

**Open Report on behalf of Heather Sandy, Executive Director for Children’s Services**

Report to:	<b>Councillor Mrs P A Bradwell OBE, Executive Councillor for Children's Services, Community Safety, Procurement and Migration</b>
Date:	<b>24 April to 3 May 2024</b>
Subject:	<b>Re-commissioning of the Lincolnshire Leaving Care Service</b>
Decision Reference:	<b>I030828</b>
Key decision?	<b>Yes</b>

**Summary:**

The Council has a statutory responsibility to provide a Leaving Care Service to eligible children in care (CiC), aged 16 to 25, that are transitioning to adulthood.

Lincolnshire Leaving Care Service (LLCS) is currently provided by Barnardo’s. The contract commenced 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 and will end 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025 and cannot be extended. The annual value of the contract in 2024/25 is expected to be £1.938m.

Children’s Services has completed a service review (see Appendix A – Commissioning Plan) and this has informed a recommended service model. Commissioning options have been considered and it is recommended that LLCS is insourced and provided by the Council from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025.

**Recommendation(s):**

The Executive Councillor for Children's Services, Community Safety, Procurement and Migration:

1. Approves the LLCS service model from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025 as detailed in *Table 6* of this report.
2. Approves the insourcing of the LLCS from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025 as the delivery model.
3. Delegates to the Executive Director of Children’s Services, in consultation with the Executive Councillor for Children’s Services, Community Safety, Procurement and Migration authority to take all decisions necessary to deliver the recommendations above.

**Alternatives Considered:**

- **Allow the contract to end and decommission LLCS:**  
This is not recommended because it is a statutory requirement for the Council to deliver a Leaving Care Service.
- **Commission LLCS from an external provider:**

Commissioning from an external provider could offer some benefits including lower staffing costs, possible added value through additional funding sources, independent budget control as contract terms could protect more against overspend and independence from the Council. This would also provide continuity of funding to the external market. However, recommissioning also brings the risk of service disruption if the provider changes, reduced flexibility to evolve the service, financial uncertainty because of the challenge of future-proofing costs for the entire contract term, the market place is extremely limited, non-staffing costs are higher, overall the service will cost more and importantly any poor performance could impact on Children's Services Ofsted inspection outcome which in turn could have significant financial and reputational consequences for the Council. This option is not recommended.

#### **Reasons for Recommendation:**

The recommended service model will:

- Provide **clearer information** to care leavers about what support they can get from the LLCS.
- Help CiC to be more **prepared to transition** to leaving care.
- Enhance the **number of Leaving Care Workers (LCW)** to meet growing demand and provide care leavers with more help to plan and move towards independence, including those aged 21+ who will now have an allocated LCW.
- Increase the volume and pay of LCWs to support the **recruitment and retention of skilled staff** that can work with care leavers with more complex needs.
- Meet the **specific needs** of former-Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children (UASC) through specialist staff based near to where they live.
- **Increase mental health support** for care leavers so they can live happier and healthier lives and access EET.
- Have an increased focus on care leavers **accessing EET**, with wider support from across the Council.

The reasons for the recommended commissioning option are:

- **Greater flexibility** to evolve service at pace according to meet the changing needs and demands of care leavers. Contractual restrictions can make it more difficult to respond at pace.
- The service will be managed more closely and **strategically led as part of Children's Services**. Insourcing would ensure alignment to our framework and practice models, improving service quality. This should help support the Council's continued high judgement as part of the **Ofsted Inspection** of Local Authority Children's Services.
- LLCS will be more **integrated with other valued Council services** including Children's Services, Public Health, Adult Care and Community Wellbeing. Transition to LLCS and to Adult Care (as required) will be more seamless.
- Indicative budgets indicate a **lower cost** when insourcing the service.
- Staff **recruitment and retention** may be more successful due to the attractiveness of the Council's terms and conditions of employment employees.
- **Greater understanding of performance** reporting including continued use of Mosaic and improved integration of reporting and data quality.

## **1. Background**

A commissioning review of the Lincolnshire Leaving Care Service (LLCS) has been completed. The review considered local and national policy requirements, evidence and needs assessment, stakeholder feedback, the performance of the existing LLCS, benchmarking and market research. The findings of this are set out in the Commissioning Plan at Appendix A.

The current contract with Barnardo's commenced 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 and will cease on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025 with no further option of extension. Barnardo's has provided LLCS since 2007, following multiple successful tenders. The LLCS model and funding has evolved over this time to reflect the changing needs and increases in care leavers, particularly former-UASC, and inflationary pressures. The original contract value in 2020/21 was £1,495,000; the annual contract price in 2024/25 is expected to be £1,938,310.

The provision of a Leaving Care Service is a statutory duty of the Local Authority and must meet the requirements of: [Children Act 1989](#), [Children \(Leaving Care\) Act 2000](#), [Children and Young Person's Act 2008](#), [Care Leavers \(England\) Regulations 2010](#) and [Children and Social Work Act 2017](#).

Care leaver eligibility and entitlement is set out below:

Category	Criteria	Entitlement
<b>Eligible</b> <a href="#">Schedule 2, Paragraph 19B, Children Act (CA) 1989</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aged 16 or 17</li> <li>Looked after by Children's Services for a period of 13 weeks since the age of 14</li> <li>Currently looked after</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A Personal Advisor</li> <li>A Needs Assessment</li> <li>A Pathway Plan</li> <li>Receive all the care and support they normally receive until they leave care</li> </ul>
<b>Relevant</b> <a href="#">Section 23A, CA 1989</a> <a href="#">Section 23B, CA 1989</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aged 16 or 17</li> <li>Looked after by Children's Services for a period of 13 weeks since the age of 14</li> <li>Looked after for a period after their 16th birthday</li> <li>No longer looked after</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A Personal Advisor</li> <li>A Needs Assessment</li> <li>A Pathway Plan</li> <li>Accommodation and maintenance</li> <li>Financial support to meet EET needs</li> </ul>
<b>Former Relevant</b> <a href="#">Section 23C, CA 1989</a> <a href="#">Section 23CZA, CA 1989</a> <a href="#">Section 23CA, CA 1989</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aged between 18 and 25</li> <li>Previously an eligible child and/or a relevant child</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A Personal Advisor</li> <li>A Pathway Plan, kept under regular review</li> <li>Assistance with EET</li> <li>Assistance with accommodation</li> <li>Help with living costs</li> </ul>
<b>Qualifying*</b> <a href="#">Section 24, CA 1989</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aged between 16 and 25</li> <li>Looked after by Children's Services on, or after, their 16th birthday and no longer looked after</li> <li>Spent less than 13 weeks in care since 14th birthday i.e. do not fulfil criteria for eligible or relevant child</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Help with living expenses and if they are in higher education; they may also help with securing vacation accommodation</li> <li>Information, advice and assistance from Children's Services, which may be in cash</li> <li>16-20 year olds are allocated a Personal Advisor but there is no requirement for a Pathway Plan or statutory visits; 21+ year olds may be allocated to a Personal Advisor depending on need</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Looked after by the LA prior to being the subject of an SGO</li> </ul>	
--	---	--

Table 1 - care leaver categories and service eligibility

- \* Many UASC are not in care long enough by their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday to be entitled to support and are officially 'Qualifying' care leavers. In recognition of this and irrespective of their time in care, all former-UASC care leavers have 'Former Relevant' status to enable full access to support.

### Current Service Model and Performance

Eligible children are allocated a Leaving Care Worker (LCW) shortly after they turn 16: some care leavers are supported solely by their LCW from this point, others are 'twin tracked' with the Social Worker and others may not fully transition to LLCS support until they are 18.

Care leavers access a range of support for EET, suitable accommodation, independent living skills, access to health services, SEND support and 8-weekly update of their Pathway Plan. Care leavers aged 21+ are allocated to a Team Manager but can be reallocated to a LCW for direct support if required; all care leavers can access the Urgent Support Service out of hours.

LLCS has areas of specialist support: former-UASC care leavers are supported with immigration issues, trauma and separation, language and cultural identity; EET and accommodation workers offer targeted advice to both LCWs and young people; and a Mental Health Worker<sup>1</sup> has added significant value to the service. Barnardo's is Ofsted-registered to provide Supported Lodgings which are able to accommodate 16-17 year olds in an assessment bed pending a more permanent placement, though most of the available spaces are for those aged 18+.

Below is a summary of Barnardo's annual performance across the contract:

Key Performance Indicator	Lincolnshire Target	2020-2021 (Q4 JET Data)	2021-2022 (Q4 JET Data)	2022-2023 (Q4 JET Data)	2023-2024 (Q2 JET Data)	Direction of Travel
Care leavers have positive relationships and transition to adulthood	90% for KIT (Tolerance: +/- 5%)	96.5%	96.5%	95.5%	94.5%	↓
% in EET at 16-18 years	Target: 85% (Tolerance: +/- 5%)	65%	60%	55%	44%	↓
% in EET at 19 years <sup>2</sup>	Target: 70% (Tolerance: +/- 5%)	62%	60%	50%	44%	↓
% in EET at 19-21 years	Target: 65% (Tolerance: +/- 5%)	54%	59%	56%	50%	↓
% living in suitable accommodation at 16-18 years	Target: 95% (Tolerance: +/- 5%)	94%	86%	89%	88%	↓

<sup>1</sup> Currently funded through Staying Close grant to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025

<sup>2</sup> 903 return KPIs used as national comparator (EET at 19, suitable accommodation at 19, Pathway Plans)

% living in suitable accommodation at age 19 <sup>31</sup>	Target: 95% (Tolerance: +/- 5%)	94%	94%	92%	91%	↓
% living in suitable accommodation at 19-21 years	Target: 95% (Tolerance: +/- 5%)	94%	95%	92%	92%	↔
Care leavers have positive sense of identity and are resilient <sup>31</sup>	Target: 90% for Pathway Plans (tolerance +/- 5%)	88%	94%	96%	92%	↓

Table 2 - LLCS KPI summary

Performance reporting has evidenced Barnardo’s keep in touch with 98% of Former Relevant care leavers which is better than the England average; Barnardo’s also update Pathway Plans within statutory timescales at a better rate. Barnardo’s exceeded the national average of care leavers in **suitable accommodation** in 2023 but are 1% below that of statistical neighbours<sup>3</sup>.

The percentage of care leavers in **EET** has been below target for most of the contract across all ages. It should be noted that the care leaver EET figures for England have been around 56% and below for the past 3 years<sup>4</sup>, and this KPI is one of the more complex to resolve. EET engagement is contingent on a range of factors, including accommodation stability, mental health and disability. Former-UASC care leavers have high EET, with 72% of 16–17-year-olds UASC and 67.6% of former-UASC care leavers aged 18-21 accessing some form of EET. There are currently 27 care leavers at university who are supported by the service, including 4 former-UASC care leavers.

The **views of care leavers** are regularly sought to help understand and co-produce areas for service improvement. Care leaver satisfaction with the service is high; 100% of exit plans completed during 2023/24 scored 8+/10. The service also receives regular compliments from both care leavers and multi-agency professionals.

Barnardo’s have reported a **higher complexity of need** of care leavers, particularly those entering care at a later age. This impacts on the type and volume of support care leavers need. As a result, LCW’s routinely provide support over and above the 8-week statutory visit requirement. There have also been increased safeguarding incidents reported by LLCS, noting a higher presentation of mental health concerns.

In the current LLCS there has been a **high turnover of LCW’s**. Barnardo’s conducted exit interviews and staff pay was highlighted as a key factor. The service has struggled to recruit staff at the right skill level on the current pay grade to support increasingly complex young people. Team Managers spend a lot of time training LCWs to ensure they can provide the right support. Once up-skilled staff then want to progress to higher paid positions. Barnardo’s have tried to recruit LCW posts regularly and have had low interest, often with no candidates passing the short listing or interview processes.

Benchmarking with other Local Authorities’ LCW salaries indicates that increased salary costs will need to be considered in any future LLCS model. In the interim, Children’s Services has supported Barnardo’s to pay existing LCWs a non-recurrent retention payment pro-rata to the end of the contract to broadly align to Council Grade 7.

<sup>3</sup> [Local Authority Interactive Tool \(LAIT\)](#)

<sup>4</sup> National EET figures in England were 53% in 2020, 52% in 2021, 55% in 2022 and 56% in 2023 ([LAIT 24-11-23](#))

## Lincolnshire's Ofsted Performance

In January 2023, Ofsted introduced a new, separate judgement for care leaver services to their inspection framework<sup>5</sup>. Ofsted inspected Lincolnshire Children's Services in April 2023; Lincolnshire was one of the first Local Authorities inspected under the new framework. The overall judgement for Lincolnshire Children's Services was 'Outstanding,' whilst LLCS was judged as 'Good'<sup>6</sup>. There were some key improvements required to LLCS and an Improvement Plan is in place to address this, which also requires significant Council staffing resource to support.

There is a risk to the Council maintaining its overall 'Outstanding' judgement if the LLCS is not providing the highest quality support to care leavers and if demonstrable improvements are not seen rapidly.

Positive feedback included:

- Good outcomes for care leavers in key areas of **relationship-based support** which is bespoke to the young person and support to maintain important networks.
- A good **health offer** e.g., funding for dental treatment; however, this was not widely known by LCWs.
- Access to **specialist support services** such as counselling and CAMHS was seen to be effective. The specialist Mental Health Worker post (funded via Staying Close) was identified as good practice which care leavers spoke about in glowing terms.
- The **participation offer** was also good but could be better publicised, and take-up of activities was therefore sometimes low. The online Local Offer was highlighted as variable across the seven District Councils, but Ofsted could see Leaders are making efforts to unify the offer across the Local Authority area.
- The **EET offer** is valued by care leavers who appreciate the range of support and opportunities available to them.
- LCWs have a sound **understanding of risk** of potential and actual exploitation; all care leavers have a risk assessment and safety plans, but whilst realistic, do not appear to be consistently shared with other professionals.

Areas for improvement included:

- **Allocations and transitions** were insufficiently robust and did not always happen in good time or consistently, with some young people developing relationship with their LCW from 16 years old and other not meeting their LCW until they are 18 at their last care review.
- The **quality of Pathway Plans**; whilst plans are updated within statutory timeframes, they do not always reflect changes in the circumstances of young people and the quality of recording is variable. Some plans lack aspirational language or specificity on how to achieve goals, or related timeframes.
- Support and engagement for **care leavers in custody**. Ofsted observed that attempted support and visits were not always accurately documented by LLCS, who recognise that creative solutions need to be explored to engage this challenging cohort of care leavers.
- Significant development is needed for the **21+ Service**, Ofsted observed that some young people were closed to a LCW at 21 years of age and may have benefited from remaining allocated. Some young people were unsure why they had been stepped down and the decision is sometimes unclear in their case records. Contact with those aged 21+ who are not allocated to a LCW is annual and whilst this is the statutory requirement, Ofsted found Lincolnshire's offer was 'Good' and did not go far enough to achieve a higher judgement.

---

<sup>5</sup> [Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services Framework \(ILACS\)](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Lincolnshire's Ofsted Report \(April 2023\)](#)

There were two areas of the framework which Ofsted did not comment on: support for young parents and former-UASC care leavers.

The recommendations from Ofsted relating to LLCS have been considered as part of the commissioning review and form part of the recommended future delivery model.

### Summary of Key Lincolnshire Data

The service review considered a range of evidence and benchmarking data. Key data is summarised below:

- Lincolnshire CiC numbers have increased by 10.5% since 2018<sup>7</sup> compared to c.16% increase nationally.
- 24% of all children that entered care in the 6 months prior to October 2023 were UASC. Overall UASC made up 11.6% of all CiC.
- In October 2023 there were 936 young people eligible for LLCS:
  - 20% (183) were 16-17 years.
  - 30% (286) were 18-21 years.
  - 42% (394) were 21+
  - 8% (73) were recorded as ‘Other’ – these care leavers are age 25.
- 173 care leavers were Eligible, 10 Relevant and 753 Former Relevant (including 145 Qualifying<sup>8</sup> young people).
- 58% of care leavers live in Lincolnshire and 41% live out of county, with 1% whose whereabouts are unknown<sup>9</sup>.
- 2021-22 data (most recent) indicated Lincolnshire care leavers continuing to live with foster carers which is in line with Statistical Neighbours and England.
- 66% of care leavers were male.
- 19% of care leavers had a disability.
- 70% of care leavers were white and 30% are from all other ethnic groups combined.
- In December 2023, 5 Lincolnshire care leavers aged over 18 years were in custody, which has remained broadly the same for the past 4 years<sup>10</sup>.
- In 2023, on average 48% of Lincolnshire care leavers were in EET compared with 58.5% in statistical neighbours and 56% in England<sup>42</sup>. Care leavers engaging in EET is significantly worse than non-care experienced peers. Nationally, 12.3% of all 16-25 years olds were NEET.
- The proportion of care leavers that are former-UASC in October 2023 is below:

Age	% of care leavers that are UASC	Average by cohort
16	23.5%	30.25%
17	37%	
18	36%	24.6%
19	22%	
20	16%	
21	20%	20%

Table 3 - former-UASC care leavers as percentage of wider cohort

<sup>7</sup> 659 Lincolnshire CiC on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018 (Source: LCC Children’s Services Analysis Tool (ChAT) March 2018)

<sup>8</sup> Qualifying care leavers are not currently separated out from Former Relevant numbers; this has been identified as a reporting issue and is being addressed)

<sup>9</sup> LLCS Q2 2023-24

<sup>10</sup> Average of 4 care leavers in custody; numbers taken from Mosaic as of 31<sup>st</sup> December in 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023

On average, former-UASC care leavers accounted for c.25% of the total care leaver cohort and this is expected to grow; grant funding from the Home Office for all former-UASC care leavers up to the age of 21 (and to 25 in education) should be utilised proportionately to fund any future model of LLCS.

