

Cllr Paul May – Care Leavers’ protected status

Thank you Chair. I’m very glad to read this statement on behalf of Councillor Paul May, because the council’s support for care experienced young people is a very important issue.

As you all know, councillors share responsibility as corporate parents for children in care – this is currently about 240 looked-after children.

At the age of 18 children officially leave the care system and become independent, however – as with our own children – the parental role doesn’t end there and the council continues working with care experienced young people until the age of 25. As of last month, B&NES is supporting 110 care leavers who are allocated to a personal advisor and a further 90 people aged between 21 and 25 who can ask for support at any time.

The council and its partners are very aware of the need to continue to support care experienced young adults and we are doing so in a variety of ways. This includes advice, support in finding work or going into further education, accommodation and so on. These are all laid out in our Local Offer and in the Pledge to Children in Care, which colleagues will remember discussing in May.

This ongoing support is particularly in recognition of the challenges faced by care experienced people, which can include financial struggles, mental health problems, and sadly a higher chance of dying early or going to prison.

Colleagues, I know you are all very supportive of the Corporate Parenting Group meetings, which are the forum for discussing how we support looked-after and care experienced young people. One of the issues currently being discussed is for B&NES and its partners to treat care experience as if it were a Protected Characteristic. This would help to recognise that care experienced people are a group who are likely to face discrimination and disadvantage.

Other people have protected status by law but we can give our children and young people this commitment they have had to fight for in the past.

This issue has been discussed with Directors and Senior Leaders within the council and Councillor May is undertaking to bring an update to a forthcoming Corporate Parenting Group meeting with more information. If colleagues are agreeable, he intends that this proposal should come before Council as a formal and cross-party motion.

Care experienced young people are vulnerable and this is one way we can show them we care about them.