

The Pan London Care Leavers Compact





"It is important for care leavers to be involved in decision making and policy changing such as the compact because they are the ones who have first-hand experience of the challenges and difficulties faced by young people who have grown up in the care system. They are the voices with the lived experience who need to be heard. The Compact offers a space where we can work together and make this happen."

Pan London Children
in Care Council

Introduction

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 project is sponsored by Lambeth and the London Innovation and Improvement Alliance (LIIA), working to the Association of London Directors of Children's Services (ALDCS). It has secured £110,000 of Department of Education funding to support delivery. Key delivery partners include the London Children in Care Council, Partnership for Young London, and the GLA.

Care leavers are young people who have previously been children in the care of their Local Authority. Children come into local authority care for a variety of reasons but will often have experienced significant trauma, the breakdown of family relationships and a range of challenges and disadvantages. They are entitled to the nurture, support, and opportunities that parents provide for their children as they transition to adulthood.

Together, as corporate parents, partners, and society, we have a duty to ensure that children who have not been able to live with their parents receive this.

Whilst most care leavers are adults, understandings around the extended nature of adolescence have deepened. In particular, young adulthood is increasingly recognised as a critical developmental stage of life. This is reflected in the 2017 Children and Social Work Act which extends the support duty of local authorities towards those care leavers who request it until the age of 25 (previously until age 21). This project reflects that change by recognising care leavers as 18–25-year-olds who have been in the care of a local authority. There are an estimated 16,000 London Care Leavers fitting this definition.

Why is a Pan London Care Leavers Compact needed?

“The disadvantage faced by our care experienced community should be the civil rights issue of our time. Children in care are powerless, they are often invisible to society and face some of the greatest inequalities that exist in England today ...

... the ‘corporate parenting’ responsibility that applies to local authorities needs to be extended to all public bodies for children in care and care experienced adults, to reflect the shared responsibility they have to these children and adults.”

(Independent Review of Children’s Social Care, 2022, pg. 144/145)

The 2022 Care Review is not alone in making this case. It is mirrored by the comments of London’s Children in Care Council, those who work with care leavers, and multiple national research bodies. The need for a regional approach to care leaver support was raised in the 2020 Children’s Society report: [Towards a Pan London Offer](#), which highlights care leavers’ confusion about the support that is available to them, as well as inequalities according to where they live and where they were in care.

It is a duty under the Children and Social Work Act 2017 that England Local Authorities publish information about the services offered for care leavers. Each London borough therefore has a care leaver offer, but these are individual to each authority and do not provide a consistent and shared offer. Care leavers do not always live in the borough responsible for them which further complicates understanding of their entitlements and the practical means of accessing them. Reaching reciprocal agreements is extremely challenging, which means that few Boroughs will offer support to each other’s care leavers. Movement is a particular challenge in London, where the existence of 33 Local Authorities with complex population, housing, and funding

dynamics mean that care leavers often live outside of their responsible borough and/or move frequently. Across London in 2020, 53% of children in care were placed outside of their local authority (DfE 2020), a proportion that is likely to be similar amongst young people who have left care.

In addition to issues of equity and accessibility, ‘local offers’ are currently heavily weighted towards the support provided by local authorities. The offer to care leavers should reach beyond services provided by local authorities, with partners such as health, education, transport, and the private and voluntary sector having vital roles to play. The Care Review recommends we adopt the term ‘community parenting’ rather than the currently used ‘corporate parenting’. There are many intersecting public services, business and commissioning frameworks that could be utilised to build offers that span London boroughs. Working in this way will have the added benefit of developing new ways of working across leaving care services to strengthen our regional approach and establish a better infrastructure for collaboration.

What should a Pan-London Care Leavers Compact deliver?

