

## **Item 10 – Care Leavers Support**

The attached report was considered by the People & Places Advisory Committee on 3 October 2023. The relevant Minute extract is below.

### **People & Places Advisory Committee (3 October 2023, Minute 17)**

The Chief Officer, People and Places presented the report which set out the statutory corporate parenting responsibilities and funding arrangements for care leavers under Kent County Council (KCC) whilst outlining the support provided through Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) to its customers, including care leavers. It also broke down the number of care leavers in Kent, by district.

The report also detailed the other organisations who had signed up to the Care Leavers Covenant. She noted that only councils with the statutory duty as corporate parent had signed up to the Care Leavers Covenant. Nationally, no lower tier Borough and District Councils had signed up.

She advised that following KCC's Cabinet meeting on 12 September, the KCC Cabinet had agreed to end supported accommodation on a care leavers 19<sup>th</sup> birthday. At present this support had been until they were 21 years old or 25 years in some circumstances. The removal of this support service was due to budget efficiencies. This change could have a significant impact on SDC in that the care leavers could be served with an eviction notice and would likely present to local housing authorities, which would not only impact staffing resources, but also homelessness budgets.

Members discussed the report and some concerns were expressed that KCC were reducing their support to 19 year olds and the risks, including officer and financial resources that this could have on SDC. Members noted that SDC was in a good position with support that it offered but questioned how the Council would be affected by signing the covenant and whether it was possible to sign the covenant without committing to all the requirements associated with it.

In response to questions Members were advised that care leavers should have a personal adviser provided by KCC to support them and KCC received funding from central government to enable their care leaver offer under their statutory obligations. SDC did not receive any funding to offer bespoke care leaver support. She advised that signing up to the Covenant, the Council would need to demonstrate that it is able to meet the Covenant's pledges. This would take away vital staff resources from helping customers directly.

Members were advised that a key concern and risk is SDC are the only District Council signatory in Kent, such a commitment could present a significant resource burden on SDC, with care leavers from across Kent being

signposted into the Sevenoaks District. This would likely reduce and detract from the meaningful support we currently have in place for care leavers. This risk is heightened in light of KCC's significant budget pressures and efficiency proposals, which includes services being reduced or removed.

The Chief Officer, People & Places advised that in the previous month 156 customer enquiries had been made to the HERO team, many with complex issues, including health, employment, benefit advice and debt advice and these customers would be impacted if resources were taken away for paperwork. SDC's Housing, Energy, Retraining Officers (HERO) Team were a single point of contact for any care leavers who were in the district.

In response to further questions Members were advised that it was KCC's responsibility as the corporate parent to assist care leavers into training and employment. Sevenoaks District Council provides details of all its current vacancies to KCC and were looking at developing a recruitment policy to ensure that care leavers and veterans are provided with an opportunity for interview, should they meet the criteria.

In summing up the Chairman advised that the report was thorough and detailed and discussion had raised comments on signing up and the additional workload it could put on SDC resources. Details had been provided regarding the level of support that already existed for care leavers across the district and the work that SDC undertook to support the care leavers with wrap around support.

#### Public Sector Equality Duty

Members noted that consideration had been given to impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Resolved: That it be recommended to Cabinet that

- a) The statutory corporate responsibility and associated Government funding assigned to KCC to support care leavers, be noted;
- b) To date, the Care Leavers Covenant had been signed up to by councils with a statutory responsibility and associated funding for children's services and care leavers, be noted;
- c) That the support provided by SDC to its customers, including care leavers, through existing service provision and resources, be acknowledged;
- d) That the Council should not become a formal signatory of the Care Leavers Covenant, noting there were risks and resource implications (staffing and budget) to the Council in meeting the Charter's five pledges; and the report, be noted.

