

From: Paul Webb, Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services
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To: **CYPE Cabinet Committee**

Date: 14th July 2026

Subject: 18+ Care Leavers Service

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary:

The Ofsted ILACS inspection published on 2nd February 2026 graded Kent County Council's Children's Services as "**GOOD**" overall, noting that whilst care for children currently in care was judged "**OUTSTANDING**", the experiences and progress of care leavers "**REQUIRES IMPROVEMENT TO BE GOOD**".

Elected members requested a progress report on the 18+ Care Leavers Service to include both current and future demand, the areas identified for improvement and how the numbers of former unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who transition into the service impact upon the overall service delivery.

Recommendation(s): Members are asked to **COMMENT** and **NOTE** the forecasted future demand for the 18+ Care Leavers Service and the implementation of the Ofsted Improvement Plan.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Kent County Council's 18+ Care Leavers Service provides the statutory responsibility of support to Care Experienced Adults (CEA) aged 17.5 years, up until their 25th birthday, supporting their transition from being a Child in Care of the Local Authority, through into independence and adulthood.
- 1.2 Kent County Council supports 2,132 CEA, of which 1,936 are open to the 18+ Care Leavers Service. (*Data as of 1st June 2026*)
- 1.3 Of the 1,936 CEA open to the 18+ service, 53.5% (1,036) are former unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UAS), 47.5% (900) originate from Kent.
- 1.4 The service ensures CEA understand what support is available to them and what they can expect from the council as their Corporate Parent as they move towards independence. This is detailed in the Care Leaver Local Offer.
- 1.5 KCC made a key decision to become signatories to The Care Leavers Covenant in March 2023.

- 1.6 The service supports eligible, relevant, former relevant and qualifying young adults, from age 17 – 25 years old, through its legal duties under the Children's Act 1989, Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 and the Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010.
- 1.7 In England and Wales, local authorities break care leavers down into legal categories to determine specific support levels:
- **Eligible child:** A young person aged 16 or 17 who is currently in care and has been for at least 13 weeks since age 14. These children would be supported in the Child in Care and adolescent teams.
 - **Relevant child:** A young person aged 16 or 17 who has already left care but meets the standard 13-week criteria. These children would be supported in the Child in Care and adolescent teams.
 - **Former relevant child:** A young person aged 18 to 25 who was an eligible or relevant child. They are entitled to ongoing support, including an allocated Personal Adviser (PA) and a Pathway Plan. This is the vast majority group at 1,926 CEA.
 - **Qualifying care leaver:** A young person who spent time in care but doesn't meet the 13-week threshold (e.g., spent less than 13 weeks in care after age 14). They are still entitled to advice and limited support from the local authority. This is a very small minority at 10 CEA.
- 1.8 The Children and Social Worker Act 2018 introduced extended duties to care experienced adults, extending support up until the age of 25 (formerly 21 years).
- 1.9 A further 1,585 CEA aged 21–24 years formally opted out of extended Personal Advisor (PA) support but remain eligible for a service up to their 25th birthday. These cohort of care leavers are supported via the current Duty system to maintain statutory "keep in touch" requirements but can "opt back in" for a service or emergency support at anytime up until their 25th birthday.
- 1.10 The service currently comprises approximately 100 case holding staff working across teams supporting care leavers aged 18–21 and 22+. Personal Advisers (PAs) carry caseloads of 18–23 in 18–21 teams and 30–35 in 22+ teams. Senior PAs (SPAs) hold smaller caseloads due to the complexity of their work with specific young adults; they lead on the induction of new staff and have oversight of duty tasks. The role of the Personal Advisor includes assessing needs, preparing and reviewing a Pathway Plan and providing advice, practical help and, where appropriate, financial assistance related to accommodation, education, training and employment.
- 1.11 The numbers of care experienced adults receiving a service from the 18+ Care Leavers service remained similar over the last five years, with a small increase in the numbers for Kent born (citizen) children transitioning to the service.