- UASC numbers have increased since the mandating of the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) in 2021. Between December 2021 and October 2023 there has been a subsequent 40% increase in former-UASC care leavers. UASC numbers will continue to grow as Lincolnshire has not reached the NTS maximum capacity<sup>11</sup> and there are unpredictable future numbers of UASC presenting from asylum hotels, ongoing NTS referrals and the proposed adult asylum centre at RAF Scampton.
- Since the start of the current contract there has been a 21.3% increase in care leavers<sup>12</sup>. Care leaver numbers are predicted to increase further, partly due to higher numbers of CiC, more UASC and as more children are entering care at an older age. This mirrors trend data nationally and for our regional and statistical neighbours<sup>13</sup>.
- Growth projections from Corporate Performance suggest numbers of care leavers could increase by c.7% by April 2025<sup>14</sup>, taking into account the rising numbers of late entrants into care and numbers of former-UASC care leavers. Growth modelling using LAIT data on average cohort increases from 2018 and applying them to forward-looking care leaver projections suggests a possible c.59% increase by the same date:

Care leaver cohort by age	Oct-23 (from ChAT)		Apr-25 (from Corp. Performance)		Apr-25 (from LAIT)	
	CL numbers at Oct 23 <sup>15</sup>	% of whole cohort	Predicted numbers from April 25 <sup>16</sup> (breakdown)	% of whole cohort	Predicted numbers from April 25 <sup>17</sup> (breakdown across cohorts)	% of whole cohort
<b>16–17 year olds</b>	183	19.6%	185	18.4%	286	19.2%
<b>18–20 year olds</b>	286	30.6%	343	34.2%	616	41.3%
<b>21+ year olds</b>	467	49.9%	475	47.4%	589	29.5%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>936</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>1003</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>1491</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
<b>Variance to Oct 2023</b>			<b>+7.1%</b>		<b>+59.2%</b>	

Table 4 - care leaver projections to April 2025

However, the LAIT data could be considered somewhat unreliable, due to the anomaly years during the pandemic. The varying projections indicates the lack of certainty in forecasting future numbers and highlights how volatile those figures can be. It is felt the Corporate Performance projections are

<sup>11</sup> 0.1% of the 0-17 child population, which would require Lincolnshire to have min. 144 0–17-year-old UASC in care before we would reach capacity and refuse NTS referrals

<sup>12</sup> LLCS contract report showing Open Allocated Cases i.e. 16–20-year-olds – increased from 394 in April 2020 to 478 in December 2023. Note this excludes Qualifying young people and 21+ year olds

<sup>13</sup> [Local Authority Interactive Tool \(LAIT\)](#)

<sup>14</sup> Increase calculated by forward modelling data taken from the ChAT Oct-23

<sup>15</sup> LCC Children’s Services Analysis Tool (ChAT) October 2023; data includes 73 care leavers categorised as ‘Other’ – these are 25+ year olds who are in scope of reporting due to eligibility for LLCS within the reporting period

<sup>16</sup> Data from Children’s Performance team using October ChAT data as a starting point, incorporating CiC and UASC projections; data also includes 102 care leavers aged of 25+ using the same calculation as the October ChAT for consistency

<sup>17</sup> Data from the LAIT, based on previous annual growth percentages, calculated forward to April 2025 inc 27% increase of former-UASC care leavers, 21% increase in 16-20 year old care leavers and 2.5% increase in 21+ year olds



more reliable at this point, in terms of modelling future service requirements, as these figures have been calculated using our own data over previous years and taken our local trends into account.

Indications are the future LCCS model should consider a base in or close to Peterborough where many former UASC care leavers reside and ensure LCW caseloads account for travel requirements across Lincolnshire and out of area. Although Lincolnshire has not seen increases to CiC to the same extent as other areas there has been a noted growth. It is projected that care leaver numbers will continue to rise. Accurate future forecasting of care leaver numbers is difficult given there are a number of unpredictable variables including late entrants into care and UASC arrivals. Where this relates to UASC, the Council receives grant funding which must be used to proportionately towards the LLCS. Care leaver support needs are similarly difficult to predict. Future modelling needs to be sufficiently flexible to be able to properly resource the service to have capacity to meet both demand and support need.

### Stakeholder Engagement

The Council has engaged with stakeholders as part of the review. In summary, the feedback was:

- Care leavers have said that they like early allocation to their LCW and that this helps them feel independent, and that they value having consistency in their LCW.
- Support after 21 years old is highly valued, though some care leavers have said they would have preferred to be given the choice to remain allocated to the service.
- Mental health support, both direct intervention and a broader range of wellbeing activities, is highlighted as a key area for future service delivery.
- Most authorities deliver their own Leaving Care Service apart from Lincolnshire and Cornwall (part commissioned) in England. Furthermore, many authorities have chosen to insource the service.
- There is not an extensive market of providers across the UK that deliver Leaving Care Services – Barnardo’s is the main supplier.
- Previous procurement indicates low market response and indications are this would be similar during any new tendering opportunity.

### Leaving Care Worker Projections

Based on future care leaver projections, more LCW capacity will be needed from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025 onwards. In addition, different service models will have an impact of LCW capacity. For example if a LWC is only allocated those aged 21+, they would have a higher caseload than a LCW allocated with only 16-20 year olds because the support offer is different:

Scenario	Care leaver cohort by age	Indicative max caseload per LCW	Oct-23 (from ChAT)			Apr-25 (from Corp. Performance)		
			CL numbers at Oct 23 <sup>18</sup>	% of whole cohort	Optimum no. of LCWs	Predicted numbers from April 25 <sup>19</sup>	% of whole cohort	Optimum no. of LCWs
1	16-20 year olds	20	469	50.1%	23.5	528	52.6%	26.4
	21+ year olds	75	467	49.9%	6.2	475	47.4%	6.3
	<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>936</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>29.7</b>	<b>1003</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>32.7</b>

<sup>18</sup> LCC Children’s Services Analysis Tool (ChAT) October 2023; data includes 73 care leavers categorised as ‘Other’ – these are 25+ year olds who are in scope of reporting due to eligibility for LLCS within the reporting period

<sup>19</sup> Data from Children’s Performance team using October ChAT data as a starting point, incorporating CiC and UASC projections; for consistency, data also includes 102 care leavers aged of 25+ using the same calculation as the October ChAT

2	Total 16-24 year old cohort	23.2	936	100.0%	40.3	1003	100.0%	43.2
---	-----------------------------	------	-----	--------	------	------	--------	------

Table 5 - care leaver and LCW projections on 1st April 2025

The above table demonstrates scenarios for LCW numbers based on different modelling approaches:

- **Scenario 1** – caseloads are 20 for LCW’s supporting the 16-20 year old cohort. LCW’s supporting 21+ care leavers have a higher allocation rate of 75. This is based on the DfE New Burdens Assessment in 2018 indicating that c.20% of care leavers aged 21+ would require engagement each week. 1 FTE 21+ LCW, with a caseload of 75, could support 15 care leavers (20% of caseload) for 2.4 hours per week. This scenario should allow for some flexibility for care leavers 21+ to remain allocated to their same LCW based on needs.
- **Scenario 2** – all care leavers aged 16-24 year are allocated based on a caseload of 23.2 care leavers per LCW, which is the average caseload number for benchmarked LAs; all care leavers including 21+ year olds will receive an equal level, or offer, of support. This scenario would provide flexibility and capacity to support 21+ care leaver should they require a more in-depth service offer.

### Recommended Service Model

The table below details the recommended service model that is based on the findings of the commissioning review:

Service element	Preferred model	Difference to current service	Future considerations
<b>Leaving Care Worker (LCW) numbers</b>	The number of LCWs will increase to 33 FTE to respond to the new demand requirements of the service moving forward.  The pay grade of LCWs should be increased to help attract and retain high quality staff.	Increased capacity and better pay for LCWs will lead to higher quality service provision for care leavers, as well as the capacity to respond to any emerging needs of the cohort.	LCWs capacity will need regular review as capacity fluctuates.
<b>Transition</b>	Care leavers will continue to be allocated to LLCS shortly after their 16 <sup>th</sup> birthday; complex young people may be ‘twin tracked’ by both a Social Worker and LCW in preparation for full transition to LLCS at 18 years old.	Increase in LCW capacity will ensure care leavers are consistently allocated early. LCW’s will have more time to build effective relationships and enable a successful transition.	
<b>Pathway Plans</b>	Increased focus on high quality Pathway Planning. The recommended increase in LCWs will ensure that statutory timescales for	Statutory timescales on Pathway Plans are currently being met but increased LCW capacity will further improve	

	completion are met, as well as provide greater capacity to enable workers to update Pathway Plans more frequently as and when circumstances change and will also drive up the quality of those plans and ensure they are meaningful to care leavers.	and enhance both frequency and quality.	
<b>Specialist user groups</b>	Greater capacity for bespoke support for any care leavers that may require more intensive support for a period of time e.g. care leavers in custody, young parents, and disabled care leavers.	Increased capacity in the Leaving Care workforce will allow more intensive support to be delivered in response to changing needs.	
<b>EET</b>	Specialist EET Officers will provide focused support for care leavers to access suitable pre-employment training, qualifications and employment opportunities. Delivery of the Care Leaver Apprenticeship Service (CLAS).	No change recommended to preferred model from April 2025.  However these specialist roles would be further developed to ensure that the right support is provided to care leavers to engage and sustain in EET, working alongside other specialist workers, such as the Mental Health and Accommodation Officers. Officers would be upskilled to ensure that the performance in this area is improved, in line with national targets and comparable with statistical neighbours.	Consider sustainable funding of further EET post that is currently funded through the Staying Close grant to March 2025, subject to DfE decision on continuity of funding.
<b>Information on LLCS Offer</b>	Improved information via updated Local Offer, use of newsletters and other targeted communications; care leavers will have better understanding of their entitlements and where to seek support.	21+ care leavers will be contacted more than the statutory minimum; this will also be informed by the ongoing Improvement Plan	

<b>Mental health &amp; emotional wellbeing support</b>	Increased Mental Health Worker capacity to be permanently funded to up-skill LCWs around mental health and provide some direct intervention and support to access adult mental health services.	Permanently fund mental health support and increase capacity.	Consider sustainable funding of Wellbeing Worker post that is currently funded through the Staying Close grant to March 2025, subject to DfE decision on continuity of funding.
<b>Additional specialist workers</b>	Specialist workers will provide targeted expertise on accommodation, participation and UASC.	No change.	DLT may also want to explore other additional posts that other excelling LAs have invested in.
<b>21+ Service</b>	<p>When care leavers reach age 20 their allocated LCW will commence an assessment to understand and plan support to meet their needs 21+.</p> <p>Where needed, care leavers that require consistency of LCW will remain allocated to their existing LCW. Their LCW will continue to visit and support them as needed until they are ready to transition to an allocated 21+ LCW.</p> <p>For care leavers that have been assessed as able to transition to a stepped down offer, transition planning will commence at age 20 with a new allocated 21+ LCW.</p> <p>21+ LCW's will keep in touch with 21+ care leavers based on their needs this may involve weekly contact for some, visiting care leavers possibly c.3 monthly but as a minimum being in active contact every 6</p>	<p>In the current service model, the majority of 21+ care leavers are allocated to Team Managers, with a relatively small number allocated to an LCW.</p> <p>Developing the service model so that all 21+ care leavers have an allocated worker would provide care leavers with a quality service and is in line with Ofsted feedback.</p> <p>More regular contact would ensure care leavers always had a route back into service and would encourage them to access low level support instead of waiting until crisis point.</p>	

	<p>months and at key times of year e.g. birthdays, Christmas.</p> <p>There will continue to be a Duty service for care leavers to contact in case of emergency.</p> <p>The 21+ offer is the same for Qualifying young people.</p>		
<b>Supported Lodgings</b>	<p>Lincolnshire Supported Lodgings is Ofsted registered as a supported accommodation provider, offering more vulnerable care leavers the opportunity to live in a family setting. Whilst the majority of placements are for 18-21 year olds, there is the option of 16-17-year-olds being placed in an 'assessment beds' as a precursor to an ongoing placement.</p> <p>Supported Lodgings providers are self-employed and are supported by trained staff, along the same principles as Supervising Social Workers.</p>	No change recommended to preferred model from April 2025; this would remain part of the future service model.	

Table 6 – service model

**Recommended Commissioning Option**

Consideration has been given to continuing to externally commission LLCS or to insource it. The Commissioning Plan provides further detail. It is recommended that the Council insources LLCS from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025.

The cost of externally commissioning LLCS based on the recommended service model is anticipated to be £2,678,930 p/a. The cost of insourcing the service is anticipated to be £2,538,675 p/a; this is £140,255 less. An overview of finances is set out below:

Item	Cost
<b>Total Budget</b>	<b>£ 1, 441,743.00</b>
<b>New Model Cost</b>	
Option 1 Outsourced	£ 2, 678,930.00
Option 2 In-sourced	£ 2, 538,675.00
<i>Variance to cost option 1 compared to 2</i>	<i>-£ 140,255.00</i>
<b>Extra UASC Contribution to Budget*</b>	
Option 1 UASC Contribution @30% + specific costs	£ 866,921.00
Option 2 UASC Contribution @30% + specific costs	£ 860,455.00
<b>Variance to Budget once UASC Contribution Added</b>	
Option 1 Outsourced	<b>-£ 370,266.00</b>
Option 2 Insourced	<b>-£ 236,477.00</b>
<i>Variance to budget Option 1 compared to 2</i>	<i>-£ 133,789.00</i>

Table 7 – budget overview

\*Currently 25% of the Care Leaver cohort is former-UASC care leavers and by 2025 this is expected to be 30%+ and therefore, 30% of the contract cost could be met by the UASC budget (this percentage would flexible and in line with the changing proportion of UASC Care Leavers). Any specific costs, attributed solely to UASC care leavers, such as a premises in Peterborough, would also be met by the UASC budget i.e. funding for an office space in Peterborough. The UASC budget would also be attributed towards the salary for the Head of Service for Leaving Care and Supported Living<sup>20</sup> under the insourced option; savings on the existing staffing budget of £32,593 are being reinvested into LLCS to reduce the cost pressure further. UASC contribution to the LLCS budget would be regularly re-based in line with cohort share.

It should be noted that staffing costs for insourcing do not include annual pay increments. This would equate to c.£66,000 if all staff progress to the next Spinal Column Point. Normally budget managers seek to manage this within existing budgets. It should also be noted though that annual inflationary price increases to a contract (if outsourcing) would also create additional costs e.g. a 3% contract cost increase in Year 2 would equate to c.£80,000.

The final management structure will be subject to further refinement and will be agreed by the Executive Director for Children’s Services in consultation with the Head of Paid Service.

Regardless of whether the service is externally commissioned or insourced, there will be a cost pressure for the Council of at least **£236,477.00 p/a**. The timing of such review means this increased cost has not been captured in the Council’s current medium-term finance plan from 2025/26. This will be reflected in the next Council’s medium-term finance plan update.

The ‘Young People of Lincolnshire’ non-recurrent reserves (former-Connexions budget) has a remaining balance of £151,219, which could be used to off-set the cost related to EET posts for at least the first year of any new service.

If LLCS is insourced, further recurrent savings of c.£99,000 per annum may be possible if existing LCC office space can be utilised to accommodate LLCS staff, with the exception of a Peterborough base.

<sup>20</sup> Assuming Head of Service would be on SLC2 by 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025

Both elements would reduce the cost pressure for an insourced service in year one (2025/26) by up to £250,000, and recurrent cost pressure would be built into medium-term financial planning thereafter.

Additional funding from the Public Health Grant is being explored linked to substance misuse and EET support. Funding towards the Mental Health Workers is also being explored as part of the CYP Mental Health Transformation.

## **2. Legal Issues:**

### Equality Act 2010

Under section 149 of the [Equality Act 2010](#), the Council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

The relevant protected characteristics are: age; disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation.

Having due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to:

- Remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic.
- Take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it.
- Encourage persons who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

The steps involved in meeting the needs of disabled persons that are different from the needs of persons who are not disabled include, in particular, steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities.

Having due regard to the need to foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to tackle prejudice, and promote understanding.

Compliance with the duties in section 149 may involve treating some persons more favourably than others.

The duty cannot be delegated and must be discharged by the decision-maker. To discharge the statutory duty the decision-maker must analyse all the relevant material with the specific statutory obligations in mind. If a risk of adverse impact is identified consideration must be given to measures to avoid that impact as part of the decision-making process.

An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed as part of the service review and, whilst it is an ongoing document, it is included within Appendix A (Commissioning Plan).

Due regard has been taken in the development of the LLCS service model of the need to advance equality of opportunity for care leavers, including those with protected characteristics and to enhance support to them.

Development and implementation of the preferred service model will ensure care leavers have improved access to support, with specialist workers around mental health, accommodation, EET and UASC. Supported Lodgings will be developed as part of the wider accommodation offer for care leavers.

It is not anticipated that there will be adverse impacts to care leavers through the new service model arrangement.

### Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA and the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy (JHWS)

The Council must have regard to the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) and the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy (JHWS) in coming to a decision.

The [JSNA](#) includes a number of topic areas that impact on the care leaver cohort in addition to the key topic of **Children in Care (Start Well)**, all of which have been considered as part of the service review:

- Children in the Criminal Justice System (Start Well)
- Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing (Start Well)
- Schools and Achievement (Start Well)
- Special Educational Needs and Disability (Start Well)
- Alcohol and Substance Misuse (Live Well)
- Employment (Live Well)
- Financial Inclusion (Live Well)
- Homelessness (Live Well)
- Housing Standards (Live Well)
- Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing (Live Well)
- Sexual Health (Live Well)

The [JHWS](#) has 3 key areas which will have been considered in relation to care leavers:

- **Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing (Children and Young People) and Mental Health (Adults)**

The recommended model includes sustainable investment in mental health support for care leavers. This will increase LLCS staff's skills to support care leavers with their mental health and provide direct support from qualified mental health practitioners. LLCS will also continue to support care leaver access to other local mental health support within the community and specialist services appropriate to the age and needs of care leavers.

