

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**CABINET
MONDAY 22 JULY 2002 AT 2.00 P.M.**

LEAVING CARE POLICY

Agenda Item No.

5

Report of the Director of Children, Schools and Families

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1. Purpose of Report

- To present for approval the Leaving Care Policy (Appendix A) which outlines the commitments the County Council will make to care leavers following implementation of the Leaving Care Act in October 2001
- To report Hertfordshire's position in relation to the requirements of the Act and the Policy, and the areas that are being developed as part of the CSF Plan for 2002/3 (in Appendix 2)

2. Summary of Report

- 2.1 The Children (Leaving Care) Act was implemented on 1 October 2001. The Department of Health Guidance to the Act requires each local authority to provide a written Policy of its philosophy and practice on the preparation of young people for leaving care and the provision of after-care support.
- 2.2 The Policy is divided into two sections: the headline commitments in the Policy Statement (Appendix A), and the detailed Policy (Appendix A1). The Policy is divided into six main sections: Guiding Principles; Care Planning Commitments; Education and Training; Employment; Accommodation; and Personal Support. The Policy went to Corporate Parenting Panel on 8 May 2002, and Strategy Panel on 23 May 2002. Both Panels welcomed the Policy (especially the format) and did not ask for any changes. It has also been sent out to partner agencies and young people for consultation, and their feedback has been factored into the Policy.
- 2.3 In keeping with the principles of Children, Schools and Families (CSF), the service provided will start from the needs of the care leaver and will provide holistic support that reflects all their social, educational and accommodation needs. These services, and the further developments that are being carried out in 2002/3, with related actions identified in the CSF Plan, are set out in Appendix 2. These services are being funded from the £4.121m Leaving Care Grant available for 2002/3.

3. Conclusion

This final version of the Policy is submitted to Cabinet for approval.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Children (Leaving Care) Act was implemented on 1 October 2001. A report to the Corporate Parenting Panel on 12 December 2001 set out the background and the main requirements of the Leaving Care Act and its Regulations and Guidance Act. It also set out the arrangements that had been made in Hertfordshire to implement the Act, including setting up the dedicated Leaving Care Service run by NCH, which commenced on 1 April 2001.
- 1.2 The Leaving Care Act enshrines the principle that local authorities should behave the same as any good parent, who continue to assist their children well into their twenties. From 1 October 2001, it changed local authority's existing **powers** to assist care leavers under Sec. 24 of the Children Act 1989 to a **duty** to assess and meet the needs of care leavers up to the age of 21, and beyond 21 if they are in an agreed programme of education or training. A definition of the different categories of care leaver who are subject to the Act, and the duties of responsible authorities to them, is attached as Appendix 1.
- 1.3 These new responsibilities apply to around 400 care leavers at any given time. As at 28 June 2002, there were 135 Eligible children, 9 Relevant children, and 52 Former Relevant children. This makes a total of 196 young people who we have a duty to assist under the Leaving Care Act. In addition, there were 220 Qualifying young people who left care before 1 October 2001 who we will use our powers to assist, if appropriate. By 2003, it is estimated that the numbers of care leavers we have a duty to assist will have grown to about 240, whilst there will still be about 170 care leavers who we can use our powers to support.

2. Leaving Care Policy

- 2.1 The DoH Guidance to the Leaving Care Act requires each local authority to provide a written Policy of its philosophy and practice on the preparation of young people for leaving care and the provision of after-care support. The draft Policy went to Corporate Parenting Panel on 8 May 2002, and Strategy Panel on 23 May 2002. Both Panels welcomed the Policy (especially the format) and did not ask for any changes. It has also been sent out to partner agencies and young people for consultation, and their feedback has been factored into the Policy. It is now submitted to Cabinet for approval.
- 2.2 Hertfordshire's Policy follows the guiding principle of the Act, that care leavers will be provided with the same degree of support as that which would be provided by any good parent who continues to support their children whilst they make the transition to adulthood. The Policy commits the County Council to meet the requirements of the Act in full by using the new duties and powers to provide comprehensive social and personal support to care leavers and maximise the numbers in education, training, and employment. This complements the objectives of the Quality Protects programme. Quality Protects National Objective 5 is "to ensure that young people leaving care, as they enter adulthood, are not isolated and participate socially and economically as citizens".

- 2.3 Hertfordshire's Policy (attached as Appendix A) has been drawn up along the lines agreed with the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) and other local authorities in the Eastern Region. In keeping with the principles of CSF, the Policy outlines that the service provided will start from the needs of the care leaver and will provide holistic support that reflects all their social, educational and accommodation needs.
- 2.4 The Policy is divided into two sections: the headline commitments in the Policy Statement (Appendix A), and the detailed Policy (Appendix A1). The Policy is divided into six main sections:
- Guiding Principles;
 - Care Planning Commitments to Care Leavers;
 - Education and Training;
 - Employment;
 - Accommodation;
 - Personal Support.
- 2.5 The legal requirements of the Leaving Care Act are attached to the Policy as Appendix A2.
- 2.6 It is also a requirement of the Regulations and Guidance to the Act that each local authority publish information about the services they provide, and take steps to ensure that those who might benefit receive relevant information. The Policy outlines the support services that the County Council makes a commitment to provide, where relevant in conjunction with partner agencies.
- 2.7 The 2000 Act includes new arrangements to make local authorities responsible for the accommodation and maintenance costs of all 16 and 17 year olds who leave care after 1 October 2001. With the assistance of the Money Advice Unit, we have drawn up and distributed to staff a procedural guide on care leavers finances, based on a template agreed by the Eastern Region authorities in conjunction with the SSI. The policy commitments on financial support are included in section 6 of the Policy on Personal Support.
- 2.8 The requirements of the Children (Leaving Care) Act are not retrospective. They only apply to young people in or leaving care after the Act came into effect on 1 October 2001. However, this means that many of our care leavers, who left care before 1 October 2001 and are not living with someone who has parental responsibility for them, could potentially be denied the benefits of the Act and the support on offer. The *Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000: Regulations and Guidance* say that "these young people too may be vulnerable and require good quality services from the council in order to safeguard and promote their welfare". Accordingly, we are taking the approach being adopted by many other responsible authorities and using our powers under Section 24 of the Children Act as amended by the Leaving Care Act to support them where appropriate, particularly with education and general assistance (see paragraph 2.5 of the Policy). The numbers of Qualifying children (the majority of whom left Care before 1 October) will fall over the next few years, as they reach 21.
- 2.9 The Act also places responsibility for after care support on the authority which had been looking after the young person at the point of leaving care, rather