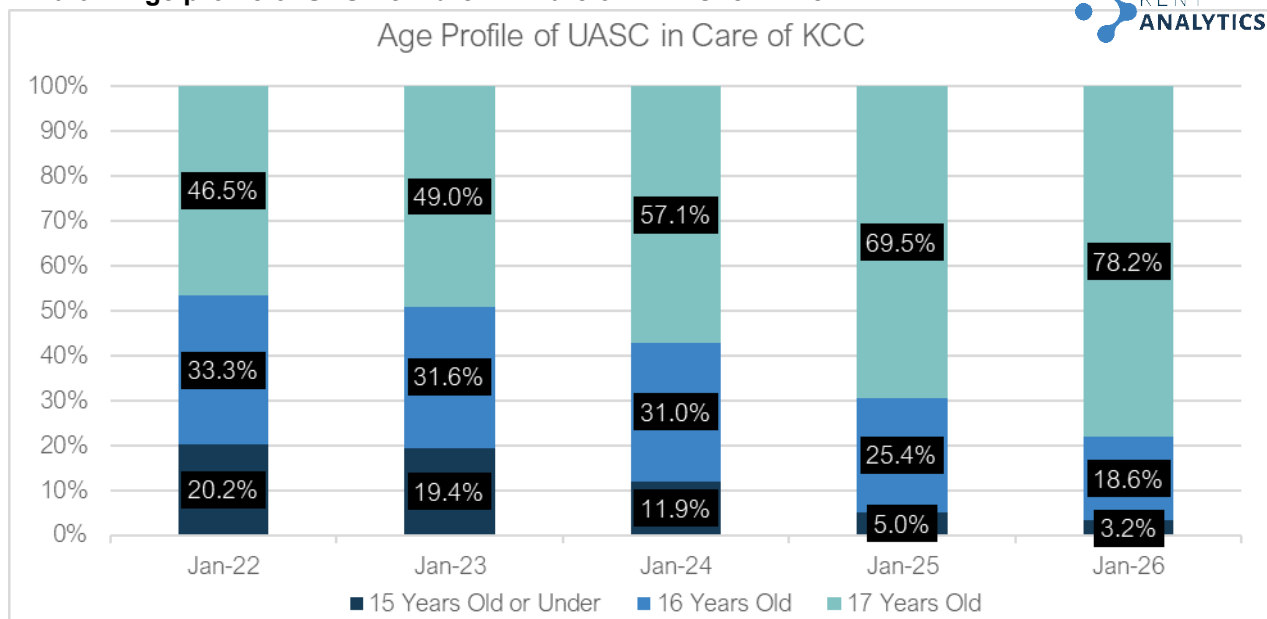
Date	UASC 18+ Care Leavers open			Kent citizen Care Leavers open			Total number of care leavers
	18+ Care Leaver Service	Other Service	Total	18+ Care Leaver Service	Other Service	Total	
31/03/2021	1042	20	1062	859	143	1002	2064
31/03/2022	1058	20	1078	878	174	1052	2130
31/03/2023	1005	23	1028	873	182	1055	2083
31/03/2024	982	27	1009	890	168	1058	2067
31/03/2025	929	17	946	906	163	1069	2015
31/03/2026	1005	11	1016	904	159	1063	2079

(Numbers of care leavers in other services includes those supported by Adult Services due to mental health, disability etc.)

2. Forecasted Demand

- 2.1 In January 2026, there were 1,924 young adults receiving support from the Care Leavers 18+ Service. Of these 1,924, 1,013 (52.7%) were UASC when they entered care and 911 (47.3%) were non-UASC.
- 2.2 Chart 1 shows the age profile of the UASC children cared for by Kent County Council on a permanent basis, i.e., children not participating in the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) has changed over time. This is currently capped at 355 children (or 0.1% of its under 18 population). This shows the age profile of UASC in the care of Kent County Council has got older since January 2022. 78.2% of UASC in the care of Kent County Council were aged 17 in January 2026 compared to 46.5% in January 2022. This is not a result of children naturally ageing through the system. In 2025, the average age of UASC children entering KCC's care in that year was 16 $\frac{3}{4}$ compared to just under the age of 16 in 2023. As a result, UASC in KCC's care are entering the care leaver system more quickly than in previous years.