- **Housing and Health**

A core element of LLCS is related to supporting care leavers to live in suitable accommodation. LLCS employs an Accommodation Worker who works with the young people and their Leaving Care Workers to identify appropriate and affordable



accommodation. Care leavers also benefit from strong and effective access NEST (commissioned youth housing service via Nacro), where they can stay until they are 21, and are supported through county-wide Local Connection agreements with all District Councils to ensure access to appropriate housing is maximised. Care leavers in Lincolnshire are also exempt from Council Tax payments with a roll-out of county-wide free prescriptions near completion. LLCS manage the New Homes Grant for care leavers on behalf of the Council, ensuring young people are able to equip their first homes, and also advocate other support including rent gap payments and accommodation support whilst at University. The Council has also worked with Lincolnshire NHS Integrated Care Board to agree free prescriptions for Lincolnshire care leavers.

### Crime and Disorder

Under section 17 of the [Crime and Disorder Act 1998](#), the Council must exercise its various functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent crime and disorder in its area (including anti-social and other behaviour adversely affecting the local environment), the misuse of drugs, alcohol and other substances in its area and re-offending in its area.

LLCS offers support to vulnerable young people who are at risk of isolation, enabling strong and supportive relationships to be developed that can have a positive impact on outcomes and behaviours.

Care leavers continue to receive support from LLCS whilst they are in custody and the service will continue to support young people who are at risk of committing or experiencing crime and disorder, continuing to work closely with relevant agencies including We Are With You (Turning Point from April 2025), the Probation Service, Youth Offending Service and Future4Me to support young people to make positive choices.

### **3. Conclusion**

The recommended service model will provide an improved offer for Lincolnshire care leavers as set out in the review and will ensure the service is resourced and skilled to meet the needs of the cohort.

The recommended commissioning option to insource LLCS from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025 will ensure the Council can more flexibly develop the service to meet the needs of care leavers, align practice with other high quality Children's Services and integrate it with other Council services. It is felt this option will deliver the best outcomes for care leavers in Lincolnshire.

#### **1. Legal Comments:**

The proposal to insource LLCS as detailed in this report is within the Council's powers and by virtue of The Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000 (as amended) is an executive function and within the remit of the Executive Councillors to consider and determine.

## **2. Resource Comments:**

The recommendation in the report to approve Lincolnshire's Leaving Care Service (LLCS) model and insourcing from April 2025 will support an improved offer for Lincolnshire care leavers and ensure it is resourced and skilled to meet cohort requirements.

The insourcing will provide greater flexibilities for the service to adapt to changing needs and demands; be more strategically led within Children's Services and integrated with other Council services. The indicative budget requirements identify a lower cost base for the insourcing model due to operational synergies with existing Council infrastructure, therefore, the recommendation delivering overall better value for money.

The increased resource requirements to respond to the service's needs (increased demands and specialist support) has identified a re-occurring budget shortfall of £0.236m from April 2025. This is following considerations of grant funding.

There are plans to partly manage this cost rise through available reserves in 2025/26, and exploration is taking place on property requirements and opportunities for synergies, along with funding considerations from other Council services. Both options of externally commissioned and insourcing will increase the cost to the Council. This new cost pressure is to be captured within the Council's updated medium-term finance plan from 2025/26 onwards.

## **6. Consultation**

### **a) Has Local Member Been Consulted?**

Not applicable

### **b) Has Executive Councillor Been Consulted?**

Yes

### **c) Scrutiny Comments**

This report will be considered by the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 19 April 2024. The comments of the Committee will be reported to the Executive Councillor.

### **d) Risks and Impact Analysis**

The Commissioning Plan provides more detail of risks for commissioning options. Irrespective of commissioning option, there is a risk of a disruption, either as the service transfers to the Council and is established or if a new provider other than the incumbent is awarded the LLCS contract.

The recommended commissioning option to insource LLCS is considered to have the following additional risks:

- **Initial staff turnover:** there is a risk that current staff may choose not to transfer to the Council, which could have a negative, short-term impact on service delivery. The Council's terms and conditions of employment are likely to be more favourable and so it is expected

most staff would want to transfer. The Council could also commence recruitment to additional posts before 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025.

- **Barnardo’s presence in Lincolnshire could be compromised:** by insourcing the service, this could have an impact on Barnardo’s presence in Lincolnshire’s marketplace. Without a substantial contract of this nature, they could potentially choose not to remain active in Lincolnshire. This may also be an implication if the service was tendered and they were not successful. It may also be a risk regarding the delivery of Supported Lodgings if current providers do not wish to be managed by the Council or the Supported Lodgings Workers do not transfer. This could be commissioned separately but may not be a cost effective proposition to Barnardo’s due to associated management and resource overheads.
- **Current strategic capacity to manage the transfer:** Children’s Services is currently delivering a number of internal transformation programmes as well as nationally important programmes such as Family Hubs and the Families First for Children Pathfinder. The timing of insourcing may not be ideal, and consideration should be given to whether there is sufficient strategic capacity to deliver the programme of work at this time. Children’s Directorate Leadership Team has confirmed agreement with the recommended option.
- **Corporate capacity to project manage the transfer:** the Council will need to identify project capacity to support the transfer i.e. admin (HR including TUPE, payroll and pension, BWON), accommodation, asset transfer etc. Support from Children’s Commissioning will be required during the exit period to maintain oversight of contract KPIs and delivery quality and may be beneficial to provide post-transfer support to the service area until identified elements are operational.
- **Negative association with the Council:** some care leavers may have a negative association with the Council and Social Care and they may choose to disengage with support, however, there should be continuity of LCW and this has not impacted other LAs in their decision to insource the service.
- **Service growth could be more costly:** as the staffing costs for Council staff are likely to be higher, if future service development or expansion is required, it will cost more in staffing than it would if commissioned externally. Furthermore, the service could increase exponentially if not monitored with the same vigour as a commissioned service, which could have a negative impact on the wider Children’s Services budget.

## 7. Appendices

These are listed below and attached at the back of the report	
Appendix A	Commissioning Plan - Lincolnshire Leaving Care Service

## 8. Background Papers

No background papers within Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the preparation of this report.

This report was written by Bridie Fletcher, Senior Commissioning Officer, who can be contacted on m. 07748 181381 or [bridie.fletcher@lincolnshire.gov.uk](mailto:bridie.fletcher@lincolnshire.gov.uk).

# Commissioning Plan

## Lincolnshire Leaving Care Service

<b>Document Control (i)</b>	
<b>Version</b>	
<b>Version Number:</b>	29.0
<b>Version Date:</b>	15 <sup>th</sup> March 2024
<b>Description of Change:</b>	Final update
<b>Sponsor Approval</b>	
<b>Name/Position:</b>	Linda Dennett, Assistant Director for Children’s Health and Commissioning Tara Jones, Assistant Director for Children’s Safeguarding
<b>Date:</b>	15 <sup>th</sup> March 2024

## Contents

- 1. Introduction**
- 2. Current service**
  - 2.1. Contract overview
  - 2.2. Service model
  - 2.3. Staffing structure
  - 2.4. Contract performance
  - 2.5. Qualitative performance
  - 2.6. Concerns raised in the current service
  - 2.7. Lincolnshire's Ofsted performance
  - 2.8. Post-Ofsted
- 3. Statutory duties, policy background and local priorities**
  - 3.1. Evidence summary
- 4. Local and national context**
  - 4.1. Lincolnshire data
  - 4.2. Stakeholder analysis
  - 4.3. Market engagement
  - 4.4. Local Authority inspections
  - 4.5. Caseload numbers comparisons
  - 4.6. Care leaver and Leaving Care Worker projections
  - 4.7. Implications for future LLCS delivery
- 5. Options analysis**
  - 5.1. Service model options
  - 5.2. Commissioning of the preferred service model
- 6. Funding**
- 7. Benefits and risks**
  - 7.1. Option 1 - Commission LLCS with an external provider
  - 7.2. Option 2 - Insource LLCS and deliver within Council Children's Services
- 8. Summary and recommendations**
- 9. Appendices**

## 1. Introduction

The Council has a statutory responsibility to provide a leaving care service to eligible children in care (CiC) that are transitioning to adulthood.

In Lincolnshire, Barnardo's is currently commissioned to deliver the Lincolnshire Leaving Care Service (LLCS). The contract with Barnardo's commenced 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 and will cease on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025 with no further option of extension.

A commissioning review of the LLCS has been completed and the findings summarised in this Commissioning Plan.

This Commissioning Plan aims to inform decision makers of:

- The key findings of the review
- The recommended model for LLCS from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025 onwards
- The funding requirements of the recommended model
- The recommended approach for re-commissioning LLCS.

## 2. Current service

### 2.1. Contract overview

Barnardo's has provided the LLCS since 2007 following multiple successful tenders. The LLCS model and associated funding has evolved over this time to reflect the changing needs and volumes of care leavers.

The current annual contract price in 2023/24 is expected to be £1,782,046 and in 2024/25 is expected to be £1,938,310.

Barnardo's have funded additional voluntary contributions to LLCS; as a children's charity they can fundraise and seek additional donations. This is not a contractual requirement. LLCS also currently benefits from access to Barnardo's national training offer and resources. Any future commissioned model must not assume any financial contribution from an external supplier.

It should be noted the Home Office pays the Council a grant towards supporting former Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children (UASC)-care leavers which can be apportioned and used towards the LLCS cost for these young people. For those aged under 18 the grant is £114 to £143 per day<sup>1</sup> and for those aged 18 to 21 (25 if in education) it is £270 per week.

The annual cost of the LLCS has increased since the start of the contract due to the rising volume of care leavers (particularly former UASC-care leavers) and associated increased staffing costs as well as inflationary pressures. The Covid-19 Pandemic meant that budgets were underspent in 2020/21 and this underspend has been partly able to offset some pressure in later years but will be fully utilised in 2023/24.

Barnardo's also increased their voluntary contributions, but this will return to the previous level contribution from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024. The Council has therefore needed to consider a hardship claim from

---

<sup>1</sup> In-county arrivals (inc spontaneous presentations and transfers from asylum hotels) are funded at £114 per day; NTS referrals are funded at the higher rate of £143 per day

Barnardo's to ensure the current service can continue to be delivered until the end of the contract. At the time of writing this Commissioning Plan, the claim was being considered. The increased costs are being funded by ensuring appropriate use of the Home Office grant for UASC and have also been built into Council budget planning, as is the case for many other contracts that have seen increased costs.

Separate to the contract funding, Barnardo's also manage a CiC budget of up to c.£700,000 per annum on behalf of the Council for care leaver-related recoverable expenditure such as driving lessons, University costs etc., management of New Home Grants and the Care Leaver Apprenticeship Scheme (CLAS).

Barnardo's also receive grant funding separately to the LLCS contract as part of the [Staying Close Staying Connected](#) programme which is funded by the DfE. The Council was awarded grant funding of £1.3m for 2023 to 2025 and Barnardo's in one of several partners delivering the programme locally. Staying Close is a national model which provides enhanced support to young people leaving care from children's homes (including supported accommodation) and is designed to be a comparable offer to Staying Put, which supports young people in foster care to remain with their former foster carers until age 21. Staying Close provides support with move-on accommodation, a package of practical and emotional support. As of December 2023, DfE have not confirmed if the funding will be renewed after March 2025. Subject to evaluation both nationally and locally, the recurrent funding of relevant posts has been factored into modelling options detailed in *sections 5.1. and 5.2.* and may be subject to further revision.

## 2.2. Service model

Shortly after an eligible CiC young person turns 16, they are allocated a Leaving Care Worker (LCW). For many care leavers their social worker remains their lead professional until they are aged 18 although some have a LCW as their lead professional if appropriate. Other young people may be 'twin tracked' by both a Social Worker and LCW in preparation for full transition to LLCS at 18 years old. Early allocation to a LCW is seen as best practice allowing the young person to build effective relationships before they turn 18<sup>2</sup>.

As part of the core LLCS offer, the role of LCW's includes:

- Working closely with Virtual School to ensure the ePEP (**Personal Education Plan**) is up to date prior to the young person turning 18 to inform future EET support.
- Direct support to Lincolnshire care leavers who are resident in-and out of county with:
  - developing and continual review of their **Pathway Plan** (every 8 weeks until 21+)
  - securing **suitable accommodation** including via the Service's Supported Lodgings scheme
  - accessing **education, employment, or training** (EET) including the Care Leaver Apprenticeship Scheme and higher education options
  - developing **independent living skills** including financial management; help with accessing benefits and financial support; help with life skills; emotional support; and practical support to access other services such as health.
  - accessing maternity and children's **health services**, Early Years Entitlement (EYE) funding towards quality childcare, Children's Centres and Family Hubs, Early Help as relevant for care leavers that are young parents.
  - assisting those with **special education needs and disabilities** (SEND) to meet their specific needs including joint working with Adult Social Care due to ongoing health or support needs.
- Care leavers aged **21+** remain allocated to a LCW based on their need and circumstance; the majority have less intensive support, consisting of access to information, advice and guidance

---

<sup>2</sup> [Ready or Not](#)



which is accessed by calling the Urgent Support Service. All 21+ care leavers engaged in education remain allocated to a LCW until they are 25. Care leavers aged 21+ accessed Urgent Support 323 times in 2022-23; the highest percentage of contacts related to accommodation (24%), financial/debt management (14%), New Homes Grant (11%) and welfare checks (9%)<sup>3</sup>.

There are also some specialist enhanced areas of support delivered as part of LLCS:

- Most **former-UASC care leavers** transition to LLCS very close to their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday; the majority arrive in the UK/Lincolnshire aged 16 or 17 and face additional challenges that require bespoke support. As such and given the high and increasing volume of UASC in the care leaver cohort (*see care leaver demographics in 4.1.*) LLCS support their additional needs including:
  - immigration issues
  - language and cultural identity
  - community engagement
  - understanding, assessing risk and supporting young people with their experience of trafficking and exploitation
  - emotional wellbeing support arising from experienced trauma.

Approximately 50% of UASC young people are accommodated with Locate Accommodation, a commissioned regulated supported accommodation provider based in Peterborough. As young people reach adulthood, they often choose to remain in the Peterborough area, close to Locate, for continued support and a known community. Barnardo's operate a LLCS office in Peterborough to support former-UASC care leavers.

- The service employs **EET workers** to provide focussed support for young people to access suitable pre-employment training and qualifications, liaising with colleges and education providers, and go on to support care leavers into employment. LLCS also support the Care Leaver Apprenticeship Service (CLAS).
- The service employs a specialist **Accommodation Worker** who provides expertise on tenancy legislation, housing-related benefits, and local social housing networks and works directly with LCWs to help create accommodation options for their allocated care leavers both in and out of county.
- Barnardo's operate an Ofsted regulated **Supported Lodgings** scheme which is commissioned via the LLCS contract. Supported Lodgings can accommodate 16-17-year-olds in an 'assessment bed' as a precursor to an ongoing placement lasting up to 21 years old. Young people over 18 in Supported Lodgings often have complex needs, meaning they may not be ready to succeed with an independent tenancy or in shared environment such as Youth Housing. As of December 2023, there were 17 approved providers able to offer a Supported Lodging for up to 26 care leavers; one young person of 11 accommodated was under 18 years old.

Many care leavers live in **regulated supported accommodation** (commissioned by the Council) and then move-on accommodation post-18. This helps care leavers with more complex needs better transition to independent living.

Barnardo's work closely in **partnership with the Council** as a result of the statutory service they are commissioned to deliver. Barnardo's input all case records on the Council's Mosaic system, which provides effective oversight and reporting across both organisations. Barnardo's LLCS senior leaders attend Children's Services Quality Assurance Board and reports on LLCS are provided to the Corporate Parenting Panel every six months.

---

<sup>3</sup> LLCS Q2 2023-24 JET

Barnardo's undertake the Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children Partnership three-year peer moderated Section 11 safeguarding self-assessment which will be renewed in April 2024. The previous assessment was Green with no identified issues.

Joint training and practice development takes place between social care and LLCS, including safeguarding training, Signs of Safety and [WRAP](#). Barnardo's staff are able to attend Children's Service Team Manager practice meetings and practice lead sessions and can access a range of appropriate training through Lincs2Learn.

### 2.3. Staffing structure

Barnardo's current staffing FTE for LLCS (November 2023) is shown below, along with LCC equivalent grade:

Post	FTE	LCC Grade nearest equivalent 2023-24 inc. on-costs
Programme Manager	1.0	G12
Children's Services Manager <sup>4</sup>	1.0	G11
Team Manager <sup>5</sup>	5.0	G10
Senior Administrator (responsibility for contract reporting, performance and service planning)	1.0	G6
Administrator	6.5	G3/4
Leaving Care Worker PW1	26.6	G3-G6 (up to G7 following retention payment)
Accommodation Specialist PW1	1.0	G6
Supported Lodgings Specialist PW2	2.0	G8
EET Specialist PW3	1.0	G8/9
EET Specialist PW2	1.0	G8
UASC Project Worker PW3	1.0	G8/9
Participation Project Worker PW2	1.0	G8

Table 1: LLCS staffing and LCC grade equivalent (inc. pay awards)

The staffing structure shown costs £1.875m per annum and excludes the posts funded by the Staying Close Staying Connected grant which are fixed term posts to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025, and sit outside of the LLCS contract.

