

North East Derbyshire District Council

Council

13 January 2020

Local Offer for Children in Care and Care Leavers

Report of Councillor Alex Dale, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Council Services

This report is public

Purpose of the Report

- To inform Council of the District Council's support and commitment to a countywide District and Borough 'Local Offer for Children in Care and Care Leavers' and the development of a countywide 'Care Leaver Covenant'.

1 Report Details

- 1.1 There are approximately 70,000 to 80,000 children in care in England at any one time. At the time of writing this report there are over 800 children in care across Derbyshire, over 120 of these children are in North East Derbyshire and Bolsover Districts. Derbyshire County Council (DCC) currently have approx. 350 active foster families/carers, far fewer than is needed to meet demand.
- 1.2 Most of these children have had a very poor start in life often witnessing things many of us thankfully have never had to. Not all children needing foster care come from broken homes or are abused, some will be due to their parents becoming seriously ill or even dying. At a time when playing, having fun and making friends should be helping to form the building blocks for their future selves, many of these children are being faced with unspeakable challenges, being removed from a place that should be their sanctuary and plunged into a life of uncertainty, worry and fear.
- 1.3 When they leave care, many of these young people will face considerable disadvantage in their lives, compared to that of others. Whilst most young people will continue to rely upon their families well into early adulthood and beyond, young people leaving care often do so without the support of a loving family. For a care leaver there is a very high risk that without continued support and people to care about them, that they will never reach their potential.

1.4 This provides the context for Section 2 of the Children & Social Care Act 2017 which requires each local authority (including District Councils) to publish a Local Offer for its care leavers (18 – 25 years). Through the Derbyshire Local Authorities Chief Executives Group and the newly formed Derbyshire Corporate Parenting Board, the County Council and District/Borough Councils agreed to collaborate to create one single ‘Local Children in Care and Care Leaver Offer’ for each of the District and Borough Councils to consider for adoption and publication.

1.5 The current number of care leavers across Derbyshire at the time of producing the report;

District/Age	18 years old	19 years old	20 years old	21 years old	Total
Amber Valley	8	11	12		31
Bolsover	3	3	5		11
Chesterfield	20	9	14		43
Derbyshire Dales	3	2	1		6
Erewash	8	16	12	1	37
High Peak	9	6	10		25
North East Derbyshire	9	5	3	1	18
South Derbyshire	5	7	6		18
Total	65	59	63	2	189

1.6 **The District and Borough ‘Local Offer for Children in Care and Care Leavers’;**

1.6.1 Council Tax Discount for Derbyshire Care Leavers

The rationale:

Managing budgets can be challenging for most people on low incomes particularly so for vulnerable young people adjusting to living by themselves without the support of a family network. A 2015 report by *The Children’s Society* (The Wolf at the Door – How Council Tax debt collection is harming children) suggests that care leavers are a particularly vulnerable group for Council Tax debt.

The offer:

A care leaver is defined as a young person aged 18-25 who was formerly a child in the care of Derbyshire County Council and becomes liable for council tax for a dwelling in this district. The discount will be awarded on the main residence of the care leaver up until their 25th birthday and will equate to 100% of their liability for council tax after all other relevant discounts and exemptions have been applied.

1.6.2 Active Fostering – Physical Activity Programme

The rationale:

It is well documented how physical activity improves overall health and fitness, however physical activity can also improve self-esteem, reduce stress, anxiety, play a role in preventing mental health problems and improving the life of those participating. However what is probably not as well-known is the impact of '*physical inactivity*' - physical inactivity is said to be the fourth leading cause of death worldwide. When coupled with other lifestyle and socio-economic issues, the effects of physical inactivity can become compounded and an individual's overall health and wellbeing can be affected to an even greater extent.

The offer:

An activity programme which helps foster families (and their families living at the same address), children in care and care leavers up to the age of 25, to be physically active by providing free access to some of our leisure facilities and activities. The programme provides free access to; swimming, swimming lessons and gym.

1.6.3 Employment, Skills, Apprenticeships and Work Experience

The rationale:

Working, whether paid or unpaid, is good for our wellbeing. It contributes to our happiness, helps us to build confidence and self-esteem and allows us to build supportive relationships and friendships with our colleagues. Employment can improve health by increasing social capital, enhancing psychological wellbeing, providing income and reducing the negative health impacts of economic hardship.