than on the authority in whose area he or she is living. This corresponds with the expectation of continuing parental responsibility, although it poses challenges when care leavers move away from their authority of origin. An inter-authority agreement has been developed with other authorities in Eastern Region, to the effect that we will provide each other's care leavers with all the benefits of our own care leavers services, and only charge direct costs - accommodation, maintenance, etc (see paragraph 2.13 of the Policy). In the interests of good practice, Eastern Region authorities are seeking to extend this approach nation-wide through the auspices of the SSI, with the proviso that it should be reviewed after a year to ascertain whether any authorities have incurred exceptional additional costs.

3. Consultation Feedback

3.1 The Policy was drafted in consultation with CSF staff, as well as staff from the Money Advice Unit, NCH, and the Connexions Service. It took into account feedback already gleaned from care leavers through CROA, Viewpoint and Quality Protects consultations. It was then sent out to partner agencies and young people and has been amended in the light of that consultation. The consultation forms were sent out to partner agencies who also work with care leavers: secondary schools, training providers, universities and colleges, the Health Authorities and Trusts and PCTs, District Councils, CVS's, and voluntary organisations. NCH and the Connexions Service were also given a further opportunity to comment. We received the following responses:

- 11 from schools
- 3 from training providers
- 1 from colleges
- 1 from Connexions
- 4 from health organisations
- 3 from voluntary organisations
- 1 from District Councils

3.2 A detailed consultation was held with looked after children and care leavers about the Policy and its implications in practice for them. This was organised by the CSF Participation Team, in conjunction with the Voice of the Child in Care (VCC) and NCH. Three separate groups were consulted, comprising young people from:

- residential care
- foster care
- Herts Leaving Care Service (NCH)

3.3 Feedback from both young people and partner agencies was then considered by the Quality Protects Group on Leaving Care, including representatives from CSF, NCH, VCC, and Herts Young Homeless Group. This resulted in a number of amendments and additions to the Policy, the significant ones being set out below.

3.4 Consultation with Members and other agencies has led to a debate about what constitutes the support which would be provided by a "good parent" in the

headline statement on Guiding Principles. The young people themselves have come up with the following definition: “This includes a good home, support, help, companionship, respect, appropriate rules, security, and a happy environment.” This has been added to the headline statement.

- 3.5 A key point raised by care leavers is that to succeed academically they should have a stable home life. This point has been included in a new para 3.4, along with the commitment that young people will not be moved in a period running up to or during examinations, except in an emergency.
- 3.6 Para 4.2 has been expanded to respond to care leavers’ request for support in seeking and sustaining employment, and their wish to have a range of work experiences available to them, in addition to Teenagers to Work.
- 3.7 Young people expressed the wish that they should be moved to independent accommodation in stages, and that there should be alternatives to go to if it did not work out. They also expressed concerns about security and that they should not be placed in unsafe areas with unsuitable people. A new para 5.3 has been drafted, and an additional bullet point added to 5.4, to respond to these concerns.
- 3.8 Partner agencies felt that the concept of emotional support was not sufficiently addressed in section 6 on Personal Support (and the accompanying headline statement). Feedback from the young people implied something similar, as well as wanting more about practical support, and about who would deliver this support. Consequently, the role of the Personal Adviser has been outlined in the introductory paragraphs to this section, and an extra paragraph has been added about practical support. The headline statement (which previously focussed just on health) has been amended to include the following: “All care leavers will be provided with a Personal Adviser who will provide the emotional and practical support they require to meet their needs.”

4. Implementation of the Policy

- 4.1 Overall, the feedback from both partner agencies and young people were positive about the Policy. Responses from partner agencies included the observations that it was clear, comprehensive, and thorough, and aimed at meeting the needs of care leavers. However, there were concerns expressed by both groups about whether CSF could deliver on it. It is clear that active implementation of the Policy will be essential over the coming months and years.
- 4.2 By anticipating the requirements of the Leaving Care Act well in advance we were relatively well prepared for its implementation on 1 October 2001. We have:
 - established arrangements to carry out needs assessments for all care leavers, and for looked after children 15 years old and above, and to draw up leaving care Pathway Plans for them

- held four training days to brief HCC staff and those in partner agencies about the principles behind the Act and the new legal requirements
- developed a reciprocal agreement with other local authorities in Eastern Region regarding support for each other's care leavers
- implemented a sponsorship scheme for care leavers in higher and further education
- extended the remit of the Voice of the Child in Care advocacy service to include care leavers

4.3 In particular, the dedicated Leaving Care Service we have commissioned from NCH has hit the ground running since it first commenced operations in April 2001. They have:

- 134 care leavers receiving Personal Adviser support
- agreed working protocols with CSF Teams, and developed working partnerships and with a range of agencies over the county
- 8 semi-independence places at the Phoenix Project in Hatfield, with plans to open a 2 bed supported "satellite" house in Welwyn Garden City
- 22 young people in Supportive Lodgings placements with 18 Supportive Lodgings carers, with a further 6 currently undergoing assessment
- established links with District Council Housing Managers, and with housing associations who provide accommodation support for care leavers
- started running regular 'surgery' times at the five county 'drop-ins' operated by Herts Young Homeless Group (HYHG)
- developed links with CSF's nurse for looked after children, CAMHS and adult mental health services, and with HYHG's Herts Mental Health Link.