### 2.4. Contract Performance

Barnardo's keep in touch with 98% of Former Relevant care leavers which is better than the England average; Barnardo's also update Pathway Plans within statutory timescales at a better rate. Below is a summary of Barnardo's annual performance across the contract:

<sup>4</sup> This is a new post that DLT agreed to fund to enhance management capacity; the post will be in place from Dec-23 to the end of the contract in Mar-25

<sup>5</sup> This includes 0.8FTE which DLT have recently agreed (Nov-23) as further enhancement to staffing capacity

Key Performance Indicator	Lincolnshire Target	2020-2021 (Q4 JET Data)	2021-2022 (Q4 JET Data)	2022-2023 (Q4 JET Data)	2023-2024 (Q2 JET Data)	Direction of Travel
Care leavers have positive relationships and transition to adulthood	90% for KIT (Tolerance: +/- 5%)	96.5%	96.5%	95.5%	94.5%	↓
% in EET at 16-18 years	Target: 85% (Tolerance: +/- 5%)	65%	60%	55%	44%	↓
% in EET at 19 years <sup>6</sup>	Target: 70% (Tolerance: +/- 5%)	62%	60%	50%	44%	↓
% in EET at 19-21 years	Target: 65% (Tolerance: +/- 5%)	54%	59%	56%	50%	↓
% living in suitable accommodation at 16-18 years	Target: 95% (Tolerance: +/- 5%)	94%	86%	89%	88%	↓
% living in suitable accommodation at age 19 <sup>31</sup>	Target: 95% (Tolerance: +/- 5%)	94%	94%	92%	91%	↓
% living in suitable accommodation at 19-21 years	Target: 95% (Tolerance: +/- 5%)	94%	95%	92%	92%	↔
Care leavers have positive sense of identity and are resilient <sup>31</sup>	Target: 90% for Pathway Plans (tolerance +/- 5%)	88%	94%	96%	92%	↓

Table 2 – LLCS KPI summary

Barnardo's exceeded the national average of care leavers in **suitable accommodation** in 2023 but are 1% below that of statistical neighbours<sup>7</sup>.

The percentage of care leavers in **EET** has been below target for most of the contract across all ages. It should be noted that the care leaver EET figures for England have been around 56% and below for the past 3 years<sup>8</sup>, and this KPI is one of the more complex to resolve. EET engagement is contingent on a range of factors, including accommodation stability, mental health and disability.

Former-UASC care leavers have high EET, with 72% of 16–17-year-olds UASC and 67.6% of former-UASC care leavers aged 18-21 accessing some form of EET. There are currently 27 care leavers at university who are supported by the service, including 4 former-UASC care leavers.

As of December 2023, there were 8 young people engaged in CLAS through a variety of employment options.

## 2.5. Qualitative performance

The views of care leavers are regularly sought to help understand areas for service improvement. A summary of feedback relating to the existing LLCS is below:

<sup>6</sup> 903 return KPIs used as national comparator (EET at 19, suitable accommodation at 19, Pathway Plans)

<sup>7</sup> [Local Authority Interactive Tool \(LAIT\)](#)

<sup>8</sup> National EET figures in England were 53% in 2020, 52% in 2021, 55% in 2022 and 56% in 2023 ([LAIT](#) 24-11-23)

- **You Said We Did** quarterly returns have shown a range of actions following feedback from care leavers including setting up participation groups including for LGBTQ+ care leavers, activities for young people including sports club access for former-UASC care leavers, opportunities to engage with national research, life skills activities etc.
- **Participation** with care leavers has been a significant focus of the LLCS, with a designated participation officer ensuring co-production throughout the service. Barnardo's have developed 8 care leaver-led transformation groups looking at different aspects of service delivery including engagement and communications. The participation offer continues to develop and be strengthened, ensuring that care leavers have a voice and an input into service delivery; Barnardo's also facilitate Lincolnshire care leavers to contribute to national conversations about their experiences.
- **Exit plans** completed during 2023-24 highlight that care leavers rate the quality of support very highly with 100% of scores 8+ out of 10.
- **Compliments** are recorded from both professionals and care leavers, though due to inconsistencies in recording there are low volumes. Care leavers that have responded have fed back how much they value their LCW and the level of support offered, and this is backed up by stakeholders including police and health colleagues, NACRO, foster carers etc who have mentioned the high level of support to young people, as well as the Council's Head of Service for Leaving Care and Supported Living has singled out a number of workers for effective practice and support.

*My life would have been very different if Barnardo's had not been a part of it. I would not have been able to accomplish as many great things as I have. At the time, getting through everything would have been challenging financially and emotionally. I do not even like to consider what life would have been like without them, since I know it would not have been the same. The gratitude I feel towards them will last a lifetime.*

Care leaver, March 2023

Barnardo's have developed effective relationships with Council colleagues and other relevant statutory and commissioned services such as the ICB, youth housing and supported accommodation providers, DWP, substance misuse services and mental health services; there is a dedicated Mental Health Worker employed by Lincolnshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust, which is now funded through the Staying Close programme, which is having a positive impact for care leavers.

## 2.6. Concerns raised in the current service

Area of concern	Description	Consideration in future LLCS
Transition protocols	Barnardo's audits identified transition protocols are not completed consistently in good time. A new transition protocol is being implemented with LCWs.	<p>Transition planning is highly important and is one of the key findings from national research (see 3.1.).</p> <p>There must be sufficient LCW capacity to support this and there may be benefit in considering a specialist role or team.</p> <p>Nottinghamshire County Council have a Transitions Service that work</p>

		with the most complex young people where it has been identified that a successful transition to leaving care may be unlikely; Nottinghamshire suggested that their Transition Service has saved over £1.5 million in specialist placements.
Quality and performance	Barnardo's have had access to Mosaic for a number of years but have only recently been able to stop recording on their own content server system. Whilst here has been a significant effort and programme of works from both Barnardo's and the Council's Mosaic team to develop worksteps and cleanse data in the past few years, there remain some inconsistencies in data.	If the service continues to be provided by an external supplier reporting on Mosaic will continue to be important and the Council will need to ensure support is available for data transfer, as relevant, as well as ongoing support in data input, data accuracy, staff training and reporting.
Staffing	<p>In the current LLCS there has been a high turnover of LCW's. Barnardo's conducted staff consultations and exit interviews and low wages for LCW's was highlighted as a key factor. In 2021/22, 10 staff members (nine LCW) left LLCS; six left for higher paid posts in local authorities (including the Council) and two were promoted to other posts in Barnardo's.</p> <p>The service has struggled to recruit staff at the right skill level on the current pay grade to support increasingly complex young people. Barnardo's have tried to recruit LCW posts regularly and have had low interest, often with no candidates passing the short listing or interview processes. The turnover of staff has an impact on the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stability of worker and care leavers needing to repeat lived experiences to multiple professionals</li> <li>• Capacity for allocation; new staff do not have a full caseload during 6-month induction</li> <li>• Recruitment process and induction which requires Team Managers capacity</li> </ul>	The Council must ensure funding is adequate for the LLCS and build in a contractual mechanism as necessary for inflationary increases.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capacity of Leaving Care Workers to buddy new workers</li> <li>• Quality of service which had a potential impact on Ofsted grading.</li> </ul> <p>Benchmarking with other Local Authorities' LCW salaries indicates that increased salary costs will need to be considered in any future LLCS model:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Surrey – av. £32,798 p/a (LCC G8)</li> <li>• Stockport - £30,151 to £34,723 (LCC G8)</li> <li>• Manchester City - £28,900 to £32,020 (LCC G7)</li> <li>• Essex - £29,741 to £34,001 (LCC G7/8)</li> <li>• Peterborough City - £27,852 to £31,099 (LCC G6/7)</li> </ul> <p>LCWs in Lincolnshire have been paid across a range of Council Grade 3-6 equivalent.</p> <p>The level and experience of staff recruited to LCW posts in Lincolnshire has meant Team Managers spend a lot of time training, coaching, mentoring and overseeing LCWs to ensure they can provide the right support for young people. Once up-skilled staff then want to progress to higher paid positions. As such, Children's Services has supported Barnardo's to pay existing LCWs a non-recurrent retention payment pro-rata to the end of the contract to broadly align to Council Grade 7. This is the same rate as Early Help Workers, which are considered comparable roles.</p>	
Complexity of young people's needs	Barnardo's have noted an increase in the complexity of needs of care leavers, particularly those entering care at a later age. The Council's Social Workers also recognise higher complexity. This impacts on the type and volume of support care leavers need. As a result, LCW's routinely provide support over and above the 8-week statutory visit requirement.	LCW caseload capacity needs to factor in complexity of needs. Sustainable funding of a dedicated mental health support for care leavers needs to be identified.

	There have also been increased safeguarding incidents reported by LLCS, noting higher presentation of mental health concerns.	
EET	<p>Following an audit on EET performance Barnardo’s note the following factors in impacting care leavers engagement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unsuitable and unstable accommodation</li> <li>• Poor mental health</li> <li>• SEND e.g. ADHD and autism</li> <li>• Substance misuse</li> <li>• Criminal record</li> <li>• Other factors including childcare and immigration status.</li> </ul> <p>Barnardo’s previously employed a specialist EET Champion and a Wellbeing Worker to help care leavers overcome barriers to EET. Both posts are now funded through the Staying Close programme to the end of the contract period.</p>	<p>LLCS EET offer needs to be strengthened to support care leavers’ engagement, with a multi-faceted and holistic approach that identifies the many relevant factors. Nottinghamshire County Council have an extensive EET offer which has had a positive impact on KPIs.</p> <p>Whilst suitable and sustainable accommodation is the key factor, poor mental health and substance misuse play a significant role in readiness to engage.</p> <p>Sustainable funding of dedicated mental health and substance use support for care leavers needs to be identified.</p>

Table 3 – areas of concern

## 2.7. Lincolnshire’s Ofsted performance

In January 2023 Ofsted introduced a new, separate judgement for care leaver services to their inspection framework<sup>9</sup>. Ofsted inspected Lincolnshire Children’s Services in April 2023; Lincolnshire was one of the first Local Authorities inspected under the new framework. The overall judgement for Lincolnshire Children’s Services was ‘Outstanding,’ whilst LLCS was judged as ‘Good’<sup>10</sup>. There were some key improvements required to LLCS and a program of work is in place to address this. The recommendations from Ofsted relating to LLCS have been considered as part of the commissioning review and form part of the recommended future delivery model.

Positive feedback included:

- Good outcomes for care leavers in key areas of **relationship-based support** which is bespoke to the young person and support to maintain important networks.
- A good **health offer** e.g., funding for dental treatment; however, this was not widely known by LCWs.
- Access to specialist support services such as **counselling and CAMHS** was seen to be effective. The specialist Mental Health Worker post (funded via Staying Close) was identified as good practice which care leavers spoke about in glowing terms.
- The **participation offer** was also good but could be better publicised, and take-up of activities was therefore sometimes low. The online Local Offer was highlighted as variable across the seven

<sup>9</sup> [Inspecting Local Authority Children’s Services Framework \(ILACS\)](#)

<sup>10</sup> [Lincolnshire’s Ofsted Report \(April 2023\)](#)

District Councils, but Ofsted could see Leaders are making efforts to unify the offer across the Local Authority area.

- The **EET offer** is valued by care leavers who appreciate the range of support and opportunities available to them.
- LCWs have a **sound understanding of risk of potential and actual exploitation**; all care leavers have a risk assessment and safety plans, but whilst realistic, do not appear to be consistently shared with other professionals.

Areas for improvement included:

- **Allocations and transitions** were insufficiently robust and did not always happen in good time or consistently, with some young people developing relationship with their LCW from 16 years old and other not meeting their LCW until they are 18 at their last care review.
- The **quality of Pathway Plans**; whilst plans are updated within statutory timeframes, they do not always reflect changes in the circumstances of young people and the quality of recording is variable. Some plans lack aspirational language or specificity on how to achieve goals, or related timeframes.
- Support and engagement for **care leavers in custody**. Ofsted observed that attempted support and visits were not always accurately documented by LLCS, who recognise that creative solutions need to be explored to engage this challenging cohort of care leavers.
- Significant development is needed for the **21+ Service**, Ofsted observed that some young people were closed to a LCW at 21 years of age and may have benefited from remaining allocated. Some young people were unsure why they had been stepped down and the decision is sometimes unclear in their case records. Contact with those aged 21+ who are not allocated to a LCW is annual and whilst this is the statutory requirement, Ofsted found Lincolnshire's offer was 'Good' and did not go far enough to achieve a higher judgement.

There were two areas of the framework which Ofsted did not comment on: support for young parents and former-UASC care leavers.

## 2.8. Post-Ofsted

There is a risk to the Council maintaining its overall 'Outstanding' judgement if the LLCS is not providing the highest quality support to care leavers and if demonstrable improvements are not seen rapidly. Ofsted will expect improvement to be demonstrated as part of the Council's annual conversation in February 2024.

Barnardo's and the Council have agreed an Improvement Plan to be delivered as part of the current contract, which has been signed off by DLT. This is being monitored as part of the CiC Transformation Programme and governance is via the Children's Quality Assurance Board. DLT has also agreed to fund some fixed-term leadership capacity in Barnardo's to oversee delivery of the service improvements.

There is significant Council resource involved in supporting the Improvement Plan and ongoing LLCS service delivery i.e. the Head of Service for Leaving Care and Supported Living and the Corporate Parenting Manager, Children's Strategic Commissioning, Children's Finance, Mosaic and a Practice Advisor from the Quality and Standards team who is supporting Barnardo's with quality audits and practice developments. The improvements to LLCS will directly inform the recommended future model in this Commissioning Plan.



### Summary of Key Findings – Current Service

- Barnardo's has delivered LLCS since 2007. As a national charity they have brought added value to the contract, including financial contributions, but supplier contribution cannot be relied on in any future LLCS model.
- The current contract cannot be extended and the Council must decide on the recommissioning of LLCS.
- Since the current contract started, care leaver numbers have risen. There has been a significant increase in former-UASC care leavers. Home Office grants can be used to fund LLCS for these young people. Going forward financial investment from the grant must be flexible to ensure proportionate funding.
- The cost of running LLCS has increased since the start of the contract and the original contract budget has not been sufficient to fund the service.
- There have been challenges in recruiting and retaining quality experienced staff, with many moving on to higher paid roles, which will have impacted service performance and stability for care leavers. Pressures on contract funding and growing demand has meant Barnardo's have been unable to pay staff at a higher rate. The Council has responded to this by increasing funding non-recurrently (including the consideration of hardship funding) but there needs to be a recurrent budget increase to ensure the right staff are employed and retained.
- Barnardo's contact with care leavers, completion of pathway plan reviews and those in suitable accommodation is better than the England average but overall contract performance has shown decline since the contract started, most notably a reduction in care leavers in EET. Barnardo's have tried to respond by putting in additional targeted staffing but they report a higher complexity of care leavers which is impacting on their engagement in EET.
- EET engagement is a priority for the LLCS in 2024 and beyond. Nationally, EET engagement has fluctuated considerably post pandemic. Some areas, including Nottinghamshire, have made impressive improvements as a result of having clear strategies and increased investment in EET specialists.
- Care leavers themselves generally have a positive view of LLCS. The KPI's that relate to human experience, relationships, and how the care leavers feel about themselves score highly, despite small declines over the life of the contract. Barnardo's encourage care leavers to have a say about LLCS improvements. The creation of specialist groups and events are the result of listening to care leavers and what they need from the service.
- Whilst Ofsted judged the LLCS to be 'good', there were notable areas identified for improvement including transitions and allocation, the 21+ service offer, the quality of pathway plans and engagement with those in custody. A poor Ofsted inspection for LLCS risks the Council's overall inspection being downgraded. A comprehensive Improvement Plan in response to the findings of the Ofsted report is in progress.
- Barnardo's have a close partnership relationship with the Council; recording on the Council's Mosaic system, attending Council Boards and Committees, joint continued professional development, joint quality assurance. Despite being an externally commissioned service, Barnardo's have worked collaboratively with other public service providers to wrap relevant support and care around young people.
- LLCS has numerous specialist officers who support with advice, guidance, and up-skilling of staff in areas such as EET, accommodation, mental health, and participation. This is recognised as best practice by Ofsted.
- Care leavers are benefitting from enhanced support funded by the Staying Close Staying Connected DfE grant, which is not part of the LLCS contract. The programme provides mental health, wellbeing, substance misuse, and practical support for Lincolnshire care leavers and has been well received

locally by professionals and young people, as well as Connective Workers who will support care leavers resident out of county to identify and remain close to their support networks or consider a return to Lincolnshire. At the point of writing this commissioning plan, the DfE have not confirmed if the programme will continue to be funded beyond the current contract period. The Council will need to decide if posts should continue to be funded as part of the future service should the DfE cease the grant entirely.

### 3. Statutory duties, policy background and local priorities

LLCS is a statutory service that supports the Council to meet its **legal responsibilities** to care leavers aged 16 to 25 years old, regardless of where they are living, including:

Category	Criteria	Entitlement
<b>Eligible</b> <a href="#">Schedule 2, Paragraph 19B, Children Act (CA) 1989</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aged 16 or 17</li> <li>Looked after by Children’s Services for a period of 13 weeks since the age of 14</li> <li>Currently looked after</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A Personal Advisor</li> <li>A Needs Assessment</li> <li>A Pathway Plan</li> <li>Receive all the care and support they normally receive until they leave care</li> </ul>
<b>Relevant</b> <a href="#">Section 23A, CA 1989</a> <a href="#">Section 23B, CA 1989</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aged 16 or 17</li> <li>Looked after by Children’s Services for a period of 13 weeks since the age of 14</li> <li>Looked after for a period after their 16th birthday</li> <li>No longer looked after</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A Personal Advisor</li> <li>A Needs Assessment</li> <li>A Pathway Plan</li> <li>Accommodation and maintenance</li> <li>Financial support to meet EET needs</li> </ul>
<b>Former Relevant</b> <a href="#">Section 23C, CA 1989</a> <a href="#">Section 23CZA, CA 1989</a> <a href="#">Section 23CA, CA 1989</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aged between 18 and 25</li> <li>Previously an eligible child and/or a relevant child</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A Personal Advisor</li> <li>A Pathway Plan, kept under regular review</li> <li>Assistance with EET</li> <li>Assistance with accommodation</li> <li>Help with living costs</li> </ul>
<b>Qualifying*</b> <a href="#">Section 24, CA 1989</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aged between 16 and 25</li> <li>Looked after by Children’s Services on, or after, their 16th birthday and no longer looked after</li> <li>Spent less than 13 weeks in care since 14th birthday i.e. do not fulfil criteria for eligible or relevant child</li> <li>Looked after by the LA prior to being the subject of an SGO</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Help with living expenses and if they are in higher education; they may also help with securing vacation accommodation</li> <li>Information, advice and assistance from Children’s Services, which may be in cash</li> <li>16-20 year olds are allocated a Personal Advisor but there is no requirement for a Pathway Plan or statutory visits; 21+ year olds may be allocated to a Personal Advisor depending on need</li> </ul>

Table 4 – care leaver categories and service eligibility

\* Many UASC are not in care for long enough by their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday to be entitled to support and are officially ‘Qualifying’ care leavers. In recognition of this and irrespective of their time in care, all former-UASC care leavers have ‘Former Relevant’ status to enable full access to support.

