

Support for Care Leavers



A report prepared by a Task Group of the Children and Young People
Overview and Scrutiny Committee

March 2015

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CONTENTS

Section	Title	Page
1	Foreword	
2	Executive summary	
3	Background	
4	Setting the context	
5	Methodology and approach	
6	Summary of evidence collected	
7	Conclusions and recommendations	
8	Glossary of Terms	
9	Background papers	
Appendix 1	Diversity Impact Assessment	
Appendix 2	Care Leavers Charter	
Appendix 3	Looked After Children Strategy 2015-2018	

1. FOREWORD

- 1.1 On behalf of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee we are pleased to present the review into support for care leavers, with its associated recommendations for Medway Council's Cabinet.
- 1.2 The Task Group has considered the scope and complexity of the services available for care leavers, together with the potential impact on Medway Council's children and adults services and the Council's partners. The Task Group has reviewed existing internal and external provision of services and sought to bring together evidence and a response to the challenges faced by young people leaving care.
- 1.3 The Ofsted inspection report into Medway looked after children (LAC) services was published in August 2013. Disappointingly the outcome was that services were graded as inadequate. Though no child was found to be at risk inspectors reported that there were a number of areas for development if our services were to offer the high quality service to which everyone in Medway aspires.
- 1.4 Since August 2013 we are aware there have been significant improvements across Children's Social Care, including the LAC service. As a result we were keen to demonstrate our commitment to corporate parenting by undertaking a Task Group on an area within the LAC service that we know will have a discrete focus when Ofsted next undertake an inspection. Our corporate parenting duties to looked after children and care leavers is a key priority for us and we relished the opportunity to meet officers, partners and young people through this Task Group and further to contribute to the development of our work with and for care leavers.
- 1.5 The Task Group was able to identify some very positive practices that provide our care leavers with fantastic support and also identified some gaps where improvements were already being made or could be made to close these gaps and improve the overall experiences for care leavers to smoothen their transition into young adulthood.
- 1.6 What was really apparent from the Task Group's findings was the real enthusiasm and ambition for improved support for care leavers across the local authority and its partners.
- 1.7 It was appreciated that at a time of constrained budgets aspirations needed to be realistic and whilst some of the recommendations can be delivered within current resources, some do require additional resource that will need to be considered as part of budget preparation processes.
- 1.8 We would like to take this opportunity of thanking all participants in the review for their time and valuable contributions.

The Task Group



Councillor Royle (Chairman)



Councillor Cooper



Councillor Purdy



Councillor Smith



Councillor Turpin

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

- 2.1 One of our key roles as a Corporate Parent is to be ambitious for all our children and support them well to have a stable and prosperous adult life.
- 2.2 The Task Group recognised the many achievements from across the Council in relation to care leavers. There is an active Corporate Parenting Board with specialist sub-groups including one specifically relating to housing and accommodation. This group have already made inroads in relation to partnership working to secure improvement in the provision for care leavers. The Task Group also noted that Medway's performance in relation to care leavers who are in education, employment or training had improved over the course of the last 18 months and were confident that there are a number of strategies in place to secure sustained improvement in this area. This included the education sub-group from the Corporate Parenting Board.
- 2.3 Since 2014 Medway has consolidated its work with care leavers into one discrete team. Though this approach has proved positive and has already secured improved outcomes for young people, the service recognises that more work could be done to build on these improvements and secure further improved outcomes for young people.
- 2.4 Medway recognises that to secure improved outcomes for care leavers we must develop our work across Children's Social Care so that every young person with whom we work has access to high quality services from social workers and partner agencies. Ensuring that the holistic needs of looked after young people are met and that they are supported to reach their full potential in education, are supported to make healthy lifestyle choices and receive suitable preparation for young adulthood will inevitably benefit them as they reach the age of 18 and become care leavers.
- 2.5 We believe that recent developments across Children's Social Care will support these improvements for younger children. The Task Group was therefore set up to review the support delivered for care leavers in a wide spectrum of areas, detailed within the key lines of inquiry at section 3. Through the Task Group's work the Members were very encouraged by the enthusiasm displayed by staff within Medway Council as well as staff from partnership agencies, to improve experiences and outcomes for Medway's young people leaving care. It was clear that work was already underway to develop the service to looked after young people and care leavers, the benefits from which would be seen in forthcoming cohorts of care leavers, such as performance and ability in English and mathematics.
- 2.6 There was evidence of effective partnership working presented to the Task Group which is contributing to a multi-agency approach to improve Medway's care leavers' life chances.

Support for Care Leavers

- 2.7 In addition there was clear evidence that all partner agencies were ambitious for our care leavers and wanted them to achieve. The young people with whom the Task Group engaged were also positive about the support they had received from the service.
- 2.8 Participants in the care leavers group are positive about the group, the engagement of officers and the opportunity to inform service development and delivery over time.
- 2.9 The Task Group were encouraged by the positive commentary displayed by colleagues within the Council and external partners. They are confident that officers have the skills and commitment to drive improvement forward and that the recommendations will support the development of the service and outcomes for care leavers.

3. Terms of reference

- 3.1 The terms of reference for the review were as follows:
- “How can Medway further support Medway’s care leavers to have a stable and productive adult life being positive active citizens”.
- 3.2 The Task Group considered a number of key lines of enquiry (KLOE), including:
- KLOE 1: How Care Leavers are supported in independent living.
KLOE 2: How Care Leavers are supported with suitable accommodation.
KLOE 3: How do we support Care Leavers to remain with existing foster carers?
KLOE 4: How Care Leavers are inspired to achieve academically.
KLOE 5: How Care Leavers are supported into employment.
KLOE 6: How are health supporting our Care Leavers?
KLOE 7: How are Care Leavers who have been placed outside of Medway supported?
KLOE 8: How can we strengthen our Corporate Parenting role?

4. Conduct of work

- 4.1 A number of meetings and activities took place, including a series themed round table evidence gathering sessions. These events provided an opportunity for Councillors, representatives of various provider organisations and Medway Council officers to come together to explore what is working well and where there are opportunities for improvements. Participants included a number of organisations and provider groups such as supported accommodation providers, NHS Trusts, Department for Work and Pensions and partners providing education and training.
- 4.2 All this was supported by additional written submissions from some individuals within the remit of this review, individual visits by Councillors to visit Care Leavers in their own accommodation, a visit to Hampshire County Council to learn from best practice and further desktop research.
- 4.3 All the Task Group’s meetings are outlined in section 5 of this report.

- 4.4 A Diversity Impact Assessment considering the recommendations is attached at Appendix 1.
- 4.5 The review was primarily supported by: -
Phil Watson, Assistant Director, Children's Social Care
Jo Cross, Specialist Children Services Manager
Jo Kavanagh, Leaving Care Team Manager
Teri Reynolds, Democratic Services Officer

5. Outcomes of the review

- 5.1 The Task Group's recommendations seek to help the Council and its partners to deliver co-ordinated services that provide care leavers with support targeted to their individual needs.
- 5.2 The delivery of these recommendations will require a Council wide and partner approach co-ordinated by Children's Social Care. Some of the recommendations will require additional expenditure and the Task Group Members appreciate that these need to be considered as part of budget setting in a difficult financial climate.
- 5.3 Officers have committed to producing a young person friendly version of this report, once the report has been presented to the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Cabinet, which will be discussed and reviewed by the Children in Care Council and the Care Leavers Group.

Recommendations

1. That the future Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) include within its Children in Care section, information on health outcomes and needs data for Care Leavers and recommend the Council and Medway CCG ensure a focus on care leavers when commissioning services using evidence about their needs by using the JSNA.
2. The Council and Medway CCG work with provider agencies to develop and implement all age pathways that help bridge the gaps caused from transition from children to adult services (e.g. CAMHS, AHDA, SEN).
3. That Personal Advisors receive additional support and training to provide: -
 - a. Promotion of healthy lifestyles advice, including emotional wellbeing (engaging with Public Health on contributing to this via workforce development)
 - b. Information on how to access support services where necessary.
4. To note and support the changes being proposed in relation to commissioning to improve choice and availability of accommodation and support options and that the impact and success of this be reviewed in six months time.
5. To recommend that Partnership Commissioning (on behalf of Children Social Care) and Housing Services: -
 - a. review the newly commissioned supported accommodation and floating support arrangements to ensure compliance and that care leavers are being supported appropriately.
 - b. Monitor allocations policy to ensure adequate and appropriate priority is being awarded to care leavers. .

- c. Review the provision of arrangements where care leavers are provided with temporary housing to ensure that it is meeting demands and conforms with relevant standards and that targeted support is provided.
6. That Children's Social Care work with Children in Care Council and Care Leavers to develop a checklist of things that carers need to support looked after children to develop skills to be able to carry out by the age of 16 to help with their transition into independence (e.g. cook 7 simple nutritious meals, register with a GP, manage a budget).
7. To assess the resource viability of appointing at a low level of involvement, a PA to each looked after child when they reach 17 to co-work with the young person's Social Worker to build a relationship with the young person to improve transition arrangements and experience of the young person.
8. To set up a multi-agency hub for Care Leavers, possibly in partnership with another agency, to provide access to a one-stop-shop of support services, as well as informal and comfortable space where the young people can meet.
9. That Personal Advisors receive additional support and training to be able to effectively signpost to MYT for specialist careers advice
10. That Category Management ensure that support with securing employment, education or training opportunities is built in more formally into future commissioning and contractual arrangements.
11. That a Looked After Child's last Personal Education Plan (PEP) meeting also include: -
 - a. The Personal Advisor so that ambitions and intentions are clear for transitional purposes
 - b. Mid-Kent College (or any other relevant higher/further educational establishment, including the Russell Group Universities) and employers where the child is transferring on from a school, to ensure all information is shared and transition is smooth.
12. To recommend the Department for Education that guaranteed bursary funding should continue for students leaving care until they finish their education.
13. To improve the offers of traineeships and apprenticeships in Medway to Care Leavers by working across the authority corporately to provide more wrap-around support to help them to succeed in these roles.
14. To review current sufficiency of mentoring for Care Leavers in Medway and explore the feasibility of commissioning a mentoring scheme like the Care Ambassador Scheme in Hampshire County Council. Part of this review of mentoring will involve scoping the development of a scheme from across Medway Council staff.
15. Support the idea around developing use of social media technologies including an app if financially viable, plus exploring other options including the use of Facebook, dedicated website or use of the existing Children in Care Council website and other models.
16. To work in partnership with the Participation Service to deliver a phone survey with Care Leavers to obtain full and meaningful feedback about their experiences of services to improve delivery.
17. Within the existing complement and through a review of service, aim to provide dedicated administration support for the Leaving Care Team. Administration support to this team should be specialised and can act as triage, thereby helping to build the team's capacity in dealing with its Care Leavers, particularly if a low level of support is begun at 17 years old.
18. In addition to the update report to the committee on progress in 6-12 months time, the Corporate Parenting Board should regularly monitor the implementation of this report and its recommendations.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 In 2011 Medway Council adopted a systematic approach to identifying and prioritising topics for in-depth review of identified areas of work by time limited Task Groups. This involves an evaluation of topics in the context of potential impact, corporate priorities, potential outcomes and timeliness.
- 3.2 Following consideration of a number of topics the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee met on 3 April 2013 to agree a programme of in-depth scrutiny reviews for 2013/14 with indicative timescales. Initially preventing looked after children from becoming criminalised was agreed as a topic for in-depth scrutiny by the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee. However, following discussion at its meeting on 15 July 2014, the committee agreed that the Task Group should instead focus on how Children's Social Care and its corporate partners supported Medway's care leavers (ie those young people aged 18 and over) to effect a smooth transition into adulthood and independent living. It was agreed that this review of how we discharged our corporate parenting duties to this vulnerable and important group of young people would be more appropriate than the original proposal in view of progress made against the original subject since the topics for Task Groups had been selected.
- 3.3 The Ofsted inspection report of Medway's looked after children in August 2013 stated, "the impact of services to improve the economic wellbeing of looked after young people and care leavers is inadequate. The education and training performance gap between looked after children and the national average for all pupils post 16 has not closed. In 2011 the percentage of children who were looked after and in full-time education at the end of compulsory schooling was 69%, lower than statistical neighbours and the national average. Some 21% were unemployed, much higher than comparators. Medway Council has recently taken positive action to overcome barriers to care leavers' participation post 16 years, supported by the Medway Youth Trust and wider partners. The percentage of looked after children and care leavers not in education employment or training at June 2013 was 26% which is an improvement on the previous quarter at 30%".
- 3.4 At the inaugural meeting of the Task Group on 13 August 2014 the Task Group agreed some key lines of enquiry and its Terms of Reference (outlined in section 5 of the report). These were deliberately set very broad to ensure that all the key aspects of the work undertaken with and for care leavers could be effectively reviewed and addressed. This broad remit demonstrated the enthusiasm and commitment of the Task Group to the task in hand.
- 3.5 At the initial meeting of the Task Group members received a broad outline of the current service; detailing:
- How the service is delivered,
 - To whom it is delivered and the framework under which it is delivered, and
 - Information relating to current partnership work with a range of agencies, both within and external to the Council.

Support for Care Leavers

- 3.6 The activity of the Task Group has focused on an analysis of hard intelligence: analysis and review of statistical data and legislation/guidance, and soft intelligence: meeting with a range of partner agencies and the Leaving Care Team and of particular significance young people themselves.
- 3.7 The priority afforded to this project can be further demonstrated by the visit by Members and the Leaving Care Team Manager to Hampshire Children's Social Care Leaving Care Service: recognised by Ofsted as providing a good quality service to care leavers.
- 3.8 Medway Children's Social Care recognises that to fully provide the services for care leavers to which we aspire, continuous improvement is required. The all encompassing remit of this project reflects our commitment to making these improvements. This commitment to all our vulnerable young people is exemplified by the senior management vision of Children's Social Care;

“To be a good to outstanding service by 2017 making a difference by delivering the right response to the right children at the right time”

4. SETTING THE CONTEXT

(a) Legal framework, Council duties and obligations, accountabilities

The Legal Framework

- 4.1 There is a raft of legislation supporting our work with care leavers. The Children Act 1989 remains a key piece of legislation for young people in and leaving care despite a number of updates since its introduction. Volume 3 of the Children Act 1989 established regulations and guidance to ensure that care leavers are given the same level of care and support that their peers would expect from a reasonable parent, and that they are provided with the necessary opportunities and chances to help them make a successful transition to adulthood.
- 4.2 The 1989 Act provided clear definitions of the young people who would be entitled to leaving care support.
- An eligible child is a looked after young person who is aged 16 or 17 and who has been looked after for a cumulative total of at least 13 weeks. This must have begun after they reached the age of 14 and will end after the age of 16.
 - A relevant child is a young person aged 16 or 17 who was an eligible child but who is no longer looked after.
 - A former relevant child is a young person aged 18+ who was either an eligible or a relevant child. Local Authorities have responsibilities to these young people until the age of 21 or 25 if they are in education or training.
 - A qualifying young person is any young person under 21 (or 24 if in education or training) who ceases to be looked after or accommodated in a variety of other settings, or privately fostered, after the age of 16. This also includes young people who are under a special guardianship order.
- 4.3 The subsequent Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 then extended the range of services Local Authorities are required to provide to support care leavers and extended the upper age limit of the young people for whom Local Authorities undertake a corporate parenting role to 24.
- 4.4 The Children and Young Persons Act (2008) amended the 1989 Children Act and further extended the range of support for young people in and leaving care. This support included the fact that care leavers under the age of 25 wishing to take up a programme of education or training can resume the support from their personal Advisor (PA) previously supplied by the Local Authority.
- 4.5 In addition there is a suite of statutory guidance further clarifying the role of the Local Authority in providing support and services to young people in and leaving care. In relation to care leavers the salient guidance is Volume 3: "Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers". Herein the government set out in detail the following:

Support for Care Leavers

- The legal framework relating to young people entitled to leaving care support,
 - Details concerning pathway planning and the role of the personal advisor (PA),
 - The entitlements of care leavers aged 18-24,
 - Support for care leavers in relation to education, employment and training,
 - Support to care leavers requiring additional support (for example disabled young people and unaccompanied asylum seeking young people),
 - Planning and arranging suitable accommodation for the transition to independent living,
 - Financial support, and
 - Complaints and representations.
- 4.6 In 2013 the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) together with the Department for Education published “Working together to support Young People not in Education, Employment or Training”: information for DWP operations and Local Authority services. This guide was aimed at joint working to support young people to seek meaningful employment or training opportunities and gain benefits where appropriate to enable them to do so.
- 4.7 The “Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers” Regulations and Guidance 2010 and the Fostering Regulations and Guidance 2011 (Children Act 1989) both require local authorities to have a Staying Put Policy. The Staying Put Policy should set out the practical, financial, tax and benefit issues (for both the foster carer and the child) which impact on the decision to extend foster care as Staying Put care when a looked after child reaches the age of 18 years. This guidance was introduced as evidence shows when young people remain in supportive homes and delay moving into independent living, in common with their non looked after peers, they have better outcomes in a range of areas including health, employment and social integration.
- 4.8 A House of Lords judgment in 2002 concluded that a local authority that failed in its duties to a looked after child could be challenged under the Human Rights Act 1998, typically under article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights relating to family life. The judgment recognised that some children with no adult to act on their behalf may not have any effective means to initiate such a challenge. In response, the Government made it a legal requirement for an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) to be appointed to participate in case reviews, monitor the local authority’s performance in respect of reviews, and to consider whether it would be appropriate to refer cases to the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass). This is set out in section 26 of the 1989 Act, as amended by the 2002 Act. The role of the IRO is this vital in ensuring that young people aged 16 and 17 are suitably prepared for adulthood through the effective provision of support, accommodation and education, employment and training opportunities to ensure they achieve positive outcomes as young adults.
- 4.9 The Children and Young Person’s Act 2008 extended the IRO responsibility from monitoring the performance of the Local Authority in relation to a child’s review, to monitoring the performance of the Local Authority in relation to a child’s overall case management. The intention of these changes being to ensure the IRO had an independent oversight of the child’s case (including

Support for Care Leavers

ascertaining their wishes and feelings, whether they were safe and whether the outcomes for the child of the LA intervention was good) and ensuring that through them the child's interests were maintained throughout the care planning process.

