



Corporate Parenting Committee
19 April 2022

**Report from the Strategic
Director of Children and Young
People**

**Annual Progress of the Local Offer for Care Leavers
(2021/22) and the Proposed Revised Local Offer 2022 -2024**

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	N/A
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
No. of Appendices:	Appendix 1 – Draft Local Offer to care leavers for 2022 - 2024 Appendix 2 - Care Leavers' Charter
Background Papers:	N/A
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1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 This report provides a review of the progress of the Brent's Local Offer for Care Leavers during the period 1st April 2021 – 31st March 2022. The report also presents a reviewed local offer for 2022-24 following consultation with young people and both internal and external partners. (See appendix 1)

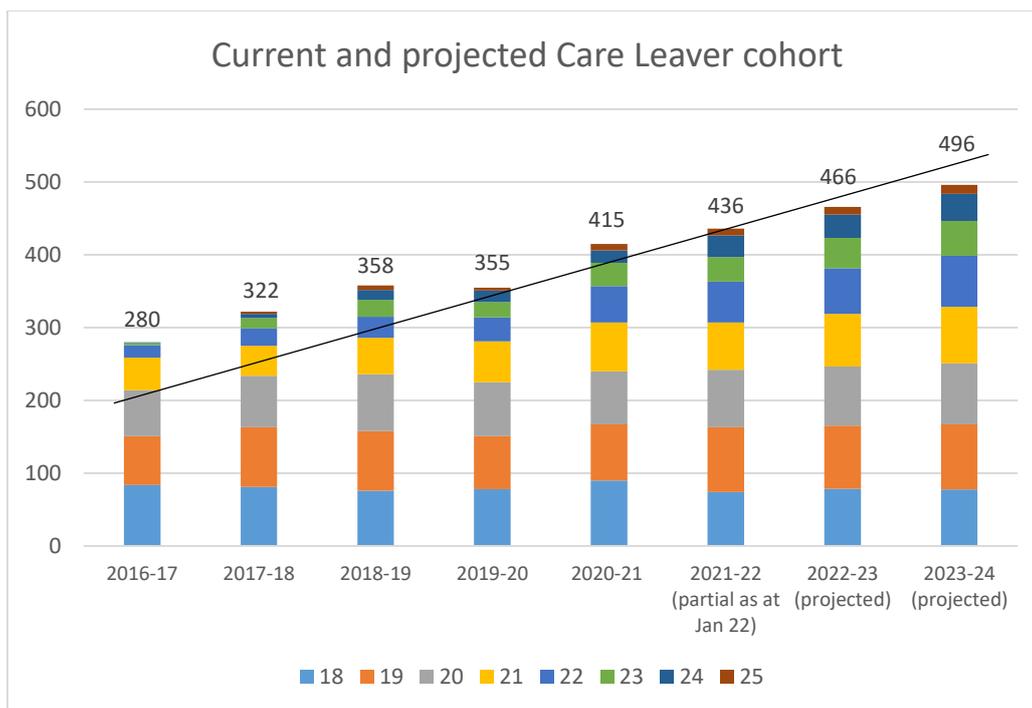
- 1.2 The Lead Member for Children’s Safeguarding, Early Help and Social Care, on behalf of the Corporate Parenting Committee (CPC), approved the last local offer in April 2020.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1. The CPC is requested to review and note the content of the report and provide support and challenge to the service area in their pursuit to achieve the best outcomes for Brent’s care leavers.
- 2.2. The Corporate Parenting Committee, is requested to approve Brent’s reviewed local offer 2022-24, presented in appendix 1.

3. Background

- 3.1 Brent’s first Local Offer for Care Leavers was presented to the CPC on 7th February 2018, following the Children and Social Work Act 2017 (SWA 2017). The SWA 2017 introduced a new obligation for local authorities to publish a local offer for care leavers following consultation with young people. The local offer is expected to provide information about the available statutory and discretionary support and services from the local authority.
- 3.2 Following approval from the Committee, the Local Offer was presented to Cabinet for approval as the offer included council tax exemption for Brent’s care leavers. The Cabinet approved the offer and it was then activated from 1st April 2018. Brent’s Local Offer for Care Leavers was one of the first published in the country. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 that came into force on 1st April 2018 allowed local authorities until March 2019 to publish their local offers. Brent however consulted early with senior leaders in the Council, members of staff, partners and most importantly young people, in the development of the local offer. Brent’s Local Offer was co-produced with 119 care leavers who participated in a consultation process, including face-to-face dialogue, workshops and a questionnaire. According to the guidance, published by the DfE, councils are expected to review the local offer once every two to three years. This was not prescriptive and was for each local authority to determine.
- 3.3 Senior leaders in Brent made a decision for the progress of the local offer to be reviewed on an annual basis with a revised version being produced on a two yearly cycle. This was to ensure care leavers’ needs were considered formally on an annual basis. Brent has kept the local offer under annual review since it was introduced in 2018 and revised it in 2020. This version (see Appendix 1) is the revised iteration for 2022 to 2024.
- 3.4 In supporting the ambition to provide a comprehensive care leaver offer there are also competing budgetary pressures. The growing number of the care leaver cohort, partly as a result of the support offer being raised to 25, has contributed to this pressure and is referenced within a report on placement sufficiency being presented at the CPC on the same date. The graph below illustrates the trend of rising care leaver numbers:



