

Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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Care Leavers Accommodation

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Summary

This report will provide the Committee with an overview of accommodation for care leavers aged 18+, allocated within the 16+ Service.

In September 2023 Ofsted graded the experiences and progress of care leavers as Good, stating *"the service for care leavers has significantly improved since the previous inspection in 2019. Personal advisers are strong advocates for their young people. They know young people well and are committed, caring and dedicated to improving their lives."*

At the of March 2025 there were 136 children in care aged 15-17 in the 16+ service, and 202 care leavers aged 18-25. Children in care are supported by a social worker and by personal advisors as they turn 18 and leave care.

1. Recommendation

- 1.1. The Committee is asked to note the information in relation to accommodation for care leavers.

2. Budget and policy framework

- 2.1 The Children and Social Work Act 2017 placed a duty on Local Authorities to have regard to seven Corporate Parenting principles when exercising a function to children in care and care experienced young people. The principles are:

- To act in the best interests and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, of those children and young people.
- To encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings.

- To take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people.
- To help those children and young people gain access to and make the best use of services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners.
- To promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people.
- For those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and
- To prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

2.2 The Children and Social Work Act 2017 extended Local Authorities duties to offer advice and support to young people up to the age of 25 years irrespective of being in education or not. This Act required Local Authorities to publish a Local offer for care leavers.

2.3 The Council has duties to provide support to care experienced young people under the Children Act 1989 and the Children and Social Work Act 2017. The proposals set out in this report will enhance and strengthen Medway Council's ability to carry out these duties.

2.4 The Children Act 1989, and the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 remain the general legal framework for young people in and leaving care. More recently legislation has been updated to supplement these provisions.

2.5 The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2010 extended the types of services and the upper age limits of the young people local authorities were responsible for as corporate parents. The act set out four groups who would be eligible for support from local authorities. These are:

- **Eligible** – A child aged 16 and 17 and currently “looked after”, either on a Care Order (Sec31 of the Children Act 1989) or accommodated (Section20). To be “Eligible” the young person must have been looked after for a period of 13 weeks, or periods amounting in total to 13 weeks, which began after their 14th birthday and ended after their 16th birthday.
- **Relevant**– A child aged 16 and 17 who have been looked after for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and who has left care on or after their 16th birthday. Young people who have a planned move back to a parent (s) or someone with parental responsibility. After the first 6 months period the young person becomes a Qualifying Child.
- **Former relevant** – A young person over 18 who was previously ‘eligible’ or ‘relevant’ Local Authorities support this group at least until the age of 25 unless the young person has stated in their Pathway Plan that they no longer need a service from LBWF post their 21st birthday.
- **Qualifying**– A young person aged 16-21 who left care on or after their 16th birthday and who was looked after for less than 13 weeks since

their 14th birthday. Also, a 'relevant child' who has returned home for six months or more.

- 2.6 The Children and Young Person Act 2008 provided guidance to Local Authorities on how to support young people in and transitioning from care.
- 2.7 Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care leavers sets out Local Authorities responsibilities towards Care Leavers. It includes setting the frequency of visits, higher education bursary and extension of support to young people aged 25 and the option of returning for an assessment up to the age of 25.
- 2.8 Also, as Medway Council is part of the National Transfer Scheme all unaccompanied minors are allocated within the 16+ Service. When they turn 18 and become a care leaver the duty to Medway remains. The guidance is that Medway Council may provide accommodation and financial assistance to care leavers when, due to their immigration status, they have no access to welfare benefits, council housing or homelessness assistance at the time they reach 18, i.e., they have no recourse to public funds (NRPF). This duty arises from section 23C(4)(c) of the Children Act 1989, which forms part of the wider leaving care responsibilities that Local Authorities have towards children who have been looked after under section 20 of that Act for a period of at least 13 weeks since they were 14 ('former looked after children'). Such duties apply until the young person is 21 or older if they are undertaking a programme of education or training (up until they turn 25). The Local Authority no longer has a duty as a corporate parent to safeguard the welfare of former looked after children who are visa overstayers, have never regularised their status, or are 'appeal rights exhausted' following an unsuccessful asylum claim when they are 18 or older. Instead, accommodation and financial support will be available to such destitute care leavers from either the Home Office, or local authority when very specific circumstances apply.
- 2.9 The recognition of care experience as a protected characteristic by Medway Council was agreed in 2024 but is not currently one of the protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.

