

Somerset County Council
Scrutiny for Policies, Children and Families Committee –
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Implementation of new statutory duties to Care Leavers

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Cabinet Member: Cllr Frances Nicholson, Lead Member for Children

Division and Local Member: Leigh Redman

1. Summary

- 1.1** The Children and Social Work Act became law on 27/4/2017, statutory guidance relating to the new duties relating to care leavers was published in February 2018 and the new duties became effective from 1/4/2018.

Guidance to the new duties were published in February 2018; Applying Corporate Parenting Principles to Looked After Children and Care Leavers, Extending the Personal Advisor Support to all Care Leavers to age 25 and Local Offer Guidance.

Local authorities are expected to have published their Local Offer within in 6-9 months of implementation.

- 1.2** Implementation of the Leaving Care Service in implementing the duties enshrined in new legislation contributes to Somerset Children and Young People's Plan priority 6 - Achieving effective multi-agency support for more vulnerable children and young people and develop an excellent children's social work service.
- 1.3** Somerset County Council will receive a government grant of £24,680 for 2018-19 to help to meet the additional staffing necessary to respond to young people who may request Personal Advisor support after the age of 21 and up to their 25th birthday. The first instalment for 2018-19 has been received. Information regarding the funding amounts for 2019-20 will be available in February 2019.

2. Issues for consideration / Recommendations

- 2.1** The Chair of the Scrutiny Committee requested a brief report about the new duties for Local Authorities in relation to Care Leavers to inform the Committee about the changes and the council's response.
- 2.2** Members are asked to consider and comment on this report. In addition to consider ways in which Members can assist in improving the Local Offer for Care Leavers taking into account Somerset County Council's current financial pressures. In particular to play a part in promoting the work outlined in 3.1 and 3.3.

3. Background

- 3.1** A number of improvements have been made as a result of the new legislation and Guidance; the Corporate Parenting Board membership has been extended to include Job Centre Plus, there have been increases in weekly, birthday and festivity care leaver allowances and to the bursary for those in Higher Education.
- 3.2** All District and County Councillors are in agreement for exemption to Council Tax for 2019/20 and are also going to be one of 6 Local Authorities championing the Care Leaver Covenant which will feed into the Local Offer.
- 3.3** Taking into account the illustrative local offer, designed to support local authorities when developing their own, we are in the process of collating information about the range of services and support that may assist care leavers in, or moving to, adulthood and independent living that the local authority provides including:
- Health and wellbeing:
 - Relationships
 - Education and training:
 - Employment:
 - Accommodation:
 - Participation in society

We aim to have a new website publicising the Offer in place by the end of September. This will be a bespoke website and easily updated as our offer develops and improves over time.

- 3.3** We are in the process of contacting local and regional private businesses such as;
- High Street shops and supermarkets
 - Cafes Food and drink outlets
 - Entertainment outlets such as Cinemas, theatre etc
 - Driving schools
- requesting that they consider discounts for care leavers by issuing vouchers for the use of those who are most in need. The Leaving Care service will target those for whom it will improve quality of life.

Somerset is one of 6 Local Authorities championing the DfE commissioned Care Leaver Covenant which will feed directly into the Local Offer. The Covenant is a promise made by organisations in the private and voluntary sector to provide support for care leavers aged 16-25 to help them to live independently. A knowledge sharing day is being held for the 6 Local Authorities on 11th July.

- 3.4** In relation to the extension of Personal Advisor support, the current cohort of 16-20 year old care leavers is 335. There are an additional 350 care leavers aged 21-24. We are currently working with 35 of those young people, 10 of them already had a right to a continuing service as in further or higher education, 12 have wanted a service to continue post 21, and 13 have returned requesting resumption of a service.

- 3.5** We have amended the SCC Leaving Care Website and the LC Service Facebook page. However we have been wary of contacting the remaining 315 care leavers directly to inform them of the new entitlements until we had processes and the staffing levels in place to respond appropriately. We are now almost fully staffed and plan is in place to send letters to the care leavers' last known addresses after the summer holiday period on a phased basis. As we have no way of knowing what level of response there will be, we intend to monitor the number making contact and adjust the timescale accordingly.

4. Consultations undertaken

- 4.1.** To assist Local authorities in implementing its new duties the Government appointed Mark Riddell OBE as a National Implementation Officer. Mark visited Somerset on 10th and 11th of April and met 8 care leavers, the Chief Executive Officer, the Leader of the Council, the Director and Assistant Director of Childrens' services, staff and managers. Mark will visit again in the autumn to discuss progress.
- 4.2.** The Care Councils, Somerset In Care Council (SICC) and Somerset Leaving Care Council (SLCC) have been, and are continuing to be, consulted about the Local Offer and have been asked to contribute to the content of the new website.
- 4.3.** A range of partners have been informed about the new legislation and asked to contribute to the development and strengthening of the Local Offer particularly taking into account the clarification about Corporate Parenting principles
- 4.4.** Interviews for an apprentice care leaver Ambassador are being held on 11th July and the post holder will help to develop the engagement of care leavers in the production of the Local Offer and in the development of care leaver services in the future.

5. Implications

- 5.1** It is a statutory duty to implement the new legislation. In making their judgements about the quality of services and outcomes for care leavers, Ofsted inspectors will take into account the extent to which we have complied with the new duties.

6. Background papers

- 6.1** Statutory guidance for local authorities February 2018:
- Applying corporate parenting principles to looked-after children and care leavers
 - Extending Personal Adviser support to all care leavers to age 25
 - Local offer guidance

Note For sight of individual background papers please contact the report author