The Compact is a series of individual agreements brought together under an umbrella. The agreements are not mutually dependent and are being delivered sequentially, as agreement is reached. The targets for agreement under the Compact are drawn from several areas, notably:

- ▶ Existing and emerging practice
- ▶ Co-Production with London’s Children in Care Council and other care leaver participation networks
- ▶ Research and policy documents
- ▶ Data and Insight
- ▶ Partnership and Collaboration

Greater Manchester Care Leavers Guarantee

Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) launched its Care Leavers Guarantee in 2019, with five key priority areas for Care Leavers to:

- ▶ Be better prepared and supported to live independently
- ▶ Have improved access to education, employment, and training
- ▶ Experience stability in their lives and feel safe and secure
- ▶ Receive improved access to health support
- ▶ Achieve financial stability

The priorities have resulted in several pledges across the 10 GMCA authorities and their partners. These include full, reciprocal, council tax exemption, free bus passes, free prescriptions, and a range of commitments around care leaver housing and education. The London Compact will look to adopt several of the GMCA pledges and is grateful for their generosity in sharing approaches and learning.

London's Children in Care Council and other participation networks

The London Children in Care Council (CICC), supported by Partnership for Young London (PYL), have led and informed every stage of the Compact's development. The CICC met with ALDCS in January 2022, securing ALDCS support for the project and discussing key areas to cover. These are reflected in the thematic areas of the Compact. We would particularly like to recognise the roles of the PYL apprentices, all of whom are care-experienced and who have provided essential leadership and advocacy. <https://www.partnershipforyounglondon.org.uk/cicc>

The six thematic groups (Houses)

These groups, known as 'Houses', are described more fully below and bring together specialist stakeholders in a particular field to identify areas to target and ensure their delivery. They look to target

areas that will most benefit care leavers, whilst also being pragmatic about what can be achieved across London's boroughs and their partners. Each group is co-chaired by a young person from the Children in Care Council.

Research and Policy Documents

The Compact has drawn on research and policy documents to identify areas for a common approach across London. [The Children's Society Report, Towards a London-Wide Care Offer](#) is a key influence, flagging inconsistencies in current offers and reciprocity issues for care leavers outside their home boroughs. The Independent Review of Children's Social Care (May/June 2022) was published after work on a London Care Leavers Compact had started, however its recommendations are strikingly similar. Its five 'missions' are focused on loving relationships, jobs and education, health, and ending care leaver homelessness, all of which fit logically within the Compact's thematic groups. The clarity of recommendations such as ending 'intentional homelessness' assessments, publishing Integrated Care Board plans for improving health outcomes and setting targets for job creation, have helped generate focus and momentum. We are maintaining contact with the DfE Care Review Implementation team to ensure the Compact remains linked to wider Care Leaver policy and practice development.

The Compact is not the limit of ambition for care leavers and concentrates on resources and access to services, rather than more complex questions of what good and impactful practice looks like. Where practice themes emerge, these are fed into networks such as the London Local Authority Network for Care Leavers, and the Catch-22 Regional Benchmarking Forum.

London's current offer

It is important that the Compact builds on existing areas of consensus and strong practice. Several mapping exercises have been undertaken to understand London's current 'local offers' and identify similarities, differences, and the approaches that are having an impact. We have benefitted from others work in this regard, for example a 2020

scoping of council tax exemption by the Children's Society. A survey undertaken by the Compact Working Group in early 2022 across a range of measures included the below findings. These are based on 28 local authorities who responded out of 33 asked.

Category	Question	Yes	No
Housing	Do care leavers have some form of council tax exemption? <i>N.B. There is a variance in types of exemption across local authorities.</i>	28 or 100%	0 or 0%
	Can care leavers be assessed as intentionally homeless?	20 or 71%	8 or 29%
Mentoring	Do care leavers have rent deposit / guarantee support?	17 or 61%	11 or 39%
	Do care leavers have an additional mentoring offer?	16 or 57%	12 or 43%
Health	Do you have a dedicated mental health / wellbeing offer for care leavers?	20 or 71%	8 or 29%
	Do you offer free or discounted access to leisure centres?	22 or 79%	6 or 21%
ETE	Do you have an LA apprenticeship offer for care leavers?	17 or 61%	11 or 39%
	Do you have dedicated skills/pre-employment programmes for care leavers?	19 or 68%	9 or 32%

We are currently undertaking further surveys for a more detailed breakdown of housing, education, training and employment, and mental health offers across London.