3 Background

- 3.1 The 16+ service has a cohort of 18–25-year-old care leavers. We have 202 open young people entitled to a care leavers service (as of 17th April 2025). 38 of these are over 21 years old, where a reduced service is offered in general and is based on a needs assessment.
- 3.2 The 16+ service has 4 teams and a combination of personal advisors and social workers and specialist roles including a housing advisor, participation officer, aspirations officer and a parent support practitioner.
- 3.3 The 16+ service also holds the unaccompanied minors transferred to Medway as part of the National Transfer Scheme. Since October 2023 Medway has taken 63 transfers. There are currently 40 unaccompanied minors under 18

allocated to 3 UASC social workers. 13 have turned 18 and are now allocated to personal advisors.

3.4 Our young people age between 16 to 18 years old are accommodated in:

- ✓ Kinship placements;
- ✓ foster placement provided in house or via independent fostering agencies;
- ✓ residential settings, in line with their assessed needs;
- ✓ supported homes provided in house or
- ✓ outsourced supported accommodations, with variable level of support, depending on young people's assessed needs.

All these accommodation options are supported financially by Medway Children Services under its duties. Medway funds supported accommodation as an option for 16+ young people to provide support via key working sessions while living in semi-independent accommodation. This is via contracts with Medway, facilitated by Medway Commissioning Service.

3.5 The accommodation options available to care leavers are:

3.5.1 **Staying Put** - Staying Put is where young people aged eighteen and older, who were previously looked after, remain living with their former foster carer/s (who may also remain a foster carer for younger children). The aim is to ensure young people can remain with their former foster carers until they are prepared for adulthood, can experience a transition akin to their peers, avoid social exclusion and be more likely to avert a subsequent housing and tenancy breakdown. Once the child reaches the age of eighteen and legal adulthood, the local authority is no longer making a placement, but facilitating a "Staying Put" arrangement for the young person.

3.5.2 **Shared Lives** (where disabilities and adult services criteria is met) - Shared Lives is a Medway adult social care service where individuals with learning disabilities, mental health problems, or other support needs are matched with approved carers in their local community. These carers share their home, family, and community life with the person they support, providing care and support. It's an alternative to traditional care homes, offering a more personalised and integrated approach to care.

3.5.3 **Supported Accommodation** – Medway Council commissioned supported accommodation combines housing with support services designed to help care leavers live independently or transition to social housing. It can be short-term or long-term, depending on individual needs and the nature of the support required. There are keyworkers who provide the support to the young people while in the accommodation to help them to prepare to live independently.

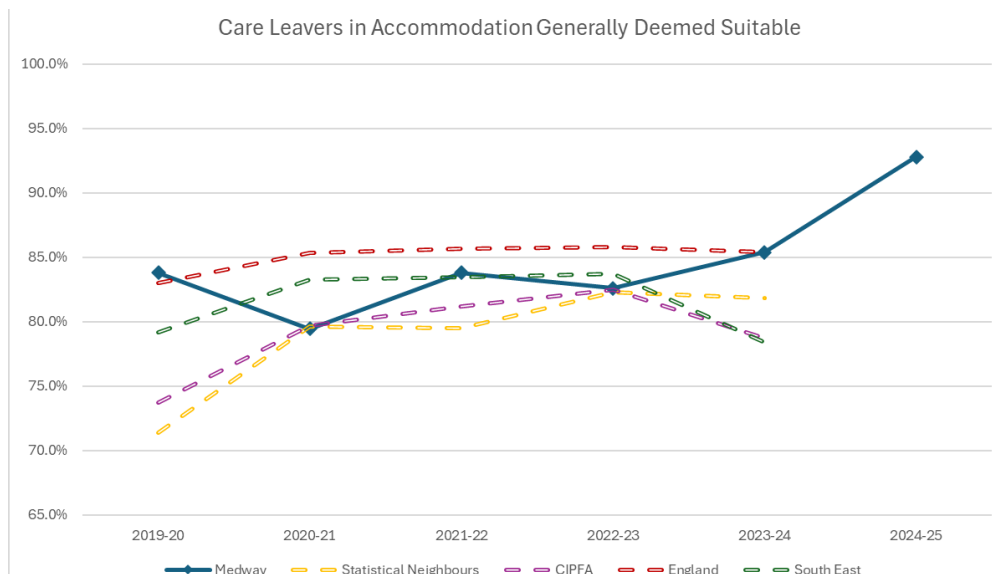
- 3.5.4 **Supported Homes** - Medway Supported Homes is a scheme that is run by Medway Council. Through this arrangement the young person will live within a home environment in the local area and will have the benefit of extra support from the Supported Homes host who they live with, if they need it. Supported Homes carers or 'hosts' live in 'every day' homes and the young person will have their own front door key and own private bedroom space and access to all the home facilities. The young person will pay a small contribution towards food and rent for their room to help get them ready for independence and there are some 'shared house rules' to make sure that the house works well for everyone.

