Certificate of Credit in Commissioning and Purchasing for Public Care Assignment Template

Please fill in your details here:

Student name:	
Student number: *(also enter in header)*	
Date assignment due:	2022
Date submitted on VLE:	
Student word count:	4964
Important Note:	Your submission, excluding the reference list and appendices, must be no less than 4,000 words and no more than 5,000 words: no tolerance is given. This is a mandatory criterion i.e. your assignment will not be passed if it does not adhere to the word count.

Assessor to complete:

Word count:	State word count and any comments

Instructions to Students

Submit a written assignment which explains and reflects upon a commissioning or purchasing project that you have undertaken. The rationale for the work must be clearly set out in the context of national policy and best practice, and draws on a critical analysis of the current commissioning and purchasing arrangements in your local organisation or service. The project must have been accepted by your line manager as appropriate to the needs of your organisation or service, and have been undertaken during the course. Supporting information will be expected that gives evidence of the project activities and implementation of good commissioning or purchasing practice. References will be expected to key local or national documents and other relevant literature to demonstrate that you have undertaken wider reading and/or research.

The criteria used to assess the assignment are:

a) Provide a rationale for the development of the project, drawing on a critical understanding of commissioning and purchasing good practice and national guidance.
b) Demonstrate appropriate commissioning or purchasing practice.
c) Critically evaluate the effectiveness of the activities undertaken and their impact on commissioning or purchasing practice within your team and/or organisation.
d) Provide a reflective commentary that demonstrates personal development and learning.
e) Present your work clearly.
f) Demonstrate good academic practice applicable to the work-based project.

The criteria will be assessed using the assessment scheme below. You must submit your assignment by the deadline given. Submit your assignment as a WORD document using the blank pages of this template.

The assignment must be between **4,000 and 5,000 words** as no tolerance is given. The word count refers to the main body of your assignment and does not include the assignment title, reference list or any appendices. The word count **does include** headings and sub headings, footnotes, tables and in-text citations.

We require you to submit the assignment text to Turnitin and to report your Turnitin originality score on your statement of originality below.

Ensure that you complete the front sheet details above and the statement of originality below.

Please include your full name within the filename when you save this template.

Details of the relevant regulations are in the Student Handbook.

Ensure that you keep both an electronic and a hard copy of your assignment.

Assignment Statement of Originality

Except for those parts in which it is explicitly stated to the contrary, this work is my own. It has not been previously submitted for assessment at this or any other higher education institution.

Checklist
Please check the following statements are true. Tick each box (or write YES):

I have included a reference list, using the Harvard system of referencing	YES
I have provided references for all the sources, empirical evidence and other materials I have used in the main body of this work	YES
I have referenced all passages from my source material	YES
I completed this work without any unauthorised help	YES
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Extract from Definitions of cheating
All assessments are intended to determine the skills, abilities, understanding and knowledge of each of the individual students undertaking the assessment. Cheating is defined as conduct (whether successful or not) aimed at deceiving the University into acknowledging a false level of attainment by a student. Any form of cheating is strictly forbidden under the University regulations but, in order to assist understanding of what is meant by 'cheating', a number of specific forms are described here:

- *Submitting other people's work as your own* – either with or without their knowledge. This includes submitting work you have paid for as your own.
- *Collusion* - you must not collude with others to produce a piece of work jointly, copy or share another student's work or lend your work to another student when it is likely that some or all of it will be copied.
- *Falsification* – the invention of data, its alteration, its copying from any other source, or otherwise obtaining it by unfair means, or inventing quotations and/or references.
- *Plagiarism* – taking or using the words, ideas or work of others as your own. To avoid plagiarism you must make sure that quotations from whatever source are clearly identified and attributed at the point where they occur in the text of your work by using one of the standard conventions for referencing. It is not enough just to list sources in a bibliography at the end of your essay if you do not acknowledge the actual quotations in the text. Neither is it acceptable to change some of the words or the order of sentences if, by failing to acknowledge the source properly, you give the impression that it is your own work.

