



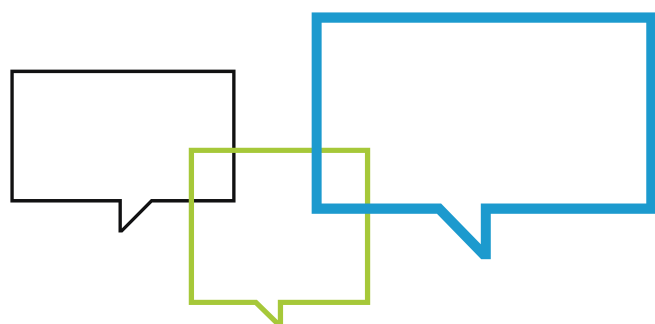
CARE LEAVER LOCAL OFFER: GUIDE AND KEY MESSAGES





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FOREWORDS

The local offer is a chance to find out how your local authority can support you with your aspirations, a way to find out how you can move forward with your life and help plan for your future.


It's a really important piece of work because it brings all the information together, making it easy for young people to understand. It places an onus on local authorities to provide more and strengthens young people's ability to ask for support.

From what I've seen, local offers are looking good. Exemption for council tax, paying for young people's passports, driving licence and driving lessons and in some places like Wigan, paying for prescriptions. These things set young people up to succeed.

I hope that the Forum's work can help with the postcode lottery of services for young people. Some councils have the resources to offer really good services and other councils who have less resources aren't able to keep up. This only penalises young people.

My advice to local authorities is to work with young people to continue to improve the offer. There's normally a couple of young people who are dedicated to work with professionals, but they also need to try and reach all the other young people.

My advice to young people is always the same - it's to look at whatever opportunities they can get and grab them with both hands.



Joe Shaw, Young People's Benchmarking Forum Champion of the Year and Finance Officer

In my role as National Implementation Advisor my focus is on pushing the 'parent' part of 'corporate parenting'. I'm driven by the principle: 'would this be good enough for my child?'

Over the last two years I've travelled across the country visiting local authorities; talking with care leavers, professionals and senior leaders. I've seen examples of fantastic practice where 'corporate parenting' is viewed as a responsibility that spans beyond children's services, reaching further to communities and local businesses. I've seen the importance of keeping care leavers at the heart of everything that is done and making sure they know about their entitlements. The local offer can play a key part in this.

The National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum is instrumental in sharing the very best of practice among its members. This toolkit is a game changer. For the first time we're able to systematically map what is offered to care leavers across the country. It highlights discretionary extras that local authorities are offering such as paying for driving lessons, supporting young people through university and more. Things we would do for our own children.

I now urge local authorities, partner organisations and young people themselves to use the toolkit to continue to raise the bar and provide the very best services for our care leavers.



Mark Riddell MBE, National Implementation Adviser for Care Leavers

BACKGROUND: WHY WAS THE LOCAL OFFER PROJECT NEEDED?

Local authorities (LAs) are now required (Children and Social Work Act 2017) to develop in partnership with their young people a local offer for care leavers. The local offer should provide information about all the services and support that is available to care leavers from the LA. It should cover (1) statutory entitlements and (2) any other discretionary support that an LA chooses to provide. Government guidance¹ states it should include six main areas:

health and well-being; relationships; education and training; employment; accommodation and participation in society.

Since the new duty, National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum (NLCBF) members have each been busy developing their own care leaver local offer. Each LA will have chosen to prioritise different types of non-statutory support, so every local offer will be unique.

NLCBF members were keen to benchmark and understand more about the additional support that was offered to care leavers. However, there was no easy way to compare and contrast the content of different local offers.

The NLCBF local offer project was designed to understand more about the development and content of members' local offers. Through this project we want to help members, and others, understand what components are commonly included in local offers, as well as highlighting less common areas of additional support. In doing so we hope to inspire LAs to review their offers and assess what more they could do for their care leavers based on ideas and learning from other LAs.

OUR AIMS:

- 1. To understand more about what worked in developing the local offer**
- 2. To create a central place that maps what additional support is on offer to care leavers in different local authorities**
- 3. To describe examples of additional support**
- 4. To help NLCBF members review and improve their local offers**

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-offer-guidance>



WHAT DID THE PROJECT INVOLVE?