- 4.10 Together the legislation ensured that the LA must; appoint an IRO, specified the specific circumstances when consultation with the IRO must take place, established the role and functions of the IRO in reviewing and monitoring each child's case and specified the actions the IRO must take where a LA fails to meet its statutory duties towards a child/ren.
- 4.11 The IRO thus has a key role in ensuring that young people leaving care are fully supported to make the transition to adulthood.
- 4.12 The Government White Paper; Care Matters: Time for change set out clear expectations that young people who had been looked after should have the same level of care and support that any young person should expect from their parents when making the transition to young adulthood and independence. The White Paper made clear that all LA's must provide young people with the opportunities they need to succeed as adults and that they must be provided with more than one opportunity to succeed.
- 4.13 In 2012 the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) published its report into children who go missing or run away from care. The APPG heard submissions from young people and a range of professionals including the Police, Local Authorities, Ofsted and the voluntary sector. They concluded that many vulnerable looked after young people were being failed by the very agencies and professionals that have a specific brief to support and safeguard them. They made a number of recommendations designed to improve communication, remove professional barriers and support multi agency working. Key recommendations included: an independent investigation into Children's homes in England from where may children go missing each year, improved reporting of children's homes locations to the Police, improved performance indicators for local authorities regarding children missing from care and more robust Ofsted inspections of children's homes to ensure that missing children is given a high priority with robust and strategic action.
- 4.14 In addition the APPG recommended urgent action on "out of area" placements for children in care as they recognised that this was major factor in young people running away from placement, thus placing them further at risk. They found that despite the Sufficiency duty of Local authorities to provide suitable accommodation within their area and to ensure that where possible young people live near their homes. In 2011 over a third of looked after children were placed in another Local Authority.
- 4.15 The APPG found further evidence of the risks that missing children face from sexual exploitation and of how some looked after young people are specifically targeted. As a result they made a clear recommendation that Local Authorities placing children in other areas must first assess the new placement and area to ensure that it is safe for that specific young person based on their known needs.

Support for Care Leavers

- 4.16 Whilst the APPG inquiry focused on young people in care their findings are of clear relevance to care leavers since poor experiences of care will inevitably impact on care leavers.
- 4.17 Following the APPG report Ofsted undertook a thematic inspection to evaluate the effectiveness of local authorities' current response to child sexual exploitation. The inspection took place across 8 local authorities and their partners. These varied in size and location. The report identified 6 broad themes and areas for improvement across the authorities inspected: a lack of strategic leadership within local authorities and their partners, lack of performance management in relation to the collation and utilization of information on the scale of the problem locally; lack of local awareness raising of the nature and scope of sexual exploitation; local authorities and partners often failed to follow their own procedures and processes, had poor screening and assessment tools and had failed to review plans for individual children; too many agencies were failing to disrupt and prosecute offenders and too many agencies had poor policies and procedures in relation to missing children given the additional risks they face in relation to sexual exploitation.
- 4.18 Amendments to the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 came into force in January 2014. These create new requirements for local authorities making distant placements to consult with children's services in the area of placement, and for the Director of Children's Services of the responsible authority to approve these placements. Placement planning should address specifically whether education and health needs can be met in the area of placement. In addition the guidance required the child's allocated IRO to be consulted about the placement and required the placing local authority to be satisfied as to the safeguarding arrangements in the new authority for young people vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.
- 4.19 A further thematic inspection by Ofsted in April 2014 evaluated the effectiveness of local authorities in discharging their responsibilities to looked after young people living away from their home community in 9 local authorities. Amongst their findings they found that permanence planning and independence preparation were not consistently strong, there was frequently a failure to notify the receiving local authority of a child placed in their area; meeting the sufficiency duty was a considerable challenge for most local authorities; and the commissioning of independent placements was poor and lacked a clear focus on outcomes for young people.
- 4.20 Two significant reports have highlighted the importance of ensuring care leavers have choice about where they live when they leave care and in addition the importance of securing suitable good quality accommodation. The Barnardos report: On my own: The accommodation needs of young people leaving care in England, 2014, recommended that Government and local authorities work together to ensure that care leavers have a choice in their accommodation, have access to safe and good quality housing, that suitable emergency accommodation other than B&B is available and that personal advisor support is available to young people up to the age of 25.
- 4.21 The House of Commons Education Committee report: Into independence, not out of care: 16 plus care options 2014, made similar recommendations as to the quality and choice of accommodation available. In addition it

recommended that local authorities secure consistent personal advisor support for care leavers, ensure care leavers are fully aware of their rights and entitlements as they approach independence, that regulatory regimes are established for accommodation provision for young people aged 16 and over, that the use of B&B's for care leavers is banned alongside a requirement to commission suitable alternative emergency provision, that young people have the right to move back into the care of the local authority if their move to semi independent provision was premature. They further recommended to the DfE that young people should have the right to remain in their children's home beyond the age of 18 and that leaving care services are extended up to the age of 25 regardless of whether a young person is returning to/remaining in education or training.

The Inspection Process

- 4.22 Ofsted undertakes inspections of Local Authority services for children under section 136 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. Amongst other areas the current framework has a key focus on the experiences and progress of care leavers. As such the inspection will review whether:

“Young people leaving care and preparing to leave care receive support and help to assist them in making a successful transition to adulthood. Plans for them to leave care are effective and address their individual needs. They are safe and feel safe, particularly where they live. Young people acquire the necessary level of skill and emotional resilience to successfully move towards independence. They are able to successfully access education, employment, training and safe housing. They enjoy stable and enduring relationships with staff and carers who meet their needs.”

- 4.23 Care leavers are a priority area for Ofsted, and as such following their fieldwork the inspection team make a judgement on the overall effectiveness of the Local Authorities services to care leavers. This judgement is a cumulative judgement drawing on the findings of, amongst other things, the experiences and progress of care leavers.
- 4.24 When evaluating the experience and progress of care leavers, such as their successful transition to adulthood, inspectors will take into account the young person's development and achievements at the point they became looked after, the age they became looked after and the age they were when they became the responsibility of the authority being inspected.
- 4.25 Within their evaluation schedule Ofsted have set out clear parameters against which Local Authorities will be measured during the inspection.
- 4.26 The internal Medway audit process follows the Ofsted format and includes care leavers to ensure that there is robust oversight of the work undertaken by individual Personal Advisor's to ensure good outcomes for care leavers.

Sufficiency Requirements

- 4.27 The 1989 Children Act placed a duty of Local Authorities to secure sufficient accommodation (as far as is reasonable practicable) within their area which meets the needs of their looked after children population: the sufficiency duty. The Act required the LA to work with their partners to improve the quality and choice of available placements through effective commissioning. The sufficiency duty recognises that good quality placements wherein children and young people can thrive, leading to increased stability of placements are essential to securing improved outcomes for looked after children.
- 4.28 The sufficiency duty was further developed in 2010 and provided further guidance to the 1989 Children Act. The sufficiency duty requires local authorities to work with a number of providers to secure accommodation for young people with a range of needs: ensuring that young people have a choice of provision wherever possible and that accommodation is provided to meet a diverse range of needs. However, this duty does not require local authorities to provide accommodation for every young person within their immediate area. It is clear that for most young people remaining close to their community and family is in their best interests but where this is not possible accommodation should be as near as is possible to their home authority and placements further from home should be made following a full assessment of need.
- 4.29 The sufficiency duty sets clear commissioning standards to ensure there is a range of accommodation which meets a range of needs and which keeps young people safe, allows them to thrive and which supports the work of social work services in securing good outcomes for young people.

Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Legislation

- 4.30 From the 1st September 2014 a new law came into effect bringing a significant change in approach to special educational needs. The legislation created a new and specific emphasis on outcomes, i.e. requiring local authorities to identify on what young people, their parents and professionals want a child or young person to achieve in the short, medium and long term. This new legislation applies to young people aged from 0-25 and requires education providers and partner agencies to ensure that children and young people have the skills needed to gain independence and prepare for adulthood. Within the legislation young people aged 16+ now have the right to make decisions themselves including requesting an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHC plan). EHC plans replaced the Statement of Educational Need plan (statement) and have shorter timescales for their assessment and production: 20 weeks reduced from 26. They also now extend to young people in further education colleges and on some apprenticeships, and young people and their carers have the right to request personal budgets to buy the provision specified in the EHC plan. Further, local authorities must set out their “local offer” of the support available to young people with EHC plans and disabilities and joint commissioning between health and social services is required to plan strategically to meet local need. Plans must still be reviewed annually

Financial Support for Care Leavers

Benefits for care leavers under the age of 18

- 4.31 The financial support that social services can provide is vital because under national benefit guidance care leavers under the age of 18 years are usually unable to claim benefits such as income support, jobseekers allowance or housing benefit until they reach 18 years old. The only care leavers who can claim benefits at 16 or 17 are single parents and people who are unable to work because of a disability or illness.

Support after the Care Leaver turns 18

- 4.32 Under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 the local authority has a duty to support young care leavers financially and under the Every Child Matters agenda the local authority is required to support young people to “achieve economic well-being”. When a care leaver reaches 18 years old, Children’s Social Care has a requirement to continue to help with accommodation, and will seek to maintain contact with and monitor the young person until they reach the age of 25 years. The Pathway Plan for each individual care leaver should set out in detail the needs of the young person and how Social Care can support the young people to meet those needs. This will include financial support including:
- supporting applications for student loans to help with the costs of the course
 - helping with the cost of living near the college, training centre or workplace
 - providing somewhere for them to live, or paying them enough to find somewhere of their own if they are still in full time education and their accommodation is unavailable during school holidays.
 - In addition Medway provides a grant to support young people to set up home
 - Bursaries can also be paid to support young people as can support with specialist equipment, fares and clothing for interviews etc.

Benefits for care leavers over 18

- 4.33 When the care leaver turns 18 they will be entitled to benefits, and will usually be able to claim housing benefit and either income support or jobseekers allowance. Single people who have been in care are entitled to the one-bedroom self-contained rate of local housing allowance rather than the shared accommodation rate until they turn 22.
- 4.34 Children’s Services will assist care leavers to claim everything they are entitled to and can help with completing application forms and attending interviews. Any financial help provided by Children’s Services should not be deducted from the amount the young person receives in benefits.
- 4.35 Care leavers may also be able to get extra help to set up their new home, and can apply for a budgeting loan to help pay for rent in advance, moving expenses or household items. Most people who have been on income support or jobseekers allowance for at least 26 weeks can apply. These loans are paid back through deductions from benefits.

(b) Medway's policy framework

- 4.36 Medway has adopted the national Care Leavers Charter. Established in 2012 between the DfE and the Care Leavers Foundation. The charter (attached at Appendix 2) sets out seven key principles designed to raise expectations, aspiration and understanding of what care leavers need and what Government and Local Authorities need to do to be good corporate parents.
- 4.37 Medway's policy framework is encapsulated within the LAC Strategy 2015-2018 (attached at Appendix 3) and the accompanying action plan. The LAC strategy has been agreed by the Children and Adults Directorate Management Team (CADMT), has been discussed at the Corporate Parenting Board and with the Children in Care Council.
- 4.38 In addition we have a Staying Put Policy and a Financial Support Policy. As part of our wider policy review they are currently being updated and will be completed by 01.04.2015.
- 4.39 As a result of the amended Care Planning, Placement and Review Regulations 2014, Medway has implemented a robust system of monitoring and reviewing of all out of authority placements, ensuring each is agreed prior to placement by the Director of Social Care.
- 4.40 In line with its sufficiency duties, Medway has an agreed Sufficiency Strategy and action plan setting out how it will meet the placement needs of looked after children and care leavers and improve their outcomes. The strategy is currently in the process of being updated and a revised strategy is being presented to the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee (CYPOSC) on 25 March 2015 before it is forwarded to the Cabinet for approval on 14 April 2015. The following web link will direct you to the agenda for the CYPOSC where the revised strategy can be viewed:
<http://democracy.medway.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=378&MId=2970>
- 4.41 We are currently reviewing our sexual exploitation strategy and from this we are developing a strategic and operational framework to manage and support young people who are being or who at risk of sexual exploitation. The work around these strategies should be complete by April 2015.
- 4.42 Currently there is close collaboration with the Police and relevant agencies wherever there are concerns that a young person is at risk of, or is subject to, sexual exploitation. Strategy and professionals meetings are held and all relevant intelligence is collated to safeguard the young person and any others deemed to be at risk. There is a multi-agency CSE Champions Group and an audit sub group which has begun the task of auditing and reviewing specific cases to draw together themes and identify areas of good practice and areas for development.
- 4.43 There has also been two Member development events to inform Members on safeguarding and child sexual exploitation, with further training on these issues and the risks to Medway's young people planned for after the local elections in May 2015.

- 4.44 In addition, the Health and Wellbeing Board agreed at its meeting on 21 January 2015 that a comprehensive Medway Emotional Wellbeing Strategy for children and young people be developed, which will, through the adoption of a strategic framework, focus attention on emotional wellbeing outcomes for children and young people and their families, across Education, Health and Social Services. Although the focus is across the whole population, particular attention is required for identified vulnerable groups at risk of developing more pronounced and longer term mental health issues and neurological conditions, including looked after children, care leavers and children and young people in transition.

(c) National and local picture

Medway's care leavers

Trends in the leaving care population

- 4.45 Young people are “eligible” for care leaving services from social services if they have spent more than 13 weeks in care and have left care aged 16 or above. They remain eligible for care leaving services until they turn 21, although they may continue to receive services up the age of 24 in certain circumstances.
- 4.46 The table below shows the number of young people eligible for care leaving services by age, and provides projected numbers for the next 3 years. The overall trend is that the number of eligible young people is reducing.