4.4 Appendix 2 sets out Hertfordshire's position in relation to the requirements of the Act, and the Quality Protects National Objectives for care leavers and Performance Assessment Framework (PAF) targets in more detail. This information is arranged into the following headings:

- Herts NCH Leaving Care Service
- Needs Assessment and Pathway Planning
- Education, Training and Employment
- Accommodation
- Financial Support
- Health
- Disabled Care Leavers
- Advocacy Services
- Co-ordination and Further Development

4.5 To meet the requirements of the Act and of our new Policy will require further development of services which will be funded from Leaving Care Grant in 2002/3 and beyond. Appendix 2 identifies the areas that will be developed in 2002/3, and where this is in response to consultation with care leavers. Development of services has been considerably enhanced by the holistic approach enshrined by CSF, and the way we have successfully integrated the NCH service into this approach. In particular, benefits have accrued from the work done by the Corporate Parenting Team with schools and the Connexions

Service, and by the Participation Team with young people and voluntary organisations. To reflect this approach, Appendix 2 also sets out related actions identified in the CSF Plan (Priority Area 5.6). The new developments for 2002/3 include:

- care leavers nurse to help meet their health needs
- extending education, training and employment support beyond 16
- supporting disabled care leavers and managing transition to adult services
- NCH out of hours support service
- drop-in and support groups all over the county
- support to unaccompanied asylum seekers when they leave care
- supported and emergency accommodation
- data systems to help ensure we keep track care leavers and their progress

4.6 Implementation of the above developments in 2002/3 will go a long way towards meeting the requirements of the Policy. Further developments that are required will be outlined in the proposals for the CSF Plan 2003/4. Areas for development that have already been identified in the feedback from young people and partner agencies are:

- additional Personal Advisers to ensure that care leavers are adequately supported and are keeping safe and well
- enhanced support for care leavers living independently who do not have a “home” to relate to (whether it be a foster home or children’s home they have moved from, or the family home)
- further development of “drop-ins” in settings that also provide advice and support on education, employment and/ or accommodation
- alternative programmes that provide work experience placements to give care leavers experience of employment in a supportive setting
- more supported accommodation in “safe” areas
- working protocols and support arrangements for care leavers suffering from mental health problems
- support and accommodation arrangements for care leavers living or at college in other local authority areas

4.7 It is also proposed that further training for staff and partner agencies is carried out in Autumn 2002, to act as a refresher to the training they received when the Act was implemented last year, and to inform them about the Policy and the implications for their practice. This will particularly include the preparation of looked after children before they leave care by helping them to develop skills, and introducing them to services and networks, that they will need as they move to independence.

5. Financial Implications

5.1 All the implications of the Leaving Care Policy for County Council budgets will be funded by the Leaving Care Grant or by CSF base budget. To coincide with the implementation of the Leaving Care Act, the Government has created a new ring-fenced budget for local authorities, to meet the needs of care leavers, called the Leaving Care Grant. In 2002/3 Hertfordshire receives £4.121 million Leaving Care Grant. This grant is ring-fenced for young people

covered by the Leaving Care Act, which means that we have to spend it on care leavers. However, it should be noted that £3 million of the Grant constitutes transfer of funding from our own SSA (base budget) expenditure on existing services for Eligible and Relevant children aged 16 and 17. These budget implications were endorsed by the County Council on 14 February 2002 when they agreed the proposals in the Quality Protects Management Action Plan 2002/3 as part of the CSF Plan.

- 5.2 The Policy commitments to Qualifying children, under Section 24 of the Children Act (as outlined in para 2.8 above) has been funded by an addition of £150,000 which has been transferred to the Section 24 base budget in 2002/3 from the Quality Protects Special Grant budget 2001/2.
- 5.3 In 2003/4 we will receive approximately £4.797 Leaving Care Grant, an increase of £676,000 on this year. Budget proposals will be developed and put forward to Members as part of the preparation of the CSF Plan.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 This final version of the Policy is submitted to Cabinet for approval.

Background papers used by the author when compiling this report:

Report to Strategy Panel 23 May 2002: Leaving Care Policy

Report to Corporate Parenting Panel 8 May 2002: Leaving Care Policy

Report to County Council 14 February 2002: CSF Plan 2002/05 Incorporating QP MAP, Early Years Childcare Development Plan and the Youth Justice Plan

Report to Corporate Parenting Panel 12 December 2001: Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000

Department of Health: *Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000: Regulations and Guidance* (October 2001)

Department of Health: Circular LAC (2001) 28 *The Quality Protects Programme: Transforming Children's Services 2002/03* (October 2001)

Report to Corporate Parenting Panel 15 December 1999: Leaving Care

If you would like to know more about the issues referred to in this report please contact Andrew Wellington (Tel: 01992 556980)

Children (Leaving Care) Act definitions

Responsible Authority

The council which last looked after the child or young person.