The following **policies** have been considered and integrated into the recommended future model within this Commissioning Plan:

- The [Children \(Leaving Care\) Act 2000](#) introduced the requirements on Local Authorities to assess the needs of young people as they leave care, appoint a Personal Adviser<sup>11</sup> to support them until they turn 18 (or to 21 if in education), and develop a Pathway Plan.
- The [2008 Children and Young Person's Act](#) introduces provision for Local Authorities to provide additional support to care leavers in education, including a £2000 bursary per year for those in higher education and extended Leaving Care Worker (LCW) support to 21 for all young people and to 25 if in education.
- [Care Leavers \(England\) Regulations 2010](#) sets out the comprehensive elements of support to enable young people make the successful transition to independence.
- [The Care Leavers Charter 2012](#) identified six key pillars of support: identity and aspiration, listening to care leavers' views, support when needed, providing information, finding care leavers a home, and working together.
- The [Children and Family Act 2014](#) introduced the 'Staying Put' duty which supports care leavers to remain with their foster carers to the age of 21 where both parties wish the arrangement to continue.
- The principles of the Government's 2016 [Keep on Caring Strategy](#) recognise the importance of supporting care leavers to be better prepared and supported to live independently, have improved access to education, training and employment experience stability and feel safe and secure, have a stable place to live, have improved access to health support, and have financial stability. The resulting [Care Leaver Covenant](#) sets out the national commitment to care leavers.
- The [Children and Social Work Act 2017](#) sets out the duties that Local Authorities have to care leavers. Local Authorities have a duty to publish a Local Offer, detailing services that they offer to care leavers that may assist care leavers in, or in preparing for, adulthood and independent living. This includes health and wellbeing, relationships, education and training, employment, accommodation, and participation in society. Care leavers are also able to access support up to the age of 25, regardless of whether they are in education or not, and further requires Local Authorities to have regard to the seven corporate parenting principles<sup>12</sup>:
  1. To act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, of those children and young people.
  2. To encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings.
  3. To consider the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people.
  4. 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.
  5. To promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people.
  6. For those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work.
  7. To prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.
- In addition, the [Immigration Act 2016](#) and the [Care of Unaccompanied Migrant Children and Child Victims of Modern Slavery \(2017\) guidance](#) state that former Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) who qualify as care leavers and who have been granted leave to remain, or who

---

<sup>11</sup> Lincolnshire use the term Leaving Care Worker (LCW), which is used in the Commissioning Plan from this point

<sup>12</sup> [Applying corporate parenting principles to looked-after children and care leavers](#)

have an outstanding asylum or other human rights claim or appeal, are entitled to the same level of care and support from the Local Authority as any other care leaver.

Several **national improvement programmes** may have an impact on future national policy changes following evaluation of outcomes delivered, and are already driving local LLCS improvements:

- [Families First for Children \(FFC\)](#)
- [Rough Sleeping Funding Grant](#)
- [Staying Close Staying Connected Grant](#)

National policy has further informed important **local strategies** which have a focus on Children in Care (CiC) and care leavers:

- [Early Help Strategy 2021-23](#)
- [Early Childhood Strategy 2020-24](#)
- [Joint Strategic Needs Assessment \(JSNA\)](#)
- [Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#)
- [Lincolnshire High Needs Strategy](#)
- [Lincolnshire SEMH Strategy](#)
- [Participation Strategy 2023-26](#)
- [Lincolnshire Local Transformation Plan for Children and Young People's Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health](#)
- [Children in Care and Care Leaver Strategy 2022-25](#)
- [Children in Care Sufficiency Strategy 2023-27](#)

As stated in the [Children in Care and Care Leaver Strategy 2022-2025](#):

*It is the ambition of Lincolnshire County Council for our children and young people in or leaving care to be safe, happy, and healthy, to enjoy life and realise their potential. Where they are provided with a safe and dependable foundation from which they can grow and achieve as this offers every child who has had a difficult start, the promise of a brighter future, with every prospect of success. We will provide them with high quality care, support, and guidance to ensure that they get the opportunities they deserve, as we know the highest quality of social care can transform the life chances of the most vulnerable children in Lincolnshire. Through relationship-based interactions, we will give them the support they need to be resilient and well prepared for adulthood and independence.*

The future LLCS will also continue to contribute to and be a key part of the local **Children in Care (CiC) transformation programme** which builds on the social care improvements proposed in the Government's implementation and strategy document, [Stable Homes, Built on Love](#) (2023), which sets out six key pillars that aim to reform children's social care. The Council's CiC transformation programme seeks to develop and improve our current understanding of and future planning for CiC and aims to provide family environments for CiC to live where possible- stepping down residential placements, particularly out of area, to provide more targeted wraparound support from other local services. The transformation programme is important in helping to shape services for CiC and has direct implications for what a future leaving care service should offer.

The Council is also leading a **Children and Young People's Mental Health transformation programme** on behalf of Lincoln Integrated Care Board (ICB) and in partnership with Lincolnshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust (LPFT) who provide many children's mental health services locally. The programme vision is that, together with children and young people in Lincolnshire, we will understand how we can best support their emotional wellbeing and mental health and transform and improve services enabling

CYP to live independent, safe, well and fulfilled lives in their local communities. There are several existing targeted services that support CiC and care leavers with their mental health, recognising the impact of experienced trauma and the higher prevalence of mental illness in care experienced children. These services are part of the transformation programme. The views of care experienced children and the professionals working with them is helping to inform what future services need to offer including how they should integrate with any future LLCS.

### 3.1. Evidence Summary

It is important to understand available evidence on what can improve outcomes for care leavers and embed this into the future LLCS; a summary of findings is set out below.

#### **Transition:**

Information in Ofsted's 2022 report [Ready or Not](#) highlights the importance of carefully planned twin tracking of children from aged 16 to 18 and the importance of planned transition work to prepare care leavers for adulthood.

#### **Education, employment and training (EET):**

The [evaluation of the Care Leavers Social Impact Bond \(SIB\) programme](#) (2023) highlighted that supporting care leavers' stability and wellbeing was a key foundation for achieving EET outcomes based on four areas of stability and wellbeing outcomes: when a care leaver agreed education and training was right for them; had at least one consistent relationship; felt safe; and managed their accommodation and costs. The study also highlighted the importance of consistent, skilled and knowledgeable support was a key enabler in engaging care leavers (and maintaining their engagement) in the EET programme.

#### **Mental health:**

The 2020 report [What Makes Life Good](#) showed that 30% of care leavers experience low wellbeing and that 26% of care leavers aged 16–34 reported low life satisfaction compared to just 3% of the general population of the same age. This is in line with other research studies that have produced data showing that care leavers mental health is worse than that of the general population.

[An exploratory study of the emotional wellbeing needs and experiences of care leavers in England](#) (2023) highlights the issues faced by care leavers and professionals when supporting young people's emotional wellbeing. The report recommends dual support (practical and mental health), improving the quality of that support, the importance of Leaving Care Workers, and using data collection and monitoring as ways to support care leavers' mental health needs.

[What Works for Children's Social Care – emotional wellbeing needs and experiences of care leavers](#) (2023) highlighted the disparity and variation in mental health support for care leavers, though positive relationships between Leaving Care Workers and care leavers are vital in providing additional support through relationships and facilitating access to services.

The 2022 ONS article '[Half a million more people are out of the labour force because of long-term sickness](#)' details how work absence due to mental ill health has risen 22% from April/June 2019 to April/June 2022, which the researchers suggest may be as a result of post-Covid change.

### Care leavers in custody:

[HMP Care Experience Matters](#) (2023) suggests beneficial practice for prisons, probation, and Local Authorities to provide consistent and appropriate support for people with care experience whilst they are in prison, upon release, or under community supervision.

### Health and wellbeing:

[The lifelong health and well-being of care leavers](#) (Nuffield Foundation, 2021) recommends that the placement of CiC should prioritise their long-term well-being, necessitating commitment across Children's Social Care and Family Justice systems. Policies must consistently consider the unique needs of care leavers, addressing substantial health, education, and employment disparities in adulthood. State intervention to protect a child should entail a lifelong commitment, with all public services attuned to the additional needs of care leavers.

[Care leavers – a hidden health inequality](#) (BMJ, 2022) advocates that growing up in care increases the likelihood of poor health later in life up to fourfold compared to those raised by parents. Leaving care leads to social and health exclusion, with a higher prevalence of psychiatric diagnoses. It highlights the NHS Care Experienced Peer Group and NHS England's commitment to the [Care Leavers Covenant](#) as steps toward addressing health inequalities for this vulnerable group.

### Care leavers who are parents:

Young participants in the [Teenage children of mothers who experienced out-of-home care: How are they doing?](#) (evidence from the UK Millennium Cohort Study, Nuffield Foundation, 2022) project emphasised that the life circumstances of care leavers create challenges predisposing them to health problems. Their experiences of early independence without typical family resources, financial constraints, and ongoing stress contribute to health issues. Stigma, lack of support, and disrupted health literacy worsen their challenges, making them more likely to need help but less likely to know how to seek it. They expressed encountering a lack of understanding and empathy, exacerbating barriers to accessing healthcare. To improve the situation, they suggested healthcare professionals need better understanding, and targeted efforts are required to reduce barriers to good healthcare for care leavers.

Barnardo's [Care-experienced Parents Unite for Change](#) 2022 report recommends five key steps to support care leavers who become parents:

1. **Develop Family Hubs:** Establish Family Hubs in every community, providing accessible and comprehensive support for care-experienced parents, aligning with government commitments.
2. **Enhance support networks:** Support care-experienced parents in building informal support networks, utilising mentoring programs and services like Lifelong Links up to the age of 25.
3. **Local Authority policies:** Ensure all Local Authorities adopt a best practice charter for care-experienced parents, addressing practical needs, from housing to baby care, promoting consistency in support.
4. **Extend corporate parenting:** Extend statutory responsibility to more public bodies, including the NHS and police forces, to ensure consistent support for care-experienced individuals across various services.
5. **Mental Health support:** Develop mental health support for care-experienced parents, involving care-experienced young people, and create a role for virtual mental health leads in each Local Authority to coordinate mental health services for children and young people.

[Themes from engagement with a youth panel: Care leavers' experiences of health inequalities](#) (2023) identifies various aspects of intergenerational transmission of disadvantage and trauma within families

where the mother has experience in out-of-home care (OHC). Previous research has shown that mothers with OHC experience report poorer general and mental health. This study reveals increased odds of their teenage children self-reporting behaviour and mental health problems, including self-harm and attempted suicide, along with higher rates of tobacco and cannabis use, and police contact. The findings emphasise the crucial need for ongoing support structures for parents with OHC experience and their children to mitigate the lasting impact of care experience on these vulnerable families.

#### **Summary of Key Findings - Statutory duties, policy background, local priorities and evidence**

- There are legal requirements that the LLCS must adhere to and these provide a clear framework for the minimum service offer. However, there is not a standard delivery model for leaving care services within England and local needs and evidence of how to improve outcomes for care leavers must help shape the future service offer.
- Lincolnshire's local related policies and strategies already align to statutory requirements and national policy. LLCS will need to be able to respond and adapt to any changes in future policy.
- The scope of the CiC and CYP Mental Health local transformation programmes are relevant to LLCS. The programmes are not complete and it is vital that the new LLCS both informs the programmes but also can adapt to meet emerging recommendations.
- Evidence suggests that LLCS should include:
  - Early transition planning from 16+.
  - A focus on improving the stability and wellbeing of care leavers to enable access to EET e.g. mental health, accommodation stability and peer modelling.
  - Consistent, skilled knowledgeable support. Positive relationships Leaving Care Workers can have a lasting positive impact on the mental health and wellbeing of care leavers.
  - Targeted support to address the much greater health inequalities that care leavers experience, including help to access health services in particular mental health support. It should be noted that many care experienced children experience health inequalities on multiple fronts and are at even greater risk e.g. from an ethnic minority background, LGBTQ+, disabled, have a mental health condition, and known to the criminal justice system.
  - Targeted consistent support for care leavers in custody and upon release.
- More broadly, the Council and other statutory services should proactively provide targeted support for care experienced parents to mitigate the impact that historic trauma can have on the children of care leavers.

## **4. Local and national context**

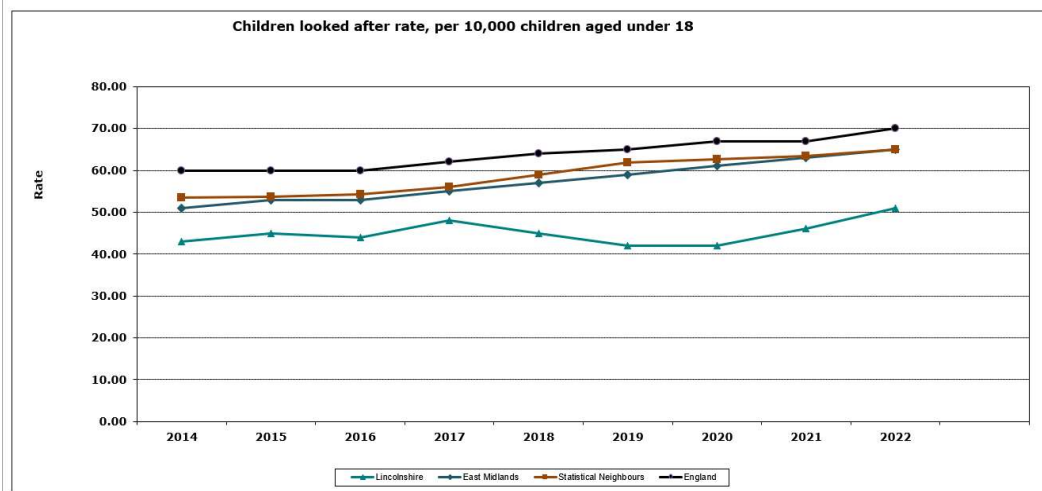
### **4.1. Lincolnshire Data**

- Lincolnshire is the fourth largest county in England; 95% of the county is classified as rural and communities are dispersed across a large and diverse landscape. 48% of residents live in rural areas which is over double the national average. The population is approximately 761,224 residents<sup>13</sup>. Approximately 21.5% of the total population is aged 0-19 years (163,550).
- c. 1/3 of children in the UK live in poverty and are at risk of poorer outcomes. Based on the [Indices of Multiple Deprivation \(IMD\) 2019](#), 6.7% of Lincolnshire's population (approximately 50,000 people) live within the 10% most deprived areas of England. This is highest within Lincoln and East Lindsey. 6 out of 7 Districts in Lincolnshire have 20+% children living in poverty. c.14%-17.8% of children live in households with below average income. 11.6% CYP aged under 16 (15,335) live in

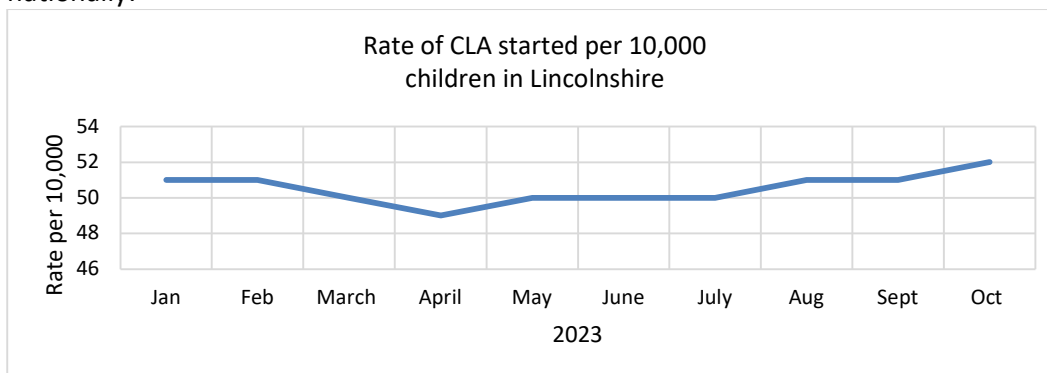
<sup>13</sup> [Office of National Statistics \(ONS\) mid-2020 population estimates](#)

absolute low-income families. 25.1% of children aged under 11 and 19.2% age 11-18 entitled to free school meals.

- In October 2023<sup>14</sup>, Lincolnshire had 3,260 Children in Need (CiN), 403 children with a Child Protection (CP) plan, and 765 CiC; Lincolnshire has lower rates of CIN, CP and CiC than statistical neighbours and England



- Lincolnshire CiC numbers have increased by 10.5% since 2018<sup>15</sup> compared to c.16% increase nationally:



- 82% of CiC were white and 18% from all other ethnic backgrounds.
- 8% of CiC had a disability.
- 24% of all children that entered care in the 6 months prior to October 2023 were UASC. Overall UASC made up 11.6% of all CiC. 98% of UASC in care (87/89) were male.
- In October 2023 there were 936 young people eligible for LLCS:
  - 20% (183) were 16-17 years.
  - 30% (286) were 18-21 years.
  - 42% (394) were 21+
  - 8% (73) were recorded as 'Other' – these care leavers are age 25.
- 173 care leavers were Eligible, 10 Relevant and 753 Former Relevant (including 145 Qualifying<sup>16</sup> young people).