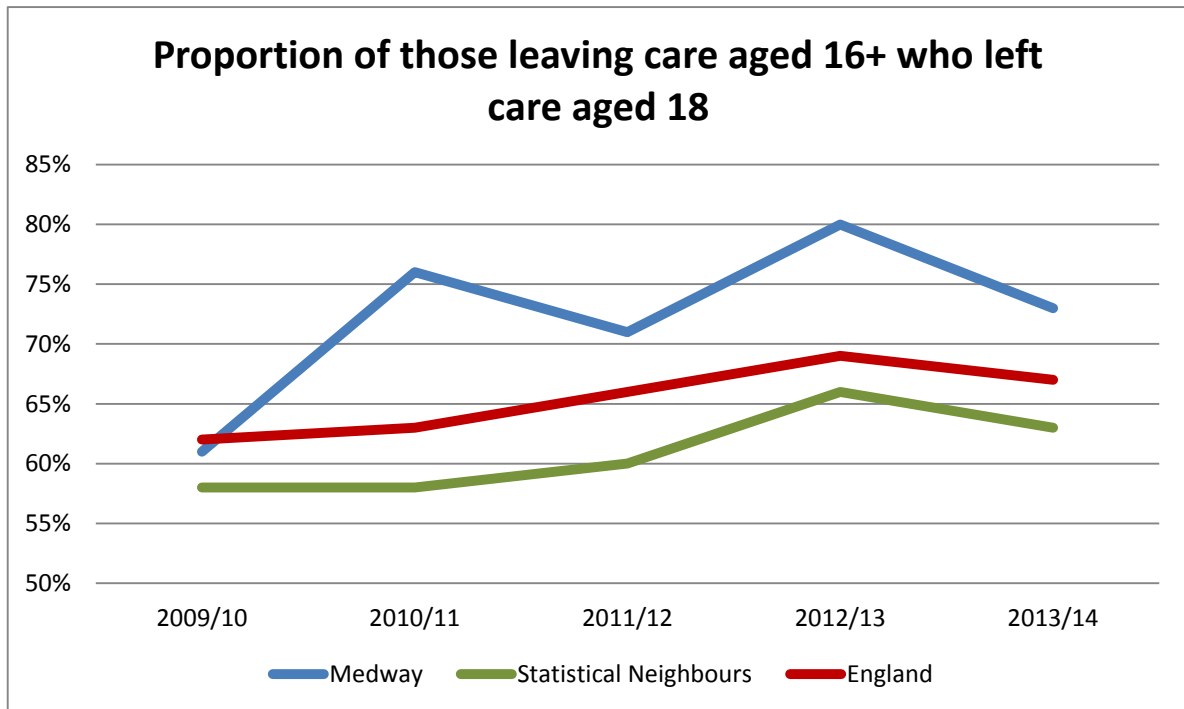
	31-Mar-12	31-Mar-13	31-Mar-14	31-Mar-15 (projected)	31-Mar-16 (projected)	31-Mar-17 (projected)
Aged 16	3	1	0	0	0	0
Aged 17	15	7	6	6	6	6
Aged 18	69	76	51	42	37	48
Aged 19	52	69	76	51	42	37
Aged 20	40	52	69	76	51	42
Total	179	205	202	175	136	133

- 4.47 The reduction has 2 drivers. As demonstrated in the following graph, Medway is supporting more of our 16 and 17 year olds in care as looked after children until their 18th birthday and this significantly reduces the number supported as care leavers aged 16 and 17. On this nationally ranked LAC indicator, Medway was 21st out of the 152 authorities in England. Medway does not encourage young people to leave care at the age of 16 or 17, and only supports this when there is a robust pathway plan with a full assessment of

Support for Care Leavers

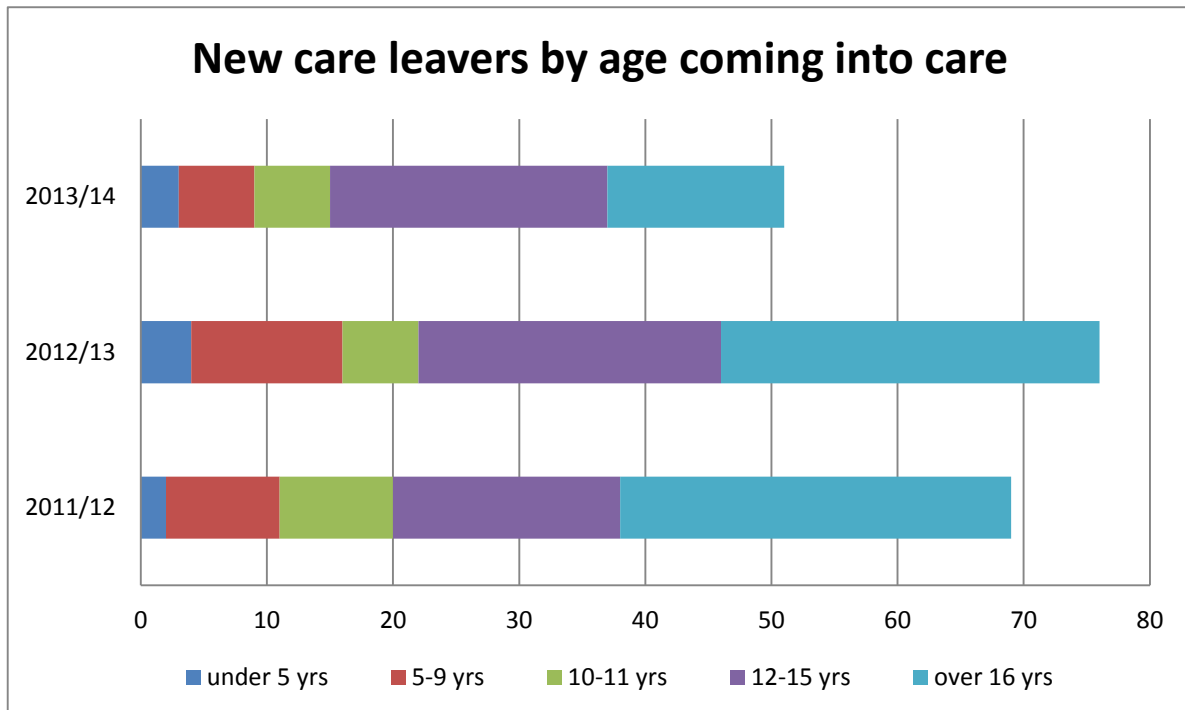
their needs and that the allocated team are satisfied that the placement meets the young persons needs and can secure positive outcomes for them.

CHART 1



- 4.48 The second driver in the reduction of eligible care leavers is the overall reduction in 16 and 17 year olds in care in Medway. On the 31 March 2011, 120 of our looked after children were aged 16 or 17 and this has now reduced to 63.
- 4.49 We are now utilising this trend analysis data to review the volume and nature of the accommodation we provide to care leavers. There is an ongoing Fostering service review to explore the types of carers we need to recruit over the next 3-5 years based on the age and needs of the looked after population, and we are working with partners in commissioning to secure high quality accommodation with a range of support options for young people aged 16-24. In addition our multi agency Housing and Accommodation Sub Group continues to review the available independent/tenancy options available for care leavers. These projects are alluded to elsewhere in the report.

CHART 2



4.50 Chart 2 shows how the number of young people becoming looked after aged 16 and over has continued to fall over the last 4 years. As above this will impact on the numbers of care leavers we support over the next 3-5 years.

Accommodation Provision

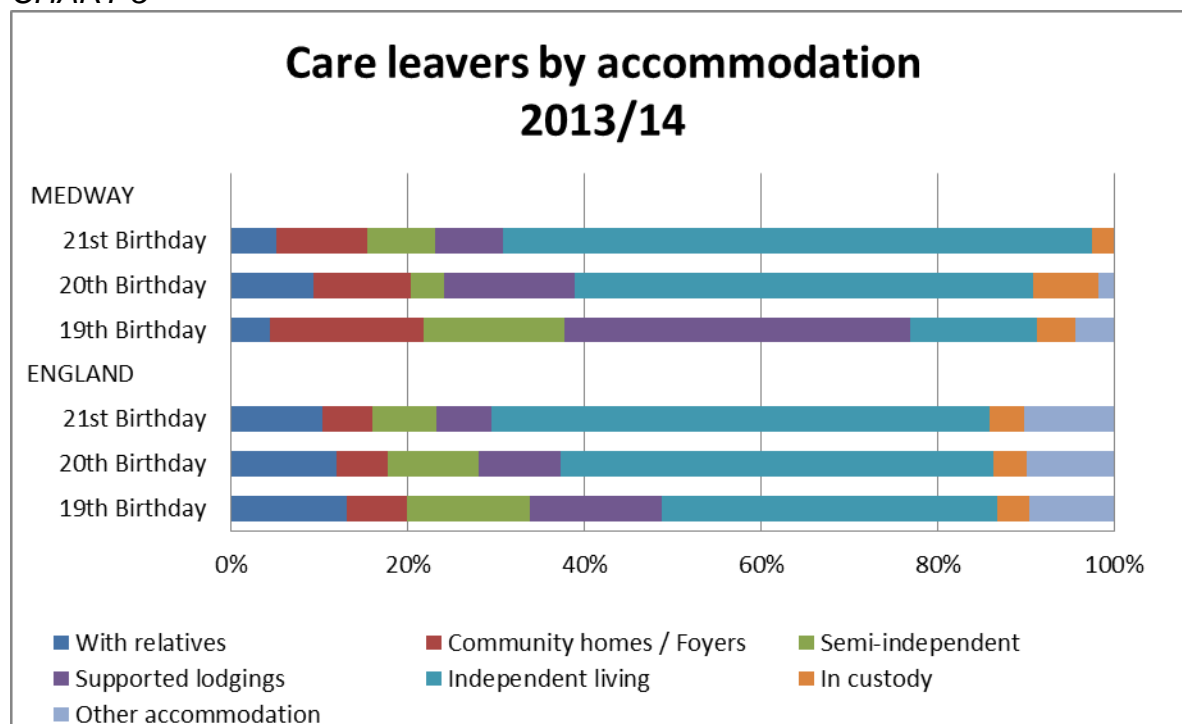
4.51 Medway actively tracks all our care leavers to ensure that they access the support they are entitled to including the provision of safe and suitable accommodation. Medway has always performed positively in this area as detailed in Chart 3.

4.52 In 2013/14 Medway's overall performance for care leavers aged 19, 20 and 21 in suitable accommodation was 78%, against 72% achieved by our statistical neighbours and 78% achieved nationally. On this nationally ranked LAC indicator, Medway was 91st out of the 152 authorities in England in 2014.

4.53 We believe that all care leavers should have access to a range of accommodation types with support needs based on their assessed needs. Working with our partners in Commissioning a tendering process is underway to secure high quality accommodation provision and this process should have completed by August 2015. Robust quality standards will apply to this provision with regular inspections taking place and we will be training some of our looked after young people and care leavers to become Young Inspectors to support this work. This training will be taking place over the next 3 months and will be led by our Participation and Engagement team.

4.54 Our aim is to secure at least 95% of young people aged 19, 20 and 21 are in suitable accommodation by 01.12.2015.

CHART 3

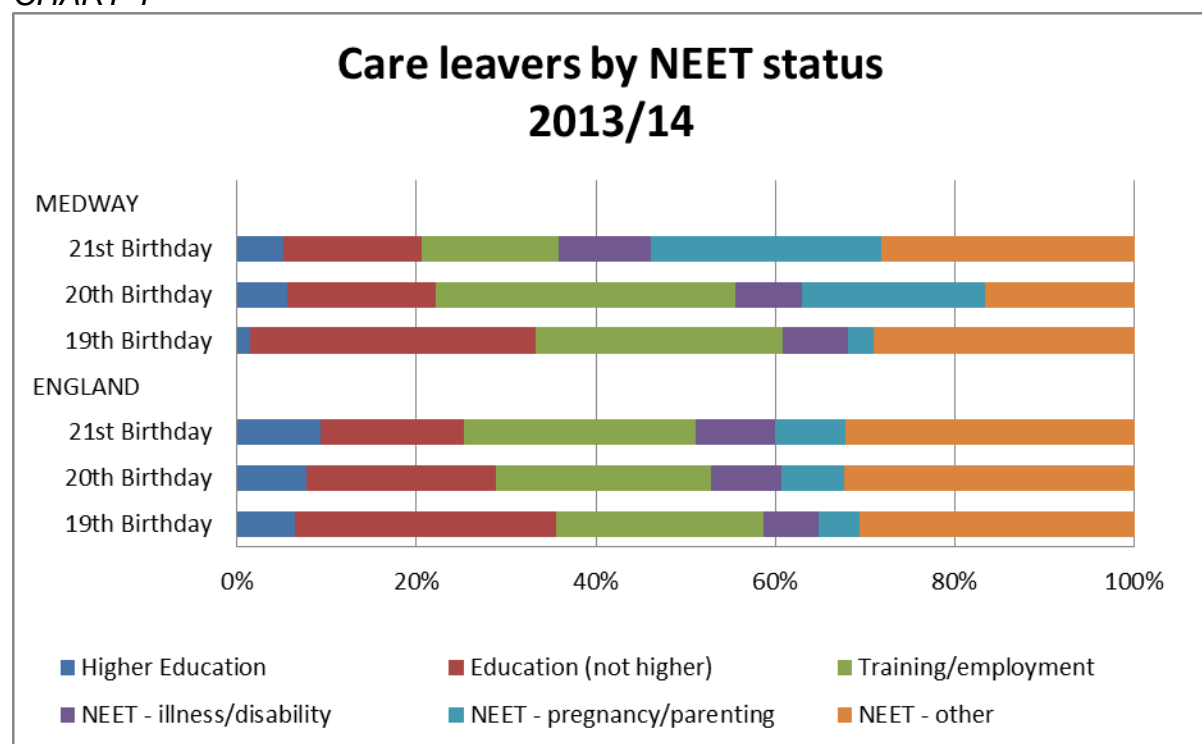


Employment, education and training

- 4.55 Medway has introduced a number of innovative schemes to support young people to secure suitable employment, education or training opportunities (EET). These include the promotion of apprentice opportunities across the Council (currently 4 in place), innovative work with the Job Centre and Medway Youth Trust to support young people, and the development of a Facebook page to advertise and promote opportunities.
- 4.56 In addition the Education sub-group from the Corporate Parenting Board has an active work plan designed to raise attainment and ensure joint working to secure positive outcomes for young people. Further, the NEET to EET operational group, comprised of operational leads from the Leaving Care team, MYT and the Education teams tracks individual young people without suitable education, training and employment opportunities and identifies joint activity to support them into specific roles.
- 4.57 The Leaving care team are developing new media opportunities with the Council's HR Dept. to advertise and promote employment, education and training opportunities and in addition the graduate trainee in the Virtual School is developing a post 16 opportunities guide for young people.
- 4.58 In 2013/14 Medway's overall performance for care leavers aged 19, 20 and 21 in education, employment or training was 44%, against 39% achieved by our statistical neighbours and 45% achieved nationally. On this nationally ranked LAC indicator, Medway was 85th out of the 152 authorities in England in 2014. Chart 4 demonstrates these statistics
- 4.59 Medway's overall performance for care leavers aged 19, 20 and 21 higher education was 3%, against 7% achieved by our statistical neighbours and 6% achieved nationally. On this nationally ranked LAC indicator, Medway was 99th out of the 152 authorities in England in 2014.

- 4.60 Ensuring that young people have access to suitable education, employment and training opportunities is a key priority for us and we have made significant improvements in the way we work with our partners and young people themselves to provide a range of opportunities to young people. We are ambitious for our looked after young people and care leavers and our aim is to ensure that at least 65% of our care leavers are in education, employment or training by 01.04.2016.

CHART 4



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5. METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH

- 5.1 On 13 August 2014, the Task Group met to set the scope and determine the terms of reference of the review and then met on 15 September 2014 to receive a briefing to the background of the review. At this point the group also considered the methodology for the review and agreed to hold a series of 'roundtable' evidence sessions, thereby providing an opportunity for the participants to get together in an informal setting to examine the issues as they relate to their specific business process.

Terms of reference

- 5.2 The Task Group agreed the following terms of reference:

"How can Medway further support Medway's care leavers to have a stable and productive adult life being positive active citizens".

- 5.3 The Task Group considered a number of key lines of enquiry (KLOE), including:

KLOE 1: How Care Leavers are supported in independent living.

KLOE 2: How Care Leavers are supported with suitable accommodation.

KLOE 3: How do we support Care Leavers to remain with existing foster carers?

KLOE 4: How Care Leavers are inspired to achieve academically.

KLOE 5: How Care Leavers are supported into employment.

KLOE 6: How are our Health colleagues supporting our Care Leavers?

KLOE 7: How are Care Leavers who have been placed outside of Medway supported?

KLOE 8: How can we collectively strengthen our Corporate Parenting role?