Assessment Scheme
Guidance for students/Assessor's Feedback:

Assessment scheme		D	M	P	R	F	Guidance for students	Weighting
a)	Provide a rationale for the development of the project, drawing on a critical understanding of commissioning and purchasing good practice and national guidance.						Introduce the project. Drawing on the self-assessment of your service or organisation's commissioning arrangements, good practice and national guidance, explain what needed to happen and why. You should consider how your project will address equality diversity and inclusion priorities.	20%
b)	Demonstrate appropriate commissioning or purchasing practice.						Provide a commentary on *key* activities *you* carried out. Use examples to illustrate how you tried to apply commissioning or purchasing good practice. Include evidence of your work on the project in appendices, which should be referred to in the body of the assignment.	20%
c)	Critically evaluate the effectiveness of the activities undertaken and their impact on commissioning or purchasing practice within your service and/or organisation.						Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of *your* project activities. What went well, less well and why? Were the chosen activities the right ones? Have there been implications for commissioning or purchasing practice in your service and/or organisation? Did the project activities address the equality diversity and inclusion priorities you wanted them to? What changes might still be needed? You may find it helpful to revisit your original project plan.	20%
d)	Provide a reflective commentary that demonstrates personal development and learning.						Reflect on what you have learned *personally* from undertaking the project and how your practice will change in the future. You might want to use a reflective framework such as Driscoll's model of reflection or the Gibbs reflective cycle to help you do this. See top tips on reflection.	20%
e)	Present your work clearly.						Effectively and coherently communicate your ideas and arguments. Use a structure and layout that makes your submission easy to follow.	10%

f)	Demonstrate good academic practice applicable to the work-based project.						We expect you to undertake wider, relevant reading and/or research outside of the course materials. Please select and use relevant sources to evidence your argument. All sources used must be cited in the text, using the Harvard system of referencing, and be included on a reference list.	10%

D = DistiCCTion, M = Merit, P= Pass, R = Refer, F = Fail

Assessor's comments:

Summarise the strengths and possible improvements of the submission, including any suggested action such as proof read more carefully. Clearly state which assessment criteria have been met and the provisional grade awarded.			
Assessed by		Date	

The marking and moderation process

Your work will be assessed in accordance with the university's regulations that seek to ensure fairness, accuracy and clarity of feedback. In judging the quality of your work, assessors follow the assessment criteria outlined above. They also follow IPC's Marking and Moderation policy and abide by the University's assessment regulations. When your work is submitted it will go through the following process:

1. It will be initially assessed and given a provisional grade by a member of the IPC assessment team.
2. It may then be subject to moderation i.e. an internal examiner will mark it and, in discussion with the first assessor, confirm the provisional grade. A sample of assessments are moderated by an internal examiner.
3. We strive to give you feedback within three weeks. You will receive this feedback via the Virtual Learning Environment (Moodle).
4. Once a provisional grade has been agreed upon it will be finalised at the next Examination Committee meeting.
5. Your work may also be selected to be in the sample sent to our External Examiner – an academic from another university – who comments on the fairness, quality and consistency of the internal assessment of our programmes as a whole.

If you are concerned about your feedback, arrange to speak to your Academic Adviser to help you better understand the reasons for the assessment judgement and our feedback. If you think that there was a flaw in the assessment process, you can submit an Academic Appeal. More information about the appeals process can be found at Student Investigation and Resolution Teamhttps://www.brookes.ac.uk/students/sirt/. However, please be advised that the University does not "re-mark" work and you cannot request an appeal on the grounds that you disagree with the academic judgement of the Examination Committee.

Assignment Title Page

Understand and review the accommodation offer in Camelotshire for care experienced young people and planning forward to address identified needs

Introduction and Background

This commissioning project aims to describe my commissioning activities around understanding and reviewing the current accommodation offer for care leavers and planning some options moving forward to address identified need.