4. Impact of Brent's Offer for Care Leavers: Annual Review 2021-2022

4.1 Brent's Local Offer for care leavers included statutory support and guidance the Local Authority must provide and additional support offered with partner agencies.

4.2 Brent has continued to meet its statutory responsibilities towards care leavers during the COVID-19 pandemic. For the majority of care leavers, during the national lockdowns, visits took place virtually, in some cases in person, by following social distancing guidance. The pandemic has had a significant impact on delivery of some enrichment activities such as weekly football, annual celebration of achievements and monthly care leavers' hub, albeit the latter continued online. Once the Covid-19 restrictions were relaxed in November 2020, face to face activities with young people re-started.

4.3 Brent has fulfilled all of its statutory duties to care leavers as set out in the Local Offer:

- i. Allocation of personal advisors to care leavers: every care leaver has an allocated personal advisor. As at 28 February 2022 there were 409 care leavers (aged between 18 and 25) receiving support from the service.
- ii. Pathway plans for young people: all care leavers were provided with a pathway plan and the vast majority of them were reviewed on a six-monthly basis. Some care leavers who did not have a pathway plan review were young people who had exhausted their appeal rights to remain in the UK; they were reluctant to come to meet with PAs.

- iii. Higher education bursary: all care leavers at university continue to be offered a bursary of £2,000. Discretionary payments (based on financial assessments) are made for educational related expenses such as a laptop or living/rent expenses during the Christmas, Easter or summer vacation.
- iv. Providing accommodation to care leavers in higher education during holidays: all care leavers in higher education or in residential further education were provided with accommodation or reasonable funding when they made their own arrangements during the summer vacation.
- v. Providing accommodation: all young people were offered suitable accommodation as per their needs. Young people who were in foster care were provided with the choice of 'staying put' with their foster carers or moving to supported accommodation where they were offered weekly sessions to improve their independent life skills. No care leaver had a breakdown of tenancy or became intentionally homeless.
- vi. Financial support: Every care leaver was offered an assessment of need when required and they received financial assistance towards expenses related to education, employment or training. They were also supported to access other sources of funding such as college or university funds or applying for Universal Credit from the Department for Work and Pensions.

5. Additional Support Offered under the Local Offer

- i. Education, Employment and Training: The Local Offer had twelve discretionary commitments in this area; ten commitments were fully met and two not met, mainly due to Covid-19 restrictions. An outline of some of the offers achieved are set out below:
 - staff members from the Department for Work and Pensions continued to offer remote 'virtual' support during COVID-19 to young people and personal advisors.
 - in line with the increase in universal credit payments during Covid-19 restrictions, subsistence allowance paid to care leavers was also increased.
 - care leavers at university and colleges were offered additional financial support due to Covid-19 including laptops and internet dongles to support remote learning when necessary.
 - the apprenticeship scheme for care leavers: ten ring-fenced apprenticeships were offered within Brent's local offer, either directly by the Council or arranged by the Council.
 - one young person has successfully secured an apprenticeship within the council,
 - one young person has now secured full time employment with Brent Council;

- two young people were assisted by the DWP on apprenticeship schemes.
 - Barnardo's as part of the Brent Care Journeys Programme has offered work opportunities to two care experienced young people as well as part-time opportunities to 10 young people.
 - Brent has been working with Drive Forward Foundation and Catch 22, to support young people with additional needs into apprenticeships or work employment with a focus on working with young people who have been released from prison.
 - four young people were offered civil service government care leaver internships,
 - Brent has also supported young people in other aspiring positions including a paralegal and a level 3 HR apprenticeship and barbering.
 - six young people were supported to apply for the government Kick Start Employment Scheme
- over 100 ASDAN Independent Living workbooks have been distributed to looked after children and care leavers. ASDAN is a curriculum development and awarding organisation, providing programmes and qualifications to help young people develop skills for learning, work and life. A virtual training event was jointly delivered with ASDAN to all personal advisors to better understand the independent living work book and how to best deliver it to young people. Later this year, a celebration event will be held for those who have completed the Independent Living Workbook in 20/21.
 - despite the Covid 19 restrictions, a Christmas event for care leavers took place in person in December 2021.
 - although volunteering opportunities were limited due to Covid-19 some young people were provided with opportunities to work with Barnardo's in a paid or in a volunteering capacity.

