ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Operational Delivery Committee
DATE	6/09/21
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Digital Support for Care Leavers
REPORT NUMBER	OPE/21/201
DIRECTOR	Rob Polkinghorne
CHIEF OFFICER	Graeme Simpson
REPORT AUTHOR	Andrea McGill
TERMS OF REFERENCE	1.2

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To provide members with an update on the implementation of the scheme to support the digital needs of care leavers. This report updates the Service Update provided to Committee in May 2021.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

It is recommended that Committee:

2.1 Note the progress and activities outlined in this report.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 At the Council Budget meeting in March 2021, £25k per year was allocated from the General Fund to support improving the access to digital technology and digital connection, for Care Leavers. Care Experienced Young People, who form part of the Aberdeen Care Experienced (ACE) network, have been influential in raising awareness of the impact and consequences of digital inequality in their links to the Champion Board. This perspective has assisted in the success of this allocation. This is in support of creating equity of opportunity and improving the life experiences of Care Experienced Young People (CEYP), linking to Stretch Aim 6 of the Local Outcome Improvement Plan:

As corporate parents we will ensure 95% of care experienced children and young people will have the same levels of attainment in education, health and emotional wellbeing, and positive destinations as their peers by 2026.

3.2 The structural and pervasive disadvantages experienced by Care Experienced Young People (CEYP) are demonstrated by their over representation in

nationally reported data that is by Who Cares? Scotland. For example, Care Experienced Young People are more likely to experience homelessness (30%), criminal justice system entry (50%) and have comparatively poorer education outcomes than non-care experienced peers with only 4% moving on to Higher Education .There is an improving position in Aberdeen, however for many there is the compounding impact of earlier childhood experiences which have been traumatic. Their disadvantaged position in relation to digital access has been most recently highlighted (2021) in *Bridging the Digital Divide for CEYP in Scotland*: https://www.celcis.org/news/news-pages/digital-connection-and-inclusion-should-be-basic-right-care-leavers/

- 3.3 The context of disadvantage highlighted above, was amplified by the impact of Covid19. CEYP have informed their Corporate Parents that earlier trauma was triggered, and for some, this led to episodes of acute emotional and mental health distress. The follow up actions in support of wellbeing and welfare by key corporate parents, identified the significance of maintaining connection and in responding to digital resource and access, served to identify the significant gaps in CEYP access to devices and reliable connection.
- 3.4 The context of equality of access has wide ramifications, due to the significance and importance of being digitally connected, to all aspects of everyday life. Many CEYP are in employment, attending further/higher education as well as having wider caring responsibilities and interests, which benefit from access to digital technology and reliable connection. The intention of this scheme is to ensure that CEYP have their digital needs recognised, assessed and responded to at key stages in their pathway plans supporting their transition from care placements and moving on.
- 3.5 As Corporate parents our support to promote and improve digital access links directly to the foundations and principles outlined in The Promise, Plan 21-24, where it is stated:
 - Children must be listened to, and meaningfully and appropriately involved in decision-making about their care, with all those involved properly listening and responding to what children want and need.
 - Moving on decisions about transitions for young care experienced people who
 move onto independent living or need to return to a caring environment, will be
 made based on individual need.
 - Each young care experienced adult will experience their transition as consistent, caring, integrated and focussed on their needs, not on 'age of services' criteria.
 - Housing pathways for care experienced young people will include a range of affordable options that are specifically tailored to their needs and preferences. Youth homelessness will be eradicated. (See the promise, pages 68 and 92 to 93)
- 3.6 The allocated monies will support CEYP to attain the above and enable those care leavers who require digital devices and connection to have these requirements assessed and appropriate devices purchased. Experience in implementing phase 2 of the Connecting Scotland Programme, brought 103 MiFi connections and 83 devices to young care leavers in Aberdeen City between December 2020 and January 2021. This has been valuable in identifying what would constitute a

suitable support 'scheme' for CEYP. As CEYP have a wide range of individual needs and circumstances, this 'scheme' has not been developed around a purchasing model, instead an additional practice component has been included in the Pathway Planning activities and Aftercare support arrangements already in place and being delivered within Children's Social Work. (Appendix 1)

- 3.7 In summary the following activities have been initiated which will improve connections and opportunities:
 - Multi-agency Pathway Planning and Aftercare Support guidance have been amended (see Appendix 1) to include assessment of the digital support required by a young person at each stage of their transition from care.
 - Guidance on completing financial assessments to access Sect 29 financial support has been updated to include assessing for digital support.
 - Quality Assurance is built into the above and will be lead by the Team Leader, Youth Team, to proactively identify unmet digital needs.
 - Briefing sessions have been arranged by the Youth Team to support Children's Social Work colleagues in these applications.
 - Planning for the provision of access to a device, data and skills as a key requirement when care plans are being updated.
 - Ensuring that at the point of leaving care each young person has a suitable device, beyond a mobile phone.
 - Provide support to eg purchase MiFi connections and exploring best value options.
 - Ensure devices purchased support care leaver circumstances e.g. to study, work, participate socially, financial inclusion.
 - Consult with CEYP on how the above approach can be built on and developed over time.

