

Thursday, 7 April 2022

## Care Leavers Service Report

1. Purpose of report: To provide an overview of the service provided to care leavers with particular regard to support around transitions, educational attainment including post 16 destinations, the impact of out of area placements and accommodation quality and stability.

### Introduction:

2. The Care Leavers service is comprised of six care leaver teams, one in each of the four quadrants and two countywide teams dedicated to working with asylum experienced care leavers. The teams are comprised of Personal Advisors, a Team Manager and a Service Manager. The service is supported by a dedicated CAMHS worker, an education specialist within the Virtual School, two migration workers and two homelessness prevention workers. Broadly there are an equal number of care leavers in the South West, North West and North East quadrants with a higher number of care leavers in the South East quadrant. Whilst the workloads of personal advisors are currently considered to be reasonable we need to be mindful of the impact of extended duties to care leavers beyond the age of 21 as established in the Children and Social Work Act 2017 and the impact of newly arrived unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people into Surrey the majority of whom will become care leavers and the impact of this on capacity particularly for the South East quadrant.
3. As of 28 February 2022, there are 817 care leavers aged 16 - 25 in receipt of leaving care services, the vast majority are between the ages of 18 – 25 with only 13 being aged 16 or 17, no longer looked after by the local authority but entitled to a care leavers service. 526 are male (64%) and 300 (36%) female. Of that group 51% identify as White, 23% identify as Black or Black British, 13% Asian or Asian British, 7% mixed ethnicity and 7% Other Ethnic Group. There are 292 asylum experienced care leavers within the service, accounting for 35.7% of the care leaver population.

### Definitions of categories of children entitled to leaving care support

4. **Eligible children** - Defined in paragraph 19B of Schedule 2 to the Children Act 1989, and regulation 40 of the Care Planning Regulations as a child who is: (a)

looked after, (b) aged 16 or 17, and (c) has been looked after by a local authority for a period of 13 weeks, or periods amounting in total to 13 weeks, which began after they reached 14 and ended after they reached 16.

5. **Relevant children** - Defined in section 23A(2) of the Children Act 1989 as a child who is: (a) not looked after, (b) aged 16 or 17, and (c) was, before they last ceased to be looked after, an eligible child. Regulation 3 of the Care Leavers Regulations prescribes a further category of relevant child who is: (a) not looked after, (b) aged 16 or 17, and (c) at the time they attained the age of 16 was detained (i.e. detained in a remand centre, a young offenders institution or a secure training centre, or any other centre pursuant to a Court order), or in a hospital, and immediately before they were detained or in hospital had been looked after by a local authority for a period or periods amounting in all to at least 13 weeks which began after they reached the age of 14.
6. **Former Relevant children** - Defined in section 23C(1) of the Children Act 1989 as a young person who is: (a) aged 18 or above, and either (b) has been a relevant child and would be one if they were under 18, or (c) immediately before they ceased to be looked after at age 18, was an eligible child
7. **Qualifying** - Defined in section 24 of the Children Act 1989 as a person who is: (a) aged at least 16 but is under 21, (b) with respect to whom a special guardianship order is in force (or was in force when they reached 18) and was looked after immediately before the making of that order, or (c) at any time after reaching the age of 16 but while s/he was still a child was, but is no longer, looked after, accommodated or fostered.

### **Transition to Independence – Relationship based practice**

8. The transition to independence can be a daunting time for many young people, and this is especially so for young people leaving care. Many care leavers need a potentially higher level of care and support compared to their peers and cannot necessarily rely on this being provided through their family and friends network. It's important the relationships they develop whilst in the care of the local authority sustain into adulthood to provide that support and that care leavers are connected within their communities. Care Leavers may require support with securing employment, navigating through education and training pathways, moving into their own home and the practical skills needed to manage this successfully, as well as developing the resilience to deal with the many challenges life presents. Young people need the opportunities to build their skills, knowledge and independence to leave the care system and flourish as adults. Surrey County Council is committed to continuously improving the quality and responsiveness of its services to ensure that young people are supported to make this transition confidently and successfully. The Ofsted inspection in January 2022 found that "***the majority of care leavers are prepared well for independent living. Most of this work is carried out effectively by commissioned semi-independent providers. Most care leavers make progress with their education, independence and overall development.***"

