

CHARTER FOR CARE LEAVERS

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Cabinet Portfolio	Education and Children's Services
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Papers with report	Charter for Care Leavers

HEADLINE INFORMATION

Summary	<p>On the 30th October 2012 the Children's Minister Edward Timpson, in association with care leavers and charities, launched the Charter for Care Leavers. The Charter is based on six principles of support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• identity and aspiration,• listening to care leavers' views,• support when needed,• providing information,• finding care leavers a home and• working together. <p>This Charter sets out principles and promises that care leavers wish both central and local government to make. Most of what is promised is already covered in legislation and should be standard practice.</p> <p>The key principles in this Charter will remain constant through any changes in legislation, regulation and guidance.</p> <p>The Charter for Care Leavers is designed to raise expectation, aspiration and understanding of what care leavers need and what the government and local authorities should do to be good 'Corporate Parents'</p> <p>Whilst the recommendation is to agree with the principles of the Charter, it has also been translated into a local Charter, which the London Borough of Hillingdon will work towards implementing in collaboration with our care leavers. It is important that "promises" are not made, which are not genuinely sustainable at the local level.</p>
Contribution to our plans and strategies	Hillingdon Children & Families Trust Plan
Financial Cost	There are no known direct financial implications arising from this report. Any future budgetary implications that arise in relation to the development and expansion of services will be fully considered as part of the Council's medium term financial forecast (MTFF).

Relevant Policy Overview Committee

Education & Children's Services Policy & Overview Committee

Ward(s) affected

The Charter and local actions affect all care leavers in wards across Hillingdon and those care leavers who are placed outside of the Borough.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That Cabinet:

- 1. Adopt the principles of the Charter for Care Leavers (Appendix 1) and;**
- 2. Approve Hillingdon's Charter for Care Leavers which sets out how the principles of the Government's Charter will be implemented and delivered locally (Appendix 2)**

INFORMATION

Children in care are one of the most vulnerable groups in society. The majority of children in care are there because they have suffered abuse or neglect. At any one time around 60,000 children are looked after in England and some 90,000 children are looked after at some point in any one year.

Around three quarters of looked after children live with foster carers and some 10 per cent are cared for in residential children's homes. The rest are cared for in a number of different settings including residential schools, placement with parents or through connected persons.

Care leavers are children and young people who have been legally looked after by the Local Authority including on, or after, their sixteenth birthday. They are entitled to multi agency leaving care and aftercare support until they reach early adulthood, up to the age of 21 or 24 if they are in education or training. Recent legislation (2010) has extended the rights of care leavers who can return to request for support with education/training post 21 and before the age of 25.

Nationally the number of young people aged 16 and over leaving care has risen each year from 8,170 in 2007 to 10,000 in 2012. More than half of these young people (63%) were aged 18 and over at the time of leaving care. 19% were aged 16 and 18% were aged 17. The number of 19 year olds who were looked after aged 16 was 6,610 at 31 March 2012. This is a rise from 6,290 at 31 March 2011. Despite the implementation of a series of legislative measures, outcomes for care leavers have not improved.

36% (2,400) of care leavers in 2011-12 were not in education, employment or training compared with 33% in 2010-11.

Nationally the number of over 16s that have started to be looked after each year has increased over the past 5 years. In Hillingdon, the increase in the number of 16-17 year olds who are looked after reflects the national trend even though the numbers of unaccompanied asylum seeking young people have decreased. The current cohort of 16-17 year old looked after children represents 35% of the total looked after population, an increase of 2 % from 2011.

Context and Legislation

The provision of leaving care services is delivered within the framework of the following legislation:

- The Children Act 1989
- The Children Leaving Care Act 2000
- The Children Leaving Care Regulations and Guidance 2001
- The Children Act 2004
- The Children and Young Person's Act 2008
- Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010 -Planning Transitions to Adulthood for Care Leavers guidance Volume 3

Improving outcomes for care leavers is a key Government priority according to recent statements by the Department for Education. Too many care leavers leave care with poor educational attainment and end up long term unemployed. However, being in care can also transform lives and give individuals good life chance opportunities. In 2010 the Government strengthened the duties local authorities have towards their care leavers. The Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010 and the statutory guidance Volume 3: Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers came into force in April 2011 and is based on the best local practice.

The principles in the underlying statutory framework are that young people should:

- Usually remain looked after until their 18th birthday unless there is a good reason to change their status;
- be listened to in the development and implementation of their Pathway Plans;
- be supported into education, training or employment;
- be provided with accommodation which is suitable and safe; and
- be given information and advice, as well as practical and financial support to make the transition into independent living.