- 5.4 The approach, methodology and programme for the review is set out below:

Date	Members in attendance	Other attendees	Purpose
13 August 2014	Councillors Cooper, Purdy and Royle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phil Watson, Assistant Director, Children's Social Care Jo Cross, Head of Service: Looked after children and Proceedings (HoS LAC&P). Jo Kavanagh, Leaving Care Team Manager Niki Smith, Democratic Services Officer 	To set the scope of the review
15 September 2014	Councillors Cooper, Purdy, Royle (Chairman), Smith and Turpin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jo Cross, HoS LAC&P Jo Kavanagh, Leaving Care Team Manager Teri Reynolds, Democratic Services Officer 	To discuss the background to the review

Support for Care Leavers

Date	Members in attendance	Other attendees	Purpose
15 October 2014	Councillors Cooper, Purdy, Royle, Smith and Turpin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simon Ablitt – Open door, CYP substance misuse • Dick Frak – Commissioning Manager • Justine Henderson – Interim Head of Commissioning • Kim Henson – LAC Nurse, Medway NHS Foundation Trust • Sally-ann Ironmonger – Head of Health Improvement, Public Health • Jo Kavanagh – Leaving Care Team Manager • Bob Lomas – CAMHS Manager • Teri Reynolds – Democratic Services Officer • Nancy Sayer – Designated Nurse for LAC, Medway CCG • Anna Trudgian - Open door, CYP substance misuse • Dr David Whiting – Public Health • Dr Saloni Zaveri – Public Health 	To gain evidence in relation to KLOE 6 – how health support care leavers
22 October 2014	Councillors Cooper, Purdy, Royle, Smith and Turpin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joy Bamford, Bridging the Gap • Jo Cross, HoS LAC&P • Matt Gough, Head of Strategic Housing • Justine Henderson, Interim Head of Commissioning • Amanda Mensah, Foyer Manager, MHS Homes • Teri Reynolds, Democratic Services Officer 	To gain evidence concerning current and future accommodation provision, support and commissioning intentions: KLOE 2
5 November 2014	Councillors Cooper, Royle, Smith and Turpin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carolle Allman, Mid Kent College • Sue Batther, Dept for Work and Pensions • Sue Morris, Senior Social Worker • Teri Reynolds, Democratic Services Officer 	To gain evidence concerning: KLOE 5.
11 November 2014	Councillors Cooper, Purdy, Royle, Smith and Turpin	To visit Hampshire County Council (HCC) to understand what good looks like in performance relating to Care Leavers and bring back some examples of best practice. Jo Kavanagh, Leaving Care Team Manager and Teri Reynolds, Democratic Services Officer accompanied Members on this trip. The Task Group met with various officers from HCC who worked in support care leavers. The Task Group also met with HCC's Lead Member for Children's Services and with some of Hampshire's Care Ambassadors.	

Support for Care Leavers

Date	Members in attendance	Other attendees	Purpose
12 November 2014	Councillors Cooper, Purdy, Royle, Smith and Turpin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jo Cross, HoS LAC&P Jo Kavanagh, Leaving Care Team Manager Teri Reynolds, Democratic Services Officer 	To feedback on the visit to Hampshire, the individual visits to care leavers and to share initial thoughts on possible recommendation areas.
16 December 2014	Councillors Cooper, Purdy, Royle, Smith and Turpin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phil Watson, AD Children's Social Care Jo Cross, HoS LAC&P Teri Reynolds, Democratic Services Officer 	To finalise a set of recommendations from the Task Group
3 March 2015	Councillors Cooper, Purdy, Royle, Smith and Turpin (Task Group Members), Councillor O'Brien – Portfolio Holder for Children's Services (Lead Member)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phil Watson, AD Children's Social Care Jo Cross, HoS LAC&P Teri Reynolds, Democratic Services Officer 	To discuss the recommendations and report with the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services (Lead Member) and for the Task Group to agree the final draft report document to be submitted to the overview and scrutiny committee.

5.5 Visits to care leavers

In addition to these meetings three of the Task Group Members also visited care leavers separately. Two Members each went to see a care leaver in their own home, accompanied by the young person's Personal Adviser. Another Member went to visit Bridging the Gap, a supported accommodation provider for care leavers specifically, based in Gillingham.

5.6 Visit to Hampshire

The Task Group visited Hampshire County Council as it was a well performing local authority in relation to Care Leavers scoring good for experiences and progress of care leavers in its most recent Ofsted inspection in 2014.

"Young people are well supported when they leave care. They and their social workers draw up clear and timely plans to help them make the transition. A high percentage of care leavers are in employment, education or training. A 'Staying Put' scheme has enabled a growing number of care leavers to remain with their carers beyond the age of 18 and this is bringing demonstrable improvements to their life chances".

Hampshire County Council Ofsted Inspection Report 2014

- 5.7 The Task Group would like to thank all participants in the review and a link to the final review document will be sent to all of them, together with the decisions of the Cabinet.
- 5.8 The outcome of this evidence gathering is reported, in summary, within section 6 of this report.

6. SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE COLLECTED

KLOE 1: How Care Leavers are supported in independent living

- 6.1. Placements for care leavers are sourced through the Access to Resources team (ART) based at Gun Wharf as part of the Commissioning service or through the Leaving Care team, depending on the resource sought. Medway has no in-house semi-independent provision for care leavers and all provision is thus secured through independent providers. Medway has in-house Supported Lodging providers and in addition has commissioned Supported Accommodation through a range of independent providers.
- 6.2. Wherever possible young people are offered a choice of accommodation and are given the opportunity to visit the provider before they move in. However, frequently this is not possible: young people may have to move quickly because their previous placement has broken down or there may simply not be a choice available.
- 6.3. The care leaver's allocated Personal Advisor (PA) works with the young person to assess their needs and this will include the provision of additional support. Where a young person has complex needs arising from a disability or mental health need the service works with providers to access additional support with agreed outcomes. This support should be an integral part of the Pathway Plan, agreed in advance with the young person and monitored and reviewed at their Pathway Plan reviews.
- 6.4. The PA will also work with local community based services and partner agencies to build support around the young person, again dependant on their assessed needs. This may include support from local substance misuse agencies, Children's Centres where the care leaver is pregnant or a parent or perhaps training and education providers helping them into education or employment. Similarly where the young person has particular skills or ambitions the PA will support them to undertake these in the community and realise their ambitions as far as possible.
- 6.5. Young people with assessed needs arising from a disability or mental health diagnosis the PA will refer them to Adult Social Care to ensure that they have an allocated social worker or support worker. The PA will remain working with them whilst their eligibility to leaving care provision remains. The PA will work closely with the allocated Adult Social Care professional to ensure they receive the required support and guidance including support to lead an active, safe and happy life whatever their accommodation provision.

Skills building

- 6.6. Moving into independence is a huge step for any young person, particularly those who may have experienced a turbulent past. Young people generally are living with their family for much longer. According to the Office for National Statistics, in 2013, 49% of 20-24 year olds lived with their parents.
- 6.7. Medway introduced its Staying Put arrangements in 2013 and is encouraging and supporting care leavers to remain with their foster carer, until the age of 21, wherever this is possible and practical to do so. This has been relatively successful, with 30 young people staying in placement with their previous carers as at 1 April 2014. Whilst national figures are not yet available it appears that Medway may well be a high performer nationally. Our Staying Put policy is actively promoted at LAC reviews, amongst teams and via Independent Reviewing Officers and we will continue to support and promote it as we recognise the benefits it brings to young people.
- 6.8. In terms of how ready care leavers currently are for independence this unsurprisingly varied and there was some evidence to suggest that a key factor was the care leavers last placement. The Task Group heard evidence that in certain cases care leavers leaving care from residential homes were less ready for independence compared to those you were placed with foster families, however, this is not always the case as young people placed at the Old Vicarage and many of our independent residential providers, commence an independence programme from the age of 14 years.
- 6.9. It is nationally recognised that developing independent living skills for looked after children should begin early, ideally around the age of 12 – 13 years old. As care leavers typically have to live independently much earlier than the most other young people it is an important part of the authority's corporate parent role to ensure that care leavers are ready for independence early enough. Being "ready" encompasses a range of issues ranging from the acquisition of basic skills as well as building the emotional resilience needed to live as an independent adult. Whilst there was evidence that some young people were supported and prepared for living independently it was clear that there was a lack of consistency in this area.
- 6.10. In terms of the essential/basic skills care leavers need to gain this includes , for example; being able to cook a number of simple but nutritious meals, balancing a budget or doing the laundry.

Local authorities must place an early emphasis on financial literacy and financial capability skills which are essential to ensuring that children and young people are given solid foundations on which to build when a more formal focus on financial planning commences as part of the pathway planning process.

The Children Act 1989: Guidance and Regulations

- 6.11 In summary the evidence presented to the Task Group suggested that there needed to be a much more formalised approach to independence training to ensure that every young person had access to the same approach and the opportunity to develop a range of core skills. The Task Group felt that it needed to be built in more distinctly to expectations of foster carers and residential homes staff, with more specific targets. One idea explored by the Task Group was that of a checklist for carers (residential and foster carers) to use to ensure that certain skills are taught to Medway's looked after children early enough to ensure readiness for independence. Whilst acknowledging that not all young people would engage with this the Task Group and the witnesses who met them felt that we needed to be able to demonstrate that we had attempted to work with young people to develop these essential skills throughout their time in care. In addition it was felt that if we were able to create a "hub" for young people we would be able to carry on supporting young people to obtain and develop these skills through classes and workshops etc.

Emotional resilience

- 6.12 A big challenge for Medway's care leavers, and indeed all care leavers, is the development of emotional resilience to enable them to deal with the many challenges of living independently at such a young age. Care leavers can be very vulnerable and the Task Group heard how they sometimes found it difficult to cope with living alone and the challenges this brings. The Task Group heard many examples of young people doing well and living positively but also heard how some young people can be vulnerable to exploitation from people living locally which can lead to anti social behaviour or the care leaver becoming isolated and alone.

"The care leavers we spoke to...told us that they had not fully understood just how lonely their lives would become once they left care".

Ofsted: Learning Independence

- 6.13 The Task Group heard and agreed that a wide ranging package of support is needed to support young people as they make the transition to independent living and young adulthood. This could be done in a number of ways and the role of the Personal Advisor is key. Care leavers are visited by their Personal Advisor every eight weeks as a minimum but the frequency is increased as appropriate and contact is maintained via text where needed. However the group heard that capacity is an issue for Medway's leaving care team with the average PA having caseloads of 25 plus. In Hampshire, the authority reported that PAs generally had caseloads of 20-25 although this varied depending on the complexity of individual cases. The management team are committed to addressing the issues of caseloads and will

review resources internally to consider how there might be a managed reduction going forward.

- 6.14 The service reported to the Task Group that their aim was to develop a drop-in centre or hub for Care Leavers. This would provide not only a safe place to go for Care Leavers when they needed to talk and access advice, but could also provide a fully functional kitchen with a cooker, washing machine etc for care leavers to use if they did not have one of their own. The hub could then be used to hold workshops and groups for young people to further enable them to develop the skills referred to above. Recognising that resources are at a premium the Task Group considered that the service could consider sharing the space with another organisation that provides support for young people, for example, Medway Youth Trust. This approach would then provide a one-stop shop for Care Leavers to access a range of other support, for example, careers and education and training advice. This approach would also foster multi-agency support for care leavers and the development of a corporate parenting approach to their support.

Planned progression and sensitive transition

- 6.15 Moving into independence can be a daunting prospect for anyone, especially care leavers who have to make the transition at a generally younger age and who may have a range of residual emotional difficulties to manage. A clear plan for progression and a sensitive approach to the transition to leaving care was therefore considered key.
- 6.16 The Task Group identified some gaps in the transition process for care leavers, in particular when young people moved from being a looked after young person to a care leaver, ie when they turned 18. There were examples given of information sharing between the different teams being very good and others where information sharing was weak and not detailed enough. It was therefore recognised that this transition could be better managed to provide a more consistent approach. In Hampshire, staff shared a document with the Task Group entitled "What leads to a good Care Leavers Ofsted inspection outcome". Within the document it states that there should be routine early engagement with 16-18 year old looked after children. Members learned how every looked after child in Hampshire is appointed a Personal Advisor at 16 and that PA would then work alongside the Social Worker for 2 years. Their individual roles and expectations were clearly laid out to avoid duplication. This enabled time for a strong relationship to be built with the young person and the Personal Advisor ready for when support from the Social Worker is withdrawn at 18.
- 6.17 The Task group Members welcomed this model and considered that a similar model should be replicated in Medway. However, it was acknowledged that this would require additional staffing resource and would therefore need to be considered within the Council's overall

budget position. The Task Group felt that assigning a Personal Advisor at 17 years of age would be extremely beneficial whilst having a lower impact on resource.

- 6.18 The increased capacity at Hampshire was further maximised by having responsive admin support embedded within each team. This is something that Medway's Leaving Care Team felt that it would benefit from too as it can act as a triage system for calls that come in, enabling the Personal Advisors to focus on their core job more effectively.

KLOE 2: How Care Leavers are supported with suitable accommodation

- 6.19 The Access to Resources Team (ART), a specialist service located within the Commissioning service work with the Leaving Care service to find suitable accommodation for care leavers, depending on the provision sought. Accommodation for young people aged 18+ is located either via the ART or through the PA. Where necessary additional packages of support can be utilised but this comes at an additional cost.
- 6.20 There is limited availability of supported lodgings and semi-independent accommodation in Medway in common with most other local authorities. This gap is particularly significant when seeking accommodation for young people with particularly challenging behaviours, eg offending, child sexual exploitation, substance misuse or anti-social behaviours: again this is a problem shared across all LA's. Where this is a presenting issue the PA will work with the young people and a range of partner agencies including the Youth Offending Service (YOS), Open Road drugs service and others to address the concerns and enable the young person to move on into adulthood. When a young person is felt ready the PA helps them with their bidding through the Housing Departments accommodation scheme. Medway has access to 2 foyer schemes which offer supported accommodation but these typically work with young people with lower levels of need.

Accommodation availability and choice

Definition of what is meant by 'suitable accommodation'. It is accommodation:

- Which, so far as reasonably practicable, is suitable for the child in light of his needs, including his health needs;
- In respect of which the responsible authority has satisfied itself as to the character and suitability of the landlord or other provider;
- Complies with health and safety requirements related to rented accommodation; and
- In respect of which the responsibly authority has, so far as reasonably practicable, taken into account the child's wishes, feelings and education, training or employment needs.

The Children Act 1989: Guidance and Regulations

- 6.21 In common with other local authorities, availability and choice of accommodation continues to be a challenge for Medway. Hampshire County Council confirmed to Members on the visit to the authority that it was their biggest challenge and despite their positive Ofsted report earlier in 2014, the Ofsted tone had been that bed and breakfast (B&B) usage is inappropriate and Hampshire's usage had been significantly scrutinised during the inspection, particularly in relation to safeguarding/risk assessment.
- 6.22 Medway still occasionally utilises bed and breakfast (B&B) accommodation for some of its care leavers. This only occurs on a very short term basis and only when all other options have been exhausted: usually because the young person has been evicted from other accommodation or suddenly appears requesting assistance. However, young people who present as homeless have been regularly reviewed since the 1st of September 2014 through the Access to Resources Panel and as at January 2015 there was only one young person placed for a very short term in B&B provision.
- 6.23 Where B&B is used the team endeavour to move young people on to more appropriate accommodation as soon as possible. Despite this intermittent use it was still considered unacceptable and inappropriate by the Task Group and by Officers. However, due to the shortage in availability of appropriate accommodation, particularly for the more difficult young people with challenging behaviour and complex needs, some level of use was necessary. The Task Group did understand that a new commissioning framework was being developed to address this issue, with an aim of eradicating the reliance on bed and breakfast placements.