There will be links made to partner services who can offer support for digital access, ensuring that this resource remains targeted and directly linked to transition planning.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There was a General Fund commitment of £25k per year in support of this development.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Part 9 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 outlines a range of duties for corporate parents across Scotland. These duties aim to ensure the attention and resources of corporate parents are focused on the task of safeguarding and promoting the wellbeing of Scotland's looked after children and care leavers.
- 5.2 Aberdeen City Council has a duty to report to Scottish Ministers every three years on how it is meeting its corporate parenting responsibilities as detailed in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. The second submission by way

of sharing key documents to the Scottish Government was provided in March 2021. The Council has a responsibility to continue to comply with its statutory obligations.

6. MANAGEMENT OF RISK

Category	Risk	Low (L) Medium (M) High (H)	Mitigation
Strategic Risk	That the multi-agency workforce training delivery plan for Corporate Parenting is insufficiently supported	M	There is a robust delivery plan and support at a senior level.
Compliance	The Council has a responsibility to comply with its statutory corporate parenting responsibilities	L	The updated Corporate Parenting plan has partnership support.
Operational	Care Experienced Children and Young People are a vulnerable cohort whose needs require to be recognised and met. Competing resource demands may have an impact	L	These are duties which have been incorporated across existing structures and will be consolidated in practice.
Financial	n/a		
Reputational	A failure of Aberdeen City Council to comply and meet its Corporate Parenting responsibilities would reflect negatively on the Council	L	There is a strong legacy of positive practice and sharing of success in this area
Environment / Climate	n/a		

7. OUTCOMES

COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN			
OCCITATION DELIVERY I LAIN			
Impact of Report			
Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement	The proposals in this report supports the Council Delivery Plan.		
Aberdeen City Local Outco	me Improvement Plan		
Prosperous People (Children and Young people) Stretch Outcomes and aims:	The proposals in the report have a direct list specifically to the delivery and attainment of stret outcome 6: As corporate parents we will ensure 95% of cat experienced children and young people will have the same levels of attainment in education, health a emotional wellbeing, and positive destinations their peers by 2026. • 6.1 Improving education outcomes for cat experienced children and young people (increase the number of care experienced young people accessing a positive as sustained destination by 25% by 2022). • 6.2 Supporting attainment of balance of cat where children are able to remain more off at home and or with kin (increase to 43% 2023 the proportion of children and you people who are supported to live in kinst care or are looked after at home by 2023 at increase by 20% the number of children and young people remaining in a placeme looked after at home/kinship between 16-years old by 2023) • 6.3 Supporting children and young people understand and access multiagent throughcare and aftercare services, (increase the number of care experienced young people young people young receiving multiagent throughcare/aftercare support by 2023).		

8. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome	
Impact Assessment	Not required.	
	·	
Data Protection Impact	Not required.	
-	Not required.	
Assessment		

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

https://thepromise.scot/plan-21-24/?vtab=1

10. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Funding for Digital Participation

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Funding for Digital Participation

Digital Rights and Connection: Good Practice Guide for Integrated Children and Family Services

July 2021

Who is this guidance for?

Additional resource has now been approved by Aberdeen City Council as part of its Corporate Parenting responsibilities to support care experienced young people access the internet through the provision of digital connectivity. This was in response to direct feedback from care experienced young people and raised on their behalf by the young people's Co-Chair of the Champions Board.

This guidance is for all children's social work staff supporting young people to leave care in Aberdeen City, whether that is from home, a children's home, foster placement, Kinship care or returning to the city. This note will also be utilised by those working alongside these professionals to support our care leavers. Including digital rights requires to be a part of looked after planning from the onset and should be considered alongside other wellbeing considerations. We consider digital connection as a right in Aberdeen City Council. These finances can be applied for through the Section 29 processes via the usual <u>financial pathway</u> for those looked after 16-17 years, care leaver 16-17 years and care leavers 18 and over.

