



Basingstoke
and Deane

Care Leavers and Corporate Parenting Update

Report to	Community, Environment and Partnerships Committee
Ward(s):	All
Key Decision:	No
Foreword - Cllr Tristan Robinson, Cabinet Member for Homes and Families	

I welcome this report on Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council's corporate parenting and care leaver responsibilities. The report explains the council's role in relation to care leavers and provides an update on work undertaken since the last report to this committee in January 2020. It also sets out how Basingstoke & Deane BC works with Hampshire County Council, which has the primary responsibility for children in care and care leavers, to support young people.

Examples of support provided by this council to care leavers in the borough include Council Tax relief, grant funding, tailored housing support and employment/ skills assistance. Covid has inevitably had an impact on the quality of life of young people and this report gives examples in respect of care leavers.

I look forward to hearing the views of the committee concerning the support already provided and actions proposed to further enhance that support.

The committee is invited to note:

- **actions taken by the borough council's in 2020 to deliver on its role in relation to corporate parenting principles, particularly in relation to care leavers, and;**
- **actions that are underway to further enhance the support to care leavers in Basingstoke and Deane.**

Views of the committee are sought on:

- **the work that is currently being undertaken and future plans.**

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 at county level provides governance for the actions being taken by HCC to fulfil its corporate parenting duty.

Actions taken by Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council (BDBC) include the introduction of a Council Tax discount scheme for care leavers, concessionary leisure rates for children in care and liaison 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:

- Strengthening Communities
- Improving Safety

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 Hampshire County Council (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.
- 1.3 The most recent information provided by HCC reports that there are currently 58 care leavers aged 18-20 living in Basingstoke and Deane who are receiving a service from HCC plus a further 12 who are aged 21-24.
- 1.4 The numbers of individuals at any given fluctuates due to people turning 18 or 21. However, based on the number of looked after children between the ages of 15-17 living within the borough (currently 51), it is not anticipated that the number of care leavers will significantly increase over the coming years.
- 1.5 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.
- 1.6 The committee is invited to note:
 - the actions taken by the council since January 2020 to deliver on its role in relation to corporate parenting principles, particularly in relation to care leavers, and
 - the actions that are underway to further enhance the council's support to care leavers in Basingstoke & Deane
- 1.7 Views of the committee are sought on:
 - the work that is currently being undertaken and future plans.

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 The most recent information provided by HCC reports that there are currently 58 care leavers aged 18-20 living in Basingstoke and Deane who are receiving a service from HCC plus a further 12 who are aged 22-24 years. 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 focused 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 – 2020 update

- 2.3.1 HCC ensures that all young people leaving care have access to a tailored support package coordinated 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 focused 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.
- 2.3.5 The Homelessness Prevention Personal Advisors (HPPAs) supported by the Transforming Social Care Partnership Manager facilitated an engagement event with local partners in November 2020 regarding the Care Leaver journey into independence. Following on from this, stakeholders have been invited to join focus groups on key areas of independence for Care Leavers such as housing/health and wellbeing/independence/financial stability and EET, with the view that services will be able to strengthen their offers of support and learning to Care Leavers with the HPPAs leading on this with PAs from across the 4 teams. The hope is that local partner agencies will as part of this commit to facilitating workshops on key issues with a rolling calendar of information events being available to all 16 to 25 year olds. Information and support around Housing and Money are the areas of information identified as most wanted by care leavers.
- 2.3.6 HCC is piloting a 'test and learn' initiative with Hampshire Achieves Adult

Community Learning (ACL) supported by the North East Care Leaver Team creating an adult learning offer centred on the journey to independence themed on personal development, staying safe, citizenship and aspirations and skills for the future.

2.3.7 The Care Leaver service is also working closely with the DWP which recognises that Care Leavers have additional support needs when transitioning into adulthood. The aim is to promote more integrated support for young people who leave care, by developing collaborative local relationships between HCC and the DWP and the result is looking positive in terms of the projects that will be taken forward in 2021. BDBC also contributes to in employment and skills initiatives (see paragraph 2.4.11)

2.4 BDBC Support Offer – 2020 Update

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 9 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** – A report to Cabinet on 9 March 2021 recommended a new allocation of strategic and programme grants to community and voluntary organisations. Many of the projects recommended for funding assist young people, and some provide help and support for the type of issues that care leavers are more likely to experience.

