

From: **Sue Chandler, Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services.**

Sarah Hammond, Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education

To: **Cabinet – 29 June 2023**

Subject: **Decision: 23-00035 - Care Leavers Covenant**

Past Pathway of Report: **Corporate Parenting Panel, Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee**

Future Pathway of Report: **Cabinet and County Council**

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Summary: This is a proposal for Kent County Council to become signatories of the Care Leavers Covenant. As part of this process, the 18+ Care Leavers Service have sought the views of the Young Adult Council, who are in support of this.

Recommendation(s):

Cabinet is asked to agree:

- (a) That KCC becomes a signatory to the Care Leavers Covenant
- (b) To delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services and impacted Portfolio holders, to take other relevant actions as necessary to implement the decision.

1. Introduction to the Care Leavers Covenant

- 1.1 The Care Leavers Covenant was established in 2016, run by Spectra on behalf of the Department for Education. It is a national inclusion programme which supports care experienced young people to live independently.
- 1.2 The Care Leavers Covenant is accessible to both private and public companies and agencies e.g., charities, businesses, and Local Authorities, to sign up and commit to providing opportunities to care experienced young adults.
- 1.3 Should Kent County Council become a signatory, they would 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 our young adults who are Care Leavers. As of 20th March 2023, we have 2051 young adult care leavers aged 18-25 years. "Under the Government's principles for corporate parenting all departments in local authorities are asked to recognise their role as a corporate parent and to look at the support and service they provide for care leavers". An example of this, is asking that all departments appoint a Care Leaver champion,

who can represent their departments and make decisions around potential pledges and opportunities for our care experienced young adults.

1.4 The 'mission' of the Care Leavers Covenant is to set out five outcomes which it asks those signing up to make commitments and pledges to, so young adults who are care experienced:

- Are better prepared to live Independently
- Have improved access to Education, Employment and Training
- Experience stability in their lives and feel secure
- Have improved access to health support
- Achieve financial stability

1.5 Specific to the whole council approach is the following five-part strategy:

- Awareness raising across all directorates within KCC, partner agencies and local businesses/organisations
- Council tax exemptions
- Training and employment opportunities both within the Local Authority and externally
- Social value policy
- Economic development

2. Background

2.1 The 18+ Care Leavers Service is looking to develop a range of practical support available to care experienced young adults across a range of dimensions; to help with developing and promoting their independent life skills.

2.2 By encouraging this, the 'whole local authority' or 'whole council approach' will help put care experienced young adults at the centre of KCC's recruitment, training, and work experience opportunities. This will eventually become more than an Integrated Children's Services responsibility, but every directorate will be committing to our young people, helping them find and develop to their full potential.

2.3 KCC already have several initiatives supporting its care leavers which constitutes the working commitments contributing to the initiatives one would expect to see as a signatory to the Care Leavers Covenant. An example of these initiatives are our Council Tax offer and Rent Guarantor Scheme and the provision of Apprenticeships¹.

2.4 KCC's 18+ Care Leavers Services' Local Offer is an example of how KCC are close to meeting the commitments expected as a signatory to the Care Leavers Covenant. However, this must go beyond the confines of Integrated Children's Services if we are to achieve the commitment needed in the signing up to the Covenant.

3. What this means and Implications for KCC Services:

¹ Currently, apprenticeships have been mainly limited to the 18+ Care Leavers Service and the Virtual School Kent.