According to the Children in Care and Care Leavers strategy (Camelotshire Children's Trust, 2022a, p7), a care leaver is a "person who has been in care for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and who is in care on their 14th birthday". This includes subgroups of care leavers, aged 16 to 25 years-old, who are entitled to support from the Local Authority. Recently, care leavers have been called care experienced young people, and this term was used in the Independent Review of Children's Social Care (McAlister, 2022).

As part of any commissioning activity, it is essential to understand the existing research and legislative context to inform good quality and relevant commissioning practice. Several research studies found that care leavers are more likely to be at risk of homelessness, criminal and sexual exploitation, custody, becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training), mental health issues and other challenges (Atkinson and Hyde, 2019; Gianni and Williams, 2022, p.1).

When it comes to housing, Gianni and Williams (2022) have listed some barriers that care leavers face when seeking housing, such as insufficient suitable accommodation and unaffordable alternative options (i.e., private renting).

The Covid-19 pandemic has increased the impact of these challenges, with bidding being halted and young people being allowed to stay longer in their care placements during lockdown (Munro *et al.*, 2021). This brought some advantages as young people had more time to prepare for independence, however there are concerns about the long-term impact of this "pause", including a backlog of housing applications for local authorities (Munro *et al.*, 2021). The percentage of care leavers presenting as homeless following Covid-19 has increased more than any other population groups (Homeless Link, 2021, p.20); "sofa surfing" was no longer an option, and the increase of family breakdowns or lack of a social network all has an impact on these numbers (Gianni and Williams, 2022).

National context

The National Leaving Care Strategy - Keep on Caring (Department for Education, 2016, p.38) – and the independent review of children's social care (MacAlister, 2022) both identified the need to reduce homelessness and provide a suitable, stable, safe, and secure place to live for care leavers as main priorities. MacAlister (2022) published a series of recommendations on this subject, the most relevant for this project being:

> There should be a range of housing options open to young people transitioning out of care or who need to return, such as Staying Put, Staying Close and supported lodgings. Staying Put and Staying Close should be a legal entitlement and extended to age 23 with an 'opt-out' rather than 'opt-in' expectation. (MacAlister, 2022, page 166).

Local context

During the last two years, two transformations happened in Camelotshire that have impacted the way we commission and work together with partners.

In April 2021, Camelotshire County Council and the eight district and borough councils went through a restructure into two unitaries (West and North), with children's services becoming a standalone Trust, delivering services to the two new local authorities.

In July 2022, the Integrated Care System (ICS) was implemented in Camelotshire to deliver better health outcomes to the population in the county, including our most vulnerable children and young people (CYP), through better working together practices. Care leavers were identified as a priority group by the ICS and a full review of the care leavers offer across Camelotshire is currently taking place.

Camelotshire Children's Trust context

CCT's Business Plan (2022c, page 17) describes its Strategic Framework, designed in partnership with employees and CYP. This framework can be found in Appendix A, and it identifies four outcomes for children, young people, and their families, as well as a set of values for the Trust.

During this project, I have kept these values and outcomes in mind when completing commissioning activities towards my goals. For example, I will later describe how I suggested we standardise outcomes for care leavers based on the four CCT outcomes, and how a lot of the options identified were taken to children in care and care leavers forums for their views, as per the "be child focused" value. I personally feel my values in life are very much in line with CCT's values, and therefore they were naturally followed during the activities described in this assignment.

I have also consulted CCT's Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy (2002a), to ensure the work I was completing was in line with its outcomes and ambitions for care leavers.

Care Leavers in Camelotshire

In 2021/22 the percentage of young people aged 17-21 and in what is considered suitable accommodation was 90%, which is above the national average (89%). Camelotshire young people in unsuitable accommodation are mainly in custody, sofa surfing, living with extended family and friends or homeless. Furthermore, there are 204 care leavers aged 18 to 21 still placed in Independent Supported Accommodation (ISA), fully funded by children's services, mainly due to lack of social housing or other suitable independent living options for young people to move on.