Work on the project took place between February and October 2019 and involved several interrelated strands. The different strands of the project are described below and were used to develop the elements of the NLCBF Care Leaver Local Offer Toolkit. For details of where to find the resources in the toolkit, please see the box on the final page of this publication².

This publication summarises the key messages and recommendations from across the various strands of the project. The project involved:

1 Survey of local authorities

NLCBF members were asked about their experiences of developing their local offer. Representatives from 34 LAs completed the survey, responding to questions on the development, content and early impact of their local offer.

2 Mapping of local offers

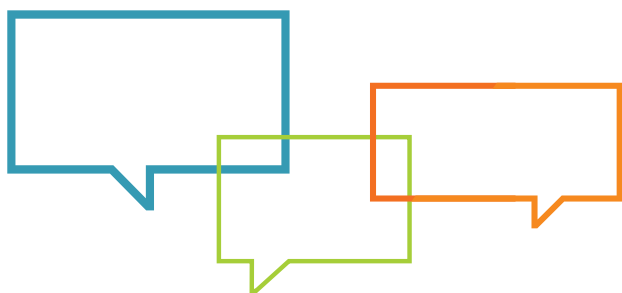
20 members' local offers were randomly selected (from those who had completed the survey) and included in a systematic mapping exercise³. Each local offer was reviewed and examples of additional support were recorded in an Excel database which covered the six main areas in the government guidance and also included finance support and support to different 'groups of care leavers'.

3 Thematic report

The Excel database containing the mapping of 20 local offers was then thematically analysed. The thematic analysis highlighted the wide range of additional support local authorities were offering their care leavers and the variation between local offers.

² Please note, some of the resources in the toolkit are available to NLCBF members only

³ The mapping took place between June and August 2019 and is therefore a snapshot of information contained in the published local offers at the time of mapping



4 Audit Tool

Based on the examples gathered from the mapping exercise, a tool was created to help NLCBF members (in partnership with their young people) review and improve their local offer. LAs can use the tool to record what they currently offer and what they will commit to offering in the future, inspired by the support other LAs already have in place for their care leavers.

5 Promising practice examples

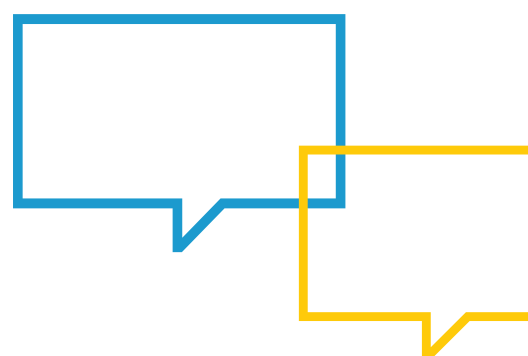
Examples were identified from the survey and mapping exercise that showed 'promising practice' in relation to the development of the offer, or additional support local authorities had brokered. Short interviews were conducted with representatives from these LAs to find out more about their work.

6 Young people's views

A focus group with seven Champions from the Young People's Benchmarking Forum (YPBMF) took place. The theme of the session was 'what would a really good care leaver local offer look like to you?'

A note on the focus of the project

The local offer is just one part of the work LAs do to support care leavers. It is likely that LAs have not included details of everything they do to support their young people within local offers; much of what is provided will be based on young people's individual circumstances. This project focused on published local offers therefore it only records the details that have been included in the offers at the time of mapping.



KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There was evidence that a huge amount of work had been undertaken by LAs (often in partnership with young people) to develop meaningful and in some cases, ambitious offers for care leavers. However, it was also clear that there is still some way to go to make all local offers as robust and accessible as they can be.

Three main findings emerged from the various strands of the NLCBF Local Offer work.

1. There was much variation between local authorities in the additional support they offered care leavers
2. Improvements could be made to the format of the offer and in how accessible it was
3. There was still work to do to disseminate and review the offer

These themes are described in more detail below. Where applicable suggested recommendations are given; these will be of relevance to different audiences including NLCBF members, young people, policy makers and others.

