

CARE LEAVERS SUPPORT

Cabinet – 9 November 2023

Report of: Sarah Robson, Chief Officer – People and Places

Status: For Decision

Also considered by:

- People and Places, 3 October 2023

Key Decision: No

Executive Summary: This report outlines the statutory corporate parenting responsibilities and funding arrangements for care leavers under Kent County Council, whilst outlining the support provided through Sevenoaks District Council to its customers, including care leavers.

This report supports the Key Aim of: the Housing Strategy and Community Plan.

Portfolio Holder: Cllr. Lesley Dyball

Contact Officer(s): Sarah Robson and Kelly Webb, Ext. 7219

Recommendation to People and Places Advisory Committee

- (a) To note the statutory corporate responsibility and associated Government funding assigned to Kent County Council to support care leavers.
- (b) To note that to date the Care Leaver Covenant has been signed up to by councils with a statutory responsibility and associated funding for children's services and care leavers.
- (c) To acknowledge the support provided by Sevenoaks District Council to its customers, including care leavers, through existing service provision and resources.
- (d) To note the report, making a recommendation to Cabinet as to whether the Council should become a formal signatory of the Care Leaver Covenant, noting that there are risks and resource implications (staffing and budget) to the Council in meeting the Covenant's five pledges.

Recommendation to Cabinet

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- (b) To note that to date the Care Leaver Covenant has been signed up to by councils with a statutory responsibility and associated funding for children's services and care leavers.
- (c) To acknowledge the support provided by Sevenoaks District Council to its customers, including care leavers, through existing service provision and resources.
- (d) To consider whether the Council should become a formal signatory of the Care Leaver Covenant, noting that there are risks and resource implications (staffing and budget) to the Council in meeting the Covenant's five pledges.

Reason for recommendation: The number of care leavers supported by KCC, as corporate parent, is relatively small in Sevenoaks District (14), compared to the rest of Kent. This report seeks to reassure members that Sevenoaks District Council has in place support for customers across different customer groups, including care leavers. The Council's approach to supporting customers, including care leavers, continues to be one that is based on partnership working, taking action, promoting opportunities and raising awareness.

Introduction and Background

- 1 When a child comes into care in Kent (excluding Medway), Kent County Council becomes the Corporate Parent. The term 'Corporate Parent' means the collective responsibility of Kent County Council (KCC), its elected members, and employees, for providing the best possible care and safeguarding for the children who are looked after by them.
- 2 KCC has a legal obligation to support young people making the transition from care to independence.
- 3 To meet their legal obligations, KCC's gross annual revenue budget for children's services in Kent is in excess of £23 million to support care leavers, asylum seekers aged 18 and safeguarding. Government Core Grant Funding is allocated annually by Government to KCC support Children's Social Care.
- 4 When a child leaves care to become independent and they are aged between 16 and 21 (or up to 25 in certain circumstances), KCC will support them through their local offer.
- 5 KCC's 'local offer' for care leavers (see Appendix 1) assists young people to understand what they are entitled to and what KCC will expect from them. This assists care leavers in making the most out of KCC's services that are available to them and make the most of their independence. KCC's local offer is available to all eligible care leavers (see Appendix 1), including:

- eligible young people aged 16 or 17 who have been looked after for a period or periods of time, start care after the age of 14, or are still in care
 - relevant young people aged 16 or 17 who are no longer looked after, having previously been in a category of eligible young person
 - former relevant young people aged 18 to 25 who have left care having previously either been eligible or relevant or both.
- 6 As Corporate Parent, KCC has a statutory duty to make a care leaver feel safe and supported and know how to get the advice and services needed. The support covers a range of areas including accommodation, money, health and wellbeing, housing, leisure, education, training and employment. As part of its care leavers offer, all KCC's departments are expected to recognise their role as a corporate parent and support the following principles:
- To act in the best interest and promote the physical, mental health and wellbeing of those children and young adults.
 - To encourage those children and young adults to express their views, wishes and feelings.
 - To consider the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young adults.
 - To help those children and young adults to gain access to, and make the best use of, the services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners.
 - To promote high aspirations and seek to secure the best outcomes for those children and young adults.
 - To ensure those children and young adults are safe and have stability in their home lives, relationships, education and/or workplace.
 - To prepare those children and young adults for adulthood and independent living.
- 7 Care leavers are entitled to this support up to the age of 21 (or longer, if they are in full-time education); if they've been cared for 13 weeks from the age of 14, and; for at least a day following your 16th birthday. This makes them a 'Relevant Child'.
- 8 KCC can support move-on accommodation such as supported accommodation, shared houses, studios or flats, private renting, social renting, or student accommodation if a care leaver intends to go on to University.
- 9 As at 31 March 2023, there were a total of 1,943 Care Leavers supported by the Kent County Council, including those residing outside of Kent.
- 10 Sevenoaks District has the lowest number of care leavers, 14, (see table below), being supported by Kent County Council, compared to Canterbury, which has the highest, 285. Please see Appendix 2 for further information on care leavers being supported by KCC across Kent.

Number of care leavers supported by Kent County Council in Sevenoaks District	
Total Care Leavers	14
Former Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)	2
Citizen	12
Currently identify as female	8
Currently identify as male	6
Aged 18-20 years	9
Aged 21-25 year:	5
Considered disabled	5

How does Sevenoaks District Council support care leavers

- 11 Sevenoaks District Council does not have KCC's statutory footing for children's services and care leavers. Therefore, it does not receive any Government funding for these responsibilities. However, the Council does provide tailored and bespoke support for customers, including care leavers.
- 12 In terms of customer demand, in 2022-23 the Council was approached by two customers who identified as care leavers. Since April 2023, it has been approached by one care leaver requesting support with housing and benefits advice via our HERO team.
- 13 In comparison, in the four months since April 2023, the Council's Housing team has been approached by 452 customers requiring support related domestic abuse, relationship breakdown, eviction from private rented accommodation and rough sleepers.
- 14 The number of current care leavers is relatively small (14) in Sevenoaks District compared to the rest of Kent, however, support and information is available. Alongside the statutory support provided by KCC, the District Council's website promotes details of the additional support available to care leavers including:
 - 15 **HERO** – Our HERO team acts as a single point of contact for care leavers aged 18 years and over. Through HERO, care leavers can access personalised advice and guidance on a range of issues including debt or money advice, housing issues and welfare benefits. They can also provide direct referrals to appropriate partners, agencies or community groups for ongoing support e.g. foodbank provision, health and wellbeing support.
 - 16 **Housing** - we know that having housing issues is very upsetting and difficult for anyone. Care leavers need a clear understanding of the housing options available to them. KCC has a duty via a Social Worker or Personal Advisor service to provide support and help care leavers understand some of the housing terms being used, the likelihood of getting your own accommodation or having to go into shared accommodation.

We recommend a care leaver obtains an independent advocate, usually via the Young Lives Foundation, to help them express their views and wishes, and help them stand up for their rights. The foundation is an award winning independent children's charity with expertise in advocacy, mentoring and befriending.

In 2022, the Council approved a refresh of its Housing Allocation Policy (which allocates social housing in the District). The refresh includes supporting young people in care accommodation and considered ready to move out of care and those who are threatened with homelessness.

Where customers, including care leavers, present as homeless, as part of their Personal Housing Plan, the Council can provide financial support for securing private rented accommodation in shared accommodation, including rent in advance and rent deposit.

The monthly Housing and Communities Hub held at the Argyle Road office in partnership with organisations including Citizens Advice, Mind, Porchlight, JobCentre Plus and West Kent Housing, includes themed sessions for young people, including care leavers.