Ofsted completed a monitoring visit to CCT in November 2021, with a focus on the care leavers service. Inspectors acknowledged that most care leavers "live in accommodation that meets their needs" (Ofsted, 2021a, p3; and Ofsted 2021b, p3), however there was "a shortage of suitable accommodation for young people with the most complex needs", meaning that the "full implementation of their plans may be delayed".

The current Sufficiency Strategy was due to be reviewed in 2022 and therefore this was great timing to review and publish a new strategy, where this project will sit.

<u>Equality & Diversity</u>

During this accreditation course, the commissioning team was tasked to complete a self-assessment regarding each phase of the commissioning cycle. The team acknowledged that we need to improve our equality and diversity practice, with a better understanding of the characteristics and how well we are supporting each population and their protected characteristics profile (a snapshot of this self-assessment can be found in appendix B). We know we need to improve in this area and include equality and diversity in all our commissioning activities. Homeless Link (2021) published a paper on the young people experiencing homelessness in England and their profile, which will be a helpful tool in the context of this project.

<u>My project and the Commissioning Cycle</u>

During this project, I have learnt and would like to acknowledge that for care leavers to achieve the desired outcomes and the aspirations that Camelotshire Children's Trust have for them, there are several areas to be addressed and improved, such as good physical and mental health and wellbeing, strong relationships, successful employment, education and training, and safe and good quality accommodation (MacAlister, 2022; Department of Education, 2016b). A lot of work has taken place to address all these areas, led by the Leaving Care Team with support from my peers in commissioning, however, for the purpose of this project, I have mainly focused on the commissioning activities I carried out to understand and review the care leavers' accommodation offer in Camelotshire and planning forward to address identified needs.

This project sits predominantly in two of the Commissioning cycle's phases: Analyse/Understand, where I will work to understand legislation, national and local guidance, population needs, reviewing current service provision, analyse resources and complete a gap analysis, and Plan, where I will propose and design a strategy moving forward. CCT's Commissioning Strategy (2022b, page 4) published our commissioning cycle, which can be found in appendix C.

Key activities carried out

I started this project by designing a brief project plan, outlining stages, tasks, timescales and what the evidence of each stage would look like. This project plan can be found in Appendix D. The sub-headings in this section will elaborate on each of the stages identified in my project plan.

Stage 1 - Intelligence gathering

Intelligence gathering sits in the Analyse/Understand phase of the commissioning cycle. Before any commissioning activity takes place, it is important to understand the national and local context and gather data to confirm the need for commissioning (Institute of Public Care, 2014). To gather intelligence, I started by reading national guidance about care leavers and the Ofsted report following the visit in November 2021 with a focus on care leavers. I had several meetings with the Leaving Care Team to understand anecdotal contexts and read the Care Leavers offer, especially the sections around accommodation and financial support. I have elaborated on this learning in the previous section of this assignment.

<u>Identifying and engaging with stakeholders</u>

Before any work on data analysis and planning could start, commissioners have the responsibility to consult and work in partnership with stakeholders and service users to gather input and share contributions (Institute of Public Care, 2014). Ayre (2020) highlights that the quality of life of a community depends on successful working relationships between agencies, including the third sector, and that more evidence needs to be gathered to show the benefits of such relationships.

To do this, I contacted the people in my own team and the Leaving Care Team, to find out what meetings already existed within CCT and with partners that I could start to attend and what meetings I could create that would promote collaborative working.

I started attending regular meetings with partners and created a 6-weekly meeting with the Housing Teams in the West and North Camelotshire Council's, called Housing Steering Group; the meeting notes for these can be found in Appendix E.

In June 2022 I attended the Children's Commissioners Conference in Derby, where I had the opportunity of choosing from a plethora of workshops, a lot of them focusing on commissioning of Leaving Care services. This conference also gave me the opportunity of networking with other Local Authorities and learning what they were doing.

