



READY WHEN YOU ARE

A WHOLE COUNCIL APPROACH STRATEGY

Photograph by Nelson Douglas





1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This guide is aimed at members of the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (SOLACE). It offers an overview of the Care Leaver Covenant and sets out ways in which local authorities can support the Covenant and improve outcomes for care leavers. It makes a series of recommendations based on best practice from across the country (these are in bold and marked with an arrow).

1.2 The Care Leaver Covenant is being managed by Spectra First¹ on behalf of the Department for Education (DfE). The Covenant has been developed in consultation with Mark Riddell, the DfE's National Implementation Adviser for Care Leavers. In creating the CLC strategic plan, Spectra First also worked closely with Chief Executives and Directors of Children's Services from six champion local authorities: Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council & Doncaster Children's Services Trust, City of Wolverhampton Council, Leeds City Council, London Borough Council of Lewisham, Somerset County Council and Staffordshire County Council.

1.3 Spectra First has developed good links with local authority chief executives, initially through a former SOLACE President, and subsequently through the current SOLACE president. A business-development case was provided to SOLACE at its national conference in October 2018.

2. WHAT IS THE CARE LEAVER COVENANT?

2.1 The Covenant is a government initiative borne out of Keep on Caring, the care leaver strategy 2016². It seeks to create practical, specific offers, by organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors, to support care leavers aged 16-25 in living independently. It was developed through a process of listening to the voices of care-experienced individuals in various fora. Spectra First is contracted to manage the Covenant by linking care leavers to the offers which include: discounts, financial support, exemptions, personal development, workshops, training, work experience, apprenticeships and internships. This is achieved through supporting organisations in signing the Covenant, and raising the awareness of local authorities and voluntary sector organisations working with care leavers. The existing contract for the Care Leaver Covenant runs to early 2020 and the Department is now planning for arrangements beyond then.

¹Spectra First Limited is a private limited company, based in Wolverhampton, that was chosen by the Department for Education (by competitive tender) as the delivery partner for the Care Leaver Covenant.

²*Keep on caring: supporting young people from care to independence*, Government policy paper, published 7 July 2016 – www.gov.uk/government/publications/keep-on-caring-supporting-young-people-from-care-to-independence/

2.2 The ‘mission’ of the Covenant is to promote five key outcomes, in order that care leavers:

- **are better prepared to live independently;**
- **have improved access to employment, education and training;**
- **experience stability in their lives and feel safe and secure;**
- **have improved access to health support;**
- **achieve financial stability.**

However, there is an overarching ambition at the heart of the Covenant: namely, for society – civic, civil and business – to be the lifelong ‘universal family’ to those who have not enjoyed the love and support that comes from having devoted birth parents to fall back on.

2.3 The DfE has set out five underpinning objectives which set out a vision for the Care Leaver Covenant:

- Care leavers aged 16-25 across England have access to a wide range of support and opportunities through the Covenant, wherever they live, to help them achieve the five outcomes.
- Local authorities and care leavers know and understand about the Covenant and what support care leavers can get from signatories.
- Personal Advisers, Independent Fostering Agencies, charities, and others working with care leavers and those about to become care leavers have the information they need about Covenant offers to help care leavers take advantage of the support offered.
- A wide range of businesses and charities across England sign up to make offers of support to care leavers that help them achieve the five outcomes.
- The Care Leaver Covenant is a recognised and valued brand, and the accepted framework, for designing and delivering exceptional interventions that enable care leavers to make a successful transition into independent living.

2.4 Information about the Covenant can be viewed on the website – www.my covenant.org.uk

- ★ **Local authorities could ensure that all relevant staff are aware of the Care Leaver Covenant website and app.**

3. THE ‘LOCAL OFFER’ AND THE COVENANT

3.1 Local authorities have a legal obligation to support care leavers. Under the Children & Social Work Act 2017, they are required to publish a ‘local offer’ setting out what services are available in their area to support care leavers. Under the Government’s principles for corporate parenting *all* departments in local authorities are asked to recognise their role as corporate parents, and to look at the support and services they provide for care leavers. Some local authorities are leading the way in changing the membership and focus of the Corporate Parenting Board to increase its effectiveness in improving outcomes.



3.2 As part of their review of current practice, local authorities are strongly encouraged to engage with the Covenant. Currently, only a few have done so. Unlike the 'local offer', buying in to the Covenant is not a statutory requirement. Rather, it is a voluntary indication of a desire to do their utmost to fulfil their role as a corporate parent to care leavers. The Covenant encourages local authorities to follow good practice in offering additional discretionary services in line with the recommendations of the National Implementation Adviser for Care Leavers.

- ★ **All local authorities could 'buy in' to the Care Leaver Covenant as a mechanism for enhancing their 'local offer'.**

4. AWARENESS-RAISING IN LOCAL AUTHORITIES

4.1 Personal advisers have a role in providing support for care leavers until they are 25. Many local authorities have realised that it is important to be proactive in reaching out to care leavers to make sure that they are fully aware of the local offer. Local authority staff and others working with care leavers are urged to make them aware of the website and especially the Covenant App. In order to take advantage of the Covenant offers, care leavers must register by downloading the App. The App lists opportunities across the country in six categories, but the vast majority focus on education, training and employment. This strategy presupposes that personal advisers have regular meetings with care leavers in their area at which Covenant opportunities could be discussed.

- ★ **All local authorities could ensure that staff working with care leavers are aware of the Covenant and the benefits offered.**

5. COUNCIL TAX EXEMPTIONS

5.1 A very direct way in which many councils (over 50 per cent) have sought to help care leavers to live independently is to recognise their vulnerability by offering council tax exemptions up to the age of 25. Given the financial constraints on councils this may be difficult for all councils to offer. Nevertheless, it remains a powerful means of supporting care leavers in gaining the financial stability which underpins successful independent living.