9. We recognise that skilled personal advisors who can develop positive relationships with care leavers play an essential role in co-ordinating the support care leavers receive. The service has increased the number of personal advisors in each team with the majority of staff being permanent. Care leavers tell us via the Big Survey, through Care Council and Corporate Parenting Board the significance of a solid relationship with their personal advisor in making a positive difference to their lives. The Ofsted monitoring visit of September 2021 confirmed that most young people were well supported by their personal advisors in their transitions to becoming independent young adults, that personal advisors worked hard to maintain contact and trusting relationships and completed skilled and sensitive work with young people. Ofsted commented in the January 2022 inspection “**Care leavers are supported by committed personal advisers who work with them from the age of 16 to ensure that their needs are met through advice, support and access to the right services**”. There has been considerable focus on the allocation of personal advisors to care leavers at 16 years to support the early development of that relationship. Having capacity to allocate personal advisors earlier is enabling a reasonable period of time to develop joint working between the social worker, personal advisor and young person, building better relationships as they prepare for independence. Whilst good progress has been made in this area, since August 2021 there has been a sharp increase in the numbers of young people seeking asylum being placed in Surrey, consequently this is creating additional demand on early personal advisor allocation, this is an area we are reviewing closely.
10. Legislation prescribes that the level of expected contact with care leavers varies according to their age. For care leavers aged 16 – 20 it is expected that personal advisors keep in touch with them a minimum of every two months, this will include face to face contact and additional contact via a communication method agreed with the care leaver, this will be reflected in the young person’s pathway plan. The service is currently in touch with 83% of care leavers across the 16 – 20 age group. For care leavers over the age of 21 the legislation is much less prescriptive requiring annual contact is made to ensure that care leavers are aware of the services available to them. Surrey has had contact with 97% of care leavers over the last year and has been in contact with 91% of care leavers aged between 21 and 25 over the last 3 months. In terms of DFE reporting for 2021/2022 quarter 3 Surrey was in touch with 100% of care leavers aged 19 – 21, this compares with South East Benchmarking data of 91% for the same period.
11. 99.3% of all Surrey care leavers aged 16 - 25 have a pathway plan in place. All eligible young people are expected to have a pathway plan in place at 16 yrs and 3 months in line with statutory requirements. As of 22.03.22, 75% of eligible care leavers had a pathway plan completed within this timescale. Pathway plans must be reviewed every 6 months or whenever there is a significant change in the care leaver’s circumstances. 77.6% of care leavers had their pathway plan reviewed within 6 months. On closer analysis of the data performance is very

strong in the west quadrants, there is focussed activity from the service managers in the east quadrants in ensuring performance is comparable across the county. Ofsted found ***“Most pathway plans are comprehensive and are completed collaboratively with care leavers, but they do not routinely include the input of other relevant agencies. They are updated every six months, but not always when the young person’s circumstances significantly change. Care leavers’ views are reflected strongly in their plans.”*** For care leavers returning to the service after the age of 21, statutory guidance confirms their pathway plans should be proportionate to their individual needs, not all care leavers will require a full pathway plan but a full assessment is completed where required.

12. In response to feedback from care leavers we have updated the roles and responsibilities document which sets out the expectations of personal advisors and social workers, ensuring there are clear messages about what young people can expect from the service.
13. We have continued to support personal advisors in ensuring they have up to date training in areas such as Housing and Welfare Benefits to ensure they can discuss confidently entitlements with young people. It is a practice expectation that all personal advisors are familiar with Surrey’s Local Offer to support progress in education, training and employment. We know that some young people were not sighted on the Local Offer and to address this have ensured personal advisors are able to speak confidently about this and it is easily accessible via the email banners of all who work within the service. Ofsted found that ***“Care leavers are made aware of the local offer”***.
14. The service is currently participating in the Coram Bright Spots survey concluding on 11 March 2022 which evaluates the lived experience of care leavers and will be a useful source of information to drive service improvement.
15. The Local Offer is currently being updated with consultations sessions on the final draft document taking place in March 2022.