"The DfE must ensure that looked after young people approaching independence are fully and effectively informed of their rights and entitlements and given a genuine choice of accommodation"
House of Commons Education Committee: Into independence, not out of care: 16 plus care options

- 6.24 The local authority's commissioning officers had worked hard to develop commissioning framework for accommodation for care leavers to improve availability and choice. Various options had been considered, including the possible development of a dynamic purchasing system, however, following consultation with the market and providers a provider framework was developed and is currently out to tender (as at February 2015). This commissioning process aims to increase the range of good quality Supported Accommodation/ Semi Independent provision that is available and to secure a range of support packages to meet the diverse needs of our care leavers. The commissioning process seeks to secure:

- **Supported Accommodation:** Comprising of communal/shared accommodation that can house a small number of young people, enabling them to live together. The home must be managed by highly trained, experienced and skilled staff, some of whom are to be on site 24 hours. Support staff are to provide appropriate levels of support designed to meet young people's individual needs and achieve the outcomes outlined in young person's pathway plan.
- **Accommodation with Floating Support / Supported Tenancy Arrangement:** Accommodation and support that will enable young people to enter into and maintain their own tenancies. Housing shall be sourced through a providers own stock or arrangements with private or social landlords. This could be in the form of one bed flats, shared flats, bedsits within a larger communal building or trainer flats as an example. Flexible packages of floating support are to be offered, which may vary from a couple of hours a week to higher levels of support e.g. 7 – 8 hours a day, 7 days a week dependent on the young person's assessed need. It is anticipated that the level of support will decrease over a period of time, as the young person develops their ability to live independently.
- **Floating Support / Outreach only:** This could be community based floating support to enable young people to live semi independently in their own accommodation. We are seeking to commission flexible packages of support which may vary from a couple of hours a day to a few hours a week.
- Some young people who are currently in care of Medway Council expressed the value of having 'tester or trial sessions' by living in semi /supported accommodation for a short period of time, prior to making the transition from foster care/ residential care. Medway Council is keen to explore and pilot this arrangement as part of the tender process. We have already received positive feedback from potential providers about this approach.

6.25 As part of the tender process, standard, enhanced and intensive support packages are being commissioned, dependent on the needs of the young people who will be referred. Some young people may initially be referred to the provider requiring an intensive or enhanced service, however over a period of time the young person's needs may reduce and on agreement of all parties the level of support provided may be stepped down to a standard service category. If support requirements increase, young people may need to be stepped up to a more enhanced level of support for a short period of time.

6.26 It is the intention that the level of support reduces over an agreed period enabling the young person to move into independence in a planned way. An estimated length of time that a package of support

would be required for and step down arrangements will be provided as part of the referral process. Providers will be required to evidence their ability to meet the needs to the young person and offer a step down package of support as part of the placement decision making process.

- 6.27 Medway is seeking proposals from providers that enable young people to remain in their accommodation for the long term. For example, if a young person moves into accommodation at the age of 18 they should be supported to take on the tenancy and retain the property using housing benefit or through alternative means.
- 6.28 Providers will also be required to offer all young people an independence support plan, in accordance with achieving the outcomes stated within their care/ pathway plan.

We recommend that the DfE consult urgently with local authorities on a...strengthened requirement...to commission sufficient alternative emergency facilities...the DfE should reiterate the message that B&Bs must only be used in extreme, emergency circumstances and for a very limited period of time, no more than a few days.

House of Commons Education Committee: Into independence, not out of care: 16 plus care options

- 6.29 At the living independently themed evidence session the Task Group learned that some supported accommodation was currently being commissioned by Housing Services, and others by Social Care. It was acknowledged that a review of this newly commissioned service would be beneficial to ensure compliance with quality standards and that support was being appropriately provided for care leavers.
- 6.30 The Task Group raised issues with the Officers they met about how the service ensures accommodation provision meets the required quality standards. The Head of Strategic Housing explained that temporary accommodation is reviewed on a case by case basis prior to its use with regular visits undertaken whilst the young person is in residence to ensure that it meets the statutory standards set out within the suitability criteria. Equally, supported accommodation commissioned by Housing Services and by Partnership Commissioning (on behalf of Children's Social Care) has to meet specific standards which are set through the commissioning process and as a result providers are required to provide on-going monitoring information on young people.
- 6.31 However, it was recognised that a review of some aspects of current service would be beneficial, such as of the current allocation policy and temporary housing provision, to ensure adequate and appropriate priority and support is provided to Medway's care leavers. The Task Group felt that Housing Services should work with Partnership Commissioning to deliver this review.

Understanding entitlements

- 6.32 There was concern that many care leavers were unclear about all their entitlements and rights, be it in relation to levels of support they can expect from the local authority, welfare benefit entitlements or accommodation support options. The representative from the Department of Work and Pensions noted that this was actually an issue for young people generally, not just care leavers.
- 6.33 The Task Group heard that the allocated PA will always support young people to make benefit claims and the team has developed excellent working relationships with Job Centre+ staff to ensure that benefits were received in a timely manner and that young people had access to a range of provision as agreed by statute. Housing benefit is always claimed with young people aged 18+.
- 6.34 Ensuring that care leavers are clear about their entitlements was a key role of the Leaving Care Team and they were in the process of developing a leaflet that would help explain simply such entitlements. Areas to be covered included how to claim benefits, how to make a complaint, what support was available to young people etc.
- 6.35 At a meeting with a group of care leavers on the 3rd December 2014 the Head of Service agreed with them to work together to develop a leaflet for young people making the transition to leaving care. This will include a range of issues including their rights and the duties of the local authority. The group have also agreed to meet monthly and to form the nucleus of a care leavers group.

KLOE 3: How do we support Care Leavers to remain with existing foster carers

- 6.36 As stated above there is a Staying Put Policy in Medway, which has been in place since July 2013, and which is actively promoted by all staff. Carers receive support to enable a young person to remain with them until the age of 21 and the service believes that this support is an excellent opportunity for care leavers to experience the richness and warmth of family life.
- 6.37 As there have been many changes of CSC staff over the past year the service will be re-launching the policy during the first 3 months of 2015 to foster carers, Independent Reviewing Officers and social work staff alike.
- 6.38 Young people are actively encouraged and supported to remain with their previous carers and where this is in their best interests Children's Social Care ensure this is built into their pathway plan.

KLOE 4: How Care Leavers are inspired to achieve academically

- 6.39 There are many reasons why looked after young people and care leavers may not achieve academically as well as their non looked after peers. Many will have experienced changes of school to disrupt their education and because of their life experiences many will take longer to achieve their full potential. In Medway during 2014 there were 5 care leavers attending further and higher education and all did so at least 1 year later than their non-looked after peers. Medway works hard to ensure that we support young people to achieve when they are ready and we provide a range of support to young people whatever their age.
- 6.40 Medway believes that supporting young people to achieve educationally starts at a young age and as such we are committed to securing the best pre-school provision for looked after children, depending on their individual needs. In addition we try to place looked after young people in the school best able to meet their holistic needs and we provide one to one tuition to help them achieve wherever needed.
- 6.41 Teams across Medway work closely with MYT and they currently provide a dedicated PA within the Looked after children and Proceedings service 5 days a week to work with care leavers and looked after young people. The PA attends PEPs and LAC reviews where possible and appropriate and supports young people with CV's, attending interviews and applying for jobs. In addition she works closely with the team to advise on the best ways to support and motivate young people.

A good standard of education is a key driver towards achieving positive employment outcomes in adulthood. However, there remains a significant gap between educational achievements of care leavers and their peers.

Care leavers are less likely to have achieved 5 A*-C GCSEs (37% of LAC compared to 80% non-LAC). Only 6% of care leavers go into higher education compared to 23% of their peers at aged 18.

A big priority for government is, therefore, to ensure that children in care and care leavers get the support they need from schools, colleges, universities and local authorities to maximise their educational attainment and employment opportunities.

Care Leaver Strategy: A cross-departmental strategy for young people leaving care

Good partnership working

- 6.42 The themed evidence session on education and employment demonstrated a good working relationship between the Leaving Care

Team, the Virtual School, Medway Youth Trust and Mid Kent College, the education establishment with the largest cohort of Care Leavers in Medway. All of these agencies are working in partnership to secure positive outcomes for young people, with regular NEET to EET meetings and regular contact in between these meetings. However, it appeared that this joined up approach was a relatively new development and so the benefits of this could not yet be evidenced in terms of education, employment and training outcomes.

- 6.43 The NEET to EET group consists of: -
The Leaving Care Team
Virtual School,
Medway Youth Trust
Department for Work and Pensions
A representative from the 14-25 Participation service
- 6.44 The group meets every 6-8 weeks and uses individual case studies focusing on the hardest to reach individuals, thus enabling the agencies to work together and provide wrap-around support for Medway's care leavers, giving them the best opportunity to succeed.

Transition

- 6.45 Mid Kent College stressed the importance for young people of a positive transition process and outlined how they worked hard to prepare for a young person's arrival at the College. They aim to have in place from the start any additional support or interventions that a young person may need. However, their ability to do this was dependent on the information the college receive from the care leaver's previous school and unfortunately this was sometimes of poor quality and lacking in vital information. This meant that in some cases they were unable to put in place additional support as they were unaware of the young person's needs. In some cases they were not even aware that the young person was a care leaver. It was therefore suggested by the College that when a young person is transferring to Mid Kent College, the college should be invited, with the young person's consent, to be included in their last PEP meeting. This would ensure that the college were aware of the interventions and support required and would also support the development of a good relationship between the College and the young person.
- 6.46 Officers from Children's Social Care were very supportive of this idea and felt this could easily be adapted for any educational establishment a young person is transferred to. It could also include their employer if they were moving on to employment or an apprenticeship.

Tackling NEET numbers

- 6.47 Medway was still performing poorly in relation to the number of care leavers that are not in education, employment or training, though

performance is gradually improving. On its visit to Hampshire, the Task Group heard about how Hampshire is performing well in this area. This is largely as a consequence of effective apprenticeship and traineeship schemes run by the Council. Hampshire County Council has a dedicated team to support young people in these positions to enable them to overcome any barriers to success that may arise. The scheme, known as Hampshire Futures, has been very successful and was felt by Officers in Hampshire to be an integral part of their success in raising their EET levels.

- 6.48 Though it was reported to have taken quite a lot of resourcing to deliver such support it was felt that Medway would benefit by focussing more intensively on developing the wrap-around support of care leavers in such roles. The Members acknowledged that within the external contracts Medway manages it has required apprenticeships to be provided for a range of vulnerable groups but it was felt these opportunities should be focussed more towards care leavers in the first instance.

Supporting to succeed

- 6.49 Members heard from Mid Kent College how well the college supports its care leavers to achieve by preparing a smooth transition into the College and putting in place any interventions required to help that young person emotionally or academically with their learning. The Task Group were encouraged by this and were keen to ensure that this was an approach mirrored by other educational establishments in Medway.
- 6.50 Personal Advisors also work hard to support care leavers to succeed in college, school, university or a work setting. Again they do this in a variety of ways: taking them to visit, keeping in touch with the college tutor, helping the young person access individual and additional tuition, providing encouragement and support etc.
- 6.51 Task Group members felt that despite some initial successes there needed to be more joined up working between the Leaving Care team and other Council Departments to create additional trainee posts and apprenticeship posts and to ring fence these, at least initially for care leavers. To date there are 3 dedicated apprentice posts: one within Finance and 2 within Cookham Wood.
- 6.52 In terms of financial support the representative from Mid Kent College raised her concerns relating to the gap in grants available for Care Leavers between the ages of 19 and 24 years old. She explained that up until the age of 19 years old, care leavers were entitled to a guaranteed bursary grant to support their education, be it their travel expenditure, books or educational trips. From the age of 24, young people were then able to apply for a 24+ Advanced Learning Loan Bursary Fund (depending on eligibility). However, there were no bursary funds available for care leavers aged 19-24.

- 6.53 In addition, it was not uncommon for care leavers, to access higher and further education later than their peers. She therefore felt that for care leavers, the Guaranteed Bursary Fund should be continued until the young person finishes their education. This was supported by the Senior Social Worker present at the evidence session. It was argued that anything that removed a barrier to education for young people in or leaving care could only be beneficial in giving care leavers the best possible chance to succeed. It will also allow care leavers to enter education at the right time for them, change course and ultimately allow them to succeed in their own time and at their own pace.
- 6.54 Whilst the service can support young people at any age to attend College the Group felt that the wider benefits/educational allowance system did not recognise the particular needs of care leavers and felt that this needed to be taken up at a national level: whether directly by Medway or through the National managers group attended by the Team Manager.

KLOE 5: How Care Leavers are supported into employment

- 6.55 As above the service currently provides a range of support to young people through access to internal entry level posts and apprenticeships and via jobs through the Job Centre+. In addition PA's support young people with the completion of CVs and can provide equipment, uniforms and interview clothes as required. The creation of a "hub" or drop in centre would enable the service to provide additional numeracy and literacy groups or individual sessions and to run careers advice workshops. Additionally it would support more proactive promotion of available jobs and opportunities.

Joint working

- 6.56 The Task Group found the working relations between the Council and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to be strong; enabling both organisations to better support Medway care leavers. The DWP is involved in the NEET to EET meetings but also meets separately with the Leaving Care service. Both organisations provide each other with a designated single point of contact to ensure positive joint working. Advance notice is provided to the DWP about when care leavers will be attending the JC+ and Personal Advisors were now attending these appointments with young people where the young person agreed to this.
- 6.57 The DWP also visited the Medway Youth Trust on a weekly basis to provide a joined up approach with MYT and to provide advice to young people there, some of whom may be Care Leavers who have disengaged from social care support.

Notifying Care Leavers of opportunities

- 6.58 The Leaving Care team also reported a strong working relationship with the Council's HR services, who inform the team of job opportunities for young people as soon as possible. This information is currently shared via email. Officers were exploring the possibility of developing an app which would then provide direct notifications to care leavers of employment, education and training opportunities but the feasibility of this had not yet been explored. Members welcomed this development if it did prove viable. If not, using less expensive methods of social media, such as Facebook and twitter were suggested, to notify young people of available opportunities. These new social media tools would also provide a means of keeping in touch with individual young people and of undertaking surveys and consultations with them.

Abilities in English and mathematics

- 6.59 At the education and employment themed session all witnesses reported that poor performance in English and mathematics continued to be a significant problem for the current and forthcoming cohort of care leavers. The Virtual Head Teacher reported that typically the performance of care leavers in English and mathematics is significantly worse than their non looked after peers and this makes finding employment challenging for these young people. This finding is mirrored nationally. In some cases this poor performance is due to multiple movements during their education causing disruption to their learning. In some cases it's a lack of motivation, confidence and self-esteem but it may be the result of a specific learning need, for example Autistic Spectrum Disorders and ADHD type disorders.
- 6.60 The Task Group heard that the Department for Work and Pensions will be piloting a scheme for all 18-21 year olds in Kent where everyone will be assessed in their ability in English, mathematics and Information Technology. For those assessed as being at Level 1 there will be a mandatory requirement to work towards and achieve Level 2 in these areas.

Support provided by Personal Advisors

Authorities should work with their partners to address employment, education and training needs of care leavers in their areas. Pathway Plans should outline how the local authority will improve the employability of their care leavers. They should ensure that care leavers are aware of, and get access to work experience, apprenticeship and other training and employment opportunities.

*The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations. Volume 3:
Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers*

Support for Care Leavers

- 6.61 As already identified , PA's provide support in a range of ways, either directly or by accessing specialist support where required. Every young person aged 18 and over has a Pathway Plan, which sets out amongst other things how they will be supported to achieve their full potential in either education, employment or training. The plan is formulated by the PA with the young person according to their assessed needs and is updated every 6 months until the age of 21 or 24 if they are in full time education..
- 6.62 If a young person requires additional support with numeracy and/or literacy additional tuition and support is sourced for them as we recognise that these are core skills that will support them in all aspects of their life including the development of self esteem and social skills.

KLOE 6: How are health supporting our Care Leavers

- 6.63 All looked after young people have annual health checks. These cease when a young person turns 18. However, the service works closely with the LAC nursing service, which is commissioned by Medway Foundation Trust within the Medway CCG. The team have recently recruited a dedicated Leaving Care nurse. The nurse took up post at the end of November 2014 and will support young people in a range of ways to access appropriate health services and make healthy life choices.
- 6.64 In addition, where necessary the PA's support young people to access smoking cessation advice or support to address their substance misuse by working with partner agencies.

“Personal advisors should have access to information and training about how to promote physical and mental health”
Promoting the health and well-being of looked-after children – statutory guidance for local authorities, clinical commissioning groups and NHS England

- 6.65 All care leavers should leave care at the age of 18 with a detailed and personalised health history and health plan. Resource issues within the nursing service have meant that this is an area for development but the Leaving Care team will be working closely with the service to target this area.

Understanding need

- 6.66 The Task Group felt that the health needs of care leavers is not currently adequately reflected in Medway's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA). As such they felt that this needed to be addressed in terms of future commissioning. In addition the Children in Care chapter of the JSNA was out of date and was in the process of being updated by senior Officers in Children's Social Care. It was therefore suggested that Public Health work with colleagues in

Children's services to make sure that the relevant section of the report is strengthened to reflect the specific needs of care leavers. This will enable commissioners, both internally and externally, to ensure there is more focus on the needs of care leavers when designing and commissioning services.