NB. Accommodation options listed above are supported financially by social care, children or adults, in line with the young person's assessed needs and are available to provide additional support and guidance to become prepared for a tenancy of their own.

- 3.5.5 **Private tenancy or Social Housing tenancy**- social housing and private tenancies are available for those who have affordability and have evidenced the ability to maintain a tenancy of their own; they come with their own criteria not set by the care leavers service.
- 3.5.6 **Return to living arrangements with family/ friends** if this is their wish - where appropriate and safe to do so.
- 3.6 The 16+ service manager continues to hold monthly meetings with housing, finance and commissioning colleagues to discuss and prepare 'move on plans' for 18+ young people who remain in supported accommodation funded by Children's Services. In April 2022 there were 43 young people in social housing tenancies, at the end of March 2025 there were 60. Please see breakdown under 3.15.
- 3.7 The 32 young people (March 2025) in supported accommodation includes 7 funded by housing benefit and/ or by Adult Services, therefore not all will be at cost to children's services. There are 25 young people aged 18+ funded by children's services in supported accommodation and move on panel, as referred in paragraph 4.6, is being utilised to support these young people to secure accommodation via housing.
- 3.8 The 2 foyers in Medway, Springboard and Endeavour, offer a good standard of supported accommodation options and work well with young people to prepare for independence and avoid homelessness.
- 3.9 Young people and care leavers are supported by the specialist housing advisor, who will provide tenancy training. The timing of providing the tenancy preparation training to young people varies; some are ready earlier than others. It would appear we are now able to intervene earlier to reduce accommodation instability. The tenancy training sessions cover amongst other things:
- ✓ looking for appropriate accommodation.
 - ✓ their rights as a tenant and those of their landlord.

- ✓ budgeting their money and prioritising their bills.
- ✓ dealing with debt.
- ✓ preparation for the moving day and their responsibilities.
- ✓ being a good tenant; how to avoid problems where possible; and
- ✓ using their setting up home grant wisely.

- 3.10 The specialist housing advisor will also provide training to colleagues within the team on how to access different types of housing, in line with the care leavers' assessed needs, to increase knowledge and resilience in the service and to ensure our care leavers receive the best possible support and representation.
- 3.11 An independence booklet is used in the service with young people to prepare them for independent living and help them to maintain a tenancy. This is currently under review to ensure it is purposeful and helpful and will include a working group and care leavers to develop it. The independence booklet will be devised to reflect young people's individual needs and the support they require to achieve different stages of independent living skills.
- 3.12 The service provides a setting up home grant to care leavers to use for essential items when setting up their own home. Care leavers are supported by their personal advisors to plan and buy items that are deemed necessary and to ensure their first home is as homely and well equipped as possible.
- 3.13 Medway Council also provide council tax exemption for all care leavers up to the age of 25 where they are holding a tenancy in their name. This financial support has been very welcomed by our care leavers.
- 3.14 The 16+ service has continued to advocate on behalf of the young people they support to ensure they are afforded suitable accommodation. In doing so, the service has developed positive working relationships with housing, commissioning and fostering service, together exploring accommodation options for our young people that suitably meet their needs. As such, 96% of care leavers are in suitable accommodation. This suggests significant and continual improvement from the end of 2023-24 (85.4%) and 82.6% the year prior, attributable to an improvement in recording of address tenure types. By contrast, the level observed at the end of 2023-24 was 85.4% nationally, and 81.8% and 78.7% in our statistical and CIPFA neighbours respectively.



3.15 This is the current accommodation as of 31 March 2025.

Accommodation for 18- 21+	Total
Adult commissioned placement	11
Care home	1
Fam/friends - LT	18
Fam/friends - ST	8
Foyer	10
Lodger	1
Owner occupier	1
Resi Home/Hospital	2
Residential School	4
Shared Lives	5
Staying put	26
Supported accommodation	36
Supported home	5
Tenant - HA	44
Tenant - LA etc	7
Tenant - Private	9
Prison	5
Sofa surfing	1
Temporary accommodation	6
Unknown	1
YOI	1
[Total]	202

3.16 The 16+ service will continue to work in partnership with housing colleagues, commissioning colleagues and fostering services in relation to supported homes and staying put arrangements to increase the number of care leavers who can access such accommodation provisions post 18 years old. This will

provide them with greater stability while they are actively supported to develop their independent living skills and confidently move to live independently

- 3.17 For young people who are not ready to live independently and/ or staying put arrangements, supported homes or return to live with parents/ friends is not an option, there continues to be discussions with supported accommodation providers by commissioning colleagues about the contracts and cost arrangements, and often successfully negotiate costs to meet the needs of the young people while providing savings to the Council.