Chart 1: Age profile of UASC children in Care of KCC Over Time



- 2.4 For UASC care leavers, the forecast was made by assuming the age profile of UASC will remain the same as of January 2026 and the current cap of 355 UASC children in the care of Kent County Council will continue to be in place.
- 2.5 Analysis of care leaver cohorts over time indicates a proportion of care leavers lose touch with the service every year. A four-year average of this trend at each year of age for UASC and Non-UASC care leavers was used to provide retention rate which is applied to care leavers as they age through the service.
- 2.6 Table 1: Retention Rate of UASC and Non-UASC Care Leavers by Age (Four-Year Average 2023-2026)

Age	Non-UASC Care Leavers	UASC Care Leavers
19	95.3%	98.9%
20	100.0%	100.0%
21	73.0%	75.7%
22	66.9%	62.7%
23	75.0%	87.1%
24	73.5%	71.4%

- 2.7 Table 2 shows the forecast number of UASC in care and care leavers by years of age from 2027 until 2033 using the retention rates in table 2 and assuming the number of UASC children in KCC's care will be at the maximum capacity of 355 and will retain the same age profile as the current cohort of UASC children in care. In this scenario, the number of UASC care leavers will increase steadily over the next seven years, reaching a peak of 1,358 in 2032, an increase of 34% compared to the current UASC care leaver cohort.

Table 2: Forecast of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children Care Leavers (2027-2033)

Age	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033
11	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
12	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
13	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
14	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
15	8	9	9	9	9	9	9	9
16	62	65	65	65	65	65	65	65
17	265	278	278	278	278	278	278	278
18	283	265	278	278	278	278	278	278
19	230	280	262	275	275	275	275	275
20	184	230	280	262	275	275	275	275
21	96	139	174	212	198	208	208	208
22	89	60	87	109	133	124	131	131
23	88	78	52	76	95	116	108	114
24	45	63	55	37	54	68	83	77

Former UASC Receiving Care Leaver Service (18-24)	1,015	1,115	1,189	1,250	1,309	1,344	1,358	1,358
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2.8 For the non-UASC care leaver projection, the current rate of Children in Care (CIC) per 1,000 population by year of age was applied to the KCC Housing Led Population Projections for each single year of age to arrive a forecast number of non-UASC children in care from 2024 to 2033. We then aged these children through the Care Leavers 18+ Service using the retention rates in table 1. The outcome of this forecast can be seen in table 3. In this scenario, the number of non-UASC care leavers is forecast to increase from 901 in 2026 to 1,005 in 2033 due to the forecast increase in the 0-17 population and the increase in CIC after Covid ageing through the system and becoming eligible for the care leaver service.

Table 3: Non-UASC Care Leaver Forecast

Age	Non-UASC CIC/CL Rate per 1,000	2026 (Actual)	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033
0	4.7	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89
1	4.3	75	76	77	78	78	79	80	81
2	2.4	43	43	44	44	45	45	46	46
3	2.7	49	49	50	50	51	51	52	52
4	2.2	41	41	41	42	42	43	43	43
5	2.0	38	38	38	39	39	39	40	40
6	2.1	39	40	40	40	40	40	41	41
7	2.4	46	46	46	46	47	47	47	47
8	2.4	48	47	46	47	47	47	47	48
9	2.7	56	55	54	53	54	54	54	54
10	3.2	67	67	66	65	64	65	65	65
11	3.8	81	81	81	80	78	77	78	78
12	3.7	81	81	81	82	81	78	77	78
13	3.6	79	79	79	79	79	78	76	75
14	5.1	116	114	113	114	114	114	112	109
15	5.7	128	131	128	128	129	129	128	126
16	8.1	181	184	189	185	184	185	185	185
17	9.5	205	211	215	220	216	215	215	215
18	10.1	191	205	211	215	220	216	215	215
19	12.7	211	182	195	201	205	210	206	205
20	11.7	186	211	182	195	201	205	210	206
21	8.0	125	136	154	133	143	147	150	153
22	4.6	75	84	91	103	89	95	98	100
23	3.9	65	56	63	68	77	67	71	74
24	2.8	48	48	41	46	50	57	49	53
18-24 Care Leavers		901	921	937	962	985	996	998	1,005

