



'Are you mindful?'

Slough's Care Leavers' Strategy 2017

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Letter to Slough's Care Leavers

In December 2016, at our Trust's annual staff event, we were challenged, in an articulate and thoughtful presentation by care leavers, to always ask ourselves 'Are you being mindful?' as we go about our work.

Slough Children's Services Trust, alongside Slough Borough Council, as equal Corporate Parents, has taken up this challenge, and this Strategy sets out our joint priorities for supporting you, our care leavers.

The Slough Care Leavers' Strategy builds on the Slough Corporate Parenting Strategy 2016-2018, which sets out our broader commitment to all our looked after children and care leavers. The priorities in this Strategy are focused on what we are doing and what we plan to do, to deliver the promises we've made to you.

Being mindful means listening to and understanding the needs of our care leavers. It's about making sure your voices are heard and that we've fully understood what you're telling us.

We know that, in the past, care leavers didn't always get the right support or help to move out of care into full time work or education, to live somewhere safe or to have the same opportunities as others.

As a new Trust, working well - and effectively - alongside Slough Borough Council, we're doing all we can to put that right. We can't eradicate the past but we can guide you to a better, more hopeful future.

Signed:

Councillor Sabia Hussain
Cabinet Member for
Children's services

Roger Parkin
Interim Chief Executive
Slough Borough Council

Nicola Clemo
Chief Executive
Slough Children's
Services Trust

Jo Moxon
Director of Childrens Services
Slough Borough Council

This strategy sets out the WHAT, HOW and WHEN. It tells you, in one document, about all the strands of work that are under way to improve our service to you.

This strategy isn't about ticking boxes. It's about letting you - our care leavers - know what we're doing to make sure that, while you're in our care and after you leave, that you have the same life chances as your peers, whether living in Slough or outside the Borough.

To make that work, we're promising to join forces. That means the active engagement of all Slough Borough Council's elected members, officers of the Council, all Trust staff and our partner agencies. We have the highest aspirations for you and that means working together, so you can reach your full potential and know that we're supporting you, every step of the way.

We are committed to ensuring you are provided with the best possible care and support. This strategy supports this commitment by being mindful, listening and delivering the services you need to live safe, happy, healthy and successful lives.

Statements from care leavers

"In the past, I've been introduced to my new social worker or personal advisor, it takes time to build a relationship with them and then they leave. But, I have a new personal advisor who I now get on with and have good relationships with."

"I have been involved in recruiting and selecting personal advisors which I've really enjoyed. It is so important that young people are involved in interviewing staff to make sure the Trust is recruiting the right people to provide the right support that care leavers need."

"I have represented the Reach Out! group at the Joint Corporate Parenting Board. It was a good experience. It gave me a chance to raise my concerns or things I wasn't sure about. It's so important for young people to be a part of the Joint Corporate Parenting Board."

Children in Care Council (Reach Out!) Participation Officer feedback

'Slough care leavers who attended the recent Young People's Benchmarking Forum (YPBMF) were particular keen to showcase how well the apprentice scheme was working for care leavers in Slough. Young People spoke confidently about the new apprenticeship plans to recruit care leavers and the support package they will receive. This feedback was very well received by young people and staff from different parts of the county'

Vision

This strategy sets out how, in Slough, we plan to improve our corporate parenting so, like any other young person, you have the right support and opportunities to go on to have safe, secure and successful lives.

Our vision includes listening to you, involving you, letting you know what we're doing for you and being mindful of what we do and say, so that you feel part of the decision-making about your future and that you're not alone on that journey.

Our Objectives (WHAT we'd like you, as our care leavers, to have)

- **High quality care.** We'll offer nurturing, supportive and meaningful relationships that develop and encourage your self-esteem, confidence and resilience. This will help you cope better with change and any difficult times, just like any parents would offer to teenagers and young adults
- **The highest standard of education.** We will help you achieve your full potential, according to your needs and abilities
- **Health and wellbeing.** We'll offer you opportunities and encouragement for self development and ways to keep fit and healthy
- **Life skills.** We'll offer you encouragement to take up hobbies, acquire new skills and ways to be a good citizen
- **Opportunities for further education, employment and training.** This will include open days, work placements, apprenticeships and help with applying to further education
- **The right kind of housing.** We'll offer you assistances with the transition from care to looking after yourself, including the provision of suitable accommodation.

Our Priorities (WHAT we're going to do)

- 1) Improve the support and contact we have with you, our care leavers
- 2) Improve the availability and access to education, employment and training opportunities
- 3) Ensure you have suitable, appropriate accommodation
- 4) Involve you in helping us shape our services

HOW we'll do this:

- Visiting you every six weeks
- Increasing our numbers of Personal Advisors and their capacity to provide you with the necessary level of support needed
- Ensuring our pathway planning is clear and effective, built around your needs and aspirations
- Providing support for increasing levels of independence, including advice on budgeting, how to cook, clean and other independent living skills
- Providing options for you, whether that's in your accommodation choices, or your education/careers
- Strengthening transition support, from children's to adult services our services to you, through the Transitions Forum and by your involvement in recruitment of our staff, presentations to staff/partners, awards events, discussions at the Joint Parenting Panel, input into training for staff and elected members and developing an effective Care Leavers Forum

The Delivery Plan (HOW we're going to deliver this strategy)

So, we've covered what we want to do and the priorities we're going to focus on but you need to know what it is we're doing to do for you. A strategy is an 'overarching' document. It sets out where we want to be in the future but it's equally important to set out, in detail, how we're going to do that and that is in an action plan.