- 3.2 For the Council, adoption of the Care Leaver Covenant is a commitment to the principles of accepting a whole council approach to Corporate Parenting on behalf of all departments across the Local Authority. In practice this may mean being part of a process that reviews such things as the Local Offer and helps the Children in Care and Care Leavers service improve its offer to Care Leavers and provides the political ambition and authority to do so.
- 3.3 For Elected Members, the signing of the Care Leaver Covenant is a confirmation of their political commitment to be the best corporate parents they can be for our Children in Care and Care Leavers. It will secure individual responsibility and accountability to be part of a process that looks at how they can individually contribute to the collective response and act as champions for care leavers when making decisions about the direction of the Local Authority. In practical terms this may mean championing care leavers causes with other organisations using their political influence, such as with the District Borough Councils for housing needs or Health Authorities. This individual Member responsibility sits alongside the established Executive responsibility and accountability for the Strategic management and policy decision-making for the relevant services across the Cabinet portfolios.
- 3.4 For Officers, it means promoting the Care Leaver Covenant across all KCC departments and identifying how they can provide meaningful opportunities and improved life chances for children in care and care leavers for whom the Local Authority is the Corporate Parent. This could include work experience, mentoring or apprenticeships across all departments.
- 3.5 For KCC services, it means identifying Care Leaver Champions within each service, who can coordinate opportunities and pledges of support, to liaise with the 18+ Care Leavers Service as a central point, to be able to match young adults to those opportunities available. All KCC services would need to actively promote their role as a Corporate Parent and ensure priority is given to care leavers for any opportunities within their departments. For example, giving priority to care leavers for apprenticeships and providing additional support to them with interviews for job opportunities. KCC already have in place, priority interviews for our care leavers, where they are appropriately qualified or experienced for the job vacancy. Signing up to the Covenant, would mean all services going the extra mile as a Corporate Parent to secure opportunities for our young adults to support them to reach their full potential. The coordination of the offers as part of the Care Leavers Covenant will be managed and overseen by the Heads of Service and leadership team within the 18+ Care Leavers Service. The service has two specialist Education, Training and Employment (ETE) workers, so there will be no additional staff resource required for the coordination and implementation of this work.
- 3.6 A recommendation for the whole council approach would be for Elected Members, Senior Leaders, and Officers, to form a cross department working group to address the recommendations in the Care Leavers Covenant guide and expand our existing Care Leavers Local Offer to include all KCC departments.

3.7 Where significant service developments or changes in future are proposed or developed in response to activity progressed under the Covenant, normal decision-making process would be required to consider and approve them before any implementation.

4. Care Leaver Covenant Feedback from our young people

4.1 At the Young Adult Council (YAC) meeting on Thursday 7th April 2022, there was a general agreement that Kent County Council should sign up to the Care Leavers' Covenant. Several young adult members were surprised KCC was not already a signatory, saying things like, 'Why aren't we a part of this already?'

4.2 The group liked the idea that by signing up, the council would be making a 'whole' council promise and further emphasising that everyone who works for KCC has a Corporate Parenting responsibility. They also thought that it was a good way to hold the Local Authority to account and ensure that promises to care leavers are clear and transparent.

4.3 The young people were shown the briefing document and looked at the Care Leavers Covenant website. In addition to looking at the opportunities available to care leavers on the website, they also discussed what it would mean for Kent County Council to support the Covenant with the '5 Part Strategy'.

4.4 Quotes from our young adults:

- *'Everyone in KCC should have the same priorities and be following the same obligations to support care leavers. It's then less limiting to us as care leavers if every team is treating us the same'*
- *'Everyone has responsibility for care leavers and this commitment would make us feel valued'*
- *'Services like Transport could be doing more for care leavers with bus and train passes and making them more available for care leavers.'*
- *'More care experienced staff in KCC mean that children in care will have more faith in services'*
- *'Young care leavers don't always have the same network as other young people to help them into work; the council should be helping us instead'*
- *'Other services should prioritise care leavers too such as children's centres and youth centres.'*
- *'We need to make sure that everyone is aware of care leaver entitlements, and we need to make sure that ALL staff know what it means to be a child in care or care leaver'*
- *"Signing up to the covenant shows a care experienced young person that they are important, taken seriously and have opportunities."*

4.5 YAC expressed that KCC is already taking some great steps to support care leavers but a signed commitment for a 'whole council approach' would allow 18+ Care Leavers Service to challenge other departments within KCC and go to

Local Businesses to secure support from them too. All agreed that there should be more apprenticeships, work experience opportunities and job roles for care leavers across KCC and not restricted to children's services. They thought it was important that services were actively seeking to recruit care leavers and thinking about how best to support them to be successful. They also thought there should be more career progression opportunities for care leavers after their apprenticeship or first role within KCC.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 There are no financial implications for the delivery of the services that will implement the covenant, it will not require any additional staff resource. One of the aims of the covenant is to improve the financial security for care leavers, by maximising their opportunities to secure employment.
- 5.2 As per the overview, subsequent service development arising from the activity under the Covenant would be subject to separate decision-making with full consideration of any relevant financial implications.