There were 2 offers that were not met due to the impact of Covid-19:

- annual evening celebration event for care leavers' achievement scheduled to take place in 2020 and 2021 could not be held due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The event was postponed and will be re-scheduled for September 2022.
- due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the traineeship programme due to take place in September 2020 and February 2021 did not take place. Instead, more efforts were made to support young people individually to be involved in EET.

ii. Accommodation: there were twelve additional support commitments, all of these were met. Some of the examples were:

- virtual workshops were put in place during 2020-22 including support in maintaining a tenancy and 'My Bank' workshops. Feedback from young people below demonstrates the positive impact of the sessions:

"I thought it would be a bit of a waste of time because I know how to save money and budget money, but it opened my eyes to a lot of different things like all the bills you have to pay and things like that. When you get your own house it's not as easy as you think it is"

"Everything is becoming more and more digitalised to do anything like take a mortgage out or go on holiday you need your card you need a bank account you need money to do everything nowadays so you should know how to handle it"

- no care leaver was made intentionally homeless. Care leavers who had rent arrears were supported with managing their tenancy through a payment plan where Brent made a part payment to secure their tenancy (through an additional rough sleeping grant provided by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government), or supported to apply for Discretionary Housing Fund to pay the whole or part of the arrears.
 - Care leavers were provided with a 'setting up home allowance' of £2,000, or £2,500 if they were parents.
 - a nominated tenancy officer was available at the point of housing allocations. Additionally, Brent employed a Personal Advisor with a housing background who specialised in assisting young people in maintaining their tenancies and offering housing advice to personal advisors.
- iii. Health and Wellbeing: under this section, there were eleven commitments. Ten commitments were fully delivered with one not delivered due to Covid-19 restrictions. Some of the headlines of the delivered commitments are as follows:
- PAs provided support to young people to register with a GP.
 - care leavers were provided with a summary of their health records at their last Health Review prior to their 18th Birthday.
 - care leavers received emotional support through the Care Leavers in Action group and via Hub events, which have taken place virtually throughout the pandemic.

- The Safe Base, therapeutic support including telephone line for care leavers, has been well-used by care leavers including those attending university in particular during Covid-19 lockdown.

One offer was not delivered:

- Kiln Theatre was closed due to Covid-19 pandemic for most of the year.

iv. Financial support: there were 8 additional commitments under this section and all of these were offered. Some of the successes were:

- Thirty one (for 21-22) young people, the total eligible cohort, were supported to be exempt from paying council tax, including those residing in other boroughs.
- provision of workshop on 'money management and budgeting' was provided through 'My Bank'. The sessions took place for 4 days and it also included a module on tenancy support.
- support to open a bank account was provided to all care leavers
- financial guide produced by CLIA was shared with all looked after children and care leavers by their personal advisor or their social worker
- a new 'Brent Financial Guide', was produced which included advice on budgeting, finance and other practical support.

One offer was not delivered:

- there has been delay in reviewing the leaving care guide. Young people will work with an in-house designer to develop a young people friendly publication of the Local Offer and leaving care guide.

v. Relationships: eight commitments were made under this section: five were fully met and three were partly met due to the impact of Covid-19. Some of the delivered commitments are below:

- as an extension of the life skills programme a group of young people completed a weekend at the Gordon Brown Activity Centre where they showed their readiness for independent living.

"I really needed this time for my mental health."

Some of the partly delivered commitments were as below:

- in person workshops for care leavers with special educational needs and disabilities are due to be delivered in 2022/23. Delay was due to the impact of Covid-19 pandemic.

vi. Participation in Society: nine commitments were made under this section; eight were achieved with one not achieved:

- monthly Hub Events. Feedback below demonstrates how important the Hub event is for young people. There has been an ongoing virtual programme during the pandemic including Zoom social time, Bingo events and motivational speakers. The event which was one of our most popular Hub events to date with over 20 young people logging in to hear a guest speaker provide tips on mental wellbeing and confidence. Some of the quotes received from young people where:

'He was really informative and motivating. I wish the session was longer'

'It was an amazing event, having a motivational speaker share his struggles and how he was able to turn it around and share his story was so useful. It was suited to us as people in care and the opportunity to ask questions was great. Came out feeling very positive and wiser which is amazing. Really enjoyed it'

- a digital pathway plan App was developed in consultation with young people and launched in Dec 2021. The App allows young people to undertake their pathway plans digitally as well as access important information such as the local offer on their phones. The app is being embedded into practice and is seen to be a pioneering piece of work that can be purchased by other LAs.
- one commitment that will be delivered in 2022/23 is the ongoing work to encourage care leavers to participate in Brent Youth Parliament, we currently have one young person but are committed to encourage more to join.
- A group of care leavers reviewed the leaving care service and presented their findings to the Strategic Director and the Lead Member.