This guidance should be read within the context of the therapeutic thread which links our reparative childcare practice and informs our understanding of the provision of aftercare support, that, for many young people who have disrupted early starts they need considerable additional supports with transitions. These can be experienced as loss and rejection, so investing in digital rights and ensuring young people can remain connected to family, friends, and services is essential.

What are our Core Objectives?

- To use digital platforms to connect with young people in a way that they feel is meaningful and relevant to them.
- To ensure care leavers have reliable and affordable connection.
- To ensure young people have a device that is fit for purpose and can support them in elements like employability, connection with friends and family and education.
- To embed Digital Rights into our Pathway Planning Process.
- To support young people with digital literacy.

How are we guided by legislation, policy and guidance in our drive for digital rights?

Digital Rights and Digital Inclusion for Care Experienced Young People (CEYP) has become more relevant than ever due to Covid 19 restrictions. Two recent pieces of research have been undertaken by CELCIS about care leavers and digital inclusion over the course of the pandemic restrictions. The 2020 research recognised that 'IT equipment and digital connection needs to be incorporated into care leaver grants so that no young person is leaving care into their own accommodation without online access.'

In addition, the 2021 research found that 'the experience and issues which underpin digital exclusion within the care experienced community had been exacerbated by the pandemic and its subsequent social restrictions.'

The 2020 report further 'identifies employment, finance, mental health, education and rights and participation among the key concerns in addition to the role digital connection now has in daily living.' (CELCIS, 2020) These pieces of research alongside others have guided the writing of this note and our practice going forward.

Connecting Scotland, 2021 stated that 'Being online is an essential lifeline.' Their aim being to support everyone in Scotland to get online. During Phase 2 of this initiative Aberdeen City Council secured devices for our care leavers and this provided 89 devices and 106 Mobile Wifi devices to our young people who were considered as being digitally excluded.

Why are we considering Digital Rights and why are we developing this practice in Aberdeen City?

The <u>Independent Care Review</u> produced <u>The Promise</u> which highlighted 'Scotland has the ability to support the development of innovative digital tools that reflect how children communicate and allow greater ownership and control of information so official narratives reflect their story, not just the facts the system holds about them.'

Views shared in the CELCIS, 2021 research show that poverty and financial insecurity is a barrier to accessing the necessary devices, software, Wi-Fi, repairs or technological support that are necessary to get online and have a stable internet connection. Includem, 2020 shared that digital exclusion is the result of entrenched poverty and they recommend that it should be economically accessible to all. Includem, 2020 further noted that 20% of those surveyed did not have access to the device they need, 33% of those felt they could not afford the ongoing costs and 16% accessed the internet through mobile data.

On looking at a small group of young people including a recent care leaver, a young parent and a student it became clear that the only means of digital connection was that of a smart phone or a laptop on loan. Anything on top of this has been provided by the recent Connecting Scotland initiative. Young people were leaving care and moving into tenancies with only their mobile phones as means of digital connection and digital participation. Therefore, leaving us to question how they accessed universal credit logbooks, job application, education as well as other essential services.

What does including digital rights look like in Looked After Planning, Pathway Planning and other process's?

Promoting Digital Rights should have similar importance as other essential pathway planning needs (Appendix 1). The Integrated Children and Family Services Pathway Plan has now been updated to reflect the above. (Appendix 2 and 3) Digital inclusion needs will be individually assessed during reviews. This can be thought about and considered by using the SHANARRI indicators;

- Safe: Use of the internet
- Healthy: To access NHS services, healthy recipes and wellbeing support services
- Active: Access to exercise videos
- Nurtured: Contact with family and friends
- Achieving: Applying for jobs, further education and school work

- Respected: Accessing Mind Of My Own,
- Responsible: Social Media and online behaviour
- Included: Access to services and facilities that others do

APPENDIX 1: Example of how to include Digital Rights in Pathway Planning

Aberdeen City Council Youth Team

AFTERCARE PATHWAY PLAN

Personal Details		
Name		

This plan should reflect all your hopes and goals that you want support with and be clear about how they are to be achieved and by when.

This plan belongs to the young person. It differs from the child's plan in that (unless agreed otherwise), it is usually written in first or second person (I or you). It is the document that lays out what work is being carried out with the young person. It can be written more informally (eg mindmap, diagrams), as long as it is written. The goals can be set from informal conversations over a period of time rather than a formal meeting if this suits the young person.

