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|  | <b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b><br><b>16th October 2023</b>                 |
|   | <b>Report from the Corporate Director</b><br><b>of Children and Young People</b> |
|   | <b>Lead Cabinet Member: Cllr Gwen</b><br><b>Grahl</b>                            |
| <b>Pan London Care Leavers Compact Report</b>                                     |  |

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| <b>Wards Affected:</b>   | ALL  |
| <b>Key or Non-Key Decision:</b>  | N/A  |
| <b>Open or Part/Fully Exempt:</b><br>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act) | Open   |
| <b>List of Appendices:</b>   | Appendix - Brent Care Leaver Offer   |
| <b>Background Papers:</b>  | Care Leaver Covenant- <a href="#">Local Authorities Engagement - Care Leaver Covenant (mycovenant.org.uk)</a>  |
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## 1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1 To inform Members about the Pan London Care Leavers Compact.
- 1.2 To inform Members of our current progress against the Compact and areas for development in 2023–24. Our ambition is to achieve an excellent outcome for every young person.

## 2.0 Recommendation(s)

That the Committee:

- 2.1 Note the contents of the report and support improvement in the consistency of Brent's local offer to include updating some elements of our housing offer as set out in paragraphs at 3.3.
- 2.2 Endorse the Council's adoption of the national Care Leavers Covenant and support its implementation across the Council.

### **3.0 Detail**

#### **3.1 Contribution to Borough Plan Priorities & Strategic Context**

- 3.1.1 The Pan London Care Leavers Compact contributes to the following borough priorities:

##### **Prosperity and Stability in Brent**

The Compact aims to tackle inequality and disproportionality for care experienced young people in London by creating a consistent response to housing need across local authority areas. It also aims to ensure care experienced young people can access safe, secure and affordable housing.

##### **The Best Start in Life**

Aligned to the borough plan priority for babies, children and young people to get the best start in life, the Compact aims to ensure that care leavers receive the support they need, when they need it, particularly at the important point of transition to adulthood.

##### **A Healthier Brent**

In order for care experienced young people to have good health outcomes social determinants of health such as inequalities in housing, employment and income must be addressed. The key elements of the Compact aims to address these inequalities.

#### **3.2 Background**

- 3.2.1 As of 31 March 2023 there were 438 care experienced young adults aged 18-25 open to the leaving care service.
- 3.2.2 Multiple sources reference the poor outcomes of children who leave the care of local authorities compared to those who live with their families. These young adults tend to be living independently earlier than their peers, often at a distance from 'home' with less support and intersecting disadvantage.
- 3.2.3 The Government's Independent Review of Children's Social Care (March/April 2022), a key policy driver in children's social care, makes recommendations regarding housing and care leavers as follows:

*"Recommendation 2: Introduce a stronger safety net against care leaver homelessness by removing the local area connection test, ending intentionally homeless practice, providing a rent guarantor scheme and increasing the leaving care grant to £2,438 for experienced people".*

- 3.2.4 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 initiated in early 2022 to support a more consistent and high-quality offer for care leavers across the capital.
- 3.2.5 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 borough therefore has a care leaver offer, but these are individual to each area and, as a result, there is a lack of consistency. Care leavers do not always live in the borough 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 in the local area. Partners such as health, education and transport have important roles to play, as do the private and voluntary sectors.
- 3.2.6 Ofsted introduced a new, separate judgement about the experiences and progress of care leavers to the inspection framework for local authorities in January 2023. Brent was inspected against this in February 2023 with an outcome of a 'good' judgement. Our current care leaver local offer is published on the Brent website (see appendix) and is in the process of revision following feedback from the recent Ofsted inspection. It will be published early in the new year following a period of co-design and consultation with young people.

### **3.3 Pan-London Care Leavers Compact**

- 3.3.1 London's Local Authorities are all being asked, by 31<sup>st</sup> December 2023, to make six commitments to London's Care Leavers as part of a Pan London Care Leavers Compact. There are five housing related positions and an additional commitment relating to whole council support of Care Leavers through membership of the Care Leavers Covenant. The Compact aims to maximise consistency and quality in the 'local offers' of support to Care Leavers by Local Authorities and their partners.
- 3.3.2 The commitments within the Compact are set out below, including the current Brent position underneath each sub-heading. Overall, as a local authority we are meeting most of the key elements of the covenant.
- 3.3.3 **London Local Authorities offer a full council tax exemption for their Care Leavers (18-25) that live within the borough.**
- a. We have a council tax scheme for care experienced young people which came into effect on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 2018.
  - b. We waive council tax payment obligations for all our care experienced young people regardless of where they live. For those living outside of the borough we ensure they have applied for any exemptions from their local council.
- 3.3.4 **Adopting the policy that no care leaver (18-25) should be found intentionally homeless.**

- a. Our housing policy ensures that care leavers are offered supported accommodation until they feel they are ready for their own tenancy, hence why they have never been in a position to be found intentionally homeless. Brent is the only London Authority that is still offering social housing tenancies to our care experienced young people.