### **Transition to Independence - Education Attainment and post 16 destination**

16. In education terms, local authorities have a statutory duty to track the participation in education, training and employment of young people in national curriculum years 12 and 13 (the year in which young people traditionally turn 18). This is aligned to the Raising of the Participation Age legislation which requires local authorities to actively promote participation for all young people in years 12 and 13. Authorities were initially required to track all young people up to the end of year 14 but this was relaxed in 2016. As a consequence of this change and the introduction of GDPR, we have increasingly seen higher numbers of young people whose destinations are not known beyond year 13, in addition to those who actively opt out of having their information shared with the local authority
17. At the current time, detailed education, employment and training (EET) destination data for care leavers is recorded by different services rather than held by one central team. These include the Leaving Care team, Inclusion and

Additional Needs (within education) and the Virtual School's Progression to Independence team. This reflects specific statutory responsibilities and accountabilities which individual teams and services have around care leavers. The development of EYES (a product within Liquid logic) and 'Career Vision' is a positive step which will combine education and social care data to create a single view of the young person and contribute to better cohort level information around EET

18. [OFSTED](#) concluded in January 2022 that *“Most children in care make good progress in education, employment and training. Learning and leisure activities are explored well in plans and reviews.”* Feedback from care leavers at the most recent Corporate Parent Board also indicated that education had been a positive experience, with school and university settings promoting opportunities to them to develop their independence.

### **Access to Apprenticeships for Surrey Care Leavers**

19. Surrey links in to the Apprenticeship Ambassador Network in the South East to grow apprenticeship opportunities with local employers and the county has strong links with the Association of Learning Providers which will support the development of internships and other employment/training opportunities. SCC is also involved in Kickstart, the rollout of youth hubs has started and there is a renewed focus on traineeships. SCC already has a strong focus on supporting care leavers into Surrey CC apprenticeships, championed by the Corporate Parenting Board and supported by the User Voice and Participation and other teams including the Virtual School. SCC will also be using its procurement leverage to encourage commissioned services to embrace and demonstrate social values by offering apprenticeships to care experienced and other vulnerable young people.
20. It's important to recognise the impact of the pandemic. Many young people start their employment journeys via hospitality, services industries and retail – for example, both Gatwick and Heathrow are within travelling distance from Surrey, however the pandemic hit these industries hard during 2020-21 and entry level employment opportunities suffered during this time.

### **The Role of the Surrey Virtual School**

21. The Surrey Virtual School (SVS) has a small post 16 team who focus mainly on ensuring those young people in Years 12 and 13 (16–18-year-olds) have access to high quality education, employment and training (EET) and transition smoothly to post 16 settings. In line with its statutory remit, the Virtual School's focus is on children and young people currently looked after. Care leavers over the age of 18 who are still in Year 13 are included in the young people who receive a range of support and services from SVS. For those young people who still wish to have additional support as they continue their education into Year 14, the Virtual School continues to be involved, providing less intensive support. At the current time, the team has one education and employment adviser who provides support on a referral basis for young people aged 18-25.

22. Educational provision and the Virtual School's support for this group of young people have been a regular focus during the 2021 monitoring and focussed visits conducted by OFSTED. HMI noted that '*Personal education plans for children aged 16 and above are clearly focused to ensure that children can access appropriate learning or employment*' ([March 2021 Report](#)). HMI also observed that '*The virtual school provides helpful dedicated education and employment advice for care leavers and UAS young people. An extensive range of mentoring, and other well-targeted initiatives, helps many young people to make progress.*' ([September 2021](#)).
23. The bespoke approach to the education of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking young people encompass an assessment of English and first language skills delivered by REMA (the LA's specialist service) access to interpreters where needed, provision of a dictionary, laptop and online ESOL (English for speakers of other language) teaching, one to one tuition plus access to a range of educational activities developed by Big Leaf, a specialist charity.
24. As of January 2022, there were 356 young people in the Virtual School's Years 12 and 13 cohort (16–18-year-olds) of whom 80 or 22.5% were not in education employment or training (NEET). This compares to a cohort size of 304 in January 2021, of whom 88 or 29% were not in education, employment or training, a reduction of 6.5%.
25. The Virtual School has analysed the reasons and barriers for young people which prevent them accessing education employment and training – these were reported to Corporate Parenting Board in April 2021 and include:
- Scarcity of roll on roll off education or training provision in different locations and no powers of direction for the Virtual School to support admission to education as is the case for statutory school age children
  - Young people entering post 16 without qualifications in English and maths
  - Historical disengagement with education, including pre-care
  - Inconsistent experience of young people around careers advice information and guidance
  - SEND needs and or emotional/mental health needs
  - Pupil Premium Plus funding is not allocated for young people post 16 by the DFE
26. The Virtual School has already implemented a package of measures to address these barriers, including early identification of young people at risk of NEET, delivery of bespoke career's guidance and one to one coaching, the Virtual School's registration as an exam centre for Functional Skills in English and maths which provides flexible opportunities for young people to gain level 2 qualifications. SVS has also developed new partnerships with Training