4. Advice and analysis

- 4.1 Medway Council publishes the Local Offer to care leavers which sets out the accommodation offer in Medway, amongst other issues, and how to access the different options. In September 2023 Ofsted said, *“the care leaver offer is easily accessible and details the statutory and supplementary support and assistance that young people are entitled to receive”*.
- 4.2 In the September 2023 Ofsted report stated *“Personal advisers support care leavers to develop the skills and confidence to live more independently. Care leavers told inspectors that when they moved into their own accommodation, they felt well prepared. While most care leavers live in suitable accommodation which meets their needs, there is a lack of choice of accommodation for some young people with the most complex needs, resulting in a minority living in temporary accommodation. The specialist housing adviser helps personal advisers and young people navigate housing processes, which prevents homelessness. A good number of care leavers benefit from continuing to live with their foster carers when they turn 18, either via staying put or shared lives arrangements.”*
- 4.3 Fewer care leavers are facing homelessness due to earlier intervention from both housing and the 16+ service which means more effective preparation and joint working is in place, if an eviction or loss of accommodation are a risk.
- 4.4 The increased use of in house Supported Homes option is also a positive option for young people meaning they have a secure home when leaving supported accommodation or foster placements. Alongside staying put arrangements, these remain the two main accommodation options for young people to access while they are being supported to further develop their independent living skills and move to live independently.
- 4.5 The quality of temporary accommodation is being reviewed, and we continue to work with providers, housing, and the Quality Assurance Accommodation team to ensure we advocate for young people, and they are housed in accommodations that are deemed suitable.
- 4.6 Housing outside of Medway continues to offer some difficulties, although there are now better links with the housing and services in other areas for support and advice. Therefore, we are working tirelessly to support young people to

return to Medway, to an area they are familiar with and have links to, and to support them to secure and maintain suitable accommodation.

5 Consultation

- 5.1 Children and young people are consulted with, to look at services on offer and services that may be missing. This is done alongside Young Lives Foundation where appropriate. Annual care leavers survey is being carried out and care leavers' views regarding their accommodations needs is being captured and analysed.
- 5.2 There is currently in place a Young Inspectors Project where care leavers are working with the 16+ service and commissioning colleagues to be trained to undertake Quality Assurance inspections of supported accommodation in Medway. Once this is in place and underway a report will be provided by the lead commissioner on the project.

6. Climate change implications

- 6.1 [The Council declared a climate change emergency in April 2019](#) - item 1038D refers, and has set a target for Medway to become carbon neutral by 2050.
- 6.2 Many complex young people are placed outside of Medway, many at considerable distances away to find appropriate residential provision and or education. This means a significant journey on a regular basis for a number of professionals as well as parents and carers. Bringing young people back to Medway will significantly reduce the carbon footprint created by travel.

7. Financial implications

- 7.1 The delivery of the 16+ service, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children service, care leavers, and supported accommodation placements are mainly funded by existing revenue budgets.
- 7.2 The 16+ service has a 2025-26 operating budget of £2.059m compared to the £1.700m it spent last year.
- 7.3 The unaccompanied asylum-seeking children service is part funded by a grant from the home office based on the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and asylum care leavers we support and house. For 2025-26 the UASC service has an operating budget of £3.432m of which £1.326m is funded from revenue budgets and £2.106m is funded by the home office grant. For the 2024-25 financial year the UASC service spent £2.979m of which £0.947m was funded from Council revenue budgets and £2.032m is funded by the home office grant.
- 7.4 The care leavers supported accommodation placement budgets as outlined in section 3.5 above has a £2.941m operating budget for the 2025-26 financial year compared to the £2.118m it spent last year. Included within this budget is the supported accommodation move on review savings target. For 2025-26,

this target has been set at £150,000 compared to the £275,000 saving target set last year of which £286,914 was achieved.

8. Legal implications

- 8.1 This report does not seek to make any changes that have any legal implications.

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Appendices

None

Background papers

None