Digital rights, connection and participation			
What do we want to happen? (Your hopes and goals) These should be described as a lived experience; what is seen, heard, felt	By when ?	What will have changed? What will be seen, noticed (This is the specific difference it will make to that young person's life)	What are we going to do and who will do it? These should be the specific tasks
I have a device that has a big enough screen which makes it easier for me to quickly type, see faces, documents, web pages etc		e.g. I will be able to take part in online meetings and complete my College work I will be able to complete job applications and have meetings with my SDS or No One Left Behind worker I can get appointments for my GP by being able to complete the E-Consult form	
I will have affordable and reliable internet connection so that I can chat with friends/family and access other services		e.g. I can keep in touch with family/friends without being cut off or running up a bill	

	I can make use of online banking services I can log into my universal credit journal I can make use of online money saving coupons	
I will have my own email address so that I can give and receive larger amounts of information	e.g. I can make better use of online shopping My receipts for things that I buy can be sent to me and not lost I will have the option of reports being sent to me	
I am able to make my voice heard and share my views directly in my own words	e.g. I can download and use the Mind of My Own app I can send information about my views to others I can get involved in surveys, research, participation events	
I'm confident in having the skills and knowledge to use my devices and the internet safely	e.g. I know how to identify secure websites, privacy settings,	

	understand about phishing and password safety etc I know what to do about cyberbullying, trolling, image based abuse etc I know how to keep my online and offline identity safe I know the laws regarding sexual content and online behaviour
I know who/where to ask if I need help with any of the above	e.g. I know how to contact the Youth Team, Who Cares? I can access information on the Youth Team and Who Cares? Facebook pages I can search the internet for local support

Aberdeen City Council Youth Team AFTERCARE PATHWAY PLAN

Personal Details				
Name				

This plan should reflect all your hopes and goals that you want support with and be clear about how they are to be achieved and by when.

This plan belongs to the young person. It differs from the child's plan in that (unless agreed otherwise), it is usually written in first or second person (lor you). It is the document that lays out what work is being carried out with the young person. It can be written more informally (eg mindmap, diagrams), as long as it is written. The goals can be set from informal conversations over a period of time rather than a formal meeting if this suits the young person.

Accommodation and living arrangements			
What do we want to happen? (Your hopes and goals) These should be described as a lived experience; what is seen, heard, felt	By when?	What will have changed? What will be seen, noticed	What are we going to do and who will do it? These should be the specific tasks

Money			
What do we want to happen? (Your hopes and goals) These should be described as a lived experience; what is seen, heard, felt	By when?	What will have changed? What will be seen, noticed	What are we going to do and who will do it? These should be the specific tasks

Digital rights, connection and participation					
What do we want to happen? (Your hopes and goals) These should be described as a lived experience; what is seen, heard, felt	By when?	What will have changed? What will be seen, noticed	What are we going to do and who will do it? These should be the specific tasks		

Employment, training or education						
What do we want to happen? (Your hopes and goals) These should be described as a lived experience; what is seen, heard, felt	By when?	What will have changed? What will be seen, noticed	What are we going to do and who will do it? These should be the specific tasks			

Health, wellbeing and lifestyle					
What do we want to happen? (Your hopes and goals) These should be described as a lived experience; what is seen, heard, felt	By when?	What will have changed? What will be seen, noticed	What are we going to do and who will do it? These should be the specific tasks		

Family, friends and significant others					
What do we want to happen? (Your hopes and goals) These should be described as a lived experience; what is seen, heard, felt	By when?	What will have changed? What will be seen, noticed	What are we going to do and who will do it? These should be the specific tasks		

Rights and legal issues					
What do we want to happen? (Your hopes and goals) These should be described as a lived experience; what is seen, heard, felt	By when?	What will have changed? What will be seen, noticed	What are we going to do and who will do it? These should be the specific tasks		

	Signatures				
	Remember to include your name, signature and date				
You					
Worker					
Other					
Date					



Pathways Plans Guidance

1. The plan can be either a throughcare (whilst still looked after), an aftercare (post looked after status) or even a continuing care pathways plan

AFTERCARE PATHWAY PLAN

- 2. This plan belongs to the young person. It differs from the child's plan in that (unless agreed otherwise), it is expected to be written in first or second person (I or you). It is the document that lays out what work is being carried out with the young person. It can be written more informally (eg mindmap, diagrams), as long as it is written. The goals can be set from informal conversations over a period of time rather than a formal meeting if this suits the young person.
- 3. The Mind of My Own app has an 'Adult Living' section which could usefully be used to give the young person's voice to the pathways plan.