- 17 **Leisure** – the Council's leisure centre's located in Edenbridge, Sevenoaks and Swanley. Our leisure operator offers concessionary membership rates, including care leavers, subject to eligibility.
- 18 **Employment** – Working for a Council is a great way to contribute to the local community, providing the opportunity to develop skills, progress a career and make a difference in people's lives. Current vacancies for Sevenoaks District Council are advertised on its website, with information shared with KCC, including work experience and apprenticeship opportunities. The Council's Health and Communities team has been working with HR to bring forward a guaranteed interviews process, including care leavers, when applying to work for the Council, as long as the applicants can evidence that they meet the essential criteria for the role.
- 19 **Accessibility** – The Council ensures access to interpreters as standard, when language is a barrier to engaging with Council services. This is provided through its annual subscription to Language Line, providing an online, face to face and telephone interpreter service.
- 20 **Mentoring scheme for young people** – children in care aged 11 to 18, living or attending a school in the Sevenoaks District, can access the Council's mentoring scheme. Those who join can engage with an adult mentor, get involved in activities, and, where needed, access mental health support, including counselling. Details of the scheme are promoted to schools and KCC's Local Children's Partnership Group.
- 21 **Community support:** The Council also promotes organisations operating in the District who can support Care Leavers, including:
 - [Coram Voice](#) helps care leavers figure out their rights and entitlements as a Care Leaver. They also have other advice and information.

- [Catch22](#) provides the national advice, support and development service focusing on young people's transition from care.
- [Become](#) provides help, support and advice to children in care and young care leavers.
- [Learner Support](#) provides help for 19 year olds or over who are having trouble with meeting the costs of participating in further education at college.
- The [Care Leavers' Association](#), a national charity run by care leavers offering support and advice.
- [Turn2Us](#) provides information on whether care leavers can claim benefits (e.g. income support and housing benefit) if you are a care leaver aged over 18 years.

Care Leavers Covenant

- 22 The Care Leaver Covenant is funded and managed by the Department for Education. They have a non-binding Advisory Board and a non-binding Business Council.
- 23 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 to live independently.
- 24 The Covenant consists of five pledges:
1. Independent Living
 2. Education, Employment & Training
 3. Safety & Security
 4. Mental & Physical Health
 5. Finance
- 25 National businesses have signed up to the Covenant, for example, Metro Bank is encouraging care leavers to bank with them by simplifying the ID and verification required to open an account by accepting a letter from the Corporate Parent as proof; Penna Recruitment agency offers CV support and careers advice; and, UCAS helps care leavers with understanding how to make a university application. In general, these have no cost or resource obligations to the signatories.
- 26 The Covenant has been signed up to by county, unitary and city councils with a statutory responsibility for children's services and care leavers, notably as they have direct responsibility, staffing, budget and funding resources to deliver on the five pledges listed above.
- 27 There are currently no councils signed up to the covenant, where they do not have statutory responsibility for children's services and care leavers.
- 28 KCC has responsibility for one of the largest care leaver populations in the country. In 2022, it was proposed for KCC to become signatory of the Covenant. As part of this process, the 18+ Care Leavers Service sought the views of their Young Adult Council and Corporate Parenting Panel, who were in support of this. In June 2023, KCC's Cabinet approved for the Council to

become a signatory, agreeing to take a 'whole council approach' in supporting the needs and progress of the young adults they are a Corporate Parent for. This means the whole of KCC will accept responsibility for its support provided to the young adults it has a legal duty to support as Care Leavers.

29 However, despite signing up to the Care Leaver Covenant, KCC is currently in the process of progressing the tender of its supported accommodation contract for care leavers (general citizens and unaccompanied asylum seeking children - UASC).

30 At present, young people are supported by KCC up to 21 years (25 in some cases). However, in their current proposal, KCC is suggesting this will end on a care leaver's 19th birthday based on the following rationale:

- to make budget efficiencies.
- it does not have responsibility for UASC in care post 18-years with no recourse to public funds. It should be noted that under Government legislation, neither do district and borough councils.
- young people are choosing to stay in KCC's supported accommodation longer than needed.

31 This will mean that any care leaver reaching the age of 19, could potentially be served with an eviction notice by KCC.

32 As a strategic proposal that will substantially impact district councils, their services and budgets. There is clearly disappointment from all councils in Kent that KCC's approach would mean care leavers reaching 19, would effectively be made homeless and would need to approach local housing authorities, being likely be placed in temporary accommodation (often outside of the locality), whilst affordable shared accommodation is sought.

