

Committee: Safeguarding Sub Committee DCCS: Grand committee	Dated: 23/11/2023 13/12/2023
Subject: Care Leaver Compact	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	3, 10
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	N
If so, how much?	N/A
What is the source of Funding?	N/A
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	N/A
Report of: Judith Finlay, Executive Director of Community and Children's Services	For Discussion
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Summary

The Pan London Care Leavers Compact provides a framework for developing consistency, breadth and quality in the support offered to City of London (CoL) care leavers. The Compact was established in early 2022 to deliver a consistent and high-quality offer for care leavers across the capital (Appendix 1). A report was taken to the Safeguarding Sub-Committee in May 2023, to set out progress against the Compact.

This paper responds to the London Innovation and Improvement Alliance (LIIA) Pan London Care Leavers Compact Local Authority Commitments report sent to local authorities in October 2023, which seeks corporate sign-up to six commitments set out in the Compact (Appendix 2).

This report to Members shows CoL's progress in these six areas. A draft Care Leaver Offer, which care leavers are currently being consulted on, shows our ambition to have a world-class offer for our children. This final version will be shared with Members following the completion and sign-off from our young people.

Recommendation

Safeguarding Sub-Committee Members are asked to:

- Note the progress made on the six commitments that all London local authorities have been invited to sign up to
- Approve recommending that the Community and Children's Services Committee sign up to the six commitments set out in the Compact

Main Report

Background

1. It is a duty under the Children and Social Work Act 2017 that England's local authorities must publish information about the services offered for care leavers. Each London local authority therefore has a care leaver offer, but these are individual to each area and do not provide a consistent and shared offer for our care leavers. Care leavers do not always live in the local authority responsible for them, which poses further challenges with the variation in offers. It is also important that the offer to care leavers reaches beyond services provided by local authorities. Partners such as health, education and transport have important roles to play, as do the private and voluntary sectors.
2. The Pan London Care Leavers Compact provides a framework for developing consistency, breadth and quality in the support offered to London's care leavers. The Compact was established in early 2022 to deliver a consistent and high-quality offer for care leavers across the capital.
3. City of London Corporation Members have always demonstrated a commitment to supporting our care leaver population. Following a focused visit of our care leaving services in November 2018, Ofsted noted that:

“Care leavers in the City of London benefit from a strong service that ensures that they are very well supported. They receive effective help which enables most to achieve good outcomes. There is a determined and appropriately ambitious political and corporate focus to sustain and improve outcomes for care leavers.”
4. Furthermore, in 2020, during the full Inspection of Children's Social Care Services, Ofsted judged the experience and progress of children in care and care leavers to be “Outstanding” noting the following:
 - Children in care and care leavers are extremely well supported.
 - Commitment to ensuring that needs are met is demonstrated by senior leaders, councillors, health partners and children's social workers, resulting in an extremely good level of service.
 - Extremely strong involvement and interest from council members.
 - Particular sensitivity shown regarding cultural diversity.
 - Strong use of advocacy and independent visiting.
 - Good housing offer, with support and moving only when ready.
5. In 2023, Ofsted introduced a separate judgement on care leavers, in recognition of the unique set of presenting needs of this cohort of young people.
6. The Care Leaver Offer has been updated after listening to the views of our care leavers, the people who work with them, from national research,

and from reviewing other offers from local authorities that are also graded as 'outstanding'. The draft is currently subject to final consultation with our young people .

Current Position

7. The LIIA wrote to London Directors of Children's Services on 10 October 2023 to ask for formal commitment to the Care Leavers Compact and its six commitments, to be approved by 31 December 2023. It is anticipated that there will be a formal launch of the agreed Compact in early 2024.
8. London local authorities are asked to sign up to the following six commitments:
 - 1) *London Local Authorities offer a full council tax exemption for their Care Leavers (18-25) that live within the borough.*
 - 2) *London Local Authorities adopt the principle that no Care Leaver (18-25) should be found intentionally homeless.*
 - 3) *London Local Authorities adopt the principle that their Care Leavers up to the age of 25 are to be found as being in 'priority need' under homelessness legislation.*
 - 4) *London Local Authorities offer a rent deposit scheme for their Care Leavers (18-25) for whom private rented accommodation is assessed as a suitable option.*
 - 5) *London Local Authorities have a joint protocol between Housing and Children's Services for Care Leavers in line with good practice advice.*
 - 6) *London Local Authorities become signatories to the Care Leavers Covenant.*