“Through the Compact, we are tackling collaboration with various sectors such as: Education, training, employment, housing, transport, standardised financial offer and health. By getting young care experienced people involved we are promoting mental health, encouraging voices who are not often heard, and contributing equally amongst the diversity of care leavers across London.”

Pan London Children in Care Council

How will the Pan-London Care Leavers Compact be delivered?

Securing support and agreement across multiple areas requires a strong and wide-reaching partnership. A Care Leavers Trust Board has been brought together to oversee the work and reflect the 'community parenting' ethos of the work. This has the following representation:

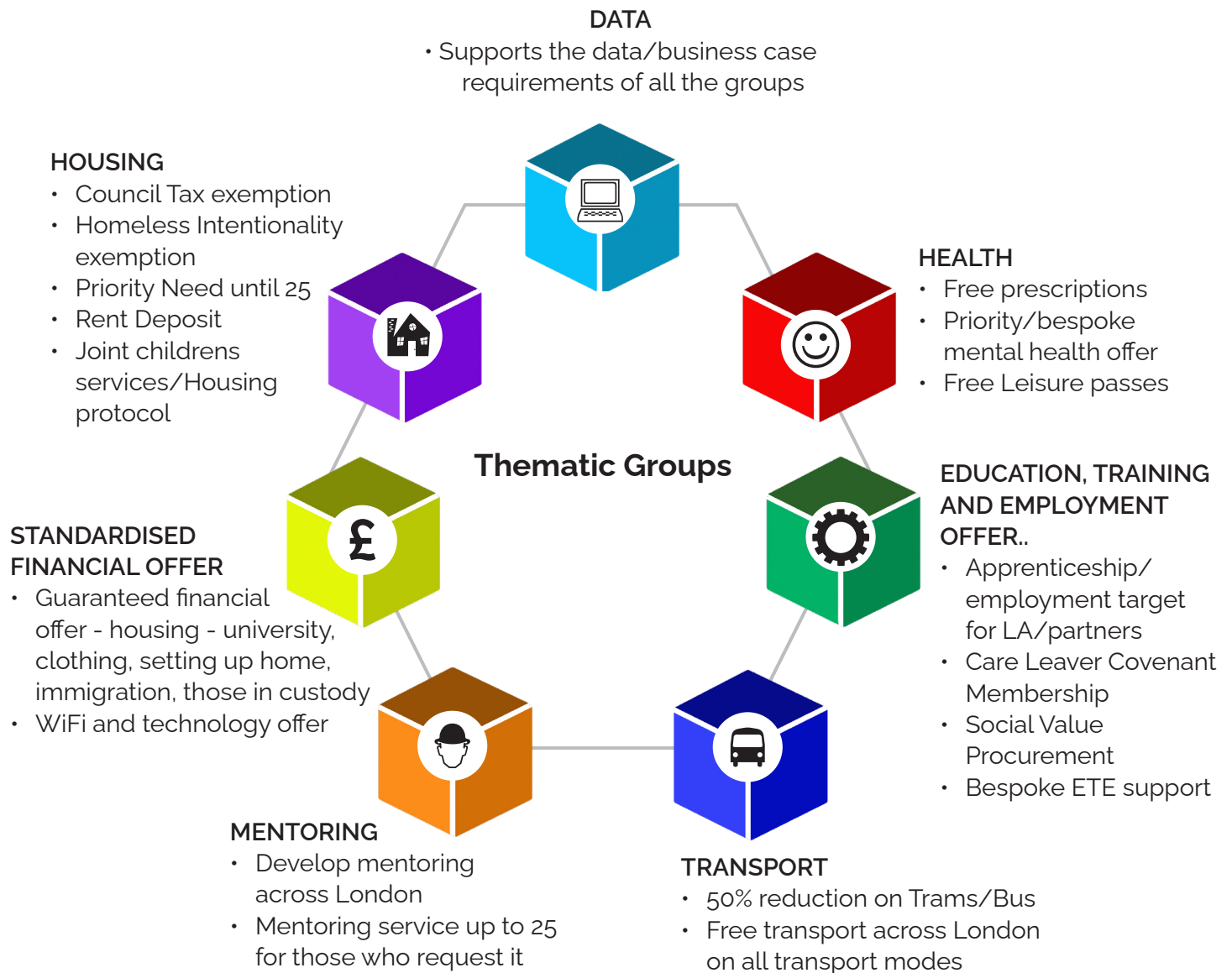
- ▶ A Director of Children's Services from each of London's Sub-Regions
- ▶ Young People from the London Children in Care Council
- ▶ Mark Riddell, the National Care Leaver Advisor
- ▶ Greater London Authority
- ▶ London Councils
- ▶ Care Leaver Covenant
- ▶ Catch-22 Regional Benchmarking Forum
- ▶ John Lewis
- ▶ NHS ICB Babies Children and Young People Lead

