

North Lanarkshire Council Report

Education and Families Committee

approval noting

Ref AG/MF

Date 23/11/21

PO44.1 Keeping the Promise – Care Foundation, Aftercare Developments

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Executive Summary

This report provides an update on a number of strands of improvement activity aimed at improving the wellbeing, opportunities and longer-term outcomes for care leavers in North Lanarkshire. This activity is part of the wider programme of work which supports the Council's commitment to *Keeping the Promise* which aligns strongly with the wider aspirations of the Plan for North Lanarkshire. Improvement activity in this area has also addressed recommendations arising from the review of Intensive Services which reported to Education and Families Committee in September 2020.

Historically young people who have experienced care have experienced gaps in support as they transition to adulthood and can face additional challenges to those experienced by their peers. The lived experience of this cohort of young people has been central to informing a range of service developments in North Lanarkshire designed to improve access to help and both practical and emotional support. This work, along with growth in young people being supported in continuing care, is critical to improving outcomes.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Education and Families Committee:

- (1) Endorse the approach to improving after care arrangements.

The Plan for North Lanarkshire

Priority Support all children and young people to realise their full potential

Ambition statement (7) Enhance collaborative working to maximise support and ensure all our children and young people are included, supported, and safe

1. Background

- 1.1 The council, along with its partners, has corporate parenting responsibilities to provide care and support to care leavers up until they attain the age of 26. These duties are set out in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 which strengthened the rights of young people to support and extended the duties of local authorities to provide support when young people need it.
 - 1.2 Historically, agencies have not prioritised the needs of care leavers as they move between children's and adult services. Their needs have been lost within complex or ineffective transition arrangements. This was recognised by the Scottish Care Leavers Covenant which set out a series of principles for corporate parents to adopt in order to close the gap between policy and practice. The Independent Care Review also reported in The Promise that many of the care experienced young people felt abandoned and ill prepared as they moved from childhood into adulthood. The Promise therefore called for care experienced people to have a right to access to supportive, caring services for as long as they require them and, critically, for those young people returning for support. North Lanarkshire has demonstrated its commitment to addressing these concerns, and prioritising the support to care leavers, in pledging to keep The Promise and as a signatory to the Care Leavers Covenant.
 - 1.3 During 2020 a working group, which included care experienced young people, mapped out the areas for improvement in planning for care leavers in North Lanarkshire and what an integrated approach to support should look like. Care experienced young people who participated in the working group were clear that it is important to coordinate such services around young people, rather than expect young people to fit into existing systems ill-suited to their needs and circumstances. The review of intensive services also found that young people who had left care did not have access to intensive social work support when often this was the very time it was most needed. Analyses of locality social work caseloads to support the prioritisation of support during the COVID 19 pandemic showed that too many eligible care leavers lose contact with services and do not find routes back to support sufficiently responsive. To address these issues the review of intensive services recommended strengthened leadership and oversight of this group of young people and increasing capacity to support care leavers through a 'hub' type approach in which support and services are coordinated around the needs of care leavers.
 - 1.4 At the current time there are a total number of 573 eligible care leavers age 16 – 26, that is young people within this age group who were looked after on their 16th birthday. The number of this group seeking and receiving support from locality social work teams has stood around 100 over the period of the pandemic. However, with the increase in support as outlined below, 29 care leavers are now receiving an intensive level support including in the evenings and at weekends.
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2. Report

Improvement Activity Update

- 2.1 There are two strands to the improvement plan for aftercare services; the individual support to care leavers in the transition from care and those reconnecting with services and seeking support and secondly, the development of an aftercare hub where care leavers can access and receive the support required from social work and partner agencies.
- 2.2 New arrangements are now in place for operational management of services for care leavers including the development of a 'hub' approach for care experienced young people which has started to ensure a shared awareness of the rights and entitlements of care leavers are upheld and more streamlined accessibility in particular for those young people who may have lost contact or moved on from services but need support at times of change or crisis . The hub is based at our intensive services building which provide an accessible and relaxed space for many care leavers and partner agencies are being invited in to come to young people, rather than young people having to navigate complex systems. The range of improvement activities to meet the intensive service review recommendations are summarised below:
- The appointment of two new social workers within the intensive services with a focus on providing intensive support for care experienced young people who need it and for young people who come back to the council in need of support.
 - The appointment of three support workers to provide practical and emotional support in the evenings and weekend.
 - The creation of a Housing Operations Group to coordinate housing support for care leavers in transition from care or young people reconnecting with services with an entitlement to aftercare who need support to establish and maintain a stable and secure home.
 - The provision of over 200 devices to care experienced young people through the Connecting Scotland scheme to tackle digital exclusion.
 - In addition to the existing commitment to support employability for this cohort of young people and those experiencing care through our *Roots to Growth* programme (previously Family Firm), as reported in previous reports to Committee capacity within the Pathways Programme has been expanded to better address the needs of care experienced young people.
 - The New Operating Model for the Financial Inclusion Team which will provide more direct access to advice, information, support and training for staff, external agencies and care experienced young people.
 - The policy and procedure for financial support for care leavers has been updated and revised to achieve greater equity of support and ensure key staff within services know young people's rights to financial support and the support available from a range of sources, for example, the care experienced bursary.

