

# Report of the Strategic Director to the meeting of Corporate Parenting Panel to be held on 7<sup>th</sup> September 2020

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## **Subject:**

Report on the Wi-Fi Access & Mobile Connectivity for Bradford Care Leavers

## **Summary statement:**

Bradford currently has 647 young people identifying as Care Leavers. This report will explore the numbers of young people who have access to smart devices and Wi-Fi.

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## **Portfolio:**

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## **Overview & Scrutiny Area:**

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## **1. SUMMARY**

- 1.1 It is widely known that within the general young people's population, having a smart device and access to Wi-Fi is a young person's world; for Care Leavers this is no different.
- 1.2 NYAS (National Youth Advisory Service) have just published a report on support for Care Leavers through Covid – 19 (please see Appendix 1). In this report you will see that nationally it has been recognised that Care Leavers are less likely to have a smart device and access to Wi-Fi as compared to their peers. 1 in 5 Care Leavers do not have the technology they feel they need. NLCAS (National Leaving Care Advisory Service) are currently working with the Department of Education and the Leaving Care Covenant to try to nationally close this gap. For example, work is being done with leading broadband suppliers to encourage them via the Leaving Care Covenant to supply free Wi-Fi to all Care Leavers nationally. The conclusion being that it is recognised that it is an issue and some care leavers are facing digital exclusion.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

### **2.1 Our Young People**

- 647 young people identify as Care Leavers 16 to 25+ and are the responsibility of Bradford Childrens Social Care
- 563 young people are active open cases held with the Care Leavers Service
- 170 young people live independently.
- 209 young people currently live within a family environment (birth family, foster carers, staying put or supported lodgings)
- 129 young people live in residential supported group living or supported tenancies
- 55 young people live in 'other' accommodation – student/hostel/"sofa surfing"
- 408 young people are currently identified as being in education, training or employment
- 155 are identified as not being in education training or employment
- Of these 155 young people 24 are registered as having an illness and 21 are pregnant or full time parents

### **2.2 Key events so far**

- At the point of the Care Leavers Service being established in January 2020 we established a system whereby all young people when 16, as part of their Pathway Planning were set up with an email address and are bought a smart phone or tablet dependent on the young person's choice. Since this time most young people living in foster care or residential homes have smart phones and access to tablets or laptops as a result of living in a care setting. Anecdotally we were aware that young people in less stable living arrangements, presenting with behaviours indicative of child exploitation, young people living with parents or UASC do not generally have smart devices and are even less likely to have access to Wi-Fi. We have since researched this area – see below
- As part of the Corporate Parenting offer to our young people our service contacted corporate IT service and were able to secure 50 refurbished smart phones and 30 basic phones as a result of a wider corporate upgrade to all staff. This supply has now come to an end.
- The Service has also secured a partnership with a local Bradford business where they

fund 50% of the cost of a smart phone and Wi-Fi contract. Young people then fund the remaining 50% out of their weekly monies, this cost is capped at £2.50 per week

- 10 Wi-Fi devices have been purchased from the same business and used to support young people during Covid.
- It is Care Leavers policy that at the point of a young person entering a Level 3 or above education course (College/University) a laptop or tablet (young person's choice) will be bought by the service, if a young person cannot secure a device via virtual school, the education establishment or person in a parental role (foster carers, parents, residential care settings). The costs for this are recouped from the young person's bursary
- The Care Leavers Service is expanding their knowledge of community charities and resources who offer free smart devices generally lap tops to young people.
- Since Covid young people who have been identified as not having smart devices or Wi-Fi and have been identified at risk of a decline in emotional well being or isolation have been bought smart devices and Wi-Fi, regardless of education status

### 2.3 Current Situation

569 young people were asked the question via the Leaving Well Pathway planning app –

Do you have access to the internet as often as you need?

- 414 said yes – 73%
- 11 said not relevant
- 60 said no - 10%
- 84 did not answer this question.
- 25% presumed as having no access to Wi-Fi

Of the young people who said yes (414):

- 243 are in education training and employment - 57 %
- 321 state that they are living in stable accommodation settings - 78%

Of the young people who said no or did not answer the question (144):

- 42 are NOT in education training or employment – 29%
- 77 state they have issues with substances – 54%
- 98 state they are living in unstable accommodation – 68%

48 young people in our service currently do not have a smart phone – 9%

176 young people in our service do not have a lap top or tablet – 32%

### 2.4 Analysis

There is a link between young people feeling that they are in unstable accommodation and not having a smart device and or Wi-Fi.

Young people are more likely to be NEET if they don't have access to a smart device or Wi-Fi.

Young people being in stable accommodation increases the likelihood of them having access to Wi-Fi and a smart device.