Transition from Children's Social Care to Adult Health and Social Care services

"Local authorities, CCGs and NHS England should ensure that there are effective plans in place to enable looked after children aged 16 and 17 to make a smooth transition to adulthood and that they are able to continue to obtain the health advice and services they need"

Promoting the health and well-being of looked-after children – statutory guidance for local authorities, clinical commissioning groups and NHS England

- 6.67 Transition for young people from CSC to Adult Health and Social Care services has been and continues to be a problem for Medway and for local authorities nationwide. One of the biggest problem areas in relation to this relates to Mental Health services, largely because the thresholds for accessing services are much higher within Adult services than they are for the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS). Therefore a number of young people receiving support for their mental health needs find this support withdrawn when they reach the age of 18 years. There is insufficient specialist support in the community and voluntary sector to fill this gap.
- 6.68 Hampshire acknowledges in their document, "What leads to a good Care Leavers Ofsted inspection outcome". They note that the local authority and partners need to be able to "demonstrate how the health needs [of care leavers] are monitored and addressed with particular emphasis on how those with complex needs make the transition into adult health and social care".
- 6.69 In relation to this, part of the dedicated Care Leavers Nurse's role in Medway will be to help young care leavers with the transition from Children's to Adult services, particularly in relation to their emotional wellbeing needs. The nurse will be present at a looked after young persons last health assessment and their last LAC review and will continue to monitor their health needs post 18. The Medway CCG representative expressed a view that this post would need to be kept under review as she felt that the demand would be very high making accommodating this post on a part time basis potentially difficult in the long term.
- 6.70 It was also suggested that there should be a review of the "age pathways" for access to health services. Transition from Children's to Adult services was a problem experienced by many care leavers who had been accessing services such as CAMHS and who subsequently

found they did not meet the criteria to access adult services support. The Mental Health Social Care Commissioning Manager informed the Task Group that there was an ADHD summit being held shortly to look at an all age pathway for that service. He added that other services that had been developed to improve transition at 18 years had proved helpful in making better transitions for care leavers. For example, the Early Intervention in Psychosis Service, which works with young people and their families from 14 to 25 years. In addition, the Disability Team works with young people up to 25 years. This was a model that was welcomed and the Task Group felt should be implemented in other services where appropriate.

- 6.71 In addition the multi agency Transition Forum discussed and reviewed cases from across CSC where there were concerns about the young persons complex needs and vulnerability, but where there was concern they may not meet the criteria for transition to Adult Social Care services. The Forum, chaired by the lead Health Commissioner has been very successful in enabling the transition of some young people into ASC and also in identifying gaps in provision, which will be fed back into future commissioning priorities.

Provision of support through universal services

- 6.72 At the health themed evidence session Public Health colleagues reported that providing health support services specifically for care leavers can be problematic. Care leavers, like looked after children, did not want to be treated any differently to their peers and this was a message heard by the local authority in various arenas. Public Health gave an example about some specific work they undertook with looked after children and care leavers around preventing teenage pregnancy. The scheme had generated low levels of interest and uptake. This work had been provided through a specific grant so the budget was instead used to provide advice and support in a more universal way for all young people. The team had been able to access more looked after children and care leavers through their universal events than they had through specific targeted workshops.
- 6.73 The Task Group felt that a key focus for public health and all health care services needed to be ensuring that there are no barriers for care leavers in accessing universal services and this needs to be at the forefront of all commissioning and service delivery.

KLOE 7: How are Care Leavers who have been placed outside of Medway supported

- 6.74 Where possible young people are supported to remain in Medway close to their family, friends and community. Where this is not possible, for whatever reason, the PA will maintain contact through regular visits and calls/texts. In addition the PA will ensure that the young person is linked into the support agencies required to enable them to live independently and make a successful transition into adulthood.

- 6.75 Many young people chose to locate outside of the Medway area and the Task Group were encouraged to hear during their meeting with the Leaving Care team that wherever possible the location of accommodation is actively discussed with the young person.

KLOE 8: How can we strengthen our Corporate Parenting Role

- 6.76 By its nature this Task Group reflects the priority Elected Members place on their Corporate Parenting role. All the experts called further emphasised the progress made already and their commitment to securing good outcomes for care leavers through joint working.
- 6.77 Tackling all of the gaps identified above and building on the best practice seen in Medway and externally will strengthen the Council's role as a Corporate Parent.
- 6.78 During the various evidence sessions, it became apparent that improvements are required in the timely transfer of cases and information on young people between the LAC service and the Leaving Care team to enable the latter to purposefully work with and support young people. Already work is underway to improve this position and the various Team Managers now meet monthly to discuss cases approaching transition and to plan positive case transfers. Early case identification will enable the LC team to support the young persons career aspirations and ensure that their Pathway Plan sets out their wishes and feelings and supports and guides the work to be undertaken with and for them over the next 6 months. The LAC service supports the identification of a PA at the age of 17 for young people and will review this over the next 4 months within its current resources to ascertain its viability. The LAC service concurs with the Task Group that this would be a significant improvement in providing a smoother transition to independence.
- 6.79 Ensuring the voice of Care Leavers is being heard across all services has been a key focus of the Task Group. However, it is not always easy to obtain detailed, meaningful feedback from young people. However, at a meeting with a group of care leavers on the 3rd December 2014 the HOS LAC&P agreed with them the establishment of a monthly group which will explore a range of issues important to young people. The first task agreed is the development of a leaflet for young people making the transition into the leaving care service.
- 6.80 At the visit to Hampshire, the Task Group learned that the Council's Participation Service (opposed to Personal Advisors themselves) conduct telephone surveys with its Care Leavers to gain meaningful, tangible feedback which is then fed back to improve service delivery. This approach is welcomed at Medway and Officers are keen to develop a survey of their own, in partnership with Medway's Participation Service. The HOS is currently in discussion with the

Support for Care Leavers

Participation service to commence such an exercise based on the template used in Hampshire.

- 6.81 The Task Group also feel that it is important for the Council to support a mentoring scheme of its own in Medway, like the successful Care Ambassador Scheme that they learned about on their visit to Hampshire County Council. The scheme there was a significant success.

“Twenty-one young people who have experience of being looked after act as care ambassadors. They provide an innovative and effective means of gathering the views of looked after children and care leavers, and ensuring that they influence the shape of services so that they get the help they need....Care ambassadors have been influential in the development of the current pathway plans template, which now reflects how care leavers want their meetings conducted and recorded”.

Hampshire County Council: Inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers - 2014

- 6.82 The Task Group also recommends that there should be continued routine briefings for all Members in their role as Corporate Parents. After the local elections in Medway in 2015, it is suggested that the findings from this review and any subsequent action plan be built in to any safeguarding/corporate parenting member briefings set up as part of member induction.

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7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 The Task Group has considered the support provided for care leavers across a wide range of areas, including; health, education and employment, accommodation and independent living.
- 7.2 From their research, their interviews and their analysis the Task Group recognise the positive work already in place to develop the Leaving Care service, and as partners in the corporate parenting process the Task group members echo the passion, enthusiasm and ambition for care leavers that they have witnessed throughout their work.
- 7.3 The following recommendations have been made following extensive discussion and consideration. Some could be easily implemented by the current team and within existing resource, whilst some are more aspirational and need to be considered as part of wider discussions around Children's Social Care service development and prioritisation during 2015/16 and onwards and the wider budgetary context.
- 7.4 Task Group members understand the financial and resource implications of some of their recommendations. They further recognise the good practice and improvements that have already been made to working practices with this cohort, and that there is strong commitment to partnership working from across agencies. The Task Group seeks assurance that senior management within children's social care will review these recommendations and draw up an action plan for their implementation, to be reviewed regularly for progress.

Health

- 7.5 It was reported to the Task Group that, historically, there had been insufficient support from Health partners and Commissioning services to ensure that care leavers holistic health needs were being considered. However, they were pleased to note that this is now improving, as evidenced by the newly appointed care leavers nursing post. The Task Group also considered there was a need to document the specific needs of care leavers in future Joint Strategic Needs Assessment documents..
- 7.6 The Task Group were concerned that very few care leavers left care with an up to date health plan and health history. However, they hoped that the creation of the new nursing post will enable a more direct focus on the needs of care leavers and will make tracking and monitoring of health needs easier.
- 7.7 The Task Group also noted that transition into adulthood continues to be one of the major problems for care leavers in relation to health services, particularly in areas such as mental health where the

eligibility criteria is much lower for children's services than adults. The group felt this could lead to care leavers with additional and complex needs lacking the support required to make the transition to young adulthood and independence. However, the group acknowledged that work is being done to address this issue (for example the newly created Transition Forum) but felt there still needs to be further improvements and changes in ways of working to tackle this issue, such as the development of all-age pathways.

Accommodation

- 7.8 The availability, suitability and sustainability of accommodation is an issue for many households in Medway. The type of accommodation available, offered or provided to care leavers will vary depending upon their age and needs. It is therefore essential that a range of accommodation types is available to meet all circumstances. Whilst in some instances there is considered to be suitable accommodation available, the Task Group heard that in some cases there are limited options available locally to provide the range and choice of accommodation and support that our care leaving population require. This has led to there still being some dependence on short term placements in bed and breakfast type accommodation, which is not considered suitable but at times it is the only option available to the service.
- 7.9 The Task Group was particularly encouraged to hear that Commissioning staff, in partnership with operational staff, are about to go out to tender with a new framework for supported accommodation which has a new approach to purchasing such services and aims to tackle the issues of availability and choice. The aim is to broaden the range of accommodation and support services available to young people and where possible to provide young people with a choice of accommodation which they currently do not have. In addition it is hoped to further reduce the use of bed and breakfast accommodation so that it will be used only in exceptional circumstances.
- 7.10 Following the above commissioning exercise where temporary accommodation is provided this will already have been reviewed to ensure that it meets the quality standards set out within the suitability criteria. Thereafter, where on-going accommodation is to be provided this should be through supported accommodation, which has been commissioned by housing to meet specific needs.
- 7.11 Where care leavers make an application through the Homechoice system they will be prioritised to allow them to move on into alternative accommodation.
- 7.12 However, the Task Group considered that there would need to be a system of ongoing review of the quality of support and accommodation provided following the commissioning and that Housing Services would

need to undertake a review of the allocations policy to ensure adequate and appropriate priority is being awarded to care leavers.

- 7.13 The Task Group also believed that Partnership Commissioning (on behalf of Children social care) and Housing Services should review the provision of arrangements where care leavers are provided with temporary housing, to ensure that it is meeting demand and conforms to relevant standards with the required support provided.

Preparation for independence

- 7.14 Preparing for independent living and leaving home is a significant event for any young person, particularly for care leavers who not have extended family members to support them. The Group heard that some care leavers, particularly those coming from residential homes, are poorly-prepared for living independently and the Group feel strongly that this needs to be addressed.
- 7.15 The Task Group therefore recommends more formal arrangements to ensure that carers are supporting looked after children to build skills in cooking, cleaning, managing finances and other essential skills to be able to lead an independent life.
- 7.16 The Task Group also recommended there should be a number of ways a young person can access support, either from their Personal Advisor direct, social media or from a hub which could provide a safe place for young people to meet and access various support and advice.

Education and employment

- 7.17 The Task Group wished to document its concern about the disparity in the level of ability in English and mathematics between care leavers and their peers. However, the Task Group Members learned from the expert witnesses that much has been done to tackle this issue and are confident that the benefit of these interventions would be realised in forthcoming cohorts of care leavers.
- 7.18 The Task group was encouraged to hear how the local authority has been providing apprenticeships and traineeships for young people, some of whom are care leavers but wanted to see opportunities for care leavers in such roles expanded and support intensified.. The Task Group felt this would be most successful through a Council-wide approach.
- 7.19 The Task group also learned that transition arrangements are not always as they should be for care leavers in relation to supporting them into higher/further education or employment. For example, educational establishments were not always good at sharing detailed information when a young person transfers from one to the other.. Equally, information was not always shared in the required detail between the

Looked after Children teams and the Leaving Care Team, again ensuring that the care leaver's PA was well equipped to support the young person to achieve good outcomes.. The Group heard some good examples of best practice but felt this needed to be built on and widened across all staff in Social Care and amongst all educational providers and employers.

Improving support

- 7.20 As well as the hub referred to above, the Task Group recommends that other ways of improving support mechanisms for care leavers should be explored. They welcomed the idea of building on technologies to provide an "app" or other social media options.
- 7.21 The Task Group were impressed with the Care Ambassador scheme they saw in place at Hampshire County Council and felt that senior managers within Children's Social Care should explore whether there are gaps locally in relation to mentoring services and consider something similar for Medway care leavers.

Improving service delivery

- 7.22 In all the evidence sessions the Task Group tested the extent to which staff and partners were ensuring that the voice of care leavers was being heard and listened to. There was some positive feedback on this issue and the Members were keen for this good practice to be built on. At the visit to Hampshire County Council they learned about a telephone survey, conducted by the participation team staff, which had been productive in obtaining detailed and meaningful feedback and the Members were therefore very keen for it to be delivered in Medway on a regular basis. Task Group members also noted that in order for young people to feel properly listened to they needed to get feedback on how changes had been made as a result of their consultation exercises. The Task group were pleased therefore to note that the Head of Service for Looked After Children and Proceedings was attending the first meeting of a care leavers forum and the implementation of "You said, we did" feedback via meetings, newsletters etc.
- 7.23 The Task Group heard from the Hampshire Leaving care service that the team has dedicated admin staff and noted the benefits this brings. The Task Group were informed that there is an admin review taking place across children social care from January and hope that positive consideration can be given to supporting the leaving care team in a similar manner.

Recommendations

To improve health outcomes...

1. That the future Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) include within its Children in Care section, information on health outcomes and needs data for Care Leavers and recommend the Council and Medway CCG ensure a focus on care leavers when commissioning services using evidence about their needs by using the JSNA.
2. The Council and Medway CCG work with provider agencies to develop and implement all age pathways that help bridge the gaps caused from transition from children to adult services (e.g. CAMHS, AHDA, SEN).
3. That Personal Advisors receive additional support and training to provide: -
 - a. Promotion of healthy lifestyles advice, including emotional wellbeing (engaging with Public Health on contributing to this via workforce development)
 - b. Information on how to access support services where necessary.

To improve accommodation options and availability for Care Leavers...

4. To note and support the changes being proposed in relation to commissioning to improve choice and availability of accommodation and support options and that the impact and success of this be reviewed in six months time.
5. To recommend that Partnership Commissioning (on behalf of Children Social Care) and Housing Services: -
 - a. review the newly commissioned supported accommodation and floating support arrangements to ensure compliance and that care leavers are being supported appropriately.
 - b. Monitor allocations policy to ensure adequate and appropriate priority is being awarded to care leavers.
 - c. Review the provision of arrangements where care leavers are provided with temporary housing to ensure that it is meeting demands and conforms with relevant standards and that targeted support is provided.

To improve transition to independence...

6. That Children's Social Care work with Children in Care Council and Care Leavers to develop a checklist of things that carers need to support looked after children to develop skills to be able to carry out by the age of 16 to help with their transition into independence (e.g. cook 7 simple nutritious meals, register with a GP, manage a budget).
7. To assess the resource viability of appointing at a low level of involvement, a PA to each looked after child when they reach 17 to co-work with the young person's Social Worker to build a relationship

Support for Care Leavers

with the young person to improve transition arrangements and experience of the young person.

8. To set up a multi-agency hub for Care Leavers, possibly in partnership with another agency, to provide access to a one-stop-shop of support services, as well as informal and comfortable space where the young people can meet.

To improve educational attainment and employment opportunities...

9. That Personal Advisors receive additional support and training to be able to effectively signpost to MYT for specialist careers advice
10. That Category Management ensure that support with securing employment, education or training opportunities is built in more formally into future commissioning and contractual arrangements.
11. That a Looked After Child's last Personal Education Plan (PEP) meeting also include: -
 - a. The Personal Advisor so that ambitions and intentions are clear for transitional purposes
 - b. Mid-Kent College (or any other relevant higher/further educational establishment, including the Russell Group Universities) and employers where the child is transferring on from a school, to ensure all information is shared and transition is smooth.
12. To recommend the Department for Education that guaranteed bursary funding should continue for students leaving care until they finish their education.
13. To improve the offers of traineeships and apprenticeships in Medway to Care Leavers by working across the authority corporately to provide more wrap-around support to help them to succeed in these roles.