KEY FINDINGS: VARIATION IN THE ADDITIONAL SUPPORT AVAILABLE TO CARE LEAVERS

The local offer project highlighted wide variation in what additional support was on offer to care leavers in different LAs. Below we briefly describe the findings from the mapping exercise in relation to each of the main areas of the care leaver offer. The focus is on the content of the local offer.

Health & Well-being



The majority of local offers had good sign-posting to both local and national support services on a range of areas like sexual health, healthy eating and mental health support. However, with some notable exceptions, the information tended to be generic with links to universal health services rather than having specific information about additional health support for care leavers.

The most common type of additional support provided by LAs was provision of a 'health passport' to help young people understand their health history. Just over half of local offers contained information about free or discounted leisure access. Much less common was reference to the availability of specialist health workers or health projects for care leavers.



Relationships



Compared to some other areas there were less examples of additional support in the 'relationships' section of local offers. Much of what was written tended to be generalised statements about helping young people with their relationships rather than detailing specific support and opportunities available.

The most common types of additional support related to mentoring (in various guises), or high level information about support to understand life stories, mainly in relation to accessing care records. Less frequently local offers contained information about financial assistance available to visit family or the opportunity for family group conferencing in order to connect (or reconnect) with important people.

Education



Support to care leavers at university was the most frequent type of additional support; this information tended to be clearly detailed. However, there was much variation, particularly between the financial support LAs provided to care leavers at university (e.g. level of bursary, help with equipment related to course and graduation costs).

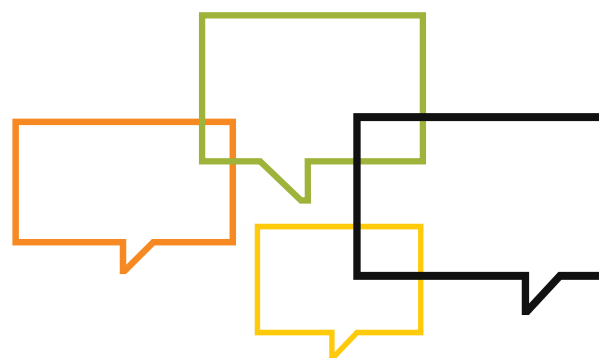
Much less appeared to be written about additional support to care leavers in other types of education; such as those in further education or studying at post graduate level. Though it was encouraging to see a small number of local authorities detailing the support they gave their care leavers when they graduated or achieved qualifications (ranging from celebratory meal(s) to financial support to help with further study or support towards student debt).

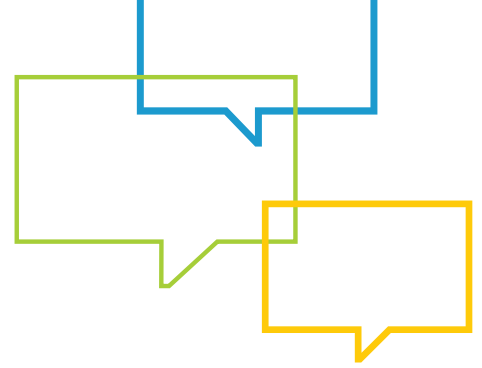
Employment



Lots of LAs offered practical support in relation to employment; for example, LA run apprenticeship schemes and opportunities for work experience were common. Local offers also tended to include details on the help they could give young people with essential equipment or travel costs related to work.

Though less frequent, it was encouraging to see local authorities offering mentoring opportunities for care leavers from senior managers and councillors and brokering offers of work experience or apprenticeships from the local business community and organisations the local authority had contracted.





Accommodation



The most common types of additional support related to council tax exemption or reduction; though on occasion the detail of what was available was not always as clear as it could be. It was positive to note that a number of LAs included in their offer information about pre-tenancy courses and support with moving or help with decoration when care leavers move into their accommodation.

A small number of local authorities contributed towards other housing related help such as providing starter packs in addition to setting up home grants and contributions towards things such as a TV licence or content insurance cost.

Participation in society



Many local offers stated that there was support available to help care leavers get identity documents. But there was significant variation in the level of detail and clarity in relation to this; it wasn't always clear if the support included financial support, what type of documents and how many were available. Also common in this section was information about care leaver forums and a high number of LAs included help with registering to vote.

