

ITEM No ...5.....

REPORT TO: CHILDREN AND FAMILIES SERVICES COMMITTEE – 9 MARCH 2020

REPORT ON: SCOTTISH CARE LEAVERS COVENANT AND CONTINUING CARE PAYMENT UPDATE

REPORT BY: EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES SERVICE

REPORT NO: 46-2020

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 Following approval by Elected Members for the Council to become a signatory to the Scottish Care Leavers Covenant, Article VII of the Minute of this committee held on 28 January 2019, (report no 44-2019 refers), this report provides a 12 month update on local progress made in implementing the 6 pillars of the covenant. This includes an update on progress in implementing the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 relating to Continuing Care.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Committee Members:

- i. Note the content of the report and continued progress made in the implementation of the Care Leavers Covenant and improving outcomes for Care Leavers.
- ii. Instruct the Executive Director of the Children and Families Service to provide a further update on the Care Leavers Covenant in 12 months.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 In relation to the Care Leavers Covenant there are no direct financial implications but effective support to care leavers does create opportunities for potential savings, such as in relation to rent arrears and the costs of additional but avoidable support. In respect of Continuing Care, it was noted in the previous report that additional costs would be contained within the existing Children and Families Service budget.

4.0 PROGRESS

4.1 The Scottish Care Leavers Covenant provides an agenda for change that is both aspirational and rooted in practice, drawing on research evidence, practice wisdom and the voices of young people. The Covenant was co-produced by a cross-sector alliance of organisations and outlines 6 pillars of support considered to be essential to enable care experienced young people to make a positive transition into adulthood.

4.2 The Council became a signatory to the Covenant on 28 January 2019 and over the last 12 months, the Corporate Parenting Partnership, which consists of partner services and a young person representative from the local Champions Board, has built on existing arrangements to coordinate a range of developments in relation to each of the 6 pillars. Increasingly, this is promoting improved outcomes as follows:

4.3 **Health and wellbeing** – using additional Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) funding for Looked After Children, a dedicated Health and Wellbeing Worker was appointed to the Throughcare and Aftercare (TCAC) Team and immediately developed a number of practical initiatives including a partnership with FareShare to provide an additional stock of foodstuffs available to young people along with free sanitary products and contraception.

A Health and Wellbeing Drop-In Session now takes place every month at the team, with a range of partners, such as The Corner, Web Project, NHS Nurses, Oral Health Team, Feeling Strong and Penumbra, providing advice and appropriate signposting to specialist support. A psychotherapist has also been based with the team one day a week providing a direct service to young people who are able to engage with this support, alongside consultation with staff.

Going forwards, an audit of the mental health needs of care leavers is being carried out to inform how services are designed and delivered. It is important to note that care leavers can have varying mental health needs and different levels of personal support which should inform proportionate and individualised responses. Further, whole system developments will need to be informed by the Independent Inquiry into Mental Health Services in Tayside.

- 4.4 **Housing and accommodation** – there is an established local position in the Care Leavers Housing Protocol that young people do not leave care and move directly to homeless accommodation. In accordance with the protocol, 35 care leavers were provided flats in the last year. Tenancy sustainment levels remain very high and joint work between Corporate Services and the TCAC Team have been enhanced to prevent Care Leavers accruing debt.

The TCAC Team and Neighbourhood Services have also delivered specialist support to Care Leavers identified as being at risk of being evicted from tenancies due to anti-social behaviour. This has received extremely positive feedback from young people and further work is also being carried out to analyse pathways into homelessness with a view to further strengthening the housing protocol.

Young people in our Children's Houses can also access a satellite flat as they transition to living more independently. Similarly, in partnership with Hillcrest Futures, the TCAC Team and the Housing Support Team have also developed 5 one bedroom flats. This provides further provision to support care leavers to move on in a graduated and supported way, with a 24 hour concierge service and additional support from the teams involved.

Going forwards, the Council were represented on a national working group that prepared a new 'Youth Homelessness Prevention Pathway: Improving Care Leavers Housing Pathways' <https://www.rocktrust.org/youth-homelessness-prevention-pathway/> This confirms good local practice and makes 8 recommendations which are informing priorities, including a review of the existing protocol. All Care Leavers up to 26 years old are also exempt from Council Tax.

- 4.5 **Education and Training** – there has been a considerable amount of joint activity to help improve the educational outcomes of Looked After Children. This includes the development of a Charter with Head Teachers and Social Work Teams; the implementation of the Breakthrough Mentoring scheme in all 8 secondary schools and Offsite Education; support from designated Pupil Support Workers; and a new Inclusion Policy.

This joint work is leading to significant improvements in educational attainment and positive destinations. Attendance is improving, exclusions are reducing, average tariff scores have gone up and positive destinations have all increased. The performance of the city also compares favourably with family group members in the Local Government Benchmark Framework (LGBF) but further work is required relating to those achieving 5 + grades at SCQF 5-6.

There has been a marked increase in the number of care leavers attending college or training, with 82 young people supported by the TCAC Team in either further education or training. The team provides ongoing support as care leavers enter college or training, contributing towards Dundee and Angus College being the top performing College in Scotland for care experienced learners last year, with a 68% completion rate against a national average of 58.7%

- 4.6 **Employment** – using the same Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) funding for Looked After Children, a Care Leavers Employability worker is now based within Discover Works. This post has been designed to develop an integrated vocational training and progression pathway for

care leavers and help to reduce barriers to employment. This includes access to a monthly Employability Drop-In Session. Building on this, there are a number of initiatives including:

- **Intense support from the TCAC** - of the 130 young people currently receiving support, 82 are attending college as noted above; 1 is doing an apprenticeship; 3 are doing Modern Apprenticeships; 9 are in employment; and 5 are on training courses. Care Leavers under the age of 29 who meet the criteria for employment with the Council are also now guaranteed an interview.