To improve support mechanisms for Care Leavers...

14. To review current sufficiency of mentoring for Care Leavers in Medway and explore the feasibility of commissioning a mentoring scheme like the Care Ambassador Scheme in Hampshire County Council. Part of this review of mentoring will involve scoping the development of a scheme from across Medway Council staff.
15. Support the idea around developing use of social media technologies including an app if financially viable, plus exploring other options including the use of Facebook, dedicated website or use of the existing Children in Care Council website and other models.

To improve service delivery...

16. To work in partnership with the Participation Service to deliver a phone survey with Care Leavers to obtain full and meaningful feedback about their experiences of services to improve delivery.
17. Within the existing complement and through a review of service, aim to provide dedicated administration support for the Leaving Care

Support for Care Leavers

Team. Administration support to this team should be specialised and can act as triage, thereby helping to build the team's capacity in dealing with its Care Leavers, particularly if a low level of support is begun at 17 years old.

To oversee the implementation of these recommendations...

18. In addition to the update report to the committee on progress in 6-12 months time, the Corporate Parenting Board should regularly monitor the implementation of this report and its recommendations.

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8. GLOSSARY OF TERMS

ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
APPG	All Party Parliamentary Group
ART	Access to Resources Team
ASC	Adult Social Care
CADMT	Children and Adults Directorate Management Team
CAFCASS	Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service
CCG	Clinical Commissioning Group
CiCC	Children in Care Council
CL	Care Leaver
CPB	Corporate Parenting Board
CSC	Children's Social Care
CSE	Child Sexual Exploitation
CYPOSC	Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee
DfE	Department for Education
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
EHCP	Education, Health and Care Plan
HCC	Hampshire County Council
HOS LAC&P	Head of Service for Looked After Children and Proceedings
IRO	Independent Reviewing Officer
JSNA	Joint Strategic Needs Assessment
KLOE	Key Line of Enquiry
LA	Local Authority
MYT	Medway Youth Trust
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
PA	Personal Advisor
PEP	Personal Education Plan
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disability
SW	Social Worker
YOS	Youth Offending Service

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9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

<p>After Care: Ofsted – 2012 This publication is available at www.rights4me.org</p>
<p>Care Leavers' Charter - DfE https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/care-leavers-charter</p>
<p>Care Leaver Strategy – A cross departmental strategy for young people leaving care, DfE – October 2013 https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/266484/Care_Leaver_Strategy.pdf</p>
<p>Care Matters: Transforming the lives of children and young people in care https://www.education.gov.uk/consultations/downloadableDocs/6731-DfES-Care%20Matters.pdf</p>
<p>Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013 http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2013/706/contents/made</p>
<p>Children Act 1989 https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/397649/C1989_Transitions_guidance.pdf</p>
<p>Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/35/contents</p>
<p>Children and Families Act 2014 http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/6/part/3/enacted</p>
<p>Children and Young Persons Act (2008) http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2008/23/contents</p>
<p>Education and Inspections Act 2006 http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/40/contents</p>
<p>Education Select Committee – Second report of session 2014-15 into independence, not out of care: 16 plus care options http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmeduc/259/259.pdf</p>
<p>Fostering Regulations and Guidance 2011 http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2011/581/contents/made</p>
<p>Hampshire County Council: Inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/local_authority_reports/hampshire/051_Single%20inspection%20of%20LA%20children%27s%20services%20and%20review%20of%20the%20LSCB%20as%20pdf.pdf</p>

Support for Care Leavers

Learning Independence: Ofsted – 2012

This publication is available at www.rights4me.org

On my own: the accommodation needs of young people leaving care in England, 2014 – Barnardos

http://www.barnardos.org.uk/on_my_own_report_final.pdf

Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers Regulations and Guidance 2010

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/397649/CA1989_Transitions_guidance.pdf

Promoting the health and well-being of looked-after children – statutory guidance for local authorities, clinical commissioning groups and NHS England

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/413368/Promoting_the_health_and_well-being_of_looked-after_children.pdf

Staying Put Policy – Medway Council

http://medwaychildcare.proceduresonline.com/chapters/pr_stay_put_pol.html

Sufficiency Strategy 2015-16 (draft) – Medway Council

<http://www.medway.gov.uk/>

Working together to support Young People not in Education, Employment or Training
DWP and DfE – 2013

<http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/19085/>

Diversity impact assessment

TITLE

Name/description of the issue being assessed

Improving outcomes for Care Leavers in Medway

DATE

Date the DIA is completed

06th March 2015

LEAD OFFICER

Name of person responsible for carrying out the DIA.

Phil Watson, Assistant Director

1 Summary description of the proposed change

- What is the change to policy/service/new project that is being proposed?
- How does it compare with the current situation?

There is no proposed change to policy. However, there are a range of proposed recommendations and actions to improve outcomes for Care Leavers in Medway.

2 Summary of evidence used to support this assessment

- Eg: Feedback from consultation, performance information, service user records etc.
- Eg: Comparison of service user profile with Medway Community Profile

There was a wide range of evidence gathered to support the recommendations including from Care Leavers themselves, a range relevant of partners, stakeholders and provider agencies, and from a Local Authority where there care leaving service is rated outstanding.

3 What is the likely impact of the proposed change?

Is it likely to :

- Adversely impact on one or more of the protected characteristic groups?
- Advance equality of opportunity for one or more of the protected characteristic groups?
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't?

(insert ✓ in one or more boxes)

Protected characteristic groups	Adverse impact	Advance equality	Foster good relations
Age		X	
Disability			
Gender reassignment			

Diversity impact assessment

Marriage/civil partnership			
Pregnancy/maternity			
Race			
Religion/belief			
Sex			
Sexual orientation			
Other (eg low income groups)		X	

4 Summary of the likely impacts

- Who will be affected?
- How will they be affected?

Care Leavers 18+ will have improved opportunities across a range of outcomes e.g. access to employment, education and training, suitable accommodation

5 What actions can be taken to mitigate likely adverse impacts, improve equality of opportunity or foster good relations?

- Are there alternative providers?
- What alternative ways can the Council provide the service?
- Can demand for services be managed differently?

N/A

6 Action plan

- Actions to mitigate adverse impact, improve equality of opportunity or foster good relations and/or obtain new evidence

Action	Lead	Deadline or review date
Recommendations contained in full CYP O + S Report with Action Plan reviewed by Corporate Parenting Board	Jo Cross, Head of LAC	6 monthly CPB and annually CYP O + S Committee

Diversity impact assessment

7 Recommendation

The recommendation by the lead officer should be stated below. This may be:

- *to proceed with the change implementing action plan if appropriate*
- *consider alternatives*
- *gather further evidence*

If the recommendation is to proceed with the change and there are no actions that can be taken to mitigate likely adverse impact, it is important to state why.

Proceed with the proposed recommendations

8 Authorisation

The authorising officer is consenting that:

- *the recommendation can be implemented*
- *sufficient evidence has been obtained and appropriate mitigation is planned*
- *the Action Plan will be incorporated into service plan and monitored*

**Assistant Director
Phil Watson**

**Date
06th March 2015**

Contact your Performance and Intelligence hub for advice on completing this assessment

RCC:	phone 2443	email: annamarie.lawrence@medway.gov.uk
C&A:	phone 1031	email: paul.clarke@medway.gov.uk
BSD:	phone 2472 or 1490	email: corpipi@medway.gov.uk
PH:	phone 2636	email: david.whiting@medway.gov.uk

Send completed assessment to the Corporate Performance & Intelligence Hub (CPI) for web publication

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Department
for Education



Charter for Care Leavers

A Charter is a set of principles and promises. This Charter sets out promises care leavers want the Central and Local Government to make. Promises and Principles help in decision making and do not replace laws; they give guidance to show how laws are designed to be interpreted.

The key principles in this Charter will remain constant through any changes in Legislation, Regulation and Guidance. Care leavers urge Local Authorities to use these principles when they make decisions about young people's lives. The Charter for Care Leavers is designed to raise expectation, aspiration and understanding of what care leavers need and what Government and Local Authorities should do to be good Corporate Parents.

We Promise:

To respect and honour your identity

- We will support you to discover and to be who you are and honour your unique identity. We will help you develop your own personal beliefs and values and accept your culture and heritage. We will celebrate your identity as an individual, as a member of identity groups and as a valued member of your community. We will value and support important relationships, and help you manage changing relationships or come to terms with loss, trauma or other significant life events. We will support you to express your identity positively to others.

To believe in you

- We will value your strengths, gifts and talents and encourage your aspirations. We will hold a belief in your potential and a vision for your future even if you have lost sight of these yourself. We will help you push aside limiting barriers and encourage and support you to pursue your goals in whatever ways we can. We will believe in you, celebrate you and affirm you.

To listen to you

- We will take time to listen to you, respect, and strive to understand your point of view. We will place your needs, thoughts and feelings at the heart of all decisions about you, negotiate with you, and show how we have taken these into account. If we don't agree with you we will fully explain why. We will provide easy access to complaint and appeals processes and promote and encourage access to independent advocacy whenever you need it.

To inform you

- We will give you information that you need at every point in your journey, from care to adulthood, presented in a way that you want including information on legal entitlements and the service you can expect to receive from us at different stages in the journey. We will keep information up to date and accurate. We will ensure you know where to get current information once you are no longer in regular touch with leaving care services. We will make it clear to you what information about yourself and your time in care you are entitled to see. We will support you to access this when you want it, to manage any feelings that you might have about the information, and to put on record any disagreement with factual content.

To support you

- We will provide any support set out in current Regulations and Guidance and will not unreasonably withhold advice when you are no longer legally entitled to this service. As well as information, advice, practical and financial help we will provide emotional support. We will make sure you do not have to fight for support you are entitled to and we will fight for you if other agencies let you down. We will not punish you if you change your mind about what you want to do. We will continue to care about you even when we are no longer caring for you. We will make it our responsibility to understand your needs. If we can't meet those needs we will try and help you find a service that can. We will help you learn from your mistakes; we will not judge you and we will be here for you no matter how many times you come back for support.

To find you a home

- We will work alongside you to prepare you for your move into independent living only when you are ready. We will help you think about the choices available and to find accommodation that is right for you. We will do everything we can to ensure you are happy and feel safe when you move to independent living. We recognise that at different times you may need to take a step back and start over again. We will do our best to support you until you are settled in your independent life; we will not judge you for your mistakes or refuse to advise you because you did not listen to us before. We will work proactively with other agencies to help you sustain your home.

To be a lifelong champion

- We will do our best to help you break down barriers encountered dealing with other agencies. We will work together with the services you need, including housing, benefits, colleges & universities, employment providers and health services to help you establish yourself as an independent individual. We will treat you with courtesy and humanity whatever your age when you return to us for advice or support. We will help you to be the driver of your life and not the passenger. We will point you in a positive direction and journey alongside you at your pace. We will trust and respect you. We will not forget about you. We will remain your supporters in whatever way we can, even when our formal relationship with you has ended.



Medway Council

Looked After Children Strategy 2015-2018

Version	Date	Type	Author
1.0	December 2014	Refreshed	Jo Cross
2.0	January 2015	Refreshed	Sue Brunton-Reed

Date Agreed by DMT	Date Agreed by Cabinet/MSCB/Improvement Board (if appropriate)	Date of Review	Person Responsible
20 th January 2015		January 2016	Phil Watson

INDEX

	Vision for Children's Services	3
	Statement from Children in Care Council	4
1	Introduction	5
2	Values and Principles	6
3	Key Objectives	7
4	Making the Strategy Work	15
5	Monitoring Progress on the Strategy	16
6	Engaging with Children and Young People	17

Our Vision for Children's Services in Medway

Medway Council is ambitious for all its children and strives to support our children to have the best start in life. We want our children to be confident and resilient individuals, successful learners, effective contributors and responsible citizens.

Children are best supported to achieve this through resilient families, who in turn contribute to thriving communities. We want all our children to grow up in circumstances where parents or carers provide safe and effective care.

Safeguarding children is everybody's responsibility and Medway Council is clear that it has a unique role in the leadership and co-ordination of this locally. All our work will be child centred and we will listen to the views of children, ensuring we balance the rights of parents whilst maintaining a focus on the child.

Universal services have an important role in enabling children to thrive and we will work closely with all our partner agencies to improve outcomes through outstanding health services, schools and children's centres. Our local Early Help offer will focus on supporting children and families in Medway to overcome challenges in their lives, and where necessary seek to prevent a further escalation of concerns.

Our specialist children's services will provide responsive support and intervention for the minority of children who will need to be directly protected from harm and abuse, recognising that children of different ages or with special needs will need a differentiated approach. We will seek to ensure all professionals are clear about their roles and accountabilities so we can in turn be clear to children and their families.

We will support our social workers to be confident and capable professionals, proud of their work and proud to be working in Medway.

We will seek to build an open culture across professional boundaries, where there is an acknowledgement about the uncertainties and risks inherent in safeguarding children, and an absolute commitment to sharing information and to learning together.

Cllr Mike O'Brien
Lead Portfolio Holder for Children's Services

Barbara Peacock
Director of Children and Adults Services

Statement from Children in Care Council – January 2015

The Children in Care Council (CiCC) continue to support this LAC strategy. Our main objectives are:

- Additional and ongoing support for parents/families when children remain living or return to living with them.
- A commitment to young people being kept in the same school to reduce disruption to their education.
- Help young people access social and leisure opportunities and to ensure these are affordable.
- Standard of social workers must improve and they must be motivated and trained to an acceptable standard
- There must be a certain standard that social workers are measured against and young people should be involved in spot checks and appraisals.

The CiCC are committed to monitoring the progress of this strategy and are keen to be proactively involved in future opportunities to do so.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this document is to set out how Medway Council will fulfil its role as a Corporate Parent and provide good and effective parenting to children in care and care leavers, which helps them to develop permanent and caring relationships, achieve their potential and improve their outcomes.

This includes doing everything possible to ensure that their time in care is a positive experience, with access to stable placements, good health and education provision, and that they are given every opportunity to develop strong, supportive relationships that extend well in to their adult life.

We are ambitious for our services and for our looked after children and young people and we believe that they deserve the best opportunities we can provide. Over the life of this strategy we will be striving to provide them with the best possible care and support, in placements that are as close as possible to their home, which prepare them to be independent and succeed in their adult lives.

Achieving this goal requires the collective engagement of all parts of the local authority and its partners to work together, under the oversight and governance of our Corporate Parenting Board. It also requires involving children and young people in the decisions being made about them.

This strategy document sets out the values and principles that underpin our work with looked after children and the key objectives that we will need to address in order to achieve this.

It is based on eight objectives, which reflect the key issues impacting on the lives of looked after children and care leavers in Medway:

1. Provide timely and high quality intervention to help children remain with or return to their families, as long as it is safe to do so
2. Provide and commission the right mix of placements
3. Promote timely permanence planning for all children to ensure they have the opportunity of a stable, permanent home and long term relationships in a placement appropriate to their needs
4. Ensure that looked after children and young people achieve their full potential and can access suitable education, employment or training
5. Improve the health and emotional well-being of looked after children and young people and care leavers
6. Aim to keep looked after young people and care leavers safe through the provision of trained, supported and motivated staff who understand and are alert to the potential for exploitation and abuse of young people and who take the right action at the right time
7. Prepare young people for a successful transition to adulthood

8. Ensure that looked after children and care leavers' views and experiences inform current and future service delivery.

This strategy is set within the context of national policy, legislation and guidance. It is linked to key local planning documents, in particular to the Children's Improvement Plan, the Sufficiency Report and the Pledge. The objectives have been developed using:

- the needs data which is included in the Sufficiency Strategy 2014-6 and accompanying LAC Commissioning Plan, including the profile of our current children in care population
- consultation with the Children in Care Council (CiCC) and our multi agency partners
- the stated commissioning priorities¹.

They reflect our ambitions outlined in the Improvement Plan to provide high quality services to the right children at the right time.

The strategy addresses the needs of children and young people from birth to the age of 21, (or 25 where children's services continue to have statutory responsibility) who are, or who may be, looked after by Medway Council.

The service will develop an annual action plan with clearly stated tasks, timescales and specific targets for improvement relating to the objective in this strategy and the stated success criteria. This will be overseen by the service and the Corporate Parenting Board sub-groups.