The offer:

Working with Derbyshire Children's Services, actively signpost care leavers to apprenticeship, work placement, work experience and mentoring opportunities within our own and partner organisations including but not limited to Rykneld Homes and Northwood.

1.6.4 Accommodation and Housing

The rationale:

Moving into suitable, safe accommodation, is often one of the main concerns for those leaving and preparing to leave care. Successful transitions into independent living can be significantly affected by the young person's accommodation and the avoidance of moving too far away from their settled area. A proper assessment of the young person's housing needs, assistance in preparing to make the move, offering choices in style and location coupled with a package of support to go with the accommodation, will all help to achieve positive results.

The offer:

The District Council will work with other District and Borough Councils and DCC Children's services to review and refresh the joint working protocols to ensure that they are fit for purpose and deliver positive outcomes for care leavers across the County. This work will focus on the following:

- Local Connection –

Young people leaving care may have difficulty establishing a 'local connection' with the area where they feel most at home and therefore be unable to access services there should they become homeless. The Council will work to ensure that a young homeless care leaver has a local connection to the area of the local authority that looked after them or, if it is different, the area where they normally live and have lived for at least 2 years including some time before they reached 16. This will make it easier for them to get help in whichever of these areas they feel most at home.

- Intentionally Homeless –

Being 'intentionally homeless' means that the individual's homelessness or threatened homelessness is due to something the individual deliberately did or failed to do - this could affect a homeless person's opportunities to secure longer term housing arrangements. The Council will work to ensure that when it comes to a young homeless care leaver, all facts will be taken into account. The Council will consult with DCC Children's Services to obtain advice and information as to the young person's emotional and mental well-being, maturity and general ability to understand the impact of their actions.

1.6.5 Marketing and Promotion

The rationale:

There is a significant national shortfall of foster carers, DCC has approx. 350 active foster families/carers, far fewer than is needed to meet demand. Effective and appropriate advertising, marketing and promotion is key to attracting and retaining quality foster carers across the County. Getting the right messages, the right level of emotion, the right images and the right information to a larger audience will ensure that not only the number of enquiries will increase, but the number of successful recruitments will increase by ensuring that the applicant is clear from the outset what being a foster carer is all about.

The offer:

Working with Derbyshire Children's Services, actively support the promotion and recruitment of foster carers and supported lodgings, through the Council's many and varied communication channels, mediums and platforms. These will include but won't be limited to; printed newsletters, websites, social media, text messages and displays within public buildings with high footfall such as leisure centres.

1.7 Care Leaver Covenant

- 1.7.1 In July 2016, the Government published a major new policy document 'Keep on Caring' to support young people from care to independence. A key policy commitment in the paper is a strategic pledge to introduce a Care Leaver Covenant.
- 1.7.2 The Covenant is a promise made by the private, public and voluntary sectors to provide support for care leavers aged 16-25 to help them live independently.
- 1.7.3 The aim of the Care Leaver Covenant, to which organisations commit, is to provide additional support for those leaving care; making available a different type of support and expertise from that statutorily provided by local authorities.
- 1.7.4 Each organisation that commits to the Care Leaver Covenant will be able to offer a support package to care leavers that is tailored to its specific expertise. The organisation would underpin its commitment to the covenant with a specific 'offer', setting out what it can provide.
- 1.7.5 The Care Leaver Covenant outcomes will ensure that care leavers:
- Are better prepared and supported to live independently.
 - Have improved access to employment, education and training.
 - Experience stability in their lives and feel safe and secure.
 - Have improved access to health and emotional support.
 - Achieve financial stability.
- 1.7.6 Along with our own 'Children in Care and Care Leavers Offer', there is an opportunity for the District Council to work collaboratively with Derbyshire County Council, other District/Borough Councils and other partners and stakeholders across all sectors within the county, to develop a 'Derbyshire Care Leaver Covenant'. It is hoped that this commitment would form the foundation to identifying further measures to support children in care and care leavers across the county.

2 Conclusions and Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 We know that children in care and care leavers face some of life's toughest challenges and are more likely to encounter many more barriers in life than those of their peers. With the right support however, children in care and care leavers are absolutely capable of achieving their ambitions, aspirations and life goals.
- 2.2 As community leaders, District Councils have the potential to support both children in care and those leaving care. By raising awareness of the challenges, by promoting the opportunities and benefits of becoming a foster carer and by working collaboratively with others to provide opportunities to those leaving care, District and Borough Councils can significantly improve the life chances of these young people.