Providers and third sector organisations to try and increase the availability of courses which can be joined midway through the academic year.

27. These measures have contributed to the reduction in NEET described in paragraph 26 above. The Virtual School's work in this area has impacted most keenly on young people in Year 12, where only 10.4% were NEET as of January 2022 compared with 27.3% in January 2021. The overall NEET figure for Year 12 and 13 is likely to fluctuate during the year but has remained below 25% since the start of the new academic year in September 2021.
28. The Surrey Virtual School is also delivering a post 16 pilot project currently for the DFE focussing on access to post 16 education, employment and training for young people, and is contributing to national research in this area.
29. A recent analysis by the Virtual School of young people who are NEET in Years 12 and 13 in January 2022 highlighted that of our 122 Y12/13 new to care since 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021,

• 4 were EET before entering care but are now NEET	3.3%
• 35 have remained NEET since coming into care	28.7%
• 22 have remained EET since coming into care	18%
• 59 were NEET before coming into care are now EET	48.4%
• 2 were long term missing	1.6%

30. Please note, this is the date each year identified by government as the cut of date for calculating the eligible cohort referred to in all published data.
31. The Virtual School has supported 59 young people into education employment and training since becoming looked after, and a further 22 to sustain their chosen post 16 EET destinations.

32. Whilst much is being done in years 10 and 11 to prevent young people from becoming NEET, it can be challenging to change the outcomes of those young people with a longer history of not engaging in education employment or training. To this end, in September 2021 'Grandmentors' was launched to provide bespoke mentoring for a cohort of 30 young people. This has been part funded during its first year by the Virtual School, and future funding for the next two years has been secured. Grandmentors is a mature organisation with a proven track record and infrastructure around mentoring care leavers and other young people from vulnerable groups. The following example from the Surrey Project Co-ordinator illustrates some of the impact Grandmentors is already making.

*I received a referral for a UASC who had hopes of one day studying Law.*

*I was fortunate enough that at the time I had a mentor who had trained and worked as a solicitor for many years and once I told him this, I could see the excitement in his face.*

*Shortly after, we arranged a match meeting for them and they just clicked.*

*They have met several times and together they have been looking at different universities, the qualifications required to get onto those courses and different areas of Law that may be of interest.*

*The mentor has kindly gifted him some old books of hers about the history and geography of the UK that she no longer reads.*

*Thanks to Grandmentors, this young man is able to receive specialised, one to one support in his area of interest that he would not have received otherwise. They are only 2 meetings in however I know that with the support and guidance of his mentor, he is destined for big things.*

33. The Virtual School links closely with the User Voice and Participation [UVP] team to identify the cohort of young people to be referred to Grandmentors pilot, identifying the other sources of support and information available to them via UVP. SVS has also further strengthened the links with Surrey's Alternative Provision and Participation teams so that we have a coherent offer across education and social care. SVS funds a post in this team to enable bespoke support to be provided to young people in care.