6. Proposed Changes to the Local Offer for 2022-24

6.1 As part of reviewing the local offer. A series of workshops were delivered in conjunction with Barnardo's (Brent Care Journey (BCJ) which included, workshops with:

1. Children in care
2. Current care leavers (current interaction with the local offer)
3. Care leavers whose cases were closed
4. Care leavers who are young parents
5. Care leavers who are or were UASC
6. Consultation took place with young people who attend the care leavers hub and Care Leavers in Action

7. Internal (i.e. Housing, Adults Social Care, etc.) and external partners (NW CCG; CLCH, registered housing providers, semi-independent providers)

BCJ facilitated workshops with care leavers with the above groups 2, 3, 4 and 5. Leaving Care Teams facilitated consultation with the groups 1, 6 and 7.

6.2 The main findings from the consultation were captured in several themes:

6.2.1 User experience and communication

- *care leavers want to know about the local offer in person from their personal advisor and via an app for care leavers.* Accepted and will continue to be discussed by PAs and will be made available on the pathway plan app.
- *young people wanted the local offer to be clearly visible on the Brent website and signposted to and from social media. Some groups suggested it should be shared in a link via email, via text message or availability of paper copy or as part of BCJ welcome pack.* Accepted and will be implemented.

6.2.2 Inclusion and accessibility

- *care leavers were concerned that local offer may be inaccessible to those who have no or low levels of English, or those with special needs such as learning disability.* Accepted. Exploration has started to assess financial viability of making the offer available in different languages as well as a visual version.

6.2.3 Format and Presentation

- *care leavers said their local offer needs to be brief, bold, clear and direct. The local offer should include pictures and images and be attractively designed with vibrant colours.* Accepted. BCJ would consider supporting young people to propose suggestions of design with support from an internal designer.

6.2.4 Improvements

- *care leavers who were former UASC wanted the local offer translated into their language.* Exploration has started to assess financial viability of making the offer available in different languages
- *care leavers wanted the local offer by a range of media, specifically plain English written, audio and video.* Accepted. A video is planned to be made by care leavers introducing and promoting Brent's Local Offer for Care Leavers.
- *care leavers said there should be procedures which guarantee accountability that each young person has been made aware of the local offer.* Accepted. This has already been covered by Brent's Practice Promises, launched in Feb 2022.

6.2.5 Contents

- *care leavers wanted discounted gym membership – This was offered in the past but not taken up by young people. Accepted to explore. Brent will re-engage with Community and Wellbeing Department to explore this option as the Sports Centres began to operate normally post Covid-19 pandemic.*
- access to emergency funds – this is already available based on a financial assessment.

7. Feedback from Stakeholders.

- 7.1 A workshop was held with internal and external stakeholders in March 2022. Brent Works offered to provide a dedicated employment worker to be based at the Brent Civic to provide advice and assistance to care leavers. This is in addition to Brent Virtual School offering career advice to all care leavers' post 18. Brent Works also offered to have a 'Care Leavers' tab on their Brent Works portal for specific employment opportunities for care leavers.
- 7.2 Prospects, the commissioned provider for post-16 education, employment and training, who offer careers advice to care leavers have also offered a careers' coach to work with care leavers. This is in addition to Catch 22 providing bespoke service to young people being released from prison.
- 7.3 As part of the 'Accredited Life Skills Programme' (ASDAN) care leavers will be offered an opportunity to attend a residential weekend at the Gordon Brown Activity Centre to further develop their independent life skills.
- 7.4 Care leavers with learning needs or SEND, who are in their own tenancies, will receive priority support from Brent's Housing Management Team.

8. Financial Implications

- 8.1 The Looked After Children and Permanency service had a budget of £6.573m in 2021-22. The final year-end figures will be available early in the new financial year. Pressures related to Covid-19 and support to young people were key issues during the year and significantly outweighed any reductions in costs where activities had to be changed or could not go ahead. A significant part of these pressures were in relation to the non-salary overspend, attributable to the statutory and discretionary spend directly supporting looked after children and care leavers.
- 8.2 The review of the offer and suggested changes would have potential financial implications. However given the nature of these and that some would be 'one-off', it is considered that these can be being managed within the existing core budgets and other resources for such purposes and without loss of other service support, as it is hoped the Covid-19 additional pressures of the last two years will further recede next year.

8.3 The pressures from increasing LAC and Care Leaver numbers continue to present challenges. Inflationary pressures in the economy are also of concern. All pressures will be managed appropriately via the LB of Brent and CYP Department detailed monitoring and review systems to track these effects and any resulting budgetary pressures will be managed appropriately internally. The level of support continues to be based on the Care Offer and the needs of the young people.

Report Sign-off:

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Strategic Director Children and Young People