the joint training in areas such as Trauma Informed Care practices, resilience training, and psychologically informed environments. This promotes consistency and stability for care leavers (and other clients) to move through the supported pathway without it feeling disjointed.
- 2.4.7 BDBC locally commission housing support services for clients over 18, which include both accommodation and outreach projects. We regularly monitor the number of care leavers identified within these services to understand the pathway clients are accessing. A particular focus is on the rough sleeper outreach service that Julian House provides. We know that across the country leaving care is a transition point, which can lead to street homelessness or unsettled homelessness (e.g. sofa-surfing), especially where the pathways are not meeting the needs of the clients. As a local authority we have a duty to accommodate someone who has care leaver status, therefore work closely with colleagues in the outreach team to ensure this duty is met.
- 2.4.8 The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA), which came into force across England in April 2018, provides further protection and more choice for care leavers who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. The HRA changed the local connection criteria for care leavers. A young person owed leaving care duties under section 23C of the Children Act 1989 will now have a local connection to the area of the children services authority that owes them the duties. If the children services authority is a county council and not a housing authority, such as HCC, the young person will have a local connection with every housing authority district falling within the area of the children services authority. Where a care leaver is aged under 21 and normally lives in a different area to that of a local authority that owes them leaving care duties, and has done for at least 2 years including some time before they turned 16, the young person will also have a local connection in that area.
- 2.4.9 This offers the young person more choice and flexibility around where they wish to reside, and as such any young person owed leaving care duties from HCC will be able to access whichever county-wide district they wish to be living in, without being refused assistance or referred to a separate area. To note, this does exclude Portsmouth and Southampton City Councils, as unitary local authorities.
- 2.4.10 With the introduction of HRA some public authorities are required to notify the housing authority of service users they consider may be homeless or threatened with homelessness; known as the Duty to Refer. HCC is one of those public authorities, which means that there is effective information sharing between its children services team and the BDBC housing team. This joint working increases the chances of a positive transition of support and advice as all parties are working towards the prevention of homelessness for the individual who is leaving care.

2.4.11 **Employment and skills** - BDBC actively supports young people to access employment related training and initiatives in partnership with a range of local organisations and businesses. It coordinates the Basingstoke Employment and Skills Zone and shares information on courses and vacancies in a fortnightly bulletin as well as holding recruitment events.

2.4.12 BDBC is also member of a local apprenticeship task group, which aims to promote apprenticeships and training. It works with local schools, the Basingstoke Consortium and Basingstoke College of Technology to promote traineeship and apprenticeship courses, and runs public awareness campaigns via social media during National Apprenticeship Week.

2.4.13 Traineeship courses last up to 6 months and prepare people for work or an apprenticeship. They include interview skills, employability skills, interview practice and general preparation for employment. This allows individuals to overcome barriers and build skills before starting the apprenticeship scheme, such as an initial interview, presentation and dissertation.

2.4.14 There are also a range of courses, many of which are free, provided within the borough by partner organisations to support people into employment and focus on both developing practical skills and building confidence. These courses are complemented by other schemes that are aimed at providing more intensive support to those who need it to help them into work, education or training. They are generally open to anyone who is not currently working (or on limited hours) or those who face barriers to employment, such as care leavers.

2.4.15 **Leisure** – A concessionary rate is currently available for looked after children at the council owned leisure facilities, Aquadrome and Tadley Pool, which are managed by Serco. These rates represent a significant discount on standard rates. At present these rates are not extended to care leavers but this is currently being explored.

2.5 Identified opportunities

2.5.1 Through discussions with lead officers at HCC, a number of further opportunities have been identified, which are currently being investigated or progressed.

2.5.2 These include the following:

- identifying a single point of contact within BDBC for the HCC corporate parenting board;
- developing closer working relationships with HCC colleagues to help ensure information about young people due to leave care is shared with the housing team far earlier than is currently required. This would enable a plan to be agreed prior to them needing accommodation;
- partnership work between BDBC officers and the new HCC group workers to connect with community based services available to care leavers and information sharing about local initiatives;
- directly marketing relevant services to care leavers through HCC, including support, apprenticeship and traineeship opportunities;
- exploring opportunities to tailor or prioritise apprenticeship opportunities for care leavers;
- exploring extending existing concessionary leisure rates available to children in care to include care leavers up to the age of 25.

2.5.3 Officers have also started to explore opportunities relating to transport for care leavers and whether there is scope to introduce reduced bus fares. At present, Stagecoach offer a lower fare for young people but that is up to the age of 18. Any introduction of a concessionary rate for care leavers would need to be in part or entirely funded and administered by the borough council but there is currently no budget for this so if this is something committee would wish to see considered, further investigation into the cost and resource implications would be required.

Corporate implications

3 Legal Implications (must be completed by Legal Services)

- 3.1 Under the Children Act 1989 HCC has the primary statutory responsibility for children in care and care leavers in Hampshire.
- 3.2 However, s.1 Children and Social Work Act 2017 introduced seven corporate parenting principles, which local authorities within England must have regard to when exercising their functions in relation to looked-after children and care leavers.
- 3.3 The corporate parenting principle that local authorities must have regard to are:
- to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people;
 - to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings;

- to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people;
- to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners;
- to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people;
- for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work, and;
- to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

3.4 Although not binding but merely advisory, the statutory guidance for local authorities published by the Department for Education in February 2018 entitled 'Applying corporate parenting principles to looked-after children and care leavers' (the Guidance) helps local authorities to identify actions.

4 Financial implications

4.1 At present there is no specific budget allocation for this purpose, although there is some impact on service budgets and in terms of staff time from the actions described earlier in the report. However the impact of this at present can be incorporated within existing staff and service budgets.

4.2 It is not currently envisaged that implementing the majority of the above will require any additional funds, although discussions are ongoing with Serco in relation to the reduced rates being offered to care leavers in relation to use of the Aquadrome and Tadley Pool. The financial impact on the council from this is currently unknown, but is not considered to be significant. Initial enquiries have started in relation to the scope for travel concessions. There is currently no budget to support this and costs are not yet known but should there be an appetite to pursue options, resource and cost implications will be explored further.

5 Risk management

5.1 A risk assessment has been completed in accordance with the council's risk management process and has identified no significant (Red or Amber) residual risks that cannot be fully minimised by existing or planned controls or additional procedures.

6 Equalities implications

6.1 When considering how BDBC delivers on its corporate parenting responsibilities in relation to the public sector equality duty, and its impact on the protected characteristics groups, it can be concluded that the support provided for care leavers is very positive for this group as it improves access to services, housing and employment opportunities. The identified opportunities for further activities and partnership work will continue to improve life chances and help build a positive future for this particularly vulnerable group.

7 Consultation and communication

- 7.1 The council will continue to work with partners to promote and signpost support and opportunities for young people in the borough and through its own communications channels such as press releases, Basingstoke and Deane Today and social media.

8 HR implications

- 8.1 There are no identified HR implications.

Conclusion

9 Summary

- 9.1 BDBC is committed to working in partnership with HCC to ensure that young people leaving care have access to support and opportunities which enable them to move towards independence and help set them up for a positive future.
- 9.2 There is already a wide range of support available for care leavers through HCC, BDBC and partner organisations but there are still opportunities to extend the offer, enhance partnership working processes and directly promote services to ensure that these young people have access to the type of services they need to help them achieve and live independent lives.

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For information

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