In respect of the 30 young people supported by the TCAC Team not in further education, training or employment, the team continues to pro-actively provide and/or coordinate support. Depending on individual needs, this can take the form of support in respect of housing, health and wellbeing, substance misuse, personal relationships, income maximisation and budgeting before they are able to enter the job market.

- **The Circle Café Project** – this is a partnership between The Circle, the TCAC Team, Barnardo's Works and Leisure and Culture Dundee. The project offers Care Leaver's paid employment, via Community Jobs Scotland and Modern Apprenticeships, to run the community café and undertake training that enhances their employability skills. Four Care Leavers are currently involved in this initiative.

Case Study

A young person chose to leave a Children's House without entering Continuing Care in order to live with her father instead. Shortly after, the father received a custodial sentence, leaving the young person on their own in the family home. They were supported into their own tenancy but other family members visited and became involved in anti-social behaviour. When the father returned from prison, the young person went back to live with them and was supported to attend both work experience placements and a college course which they were unable to sustain. They are now receiving ongoing support in respect of their relationship with the father, their health and wellbeing, income maximization and budgeting. This support is provided via routine weekly meetings, day-to-day guidance where required and coordination of assistance from other services. A key aim is to achieve greater stability and capacity to engage with education, training or employment in the longer-term.

- 4.7 **Youth and Criminal Justice** – the local Whole System Approach continues to operate and Community Justice and the TCAC Team ensure that, where a young person commits a crime, responses are based on existing relationships between young people and professionals. There has been an increase in the number of young people Diverted from Prosecution; a decrease in the number of young people admitted to secure care; and a decrease in the use of custody.
- 4.8 **Rights and participation** – individual consultation with Care Leavers and a '4Change' group continues to influence the agenda of the Champions Board. The 4Change group meets regularly to share positive and negative experiences of being Looked After and Care Leavers. They have been involved in staff recruitment and also the recruitment of Children's Panel members for Children's Hearings Scotland.

A group of Care Leavers were also supported to produce a short film called GRIT, which offers a unique insight into the challenges young people can face in making the transition from care. The film highlights the journey to independent living from the Care Leavers perspective and to date there have been 28 screenings to over 700 professionals. It has been extremely well received.

The Champions Board also now routinely agrees actions to be taken forward by Corporate Parents based on feedback from care experienced members. In order to broaden representation, a new social media application is being piloted which enables Looked After and Care Experienced children and young people to provide comments and suggestions in their own time.

4.9 Poverty and Care Leavers

In response to feedback from Care Leavers, who reported that although growing numbers of young people are remaining in Continuing Care, some decide not to do so but experience financial difficulties if they are not in education, training or employment, the local approach towards the Support and Assistance of Young People Leaving Care (Scotland) Regulations 2003 was reviewed.

These regulations stipulate that Care Leavers who meet this criteria should receive at least the equivalent of state benefits up to the age of 21 years, which is currently £57.90. As benefits have been frozen for the last 5 years, the Council is now providing a £20 food voucher to those Care Leavers who agree to accept support to pro-actively look at employment or training opportunities.

5.0 CONTINUING CARE

- 5.1 The principle of 'Staying Put', or encouraging young people to stay in placement to allow them to develop in their maturity and become more able to live independently, continues to be promoted. As of 1 January 2020, there were 20 young people aged over 16 years in Continuing Care placements. Whilst in such placements, they also continue to benefit from support from their allocated Social Worker or the TCAC Team.

6.0 FUTURE PRIORITIES

In partnership with other Corporate Parents, the Council has made significant progress in building on general approaches towards Looked After Children and progressing a range of actions which reflect the pillars of the Care Leavers Covenant. This is leading to more care experienced young people accessing and benefitting from relevant services and significantly improving outcomes across a range of important indicators.

Going forwards, In the immediate term the planned audit of mental health needs will inform developments in the design and delivery of such services; a review of the local Housing Protocol will ensure it reflects recent guidance; work on flexible and supported education, training and employment opportunities will sustain positive destinations; and work to more effectively listen to care experienced children will continually help to identify new priorities.

In collaboration with the Centre of Excellence for Looked After Children (CELCIS) and the Scottish Care Leavers Covenant Alliance, a dedicated session is planned for March 2020 to develop an action plan for 2020-2021. This will also be attended by Looked After Children and Care Leavers, whose involvement in developments will continue to be promoted. It will inform the development of a new action plan.

The Council also strongly welcomes both the process and findings of the Independent Care Review which, although challenging for all partners, in many ways mirror the local approach in relation to supporting families to stay together; listening to and engaging with care experienced children and young people; providing nurturing care; normalising care; avoiding stigma; and building on the inherent strengths of children and young people.

Nationally, an independent oversight group will be created and we have expressed an interest in both contributing towards a national implementation plan and becoming an early adopter. Crucially, the review does not set out a list of recommendations but encourages a co-produced approach informed by the voice of care experience which promotes a radical

overhaul of the care system. As can be seen, our implementation of the Covenant adopts the same principles.

7.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

7.1 This Report has been subject to an assessment of any impact on equality and diversity, fairness and poverty, environment and corporate risk. There are no major issues.

8.0 CONSULTATIONS

8.1 The Council Management Team and Chief Social Work Officer have been consulted in the preparation of this report. Young people also continue to be involved both individually and as part of the 4Change Group in highlighting areas for continuing development. They are key component of the Champions Board and are also represented on the Corporate Parenting Delivery Group

9.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

9.1 None.

Paul Clancy
Executive Director

Glyn Lloyd
Acting Head of Service

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