### **3.3.5 Offering a rent deposit scheme for care leavers (18-25) for whom private rented accommodation is assessed as a suitable option.**

Brent does not currently offer a rent deposit scheme for care experienced young people, where it is suitable for them to go into the private rented sector. However, it will be one of the recommendations from a current project looking at the cost of looked after children/care leavers placements. This will be presented to the Corporate Management Team (CMT) in October 2023.

### **3.3.6 Ensuring there is a joint protocol between Housing and Children's Services for Care Leavers in line with good practice advice.**

Brent has a joint protocol in place between Housing and Children's Services that ensures care leavers are prioritised when considering their longer-term housing options and support needs.

### **3.3.7 Adopting the principle that Care Leavers up to the age of 25 are to be found as being in 'priority need' under homelessness legislation.**

Brent has not officially adopted this principle, but in practice the close working relationship between the Council's Housing Needs and Looked After Children and Permanency services through the joint protocol has meant this has not been an issue.

**Action:** The joint protocol will be revised by the end of December 2023 to ensure this principle is formally adopted.

### **3.3.8 London Borough of Brent becomes a signatory to the Care Leaver Covenant.**

- a. The Covenant is both separate and connected to the Compact. The Covenant is a national improvement programme, following governmental commitment to care leavers. The Covenant encourages a 'whole council approach' - the strategic idea that responsibility for being a corporate parent sits across the whole council and not only with those people and departments that have 'care leaver' in their job descriptions. As well as council tax exemption and housing commitments, the Covenant commits local authorities to promote training and employment opportunities, revising social value policies to ensure that care leavers are considered as a standard part of procurement practice and connecting local economic development activity for the benefit of care leavers. Brent has demonstrated whole-council support for care experienced young people without officially adopting the covenant. For example, there are ring-fenced care leaver apprenticeships in place and a specific programme to support employment opportunities.
- b. The Compact asks local authorities to sign up to the care leaver covenant. The service will take the covenant to relevant Council departments and to

CMT before the end of this year to ensure effective visibility and promotion of the aims of the covenant.

The Corporate Parenting committee is asked to endorse Brent becoming a signatory to the Care Leaver Covenant.

### 3.3.9 The issue of **recognising being care experienced as a ‘protected characteristic’**.

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 (2022). The Review discussed the stigma and discrimination that people experience because 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 recommended that care experience should be made a protected characteristic to give employers and public services greater authority to put in place programmes to promote better outcomes for care experienced people.

Despite the Review’s position, the DfE response (Stable Homes Built on Love, 2023) did not follow through with any related proposals. A small number of London local authorities have decided to pass resolutions this year adopting this position. 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 assessments) and of whole council approaches to support Care Leavers.

As this is such a recent area of development, around which learning is still being gathered, there is no recommendation for it to be included within the London Compact. The implications of taking such an approach within Brent are being considered and any proposals will come forward if it can be seen to clearly improve outcomes.

## 4.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement

4.1 *“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

4.2 Brent care leavers have been consulted and involved in the development of our current Care Leaver offer and they will be involved in the review of the offer.

4.3 Brent care leavers in partnership with our Participation Team have also begun discussions on care leavers as a “protected characteristic” and these discussions will inform future work.

## 5.0 Financial Considerations

5.1 There are currently no financial considerations arising from this report. However, the cost implication of offering a rent deposit scheme for care experienced young people will be considered at a later stage following the outcome of a project reviewing the cost of looked after children/care leaver placements.

## **6.0 Legal Considerations**

6.1 Section 2 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 requires local authorities to publish information about services offered to care leavers and other services that may assist care leavers to transition to adulthood and independent living. This will include financial support, housing, health, education, and training. The local offer should ensure that all care leavers have a clear idea of what services are available to them, as well as helping to highlight any gaps in provision or support that the young person may need.

6.2 There is no specific legal or statutory duty on the local authority in respect of the Pan London Care Leavers Compact. The progress of Compact has come about through a vision and desire to work together across London authorities to bring partners together to deliver high quality and well-coordinated support for care experienced young people.

6.3 Recommendation 2.2 is for the Committee to endorse Brent adopting the national Care Leavers Covenant and support its implementation across the Council. It is clear that adoption will require the Council to review a range of policies and practices, to include the revision of social value policies to ensure that care leavers are considered as a standard part of procurement practice and connecting local economic development activity for the benefit of care leavers.

6.4 The implications of the council recognising care experience as a protected characteristic are still to be fully understood; and whilst the position is not binding in law, it will likely have influence on the development of new council policy and of whole council approaches to support Care Leavers.

## **7.0 Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations**

7.1 Please refer to section 6.4.

7.2 By adopting the principles outlined in the Compact and the Covenant, services provided to care leavers will ensure greater fairness and more equal treatment.

## **8.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations**

8.1 There are no climate change or environmental considerations.

## **9.0 Human Resources/Property Considerations (if appropriate)**

9.1 There are no human resource or property considerations.

## **10.0 Communication Considerations**

10.1 At this stage there are not any communication considerations.

**Report sign off:**

***Nigel Chapman***

Corporate Director of Children and Young People