2.9 The two forecast figures for the Care Leavers 18+ Service are combined in chart 2 and table 4. This shows the forecast for care leavers from 2027-2032 broken down by UASC and Non-UASC care leavers. This indicates the overall number of care leavers is forecast to increase by 23% between 2026 and 2033 to 2,363 care leavers, an increase of 447 compared to 1,916 in 2026. This is largely driven by the forecast increase in UASC care leavers which accounts for three quarters of the increase.

Chart 2: Care Leaver Forecast (2027-2033)

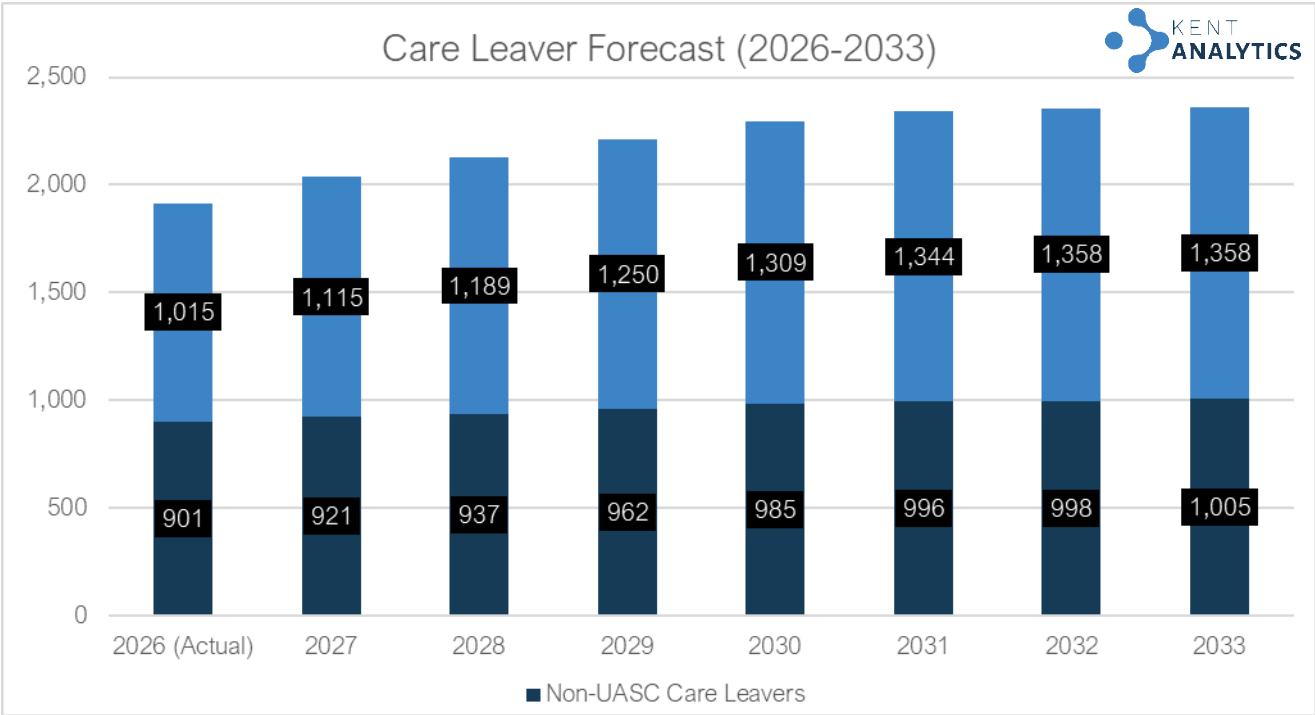


Table 4: Care Leaver Forecast (2027-2033)