Eligible children

Children aged 16 and 17 who have been looked after for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and who are still looked after.

Relevant children

Children aged 16 and 17 who have been looked after for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and who have left care.

Former relevant children

Young people aged 18 – 21 who have been either eligible or relevant children or both. If at the age of 21 the young person is still being helped by her/his responsible authority with education or training, (s)he remains a former relevant child to the end of the agreed programme of education or training even if that takes him past the age of 21.

Qualifying children & young people over 16

Young people aged under 21 (under 24 if in education or training) who cease to be looked after or accommodated in a variety of other settings, or privately fostered after the age of 16. (Section 24(1))

Children (leaving care) Act duties of Responsible Authorities

The responsible authority has a number of **duties** in relation to former relevant children. These include:

- To keep in touch with the young person
- To provide assistance with the expenses associated with education and training
- To provide vacation accommodation or the funds to secure it to care leavers in higher education or on a residential FE course which requires them to live away from home as agreed in the Pathway Plan
- To regularly review and revise the Pathway Plan (at least every 6 months)

Responsibilities in relation to care leavers who are not former relevant children include:

- Assistance where a young person incurs expenses associated with employment, education and training, up to the age of 24 where connected to a course of education or training
- Vacation accommodation or the means to secure it, for care leavers between the age of 16 and 21 qualifying for advice and assistance, who are in Higher Education or on a residential FE course, where needed
- Keep in touch up to the age of 21 or 24 if the young person is receiving assistance with education and training

HERTFORDSHIRE'S POSITION IN RELATION TO THE LEAVING CARE ACT AND DEVELOPMENT PLANS FOR 2002/3 TO IMPLEMENT THE DRAFT LEAVING CARE POLICY

1. Herts NCH Leaving Care Service

1.1 The Leaving Care Service provided by NCH commenced operations in April 2001. It was designed and commissioned in response to care leaver and practitioner feedback to consultation. The Project Manager has agreed working protocols with the Quadrant and Family Placement Teams, and has run workshops at our Leaving Care Act briefing days. Effective working partnerships and links have been developed with a range of agencies over the county with a view to improving the opportunities and life chances of young people who are in the process of leaving the care system.

- NCH started taking priority cases in April, and since 1 October they are taking on all care leavers aged 16 or over who are referred to them by Quadrant Teams. They are currently dealing with 134 young people. 60% of these are aged 16 or 17, 36% are aged 18-20, and 4% are 21 plus. As NCH commenced operations in April, most of these are pre 1 October care leavers, although this will obviously change over time.

1.2 We designed and commissioned the service from NCH as an integrated service for care leavers which contains the following elements:

- Two senior project workers who hold management responsibility for Pathway Plans and case co-ordination and supervise the Personal Advisers; they also oversee the development of initiatives in conjunction with a range of partner agencies
- Four project workers who act as Personal Advisers to provide direct support to care leavers and implement and review Pathway Plans in conjunction with a range of agencies (it is proposed that this number rises to six, so that they can potentially take on up to 220 "Qualifying" care leavers who left care prior to 1 October 2001, 80 of whom have already been referred to them)
- Four housing support workers who offer support to care leavers in supported accommodation and outreach support to care leavers who have moved on to independence;
- 8 semi-independence hostel places at Phoenix Project, supportive lodgings placements, plus further supported accommodation to be developed by the housing support workers.

1.3 We are developing the service with NCH in consultation with care leavers. Care leavers consulted last year told us that they feel that they are not involved in decisions about leaving care

- NCH will help Quadrant Teams to carry out needs assessments and develop Pathway Plans in consultation with care leavers from age 15.

Young people felt that they had to move to independence too early, or at a difficult time in their lives.

- In future they will remain in semi-independent hostels or other accommodation supported by NCH, and will only move on to independence when they are 18 or are ready.

Young people said that they wanted more support to be offered over a longer period, and more services and facilities available to them when they left care. They have also asked for more support in learning practical independence skills to help them cope with the day to day activities of adult life. In response to this, we will ensure that NCH:

- Develop support initiatives for care leavers with a range of agencies (housing, CSF, Connexions, and other voluntary organisations);
- Provide a range of accommodation for care leavers, varying from the high support Phoenix Project to a range of supported living arrangements;
- Provide Personal Advisers up to age of 21, or beyond if care leavers are in an agreed programme of education and training;
- Continue to offer outreach support to care leavers who have moved on to independence with a support plan to ensure that they manage to cope.
- Support care leavers individually and in groups to learn practical independence skills.

1.4 In line with the above, the priorities identified for NCH in the CSF Plan 2002/3 are to commission them to provide 'holistic' services for all care leavers referred to them. This includes the following tasks:

- Commission NCH to establish outreach and follow-up support mechanisms for care leavers living independently or with other carers/agencies.
- Assess current level of NCH provision of personal advisers and their ability to meet future need
- Commission NCH to establish drop-in facilities across the county
- Ensure NCH establish and co-ordinate peer group support networks for care leavers across the County
- Commission NCH to implement and maintain a database to track all HCC care leavers

1.5 In addition, we have subsequently identified two further priorities:

- Good parents do not tell their children that they can only contact them in office hours. In line with the Guidance care leavers require emergency access to support outside office hours. In 2002/3 NCH will develop the service to offer care leavers 24-hour access to the service, 365 days per year.
- Last-minute discussions between the DoH and the Home Office led to the provisions of the Act being extended to unaccompanied Asylum Seekers who are 'looked after' under section 20 CA who will then become eligible for leaving care services at age 16. In 2002/3 NCH will recruit an additional project worker to support asylum-seekers, who are widely dispersed and have a different set of needs from mainstream care leavers.