2. Values and Principles

- We will work honestly and openly with families, involve them in decisions about their children and recognise when they need support
- In most circumstances, children's needs are best met by being cared for within their families. We will actively promote family contact unless there are clear reasons why this is not in their interests
- We will promote the cultural inheritance, religion and racial identity of children in care and challenge racism and discrimination
- Children should only be in care for the minimum amount of time that is required to make permanent and sustainable plans for them. Permanency planning starts from the decision that a child needs to come into care and continues until the child's future is secure

¹ Medway LAC Sufficiency Strategy 2014-16 and LAC Commissioning Plan 2014

- Children are entitled to protection from harm through abuse, neglect or exploitation. We will investigate and assess thoroughly all situations where child abuse is suspected or alleged
- Children are entitled to be listened to and respected as individuals. We will ensure that children's views and individual needs are considered when making decisions that affect their lives
- We will aim to reduce the involvement of children and young people in criminal activities and to ensure children are not deprived of their liberty except in exceptional circumstances, and in accordance with legal and departmental processes
- Young people leaving care should receive positive preparation and support so that they are enabled to participate fully as active citizens once they reach adulthood
- Disabled children should have the same rights as all other children and the principles above will apply equally to them
- All social work staff and carers should be appropriately qualified, skilled and supported to do their work

3. Key Objectives

3.1 Provide timely and high quality intervention to help children remain with or return to their families

Children's needs are best served in their own families if this can be safely supported. Helping families stay together must therefore be a key focus for all Children's Services. Early identification of need and effective early intervention is essential. Early intervention and prevention services can reduce the number of children and young people needing to become looked after, avoid repeat entry into care or support them to return safely to their families in a timely manner.

In order to support this we will:

- Develop services in conjunction with our Early Help service to support parents and develop their parenting skills, both to prevent the need for care and to support restoration of children to their families
- Make more effective and consistent use of Family Group Conferences to help prevent unnecessary admissions

- Develop a crisis intervention response to prevent unnecessary admission of adolescents
- Improve accountability of professionals, including IROs, social workers and partner agency staff, to support safe return to families
- Build skills of foster carers to work with natural parents and family members if the objective is return to family

Key success criteria

- Reduction in the number of children looked after
- Reduction in the number of days spent in care
- Increase in numbers of children with a children in need plan.
- Families report being better supported through earlier interventions

3.2 Provide and commission the right mix of placements

We need to be sure that we have the right range of placements to meet the assessed needs of our looked after children as outlined in the Sufficiency Strategy, and offer placement choice. We want to ensure that placements provide quality services and good value for money.

In order to support this we will:

- Increase the number of good quality foster placements close to Medway through targeted recruitment
- Complete our Fostering review to ensure that the service maximises the use of in house placements, especially for young people with complex and challenging needs, sibling groups, long term care, parent & child and disabled children placements
- Continue to work with other providers to develop appropriate external placements at lower cost and higher quality
- Ensure that all placements more than 20 miles away have the required Director approval
- Analyse information to better understand the reasons for placement breakdown and plan to reduce frequency
- Improve sufficiency data and use in planning to meet demand

Key Success Criteria

- Increase in the number of in house foster placements, particularly those able to meet complex needs.
- Improved performance in relation to the distance of placements from the child's home area.
- Reduction in placement breakdowns
- Lower unit costs of placements
- Increase in availability of supported accommodation

3.3 Promote timely permanence planning for all children to ensure they have opportunity of a stable, permanent home and long term relationships in a placement appropriate to their needs

Having a clear Care Plan in place is essential for children and young people in care, not only to ensure that they come into and exit care at the right times, but to meet our statutory obligations under the Care Planning Regulations. We need to ensure that children do not 'drift' through care, but have clearly-planned processes which allow them to be reunited with family and friends where possible, have stable, supported and well matched placements with alternative carers, decisions are made in a timely way relevant to their age and development and they exit the care system in a timely and positive way at whatever age this happens. When we work with families to provide care with their agreement under S20 of the Children Act, we will ensure these cases are closely monitored and either progress to permanence in a timely way using legal processes appropriately, or that children are supported to return to their families.

In order to support this we will:

- Plan to increase the number of looked after children who achieve permanence through adoption, special guardianship orders or placement with family and friends (connected carers)
- Plan to extend placements to care for young people up to age 21 and beyond in appropriate cases, fully implementing the 'Staying Put' scheme
- Hold monthly Permanence Panels to monitor and track permanence plans and provide staff briefings on our Permanence Policy so all staff are aware of our aims and aspirations for the children we look after
- Provide practical support for permanence, including training for staff on attachment and life story work which will be undertaken with all children and young people at an age, pace and time that is appropriate for them.
- Explore peer-mentoring schemes using care leavers for other children and looked after young people to support young people where their placements may be challenged, to support placement stability.

Key Success Criteria

- Percentage increase of children looked after in permanent placements including SGOs
- Improved performance in adoption
- Reduction in the time spent in care by children aged under 10 years
- Reduction in proportion of children cared for under S20

3.4 Ensure that looked after young people achieve their full potential and can access suitable education, employment or training

Children in Care are amongst the most vulnerable in our society and are at risk of achieving poor outcomes and failing to meet their potential. Our aim is to narrow the gap between children and young people in care and all children in educational achievement, health outcomes, criminal behaviours, and employability.

We have a Virtual Head Teacher and a Board of Governors to support the Medway Virtual School. Their role is to champion the attainment of young people and the provision of high quality support according to assessed needs. All Medway schools have a Designated Teacher responsible for meeting the needs of looked after young people in their school and the VHT has established excellent links with every Designated Teacher.

To assist children and young people to understand the importance of savings and money management, we will ensure all looked after children are supported to have individual savings accounts.

To support the educational attainment of looked after young people we will:

- Provide additional tuition to support attainment where required and identified in the child's PEP, fully utilising the Pupil Premium
- Ensure the right educational setting is chosen for each young person, according to their individual assessed needs maintaining as far as possible the child's current school placement. We will ensure young people are placed in schools rated by Ofsted as good or better depending on their assessed needs and in accordance with the recommendation of the VHT. Where the grade of a school changes we will record on file whether the VHT recommends a change of school or not, and how the young person can be supported to achieve at that school
- Promote joint working between all schools, colleges and academies in Medway and ensure each child has clear and realistic progress targets. Foster carers will be supported to create a suitable environment to learn and to engage proactively with schools to secure the young person's attainment
- Ensure that looked after young people and care leavers are supported to achieve their full potential at any age and that they maintain comparable results and progress to their non-looked after peers. Each young person aged 16-18 will have a PEP regardless of their educational setting and we will continue with our engagement with the Care2Work scheme to increase internal and external apprenticeships, traineeship and work opportunities for young people
- Ensure all children in care are supported to set up savings accounts, including those in externally commissioning placements

Key Success Criteria

- Higher percentage of children and young people in schools or educational facilities graded as good or above
- Reduction in persistent absence and overall absence
- Reduction in the number of children changing school when they become looked after or following a change of placement
- Numbers of children with compliant and good quality PEP
- Improvement in the percentage of children leaving care who are in education, employment or training
- Increase in the percentage of young people achieving 5A*-C including English and Maths at GCSE in all placements
- Ensure that all children receive a minimum of 25 hours education
- Reduction in the number of fixed term exclusions.

3.5 Improve the health and well-being of looked after young people and care leavers

Evidence shows that children and young people entering and leaving care have poorer health outcomes than their peers. Medway is ambitious for our young people and we believe that a key aspect of our Corporate Parenting duties is to ensure that these inequalities are reversed. We will support children and young people to have a healthy lifestyle and access to good quality health and emotional care when needed, in a location and format that best suits their assessed needs.

We believe that supporting a child or young person's well-being takes many forms, including supporting them to end their offending behaviour or diverting them from the criminal justice system when they do.

To achieve these objectives we will:

- Ensure that health assessments are completed in a timely manner and in ways that engage young people, and that all care leavers have an up to health history and health plan
- Improve young people's awareness of the importance of good health and ensure that physical and emotional health are key areas for review in LAC reviews and monthly audits:
- Support young people to make positive choices about the use of contraception and sexual health services.
- Promote positive emotional and mental health amongst looked after children, young people and care leavers.

- Review our CAMHS services to ensure that it provides timely access to emotional health services for children and young people in a manner that meets their assessed need.
- Implement an all age Emotional Well-Being Strategy working jointly with Kent County Council and Kent's Clinical Commissioning Groups – commissioned services to be in place from September 2015
- Re-launch the Access to Leisure scheme and strengthen our links with the Youth Service to ensure that young people access positive community resources.
- Provide support for young people in partnership with police and youth justice colleagues to divert them from criminal activity

Key Success Criteria

- Increase the timeliness of initial and annual health assessments
- Increase in take up of CAMHS services at all tiers
- Reduction in waiting times for CAMHS and monitoring of improved access to CAMHS
- Reduction in incidence of self-harming behaviours in LAC
- Reduction of teenage pregnancy in children looked after
- Feedback from foster carers and children and young people about the timeliness and quality of health assessments and interventions
- Reduction in number of young people with a criminal conviction

3.6 Keep looked after children, young people and care leavers safe through the provision of trained, supported and motivated staff who understand and are alert to the potential for exploitation and abuse of young people and who take the right action at the right time

Children's Social Care places the safety and well-being of its young people at the forefront of everything we do. We want nothing but the best for our young people and that includes keeping them safe from those who would exploit or abuse them. We have clear safeguarding policies and a Child Sexual exploitation (CSE) strategy and toolkit, which has been introduced to staff from across all service areas and partner agencies.

To ensure that we continue to develop and expand our services and expertise to keep young people safe we will:

- Ensure only those IFAs and residential placement providers judged as good or above are utilised. Where the grading of a placement changes whilst a Medway young person is placed therein the case will be presented within one week to

the Access to Resource Panel with the Head of Service in attendance and an appropriate plan agreed and signed off by the Assistant Director.

- Ensure that all staff are supported and trained to recognise young people who are being sexually exploited or who are vulnerable to being exploited:
- Establish the multi-agency CSE Champions group which will meet quarterly to ensure that robust planning, mapping and training is in place to safeguard young people from CSE.
- Work with partner agencies to ensure that they have in place good safeguarding policies which encompass sexual exploitation and which ensures that where there are known risks about specific young people these risks are shared in a timely manner with the appropriate action taken.

Key Success Criteria

- Reduction in the number of young people known to be at risk of sexual exploitation
- Increase in the number of children and young people who report feeling safe in their placement
- Increase in the number of carers (including those from commissioned services) who have attended relevant training

3.7 Promote a successful transition to adulthood

All young people need to be able to develop practical, social and emotional skills in order to live independently. Young people in care are particularly vulnerable and will need additional support to make this move. Important requirements of successful transition are access to suitable accommodation, and engagement in education, training and employment. We do this through the provision of a trained and motivated staff team, training and development to other social care staff, the planned transfer of cases to the Leaving Care service and support to young people to develop independence skills at their own pace and with the required support. We believe that like their no- looked after peers, care leavers should be provided with a safety net when they fail or make mistakes and they should be equipped with the necessary social skills, emotional resilience and practical skills to make a successful transition into adulthood and independent living.

To support young people make a successful transition to adulthood and independence we will:

- Ensure young people have access to the good quality accommodation with support and assistance according to their assessed needs.

- Work with partners including Commissioning to ensure that there is a range of semi-independent accommodation with appropriate support packages available
- Re-launch the Staying Put Policy to social workers, PA's, SSW's, IROs and foster carers.
- Support our care leavers to access employment, traineeships and apprenticeships within the Council and with partner agencies.
- Develop peer mentoring for care leavers
- Support foster carers to teach independent living skills and see this as an integral part of their role.
- Improve support for placement transition including "taster" periods in semi-independent provision.

Key Success Criteria

- Increase in percentage of care leavers aged up to 21 in suitable accommodation
- Increase in percentage of care leavers aged up to 21 in employment, education or training
- Increase in capacity of supported accommodation
- Increase in opportunities for apprenticeships across council departments

3.7 Ensure that children looked after and care leaver's views and experiences inform current and future service delivery

Listening to the views of children and young people, and involving them in decisions about their lives is an important part of the work of all professionals involved in caring for children and young people.

We actively seek input from our young people and this is evidenced through a range of opportunities including attendance at the Corporate Parenting Board, an invitation to the Chair of the Children in Care Council (CiCC) to address full Council, senior officer attendance at the CiCC and a range of workshops with young people.

Our ambition is to ensure that not just the voice of young people but their experiences are captured in our assessments, plans and audits and that all staff within Children's Social Care and our partner agencies actively consider the voice and experience of young people within all aspects of their work.

To achieve this we will:

- Develop a range of young person friendly mechanisms using social media where possible to enable young people, including younger children and those with

disabilities, to provide feedback about their experience of being looked after by Medway and their wishes and feelings about their future

- Ensure that the voice and experience of young people is explored during supervision and that this is a key part of all case audits. Feedback from these audits will be reviewed at a management level to ensure that training and development opportunities are developed as required
- Develop a Facebook page for the Fostering service which not only enables us to promote our service to potential carers but which provides an opportunity for young people to contribute to service development
- Ensure that the information provided to young people when they become LAC, at their first LAC review and at subsequent LAC reviews actively addresses their rights including how to obtain support and how to make a complaint
- Utilise the information from complaints and representations and feedback from parents to support service development and improvement. We will ensure that feedback and outcomes from complaints is on the agenda of every team meeting across the LAC service and that the service records how it will address the issues raised. We will review on a quarterly basis the outcome of complaints received across CSC to ensure that learning is shared across the service
- Consult more with the parents of looked after young people
- Develop a participation strategy in partnership with young people
- Work with our partners in Commissioning to ensure that the Advocacy service reaches looked after young people and care leavers as required, and develop peer-mentoring services for looked after young people and care leavers.

Key Success Criteria

- Increase in the percentage of children and young people who actively contribute to their reviews
- Evidence that children and young people are aware of and know how to use the complaints process
- Monitoring of complaints made by children and young people
- Increase in percentage of audits that are judged good or better in relation to the recording of the views of children and young people

4. Making the strategy work

Making the strategy work will require not only the development or improvement of services but also ensuring that planning is based on good, accurate information, professionals are held to account, and that the governance and oversight by the

Corporate Parenting Board is effective in maintaining and improving standards. The strategy should be clearly communicated to all who have an interest, and who it affects.

The key elements which will need to be in place to make the strategy work are:

- Good management information about the current use of care placements and the current and predicted levels of demand. This information can be used to develop and update the required Sufficiency Strategy, and drive the LAC Commissioning Strategy and 16+ Homelessness and Leaving Care Commissioning Action Plan.
- Effective structures for engaging with the views of young people in care, including those in younger age groups, and those with specific needs and disabilities. This will include Children in Care Council, consultation processes and involvement in the Corporate Parenting Board
- Effective oversight and governance: This will include:
 - Review of the strategy and action plan at the internal LAC Improvement Board and at Children's Social Care Management Team annually to ensure compliance with targets. Where there is slippage, corporate and service based resources can be utilised to ensure service improvement is sustained.
 - The Corporate Parenting Board (CPB) chaired by the Lead Portfolio holder for Children's Social Care, has reviewed and agreed this 3-year strategy.
 - The Sub-groups of the CPB will take responsibility for monitoring and driving forward this strategy and overseeing progress on the action plan. The relevant groups are: Education, Health, Housing and Accommodation, Youth Justice, Children in Care Council. The CPB will review progress annually.
 - Progress against this 3-year Strategy and the Action Plan, and on the work of the CPB sub-groups, will be presented annually to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee/Cabinet.

5. Monitoring progress on the strategy

The strategy will be reviewed on an annual basis as outlined above and the Action Plan updated annually to reflect changes in needs or supply information, and respond to emerging policy initiatives.

All partners should be supported to recognise their role in implementation, through leadership, communication, and supervision to promote good care planning practice, and clear accountability frameworks.

6. Engaging with looked after young people

Ongoing engagement with children and young people is key to ensuring that our strategies and policies are child-centred. As well as agreeing the Strategy with our Children in Care Council, progress against this Strategy will be reviewed by the CiCC annually.

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Councillor Mike O'Brien: Lead Portfolio Holder for Children's Services

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Barbara Peacock: Director Children & Adult Services