<sup>14</sup> LCC Children's Services Analysis Tool (ChAT) October 2023

<sup>15</sup> 659 Lincolnshire CiC on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018 (Source: LCC Children's Services Analysis Tool (ChAT) March 2018)

<sup>16</sup> Qualifying care leavers are not currently separated out from Former Relevant numbers; this has been identified as a reporting issue and is being addressed)



- 58% of care leavers live in Lincolnshire and 41% live out of county, with 1% whose whereabouts are unknown<sup>17</sup>.
- 2021-22 data (most recent) indicated Lincolnshire care leavers continuing to live with foster carers which is in line with Statistical Neighbours and England.
- 66% of care leavers were male.
- 19% of care leavers had a disability.
- 70% of care leavers were white and 30% are from all other ethnic groups combined.
- In December 2023, 5 Lincolnshire care leavers aged over 18 years were in custody, which has remained broadly the same for the past 4 years<sup>18</sup>.
- In 2023, on average 48% of Lincolnshire care leavers were in EET compared with 58.5% in statistical neighbours and 56% in England<sup>42</sup>. Care leavers engaging in EET is significantly worse than non-care experienced peers. Nationally, 12.3% of all 16-25 years olds were Not in Education Employment and Training (NEET).
- Former-UASC care leavers have a higher engagement with education; 72% of 16–17-year-olds are in EET and 67.6% of 18+ year olds.
- The proportion of care leavers that are former-UASC in October 2023 is below:

Age	% of care leavers that are UASC	Average by cohort
16	23.5%	30.25%
17	37%	
18	36%	24.6%
19	22%	
20	16%	
21	20%	20%

Table 5: former-UASC care leavers as percentage of wider cohort

On average, former-UASC care leavers accounted for c.25% of the total care leaver cohort and this is expected to grow; grant funding from the Home Office for all former-UASC care leavers up to the age of 21 (and to 25 in education) should be utilised proportionately to fund any future model of LLCS.

- UASC numbers have increased since the mandating of the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) in 2021. Between December 2021 and October 2023 there has been a subsequent 40% increase in former-UASC care leavers. UASC numbers will continue to grow as Lincolnshire has not reached the NTS maximum capacity<sup>19</sup> and there are unpredictable future numbers of UASC presenting from asylum hotels, ongoing NTS referrals and the proposed adult asylum centre at RAF Scampton.
- Since the start of the current contract there has been a 21.3% increase in care leavers<sup>20</sup>. Care leaver numbers are predicted to increase further, partly due to higher numbers of CiC, more UASC and as more children are entering care at an older age. This mirrors trend data nationally and for our regional and statistical neighbours<sup>21</sup>.
- Growth projections from Corporate Performance suggest numbers of care leavers could increase by c.7% by April 2025<sup>22</sup>, taking into account the rising numbers of late entrants into care and

<sup>17</sup> LLCS Q2 2023-24

<sup>18</sup> Average of 4 care leavers in custody; numbers taken from Mosaic as of 31<sup>st</sup> December in 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023

<sup>19</sup> 0.1% of the 0-17 child population, which would require Lincolnshire to have min. 144 0–17-year-old UASC in care before we would reach capacity and refuse NTS referrals

<sup>20</sup> LLCS contract report showing Open Allocated Cases i.e. 16-20 year olds – increased from 394 in April 2020 to 478 in December 2023.

Note this excludes Qualifying young people and 21+ year olds

<sup>21</sup> [Local Authority Interactive Tool \(LAIT\)](#)

<sup>22</sup> Increase calculated by forward modelling data taken from the ChAT Oct-23

numbers of former-UASC care leavers. Growth modelling using LAIT data on average cohort increases from 2018 and applying them to forward-looking care leaver projections suggests a possible c.59% increase by the same date:

Care leaver cohort by age	Oct-23 (from ChAT)		Apr-25 (from Corp. Performance)		Apr-25 (from LAIT)	
	CL numbers at Oct 23 <sup>23</sup>	% of whole cohort	Predicted numbers from April 25 <sup>24</sup> (breakdown across cohorts)	% of whole cohort	Predicted numbers from April 25 <sup>25</sup> (breakdown across cohorts based on % in column D) *	% of whole cohort
16–17 year olds	183	19.6%	185	18.4%	286	19.2%
18–20 year olds	286	30.6%	343	34.2%	616	41.3%
21+ year olds	467	49.9%	475	47.4%	589	29.5%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>936</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>1003</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>1491</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
<b>Variance to Oct 2023</b>			<b>+7.1%</b>		<b>+59.2%</b>	

Table 6 – care leaver projections to April 2025

However, the LAIT data could be considered somewhat unreliable in terms of future trends, due to the anomaly years during the pandemic, skewing those figures. The varying projections indicates the lack of certainty in forecasting future numbers and highlights how volatile those figures can be. It is felt the Corporate Performance projections are more reliable at this point, in terms of modelling future service requirements, as these figures have been calculated using our own data over previous years and taken our local trends into account.

#### Summary of Key Findings – Lincolnshire data

- The rurality of Lincolnshire is important to consider for staff bases and travel in any LLCS model. A high number of care leavers live outside of Lincolnshire, with a large number of former-UASC care leavers in Peterborough. Any future model should consider a base in or close to Peterborough and ensure LCW caseloads account for travel requirements.
- Although Lincolnshire has not seen increases in CIN, CP or CiC to the same extent as other areas there has been a noted growth locally. It is projected that care leaver numbers will continue to rise. Where this relates to UASC, the Council receives grant funding which must be used to proportionately towards the LLCS. Any future commissioning arrangement should be flexible to allow changes to care leaver volumes and associated funding.
- Former-UASC care leaver numbers are projected to increase due to the National Transfer Scheme’s impact on CiC numbers. National policy changes as well as local programmes such as the asylum hotels and RAF Scampton may further impact numbers of former-UASC care leavers.
- Lower numbers of care leavers in EET are a concern in Lincolnshire and will require an increased focus in any future model; any enhancements to the EET offer need to be considered in the wider context of care leavers readiness to engage and include a wider wellbeing offer such as mental health and substance use support.

<sup>23</sup> LCC Children’s Services Analysis Tool (ChAT) October 2023; data includes 73 care leavers categorised as ‘Other’ – these are 25+ year olds who are in scope of reporting due to eligibility for LLCS within the reporting period

<sup>24</sup> Data from Children’s Performance team using October ChAT data as a starting point, incorporating CiC and UASC projections; data also includes 102 care leavers aged of 25+ using the same calculation as the October ChAT for consistency

<sup>25</sup> Data from the LAIT, based on previous annual growth percentages, calculated forward to April 2025 inc 27% increase of former-UASC care leavers, 21% increase in 16-20 year old care leavers and 2.5% increase in 21+ year olds

- Care leavers in custody frequently refuse to engage with services but require focused support to prepare for their release and life in the community, including timely applications for benefits and accommodation. Post-release engagement with EET is also essential if the any potential reoffending cycle is to be broken, as well as support with networks and good mental health. A specialist custody worker may be an option for consideration in any future model.
- Accurate future forecasting of care leaver numbers is difficult given there are a number of unpredictable variables including late entrants into care and UASC arrivals. It is expected though that the cohort will continue to rise over coming years. Care leaver support needs are similarly difficult to predict. Future modelling needs to be sufficiently flexible to be able to properly resource the service to have capacity to meet both demand and support need.

#### 4.2. Stakeholder analysis

A summary of key themes from care leaver feedback conducted as part of the review is below:

Likes	Improvements	Future delivery
Activities	Accommodation matching	Help with emotional support and well-being issues.
Being ourselves and not be made to do things	More supported accommodation options	Monthly mental health drop-ins
Can ask for help if we need it	Most care leavers said they would prefer a named LCW after age 21	1:1 tutor especially to support learning difficulties
UASC in placement at Locate Accommodation felt they understood what the LLCS offer was	Having the choice to stay open or be stepped forward after age 21	Wellbeing / emotional support worker
Supported Lodgings providers treated me like I was part of the family	More information about what the service offer is after age 21	Someone to help with self-regulation and emotions
Mental Health Worker		

Table 7: care leaver engagement

Further engagement is taking place in March and will inform the specification and service delivery of the LLCS. Existing engagement conducted throughout the contract period is detailed above reiterating much of the engagement feedback in *Table 7*, as well as compliments and feedback from professionals working with the service.

#### Summary of Key Findings – Stakeholder analysis

- Care leavers have said that they like early allocation to their LCW and that this helps them feel independent, and that they value having consistency in their LCW. Providing such consistency of support will require sufficient numbers of LCWs to manage the predicted rise in care leaver numbers as well as appropriate levels of remuneration to improve staff retention.
- Support after 21 years old is highly valued, though some care leavers have said they would have preferred to be given the choice to remain allocated to the service and this has been implemented as part of the improvement work. Development and expansion of the 21+ Service is a further resource consideration and is a key part of post-Ofsted improvement.

- Mental health support, both direct intervention and a broader range of wellbeing activities, is highlighted as a key area for future service delivery. Care leavers benefit from in-service support at present (part of Staying Close) and there is an opportunity to develop the service further through recurrent investment.

#### 4.3. Market engagement

In England, the only two Local Authorities that externally commission their leaving care service are Lincolnshire and Cornwall; the latter is only part-commissioned.

Cornwall County Council, commission [CareFree](#) to deliver approximately a third of their Leaving Care Service. CareFree are a Cornish CYP charity who have delivered part of Cornwall's leaving care service since 2015. CareFree employ about a third of Cornwall's total LCWs and offer specialist support around EET and accommodation, along with support to former-UASC care leavers. They are involved in youth work for 11+ year old CiC and work closely with the voluntary sector to fundraise and deliver small projects. Engagement with CareFree indicated they do not intend to become a national organisation at this point or deliver work with other authorities.

Barnardo's deliver Leaving Care Services in part of Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales, namely Glasgow, Edinburgh, Belfast, Clackmannanshire, and Denbighshire where they also deliver a 21+ transition service. Barnardo's deliver a range of other services to care leavers including the Kick-Start program to former-UASC care leavers, participation and engagement support, and supported lodgings.

Previous market engagement in Lincolnshire indicates a limited market of other potential suppliers. In 2015, Barnardo's were the only bidder when the Leaving Care Service was advertised as an open tender, and they were awarded the contract following a full evaluation period. In 2019, further market engagement work was undertaken prior to the publication of the tender opportunity, with similarly low interest from providers in the market. However, there were four applications received to deliver the current contract; two were disqualified at the initial stage due to incomplete documentation of poor quality, and two went on to full evaluation, after which Barnardo's were awarded what is the current contract.

The other bidder that was evaluated continues to offer a range of services outside Lincolnshire to children and young people including care leavers, though not a leaving care service. There are a small handful of voluntary sector organisations that offer support to care leavers including education, criminal justice, and supported accommodation options, as well as mentoring. It is not inconceivable there may be interest from the wider children's services market who have experience of working with care leavers if the service was presented to the market through a competitive tender, subject to appropriate indicative budget.

#### **Summary of Key Findings – Market engagement**

- Most authorities deliver their own Leaving Care Service apart from Lincolnshire and Cornwall in England. Furthermore, many authorities have chosen to insource the service.
- There is not an extensive market of providers that deliver Leaving Care Services – Barnardo's is the main supplier.
- Previous procurement indicates low market response and indications are this would be similar during any new tendering opportunity.

#### 4.4. Local Authority inspections

In January 2023, Ofsted introduced a new category in their framework for Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS), which separated out care leavers from the previous category which included care leavers with CiC and focuses on *'The experience and progress of care leavers'*.

Since the new category's introduction, ninety-three Local Authorities have been inspected. Only four authorities received an 'Outstanding' judgment for this specific category; Bexley, North Yorkshire, St Helen's, and Essex.

Cornwall, who are the only other authority in England to externally commission part of their leaving care service, have not been inspected under the new framework category yet. In October 2019, they were graded 'Outstanding' overall and 'Outstanding' for the previous ILACS judgement focusing on *'The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers'*.<sup>26</sup> The report highlights an exceptional participation offer, strong relationship-based practice, tenacious and skilled LCWs who go above and beyond to support young people, purposeful visits to care leavers, prioritisation of care leavers' mental wellbeing, and strong support around EET. Quality of Pathway Plans was found to be variable but at no significant detriment. Given a more recent inspection hasn't been completed a direct comparison to a commissioned service is not currently possible.

The summary of good practice, acknowledged by Ofsted, seen in other Local Authorities' leaving care services is available on request. This information has been obtained from desktop research, conversations, and published Ofsted inspections.

##### 4.4.1. What does Ofsted 'Outstanding' in *'The experience and progress of care leavers'* judgement look like?

The ILACS framework states that *'The experiences and progress of care leavers' is likely to be judged outstanding if the response to young people is consistently good or better and results in sustained improvement to their lives.'*

The table below illustrates the performance of the four Local Authorities who received Ofsted Outstanding in the category of *'The experience and progress of care leavers'*, compared to LLCS Ofsted performance where area for improvement were identified, and is based on a review of the available reports and areas highlighted as good practice or flagged as areas of weakness (*shown in orange*):

OFSTED priority		Essex <sup>27</sup>	Bexley <sup>28</sup>	N. Yorkshire <sup>29</sup>	St Helens <sup>30</sup>	Lincolnshire <sup>31</sup>
1	Care Leavers know their entitlements. They know how and where to access the local offer, often a well-structured website created with care leavers in mind,	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

<sup>26</sup> [Ofsted Inspection of Cornwall Children's Services](#)

<sup>27</sup> [Ofsted Inspection of Essex Local Authority Children's Services](#)

<sup>28</sup> [Ofsted Inspection of Bexley Local Authority Children's Services](#)

<sup>29</sup> [Ofsted Inspection of North Yorkshire Children's Services](#)

<sup>30</sup> [Ofsted Inspection of St Helen's Children's Services](#) – note that St Helens were judged 'Good' overall but 'Outstanding' for leaving care

<sup>31</sup> [Lincolnshire's Ofsted Report \(April 2023\)](#)

	signposted by professionals. Care leavers will be part of designing their offer, regularly consulted on the provision, quality, and what they feel is needed to best support them and other care leavers.					
2	Additional funds to support their path to independence, such as council tax exemption, free or subsidised Wi-Fi, free transport, tech, and setting-up grants. Care leavers know about and utilise this support.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	Pathway Plans are updated within the statutory time frame. Additionally, Pathway Plans are updated more frequently to reflect young people's change of circumstance and need.	✓	✓	✓	✓	
4	Specialist Mental Health / Emotional Support professionals are available for care leavers. Agencies collaborate effectively to deliver services for vulnerable young people. Ensuring equal access to mental health care for all care leavers, regardless of their medical history or previous involvement with CAMHs.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
5	Specialist support available for young parents.	✓	✓	✓	✓	Not mentioned
6	Continued engagement and support for 21+ care leavers.	✓	✓	✓	✓	
7	Collaboration with wrap-around agencies to support the young person to thrive, such as The Virtual School for NEET and Probation for care leavers in custody.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
8	Comprehensive risk assessments for the most vulnerable young people shared and followed amongst agencies.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
9	Care leavers feel part of a community, they know how and where to seek support from their Corporate Parents. They can access clubs, societies and events designed for them.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
10	Support and visits for care leavers people in custody.	✓	✓	✓	✓	
11	Signposted access to health history and important documents, such as NI, driving license and passport.	✓		✓	✓	
13	Early allocation of Personal Advisors allows for positive relationship building prior to transition to the leaving care service at 18 years old.	✓		✓	✓	
14	Support for former UASC care leavers recognises their individual needs. They are supported to join EET, their identity, religious and cultural needs are well considered and prioritised. Personal Advisers are knowledgeable of UASC needs. Prioritising diversity and culture when considering appropriate accommodation, links to friends and family, and wider support.	✓	✓	✓	✓	Not mentioned

15	Care leavers live in suitable and safe accommodation that meets their needs. Positive encouragement for care leavers to access 'Stay Put' arrangements where appropriate, such as returning home from university during the holidays.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
16	Phased support to support readiness for full independence in adult life. Help with tenancy and life skills.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
17	Support for young people who are NEET to encourage them into employment, education, or training. Supported by a specialist professional.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Table 8: comparison of LAs with 'Outstanding' for the care leaver judgement, compared to Lincolnshire

#### 4.5. Caseload numbers comparisons

The table below shows the approximate case load numbers for LCWs in other local authorities that have responded to benchmarking research:

Local Authority	Grading (Year)	Caseload per 1.0 FTE LCW	21+ Service model
Nottinghamshire <i>Stat. neighbour</i>	Good (2019)	22	21+ remain allocated to their LCW for up to 6 months to build on existing relationships and maintain level of service offer and then transfer to separate 21+ Service and new LCW.
NC Trust <i>Stat. neighbour</i>	Requires Improvement (2022)	26 max	Post-21 assessment of need if the YP asks to remain open or has been stepped down and returns for support.
Essex <i>Outstanding LA</i>	Outstanding (2023)	20-22	21+ remain allocated to their LCW to build on existing relationships and maintain level of service offer.
Kent <i>Outstanding LA (old framework)</i>	Outstanding (2022)	14-22 (16-20 year olds)	Separate 21+ Service allocate all care leavers to a new LCW, plus Duty service allows effective keeping in touch and triage of low-level queries.
Calderdale <i>Recently brought in-house</i>	Good (2018)  NB/ Outstanding for 'The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers'	22-24	Post-21 assessment of need if the YP asks to remain open or has been stepped down and returns for support.

Table 9: caseload numbers in other LAs

The average caseload per LCW across these authorities is 23.2 care leavers although it should be noted all service models are different. Essex were judged as 'Outstanding' for the new Ofsted category of 'The

experience and progress of care leavers' and have a separate 21+ Service with caseloads of c.30 care leavers per LCW. Caseloads of c.20 care leavers is considered best practice.