### **Access to further education (FE) and University**

34. The following table shows the number who have started their university course from 2017 to the current year.

2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-2
20	10	7	15	9

<b>2021-22 University</b>	<b>Course</b>
Southampton	Psychology
Greenwich	Primary Education
Williams College U.S.A.	Mathematics
Portsmouth	Business & Finance
West London	Paediatric Nursing
Greenwich	Electrical Engineering
Surrey	Law
Bristol UWE	Fashion and Communication
Roehampton	Diverse Dance

35. Surrey young people are studying a range of courses including Law & Politics, Game Design/Development, Game Design/Animation, Musical Theatre, Foundation Health Education & Well Being, Philosophy, Politics & Economics, Health & Social Care, Mental Health Nursing, Law& Criminology, Social Work, Public Services, Music, Veterinary Nursing and Animal behaviour, English with Law and Performing Arts.
36. SVS has linked up with Aim Higher for pre-HE mentoring and outreach work. Links are also in place with NNECL (National Network for the Education of Care Leavers), the Universities of Surrey and Sussex for Widening Participation events and bespoke pieces of work, ‘children in social care’ around access to HE planned for the next academic year.

### **Education, Employment and Training across the Care Leaver population**

37. Of the 814 young people in Surrey’s care leaver population aged 16 – 25, 68% are engaged in education, employment or training. In terms of DFE reporting 69% of 19 – 21 yr old care leavers in Surrey were reported as being in education, training or employment for quarter 3 of 2021/2022, this compares with South East Benchmarking data of 55% for the same period.
38. There are 294 asylum experienced care leavers within Surrey’s care leaver population. 84% [246] are engaged in education, employment or training with 15% [44] not engaged in education, employment or training. Social workers and personal advisors work closely with Virtual School to address the barriers

preventing access to education, employment and training for those up to the age of 18. We know that for some of this group delays in their asylum status being confirmed by the Home Office act as a barrier to accessing education, training or employment beyond 21.

39. Within the South West quadrant, a NEET clinic is being piloted to consider the specific needs of each care leaver who is not in education, employment or training and ensure the right support is in place to enable access. The pilot commenced in February 2022 and reviews all of the NEET care leavers with the Team Manager, the Virtual School and the Education lead workers in the team. The intention is to reduce the numbers of young people who are NEET and to generate a better understanding of young people's circumstances. The Virtual School Lead brings detailed knowledge of options available for young people. Whilst it is too early to assess the impact of the clinic it is hoped collaborative working with clear objectives will result in more young people accessing education, employment and training opportunities. If it is evidenced that focussed activity of this nature can drive improvement the intention would be to establish similar clinics in the other quadrants.
40. The service has recently met with the London based Drive Forward Foundation with a view to engaging their support in working with care leavers living in London and supporting them into employment, education or training. The organisation can facilitate differing levels of support according to individual need. This can range from supporting those with no experience of employment to develop the necessary skills and gain relevant work experience, to supporting those wanting to move from part time into full time employment and preparing for internships and apprenticeships. The only requirement is consent from the young person to be referred and motivation to engage with the foundation. This provides an excellent opportunity for those living in London to be supported into employment, education or training.

### **Transition to Independence – Financial Support**

41. In terms of financial support, Independent Living Allowance payments have been increased to £60 per week, enabling care leavers to access all of their financial entitlement. As the weekly universal credit payment is slightly below this level, paying a rounded-up total enables care leavers to physically access the full entitlement from their bank accounts. This is in line with recommendations from Mark Riddell, National Adviser for Care Leavers about actions which Local Authorities can undertake that make a big difference to care leavers. During the pandemic, additional financial support of £20 per week was provided to care leavers in receipt of Independent Living Allowance, matching the government scheme which continued to October 2021. Grant funding has also been secured at Christmas and Easter allowing additional £30 payments and most recently funding secured via the Household Support Fund to pay eligible care leavers £50 towards energy costs before the end of the 21/22 financial year.
42. As part of the pathway planning process, social workers or personal advisors

will discuss with young people all finance related issues, this is also supported by foster carers, residential carers and keyworking staff for those in independent accommodation. Colleagues in Surrey's residential homes developed a helpful guide which considers in detail all issues related to finance and the important elements young people need to be aware of. Young people are encouraged to engage in Education, Employment and Training opportunities in order to maximise their chances of being able to realise their aspirations and Virtual School offer a number of initiatives to increase participation in education, employment and training.