Less frequently mentioned were: ways to celebrate care leavers' achievements such as annual awards; help with driving lessons or different ways to keep in touch, such as Facebook or newsletters. Only one or two local offers mentioned there was a care leaver drop in venue or out of hours (weekend or evenings) support available.

Finance



The most common type of additional support related to finance was help to access the Junior ISA. Lots of local offers explained that care leavers would receive a birthday gift though there was much variation in the amounts specified (ranging from £25 to £150; sometimes there were age cut off points and it wasn't always clear if older care leavers received gifts).

A few LAs indicated that funding may be available for young people to pursue personal interests or hobbies. Several local offers referred young people to separate finance policies for a more detailed breakdown of their financial offer. Much less common was information on 'budget skills training' or access to financial specialist workers.

The additional support offered across the different sections of local offers was not extravagant. Instead, they were the kinds of things we would expect parents to do for their children (e.g. ensure they had an adequate income; were prepared for living away from home and had access to support with their career and help as and when they needed it).

This project calls for everyone to be ambitious, asking what else can be done to improve local offers and support care leavers. Below we detail more on this.

RECOMMENDATIONS: ACCESSIBILITY AND FORMAT OF THE LOCAL OFFER

The content and opportunities contained within local offers are extremely important, but for young people to make the most of the services available, the local offer needs to be easy for young people to access and understand. Findings and recommendations relating to accessibility and format of local offers are summarised below.

Make sure information is accurate and easy to find

Many local offers have been developed incrementally over time and this work has often involved different partners. As a result we sometimes found different versions of the offer available online and discrepancies in the content. Some offers contained out of date or incorrect information and links that were broken.



RECOMMENDATION for local authorities and young people

- If your local offer is available in different formats, make sure that all parts are consistent, and remove duplication.
- Make sure you have a process in place for people to report errors.
- Nominate a named person responsible for keeping the offer up to date; they can update the offer when services change, opportunities arise or new additional support is agreed.
- Build into your review an accuracy check to ensure information is still in date and all links work.
- Do a check to make sure your local offer is easily found when it is searched for online.

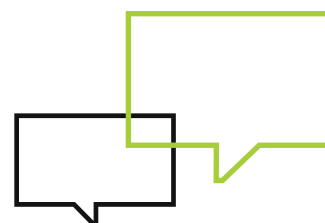
Remember your audience

It was encouraging to see that most local offers had been written using clear language and many contained images and were brightly coloured. However, on occasion, there were sections that appeared to have been copied directly out of LA policy documents– this meant that some offers had overly technical or legal language. Sometimes offers had information on entitlements for children in care that were not relevant to care leavers.



RECOMMENDATION for local authorities and young people

- Remember your local offer is for young adults, not children. The entitlements and offers within it need to be tailored to care leavers.
- Check that what is written is aimed at your young people not directed at Ofsted or commissioners.
- Get your young people to sense-check what is written and help review and improve the accessibility and format of the offer.



Set the right tone

There was variation in the kind of tone used in the local offers. More positive examples used aspirational, encouraging and friendly language. Other local offers were vague, used bureaucratic language and tended to be non-committal about what was on offer to young people.



RECOMMENDATION for local authorities and young people

- Check the language and tone in your local offer – is it friendly, easy to understand and aspirational?
- Get different people to read different sections to each other (include senior managers and young people) and check how what is written sounds – is it really how you would talk to your own children?

Be specific and not too general

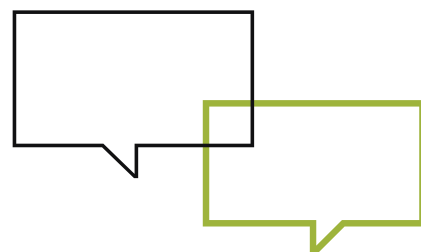
Lots of the support described in the local offers was clear and this should enable young people to find out about what they are entitled to. However, some of the information presented was confusing or unnecessarily vague. For example not explaining whether incentives were available weekly or monthly, or not specifying whether support applied to young people aged 21 or over. Not all offers included details of who to contact to find out more about the local offer support.