Stage 2 - Mapping of needs and resources (Analyse)

<u>Mapping of existing commissioned resources</u>

According to the Institute of Public Care (2014), resource mapping is part of the Analyse phase of the cycle, and it is an important part of any commissioning project, as it enables a better understanding of what already exists and what are the gaps. To create a map of resources for care leavers, I used existing databases to understand how many young people over 16 years-old were placed in each type of accommodation, broken down by age (appendix F). This allowed me to have a good visual map of where most care leavers lived and the cost-benefit analysis of some of these placements. For example, the majority of 18 years-old were placed in Independent Supported Accommodation, which is fully funded by CCT, without any Housing Benefit Support from the councils.

Together with one of my commissioning peers, I organised a workshop with the Leaving Care Team, Housing Teams in the West and North Camelotshire Councils and Project Managers, where we discussed what already exists, the cohorts of care leavers we have, what gaps and options we have, and what stakeholders would be interested in collaborating with us. In this workshop I learnt that, besides the mapping I had started with, there were other types of accommodation used for care leavers that were not commissioned by CCT, such as temporary accommodation, such as hostels. We also discussed several options to address these gaps in accommodation. The notes from this workshop are on appendix G.

<u>Sufficiency strategy</u>

The Sufficiency Strategy sits in both Analyse and Plan phases of the Commissioning Cycle. The Children and Young Persons Act (2008, section 9) states Local Authorities have a sufficiency duty to ensure suitable accommodation is available to all children in care, when appropriate, within the area of the Local Authority,

and that meets the needs of the child. I started working on CCT's Sufficiency Strategy for 2022-2024, in collaboration with the rest of the commissioning team and led the Care Leavers section. We gathered data on the whole of the children in care population and the care leavers data. I worked to understand the forecasting of number of care leavers, and we quickly reached the conclusion that we had significantly more young people leaving care in the next 2 years (aged 16 and 17 now), than we had care leavers ending support (aged 23 and 24), which clearly evidenced the future need of more accommodation options for care leavers in Camelotshire.

Based on these numbers and in the conversations I had with stakeholders, as mentioned above, I outlined a list of options that could be considered by CCT for care leavers.

In June 2022, the team met with Service Leads to present the draft for the sufficiency strategy and our suggested options, to gather their views and expertise on what would work well and what challenges we might face when commissioning such options and any considerations our team wouldn't have thought of.

Equality and Diversity

Equality and Diversity sits across the whole commissioning cycle and should be considered throughout any project. Census 2021 published some initial data about the population of Camelotshire in the first half of 2022. This has helped us understand some of the characteristics of all the people aged 15 to 19 years-old in the county and will allow us to compare with our care leavers population.

The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) for children in care and care leavers in Camelotshire is also due to be reviewed in 2022 and therefore we did not have this data available to support with the sufficiency strategy. This was flagged and the strategy will be reviewed once the JSNA is published.

In September 2022 I attended a debate, promoted by CCT in the context of the Equalities Week, called "Care Leavers as the 10th protected characteristic"; this is in line with MacAlister's (2022) recommendation in his review. This debate was attended by several CCT professionals as well as some care experienced young people. This was a very enriching conversation, and the topic of housing and accommodation was discussed, with private landlords refusing care experienced tenants due to the stigma associated with this cohort, providing some evidence that this kind of protection and awareness is indeed needed.

Stage 3 - Market analysis and engagement (Analyse/Plan)

Voice of the Young People

One of Camelotshire Children's Trust views is

Our Vision is:

" Children, Young People and Families at the heart of all we do - in every decision we make and every action we take "

Figure 1 - Taken from CCT's Business Plan

As stated above, the options identified will be presented to the Care Leavers Council for their views. CCT has also recruited two care experience young people as apprentices and they have, for example, visited a similar project to the one we want to develop in Camelot and their thoughts were included in our proposal to senior leaders.

