

Redcar & Cleveland Council Care Leaver Covenant



Thriving children, fulfilling their dreams.



The Care Leaver Covenant

Redcar & Cleveland Council have signed up to the Care Leaver Covenant, a government led agenda to create opportunities for Care Leavers.

This document explains what we are hoping to achieve, what the council will be doing to make this happen and how partner agencies, businesses and the voluntary sector can get involved.

Who are care leavers?

When it's not safe for children to remain at home with their family, children become 'looked after' by their local council, when this happens they might live with a foster family or in a residential care home.

In Redcar & Cleveland we refer to these children and young people as 'Children in Our Care' because we have parental responsibility for their day to day care, their wellbeing, making sure they are happy, healthy and able to achieve their dreams. Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council are the 'Corporate Parents' for Children in Our Care, like most parents we want the best for our children including access to opportunities that will help them to succeed.

When children in care turn 18, or sometimes as young as 16 if this is their choice, this parental responsibility ends, and Children in our Care become Care Leavers. We provide help and support to Care Leavers via our Leaving Care Team, but the statutory help offered is very limited and there is no financial support available. Our Leaving Care Team do everything they can to help our Care Leavers access opportunities and this is where the Care Leaver Covenant will help.

Care Leavers are young people aged 16 – 25 who have spent at least 13 weeks in care after their 14th birthday and ending at least one day after their 16th birthday.

In Redcar & Cleveland there were around 138 Care Leavers in March 2021



Life as a Care Leaver

For Children in Our Care turning 18 is a very different experience compared to most young people, it's not just about celebrating a milestone and partying with friends. It's also the time when they need to move out of their foster placement or residential home, move into their own home and become financially independent. That's a lot for any 18-year-old and care leavers tell us that it's really lonely living by themselves at this age. In comparison, on average, most people leave their family home at age 23.

For any young person, moving into adulthood and starting to make their own way in the world can be extremely daunting and a huge learning curve. Imagine how difficult it is for those young people that don't have the backing of a supportive family to help them along the way and to be there for them when things don't go to plan. For young people that have grown up in care, leaving care and striking out on their own can be a massively challenging time. It also means that they are dealing with the financial difficulties of living independently from a much younger age.

The transition from childhood to adulthood and the practical and emotional challenges this brings are hard for most young people. But bear in mind that most young people have a Mum, Dad or Grandparents to turn to when times get tough - most Care Leavers do not. Also, a lot of Care Leavers have had difficult and traumatic childhood experiences which they are struggling to understand, and which may have impacted their lives in many ways - this can also make everything harder, like living independently, achieving in education and getting a job.

Redcar & Cleveland Council wants the best for its children, and we want to provide the help, support and opportunities to help Care Leavers become successful adults. As a council we want to use our organisational power to do this, creating positive opportunities to overcome the barriers, and help counteract the challenges, that Care Leavers face.

This isn't just a responsibility for the Leaving Care Team, it's the responsibility of all services within Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council. The Care Leaver Covenant creates the strategic framework to help us do this and to ensure the Council is delivering on its promise to Care Leavers.

The Care Leaver Covenant is about recognising the challenges that Care Leavers face and using our organisational power, skills and resources to create opportunities to help Care Leavers on their journey to becoming successful adults, for Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council we see this as an important part of our Corporate Parenting responsibilities and an opportunity to enhance the services and support we can provide to Care Leavers, beyond the statutory requirement.

By working together, just imagine the range of opportunities that the Council and our partners could create to help Care Leavers, supporting them to take their first steps into independence, achieve financial stability, establish stability in their lives and achieve their ambitions.

The Challenges for Care Leavers

In Redcar & Cleveland we know that the biggest challenges are:

- **Finding suitable, stable, affordable, good quality homes** in the right locations for care leavers to move in to when they turn 18, with the right support available to help them live independently.
- **The financial difficulties of living independently** budgeting is hard and particularly difficult when young people are balancing their first jobs, which are often low paid, with benefit rules and paying their rent.
- **Finding employment and developing the skills to be work ready.**
- The **social isolation and loneliness** Care Leavers experience when they leave care due to living alone and having a limited support network of people they can turn to – furthermore there are limited services available to support their mental health.

National research tells us that outcomes for children in care and Care Leavers are worse than the general population, as illustrated in the following facts and figures:

- At GCSE level, children in care have an average Attainment 8 score of 19.1 compared to 44.6 for all children (DfE, 2020).
- 39% of all Care Leavers aged 19, 20 and 21 are NEET compared to 13% of all 19, 20 and 21 year olds (DfE, 2020).
- Access to higher education is much lower for young people who have been in care. In 2018-19 only 13% of Care Leavers entered higher education compared to 43% of all other pupils. (DfE, 2020)
- 20% of young homeless people have been previously in care.
- Children in care are four times more likely to have a mental health difficulty, which in many cases is attributed to isolation and loneliness.

What is the Care Leaver Covenant?

The Care Leaver Covenant is a government funded initiative that provides a mechanism for public, private and voluntary sector organisations to pledge their support to help Care Leavers aged 16 – 25. Organisations that sign up to the Covenant make 'offers' by providing opportunities like apprenticeships, work experience and free or discounted goods and services. All these offers, and the commitment from staff across the organisation to deliver their pledges, form the Covenant.

The aim of the Care Leaver Covenant is to provide additional support for those leaving care, enhancing and complementing the statutory services provided to Care Leavers via their Council's Leaving Care service. By involving departments and partners from a broad range of sectors it makes available a different type of support and expertise from the statutory offer.

The Covenant encourages organisations to draw on the resourcefulness and imagination of their staff, to bring about new ways of thinking and create opportunities to help Care Leavers live independently.

Implementing the Care Leaver Covenant in Redcar & Cleveland

Redcar & Cleveland Council is adopting the Care Leaver Covenant and will be working together across all departments to create the best offer for Care Leavers. We also want to work with partner agencies, suppliers and local businesses to create more opportunities for care leavers, especially via procurement as part of our social value agenda

Examples of opportunities we are developing include:

- Offering apprenticeships and work experience opportunities to care leavers for jobs at the council.
- Using the skills of a our staff to deliver workshops for care leavers like budgeting and healthy eating.
- Working with our Handy Person scheme to help support care leavers with practical tasks when they move home like putting up curtain rails and plumbing in a washing machine.
- Working with our procurement team and procuring offers across all departments to look at how we can develop requests for care leaver opportunities into service specifications.

Implementation of the Covenant will be delivered via the Care Leaver Covenant Working Group a sub group of our Corporate Parenting Board.



Care Leaver Covenant Key Outcomes

The Care Leaver Covenant seeks to achieve the following outcomes for Care Leavers:



Independent Living – Care Leavers are better prepared and supported to live independently.



Employment, Education, Training – Care Leavers have improved access to employment, education and training.



Safety & Security – Care Leavers experience stability in life, feeling safe and secure.



Health support – Care Leavers have improved access to health and emotional support.



Financial Stability - Care Leavers achieve financial stability.

How to get involved

Could your team or organisation help us deliver the Care Leaver Covenant?

Maybe you could offer discounts on services, run workshops for care leavers, create job or work experience opportunities?

We welcome all ideas however big or small. For more information or an informal chat about the Covenant please email PSPA@redcar-cleveland.gov.uk



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