6. Legal Implications

- 6.1 There are no specific legal implications, the Care Leavers Covenant will give a framework to KCC by which to formalise the opportunities it offers to our young adults who are care experienced. It is not a statutory legal requirement or obligation for the organisation to be a signatory to the covenant. If agreed, this would become part of the Care Leavers Local Offer, which is a published document as part of our Corporate Parenting Responsibilities.
- 6.2 As per the overview, subsequent service development arising from the activity under the Covenant would be subject to separate decision-making with full consideration of any relevant legal implications.

7. EQIA

- 7.1 The proposed Care Leavers Covenant will have positive impact across all protected characteristics as it will provide a firm declaration and commitment from KCC to adoption of "whole council approach" to promote inclusive approach for care experienced young adults for their economic growth and independence, community cohesion and overall wellbeing.
- 7.2 It is anticipated that this proposal will not have any adverse negative impact on the protected characteristics of our children in care and care leavers that KCC have responsibility for and aim to promote overall fairness.

8. Data Protection implications

- 8.1 The DPO confirmed that this decision did not require a DPIA.

9. Next Stages if KCC agree to a "Whole council approach"

- Awareness raising across both the Local Authority and partner authorities such as District Councils, health authorities and the DWP. The development of a network of champions across all departments for care experienced adults.
- Exploring Council Tax exemptions, with the 12 District Councils to achieve an exemption for all Kent care leavers up to the age of 25 years, as Medway are now offering this to all care leavers living within their boundary. Kent currently only has one district council who have a council tax offer for Kent Care leavers aged 22-25 years, which is the Folkestone and Hythe district. The aim would be to get the agreement from all 12 districts. Currently KCC pays the council tax on behalf of our Kent care experienced young adults, where there is a liability up to the age of 21 years.
- Training and employment opportunities within both the Local Authority and with commissioned services and local businesses. Including offers within the Social Value aspects of contracts, to ensure that meaningful offers of work, apprenticeship, internships, and work experience for care leavers are a standard part of procurement practices.
- Economic development with local employer groups and other partners to set and meet ambitious targets to increase the number, range and take up of Employment, Education and Training opportunities for care leavers. KCC could host annual, social-value events for local businesses aimed at connecting them to our young adults and promotion of the Care Leaver Covenant.
- Working together to enhance local offers and joining 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.

10. Conclusion

- 10.1 KCC has one of the largest care leaver populations in the country with over 2,000 young adults aged 18-25 years who are care experienced. The Covenant gives a clear framework developed collaboratively with young people to prioritise which support is best for them. By signing this Covenant, KCC will provide a clear declaration of its commitment to our care leavers and increase the access to opportunities across the full spectrum of KCC departments.
- 10.2 KCC becoming a signatory will provide the 18+ Care Leavers Service with an opportunity to talk to partners and local businesses to ask them to offer similar commitments and opportunities to KCC's care leavers which would help improve the lives of our young adults. It is more difficult to get further signatories and commitments, all the time KCC are not signed up to the Covenant.
- 10.3 The signing of the covenant is about formalising our current offers, by promoting the Care Leaver Covenant across all KCC departments and

identifying how they can provide meaningful opportunities and improved life chances for children in care and care leavers for whom the Local Authority is the Corporate Parent. This may include work experience, mentoring or apprenticeships across all departments. KCC already gives priority interviews for apprenticeships and job vacancies to care leavers – we are not asking for this to change, rather promoting this across KCC asking members to support taking a “whole council approach” and the signing of the covenant formalising our existing Local Offer.

- 10.4 It is recommended that KCC becomes a signatory to the Care Leaver Covenant because it will confirm its commitment to the young people for whom it is a Corporate Parent. This has been endorsed by the Corporate Parenting Panel on 27th July 2022.

11. Recommendation(s):

Cabinet is asked to agree:

- (a) That KCC becomes a signatory to the Care Leavers Covenant
- (b) To delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children’s Services and impacted Portfolio holders, to take other relevant actions as necessary to implement the decision.

12. Background Documents

**Care Leavers Covenant - A whole Council Approach
Social Worker Toolkit**

13. Contact details

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