	2026 (Actual)	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033
Non-UASC Care Leavers	901	921	937	962	985	996	998	1,005
UASC Care Leavers	1,015	1,115	1,189	1,250	1,309	1,344	1,358	1,358
All Care Leavers	1,916	2,036	2,127	2,211	2,294	2,340	2,356	2,363

3.Statistical Neighbours

- 3.1 Kent, alongside West Berkshire and Windsor and Maidenhead local authorities, have the highest ratio of unaccompanied-asylum seeking care leavers in the South East region. (47%-58%). However, both these authorities have low numbers of children in care in comparison to Kent.

Local Authority	Number of Care Leavers Aged 17-24 years (Average year end data for 2025)	Proportion of Care leavers aged 17-24 who were UASC
Bracknell Forest	211	23%
Brighton & Hove	629	30%
Buckinghamshire	301	30%
East Sussex	455	34%
Hampshire	2,471	26%
Isle of Wight	270	14%
Kent	1,988	47%
Medway	202	4%
Milton Keynes	248	4%
Portsmouth	330	40%
Reading	247	27%
Slough	264	32%
Southampton	360	27%
Surrey	773	38%
West Berkshire	184	52%
West Sussex	642	40%
Windsor & Maidenhead	129	58%
Wokingham	275	27%
South East	9,979	33%

(South East Benchmarking data for 2025)

4. OFSTED Inspection of Integrated Childrens Services

- 4.1 The Ofsted ILACS inspection published on 2nd February 2026 graded Kent County Council's Children's Services as "GOOD" overall, noting that while care for children currently in care was judged "OUTSTANDING", the **experiences and progress of care leavers requires improvement to be good.** [Children's services inspection - 2 February 2025](#)
- 4.2 Following the inspection, the council wrote to the government to outline the pressures influencing these outcomes as Kent now supports over 1,000 former unaccompanied asylum-seeking care leavers aged 18–25.
- 4.3 The 18+ Care Leavers Service, supported by the Safeguarding, Professional Standards & Quality Assurance team, have developed a detailed Ofsted Improvement Plan, which focuses on key areas of improvement:

- Safeguarding
- Accommodation
- Care Leavers Local Offer
- Pathway Planning and Transitions
- Support for Care Leavers in Custody
- Multi-agency and partnership working
- Access to Education, Training and Employment (ETE)
- Staff development of Core Skills

4.4 Transitions for children in care were a key area identified in need of improvement:

“Children are primarily prepared for adulthood by social workers and foster carers. However, the transition to PAs often takes place close to, or shortly after, a young person’s 18th birthday. For some, this limits the opportunity to build meaningful relationships with their PA and impacts on the quality of support they receive as they enter adulthood. High demand and heavy caseloads mean there is little opportunity to match care leavers to PAs whose skills and approach might best meet their needs.”

“For some young people, when they turn 18 years old, their support is significantly reduced at a time when they have to develop the skills to be independent adults but retain many of the vulnerabilities that were identified when they were a child.”

4.5 In response to this, the 18+ Care Leavers Service are reviewing the structure and delivery of the service, with a view to earlier allocation of the Personal Advisor to have a 16+ delivery model. An options paper is being developed, taking into consideration the impact of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and the financial implications for the staffing resource required for a 16+ delivery model.