The Leaving Care Team has proactively worked with young people to gather their views on most of the projects that are being considered in the strategy.

Reviewing existing provision

During the meetings with the West and the North, I learnt a lot about Registered Social Housing Providers, Housing Benefit, Universal Credit, and the challenges faced by young people when it comes to these aspects of their accommodation. It helped me understand that the current Independent Supported Accommodation model CCT uses works well for some young people but, in general, it is not an affordable or sustainable option for care leavers over 18. This will support the work moving forward when recommissioning the framework in 2024.

I met with the Leaving Care Team to review other projects that had been developed recently to understand what was working well, any challenges and whether we should continue, re-design or recommission it. One example of this was the reviewing of the Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) for former Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers, which were developed with landlords and support from staff coming in. It was decided that it was working well for two of the three properties if there was more regular monitoring of the quality of the provision. Therefore, we decided to not renew the lease for one of the homes and increase the quality visits to the remaining two properties.

I also researched and contacted other Local Authorities with similar statistics to Camelotshire, to understand what they did that worked well, including any ideas that I could replicated.

Designing new provision

At the same time, there was an opportunity to work in partnership and commission specialist supported accommodation with a Registered Social Housing Provider, where CCT would fund the support staff, however, rent would be paid to the provider through young people's housing benefits. I completed a cost-benefit analysis of this proposal and presented to senior leads. This was approved and I am currently designing the service specification in partnership with the provider and the Leaving Care Team, and we plan to involve young people in the co-production of this project.

Stage 4: Design measuring of project success (Plan)

Initial workshop to design an Outcomes Framework

Service design is part of the Plan phase of the commissioning cycle. I wanted to develop, as much as possible, an outcomes-focused design. This approach allows commissioners to communicate and share responsibilities with providers to achieve the best outcomes for CYP. I met with the Leaving Care Team and a transformation project manager to start developing an outcomes framework for care leavers. We identified four pillars:

healthy relationships; emotional wellbeing and mental health, suitable and stable accommodation and employment, education, and training (EET). I suggested fitting these pillars into the four outcomes on CCT's Strategic framework, mentioned earlier in this assignment, with the following example:

- Enjoying good health and wellbeing - Care Leavers feel physically and emotionally healthy and know how to access services.
- Fulfil potential - Care Leavers are in EET
- Develop resilience - Care Leavers sustain their own tenancy without accruing debt
- Live Safe, Be Safe - Care Leavers develop positive relationships

We were pleased that the outcomes fell in line with the general vision and outcomes of the Trust and the next steps will be to develop measurable Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) around these outcomes.

Critical evaluation of the effectiveness of the activities undertaken

CCT uses Signs of Safety (SOS) as primary framework. SOS uses three main questions to complete assessments, and I chose to use these questions to evaluate the work I carried out.

What went well?

The timing of this project was convenient, as organisations and services are more and more aware of the importance of supporting care leavers after the sudden decreasing of support they go through when turning 18. Care leavers have been mentioned in Government guidance and Health and Education Strategies, as well as a whole chapter dedicated to them in the Independent Review of Children's Social Care (MacAlister, 2022).

Therefore, when I started approaching partners and stakeholders, there was engagement and interest across the board, and a clear willingness to work together and improve outcomes for care leavers. The fact that the eight district and borough councils are now only two Councils, meant that an agreement could be reached more easily, with Councils sharing Corporate Parenting responsibilities.

As I worked in the project, I noticed an increase in visibility of the commissioning team across other services; as people became more aware that I was working on reviewing accommodation options for care leavers, I started getting invited to more meetings and asked to be involved in earlier stages of discussions, which contributed to my faster understanding of the current context, challenges, and forward planning.

I was given the opportunity to attend several meetings taking place regarding care leavers and then was able to assess and attend the ones which would be of best value for my time and resources.