Lincolnshire's current caseload average for 1.0 FTE LCW is c.20 care leavers:

Care leaver cohort	Average caseload
16-17 year olds	6.45
18-20 year olds	11.95
21+ year olds	1.54

Table 10: LLCS caseload per 1.0 FTE LCW

LLCS caseload numbers do not currently include allocation of all 21+ care leavers which is a focus for improvement post-Ofsted. Based on the average caseload shown in *Table 9*, c.41 21+ year old care leavers are fully allocated to a LCW at present<sup>32</sup>, with the rest assigned to a Team Manager for oversight but can be reallocated if required. If all 21+ year old care leavers were fully allocated to an LCW, and with the current 26.6 FTE LCWS, caseload numbers would increase to 36 care leavers per LCW, which is an 80% increase on the current average caseload.

Local Authorities in the East Midlands have a range of service offers for their 21+ care leavers:

Local Authority	21+ allocation process/offer	Keep in Touch (KIT) model	Funding & staffing FTE
Derby City	Post-21 assessments completed ahead of care leaver turning 21 to establish level of support and whether they remain allocated to their LCW. Post 21+ returners are similarly assessed and allocated to a LCW if required.	Pathway Plans contain a QR code to the Local Offer. Use of telephone, visits, text, social media, and traditional letter. Annual contact for care leavers not allocated an LCW.	Funding not separated for 21+ offer.
Derbyshire	<i>Not provided</i>		
Leicester	Care leaver allocated to LCW if longer-term support is required. Duty service for general support.	No change in support or level of service if remain allocated to an LCW.	New Burdens funding* directly allocated to 21+ service funds 1.5 FTE LCWs
Leicestershire	<i>Not provided</i>		
Northamptonshire	Post-21 assessment of need if the care leaver asks to remain open or has been stepped down and returns for support.	Letters, emails, birthday/celebration event cards.	Funding not separated for 21+ offer.
Nottingham City	Care leavers who wish to remain open to the service remain with their LCW;	Local Offer sets out the Council keep in touch with 21+; minimum annual contact via	Funding not separated for 21+ offer.

<sup>32</sup> Based on 26.6 FTE LCWs i.e., av.1.54 21+ year olds x 26.6 = 40.96 21+ care leavers



	visit frequency dictated by care leaver but min every 12 weeks. Stepped down care leavers who wish to return are allocated to a Team Manager and then ideally back to their old LCW.	telephone plus birthday/celebration event cards, quarterly newsletters, and invitation to events.	
Nottinghamshire	Transfer summary completed as approach 21 and will be reallocated to 21+ Service but will remain with old LCW if there are specific support needs for up to 6-months before transfer to a named 21+ LCW.	Proactive KIT model of 8 contacts per annum via newsletter, telephone, email, social media, drop-in sessions around the county. Daily duty system for immediate IAG with onward referral to 21+ Service in case more support needed (including reallocation to LCW). Mailshots for any update to Local Offer.	New Burdens funding directly allocated to 21+ Service funds 1.0 FTE Team Manager, 3.5 FTE LCWs, 0.6 FTE Homelessness Prevention LCW
Rutland	Care leavers allocated to an LCW; unclear about level of 21+ offer.	Local Offer available on LA website. Regular KIT via telephone and text, as well as visits see YP at agreed venues.	Not clarified.

Table 11: East Midlands LAs 21+ Service models

*\*The Council already allocates 21+ New Burdens funding to the core LLCS budget and it is not ring-fenced for 21+ service delivery.*

#### Summary of Key Findings – Ofsted inspections

- There have been low numbers of Local Authorities with ‘Outstanding’ for the category of ‘*The experience and progress of care leavers*’ proportionate to the number of ILACS inspections since the changes to the Ofsted inspection framework in January 2023.
- Like many Local Authorities, Lincolnshire was found to be delivering the statutory requirement for care leavers and received ‘Good’ for the stand alone judgement, and ‘Outstanding’ overall for Children’s Services.
- Analysis of Lincolnshire’s Ofsted report shows areas of good practice that were highlighted by inspectors; the Mental Health Worker role was noted as a particular strength. This post is funded via Staying Close to March 2025 only.
- Assuming LCW numbers will increase to support a predicted rise in care leaver numbers, it is also necessary to consider management capacity to have oversight of Pathway Plan quality, staff supervisions and support to strategic delivery. Confidence in the accuracy of data recording into and reporting out of Mosaic reporting needs to be improved in advance of the next Ofsted inspection.
- For Lincolnshire to achieve ‘Outstanding’ in the category of ‘*The experience and progress of care leavers*’, Lincolnshire should develop the 21+ Service to provide named allocated workers and improve engagement with this cohort, improve support to care leavers in custody, and improve quality oversight of Pathway Plans which should be updated as and when circumstances change along with

clear aspirations and evident care for their wellbeing. Ofsted will want to see LLCS deliver over and above the statutory minimum which will require additional staffing and resource capacity, as well as wider system recording improvements and management oversight to challenge quality

- Full allocation of 21+ year old care leavers to a named LCW will impact on the numbers of LCWs required within any new service model, although most 21+ year olds will not require as intensive support.

#### 4.6. Care leaver and Leaving Care Worker projections

Based on future care leaver projections alone, more LCW capacity will be needed from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025 onwards. In addition, different service models will have an impact of LCW capacity. For example if a LWC is only allocated those aged 21+, they would have a higher caseload than a LCW allocated with only 18-21 year olds because the support offer is different:

			Oct-23 (from ChAT)			Apr-25 (from Corp. Performance)		
LCW options	Care leaver cohort by age	Indicative max caseload per LCW	CL numbers at Oct 23 <sup>33</sup>	% of whole cohort	Optimum no. of LCWs	Predicted numbers from April 25 <sup>34</sup> (breakdown across cohorts)	% of whole cohort	Optimum no. of LCWs
1	16-20 year olds	20	469	50.1%	23.5	528	52.6%	26.4
	21+ year olds	75	467	49.9%	6.2	475	47.4%	6.3
	TOTAL		936	100.0%	29.7	1003	100.0%	32.7
2	Total 16-24 year old cohort	23.2	936	100.0%	40.3	1003	100.0%	43.2

Table 12: care leaver and LCW projections on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025

The above table demonstrates scenarios for LCW numbers based on different modelling approaches:

- **Scenario 1** – caseloads are 20 for LCW’s supporting the 16-20 year old cohort. LCW’s supporting 21+ care leavers have a higher allocation rate of 75. This is based on the DfE New Burdens Assessment in 2018 indicating that c.20% of care leavers aged 21+ would require engagement each week. 1 FTE 21+ LCW, with a caseload of 75, could support 15 care leavers (20% of caseload) for 2.4 hours per week. This model should allow for some flexibility for care leavers 21+ to remain allocated to their same LCW based on needs.
- **Scenario 2** – all care leavers aged 16-24 year are allocated based on a caseload of 23.2 care leavers per LCW, which is the average caseload number detailed in *Table 9*; all care leavers including 21+ year olds will receive an equal level, or offer, of support. This model would provide flexibility and capacity to support 21+ care leaver should they require a more in-depth service offer.

Whilst the whole leaving care cohort is projected to increase by April 2025, exact numbers are difficult to predict as a result of variable such as numbers of late entrants into care and former-UASC care leavers. Care leavers’ support needs are equally difficult to predict; as an example it may be that increasing

<sup>33</sup> LCC Children’s Services Analysis Tool (ChAT) October 2023; data includes 73 care leavers categorised as ‘Other’ – these are 25+ year olds who are in scope of reporting due to eligibility for LLCS within the reporting period

<sup>34</sup> Data from Children’s Performance team using October ChAT data as a starting point, incorporating CiC and UASC projections; for consistency, data also includes 102 care leavers aged of 25+ using the same calculation as the October ChAT

numbers of 21+ year olds require in-depth support from their LCW for a sustained period or that more care leavers would benefit from targeted and specialist mental health support.

Numbers of former-UASC care leavers are expected to continue due to National Transfer Scheme and the possibility of adult asylum accommodation in the county resulting in age assessment claims. The growth in former UASC care leavers is supported by LLCS and funded through a specific budget from the Home Office. The former UASC cohort have specific needs and challenges that requires specialist workers, accommodation and a LCW team. Any further growth in this cohort can be funded through the UASC budget.

#### 4.7. Implications for future LLCS delivery

##### Summary of Key Findings

- Research into other Local Authority offers, recent Ofsted judgements, and national/local trends indicate that LLCS can expect to experience increasing service demand in the coming years due to more care leavers, particularly former-UASC care leavers, more complexity of need and rising delivery costs exacerbated by inflation, cost of living and the recruitment and retention of high quality staff.
- The LLCS model needs to include practice development to move the service towards a future Ofsted 'Outstanding' judgement in *'The experience and progress of care leavers'* and therefore 'Outstanding' for Children's Services overall.
- The cost of delivering the LLCS will be higher than the current contract and a budget increase will be required, irrespective of the delivery model, using relevant funding streams, including the Home Office UASC Grant, to increase the service budget envelope.
- Research detailed in this Commissioning Plan indicate that a revised and improved LLCS will require:
  - Increased management capacity with stronger strategic and operational leadership, including service quality, data recording and reporting.
  - Increased LCW's to meet the growing number of care leavers and those with more complex needs and to ensure caseload numbers are sufficient to provide high quality support.
  - Improved and consistent transition support for 16–18–year-olds to LLCS.
  - Improved Pathway Plans that reflect changing circumstances and are clear regarding aspirations for care leavers.
  - An improved 21+ Service offer allowing more capacity for keeping in touch and allocating those that need continuity of support.
  - A robust strategy focused on improving care leavers engagement with EET.
  - Bespoke support for young people who have specialist needs, such as young parents and care leavers in custody, to meet their individual needs and overcome their barriers.
  - Embedded mental health support available for all care leavers.
  - Improved information for all care leavers, to ensure they understand their entitlements, wider corporate parenting offer and are encouraged to keep in touch with the service.

## 5. Options analysis

### 5.1. Service model options

There are 3 service model options to be considered:

#### 5.1.1. Option 1 - Do nothing i.e. decommission LLCS

It is a statutory requirement for the Council to deliver a Leaving Care Service. This option is not feasible.

**This option is not recommended**

#### 5.1.2. Option 2 - Continue to deliver the model of service that is currently being provided

The Council could choose to deliver the service with the same model moving forward. The service review has shown that this model would not be sufficient to deliver the expected volume and standard required in a Leaving Care Service.

It is also noted that it would still cost more to deliver the current LLCS model of service, given the variations and enhancements to delivery agreed within the current contract period and rising costs for staffing and other service-related expenditure. As a minimum, an 'as currently provided' model and structure would cost an indicative £2,360,527 per annum as an insourced service.

**This option is not recommended**

#### 5.1.3. Option 3 - Deliver the preferred model

This option would allow the Council to deliver a high quality, robust service for Lincolnshire Care Leavers. It includes capacity to deliver the transformation work following the recent Ofsted inspection, develop the 21+ offer in line with Ofsted good practice and respond to Corporate Performance's projections regarding future care leaver numbers.

**This option is recommended**

The table below details the service elements to be included in the preferred model moving forward:

Service element	Preferred model	Difference to current service	Future considerations
<b>Leaving Care Worker (LCW) numbers</b>	The number of LCWs will increase due to the rising numbers of care leavers and to respond to the new requirements of the service moving forward.  From April 2025, based on care leaver projection numbers in <i>section 4.6</i> , the new service would need to have c.33 LCWs in	Increased capacity in the Leaving Care workforce and better pay will lead to higher quality service provision for care leavers, as well as the capacity to respond to any emerging needs of the cohort.	LCWs capacity will need regular review as capacity fluctuates.

	<p>place to deliver the service effectively and generate the additional capacity to deliver a quality service to care leavers.</p> <p>The pay grade of LCWs should be increased to help attract and retain high quality staff.</p>		
<b>Transition</b>	<p>Care leavers will continue to be allocated to LLCS shortly after their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday; complex young people may be ‘twin tracked’ by both a Social Worker and LCW in preparation for full transition to LLCS at 18 years old.</p>	<p>Increase in LCW capacity will ensure care leavers are consistently allocated early as this is considered best practice to facilitate effective relationships and trust to develop prior to turning 18. LCW’s will have more time to build effective relationships and enable a successful transition.</p>	
<b>Pathway Plans</b>	<p>Increased focus on high quality Pathway Planning. The recommended increase in LCWs will ensure that statutory timescales for completion are met, as well as provide greater capacity to enable workers to update Pathway Plans more frequently as and when circumstances change and will also drive up the quality of those plans and ensure they are meaningful to care leavers.</p>	<p>Statutory timescales on Pathway Plans are currently being met but increased LCW capacity will further improve and enhance both frequency and quality.</p>	
<b>Specialist user groups</b>	<p>Lower caseloads for LCWs will facilitate greater capacity for bespoke support for any care leavers that may require more intensive support for a period of time e.g. care leavers in custody,</p>	<p>Increased capacity in the Leaving Care workforce will allow more intensive support to be delivered in response to changing needs.</p>	

	young parents, and disabled care leavers.		
<b>EET</b>	Specialist EET Officers will provide focused support for care leavers to access suitable pre-employment training, qualifications and employment opportunities. Delivery of the Care Leaver Apprenticeship Service (CLAS).	<p>No change recommended to preferred model from April 2025.</p> <p>However these specialist roles would be further developed to ensure that the right support is provided to care leavers to engage and sustain in EET, working alongside other specialist workers, such as the Mental Health and Accommodation Officers. Officers would be upskilled to ensure that the performance in this area is improved, in line with national targets and comparable with statistical neighbours.</p> <p>No change as CLAS would continue.</p>	Consider sustainable funding of further EET post that is currently funded through the Staying Close grant to March 2025, subject to DfE decision on continuity of funding.
<b>Information on LLCS Offer</b>	Improved information via updated Local Offer, use of newsletters and other targeted communications; care leavers will have better understanding of their entitlements and where to seek support.	21+ care leavers will be contacted more than the statutory minimum; this will also be informed by the ongoing Transformation/Improvement programme	
<b>Mental health &amp; emotional wellbeing support</b>	Increased Mental Health Worker capacity to be permanently funded to up-skill LCWs around mental health and provide some direct intervention and support to access adult mental health services.	Permanently fund mental health support and increase capacity.	Consider sustainable funding of Wellbeing Worker post that is currently funded through the Staying Close grant to March 2025, subject to DfE decision on continuity of funding.
<b>Additional specialist workers</b>	Specialist workers will provide targeted expertise on accommodation, participation and UASC.	No change.	DLT may also want to explore other additional posts that other excellent LAs have invested in:

	<p>These roles are valuable in offering targeted support to specific cohorts of young people with the wider care leaver cohort and it is recommended that they are included in the future service model.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• dedicated Benefits Officer</li> <li>• dedicated Social Worker</li> <li>• Occupational Therapist</li> </ul> <p>Consider sustainable funding of Connective Workers, Substance Misuse Worker<sup>35</sup> post that is currently funded through the Staying Close grant to March 2025, subject to DfE decision on continuity of funding.</p>
<p><b>21+ Service</b></p>	<p>When care leavers reach age 20 their allocated LCW will commence an assessment to understand and plan support to meet their needs 21+.</p> <p>Where needed, care leavers that require consistency of LCW will remain allocated to their existing LCW. Their LCW will continue to visit and support them as needed until they are ready to transition to an allocated 21+ LCW.</p> <p>For care leavers that have been assessed as able to transition to a stepped down offer, transition planning will commence at age 20 with a new allocated 21+ LCW.</p> <p>21+ LCW's will keep in touch with 21+ care leavers based on their</p>	<p>In the current service model, the majority of 21+ care leavers are allocated to Team Managers, with a relatively small number allocated to an LCW.</p> <p>Developing the service model so that all 21+ care leavers have an allocated worker would provide care leavers with a quality service and is in line with Ofsted feedback.</p> <p>More regular contact would ensure care leavers always had a route back into service and would encourage them to access low level support instead of waiting until crisis point.</p>	

<sup>35</sup> The Substance Misuse Worker is embedded into LLCS via Public Health's substance misuse support contract; there is flexibility in the new substance misuse contract with Turning Point to continue embedding this post within LLCS from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025, subject to funding.

	<p>needs this may involve weekly contact for some, visiting care leavers possibly c.3 monthly but as a minimum being in active contact every 6 months and at key times of year e.g. birthdays, Christmas.</p> <p>There will continue to be a Duty service for care leavers to contact in case of emergency.</p> <p>The 21+ offer is the same for Qualifying young people aged 16+ i.e. there is no statutory visit or Pathway Plan requirement. Qualifying care leavers aged 16-20 are allocated an LCW</p>		
<b>Supported Lodgings</b>	<p>Lincolnshire Supported Lodgings is Ofsted registered as a supported accommodation provider, offering more vulnerable care leavers the opportunity to live in a family setting. Whilst the majority of placements are for 18-21 year olds, there is the option of 16-17-year-olds being placed in an 'assessment beds' as a precursor to an ongoing placement.</p> <p>Supported Lodgings providers are self-employed and are supported by trained staff, along the same principles as Supervising Social Workers.</p>	No change recommended to preferred model from April 2025; this would remain part of the future service model.	

Table 13 – service model



## 5.2. Commissioning of the preferred service model

To deliver the preferred service model from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025 as detailed above, the Council have 2 options to consider:

- **Option 1** - continue to externally commission the service and undertake an open competitive tender process.
- **Option 2** - insource the service and Children's Services will provide it directly.

Prior to looking at those options in more detail, the indicative costings for each delivery option is set out in the section below:

### 5.2.1. Option 1 - externally commissioned LLCS

#### Staffing costs

This delivery option has been costed based on information supplied by the incumbent provider mapped onto the County Council's salary grades. It is assumed that staff are funded at the top of their salary grades. This also assumes LCWs are paid a LCC Grade 7 equivalent. However, it is important to note that a different supplier would have different posts and salary structures.

The delivery option has been costed using the staffing structure detailed in *Table 1*, with an additional 6.4 LCWs taking this to 33.0 FTE and 2.0 FTE new Mental Health Worker posts, totalling **£2,322,637**.

Note that the indicative staffing cost does not include additional posts funded via the Staying Close grant highlighted in *Table 13* i.e. Wellbeing Worker, Substance Misuse Support or Connective Workers.