3 Consultation and Equality Impact

- 3.1 There are no negative equality impact implications from this report. The Local Offer for Children in Care and Care Leavers has significant and positive benefits for those in care and those leaving care who are some of the most vulnerable residents in the District.
- 3.2 The Local Offer for Children in Care and Care Leavers was approved at Cabinet on 7th November 2019.

4 Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

- 4.1 The publication of a local offer is a requirement for the local authority so there is no option not to have an offer. Rather than each Council producing and publishing its own offer, this offer is presented as a minimum 'joint offer' that all Districts and Boroughs within the County will adopt and publish in the interests of consistency, clarity and equity.

5 Implications

5.1 Finance and Risk Implications

- 5.1.1 Section 13A of the Local Government and Finance Act 1992 allows local authorities to reduce council tax in addition to statutory discounts. There is a financial implication to awarding reliefs under Section 13A as the Council has to finance all such reliefs from its own funds. As this can only be introduced as a local council tax discount, the cost is not shared with other preceptors and all the cost falls to North East Derbyshire District Council. The Council have approved this element of the offer previously in January 2019.
- 5.1.2 The *Active Fostering Physical Activity Programme* is part funded through DCC Public Health existing contracts with the Council, North East Derbyshire District Council currently receive £1600 p.a. towards the delivery of this programme. There are no additional financial implications for this element of the offer.
- 5.1.3 With regard to *Employment, Skills, Apprenticeships and Work Experience*, there are no material additional direct costs associated with this proposal. This strand of the proposal will be delivered through existing budgets and will largely involve improved processes, organisational links and communication.
- 5.1.4 The *Marketing and Promotion* element of the offer will not generate additional direct costs for the Council. DCC will be responsible for the design and content of the material, the District Council will provide the platforms for the promotion of the material. There may be a slight loss of income/opportunity when promoting foster care opportunities within the Councils printed magazine due to a missed opportunity to 'sell' that space within – this is thought to be negligible however.
- 5.1.5 The proposal seeks to reduce the risk of future poverty and deprivation. Increased financial resilience will increase personal resilience and reduce demand for future services.

5.2 Legal Implications including Data Protection

- 5.2.1 Section 2 of the Children & Social Care Act 2017 requires each local authority (including District Councils) to publish a Local Offer for its care leavers (18 – 25 years).
- 5.2.2 The definition of a ‘local connection’ for young people leaving care was amended by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 so that a young homeless care leaver has a local connection to the area of the local authority that looked after them. Additional provision is made for care leavers who have been placed in accommodation, under section 22A of the Children Act 1989, in a different district to that of the children’s services authority that owes them leaving care duties. If they have lived in the other district for at least 2 years, including some time before they turned 16, they will also have a local connection with that district until they are 21.
- 5.2.3 The Secretary of State for Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government considers that all attempts should be made by housing authorities to avoid the impact of intentionally homeless decisions in relation to care leavers aged 18 – 25. It will be a matter for the housing authority to determine whether or not a care leaver has become homeless intentionally, taking into account all relevant facts.

5.3 Human Resources Implications

- 5.3.1 There are no significant direct additional HR implications arising from the proposals.

6 Recommendations

- 6.1 That Members support the approach set out in the report and endorse the offer specifically set out at 1.6 and 1.7 of the report.

7 Decision Information

Is the decision a Key Decision? A Key Decision is an executive decision which has a significant impact on two or more District wards or which results in income or expenditure to the Council above the following thresholds: <i>BDC: Revenue - £75,000</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Capital - £150,000</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>NEDDC: Revenue - £100,000</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Capital - £250,000</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <i>Please indicate which threshold applies</i>	No
Is the decision subject to Call-In? (Only Key Decisions are subject to Call-In)	No

Has the relevant Portfolio Holder been informed	Yes
District Wards Affected	All
Links to Corporate Plan priorities or Policy Framework	All

8 Document Information

Appendix No	Title
None	
Background Papers (These are unpublished works which have been relied on to a material extent when preparing the report. They must be listed in the section below. If the report is going to Cabinet (NEDDC) or Executive (BDC) you must provide copies of the background papers)	
Report Author	Contact Number
Lee Hickin Joint Strategic Director	7218