

Lancashire County Council – Corporate Parenting

Practice guidance for Preparing Children Looked After for Independence:

26th April 2018- updated September 2021

Introduction:

Lancashire County Council ensure that they exercise their responsibilities, towards children looked after and care leavers, by upholding the seven corporate parenting principles, as set out in Section 1 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017:

1. To act in the best interest and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing of those children and young people.
2. To encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings.
3. To take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people.
4. To help those children and young people gain access to, make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and relevant partners.
5. To promote high aspirations and seek to secure the best possible outcomes for those children and young people.
6. For those children and young people to be safe and for stability in their home, relationships and education or work.
7. To prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

This practice guidance outlines the expectations of social workers who are involved in the care planning of adolescent children in our care.

Health and Wellbeing:

All children in care receive annual health assessments, social workers should read the assessment resulting from this and promote attendance to the assessment itself. All young people leaving care will have a health passport, provided by the children looked after (CLA) nurse, this contains their NHS number, GP and Dentist details and date of last dental check. It also details their immunisation schedule and indicates whether or not their immunisations are up-to-date. If their immunisations are incomplete, it advises them to make an appointment at GP surgery and tells them what immunisations are outstanding.

All children looked after need to be registered with a GP and dentist and these details of these need to be recorded in the case file.

All children looked after should have a Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) completed annually by the carer, it is good practice for these to be completed by the young person, social worker and education provision alongside the carer's assessment, for the most accurate assessment of emotional wellbeing. In cases where a young person is scored as Borderline or Abnormal consultation with SCAYT+ (supporting carers and young people together) must take place and a referral to CAMHS.

For young people who have additional needs and/or mental health issues a referral to Adult Transitions needs to be completed at the age of 16. Should a young person require specialist accommodation in adulthood, this referral needs to be completed at the earliest opportunity to ensure that the correct provision is sourced in time.

Positive activities need to be promoted in placements and at school. This should form part of the care plan/pathway plan for the young person and most placement providers should facilitate and fund any activities. In cases where this is not possible activities and equipment for activities can be accessed through PEPSA funding (funding through the virtual school) and if the young person is accommodated in leaving care provision there are activity allowances within the leaving care financial procedures.

A healthy diet and information regarding how to access a healthy diet should be provided through the placement and the social worker. Young people need to be encouraged and supported to prepare balanced meals.

Views of children and young people and how they are responded to:

Lancashire children looked after should all have access to the Mind of My Own app', this enables them to contribute to their reviews and provide feedback regarding the care and support they receive. [Mind Of My Own | Making it easier for children and young people to communicate](#)

All Lancashire CioC and Care Leavers should be made aware of the Children in Care Council (LINX), the Care Leaver Forum and POWAR, which are delivered by the Child, Family, Wellbeing Service.

There are also participation groups that are set up locally by the Leaving Care Service leading on activities such as the Consultation on the Local Offer and life skills. Social workers need to ensure that their young people are aware of how to access these and support available for travel.

Social workers need to be aware of advocacy services and independent visiting services provided by The National Youth Advocacy Service. [Advocacy | NYAS | National Youth Advocacy Service](#)

Social workers need to consider and record the views of the children and young people they work with. Young people need to contribute and be engaged in the planning process, with the benefit of accurate information and realistic expectations that are set out by their social worker.

Social workers need to consider a young person's identity as a looked after child. Who in their life is aware of their care status and how do they want to identify you to people they know?

Knowledge of and access to information regarding entitlements, service and support provided by the local authority and relevant partner agencies:

All Lancashire's leaving care entitlements are accessible to the Youth Zone website and all CLA and Care Leavers should be directed to this site:

<https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/youthzone/care-leavers-local-offer/>

Each locality has a Facebook page for care leavers which enables them to access support locally and provide information regarding events and local services.