Regarding the key activities carried out, I was very pleased that they naturally fell into my outlined stages of the initial project plan (Appendix D). I believe the actions taken were the best available at the time and my commitment to the learning curve that this project demanded helped me meet with the right people and ask the right questions to achieve what I needed.

It is worth mentioning that, despite all the gaps and challenges identified, I also found that Camelotshire is supporting our care leavers very well, with a very small percentage living in unsuitable accommodation.

Everyone I spoke with showed a child-focused approach and genuinely wanted to make the lives of our care leavers better.

What did not go so well?

Despite the relevance of care leavers mentioned above, during the brief literature review I completed, I found there is a lack of recent research on care leavers. It would have been beneficial to have more resources, for example around accommodation and its link to achieving better outcomes. Furthermore, I also encountered challenges in finding commissioning literature that is directed at children's social care and its particularities, with most of the resources I found focusing on health or adults' social care.

As mentioned in the introduction of this assignment, the team have self-assessed as needing to improve their understanding of the impact of equality and diversity and how to embed this across the commissioning cycle. Furthermore, the data from the Census 2021 and JSNA unfortunately was not published in time to support my needs analysis.

The biggest challenge of this project was gathering data that was meaningful and would support the analysis of the current population of care leavers. In the same way, knowledge was not always shared with the commissioning team, as I found relevant sets of data, or attended meetings much later in the process of information gathering. Additionally, I realised there were a lot of meetings and panels, happening in parallel across different agencies, with partners working in silos and many times discussing the same topics in separate meetings.

Another challenge of this project was learning to manage and balance the interests of different stakeholders, as, initially, every meeting I attended would bring new information, issues, actions or requirements, due to the varied expertise and interests of different stakeholders, and sometimes consultations felt vague and overwhelming. For example, in one of our first meetings, the Leaving Care Team stated their main gap and aim was "a suite of accommodation options for care leavers", so I had to work to decipher what this meant for them, hence organising the workshop mentioned in above, in Stage 3, to finally discuss some actual options of accommodation. Consequently, the beginning of this project felt very overwhelming.

What would I have done different/What needs to happen?

As stated above, during the period of this project I managed to complete most of the tasks I outlined in my project plan, however, there is still work to do, which will be completed in due course. For example, evaluating the impact and the KPIs for young people when commissioning new models to support them will be the priority for the commissioning and leaving care teams in the coming months.

I would have liked to have had a more active role in the co-production with young people in developing this project, as mostly young people were involved through participation team or leaving care team, where I missed the opportunity to be present and listen to their views first-hand. Moving forward I will aim to be present during consultation and ideally include some young people in stakeholder meetings.

As well as suitable accommodation options, we know young people thrive by achieving in four main areas, including mental health and wellbeing and that these areas are interrelated. Newman et al. (2012) completed a review of research regarding joint commissioning, concluding that it has many benefits, including reduction

of duplication of services, savings, better services and working relationships; the study did identify some factors to consider that can influence the success of a jointly commissioned piece of work, such as context, internal and external communication, and relationships between partners. Thus, I believe that CCT should be moving towards a joint commissioning approach with other agencies (i.e., health, education, etc), to encourage data and knowledge sharing, as well as sharing responsibilities and providing a holistic approach to achieving the best outcomes for our care leavers.

It was clear during the writing of this assignment that we have still a lot of work to do around understanding the impact of equality and diversity and how to embed this in our commissioning practice across the cycle. Our Policies Team are developing an Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment, which I believe will enable commissioning practice to focus more on this. Furthermore, MacAlister (2022) suggested in his recommendations that Care Leavers are added as the 10th protected characteristics in the Equality Act, therefore, it will be interesting to see what the response is to this, as this would very likely impact the outcomes and opportunities for our care leavers.

Bach-Mortensen *et al.* (2022) analysed 84 sufficiency strategies across the country and concluded, among other issues that Local Authorities have difficulty in accurately forecasting and communicating needs to the market. I agree this is a challenge that CCT faces, and the team has been working together to address this and explore how best to reflect what we know we will need and how we plan to achieve it.

