



YOUNG PEOPLE



Plymouth City Council

Adopting Care Experience as a Protected Characteristic

Care experienced individuals include people who have lived with Foster Carers, in Residential Children's Homes or who have been adopted. Plymouth City Council has over 500 Children in its care at any one time with over 180 young people leaving care every year.

Children in care experience worse health outcomes and higher rates of truancy and exclusion. Care leavers are nine times more likely not to be in education, training or employment and are more likely to experience challenges in dealing with the emotional and practical upheaval of living independently and finding suitable accommodation. Though their experiences will have varied, the challenges faced by care experienced individuals can have profound and lasting impacts.

Recognising that we needed to do better Councillors showed community leadership, unanimously supporting a motion on notice brought to council by back bench councillors to 'Treat care experience as if it were a Protected Characteristic'. The Council led by example, providing guaranteed interviews to those with care experience and a work experience programme that prioritises children in care and care experienced young people.

'It was an absolutely great experience to have spent the past week at Plymouth City Council and being able to see how everything is done both at the democratic level and at the administrative level. Especially coming from a care leaver background, it really helps me build up my employment skills and allowed me to explore future career options, such as local

government. I hope that going forward these work experience weeks can continue to be done especially for those from disadvantaged backgrounds, as they can make a massive difference for our futures’ – James, placement student.



Foster Care

We set a new Equality Objective that reads: ‘Plymouth City Council will give specific consideration to care experienced people in its decision-making to raise aspirations, increase opportunities and seek to improve their life outcomes, including access to training, employment and housing, and will encourage other organisations to do the same’. We developed new models of meeting priority need and new Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) guidance and training for senior leaders to make sure that they understand their roles and responsibilities.

‘The policy change has given us a ‘hook’ to promote equality for people with care experience in a systematic and systemic way – this will ensure a longer lasting effect and impact as opposed to a single-issue campaign’ – Kevin, Lead Officer for ED&I, Plymouth City Council.

We explored how our social partnerships can support the Council's corporate parenting role, for example Devon Home Choice have agreed a 6-month pilot of automatically assigning priority need for Care Leavers who are assessed as tenancy ready, and there is further engagement with local Housing Associations inviting them to consider ring-fencing a proportion of housing stock for care experienced young people.

We committed to co-production wherever possible. We developed two new engagement networks with people with care experience, parents and young people. We are proactively seeking out and listening to the voices of care experienced people when developing new policies and we are reviewing our procurement guidance, templates and commissioning processes to give care experienced people a greater voice in the design of services.

We are supporting the creation of jobs in social enterprises and other businesses. Our Post 16 & Skills services have developed a free pastoral leadership programme for managers and employers of care experienced young people. It includes short courses on safeguarding, trauma informed practice and mental health awareness and can be tailored to teams or businesses with flexible delivery options. A 'Your Future' employability programme has been established which is open to all care experienced individuals.

There have been over 30 pledges from senior leaders of what they will do differently or more to support people with care experiences in their roles and departments.

'The biggest impact has been the culture change – an appreciation of how care experience might affect people and what large or small things can be done to mitigate this. It is creating a ripple effect across the organisation and across the city' - Karen, Senior Sponsor, Plymouth City Council

Reflections and tips

- We needed to put our own house in order before we went out to partners in the city.
- There is a fine line between positive promotion and sympathy or pity. Young people's past and stories are theirs and they have a right to personal information being personal. They don't want another label – these are important considerations that need to guide any support and intervention with sensitive communication being vital.
- Don't underestimate the amount of work it takes to implement this policy change well so it 'sticks', through the right processes, guidance, training and awareness raising amongst policy and decision makers.

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