- Most recently the service, involving the Promise Team, has collaborated successfully with Life Long Links (an approach that provides tools and techniques to search for, find and engage with family members for care experienced young people) to receive funding from The Promise Partnership 'brothers and sisters' fund. The money will be used to expand the capacity of Family Group Decision Making within intensive services to provide a creative new approach to enabling care experienced young people and care leavers to maintain and/ or successfully reconnect with brothers, sisters and important people in their lives when these relationships have been previously severed or damaged through care experience.

2.3 The voice of care experienced young people, care leavers and The Promise Development Workers is critical to all the improvement activity detailed above. For example, the Promise Development Workers are assisting in the coproduction of new ways of recording and reviewing support plans that place the rights and views of young people at the centre of the process.

2.4 **Next Steps**

- Work is underway with NHS Lanarkshire with a view to improving the responsiveness and accessibility of health advice to care experienced young people wherever they are accessing support and to ensure they have timely access to care and treatment.
- We are continuing to explore how we can most effectively promote how care experienced young people can access support through the hub approach if they need or want to return to council and partners for any advice guidance or assistance.
- We are currently completing a data cleansing exercise in order that we can more effectively capture all care experienced accessing council services, identify gaps and measure outcomes as a basis for continuous improvement activity.
- A link has been established with Skills Development Scotland and we are exploring new ways of supporting care experienced young people successfully sustain positive destinations through the partnership approach delivered via the 'hub' described above.
- Links have also been established with Active and Creative Communities colleagues in order to explore arrangements which will support improved access for care experienced young people with a view to supporting health and well-being, new opportunities and natural networks.

3. **Public Sector Equality Duty and Fairer Scotland Duty**

3.1 **Fairer Scotland Duty**

The areas of work outlined in this report strengthen local provision to benefit care experienced children and young people whose childhood experiences are impacted by trauma and adversity and are significantly more likely to experience poverty. These actions therefore support the council in its Fairer Scotland duty.

3.2 **Equality Impact Assessment**

Will be undertaken as required with respect to specific changes.

4. **Impact**

4.1 **Financial impact**

The additional capacity for the support to care leavers has been supported by reconfiguration on existing budgets with the exception of (1) The three additional support workers within intensive services providing enhanced capacity for out of hours support are funded through Community Mental Health and Wellbeing Framework funding, initially to March 2022 and (2) The council will receive £100,000 for 12 months from the Promise Partnership Fund to implement the Life-Long Links work with opportunity to apply again for continued funding for a further year.

4.2 **HR policy / Legislative impact**

The duties of the local authority towards care leavers are set out in the Children and Young People's (Scotland) Act 2014. Local authorities are under a duty to provide aftercare support to all eligible care leavers under 19 years of age, unless they are satisfied that the young person's welfare does not require it. An eligible care leaver is a young person who was looked after at their 16th birthday.

In addition, all care leavers aged 19 – 26 are entitled to request assistance from their local authority and the local authority must undertake an assessment and, if the care leaver is assessed as having eligible needs which cannot be met by other means, the local authority must provide them with 'such advice guidance and assistance as it considers necessary for the purposes of meeting those needs'.

4.3 **Technology / Digital impact**

None

4.4 **Environmental impact**

None

4.5 **Communications impact**

None

4.6 **Risk impact**

The expansion of support to this cohort of young people reduces the risk of the Council meeting failing to meet its statutory responsibilities and policy commitments. Most significantly it reduces the risk of negative outcomes for this cohort of young people and associated failure demand on services,

5. Measures of success

- 5.1 Young People have access to and support to live in stable and safe accommodation
- 5.2 Young People have strong and trusting relationships that continue through transitions
- 5.3 Young People sustain employment and education or training
- 5.4 Young people are hopeful, are confident and resilient

6. Supporting documents

- 6.1 None



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