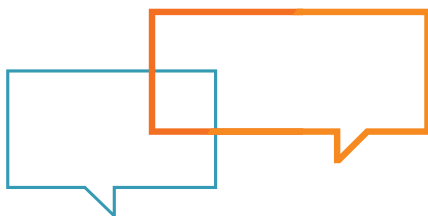
Across the offers reviewed the area that seemed to have the least clear information was 'participation in society'. Lots of the information in this section appeared to be taken directly from the government guidance, rather than tailored to LA-specific support.



RECOMMENDATION for local authorities and young people

- Look at your offer and check is it as specific as it can be (especially in relation to 'participation in society').
- If the details of the support available are too individual or complex, make sure there are contact details for people who can tell young people more about the offer and how it applies to them.





Make sure everyone can access your local offer

Many local authorities reported having worked with young people to ensure the local offer was accessible to them, however, very few offers detailed what work had been done to ensure young people with additional needs were able to access the offer. One or two LAs used videos to explain what the local offer was or had produced easy read versions.



RECOMMENDATION for local authorities and young people

- Think about how you can make your offer as accessible as possible to your care leavers and work with your young people to make this happen.

Check the local offer really covers all care leavers

There was very little information found in local offers about additional support for specific groups of care leavers (such as those who were parents, in custody or disabled). When support was included, this tended to be generic or copied from the government guidance and not specific to local circumstances.

Hardly any of the offers had clear information about what the local offer meant for young people who were living outside of their responsible local authority area. Similarly, offers were not always clear about whether additional support applied to older young people (such as those aged 21 and over).



RECOMMENDATION for local authorities and young people

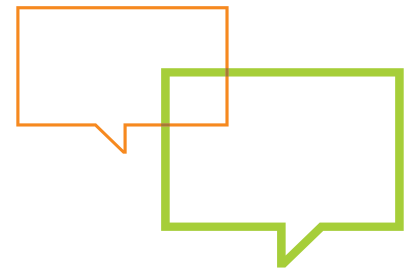
- Make sure all your young people (including different 'groups' of care leavers and those who do not live within the local authority area) are covered by your local offer - if parts of your offer only apply to some care leavers be clear about these restrictions.



RECOMMENDATION for Department of Education and NLCBF

- Engage in regional and national conversations on how local offers are working in relation to different 'groups' of care leavers and how support is delivered to young people out of area; can joint regional agreements and inter-authority arrangements be bolstered or established?

⁴ We are aware of the work underway to develop a consistent offer for care leavers across the 10 LAs in Greater Manchester. NLCBF will be sharing learning from this regional approach: <https://greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/news/care-leavers-receive-major-employment-boost-with-launch-of-greater-manchester-guarantee/>



RECOMMENDATIONS: DISSEMINATION AND REVIEW OF THE OFFER

Previous sections have explored findings in relation to the content and accessibility of the local offer. Another important aspect of the work surrounding the local offer was about ensuring care leavers and people working with them were aware of the local offer, and how LAs were reviewing the offer and its impact. Key points and recommendations are summarised below.

Promote and raise awareness of the local offer

The most common ways of letting young people know about the offer was: via care leaver forums; discussing the offer as part of pathway plan reviews; sending copies in the post; asking care leaver apprentices to promote the offer via social media and holding launch events. Despite these strategies to get the offer out to care leavers there were concerns that some care leavers (especially those who were aged 21 and over) did not know about the local offer.

RECOMMENDATION for Department of Education and other national care leaver organisations



- Explore options for a national awareness raising campaign on the care leaver local offer for young people.
- Few local offers appeared to explicitly reference the Care Leavers Covenant so explore whether this is an area for further links and support to help raise the profile of local offers.

Address the variation in local offers

As detailed above there was much variation in relation to the additional support on offer to care leavers in different LAs. The resources produced as part of our Care Leaver Local Offer Toolkit can be used to help address these disparities.

RECOMMENDATION for local authorities and young people



- Set a date to review your offer and use the resources in this toolkit such as the mapping and audit tool to help you.
- Ask the question: why don't we do this, could we do this and how can we get it done?

RECOMMENDATION for Department of Education, Ofsted and NLCBF



- Use your available communication mechanisms to let other LAs know about the types of additional support some LAs are already offering their care leavers in order to challenge all LAs to review and improve their local offer.
- Consider whether support can be offered to local authorities to measure the impact of their local offer.
- Ask YPBMF champions what work they would like to progress based on the findings; they may wish to develop a training programme to empower young people in other authorities to review their LAs offer.