Central - StayCentred: <https://www.facebook.com/StayCentred/>

North - NorthView4U: <https://www.facebook.com/NorthView4U/>

East – EastSide4U: <https://www.facebook.com/EastSide4U/>

Lancashire are currently working with multi-agency partners to refresh the Local Offer for each district across the County. This is a requirement set out in the Children and Social Work Act 2017 and needs to be available to young people before the end of 2018. The Local Offer will place corporate parenting responsibility on other organisations who will need to publish the service they provide to care leavers. This information will be collated alongside the Local Authority's offer to care leavers in an accessible format, for all young people to view. Social workers need to familiarise themselves with the progress of the local offer and support to their young people to have up to date information.

High aspirations for children looked after and care leavers:

Social workers need to undertake Personal Education Plans (PEP) every term to monitor the educational progress of children in our care and access any additional support required with support of the Virtual School. PEPs need to be completed until the end of year 13 for all children looked after and care leavers.

Changes in school should be avoided unless it is in the interests of a child's education. Moves at key points during a child's education should not be considered, unless in exceptional circumstances.

Children should be spoken to about their aspirations and career advice provided. Children should be encouraged to visit university campuses and explore higher education options.

Consultation with children and young people has highlighted that children being taken out of classes for CLA reviews and PEP meetings, causes significant issues in school due to missing key pieces of classroom information and unwanted attention from their peers regarding the reason for their absence.

Social workers are able to access the Employment Support Team for young people who are interested in employment, training, further education and apprenticeship options.

Promoting stable placements, relationships and education/employment:

Social workers need to work alongside placement providers to promote the continuation of placement that meet the child's needs. There should be an

understanding of what support is available to the placement and how to access that and what the placement is obliged to provide that child, to avoid duplication of provision and expenditure.

Realistic and detailed placement plans needs to be in place with the correct delegated authority and contingency planning from the outset.

Social workers should respond to placements issues promptly. Contact planning should take into account the placement's capacity to support, ensure that the placement are promoting and supporting family contact without placing unrealistic expectations on carers.

A social worker's relationship with a child on their case load is key, being reliable and not cancelling visits to children holds significant importance. Consultation with children looked after and care leavers has repeatedly shown us that feeling 'let down' by workers cancelling or being late has a significant impact on their ability to engage.

Social workers need to consider the importance of friendships and the support we offer to young people who may not live close to their friends. Carers need to be encouraged to have school friends' home for dinner and sleepovers to promote normative peer relationships. Risk within friendships should be managed in a balanced way.

Family contact needs to be reviewed regularly. Any restrictions that are in place should be considered in line with the child's age and level of maturity.

Preparation for adult life and independence:

Preparation for independence starts as soon as a child comes into care. Children and carers need to be prepared, at an age appropriate level, for what comes next, what support is available and what the realistic options are.

Conversations with foster carers regarding Staying Put should take place from the time the child is placed, when the placement is ratified as permanent, with more robust conversations taking place as the child reaches 16. Young people need very clear information about what Staying Put is. Recent feedback we have received indicates that some young people are deterred from this option as they believe they are obligated to remain there until they are 21, when in fact this is a mutual agreement that can end at any time.

If a young person is in year 13 of education when they turn 18, a foster placement will be fully funded until the end of the academic year. Social Workers need to liaise closely with Independent Fostering Agency regarding the requirement for a service from the agency and the cost of the placement should be adjusted accordingly.

Social workers need to familiarise themselves with accommodation options for care leavers to ensure their young people's expectations are managed appropriately. The options are as follows:

- Staying Put with former foster carers; this is the preferred options for children in foster care. Young people in other kinds of placement can request Staying

Put prior to their 18th birthday, a placement search for a foster carer, who would consider this option, would need to be undertaken. Staying Put Procedures can be found at Chapter 6.8.2 of the Children's Services Manual;
<https://www.proceduresonline.com/lancashirecsc/contents.html>