2. Needs Assessment and Pathway Planning

2.1 The Act makes it clear that preparation for leaving care must start well before the young person ceases to be looked after. At the heart of the Act is a requirement for every young person who is looked after to have a “Pathway Plan” by their 16th birthday. The plan will be founded on a thorough assessment of need based on the National Assessment Framework, carried out on a multi-agency basis and in collaboration with the young person.

- Our new procedures require teams to start planning the needs assessment and drawing up the Pathway Plan at the first statutory review after their 15th birthday. NCH should be invited to all these review because, even if it is not planned that they will take on the case, because they can contribute a wealth of information about services and support networks available for care leavers.

2.2 For each young person the support they receive up to and after they leave care will be agreed with them and set out in their Pathway Plan, including:

- accommodation and maintenance for those aged 16 and 17;
- general assistance up to the age of 21;
- help with employment up to the age of 21;
- help with education and training to the end of the agreed programme, even if that takes someone past 21;
- provision of vacation accommodation (if needed) for someone in Higher Education or in Further Education which means living away from home;
- provision of a personal advisers to the age of at least 21, or for as long as someone is being helped with education or training.

2.3 Personal Advisers

The Leaving Care Act requires that every 16-21 year old who is in care or has left care should have a designated “Personal Adviser”. They would have three key roles:

- A single focus for contact, advice and support
- To participate in preparation and reviews of the Pathway Plan, convening meetings after the young person has left care
- To co-ordinate the provision of services by all concerned agencies and ensure the young person makes use of them

2.4 These arrangements will need the trust of young people if they are to work. Consequently, the Government proposes that there should be flexibility about who should be the Adviser, and that authorities will need to ensure that the range of advisers is sufficiently wide to provide young people with a choice of adviser (although the final decision rests with the responsible authority). In Hertfordshire, these roles will primarily be carried out by:

- Quadrant social workers and professional assistants
- NCH Leaving Care Service project workers

On some occasions the role will be held by:

- Connexions Service LAC and Leaving Care Personal Advisers
- Advisory Teacher Service Education Support Workers

In exceptional circumstances, where it is difficult to engage the young person in any other way, the role could be held by:

- Foster Carers
- Residential social workers
- Independent advocates and Mentors
- Workers from voluntary organisations other than NCH, e.g. homeless/housing support workers

2.5 The CSF Plan 2002/3 contains an Action Sheet to implement arrangements that will provide a Pathway Plan for every care leaver, including the following tasks:

- Develop and implement Pathway Plans in consultation with individual Care Leavers from age 15 at the first statutory review after the child's 15th birthday
- Identify the Personal Advisor in the Pathway Plan
- Establish how many Personal Advisors are required and recruit to that number
- Identify what support Care Leavers who have moved onto independence require and as part of the Pathway Plan provide a package to support them financially, with housing, education training and employment

2.6 Our own Quadrant Teams will carry out the above tasks for those young people they have retained responsibility for. These are mainly Eligible children - young people aged 16 or 17 who are still looked after. The tasks will be carried out by the NCH Leaving Care Service for those young people who have been transferred to them. As indicated in the report, this will include providing Personal Advisers for young people who left care before 1 October 2001, 80 of whom they are already supporting.

- To help NCH cope with the additional demand this has engendered, we have included a development for two additional project workers/ Personal Advisers in the Leaving Care Grant budget. This will ensure that they continue to support young people who left care before 1 October 2001.

2.7 **Maintaining Contact and Support**

The 2000 Act places a duty on the local authority to keep in touch with care leavers up to the age of 21, or beyond if they are in an agreed programme of education or training. This duty reflects the underlying philosophy of the Act that local authorities should behave in the same manner as a responsible parent by being proactive in expressing interest and concern. This duty corresponds to QP National Objectives sub-objective 5.2, which is to maximise the number of young people leaving care after their sixteenth birthday who are still in touch with SSD, or a known and approved contact, on their 19th birthday. In practice it is the Personal Adviser who is likely to carry the responsibility for keeping in touch with the young person and taking action if they lose contact.

2.8 The Act now makes it essential that we keep in contact with care leavers and are able to track their performance. At the end of March 2002 85% of our care

leavers who were 19 in 2001/2 were still in contact with Quadrant Teams or NCH.

- Our stated PAF objectives are to ensure that 90% of young people are still in contact by March 2004. Consequently, we have required NCH to develop and constantly update a database that will show the current situation of all care leavers (including those they are not directly working with) with regard to all the PAF indicators. To achieve this the Leaving Care Grant developments also contain a development for the development costs of the database and 1.5 admin workers to maintain it, as well as the financial systems required to administer care leavers' accommodation and living expenses.

3. Education, Training and Employment

3.1 The Government expects local authorities to ensure that they engage fully with local education authorities, schools, Connexions, the careers and employment services in the after-care planning process.

- Since 1999 we have had a Quality Protects sub-group, looking specifically at the employment, training and education needs of care leavers. This joint planning process has been facilitated by the implementation of CSF in April 2001. The group currently includes representatives from CSF, NCH, Connexions, and the Careers service.

3.2 We are also expected to engage the above agencies in the Pathway Planning process and that these agencies are regarded as integral partners in the assessment of the needs of care leavers. Hertfordshire's Policy for the Education of Children in Public Care requires every looked after child to have a Personal Education Plan, and each school to have a designated teacher for looked after children. However, the requirements of the Leaving Care Act extend these education and careers support responsibilities beyond the age of 16, up to 21 or whenever the care leaver finishes an agreed programme of education and training.