43. The Care Leavers Service is piloting a financial literacy course through The Money House, an accredited UK charity which delivers expert led financial education programmes. The sessions will be focussed on young people who are about to move into their own accommodation and have responsibility for managing a tenancy. The initial pilot will be with asylum experienced care leavers and consider all aspects of preparedness for independent living with a desired outcome of reducing the risk of homelessness and better equipping young people in the transition into their own accommodation. The Money House programmes evidence strong outcomes for care leavers who have accessed the courses in terms of positive management of tenancies and maintaining accommodation.
44. Care leavers have continued to benefit from Council Tax exemptions and all Surrey Districts and Boroughs will offer this to Surrey care leavers with effect from 1 April 2022 which will make a significant difference to easing financial pressures.
45. All care leavers in Further and Higher Education are in receipt of the relevant bursaries, £1200 per annum for those 16 – 19 in further education and £2000 per annum for those attending university. Personal advisors ensure that young people are sighted on their financial entitlements and are able to access these and the Local Offer also signposts to a range of organisations that can provide financial support.
46. All care leavers securing permanent housing are able to access the setting up home allowance of £2000 and are also supported with initial costs associated with setting up home as identified in the finance policy including one month's rent and deposit. We are currently in the process of finalising a rent guarantor scheme for care leavers who can evidence their ability to manage independent living successfully. The service has also started to engage with the Care Leaver Covenant with a view to establishing partnerships with a variety of local businesses and providers within Surrey that can create opportunities for care leavers both in terms of training and employment as well as potential financial savings.

### **Transition to Independence – Commissioning arrangements**

47. All local authorities have a statutory duty to secure (as far as reasonably

practicable) enough accommodation that meets the needs of looked after children and care leavers within the local area. Surrey has continued to make progress on this measure during 2021/22, reaching: 43.9% of care leavers accommodated in Surrey and 77.1% placed within 20 miles of the county as of December 2021. Compared to December 2020 where 40.68% of young people were accommodated in Surrey and 76.18% where within 20 miles of Surrey's borders.

48. Surrey County Council's Looked After Children and Care Leaver Sufficiency Strategy 2020-25 includes 5 key ambitions: Surrey homes for Surrey children; living in a family setting; a wide range of placements for diverse needs; homes of the highest quality; and support to move to independence. These principles underpin much of our thinking in terms of planning accommodation and support for care leavers. This work is currently being enhanced by resources and governance oversight provided through the Placement Value and Outcomes Transformation Programme, which covers a comprehensive range of projects and initiatives that are focussed on further improving the number of looked after children and care leavers who live in and contribute to Surrey's communities.
49. One key area of change that affects care leavers specifically, is the focussed work that has taken place to improve access to high-quality supported accommodation in Surrey. In September 2021, Surrey County Council became a Member of the Commissioning Alliance Dynamic Purchasing Vehicle for Semi-independent Accommodation and Support (hereafter Commissioning Alliance DPV), which is enabling us to work together with 18 other local authorities to assure and improve the quality of supported accommodation provision for young people, whilst also ensuring value for money. Central to this is the "Setting the Standard" quality accreditation that providers are required to secure as part of the Commissioning Alliance DPV, which provides confidence about the quality of accommodation and provision, ahead of the planned introduction of Ofsted regulation from April 2023 onwards.
50. Working through this arrangement and in support of Surrey homes for Surrey children, Surrey County Council has awarded new block contracts for provision based in the county for over 300 beds, increasing from the previous level of 229, to start from 1 April 2022. This will enable more care leavers to access quality assured provision locally in the county and for us to establish longer term relationships with a network of key providers to support collaboration, learning and improvement.
51. An added benefit of joining the Commissioning Alliance is the opening up of a new route for commissioning specific packages of floating support for care leavers who have moved into their own tenancies. This arrangement should enable us to better support young people's progression to independence.
52. Alongside quality assurance carried out at a cross-regional level through the Commissioning Alliance, Surrey County Council also undertakes its responsibilities for contract management and quality assurance – with the lead for this work sitting in the Gateway to Resources Resource Review Team. Since April 2021, strengthened quarterly contract monitoring meetings have

taken place with all providers on Surrey County Council's current Dynamic Purchasing System for Supported Accommodation for Young People (which comes to end on 31 March 2022). These have focused on set Key Performance Indicators, young people's outcomes as well as looking at young person's feedback. In addition to the contract monitoring meetings, property inspections and Quality Assurance (QA) visits are undertaken on both an announced and unannounced basis.