5. Care Leavers Local Offer <https://www.kent.gov.uk/education-and-children/children-in-care/care-leavers-local-offer>

- 5.1 One of the significant challenges for Kent is the quantity of care leavers the service supports, meaning adding any additional offers to the existing Local Offer would require additional funding. Whilst funding to support unaccompanied asylum-seeking care leavers is provided through a grant from the Home Office, all existing and any new offers detailed in the Care Leavers Local Offer, must be offered to all care experienced adults.
- 5.2 Ofsted feedback to KCC, compared to Local Offers provided by other Local Authorities; Kent’s was not viewed as generous. As an example, Ofsted noted Kent do not have an offer of gym membership/leisure pass, whereas neighbouring local authorities include this for all care leavers. A small number of other Local Offers included funding for the care leavers friend to go to the gym with them. Even a very basic gym membership would have significant financial implications, given the quantity of care leavers being supported by Kent.
- 5.3 Historically, Kent focused the Care Leavers Local Offer on providing support which promotes independence and an ethos of young adults achieving in education, training and employment. For example, providing bursaries for further education, support with summer and winter clothing allowance including an interview outfit, a contribution towards driving lessons (accessible only if driving is required to access employment), 16+ Saver Travel

Pass giving free bus travel in Kent, support with CV writing and job applications and offering priority interviews for job vacancies within Kent County Council.

- 5.4 KCC offer a range of apprenticeship opportunities across the council for care experienced young adults and are signatories to The Care Leavers Covenant.
- 5.5 Kent offer support to care leavers to access suitable accommodation, with a dedicated Accommodation and Housing Pathways Team, alongside the specific offers of a month's rent in advance and/or rent deposit, a Rent Guarantor Scheme and Council Tax support between the ages of 18-21 years. A Setting Up Home Allowance of up to £3,000 which is funded by the government is available for all care experienced adults moving into their first independent accommodation.
- 5.6 At the previous Ofsted ILACS inspection in 2022, Kent Children's Services included the same variety of support within the Care Leavers Local Offer, was graded as OUTSTANDING.
- 5.7 As part of the Ofsted Improvement Plan, KCC will be working with multi-agency partners to improve the Local Offer from other agencies including Health, Education and Housing.
- 5.8 The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act (2026) will mandate corporate parenting responsibilities and specifically require a District Housing Borough to have its own local offer for care leavers and include measures to reduce homelessness.

6. Conclusions

- 6.1 Overall, the number of care leavers is forecast to rise by 23% between 2026 and 2033 (from 1,916 to 2,363). This is predominantly driven by UASC care leavers, from 901 to 1,005 based on UASC entering Kent being older on arrival and accelerating transition into the 18+ Care Leavers service.
- 6.2 To achieve the improvement needed within the transition years of 16-17 years the service will need to review the service delivery model, to consider the earlier allocation of the Personal Advisor and a 16+ service. Development of a 16+ service model is in the design phase, taking into consideration the resource implications for increased staffing and potential reorganisation under LGR.
- 6.3 An Ofsted Improvement Plan was implemented within the 18+ Service to provide oversight on the areas of practice which require improvement, in preparation for a future inspection and to strengthen the support and outcomes for care experienced adults. Ofsted are in agreement with KCC the plan is robust.
- 6.4 The Care Leavers Local Offer will be reviewed following the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act, whilst acknowledging the budget position and financial impact any additional offers would require.
- 6.5 Kent has 1250 Other Local Authority (OLA) children in care placed into Kent, who in the main will seek accommodation within the county when they enter adulthood at 18 years. When this cohort of OLA children in care are compared against where Kent's children in

care and care leavers are residing, this gives a unique position in the county, putting a significant demand on housing options within Kent.

- 6.6 To address this pressure on accommodation available to our care leavers, the joint protocol between KCC and the 12 Housing districts is being reviewed, in line with the additional duties placed onto housing authorities from the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act (2026). This includes housing authorities publishing a specific Housing Local Offer to care leavers and mandating corporate parenting responsibilities, alongside measures to reduce homelessness for care leavers.

7. Background documents

7.1 Ofsted Action Plan



Ofsted Action Plan
2026 - Final.pdf

7.2 Care Leavers Local Offer

<https://www.kent.gov.uk/education-and-children/children-in-care/care-leavers-local-offer>

8. Contact details

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