The following paragraphs update Members on how the CoL is demonstrating its dedication to these six commitments:

9. Commitment 1: Council tax scheme for care leavers
 - a. We have a council tax scheme for care leavers.
 - b. Care leavers aged up to 25 who reside in the City are exempt at source; no care leaver supported by the CoL has to pay council tax up to age 25 years; and the corporation does not bill these young people.
 - c. We ensure that care leavers aged up to 25 who reside outside the City who are eligible to pay council tax have applied for any discounts from their local council; their council tax is paid direct from the corporation to their local authority.

- d. At present we do not offer council tax exemption at source for care leavers supported by other local authorities who live in the City. We are currently unaware of any care leavers residing within the CoL boundary. Any amendment to this offer would likely have minimal impact on the budget.
 - e. This report seeks formal approval to extend our offer to any care leaver residing in the City.
10. Commitment 2: Housing policy exempting care leavers from becoming intentionally homeless
- a. Our housing policy ensures that care leavers are offered accommodation or are supported to access private renting, and are not ever in a position to be found intentionally homeless.
 - b. No care leaver supported by the City has ever been found intentionally homeless.
 - c. Legal advice has confirmed that we are not able to use the language 'exempt our young people from being found intentionally homeless' under housing legislation. However, we are able to commit to ensuring that no care leaver under the age of 25 will be homeless, and that an alternative home will be provided if required. The commitment to no care leaver being homeless is therefore present.
11. Commitment 3: All care leavers up to the age of 25 are to be found as being in 'priority need' under homelessness legislation
- a. Our care leavers are at the top band (band f) for bidding for CoL accommodation.
12. Commitment 4: London local authorities offer a rent deposit scheme for their care leavers (aged 18–25 years) for whom private rented accommodation is assessed as a suitable option
- a. We have a rent deposit scheme for care leavers aged 18–25 years for whom private rented accommodation is assessed as a suitable option.

Two care leavers took up this option in 2022–23, as they did not want to take up permanent accommodation within the CoL estates.
13. Commitment 5: A joint protocol between Housing and Children's Services for care leavers
- a. There is a joint protocol between our two services, and the services sit in the same department. This protocol is in line with good practice advice, including tenancy support and banding. The protocol will be revised again in 2023–24, as set out in the Children's Social Care Service Development Plan.

- b. The Housing lead sits on the Child in Care and Care Leavers Strategic Development Group, and regular Housing and Social Care meetings are held.
- c. The Housing department has created a video for care leavers about realistic expectations of their new studio flats. The Housing team ensure that every care leaver has an allocated tenancy support officer. No care leaver has ever been evicted from their home.
- d. A programme of preparation for independent living (including housing and expectations) is in place for 2024 to support the 121 social work and 121 keywork sessions.
- e. As young people move into their permanent homes, Children's Social Care will fund extra keywork support for their first six months of tenancy.

14. Commitment 6: Signatory to the Care Leaver Covenant in terms of its role as a large employer

- a. The City of London Corporation is signed up to the Covenant, which is separate to, but connected with the Compact.¹
- b. The Covenant is a national improvement programme, following governmental commitment to care leavers. It aims to ensure that young adults leaving care:
 - are better prepared to live independently
 - have improved access to employment, education and training
 - experience stability in their lives
 - feel safe and secure
 - have improved access to health support
 - achieve financial stability.
- c. Examples of CoL's approach to ensure these aims include:
 - Exploring ring-fenced opportunities for care leavers within the local authority. Our ambition is to offer a world-class service to our care leavers. The next phase of our work is looking at how care leavers can be included in the 'family firm', with the Corporation prioritising these – our children, in respect of work and work readiness.