53. Alongside this, since September 2021 we have been rolling out Outcomes Star training to all our commissioned Supported Accommodation providers. Outcomes Star is an evidence-based tool to enable improved person-centred practice and measure the difference that is being made to young people's lives through supported accommodation provision. When all providers have received Outcomes Star training the expectation is that monthly report will be sent to personal advisors to evidence the progress that it being made against defined preparation for adulthood outcomes.
54. As part of the on-going improvement in our approach to support better outcomes for young people in supported accommodation, a review of the forms used to undertake quality assurance visits has been undertaken. A decision has been made to use the standard templates developed by the Children's Cross Regional Arrangements Group (CCRAG – a network of local authorities who work together to share quality assurance information and best practice) for all quality assurance visits as of April 2022. The use of these templates we ensure focus on the lived experience of care leavers in the provision where they are living. We are also exploring adoption of the Commissioning Alliance property inspection forms for supported accommodation, again looking to improve our practice in collaboration with other local authorities.
55. As part of our work to further improve accommodation and support pathways for care leavers, we have begun exploring the potential to implement the [Care Leaver Accommodation and Support Framework](#) (St Basil's and Barnardos) in Surrey. This would provide a clear structure for our future work to develop and improve pathways for care leavers. In response to this, we are working to develop a new pilot of Houses of Multiple Occupation with floating support, as a bridging option to support care leavers to progress from supported accommodation into their own tenancies. Our current plan is to use SCC capital to purchase property and then commission floating support from a third party provider to create and deliver up to 30 beds over the next 18 months, through to summer 2023.

### **Transition to Independence – Care Leaver Accommodation**

56. In accordance with the DfE definition "accommodation is considered to be suitable if it provides safe, secure and affordable provision for young people ...it would generally include short term accommodation designed to move young people on to stable long-term accommodation but would exclude emergency accommodation used in a crisis".

57. As of 28 February 2022, 92% of Surrey Care Leavers between the ages of 16 - 25 are living in suitable accommodation. Over the course of the last year there has been considerable focus on ensuring that practitioners are aware of the importance of housing registration being progressed as close to 16 as possible for all eligible young people. We have also recently introduced performance reporting via Tableau, this is linked to the pathway plan being updated at six monthly intervals and capturing housing registration. In due course this should provide a helpful guide to identify those not yet registered alongside the scrutiny of the accommodation panels [see paragraph 54]. As identified in the Care Leavers Service plan 2020/21, we are involving Housing Officers in pathway planning meetings with the consent of the young person. Currently approximately 62% of all Care Leavers are registered with Housing and as pathway plans are updated we expect this total to increase. We encourage care leavers to register for housing with more than one borough in Surrey to increase the likelihood of securing social housing whilst also exploring privately rented options. Registration in Surrey can take place alongside registration in a borough outside of Surrey. Ofsted found that **“most care leavers are in accommodation that meets their needs. While many care leavers are supported to get permanent housing which is suitable and safe, the sufficiency and availability of accommodation for some care leavers are limited.”**. Our sufficiency strategy continues to focus on this area and the development of accommodation options which meet identified needs.
58. Social housing is one option available to young people post 18 but not all district and boroughs are able to meet the demand for care leaver accommodation, an issue that was recognised in the January 2022 Ofsted inspection. For those placed outside of Surrey they are subject to the housing allocation policies of the areas where they are living, contingent on having established a local connection there. For all care leavers it is important they develop the skills to manage a tenancy in either the social housing or privately rented sectors with the support of their personal advisors. Some care leavers opt to remain with their foster families under a Staying Put arrangement through to 21, others will opt for Supported Lodgings arrangements available through to 25. For those with needs indicating they require a greater level of support whilst they build on their independence skills, there are a variety of time limited supported accommodation options available. With the development of the Commissioning Alliance Framework supported accommodation capacity within Surrey will increase by 100 beds from April 2022 enabling care leavers to be located within Surrey, closer to their existing networks.
59. In order to ensure good understanding of post 18 accommodation arrangements, accommodation panels were introduced for all young people aged 17 in each of the quadrants in April & May 2021. The panels meet six times per year and their purpose is to ensure that Children’s Services and Housing have clear accommodation plans in place for all 17 yr olds. The panels are chaired by the Looked After and Care Leavers Service Managers and include Care Leaver and Housing representatives with the discussion considering housing registration, ability to live independently, whether Staying Put is being considered and actions to achieve, the young person’s ability to manage a tenancy and their risk of homelessness. The accommodation plan