- Shared Lives; for young people who have additional needs and have been assessed by Adult Transitions. A young person's foster carers can be assessed to be Shared Lives carers and in these circumstances this would be the preferred option, as this offers more long term accommodation and more support for the carers. Shared Lives carers can also be sourced outside of existing fostering arrangements.
- Residential Children's Home/Staying Close; staying put does not apply to residential placements. Children need to be encouraged to move onto more independent accommodation prior to their 18th birthday. There are specific challenges in preparing a young person for independence in a residential setting and a period in supported lodging/supported accommodation/semi independence while being a looked after child is often more beneficial. There are plans nationally to introduce Staying Close, this is where a young person moves into independence close to their children's home and is supported by staff from the home in the community. Although we are able to implement informal arrangements with this in mind, LCC have not implemented a Staying Close strategy at this time.
- Leaving Care Providers – Block Contracted Services; Lancashire have commissioned a number of leaving care placements across county, in which the support element has been funded up front as part of a block contract. These placements include supported accommodation of varying sizes and support hours and supported lodgings. These placements should always be considered first when looking for a leaving care placement for a looked after child. This is because these placements are affordable for young people post 18 and they have links to the local district councils who can access independent accommodation and support in move on planning. Leaving Care placements should never be sourced by the social worker directly, an Access to Resource Team (ART) referral should be made on every occasion.
- Leaving Care Providers – Agency; these providers should be considered in the event other options are not available. These placements are often more appealing to young people as they can offer self-contained accommodation. It is important to ensure that if this kind of provision is sourced that it will be affordable for the young person post 18 and to consider whether the young person is able to maintain a tenancy to a standard that would convince a private landlord to allow them to take over the tenancy. These placement are often more flexible in terms of admissions and may take more complex young people. The standard of accommodation and quality of support, needs to be closely monitored through placement planning and CLA statutory processes. These placements are not Ofsted regulated and the North West's framework and LCC's capacity to monitor is limited.

- Independent living – social housing: the aim for the majority of young people is to support them to a stage where independent living is successful. Children looked after should register with local district council's housing advice at the age of 16, with their application details kept up to date and housing options meeting taking place at 17 ½. Most housing associations require pre tenancy training (this can be covered through ASDAN) and a financial assessment before access to this form of accommodation is granted. Children in care need to be aware at the earliest stage that social housing will not be available to them if they are not in some form of Education, Employment or Training (EET), as the financial assessment precludes people who are in receipt of basic benefit rates for that age group (despite the higher rate of housing benefit they receive due to their care leaver status). Social housing is the preferred option as there is much more stability and security in this accommodation and rent rates are affordable in the longer term.
- Independent living – private rented; private landlords and letting agents often require a guarantor, LCC does not act as a guarantor for young people. Unless you have senior management approval for this for exceptional circumstances, social workers cannot act as guarantor for a young person. Social workers can liaise with the district councils regarding the standards of private landlords.

For all plans to move a child looked after from an Ofsted regulated placement (fostering or residential children's home/school) to an un-regulated placement (block contracted services/agency leaving care placement) senior management approval needs to be obtained. This is a significant change in care plan and although they will remain 'looked after', they are leaving care.

Lancashire introduced the ASDAN Living Independently short course in September 2017. The purpose of this is to help CLA/Care leavers become better prepared to live independently. The short course aims to develop their understanding of topics such as personal wellbeing, finance, housing and employment and how these can have an impact on their independence. This needs to be incorporated in to the care plan/pathway plan. It is expected that Carers will be undertaking this preparation anyway, ASDAN is a way to evidence the preparation work undertaken with an added bonus of accreditation. This work can commence prior to the young person turning 16.

Young people need to be adequately prepared for the introduction of their Personal Advisor (PA). The PA has a lot of information to provide in the early stages of their involvement and this isn't easily retained when the young person hasn't been made aware, beforehand, what their PA's role is. Many young people fear that the introduction of their PA signifies the end of their time in care.

For further information about the role of the PA, please see Chapter 6.8.4 on the Children's Services Manual; <https://www.proceduresonline.com/lancashirecsc/contents.html>

From the age of 15 ¾ a child looked after requires a thorough needs assessment and pathway plan. A referral needs to be made for a PA.

All young people leaving care need; NI number, photo ID, bank account, information regarding junior ISAs, consideration to criminal injuries compensation application (CICA) and information regarding access to records.

It is good practice to hold to multi agency planning meetings prior to CLA reviews, especially if there are any contentious issues regarding long term accommodation or funding issues. PAs should be invited to these meeting to contribute to planning throughout.