- The draft Leaving Care Policy incorporates policy commitments for the education, training and employment of care leavers, in conjunction with Careers and Connexions services, schools, colleges of further and higher education, training providers, employers, and the Teenager to Work Scheme.

3.3 Quality Protects Sub-objective 5.1 is for young people who were looked after on their sixteenth birthday, to maximise the number engaged in education, training or employment at the age of 19. New targets, set in the NHS Plan published in July 2000, have increased the PAF target for improving the level of education, training and employment outcomes for care leavers aged 19. The aim is that levels for this group are at least 75% of those achieved by all young people in the same area by March 2004 (this is also a Connexions Service target). At the end of March 2002 63% of our care leavers who were 19 in 2001/2 were engaged in education, training or employment.

- 3.4 The 2000 Act requires local authorities to assist with an agreed programme of education and training, even if it extends beyond the age of 21. The Guidance says that we should encourage young people to continue their education and learning beyond the minimum school-leaving age unless they will quite clearly not benefit from this. Feedback from our own care leavers is that they regret the learning opportunities they missed because of disruption at the time of school-leaving age and that they wish they had a second chance to take advantage of these opportunities. In addition, many care leavers over 18 drop out of further education because they have inadequate financial support.
- Currently 40 young people are in higher and further education. Our aim is to expand this by at least 50% by 2004. To support this goal we have implemented a sponsorship scheme to support care leavers up to the amount we can offer them without it affecting their education grant entitlement. This sponsorship has been supported by Quality Protects and Leaving Care Grant funding in 2001/2, which will continue in 2002/3.
- 3.5 Analysis of the participation trends for care leavers in education training and employment indicate that there is a need to provide continued encouragement and support to care leavers. This helps enable them to sustain their placement in education, training or employment and to acquire the substantive work ethic necessary for sustained success. This is supported by feedback from our own care leavers who have asked us for more support sustaining education courses.
- The "Kick Start" pilot project started in April 2000, and has provided support for 27 care leavers, of whom 23 are now in education, training or employment. This pilot has been funded by Connexions in 2001, but will be absorbed into mainstream care leaver programmes in 2002/3. Regular contact has been established by NCH with both Kick-Start and Connexions, to ensure joint and complementary working to meet the educational support needs of care leavers.
- 3.6 Support schemes in other authorities include a payment to care leavers who are in further education tied into their attendance, to act as an incentive and an alternative to state benefits. This covers both young people attending 6th form to those in further education, training or initial employment.
- In 2002/3 we will extend the sponsorship scheme to include an Incentive Scheme for Post 16 Education and sustainability in employment. This scheme will cover 6th form and vocational training and employment, as well as higher and further education.
- 3.7 The CSF Plan 2002/3 contains an Action Sheet to develop support programmes that enable every care leaver to access and sustain appropriate education, training and employment. The purpose of this is to implement the education, training and employment provisions of the Leaving Care Policy and ensure that:
- care leavers are supported to move into and sustain appropriate education, training or employment;
 - joint work is done with Schools, Colleges, Careers and Connexions Services to prioritise care leavers;

- care leavers are assisted to access sponsorship funding and post-16 incentive scheme
- Numbers in Higher and Further Education are increased by at least 50% by March 2004, and sustained until completion of course.

3.8 The particular tasks associated with this Action Sheet are to:

- Carry out a survey of the involvement in education, training and employment of care leavers to include reasons why, and why they are not, involved
- Develop responses which will increase the involvement of care leavers in education, training and employment. This to include:
 - use of 16-19 collaboration planning groups
 - career mentoring and support
 - job and education clubs
 - focused support from the age of 14 and points of transfer at 16 and 19
- Draw up and implement a schedule for monitoring care leavers' achievements in sustaining education, training and employment opportunities
- Develop Teenagers to Work Scheme. This to include: one day holiday placements; substitute year 10/11 school work experience placements; summer jobs; ongoing part-time placements; young people trained to work to help training/ interviewing.

3.9 To carry out the above tasks, implement the education, training and employment provisions of the Leaving Care Policy, and mainstream the "Kick Start" programme, we will recruit additional staff in 2002/3, created out of a CSF and Connexions joint funded programme:

- One wte Development Manager for the Education, Training and Employment of Care Leavers, funded by Leaving Care Grant to report to the Corporate Parenting Officer. This post will oversee the implementation of the Policy, and link partner agencies, including Universities and Colleges, training institutions and employers, with other strategies that are led by the needs of the young people.
- Four Personal Advisers funded by Connexions, to support looked after children and care leavers aged 13-19. They will carry out comprehensive assessments and liase with all relevant agencies to arrange education and careers opportunities and provide ongoing support. They will work closely with the Development Manager and LAC Advisory Teachers.
- Four additional Education Support Workers (one per quadrant) funded by Leaving Care Grant. These ESWs will complement the work of the Personal Advisers by giving day to day practical support to looked after children and care leavers. Our four existing ESWs currently have no capacity to continue to support LAC after the age of 16 in either sixth form or college placements. Relationships formed with education support workers should not be broken by the artificial barrier of the end of statutory school time but rather should be continued to promote attendance at school, further education, training or employment. Four additional

workers will ensure that this continuity can be offered by all of them up to the age of 21 and beyond if necessary.

4. Accommodation

4.1 The 2000 Act requires local authorities to ensure that young people are properly equipped with the life skills to enable them to deal with social and practical aspects of living independently. For many care leavers this will involve a graduated transition to independence through semi-supported accommodation. The Leaving Care Act Guidance requires us to develop a strategy in partnership with housing providers to provide a range of accommodation to meet the needs of care leavers.