is captured in the young person's pathway plan. Feedback from the meetings is positive. We know from discussions with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities this can be one mechanism which facilitates early identification of those at risk of homelessness allowing measures to be implemented which reduce the likelihood of this. There are also two dedicated homelessness prevention officers within the care leavers service who work countywide to address promptly with personal advisors and young people any emerging housing issues. All looked after children and care leavers have access to the advocacy contract with Coram to advise on issues related to housing and homelessness and personal advisors have received bespoke training from Shelter regarding tenancies and tenancy management.

60. For young people living in London boroughs, particularly those seeking asylum, there is often a belief that they will be able to secure social housing within London. Given the demand for accommodation in London it is highly unlikely that a young person would be able to secure social housing via this route. Social workers and personal advisors have ongoing discussions with young people to manage expectations around this and encourage registrations with housing in Surrey boroughs. Workstreams aligned to the sufficiency strategy are also exploring how more in-house provision can be developed including step down options in areas where there are high numbers of young people seeking asylum. This would enable continuity of education or training for the young person and also provide more cost-effective provision for the local authority with associated support costs aligned to the young person's needs as opposed to contracted hours.
61. The last year has seen more collaborative working with colleagues in Property and Commissioning as we look at the existing resources available within Surrey and what opportunities there may be to deliver in house supported accommodation options for Care Leavers. A number of sites are being considered for the development of supported accommodation and plans have been shared with the Participation Officers within User Voice and Participation seeking their views on design considerations.

### **Transition to Independence – Impact of Out of Area Placements**

62. Surrey's ambition is to reduce the numbers of young people coming into the care of the local authority through a solid offer of Early Help interventions, the Family Safeguarding model and the embedding of the No Wrong Door approach which seeks to enable children to remain safely within their families.
63. When children do need to become looked after and go on to become care leavers, Surrey's Sufficiency Strategy has been developed on the premise of Surrey Homes for Surrey Children. It is acknowledged that it will take time for the impact of these approaches to be evidenced.
64. For many of our care leavers living outside of but close to the Surrey borders and well established within their local communities, it would not necessarily be appropriate for them to return to live in Surrey. However, for those newly

looked after, particularly teenagers, the ambition is for them to reside within Surrey. There are clear benefits for Surrey care leavers from living within Surrey in terms of access to a range of local services which may not be as easily accessible in a different local authority and easier contact with the professionals working alongside them. There are also practical and economic benefits for the local authority in terms of personal advisors spending less time travelling to locations outside of Surrey, more established relationships with local professionals and greater understanding of access to local services and resources. It is also more likely that those living in Surrey will be prioritised for services.

65. Given the current reality, personal advisors have become well versed in liaising with professionals in other local authorities to secure relevant services and as an authority we are looking at opportunities to work collaboratively with organisations operating where we have groups of care leavers placed to promote relevant opportunities for them [e.g., Drive Forward Foundation]. The migration workers based in the asylum teams continue to develop good links with local charities and faith-based communities to ensure the needs of asylum experienced care leavers can be promoted locally and we can shift the narrative amongst some newly arrived asylum experienced young people of wanting to reside in a London borough.

#### **Conclusions:**

66. The Care Leavers Service has made positive progress over the course of the last year. There has been helpful feedback from the Ofsted Monitoring Visit from September 2021 and full inspection in January 2022 alongside internal scrutiny informed by quality assurance stocktakes and the audit programme. There will be further feedback from the Coram Bright Spots survey findings. Collectively these are contributing to the development of a solid platform from which to further develop and strengthen the service ensuring it continues to be responsive to the needs of Surrey's care leavers.

#### **Recommendations:**

67. The Select Committee notes the Care Leavers Annual report.
68. For continued scrutiny of the activity to reduce care leavers who are not engaged in education, employment and training and how Surrey as an organisation can collectively work to reduce the number of care leavers who are NEET.

#### **Next steps:**

Identify future actions and dates.

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