Most young people in the service have a smart phone (91%); young people who don't have a smart phone are young people where there are exploitation issues, criminality or young people who are UASC.

73% of young people say they have access to Wi-Fi. These young people are more likely to live in family environment, of the young people who said they don't have access to Wi-Fi most live in semi-independent living environments.

32% of young people do not have a lap-top or tablet or access to one. Most of these young people are not in education, training, employment, do not live in 'family environments' and state that they would not be able to either afford a lap top or the Wi-Fi. Most of these young people are older Care Leavers.

## **2.5 What we would like to do**

The service would wish to identify resources to approach local Bradford business to sponsor and support all Bradford Care Leavers having a smart device and Wi-Fi.

The Care Leaver Service to work with commissioning to change the tender specification to ensure that all post 16 accommodation has a basic requirement that Wi-Fi is available to all young people. (See point 3)

The Care Leavers Service to ensure that all young people at 16 have a smart device of their choice and repeat this again at 18. It is strongly felt by the service that this will improve life chances for our Care Leavers. There is of course, a resource implication to this aspiration which needs to be fully explored.

## **3. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS**

3.1 Bradford Children Services has a block contract with Horton Housing and Centre Point where 30 young people live in semi-independent living. This contract is in its 5<sup>th</sup> year and will be re-commissioned next year. In 5 years the digital world has changed significantly, it was not part of the contract specification that Wi-Fi should be part of the basic requirements, going forward this will be the case.

3.2 Bradford Childrens Services have a 16+ commissioning accommodation framework in place, as above not all providers used have Wi-Fi within their standard requirement specifications. This is an area that needs exploring as part of the forward planning for our young people.

## **4. FINANCIAL & RESOURCE APPRAISAL**

4.1 There will be a resource implication to the roll out of smart devices and Wi-Fi for young people at transitional points 16 and 18. Smart phones are approximately £50 per hand set, lap tops £200 and Wi-Fi £2.50 per week, for 16 to 18 year olds.

## **5. RISK MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES**

5.1 N/A.

## **6. LEGAL APPRAISAL**

6.1 N/A.

## **7. OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

### **7.1 EQUALITY & DIVERSITY**

7.1.1 Without question, we have some Bradford Care Leavers where there is no parity with their peers due to them being a Care Leaver and having to rely on the Corporate Parents to purchase smart devices and the Wi-Fi or enter into Wi-Fi/broadband contracts on their behalf.

7.1.2 Young people have articulated to us that they feel there is inequality and some go as far as saying they are in 'digital poverty'

7.1.3 It is felt by the service that not having smart devices and Wi-Fi puts our young people at a disadvantage in terms of education, training and employment. This has been exacerbated especially as a result of Covid, as public spaces where Wi-Fi was accessible and free are no longer available.

### **7.2 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS**

7.2.1 N/A

### **7.3 GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS IMPACTS**

7.3.1 N/A.

### **7.4 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

7.4.1 N/A.

### **7.5 HUMAN RIGHTS ACT**

7.5.1 N/A.

### **7.6 TRADE UNION**

7.6.1 N/A.

### **7.7 WARD IMPLICATIONS**

7.7.1 N/A.

## **7.8 AREA COMMITTEE ACTION PLAN IMPLICATIONS**

7.8.1 N/A.

## **7.9 IMPLICATIONS FOR CORPORATE PARENTING**

7.9.1 The provision of a good quality offer from the Corporate Parents of Care Leavers is crucial to the outcomes of Bradford Care leavers.

## **7.10 ISSUES ARISING FROM PRIVACY IMPACT ASSESMENT**

7.10.1 See above.

## **8. NOT FOR PUBLICATION DOCUMENTS**

8.1 None.

## **9. OPTIONS**

9.1 Nationally it is recognised at the highest level that Care Leavers are disadvantaged as a result of not all being able to have access to smart devices and Wi-Fi. Already in Britain there are Cities where free Wi-Fi is available. Therefore, it is felt that this is a changing picture and in 1 to 2 years' time issues may have resolved themselves. Therefore, there is an option to continue as is and wait for a changing national landscape.

9.2 Bradford Children Service have an option to purchase smart devices and facilitate Wi-Fi, for all young people but this will be at a cost. Young people would state that having access to the digital world is a basic need and to not have this is seriously impacting on their wellbeing across all developmental areas.

9.3 Bradford Children Service have an option to continue to purchase a one off smart devices at 16 and then review at the point of young people being in education.

## **10. RECOMMENDATIONS**

10.1 The views of the Corporate Parenting Panel regarding options set out in Section 9 of this report are welcomed.

## **11. APPENDICES**

11.1 Appendix 1: NYAS - Young Lives in Lockdown.

## **12. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

12.1 N/A.