Reflection on personal development and learning

<u>What I have learnt</u>

This project has presented as a steep learning curve for me, having to learn in a very short amount of time what leaving care meant for young people and housing processes and challenges. I developed professional relationships with a lot of key stakeholders, introducing myself and my project and listening to what they did well, their challenges and how they could contribute to this project. I also learnt that it is important to find an appropriate balance between data and anecdotal information; at times, the data does not show all the challenges or gaps that we are having, and meeting and listening to the Leaving Care Team helped me understand that, even though we were offering young people a safe space to live, the provision offered was not always what they needed, as it was not, for example, promoting their independence.

While writing this assignment, two factors were of particular importance. Firstly, the fact that the whole team completed the course sessions, and we were able to discuss together what we did well, our challenges and shared experiences, was invaluable to my development and learning. Secondly, reading the research related to my project, and reflecting on how I carried out each activity, contributed to the development of the project itself and my knowledge around care leavers context. In a normal day-to-day project, I might not have thought to complete as much research and I have learnt form this that it is important to take the time to understand and plan before carrying out any important decision making.

Regarding the overwhelming feelings I got when starting this project, I learnt that, through conversations with my line manager and my IPC tutor, as long as key processes are followed, projects sometimes will "drive themselves", and it is important to learn when to "rest" into the process of the work, and when to take control, feeling at ease with the fact that the end product might not yet be clear in the beginning. I also learnt that sometimes, project plans and stages cannot be rigid and will not happen exactly in the order I plan. This

meant that a lot of times work did not happen linearly; changes of circumstances, bids or partnership opportunities took priority, and I feel I have developed the skill of managing pressures, time management and prioritising, not worrying too much with the fact that plans are not following the path I initially intended.

Similarly, I also learnt that commissioning cycle phases do not always happen in the order they ought to happen and sometimes occur alongside each other; despite being predominant in one of the phases, most commissioning tasks have a component of the whole cycle. For example, when I mapped resources, I had to use a critical approach to understand that, albeit having a majority of care leavers placed in Supported Accommodation, this was not cost effective and the quality of this provision was not always good or consistent. This impacts and is impacted by the Do and Review phases of the cycle. However, it is important to keep a strategic view and a clear forward plan, to try as much as possible to pre-empt what opportunities may be coming up and plan them to meet the needs of our children, young people, and families, through our commissioning plans.

<u>Learning opportunities</u>

This assignment has given me a lot of opportunities for learning and personal and professional development, as well as a better understanding of my development needs and learning opportunities I would like to persue.

During the project I felt a gap in my project management skills, as I would have liked to be more aware of concepts such as time and risk management when carrying out a project and have more structured skills around planning, hitting targets and performance and outcomes management. I believe having broader knowledge and skills in project management would enable me to navigate the learning curve and be more adaptable and flexible to work on different projects simultaneously more swiftly.

I have thoroughly enjoyed this course and learning about commissioning in social care. I believe this is an area where we are required to keep ourselves up to date regarding good practice and constantly learning about creative ideas that worked in other local authorities that we could perhaps implement in Camelotshire. I plan to keep myself up to date, by attending conferences and webinars, and researching innovative practice. One aspect I would like to learn more about is outcome-based commissioning, through focusing on providers delivering results to children, young people, and their families, rather than delivering a service based on outputs (Department for Education, 2016a).

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Appendices

Appendix A – Camelotshire Children's Trust Strategic Framework and Values

Appendix B – Commissioning Service Self-Assessment Exercise (snapshot)

Appendix C – CCT Commissioning Cycle

Appendix D - Project plan outline

Appendix E – Meeting notes from first housing steering group meeting

Appendix F – Mapping of Commissioned Placements for care leavers

Appendix G – Accommodation Workshop notes