- NCH are working with housing providers (see below) who are already contracted by CSF to provide accommodation support for care leavers, and are exploring the possibility of initiating new partnerships with Housing Associations on a 'shared housing' basis. CSF also fund five young homeless development teams run by Herts Young Homeless Group, giving advice and support to young homeless in all Districts in the County. NCH have established regular 'surgery' times at the 5 county 'drop-ins' operated by Herts Young Homeless Group, increasing the opportunity of access to local service provision.

4.2 The Government has also introduced legislation requiring local housing authorities to review their services for homeless people and develop a homelessness strategy. This is likely to include an expectation that care leavers aged 18 and upward (former relevant children) are given priority for housing. The Leaving Care Act Guidance says that it is important that we have joint protocols in place with housing departments for dealing with care leavers.

- A Standard Framework for Joint Housing Protocols, which includes accommodation for young homeless people and for Care Leavers, exists with all 10 District Councils. The NCH Project Manager has met with all of the 10 District Council Housing Needs Managers in order to develop a mutual understanding of new legislation and hence maximise the opportunities for the availability of suitable accommodation for care leavers throughout the county. The countywide nature of the service has highlighted the variation in practice between the Districts, and further work is required by HCC and NCH to ensure that care leavers are included in District Council homelessness strategies.

4.4 The Act requires us to develop a range of supported accommodation rather than allow care leavers to live in unsuitable accommodation or take up independent tenancies prematurely whilst claiming Housing benefit (as many do at present). At the end of March 2002 81% of our care leavers who were 19 in 2001/2 were known to be in suitable accommodation.

- The NCH Service provides 8 places for care leavers in their Phoenix Project, Hatfield, and are planning to open a 2 bed supported "satellite" house in Welwyn Garden City. They also have 18 supportive lodgings carers, with a further 6 currently undergoing assessment. 22 young people have been accommodated in Supportive Lodging placements since May.

We also fund 96 places in five Young Homeless housing projects providing accommodation all over the County. We have implemented standard partnership agreements with these projects, requiring them to give priority to care leavers, and adopt Warner staffing standards.

4.5 We also need to develop emergency same night accommodation, as some young people in crisis have to be placed in bed and breakfast or unsuitable adult provision. Currently only Phoenix Project offers this service for care leavers. Funding was identified in the 2001/2 Leaving Care Grant to develop Supported Housing and emergency accommodation for care leavers, which could be managed by NCH or the Housing Associations with whom we have partnership agreements.

- Since NCH became operational in April 2001 they have found that there is a shortage of supported housing appropriate for 16-18yr olds in the South Quadrant in particular. Prior to Oct. 1, of 14 care leavers NCH took on from South Quadrant, five spent time in unsuitable accommodation. The 2002/3 Leaving Care Grant developments include one additional wte NCH housing support worker to develop and manage supported housing in South Quadrant.

4.6 There is considerable further work required to carry out a comprehensive needs analysis and ensure that suitable accommodation is available for all care leavers (including vacation accommodation for care leavers in higher education, and those whose further education require them to live away from home). This will require CSF to work in conjunction with NCH, District Councils, and other housing providers. The CSF Plan 2002/3 has an Action Sheet to develop a range of suitable accommodation with varying levels of support that will meet the assessed needs of every care leaver. This includes the following tasks:

- With NCH and other housing providers carry out an audit of present and future accommodation needs of care leavers by location and type and level of support
- Commission NCH to provide accommodation services indicated by audit, including a second high support hostel if that is needed
- Assess need for same night accommodation, and how this might best be provided
- Specify future requirements and funding of other housing providers and commission identified services
- With quadrants, review joint housing protocols and joint commissioning arrangements for independent and supported housing with Housing Authorities

5. Financial Support for Care Leavers

5.1 The Government believes that the historical trend for local authorities to discharge young people from care early was in part a cost saving measure as, after discharge, many young people are supported on benefits. Consequently, the 2000 Act includes new arrangements to make local authorities responsible

for the accommodation and maintenance costs of all 16 and 17 year olds who leave care after 1 October 2001. With the exception of lone parents and certain disabled young people, their eligibility to state benefits is withdrawn.

- Supported Housing funding in the Leaving Care Grant contains an element to pick up the Housing Benefit and Income Support costs of the prevailing average of 40 young people per annum who leave care aged 16 or 17 (relevant young people).

5.2 In taking over income maintenance, discretion will have to be exercised by staff with no formal training in income maintenance and no national guidance as to minimum incomes. Staff will have to make the kind of decisions employment service and housing benefit staff have to – e.g. on job-seeking efforts and reasonable rents.

- With the assistance of the Money Advice Unit, we have drawn up and distributed a procedural guide on care leavers finances (Appendix A3) based on a template agreed by the Eastern Region authorities in conjunction with the SSI. In practice, the overwhelming majority of care leavers the benefit changes apply to will be dealt with by the NCH service. We have agreed with NCH that they will administer the maintenance, accommodation, and education and training expenses of all the care leavers they are dealing with, and invoice us monthly. Consequently, the 2002/3 Leaving Care Grant also contains a development for NCH to have additional financial admin support hours (included in the 1.5 admin posts that will also cover the data input and tracking). This will help to ensure that the financial needs of care leavers under the new Act are adequately and efficiently met.

5.3 The ring-fenced Leaving Care Grant also includes funding for all looked after children aged 16 and 17, which has been transferred from SSA.

