

Report of the Director for People and Neighbourhoods

Protected Characteristics Implementation Plan 2024-2025

**1. Introduction**

- 1.1 This report sets out the care leavers protected characteristic implementation plan 2024/5 and the progress updates against the priorities that seek to redress the inequalities that care experienced young people can face.

**2. Purpose of Report**

- 2.1 This report outlines the agreed priorities and provides an update on the current progress against the priorities agreed with our care experienced young people. These priorities also include areas of focus for the forward plan for 2025-6.

**3. Background and Update**

- 3.1 Stockport Council cabinet approved care leavers as a protected characteristic in October 2023 following close working between Stockport's care experienced young people supported by senior officers and Cllr Meikle, lead member for children, families and education.

- 3.2 The Protected Characteristic Implementation plan 2024-25 outlines the key priorities agreed for action to redress inequalities for our care leavers during 2024-5, these are:

- **Priority 1** Care Leaver approved as a protected characteristic and priorities to be agreed to redress inequalities faced by care leavers.
- **Priority 2** Care leavers told us that the ending of the Our Pass bus pass at 21yrs was impacting on them financially and emotionally and extending this from 21 to 25 years would provide more financial support, reduce isolation and support education, employment and training.
- **Priority 3** Care leavers told us accessing dentist services can be challenging and this impacts on their health and emotional wellbeing.
- **Priority 4** Care leavers told us that accessing and sustaining their tenancy can be more challenging at times. Stockport Homes Group are adopting the Greater Manchester care leaver housing pledge for priority need and improving housing options and support for care leavers.
- **Priority 5** Care leavers told us they wanted more help with accessing and sustaining education, training and employment opportunities so they can achieve their career aspirations.
- **Priority 6** Care leavers told us that they need more support with accessing cultural and leisure facilities to connect with their local communities, improve their social and emotional wellbeing and help with their finances.

## Protected Characteristics Action Plan update 2024-2025

You Said - Priority	We will - Actions required	By Who	Timescale	Progress
Care Leaver approved as a protected characteristic and priorities to be agreed to redress inequalities faced by care leavers.	Refresh the Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) form to include care leavers as protected characteristics with an annual impact report including mitigation	Business Relationship and System Manager	31/3/25	The GMCA Equalities Impact Assessment tool is being tested, and any changes will be made based on the user feedback. The plans are to roll this new tool out at the end of April 2025. Once live the team can look to run an annual impact report.
Care leavers told us that the ending of the Our Pass bus pass at 21yrs was impacting on them financially and emotionally and extending this from 21 to 25 years would provide more financial support, reduce isolation and support education, employment and training.	Advocate for this extension to the Our Pass across GM and with the GM Mayor to extend our pass from 21 to 25 years for care leavers as corporate parents.	HoS Social Care and Commissioning/ Cllr Meikle	31/3/25	GMCA have agreed to the extension of Our Pass bus pass for care experienced young people from age 21 to 25 yrs. This decision is being ratified and advised roll out will be Spring 2025.
Care leavers told us accessing dentist services can be challenging and this impacts on their health and emotional wellbeing.	Work closely with health commissioners and dental forum colleagues to develop a flexible dental scheme for care leavers in Stockport that could provide a blueprint for across GM.	HoS Social Care and Commissioning/ Named Nurse Children in Care	31/3/25	Research has been undertaken across GM about targeted flexible dental schemes. Meetings have been held with health commissioners and Dental Forum colleagues to draft the business case proposals including financial implications. Financial approval from health commissioners is being awaited.
Care leavers told us that accessing and sustaining their tenancy can be more challenging at times. Stockport Homes Group are adopting the Greater Manchester care leaver housing pledge for priority need and improving housing options and support for care leavers.	GM Housing Providers have agreed to adopt the GM care leaver pledge for care experienced young people as a protected characteristic in partnership with Leaving Care Services.	HoS Homelessness/ Service Leader Leaving Care	31/3/25	The Greater Manchester care leaver pledge has been reviewed by Stockport Homes Group management team and leaving care service and actions agreed to enable the pledge to be embedded. The housing allocation policy and 16+ protocol have been refreshed.
Care leavers told us they wanted more help with accessing and	Develop more targeted and flexible work	Virtual School Head	31/03/25	Monthly meetings are chaired by Director CSS with all key partners working together to

sustaining education, training and employment opportunities so they can achieve their career aspirations.	schemes for needs of care leavers and supported apprenticeships both within the council and with partners.			focus on developing more education, employment and training opportunities as well as support for care leavers and employers. This work also incorporates optimising social value opportunities such as match my project and specifying opportunities within corporate contracts.  We are now seeing the impact of this focused work with an increasing number of care leavers engaging and being supported in education, employment and training.
Care leavers told us that they need more support with accessing cultural and leisure facilities to connect with their local communities, improve their social and emotional wellbeing and help with their finances.	Work closely with Culture and Leisure services to extend the life leisure membership offer for care leavers plus 1 and extend the Museum Pass for care leavers to include a visit to Lyme Park.	HoS social care and commissioning / HoS Culture and Leisure	31/03/25 (Review)	Museum passes have been refreshed and widened to include 1 visit to Lyme Park for 2024/5 and distributed to all our care leavers. This will be reviewed to consider further extension and increased access in partnership with leisure and culture colleagues in March 2025.
<b>Forward Plan- NEW Focus areas for 2025-6</b>				
Request for Our Pass bus pass to include GM trams for care leavers	To be scoped	HoS/ Service Leader Leaving Care	31/03/26	Area of focus agreed at Children in our care board meeting for 2025/6
Reduce Fuel poverty/ hardship for care leavers by reaching out to energy suppliers, with particular focus for care leavers with pre-payment meters.	To be scoped	HoS / Service Leader Leaving Care	31/03/26	Area of focus agreed at Children in our care board meeting for 2025/6

This focused work has raised awareness about the inequalities faced by care experienced young people across the council, its partners and Greater Manchester.

#### **4. Governance Arrangements**

- 4.1 The implementation plan is overseen by the children in care council business meeting made up of young people, key council officers and councillors and reports to children in our care board and corporate parents working group.
- 4.2 The next steps are to continue to work with our care experienced young people, key officers and councillors to deliver progress against the priorities and incorporate this implementation plan within the leaving care action ready for April 2025-2026.

#### **5. Financial and Risk Assessment Considerations**

5.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report.

## **6. Legal Considerations**

6.1 The Equality Act 2010 protects against any unlawful treatment (discrimination) relating to one of the nine Equality Act protected characteristics. Being a care experienced individual is not currently recognised in law as a protected characteristic. However, as appreciated by the Cabinet when making their decision in 2023, there are a growing number of local authorities, including Stockport, who see the value of recognising care leavers as if they have a legally defined protected characteristic to ensure that they are treated no less favourably because they are a care leaver.

## **7. Human Resources Impact**

7.1 There are no human resource implications associated with this report

## **8. Equalities Impact**

8.1 The protected characteristic implementation plan for care leavers contains agreed priorities with care experienced young people and outlines actions to proactively redress the inequalities that they can face.

## **9. Environmental Impact**

9.1 There are no environmental implications associated with this report

## **10. Conclusions and Recommendations**

10.1 Children and families scrutiny committee are asked to note and comment on the report.

### Background Papers

There are no background papers.

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