#### Additional/Corporate Costs:

Indicative additional costs have been costed based on the incumbent provider. A different provider may have different costs which could be lower or higher.

Budget breakdown	Total
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Recruitment</li><li>• Insurance</li><li>• Apprenticeship Levy</li><li>• Transport, travel, IT equipment and related staffing sundries</li><li>• Accommodation, utilities, stationary and associated costs</li><li>• Management and Corporate Overheads</li></ul>	<b>£356,293.50</b>

Table 14 – indicative additional costs for commissioned service

#### Total cost:

Total indicative cost for externally commissioned LLCS is **£2,678,930 per annum**. The contract value over 5 years (1<sup>st</sup> April 2025 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2030) would be c.£13.39m. Note that included in the contract would be a clause allowing an inflationary increase to the contract annually, based on relevant indices and where there is evidence of increasing costs that are greater than the current budget. For every 1% increase this would equate to £26,789. This would be built into the Council's financial planning.

Providers may tender costs under the indicative amount, offering additional savings on the potential contract value. Any providers unable to submit a contract cost under the indicative amount to the market would score low for price within the evaluation; there is a risk that providers may consider the indicative budget insufficient.

### 5.2.2. Option 2 – insourced LLCS

If the service were to be insourced, LLCS would sit in Children’s Services directorate under the Head of Leaving and Supported Living, supported by the Corporate Parenting Manager. The Council would look to transfer the service as is within the Children’s Services structure, using the Children in Care teams as a basis to realign an indicative service staffing structure.

#### Staffing costs:

Staffing costs have been calculated by mapping the salaries for existing staff members in the current commissioned service to the corresponding Council grade and spinal column point, with an additional 6.4 LCWs taking this to 33.0 FTE and 2.0 FTE new Mental Health Worker posts; this does not include pay increments beyond year 1. Indicative staffing costs for the insourced LLCS are **£2,437,103**.

Whilst is expected nearly all staff will be eligible to TUPE to the Council, a small number of posts may be then redeployed to other areas of the Council or assimilated within the proposed structure in a comparable role. The final management structure will be subject to further refinement and will be agreed by the Executive Director for Children’s Services in consultation with the Head of Paid Service.

Note that the indicative contract cost does not include additional posts funded via the Staying Close grant highlighted in *Table 13* i.e. Wellbeing Worker, Substance Misuse Support or Connective Workers.

#### Additional/Corporate Costs:

Indicative additional costs are in line with current LCC corporate costs:

Budget breakdown	Per annum	Notes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruitment</li> <li>• Insurance</li> <li>• Apprenticeship Levy</li> <li>• Transport, travel, IT equipment and related staffing sundries</li> <li>• Accommodation, utilities, stationary and associated costs</li> <li>• Management and Corporate Overheads</li> </ul>	<b>£101,572.00</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Majority of costs would be picked up corporately</li> <li>• £1500 per FTE for transport/travel/IT etc</li> <li>• Additional accommodation budget identified to resource Peterborough office space</li> </ul>

Table 15 – indicative additional costs for insourced service

Total indicative cost for insourced LLCS is **£2,538,675 per annum**.

Note that salary uplifts have not been calculated (future pay award or increased spinal column point) and would depend on increases for Green Book employees negotiated via National Employers and the relevant employment Unions. A movement of one spinal column point would equate to c.£66,000 additional cost. Normally budget managers should seek to manage this within existing staffing budgets.

## 6. Funding

Based on the cost modelling in *sections 5.2.1. and 5.2.2.* it would be c.£140,255 cheaper per annum from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025 to insource the service.

An overview of finances is set out below:

Item	Cost
Base Budget	£ 1,218,932.00
S31 PA Contribution	£ 117,811.00
Budget Increase (Contract Pressures Funding)	£ 105,000.00
<b>Total Budget</b>	<b>£ 1, 441,743.00</b>
<b>New Model Cost</b>	
Option 1 Outsourced	£ 2, 678,930.00
Option 2 In-sourced	£ 2, 538,675.00
<i>Variance to cost option 1 compared to 2</i>	<i>-£ 140,255.00</i>
<b>Extra UASC Contribution to Budget*</b>	
Option 1 UASC Contribution @30% + specific costs	£ 866,921.00
Option 2 UASC Contribution @30% + specific costs	£ 860,455.00
<b>Variance to Budget once UASC Contribution Added</b>	
Option 1 Outsourced	<b>-£ 370,266.00</b>
Option 2 Insourced	<b>-£ 236,477.00</b>
<i>Variance to budget option 1 compared to 2</i>	<i>-£ 133,789.00</i>

Table 16 – budget overview

\*Currently 25% of the Care Leaver cohort is former-UASC care leavers and by 2025 this is expected to be 30%+ and therefore, 30% of the contract cost could be met by the UASC budget (this percentage would be flexible and in line with the changing proportion of UASC Care Leavers). Any specific costs, attributed solely to UASC care leavers, such as a premises in Peterborough, would also be met by the UASC budget i.e. funding for an office space in Peterborough. The UASC budget would also be attributed towards the salary for the Head of Service for Leaving Care and Supported Living<sup>36</sup> under the insourced option; savings on the existing staffing budget of £32,593 could be reinvested into LLCS to reduce the cost pressure further. UASC contribution to the LLCS budget would be regularly re-based in line with cohort share.

Regardless of whether the service is externally commissioned or insourced, there will be a cost pressure for the Council of at least **£236,477.00** per annum.

Children’s Finance have confirmed that there is £151,219 in the ‘Young People of Lincolnshire’ non-recurrent reserves (former-Connexions\* budget) which could be used to wholly or proportionately off-set the cost related to EET posts for at least the first year of any new service.

If LLCS is insourced, further recurrent savings of c.£99,000 per annum may be possible if existing LCC office space can be utilised to accommodate LLCS staff, with the exception of a Peterborough base.

<sup>36</sup> Assuming Head of Service would be on SLC2 by 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025

Both elements would reduce the cost pressure for an insourced service in year one (2025/26) by up to £250,000, and recurrent cost pressure would be built into medium-term financial planning.

## 7. Benefits and risks

### 7.1. Option 1 - Commission LLCS with an external provider

#### BENEFITS

- **Independent budget control and contract terms can protect against overspend:** spend would be within the agreed contract sum, and any increases would be limited by the Terms and Conditions, with any additionality agreed through the Council's financial and commissioning approval processes.
- **Strengthening the local market:** the value of this large contract may attract new entrants or assure the presence of the incumbent supplier in Lincolnshire which has benefits on other services.
- **Added Value:** an external provider may be able to apply for additional funding that cannot be accessed by the Council, adding value to commissioned services. Large charities can also bring added value to the service in the form of donations and investments.
- **Lower staffing costs:** independent providers will often have lower staffing costs than the Council, largely due to lower pension contributions.
- **Independence from the Council:** care leavers are used to the service being delivered outside of the Council and may feel this has benefits with the support feeling separate from their Social Worker interactions and a step towards independence. This has not been noted as a specific request from care leavers in engagement but has been a consideration previously.

#### RISKS

- **Disruption of service if supplier changes:** unless the incumbent provider is awarded the contract, there is likely to be a 12-18 month period of disruption with a new provider as services and staff transfer across or whilst new staff are recruited. Any new supplier would also require additional support to integrate with Council systems including Mosaic, all of which could have a negative impact on care leavers.
- **Impact on Children's Services' Ofsted outcome:** Ofsted are likely to undertake another full inspection in 2027 (previous inspections in 2019 and 2023) and there is the risk with an externally commissioned provider that the service may not be fully aligned with the Council in terms of reporting, quality, management consistency and service level expectations and so adversely impact on Lincolnshire's 'Outstanding' grade. The recent 2023 inspection highlighted weaknesses in '*The experiences and progress of care leavers*' which was found to be 'Good' (see 2.7. and 2.8.), resulting in improvement work within the current service, and there would be the risk that necessary improvements or further service developments are partially outside of Council oversight and control.
- **Less flexibility to evolve service:** an externally commissioned service would not be able to provide a flexible response to changes in service and would require contract variations to change their offer. Those variations can be limiting as we have seen throughout the service review, care leaver numbers are volatile and there is unpredictability in terms of what the LLCS will need to look like over time. More flexible Terms and Conditions can be developed to mitigate this but there will always be issues around changing the service quickly in response to care leaver numbers and demands, support needs, rises in UASC and any other external factors that may arise throughout the life of the contract.

- **Financial uncertainty:** related to the last point, the unpredictability of service needs will make it difficult for providers to submit a bid that would sustain the life of the contract. This may then result in budget negotiations, uplift requests and variations and potentially lengthy and resource-intensive processes. It also weakens any benefit around budget control and lower initial costs as financial pressures may only become apparent at a later date, as seen with the current contract.
- **Benchmarking:** if the Council decides to commission the service from the external market from 2025, Lincolnshire will be the only LA in England to commission out the whole of the service. Whilst this is no different to the current position, it is worth noting that since the last re-procurement a number of LAs have insourced the service to allow them greater control and flexibility to manage the service, aligning it to other related services within their LA.
- **Limited marketplace:** there is a limited marketplace for providers that deliver leaving care services (see 4.3.) The past two open tenders in 2014 and 2019 yielded little interest from the marketplace with only two viable bids in 2019. This could be due to the declining numbers of LAs that now commission this service externally in England. There is a significant risk that very few responses will be received.
- **Higher corporate costs:** non-staffing costs and central costs included in a provider's budget will likely be higher than insourcing due to the benefit of the Council being able to achieve economies of scale.
- **Ongoing Council oversight and support to service quality:** the Council will need to continue allocating resources to a commissioned service i.e. contract implementation and ongoing contract management via Commissioning, strategic oversight via Head of Service for Leaving Care and Supported Living and the CPM, data systems and reporting, staff training and quality improvements etc.

### This option is not recommended

## 7.2. Option 2 - Insource LLCS and deliver within Council Children's Services

### BENEFITS

- **Greater flexibility to evolve service to meet need:** one major benefit of bringing the service in house would be the flexibility it would give the Council to be able to deliver, evolve and quality assure the service. The service could be much more easily developed according to the changing needs and demands of the service; both in terms of changing numbers of care leavers and emerging priorities. In recent years, LLCS has needed to be more dynamic and reflective of both local and national priorities as they emerge and a commissioned service has made this difficult to achieve in a timely manner due to contractual restrictions.
- **Synergies with LCC services:** by bringing LLCS in-house, greater integration with other Council services can be developed. The service would be led by the current Head of Service for Leaving Care and Supported Living and the Corporate Parenting Manager, and would be integrated into the wider service, developing much closer working relationships with colleagues in the Social Care, FAST and Future4Me teams, creating a more seamless transition and service offer for care leavers who may be involved with a number of these professionals. It would also improve the working relationship with other commissioned services such as Youth Housing, as there would no longer be commercial sensitivity. Links to Virtual School, Participation, SEND, and Adult Social Care would be strengthened, with additional oversight of service KPIs and quality through Children's Performance and Quality Standards team
- **Efficient use of resources:** section 6. indicates a lower cost when insourcing the service, largely due to the benefit of the Council's infrastructure resulting in less non-staffing costs.

- **Staff recruitment and retention:** it is anticipated that if the service were to be brought in-house that staff recruitment and retention may be more successful due to the attractiveness of the Council's Terms and Conditions for employees. This would likely result in a higher calibre of candidates, which would drive up the quality and effectiveness of the workforce for the service.
- **Strategic management oversight:** bringing the service in-house would allow it to be managed more closely and strategically by the Head of Service for Leaving Care and Supported Living and would ensure that the service was fully integrated into the wider Children's Services. Insourcing would ensure alignment to our framework and practice models, improving service quality within the ILACS requirements.
- **Corporate overheads lower:** potential savings on overheads through insourced delivery through efficiencies and use of existing corporate resource including HR, accommodation and administrative support.
- **More seamless transition to LLCS and adult care:** LCWs would be linked to CiC and FAST social care teams which would better facilitate transition to LLCS and improve understanding of care leaver needs, with improved allocations and twin tracking. Care leavers moving to adult social care would be similarly supported within LCC processes.
- **Greater understanding of performance reporting:** continued use of Mosaic for recording and improved integration of reporting and data quality.

## RISKS

- **Disruption of service:** there is likely to be a period of 12-18 months where the service could be disrupted as it transfers to the Council, which could have a negative impact on care leavers. Barnardo's already upload performance information onto the Council's Mosaic system which would ease data transfer.
- **Initial staff turnover:** there is a risk that current staff may choose not to transfer to the Council, which could have a negative, short-term impact on service delivery. The Council's terms and conditions of employment are likely to be more favourable and so it is expected most staff would want to transfer. The Council could also commence recruitment to additional posts before 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025.
- **Barnardo's presence in Lincolnshire could be compromised:** by insourcing the service, this could have an impact on Barnardo's presence in Lincolnshire's marketplace. Without a substantial contract of this nature, they could potentially choose not to remain active in Lincolnshire. This may also be an implication if the service was tendered and they were not successful. It may also be a risk regarding the delivery of Supported Lodgings if current providers do not wish to be managed by the Council or the Supported Lodgings Workers do not transfer. This could be commissioned separately but may not be a cost effective proposition to Barnardo's due to associated management and resource overheads.
- **Current strategic capacity to manage the transfer:** Children's Services is currently delivering a number of internal transformation programmes as well as nationally important programmes such as Family Hubs and the Families First for Children Pathfinder. The timing of insourcing may not be ideal, and consideration should be given to whether there is sufficient strategic capacity to deliver the programme of work at this time.
- **Corporate capacity to project manage the transfer:** the Council will need to identify project capacity to support the transfer i.e. admin (HR including TUPE, payroll and pension, BWON), accommodation, asset transfer etc. Support from Children's Commissioning will be required during the exit period to maintain oversight of contract KPIs and delivery quality and may be beneficial to provide post-transfer support to the service area until identified elements are operational.

- **Negative association with the Council:** some care leavers may have a negative association with the Council and Social Care and they may choose to disengage with support, however, there should be continuity of LCW and this has not impacted other LAs in their decision to insource the service.
- **Service growth could be more costly:** as the staffing costs for Council staff are likely to be higher, if future service development or expansion is required, it will cost more in staffing than it would if commissioned externally. Furthermore, the service could increase exponentially if not monitored with the same vigour as a commissioned service, which could have a negative impact on the wider Children's Services budget.

**This option is recommended**

## **8. Summary and recommendations**

The review has found that LLCS requires further development to ensure it meets the changing needs and demands of the cohort. The service must continue to build on service improvements that are in progress, to ensure that Lincolnshire care leavers receive an excellent service that supports them to transition into the next phase of their lives, with the skills and confidence they need to thrive as adults.

The new service must ensure that there is the appropriate level of leadership and management oversight and an increased staffing capacity to ensure caseload numbers are kept low and to enable LCWs to respond to that growing numbers of care leavers; trained and supported to deliver quality services to all care leavers, including former UASC care leavers, those from minority groups and those with more complex needs. Specifically, there must be the capacity within the new service to develop a strategy focused on improving care leavers engagement with EET and capacity to deliver bespoke support for young people who have specialist needs, such as young parents and care leavers in custody, to meet their individual needs and overcome their barriers.

Transitions will be a key element of the new service. It must look to strengthen and develop a responsive and high quality 21+ service, providing that older cohort of care leavers with practical and emotional support to ensure that they are able to transition into adulthood, as well as adopting an improved and consistent approach to allocating more 16-18 year olds, earlier to allow that smooth transition from a CiC to a care leaver. Care Leavers have told us that keeping the same LCW wherever possible is a priority for them and so this will be a key feature in developing this area of work.

Young people have also fed back that they greatly value the mental health and emotional support they receive through the current service and this must also be embedded in the new service.

From a quality perspective, the new service must ensure that service quality, data recording and reporting are of an excellent standard and that Pathway Plans reflect changing circumstances and are clear regarding aspirations for care leavers.

These key elements are built into the preferred model.

In terms of how the new service might be delivered, the review has found that there are risks and benefits associated with each option. Whilst bringing the service in-house allows the most flexibility to be able to evolve the service over time it will require resource from across the Council to successfully deliver the implementation.

Nevertheless, there are significant benefits to bringing a statutory service of this nature in-house as it would allow us to integrate the service with Social Care teams, as well as removing the commercial constraints that are in currently place for LLCS, when working with other commissioned services.

There would also be the opportunity to exercise a greater strategic influence across the service, including with the Integrated Care Board and health providers as it would sit directly under the responsible Head of Service for Leaving Care and Supported Living and the Corporate Parenting Manager, and this flexibility would allow us to be responsive and re-design the service as needed, according to demand and our strategic priorities.


However, if externally commissioned, there would still need to be the ability for the Council to exercise tighter, strategic control over the service, developing more of a strategic partnership arrangement, which may be off-putting to providers, but necessary to develop and improve the service. This element of strategic oversight would be a key consideration in terms of how it would need to be commissioned; there would need to be far greater flexibility within the terms and conditions of the contract to vary the number of LCW required in accordance with demand, manage index-related cost increases, all of which would impact of any available budget and potential service variations. Benchmarking of an externally commissioned service is also difficult as there are no fully-commissioned Leaving Care Services in England.

**Recommendations:**

1. **Service delivery model Option 3**, to deliver the preferred model, as this will provide a high quality Leaving Care Service to Lincolnshire care leavers, as set out in the review.
2. **Commissioning Option 2**, to insource the service, is selected as the delivery model. This option affords the Council the best opportunity to develop, embed and strategically manage this key, statutory service. In the long-term, the service would be integrated into the wider Children's Services and would deliver a highest quality service for our care leavers.
3. To delegate to the Executive Director of Children's Services , in consultation with the Executive Councillor for Children's Services, Community Safety, Procurement and Migration the authority to take all decisions necessary to deliver the recommendations above.



**9. Appendices**

<b>Appendix</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Attachment</b>
Appendix A	Equality Impact Analysis	 LLCS Equality Impact Analysis v.2.docx