	Personal Details
Name	

This plan should reflect all your hopes and goals that you want support with and be clear about how they are to be achieved and by when.

4. Whilst the child's assessment and plan is focused on the SHANARRI wellbeing indicators, the pathways review, assessment and plan has to take account of 6 elements as shown below. Digital exclusion is recognised as a significant issue and so a new element is now expected to be thought about.

Whether a young person is Safe, Healthy, Achieving, Nurtured, Active, Respected, Responsible and Included can however be thought about under each element

Accommodation and living arrangements NEW Money Digital rights, connection and participation Employment, training or education Health, wellbeing and lifestyle Family, friends and significant others Rights and legal issues 5. Some things to think about...

- Accommodation and living arrangements
- Being able to cook, plan for meals, shopping for food, storing food safely
- Cleaning and tidying, routines, washing clothes and bedding
- DIY, getting help with repairs, painting, decorating
- Living on their own, with others, private or local authority renting, process for making applications
- Furnishing charity, community care grant, savings, leaving care budget (s29), planning ahead for breakages, measuring for large items/carpets etc

Money

- Saving money how to do this, where to get advice, what's a good deal, money off vouchers, interest rates, bank accounts, credit unions, shopping around, council tax exemption, changing gas/electric providers
- Getting help financial inclusion team, crisis loan, charities, food banks, budgeting apps, SCARF
- Paying bills direct debits, online, TV licence
- Bursary save to cover the summer months
- Online banking -
- BT essential provide unlimited fibre for those on universal credit for £15 a month

Digital rights, connection and participation

- Devices do they have one, does it have a big enough screen
- Internet access affordable, type of contract, reliable
- Knowledge/skills keeping safe, phishing, passwords, oversharing, privacy settings
- Voice being included, Mind of My Own usage
- Support they have details of the Youth Team and Who Cares? Scotland and their Facebook details

Employment, training or education

- SDS, ABZ Works, Barnardos, Discovering your potential, Kickstart, Modern Apprenticeships, Working Rite, Princes Trust, Developing the Young Workforce
- Transition Extreme
- Job Start Payments
- Independent Training Account
- #YSNext
- Volunteering
- Being a student, studying, learning style

Health, wellbeing and lifestyle

- Sport Aberdeen cards
- Counselling online, local
- Substances Drugs Action
- Samaritans, Breathing Space,
- Covid vaccine, register with GP, eye tests, free dental treatment for under 25s

Family, friends and significant others

- Neighbours being able to get along, sort issues, reporting problems, handle complaints
- Keeping in touch family, support of friends, keeping and cancelling appointments
- Youth Team how to contact, Facebook

Rights and legal issues

- Children (Scotland) Act 2020 the duty to support relationships with brothers and sisters when they can't live together; the right to give their view on what should happen for those brothers and sisters who are looked after by local authorities (whether in different parts of Scotland); the opportunity to take part in a Children's Hearing for their siblings
- Continuing Care
- Eligibility for Aftercare
- Bursary and rent payments whilst a student
- ID copy of birth certificate; form of ID, young Scot card
- National insurance number apply for this before 16
- Rights Team how to contact
- Court proceedings

6.	As with child's plans, pathways p	olans should be SMART – Specific,	, Measurable, Achievable, Reasonable and Tim	ely

What do we want to happen?	By when?	What will have changed?	What are we going to do and who will
(Your hopes and goals) These should be described as a lived experience; what is seen, heard, felt		What will be seen, noticed	do it? These should be the specific tasks

7. Examples....

What do we want to happen? (Your hopes and goals) These should be described as a lived experience; what is seen, heard, felt	By when?	What will have changed? What will be seen, noticed	What are we going to do and who will do it? These should be the specific tasks
My flat will be decorated, furnished and warm	4 weeks	Gas will be uncapped Living room wallpapered and carpeted Bedroom painted Curtains in the living room and bedroom	Contact the gas provider Measure flat for carpets and curtains Choose carpet and paint Ask friends to help with painting
I will cook 2-3 times a week	3 months	Kitchen surfaces will be clean New cooking skills and recipes Better confidence to cook	Play music whilst cleaning to make this less of a chore Ask for help Watch youtube videos and download a recipe app
I want to save for a bigger sofa	6 months	Two bank accounts – one for saving and one for money coming in	Get a copy of my birth certificate for ID Research options online for types of accounts
I need a laptop and faster internet for my college work	3 months	I'll have a chromebook from Connecting Scotland I'll have a new broadband provider	Apply to Connecting Scotland through my social worker Research broadband options via the internet

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