Evidence from research and practice confirm that for care leavers:

- Transitions are accelerated, compressed and not sequential;
- Stability, consistency and quality relationships promote resilience;
- Good quality support does improve life chances and outcomes ;
- Young people need to be at the centre of decision making for creating leaving care plans

Young people in various consultations both nationally and locally have said that they have concerns about leaving care. These are noted below:

- Being on their own
- Not being able to cope
- Not being able to get help when you most need it
- Not having enough money to live on
- Cleaning up after yourself
- Leaving care before you're ready
- Having nowhere to go/come back to
- Being put in a 'dodgy' place

- Having nowhere to live
- Not being settled anywhere and having to keep moving around

Hillingdon Care Leavers

In Hillingdon there are 434 care leavers and the Council has carried out its statutory responsibilities as corporate parents to ensure that they are supported in their transition to adulthood. In addition, Hillingdon has, through working with Step Up, (the Children in Care Council) improved the support and services for care leavers. These have included:

- Reviewing the allocation of accommodation for care leavers
- Increasing the leaving care grant (agreed by Cabinet /Council in February 2013)
- Implementing the 'Staying Put' policy, a scheme which allows care leavers, following an assessment of their needs, to continue to live with their foster carers and leave care when they are ready for independent living.
- Setting up a pilot supported lodgings scheme which give care leavers support in semi independent living with approved families.
- Working in partnership with Brunel University to run an annual 'taster' programme to inspire and encourage care leavers to go to university.
- Providing work experience placements within the Council and with local businesses.

Charter for Care Leavers

On 30 October 2012, the Department for Education issued a series of documents aimed at improving outcomes for care leavers:

- A Charter for Care Leavers, setting out a series of principles and promises which care leavers want central and local government to make. The care leavers involved in the preparation of the Charter urge local authorities to use these principles when they make decisions about young people's lives. As noted earlier, the Charter for Care Leavers is designed to raise expectations, aspiration and understanding of what care leavers need and what the government and local authorities should do to be good corporate parents.
- A Care Leavers Data Pack, summarising national data about children who leave care aged 16 and over, outcomes of care leavers at age 19 and investigating issues such as age of leaving care and placement stability on the outcomes of care leavers. It is designed to help local authorities to compare their performance with others.
- A letter from Edward Timpson, MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families, to Directors of Children's Services, setting out the Government's expectations of local authorities.

The Charter for Care Leavers sets out that care leavers want authorities to:

- respect who they are, and remember that they are individuals;
- listen to them and place their views at the heart of decisions made about them, and, if not in agreement with their views, to explain why;
- provide them with information, advice, practical and financial help as well as emotional support. This includes helping them to find suitable accommodation when they move to independent living;

- value their strengths and help them learn from their mistakes;
- to support them in whatever way is possible, even when the formal relationship with them has ended.

Reasons for recommendation

The Charter for Care Leavers sets out the overarching principles, which will enable the Council to continue to improve and embed the principles in everyday practice and policies to meet the needs of care leavers.

Alternative options considered / risk management

The Cabinet can decide not to adopt the Charter.

Comments of Policy Overview Committee(s)

The Education and Children's Services POC undertook a major review into children in care during 2012. Their chief recommendation to increase the care leavers' grant was approved in 2013 as part of the budget process.

Financial Implications

There are no known direct financial implications arising from this report. Any future budgetary implications that arise in relation to the development and expansion of services will be fully considered as part of the Council's medium term financial forecast (MTFF).

EFFECT ON RESIDENTS, SERVICE USERS & COMMUNITIES

What will be the effect of the recommendation?

The Charter is aimed at improving the outcomes for care leavers.

The plan aligns the priorities of the Children and Families Trust alongside the Council's priorities and those of Hillingdon's Partners. The Charter also accords with the work being undertaken via the Corporate Parenting Board, which is chaired and supported by Elected Members.

Consultation Carried Out or Required

The Charter was discussed at the Children in Care Council 'Step Up' and members endorsed Hillingdon's draft Charter and commitment to its care leavers. Hillingdon will work with Step Up and care leavers on how the Council would implement the principles; with achievable promises that will meet the local needs of Hillingdon's leaving care population.

If the Charter is adopted, in the first instance it would be expected that all corporate parents in Hillingdon sign the Charter and their officers publicise the principles of the charter to all care leavers.

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Corporate Finance

Corporate Finance notes the recommendations in the report and concurs with the financial implications set out above.

Legal

There are no legal implications arising out of this report. Under the Council's Constitution, Cabinet has the appropriate powers to adopt recommendations proposed at the outset of this report.

The statutory authority for adopting the recommendations will be by virtue of Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 which makes provision for 'a general power of competence' for local authorities in England. The 'power' gives local authorities the power to do anything an individual can do unless specifically prohibited by law. This includes the power to act in the interest of their communities.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

NIL.