

REPORT TO: Children, Young People and Families Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 24th February 2014

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director Children & Enterprise

SUBJECT: Care Leavers

PORTFOLIO: Children, Young People and Families

WARD: Borough Wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To provide an update on issues in relation to Halton's care leavers.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That the report is noted

3.0 BACKGROUND

3.1 The Leaving Care Act (2000) defines the duties of a local authority towards those young people who leave its care, and those duties vary depending upon their age when they entered care and the length of time they were in care.

3.2 There are 4 categories under the Act –

- (i) Eligible children – an eligible child is one who is aged 16 or 17, has been looked after by the local authority for a period of 13 weeks since the age of 14, and remains looked after
- (ii) Relevant children – a relevant child is one who was previously an eligible child but who is no longer looked after and is under the age of 18
- (iii) Former relevant children – former relevant children are those young people who have reached 18 but not 21 and were eligible and/or relevant prior to becoming 18. However, if someone is being helped with education or training they remain a former relevant child to the end of their agreed programme, even if that takes them past the age of 21.
- (iv) Qualifying children – a qualifying person is one who is at least 16 but under 21, was in care prior to the making of a Special Guardianship Order and was 16 or over at the time that order was made.

3.3 While the local authority's general responsibility to care leavers extends until they are 21, or beyond if they continue into higher education, a young person who ceased to be eligible to receive services at 21 can return to the local authority to request additional support if they return before their

25th birthday and wish to pursue further education and training.

- 3.4 Depending upon their category, the leaving care services provided to the young people can include pathway planning, assessment and review; financial support; accommodation; provision of a Personal Advisor; assistance with employment; education and training; advice and guidance.
- 3.5 In Halton, care leaving services are currently being provided to 66 young people, the majority of whom are former relevant children.
- 3.6 The key challenges in respect of all care leavers continue to be to ensure that they have appropriate accommodation and engage in EET opportunities. Considerable work has been done in recent years to ensure that the options available to them have increased.
- 3.7 Against the government's performance indicator, just one care leaver was in unsuitable accommodation in December 2013 (custody) compared to 92% who were in suitable provision.
- 3.8 The number of care leavers who are engaged in EET activities can fluctuate depending upon their individual circumstances and the issues they are facing. In December 2013, 63% of care leavers were engaged in EET. This represented a slight reduction on the previous quarter's figures (75%) and was due to a number of young people being unable to sustain work or learning due to a range of personal issues including ill health, pregnancy or childcare, emotional stability.
- 3.9 More recently, the changes to the benefits system are also having an impact on care leavers, particularly in relation to the availability of one bedroomed properties in the Borough and in relation to the benefits claim system. Work will continue in these areas.
- 3.10 Alongside the revised pledge to children in care, a charter for Care Leavers has also been approved (Appendix 1). Based on a nationally developed charter, the Halton version was consulted on with care leavers who added some additional comments to it. These are highlighted in yellow.
- 3.11 A 'Moving on' booklet has also been re-issued to care leavers to explain some of the services available to them when they leave care. In future, both the charter and the booklet will be issued to all young people as they enter into planning for leaving care.
- 3.12 Each young person who has been in the care of the local authority is entitled to a leaving care/setting up home grant when they leave care. This has recently been increased to £2,000 per care leaver, in line with national recommendation.
- 3.13 In light of the revised Ofsted framework, in which services to care leavers are a graded judgement, a Care Leavers Action Plan has developed to increase the focus on them. Consultation with care leavers themselves is

an important part of developing services.

- 3.14 Ultimately, all services offered to care leavers aim to support their smooth transition to adulthood.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Halton's policy in relation to care leavers is compliant with legislation, regulation and national guidance.

5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Ensuring that the needs of care leavers are met is consistent with the role of officers, members and partners as Corporate Parents.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL PRIORITIES

6.1 Children and Young People in Halton

Support for care leavers is essential in ensuring that they achieve their potential and access the same opportunities as their peers.

6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

Access to opportunities will be enhanced if care leavers feel well supported and are able to have a smooth transition into adulthood.

6.3 A Healthy Halton

If care leavers are well supported and prepared for adulthood, their health outcomes should also be improved.

6.4 A Safer Halton

Stability can impact on a young person's ability to develop as a socially aware citizen, able to protect themselves and others.

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

Improving the outcomes for care leavers will enhance their ability to contribute productively to the borough.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

- 7.1 Failure to provide appropriately for care leavers will reduce their ability to achieve.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

Improving the life chances of Care Leavers will contribute to meeting their needs and ensure that they have the same opportunities as other young people.

9.0 REASON FOR DECISION

9.1 Report to be noted.

10.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED/REJECTED

10.1 No alternative options.

11.0 IMPLEMENTATION DATE

11.1 Already in place.

12.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

Leaving Care Act (2000)	DFE	CT
-------------------------	-----	----

APPENDIX 1 – CARE LEAVERS CHARTER

See attached.