¹ [Home - Care Leaver Covenant \(mycovenant.org.uk\)](https://mycovenant.org.uk)

- Our ambition is to ensure that all children and young people are in employment or education. For example, we will invite those who are unable to work or study full time into the Guildhall or other CoL spaces to offer routine, higher-level exposure to work, with real learning opportunities such as apprenticeships. This is a joint project between Children’s Social Care, Participation, the Virtual School and Adult Education.
- The apprenticeship offers are circulated to social workers and young people.
- The first collaborative offer between Adult Education and the Virtual School took place in summer 2023, with intensive English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision to strengthen one of the biggest barriers to work – confidence through clear spoken English.
- In October 2023, the Virtual School held an Oracy Day to improve spoken English and confidence. This was a joint project with the City of London Freeman’s School.
- A social value contracting approach that benefits care leavers (whether around education, training or employment or other areas).
- The City of London Corporation uses a social value approach, and this work was taken forward between central strategy, the Head of Social Care and Early Help and Education and Early Years in 2022. One example was the collaboration with Procurement and IT colleagues to distribute laptops to our children in care and care leavers.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

Corporate plan

15. Work supporting care leavers sits within a commitment to a flourishing society, ensuring equality of opportunity. We would like to see equal outcomes for our young people: being able to access well-paying jobs and receive a good quality education. Our ambition for care leavers is equivalent to our hopes for our own children.

Financial implications

16. Costs to meet these commitments are managed within local budgets. Some features of the Compact include central support and funding, for example, Transport for London are covering 50% of the costs for care leavers for annual bus passes from April 2024.

Resource implications

17. Resource needs are met within the Department's resource base. Wider corporate engagement, for example, the procuring of laptops, will see wider commitment and distribution of resources to support our ambitions.

Legal implications – none

Risk implications

18. Providing a full, creative, enrichment programme and ensuring that young people are provided with opportunity and courses that will stretch them offers an antidote to boredom and the risk of unhealthy behaviours on an individual basis. The CoL will be subject to an Ofsted inspection in this area. There is a risk that, should the impact of the offer not continue to innovate and grow, then the CoL would suffer reputational risk.

Equalities implications

19. As part of the Care Leaver Compact, several London and national local authorities have adopted care leaver status as a protected characteristic. The LIA Report on Local Authority Commitments notes the following:

Care Leavers and those who support them have advocated for some time that care experience should be recognised as a 'protected characteristic'. This gained further traction through the Independent Review of Children's Social Care. The Review discusses the stigma and discrimination that people experience as a result of being in care or care experienced and argues that it is similar in nature to other groups that have a legally protected characteristic under the Equality Act (2021). It recommends that care experience should be made a protected characteristic to give employers, public services etc greater authority to put in place programmes to promote better outcomes for care experienced people.

Despite the Review's position, Stable Homes Build on Love does not follow through with a related proposal. Various Local Authorities have therefore decided to adopt this position themselves, with Lambeth, Waltham Forest, Merton, Ealing, Hammersmith and Fulham and Sutton passing resolutions in short succession this year. The implications of such a position are still to be fully understood; whilst the position is not binding in law, it will likely make a difference to the development of new council policy (through EDI [Equality, Diversity & Inclusion] assessments) and of whole council approaches to support Care Leavers.

As this is such a recent area of development, around which we are still learning, we are not making a recommendation, but flagging it as a topic that features strongly in many LA's thinking about their care leaver support.

20. Legal advice is being sought to support CoL to adopt this position. A future report will be submitted to the Safeguarding Sub-Committee and the Community and Children's Services Committee.

Climate implications – none

Security implications – none

Conclusion

21. The Care Leaver Compact sets out a comprehensive ambitious offer for all CoL local authorities to sign up to. The CoL is well positioned in this regard, having adopted most of the provisions already and already working towards recognising care leavers as a protected characteristic. The ambition is to be a world-class service to care leavers. Signing up to the Compact formally strengthens our offer across each of the Compact's six commitment areas.

Appendices

- **Appendix 1:** Pan London Care Leavers Compact
- **Appendix 2:** Pan London Care Leavers Compact Local Authority Commitments Report

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