The action plan includes all sorts of targets, the people involved, what they need to do and by when and it constantly changes. You can ask to see the action plan at any time but, to summarise what we'll be doing as a priority and how, we've set out below what success looks like for each of the promises we've made.

1) Better support and contact: HOW it'll be different:

- At your last pre 18 Children Look After review, plans for 18+ are clear and funding is agreed. The transitions process between services is smooth and centred around you
- You'll have a say about where you will be living and what support you will get, with more opportunities for 'staying put' in your foster home, if you want to
- You will feel you are supported well by all agency partners, to achieve your goals.

2) Improved Skills for Education, Employment and Training: HOW it'll be different:

- An improvement in the numbers of all our care leavers in Employment, Training and Education (EET), including aspiring high for University, or apprenticeships
- Wider work options explored with the council, the Trust and its partners to ensure new opportunities are progressed for you and we identify appropriate options for individual young people.

3) Suitable Accommodation (for a list, see Appendix C): HOW it'll be different:

- All care leavers will have appropriate housing which is planned. You will have choice and we will make sure you are able to support yourself to live independently
- An increase in stable and suitable accommodation, both for emergencies and planned moves
- An increase in the number of our care leavers who reach the outcomes outlined in their individual Pathway Plans and who report that they feel safe in their accommodation.

4) Involvement of Care Leavers in shaping services. HOW it'll be different:

Care leavers will be involved in the recruitment of key employees within the Trust and Council

- Care leavers will be given the opportunities to present their experiences and views to staff and partner agencies, through staff training sessions, staff conferences, elected member briefings, and the Joint Parenting Panel
- Care leavers will be given opportunities to attend national events for care leavers

Appendix A

Definition of a care leaver:

A care leaver is defined as a person aged 25 or under, who has been looked after by a local authority for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14; and who was looked after by the local authority or Trust at school-leaving age or after that date.

“Looked after”, or “in the care of the local authority or a Trust” includes at home under a care order, in foster care, in local authority accommodation, or under the care of family, friends or connected persons.

Local context:

In February 2016, the Ofsted inspection of Leaving Care services highlighted that:

Care leavers receive a disjointed service and they do not have an arena to express their views. They say that they do not feel safe where they live. Too many care leavers have frequent changes of worker and go for long periods without seeing their personal advisor. Pathway plans are not always up to date or useful and managers have not overseen this work well enough. However, some personal advisors and social workers develop helpful and meaningful relationships with young people. Young people’s support workers enable care leavers to access and sustain employment, education or training and many more care leavers in Slough are engaged with these activities than in other areas. Accommodation for care leavers is not sufficient and does not always meet young people’s needs. Not enough young people benefit from remaining with their foster carers into adulthood.

The young people who are part of the Children in Care Council (CiCC) are keen to make a difference, but leaders have not been proactive or creative enough in helping them to have an influence within the council. The corporate parenting board has not fulfilled its duty to children looked after well.

In response, Slough Borough Council and Slough Children’s Services Trust launched a joint Slough Corporate Parenting Strategy. This committed the council and Trust to delivering six key priorities, that our looked after children and care leavers would be:

- 1) supported by strong and effective corporate parenting;
- 2) enabled to reach their educational potential;
- 3) encouraged to keep safe;
- 4) encouraged to develop positive relationships;
- 5) respected and engaged in planning for their future, and supported as they move into adulthood; and
- 6) supported to have good health and wellbeing.

The new Joint Parenting Panel oversees the delivery of these priorities, and those contained in this Strategy. The Joint Parenting Panel is the primary vehicle for Slough Borough Council elected members and the Non-Executive Directors of Slough Children’s Services Trust to demonstrate their commitment to deliver better outcomes for children and young people in care and care leavers.

Slough has 179 care leavers (February 2017), with 54.7% living in the Borough.

Appendix B - Key legislation, legal and policy framework

- Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations: Volumes 2 and 3 Transitions to adulthood for care leavers
- Care Leavers Charter
- If this were my child - A Councillor's Guide to being a Good Corporate Parent (2003)
- Making the Difference - Putting the care back into corporate parenting (2007)
- Care Matters: time to deliver for children in care (2008)
- Children and Young Persons Act 2008
- The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000
- Carers and Disabled Children Act 2000
- The Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010
- IRO Handbook (2010)
- Care Leavers Strategy 2013
- The Care Act 2014
- Care Leavers Transitions to Adulthood - National Audit Office report (July 2015)
- Keep on Caring - Supporting Young People from Care to Independence (July 2016)

Appendix C - Suitable Accommodation

Care leavers need access to a range of accommodation options, and the support and skills to maintain themselves in their accommodation.

Accommodation available to care leavers aged 18 and over includes:

- Staying Put - enabling a young person to remain in their foster home beyond the age of 18
- Living with parent(s) or other family members (referred to as Family, Friends or Connected Persons)
- Supported Housing and Support Lodgings (External and Internal Providers)
- Social rented accommodation from the local council or a housing association
- Private rented accommodation
- Emergency accommodation

Appendix D - Care Leavers' Charter

Slough Borough Council and Slough Children's Services Trust will build upon the work undertaken by our care leavers in 2014 to develop a local Care Leavers' Charter. This work will take into account any requirements in the Children and Social Work Bill.

The Government is also separately introducing the Care Leaver Covenant. This will be a voluntary version of the 'local offer' that organisations other than local authorities (other public bodies, businesses, and the voluntary sector) can sign up to, setting out their offer to care leavers. Slough Children's Services Trust and Slough Borough Council will promote the take up of this by local partners.