The Trust Board oversees the Compact Working Group, which consists of Lambeth, LiIA, and Partnership for Young London (including the Children in Care Council). London's existing Local Authority Network for Care Leavers (LLANCL), which brings together care leaving representation from the local authorities, is the reference group for delivery. Political support for the agreements will be critical and both young people and officers working on the project will look for engagement, advice, and support from Members, Chief Officers, City Hall, and national government.

Delivery of the project is organised into six thematic stakeholder groups, known as 'Houses', which bring together specialists in specific areas. Each group works to first identify and then deliver the support offers that come together to form the Compact. Whilst many targets for delivery are agreed, in some areas the detail of targets is still under consultation.



The 'Houses' - thematic areas for a Common Offer



“The care leavers compact is like a guide for all Local authorities and other partners across London to ensure professionals share resources and develop their skills, building best practice across London.”

Pan London Children in Care Council

How is the Compact progressing?

Each support offer is arrived at separately but will sit under the umbrella of a common offer to London's care leavers. The focus to date has been on the following areas.

Health

Free Prescriptions

Following advocacy by the Children in Care Council to the Regional Babies Children and Young People Transformation Board, London's Chief Nurse wrote to each of the ICS areas asking them to work with Local Authorities to implement a free prescriptions scheme for Care Leavers without an existing exemption. This will not only make access to essential medication affordable but have wider benefits in terms of prevention of more severe illness and supporting engagement with health services.

The South-West ICS area had already been working on a Free Prescription scheme and, along with the North-East ICS, are ready to launch their scheme before the end of 2022. London's other three ICS areas are all working on their schemes, which should follow promptly. An additional benefit has been bringing together the ICS areas for discussions on meeting care leaver needs.

Mental Health Provision

Almost without exception, care leavers will have experienced trauma and adverse childhood experiences. The impact on their mental health is significant; a 2017 report from Barnardo's, which mirrors earlier research, suggests that 46% of care leavers have been identified with a mental health concern, of which 65% were not receiving

a service. The Care Review stresses the need to meet care leaver mental health needs, including a recommendation for specialist, bespoke support to be delivered in partnership with Borough Leaving Care Services.

The Compact Working Group is currently mapping each local authorities' Mental Health Offer as a precursor to discussions on a London offer.

Education, Training and Employment

A series of successful events have been held with education providers and businesses to look at the offers to care leavers, pathways into provision, and how best to meet their support needs. These included a November 2022 workshop focused on the 'business offer' that was hosted by the West Ham United Foundation and John Lewis Partnership. The event was co-facilitated by the Children in Care Council and reached a broad range of businesses, one of whom made an immediate offer of 200 apprenticeships to London care leavers! The Compact will continue bringing together businesses, care leavers, and Personal Advisors to develop ETE offers and pathways. This also includes linking with statutory partners, for example the NHS England offer to develop 1,000 internship or early-stage career opportunities for care experienced young people over the next three years.