33 This is of particular concern if a care leaver loses their 'care leaver status' and the support package they are eligible for under KCC.

Other options Considered and/or rejected

34 The Council has no statutory obligation or funding to resource and provide a care leavers service in the District. This obligations sits with KCC as corporate parent. However, it should be recognised that Sevenoaks District Council does have in place support for customers across different customer groups, including care leavers. The Council's approach to supporting customers, continues to be one that is based on partnership working, taking action, promoting opportunities and raising awareness.

35 Sevenoaks District Council could chose to sign up for the Care Leavers Covenant, but a key concern and risk is that by being the only District Council signatory in Kent, such a commitment could present a significant resource burden (both staffing and budgetary) on our Council, 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.

- 36 Potential cost pressures being transferred from KCC to district councils is of considerable concern, notably in light of the substantial budget savings being proposed to KCC's services to meet their budget gap, all of which will have knock on effects on Sevenoaks District's residents, alongside increased pressure and demand on our services and budgets. For example, KCC is proposing to reduce its community wardens service by 50% over the next two years, whilst KCC's youth provision may be significantly reduced as part of its Family Hub proposals. Such reductions play a part in the health and wellbeing of our local communities, whilst pushing that demand to the District Council.

Key Implications

Financial

Sevenoaks District Council does not have a statutory responsibility for Care Leavers, i.e. it is not the Corporate Parent. KCC has this responsibility in Kent and accordingly receives Government Core Grant Funding provided annually by Government to support Children's Social Care.

Although the number of care leavers supported by KCC is relatively small in Sevenoaks District compared to the rest of Kent, if Sevenoaks District Council chose to sign up for the Care Leavers Covenant, being the only district council signatory in Kent, such a commitment is likely to present a significant resource burden (both staffing and financial) on our Council, with care leavers from across Kent being signposted into the Sevenoaks District.

This risk is heightened in light of KCC's significant budget pressures and efficiency proposals, which includes services being reduced or removed. Potential cost pressures being transferred from KCC to district councils is therefore of considerable concern.

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement

When a child comes into care in Kent (excluding Medway), Kent County Council becomes the Corporate Parent. The term 'Corporate Parent' means the collective responsibility of Kent County Council (KCC), its elected members, and employees, for providing the best possible care and safeguarding for the children who are looked after by them. KCC has a legal obligation to support young people making the transition from care to independence.

Sevenoaks District Council has no legal corporate parenting obligation to care leavers.

As highlighted in the report, committing the Council to the Covenant could have significant resource implications, both in terms of its budget and demand on services and staff, as care leavers from across Kent are likely to be signposted into the Sevenoaks District, citing our pledge to meet the five pledges. Customers often do not distinguish between the county council and district council responsibilities, which may only further be blurred by a commitment to the Covenant.

Equality Assessment

The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

Net Zero Implications

The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the council's ambition to be Net Zero by 2030. There is no perceived impact regarding either an increase or decrease in carbon emissions in the district, or supporting the resilience of the natural environment.

Conclusions

This report has been provided to distinguish the statutory corporate parenting responsibilities for care leavers under by Kent County Council, whilst outlining the support provided through Sevenoaks District Council to its customers, including care leavers.

The report aims to demonstrate members that there is support is available to our customers, including care leavers.

It is careful to set out the rationale and positive principles behind the Care Leaver Covenant, whilst setting out the risks, in terms of resources and increased demand to the District Council, notably in light of the significant budget savings required from KCC over the next few years. Customers often do not distinguish between the county council and district council responsibilities, which may only further be blurred by a commitment to the Covenant.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – App 1 KCC care leavers offer
- Appendix 2 – Breakdown of care leavers in Kent by district

Background Papers

- Sevenoaks District Council website:
https://www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/info/20002/your_environment_and_community/736/care_leavers
- Young Lives Foundation website: Young Lives Foundation

Sarah Robson

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