- A sum is included in the Leaving Care Grant which includes all the costs of 16 and 17 year olds in our own children's homes and foster placements, as well as in agency placements. This sum also includes an amount for their associated incidental expenses (transport, etc) as well as leaving care grants and independence set-up costs.

6. Health of Care Leavers

6.1 The Leaving Care Act Guidance notes that, historically, care leavers have had high incidence of early parenthood, mental ill health and stress, loneliness and incidence of risk-taking behaviour. They have also reported that they have been ill-prepared to take responsibility for their own health. The Guidance says that Health services have an important health advisory and health promotion role with care leavers.

- The new NCH service has already developed links at both strategic and local level with CAMHS and adult mental health services. The project is working closely with CSF's nurse for looked after children and the health arm of HYHG, Herts Mental Health link. However, it is inappropriate to expect that NCH on their own can ensure that care leavers' health needs are adequately met.

- 6.2 Our Community Nurse for Looked After Children has been in post since July 1998, and subsequently found many areas of need and neglect in working with care leavers. She has developed, and is developing several projects/pilots for Looked After Children across the county in order to try and address the health issues that have been found. These include Health training for care staff and foster carers, drop-in clinics and Health projects for staff and children in Children's Homes, and Health policy and protocol development for working with looked after children.
- 6.3 The CSF Plan 2002/3 contains an Action Sheet to develop and implement initiatives with Health and other partner agencies that will improve and sustain the physical and mental health of care leavers. This will involve the following tasks:
- Monitor the numbers of care leavers using dental practices, general practices and ophthalmology services
 - Develop with care leavers, NCH, and health, polices and practices to promote healthy living for care leavers
 - Arrange with NCH, health and other agencies, health training on appropriate issues for care leavers.
- 6.4 However, the Community Nurse (LAC) works across the whole county, so it is difficult for her to take on the work with young people leaving care. It has been agreed that these young people would benefit more from a health professional dedicated specifically to address their health needs.
- The Leaving Care Grant contains a new development for a Specialist Care Leavers Nurse who will work with NCH, Connexions, School Nurses, CSF staff (social workers, staff in community homes, etc.) foster carers, Youth Workers, Youth Offenders Teams, and appropriate health agencies. She would work with young people at least 6 months before leaving care, and up until age 21, depending on need. She would also develop specific projects for care leavers on health issues in liaison with partner agencies.

7. Disabled Care Leavers

- 7.1 Disabled young people may well face more barriers than other care leavers and may also have needs related to impairment. The Guidance says that it is essential to ensure that these needs are met when preparing for leaving care, and supporting these young people subsequently. In particular, local authorities are asked to take cognisance of:
- any transition plan drawn up under the SEN Code of practice
 - Connexions Service, which will support young people with learning disabilities up to the age of 25
 - housing needs
 - transition to adult support services
- 7.2 The creation of the CSF Service has helped considerably, in that it has integrated education and social care services for disabled young people. However, a considerable amount of work still has to be done to develop

transition services, both for care leavers and for disabled children generally. Two new Transition Development Worker posts, funded by Quality Protects will develop transition services. Although they will be working with all disabled young people, they will be able to ensure that disabled care leavers have a Pathway Plan which will aid seamless transition to adult services.

7.3 The CSF Plan 2002/3 contains an Action Sheet to develop and implement appropriate Pathway Plans for disabled care leavers. This will involve the following tasks:

- Identify all disabled care leavers eligible for the service
- Make projections and draw up joint plans with Adult Care Services to ensure that disabled care leavers have appropriate accommodation, support and education, training and employment opportunities into adulthood
- Draw up a protocol to ensure all disabled care leavers have a Pathway Plan to aid seamless transition to adult services.
- Draw up and implement a process which combines person centred planning for disabled care leavers (guidelines due out from DoH Autumn 2001) and SEN/Disability Codes for children
- Develop a protocol with the Hertfordshire Connexions Service to prioritise Personal Advisors for disabled care leavers

8. Advocacy Services

8.1 The Guidance says that Councils should allow young people access to an independent advocacy service at any or all stages of the complaints procedure. It also cautions that if the Leaving Care Service is run by an independent provider (as ours is), the advocacy role should not create any conflict of interest.

- In recognition of this expectation, we have extended the remit of our looked after children advocacy service, run by Voice of the Child in Care (VCC), to include care leavers, rather than ask NCH to take on this role as well.

8.2 VCC are already providing casework to 7 care leavers. In addition they have sent a booklet/annual report to all care leavers via NCH, and have set up a visiting advocacy service to the Phoenix Project. They are also working with six care leavers in the Children's Rights and Change group, some of whom have attended the VCC AGM. They have also offered to write to all the care leavers we have lost contact with at their last known address, to put them in touch with the new NCH service.

9. Co-ordination and Further Development

It can be seen that the Leaving Care Act requires considerable further development of services and the co-ordination of new initiatives in partnership with Quadrant Teams, Health, District Councils, the NCH service and other and the voluntary sector partners. This will involve the evaluation of future needs and identification of gaps in service, and the development of plans, to ensure that we meet the requirements of the Act and objectives set in Government Guidance and PAF targets. Currently, we have no post dedicated to this evaluation, co-ordination and development role.

- The Leaving Care Grant developments include 1 wte Project Officer post to co-ordinate the roll-out of the Leaving Care Act implementation arrangements in 2002/3 and the further development of services for care leavers. This particularly applies to the fields of accommodation, health, asylum seekers, young people placed in other local authority areas (agency placements) financial support, and co-ordination of monitoring and support systems.