A survey is currently out to local authorities to map their 'family firm' offers to care leavers. This includes looking at apprenticeship, internship, and work experience offers across the Council, ETE support packages, and social value procurement policies. Local authorities are also being asked whether they are signatories to the Care Leavers Covenant, the DfE funded National Inclusion Programme. The Care Leavers Covenant does important work in supporting organisations across multiple sectors in their offers to care leavers, including tailored support to local authorities around developing Whole Council Approaches. 13 London Boroughs are currently signatories to the Whole Council Approach.

Housing

The Housing group has developed housing proposals that build on the work of Greater Manchester, the Care Review recommendations, and previous work undertaken by the Mayor of London and the Children's Society. Initial consultations have been undertaken with ALDCS and London's Housing Directors on the following proposals:

- ▶ Council Tax Exemption for Care Leavers
- ▶ Principles of avoiding 'intentional homelessness' assessments for Care Leavers and extending priority need to the age of 25
- ▶ Rent Deposit Schemes
- ▶ Joint housing protocols for Care Leavers between Housing and Children's Services in line with the Governmental best practice model

A survey is currently out to Local Authorities to map their positions against these proposals. Once the precise position is known, further engagement will take place with LA members and officers aiming to secure agreement.

Transport

The Mayor of London made a 2021 Manifesto commitment that Transport for London (TfL) would support London's care leavers with half-price travel. TfL have currently offered this on all bus and tram travel. This is a benefit that will be accessible to an estimated 16,000 18–25 year-old London care leavers. TfL are currently working with the London Datastore (GLA), the Compact Working Group and local authorities to devise an automated process for checking eligibility and administering the scheme. It is anticipated that the scheme will be available to care leavers by mid-2023.

Together for London's care leavers

A defining principle of the Pan London Care Leavers Compact is the 'community parenting' approach that brings partners together to deliver high quality and well-coordinated support offers. In a relatively short period, partners have come together across local authorities, Health, Education, Transport, Business, and Voluntary sectors to work on building these offers together in London. We anticipate that the number of stakeholders will continue to grow in 2023, offering the potential to move beyond the remit of the Compact and tackle the larger and more complex challenges facing care leavers.

We therefore use the final part of this briefing as a call to all parts of London to be a 'community parent'. Together, we will be better in the face of financial challenge and, through co-ordination of efforts, more than the sum of our parts. With London's Children in Care Council at the heart of delivery, all that we do will continually be tested against what is needed and what will work for the Care Leaving community. Together, we can ensure London's care leavers are not 'invisible to society', but rather that we are building the awareness and will to ensure care experienced young people have the opportunities and support that we would want for our own children.

To ask anything about this briefing or find out more about how to get involved please contact: matthew.raleigh@londoncouncils.gov.uk

"The Compact truly focuses on involving care leavers in decision making and policy changing can help to promote greater transparency and accountability in the care system. Care leavers can act as advocates for their peers and help to ensure that the care system is held accountable for its actions and decisions."

Pan London Children in Care Council

“A tree may grow in silence, but it does not stop the effects of nature. I am human my drive and need for change requires action which start words. How will they know? How will they know? How will they know what we really want if we remain silent? Do not respect fear, respect the power of the tongue embrace it and let it drive your change into success. We are the people who accept our past as part of us but do not let our past define us. Do you know how hard it is to see light when you've been buried in darkness? Do not respect fear respect the bravery of overcoming that fear, that silence and speaking up for what you truly believe in. We are using our stories to hopefully shorten the next child's journey to light. To make sure every child knows there will always be light after darkness.”

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Design: pinsentdesign.com

Publication date: 1 February 2023

(In memory of the great contributions and challenges from the brilliant and much missed Aishat Hamzat)