2.4.3 **Housing** The joint working protocol between district housing authorities and HCC in place since April 2015 was reviewed and revised in 2019. This details the pathways and options of housing support for young people in care and transitioning to having care leaver status. HCC continues 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 As part of the commitment at the last committee to enhance working relationships between the housing team and care leaver team, monthly meetings have been set up with a manager from both services to address any issues and consider up-coming complex situations. This has resulted in improvements for the young people using both services.

2.4.5 Since 1 April 2020 the housing team have had 13 people approach for housing advice and assistance who have “leaving care” as a support need; nine people were aged 18-20, and four aged 21 and over.

2.4.6 One of the observations from the last committee was to improve partnership working and since this time we have ensured that the Social Inclusion

Partnership (SIP) has been accessible to children services colleagues and broadened the topics and working group themes. At the next SIP in April there is an agenda item on leaving care and homelessness to ensure the whole homelessness support sector is aware of the needs of people leaving care.

- 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. This bulletin is emailed to Hampshire County Council Care Leaver teams for distribution.

- 2.4.12 There are a range of free courses available within the borough 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.
- 2.4.13 During 2020 and into 2021 the majority of these courses and support services had to be adapted so they could be delivered online. New virtual provision specifically for younger job seekers was launched by the National Careers Service and a new service to support young entrepreneurs is now being delivered in the area by WSX Enterprise.
- 2.4.14 BDBC is a member of a local apprenticeship task group, which aims to promote apprenticeships and training. It works with local schools, and providers to promote traineeship and apprenticeship courses, and runs public awareness campaigns via social media during National Apprenticeship Week. BDBC is liaising with local apprenticeship providers and the HCC care leavers team to look at how best to offer targeted support and promotion to care leavers.
- 2.4.15 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.
- 2.4.16 COVID-19 has had significant impact on benefit claimant levels and younger people have been disproportionately affected. The claimant rate in Basingstoke and Deane among 18-24 year olds rose from 2.8 in January to 8.2 at its 2020 peak in September and remained at 7.9 at the end of the year. This is against an overall claimant rate of 4.3 in December 2020 across all age groups in the borough (1.6 pre pandemic.)
- 2.4.17 There have been a number of national schemes and incentives introduced to address this including the Kickstart scheme and additional financial incentives have been made available to employers to take young people on traineeships and apprenticeship schemes. Basingstoke and Deane have worked with DWP and other local partners to promote these schemes to local employers and residents and have offered eight kick start placements within the council.
- 2.4.18 Basingstoke and Deane have also worked with neighboring authorities Hart and Rushmoor and submitted a bid in October 2020 to DWP for funding to establish a youth hub across the three districts. The hub will support young people to access training, advice and guidance and help them move from benefits into sustained employment. The intention is to work with specific partners to target groups of young people such as care leavers.
- 2.4.19 **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. UPDATE

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 – in progress;
- developing closer working relationships with HCC colleagues to help ensure information about young people due to leave care is shared with the BDBC housing and other teams far earlier than is currently required. This would enable a plan to be agreed prior to them needing accommodation – in progress;
- 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 – in progress;
- directly marketing relevant services to care leavers through HCC, including support, apprenticeship and traineeship opportunities – in progress
- exploring opportunities to tailor or prioritise apprenticeship opportunities for care leavers - under consideration but it may be difficult to achieve or to give any one group priority in the recruitment process
- exploring extending existing concessionary leisure rates available to children in care to include care leavers up to the age of 25

2.5.3 Care leavers do not receive a general discount on bus fares. There are no proposals to implement new concessions but HCC has clarified that it does provide support such as free travel to attend interviews.

Corporate implications

3 Legal Implications

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

noted in 2.1.2 above.

- 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 The current estimated annual cost of the care leavers Council Tax discount is approximately £6,000 which is fully funded by the council in accordance with regulations. The estimated cost of the care leavers discount for 2021/22 is difficult to determine but, if the number of additional eligible care leavers receiving discount was similar to the current year then, the total cost of the discount for 2021/22 is estimated to be around £8,000 which can be met from within existing budgets.
- 4.2 Other than Council Tax discount 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.

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.

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. 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.

**Date: 17 March 2021
for information**

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