Check all essential services and opportunities are included

Through the work of the NLCBF we hear about lots of good work and opportunities but when reviewing the content of local offers not all of these key services for care leavers appeared to be included in individual offers. Whilst it is important to get the balance right between letting care leavers know about the support available and avoiding overloading young people with too much detail it is important that the main additional support services are not left out of the offer.



RECOMMENDATION for local authorities and young people

- Use the NLCBF audit tool to review your local offer and check you have included all of the main additional support you offer your care leavers.

Corporate parenting in action

The local offer is inextricably linked to the broader corporate parenting agenda. The LAs that tended to report a positive experience of developing their local offer had strategic commitment and engagement from a wide range of partners; elected members, senior management team, corporate parenting boards and to a lesser extent local community organisations and businesses. But not everyone had been able to engage partners in the development of their offer.



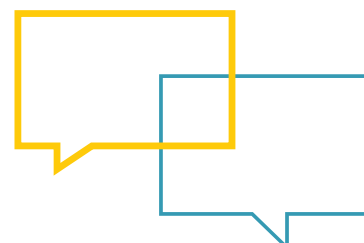
RECOMMENDATION for local authorities and young people

- Look for varied ways to raise the profile of the local offer and try different strategies (including using the audit tool) to continue to engage senior leaders and those with responsibility beyond children's services ('the corporate family').




RECOMMENDATION for local and national businesses

- Link in with LAs and work with them to identify what you could offer care leavers in your area in terms of discounts, job opportunities and mentoring.
- Work with the Care Leavers Covenant to understand how you can become involved with supporting young people at a national level.



WHAT WOULD A REALLY GOOD LOCAL OFFER LOOK LIKE?


YOUNG PEOPLE SAID:



Get the offer out there by using different social media so that young people know about it



Have a mental health professional in the leaving care team so care leavers can access the support they need quickly




See if you can offer starter packs with basics like crockery and white goods in addition to the setting up home grant

Include the name and contact details of the leader of the council, councillors and other key corporate parents so that young people know who to contact



Offer support and advice about healthy relationships and domestic violence



Include short videos led by young people - such as 'how to' videos with advice about universal credit or what to do if you can't pay your rent



Have workshops, support and awareness for LGBTQ care leavers and specialist support for young people from different countries available



Help pay for passports, driving licences and contribute towards driving lessons

WHAT KIND OF ADDITIONAL SUPPORT IS ON OFFER?⁵

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

WIGAN - care leavers can access the council's Employee Assistance Programme (365 days a year 24/7). This provides a range of support including confidential counselling, debt advice and free prescriptions until 25th Birthday.

RELATIONSHIPS

EALING - run drop-in sessions in their dedicated care leavers space so young people can build relationships with staff and other care leavers in an informal environment. They also offer a peer mentoring programme.

PARTICIPATION IN SOCIETY

STOCKPORT - have 'intensive support workers' who provide support on evenings and Saturdays and can help young people participate in activities such as going to the gym and attending groups.

EDUCATION

NORTH YORKSHIRE - offer a Higher Education bursary of £3,100 per year for a maximum of four years and £2,000 upon graduation, to assist with the cost of post graduate studies or contribute to paying off student loan.

ACCOMMODATION

YORK - when a young person moves into their first property, York pay for the first year's contents insurance and TV licence and provide practical support to paint and decorate.

EMPLOYMENT

MIDDLESBROUGH - provide a guaranteed interview for their apprenticeship and job vacancies for care leavers who meet the essential criteria.

FINANCE

KENT - are planning to develop a peer to peer financial mentoring model, where former care leavers will support current care leavers by sharing basic advice and support with issues relating to personal finances and budgeting.

⁵ NLCBF members can read more of these examples and full promising practice examples in the Thematic Report available at www.leavingcare.org

WHAT NEXT? A CALL TO ACTION

As Joe Shaw eloquently reminds us in his foreword to this report, our work supporting care leavers is all about setting young people up to succeed. The local offer can play an important part in this. It provides an opportunity to bring together in one place all the support LAs can give their care leavers. It also provides further impetus to ask for more from corporate parents and partners.