- ★ **All local authorities, as good corporate parents, are encouraged to follow the lead of many in offering council tax exemptions to all care leavers up to the age of 25.**

6. TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES WITH THE LOCAL AUTHORITY

6.1 The national picture is that only 52% of care leavers are in education, employment or training (EET). Local authorities remain major employers in their area. They also work with SMEs to provide services, not least in maintaining the housing stock. Local authorities could be ambitious and aspire to helping 70-80% of care leavers to participate in EET.

6.2 One simple way that local authorities can improve their care leavers' EET rate is to provide ring-fenced and supported opportunities in the Council. For example, a dimension to Warwickshire County Council's Local Offer has been to ring-fence apprenticeships for care leavers within the Council. They currently have eight of their young people either working or about to start work within the Leaving Care Team, Participation Service and transformation team, including one young person who was an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child.

6.3 The purpose of the Covenant is to promote new opportunities for care leavers including the opportunity to gain work experience through internships. Internships vary greatly in duration, remuneration and progression opportunities. The Covenant is promoting internships for care leavers which would meet the following minimum criteria:

- Duration – they should last for a minimum of 12 weeks;
- Paid – they should ideally match, or exceed, the 'living wage' for the area;
- Support – they should involve some additional support measures, in particular, a mentor or workplace coach;
- Certified – they should have certification attached to the skills acquired;
- Progression – they should have the opportunity for progression into a real job opportunity, such as a guaranteed interview.

★ **Local authorities could revise their Social Value Policy to ensure that meaningful offers of work, apprenticeship, internships and work experience for care leavers are a standard part of procurement practices.**

7. SOCIAL VALUE POLICY

7.1 Under section 106 of the 1990 Town & Country Planning Act, agreements can be struck between developers and local authorities which are attached to planning permission. Public procurement can thus be used to secure social value. Under the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 (SVA) local authorities can consider social value as a criterion when judging tenders for services. In principle, local authorities could write in the requirement to offer internships to care leavers when making public sector contracts over £100,000.

7.2 In the National Social Value Themes Outcomes & Measures (TOMS) Framework 2018, a principal theme is promoting skills and meaningful employment. Proxy values are attached to social value benefits such as new posts, weeks of apprenticeships and work placements. Spectra First has supported two champion local authorities in reviewing and redrafting their social-value procurement rules to provide a new focus on care leavers. Spectra First is also working with ENGIE, a major national provider of services to local authorities, to develop a coordinated strategy for internships to form part of procurement.

★ **Local authorities could revise their Social Value Policy to ensure that meaningful offers of work, apprenticeship, internships and work experience for care leavers are a standard part of procurement practices.**



8. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

8.1 Many local authorities have established significant relationships with SMEs in order to enhance economic growth. For example, the City of Wolverhampton has relationships with 300 SMEs. Cheshire has promoted their relationship with 65 SMEs willing to provide meaningful offers to the care-leaver population. Leeds City Council has an annual week focused on employer engagement, coupled with a comprehensive strategy. There appears to be a willingness in local companies to support care-experienced and other disadvantaged groups in their local community. Care leaving teams can work closely with regeneration and community development colleagues in the local authority to bring their local businesses into the ‘corporate family’.

- ★ **Local authorities could work with SMEs, local employer groups and other partners to set and meet ambitious targets to increase the number, range and take up of EET opportunities for care leavers.**
- ★ **Local authorities could host annual, social-value events for local businesses aimed (in part) at connecting them to the mission of the Care Leaver Covenant and creating an increased number of ‘offers’ to care leavers.**

9. WHOLE-LA APPROACH

9.1 It is clear from the first annual report of the National Implementation Adviser that the local authorities that have made most headway in improving outcomes for care leavers have adopted a ‘whole-LA approach’. This means accepting that responsibility for being a corporate parent does not solely reside with those people and departments that have ‘care leaver’ in their job descriptions. We would argue that cabinet members, senior leaders from the executive, including economic development should form a self-organising group to take the agenda set out in this paper forward.

- ★ **Local authorities could form a cross-department, working group to address the recommendations made in this guide.**

10. SUMMARY

10.1 Chief Executives are key influencers in the organisations they lead and across the partnerships and communities that they engage with. They also, with Leaders/Mayors and Lead Members for Children’s Services, form the vanguard of corporate parenting. The reach of SOLACE is extensive nationally, regionally and locally and Spectra First appreciates the huge contribution and value that councils’ senior leadership brings to ensuring that care leavers benefit from the love and support that is required for them to thrive and enjoy a purposeful and fulfilling adult life.

10.2 Working together to enhance local offers and joining together to promote and roll out the Care Leaver Covenant will further develop and strengthen the ‘universal family’. This will ensure that care leavers can say to us that they enjoyed, and had their lives improved, by their experiences and that we can say to ourselves, at the very least, we did what we would do for our own children.

Mark Rogers – Chair, Care Leaver Covenant Advisory Board

Martin Swales – UK President of Society of Local Executives (Solace)

Nigel Richardson – Member, Care Leaver Covenant Advisory Board

Matthew Gordon – Chief Executive, Spectra First

Photograph by Nelson Douglas



READY WHEN YOU ARE

Care Leaver Covenant
38-39 The Chubb Buildings
Fryer Street, Wolverhampton WV1 1HT

t: 0800 077 3557
e: info@mycovenant.org.uk
w: mycovenant.org.uk



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