It was evident that, in the main, a lot of time and effort had been invested in producing the first local offers and new opportunities had been generated as a result. However, most authorities were clear that there was much more to do and they intended to continue working with their partners and the wider corporate family on this. Members reflected on the importance in the coming months and years of measuring and reviewing the impact of the local offer.

Our aim is for the Care Leaver Local Offer Toolkit to support this on-going work; to inspire LAs with ideas on how to continue to improve their own local offer so they can achieve the very best for their care leavers. Here at NLCBF we are committed to continuing to support members and young people with this work at the local level, while also engaging with national policy makers and partners to take forward the recommendations. We urge others to do the same so we can all work together to continue to improve the local offers that are available to care leavers.

“I am really impressed with the audit tool, I love the fact you have collected a lot of the offers across the local authorities to prompt and seek an enhanced offer.”
(NLCBF member)

“What I would like to do next is give the audit tool to our Care Leavers Forum so they can lead on it. They can work through each section and then give feedback as they go about the things that are most important to them, which can then lead to a change in our offer.”
(NLCBF member)

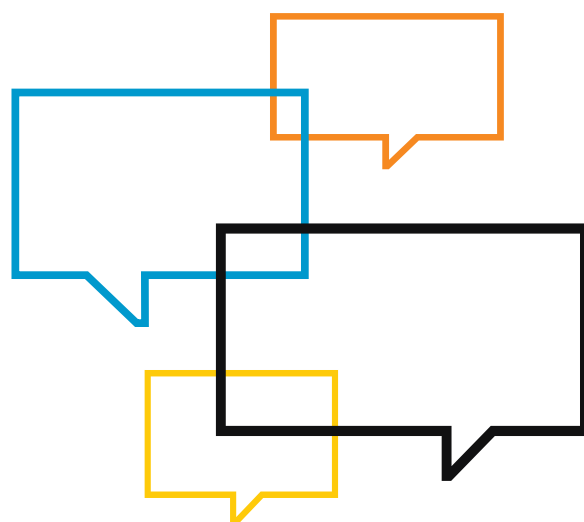
“We would use the audit tool to map my provision and to help stimulate thinking about what else we could / should be offering in our local offer. For me our current offer is a starting place and I would hope this continues to develop, drawing on others ideas is really helpful as I expect different Local Authorities have some parts they are strong and others where more work is needed. I would use this tool with decision makers and key partner agencies to try and encourage more thought and commitment to continue to enhance our offer.”
(NLCBF member)

“Thank goodness this is something that has been developed for us to use, it certainly saves a lot of time within busy local authorities. Great piece of work.”
(NLCBF member)



THANK YOU

NLCBF and the authors would like to thank young people from the Young Peoples Benchmarking Forum (YPBMF) including Jasmin, Joe, Francis, Harlie, Dalal and Miguel. We would also like to thank members of the working group: Jane Hylton, Karen Bazell, Matt Clayton, Steve Swinhoe and Mark Bone and the member authorities who supported the work by responding to the survey and giving up their time to be interviewed.



The printed toolkit comprises of:

- **Guide and Key Messages** - describes the background of the project, summarises key findings and recommendations
This document is the Guide and Key Messages
- **Survey Findings Summary** - details members' views and experiences of developing their local offer
- **Audit Tool** - based on systematic mapping of a sample of 20 members' local offers. This tool helps local authorities (with young people) review and improve their local offer

If you are an NLCBF member, you can access the full Care Leaver Local Offer Toolkit here: www.leavingcare.org or contact nlcbf@catch-22.org.uk



NLCBF The National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum is a national network of over 100 local authorities promoting the development of quality leaving care services with member authorities and partner organisations through a process of benchmarking and shared learning on a national scale. Our aim is to achieve the best outcomes for young people making the transition from care to adulthood.

Catch22 is a social business, a not for profit business with a social mission. For over 200 years we have designed and delivered services that build resilience and aspiration in people and communities.

Authors: **Sarah Wilkinson and Dr Claire Baker with Lisa Holland.**

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Twitter: [@nlcbf](https://twitter.com/nlcbf)