

9 March 2017		ITEM: 9
Corporate Parenting Committee		
Care Leavers into Employment, Education or Training (EET)		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision:	
Report of: Michele Lucas Strategic Lead Learning & Skills		
Accountable Head of Service: Michele Lucas Strategic Lead Learning & Skills		
Accountable Director: Rory Patterson		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

This report summarises our approach to improve the number of Care leavers* into Education Employment & Training to enable them to access the regeneration opportunities in Thurrock.

*Care leavers is the collective term used throughout this document but also includes Children in Care and Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking/Trafficked Children

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 To support the ongoing development of the programme to enable Care Leavers to transition into EET.**
- 1.2 To recommend the activities continue to be delivered by representatives cross directorate, as well as making use of external agencies/services.**

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 Local Policy Context

The outline proposals within this report link with the Council's corporate priorities:-

- 1. Create a place for learning & opportunity

National Policy:

According to the National Audit Office (NAH) the system for supporting young people leaving foster or residential care in England to live successful independent lives is not working effectively.

The cost of not moving into adulthood successfully is likely to be high to both care leavers and the public. The principal outcome measure is the number of care leavers not in education, employment or training (NEET). In 2013-14, 41% of 19-year-old care leavers were NEET compared with only 15% of their age peers. According to the NAO, the lifetime cost of the current cohort of 19-year-old care leavers being NEET would be around £240 million or £150 million more than if they had the same NEET rate as other 19-year-olds.

Reports in 2016 'Keep on Caring: Supporting Young People from Care to Independence' (July 2016), 'Evaluation of Better by Design: A Report for Achieving for Children' (July 2016) and 'Supporting Care Leavers to thrive: Everyone's Business' (October 2016) suggest that there needs to be a more collaborative and joined up, effective approach when supporting Looked After Children into positive destinations.

'Too often services are not joined up, meaning that care leavers do not get the whole spectrum of support they need at the right time and, in the worst cases, one bit of the system can act in a way that undermines the work that another part of the system is providing' (Timpson E. ,MP, 2016)

Furthermore, the Department for Education is currently reviewing the role of Personal Adviser to maximise contact time between them and the young people as well as reviewing the knowledge and skills that is required to perform the role effectively.

Local Arrangements:

In May 2011, the Learning & Skills team secured funding to create a pilot to enable vulnerable young people to access apprenticeship opportunities. Thurrock Council's decision was to focus on Care leavers, (aged 18-24 years). A personalised programme of support was created to improve skills and abilities before work experience and an apprenticeship. The pilot ran for a year, was successful and during this pilot phase was embedded across a range of services.

Over the past 5 years, the model has changed and in June 2015, representatives from 5 different teams, within Thurrock Council, formed a strategy group to increase the number of Care leavers into EET. The group defined the purpose of the work as:

Improving access of care leavers into EET so they can benefit from the significant regeneration programme underway in Thurrock.

This work directly contributes to the Child Poverty strategy and national strategies to reduce reliance on the benefits system and ensure that the service continues to address local inequities.

Progress to date:

February 2017 figures show that 20.2% of Care leavers (aged 17-21 years) are NEET. This is a significant improvement since July 2016 when 30.8% NEET figure was recorded. These successes are due to a range of factors, and are outlined below:-

The opportunity to extend the former Diversity in Apprenticeship review group to include staff from different teams which is an effective mechanism for progress checks, understanding the challenges, identifying/engaging further services etc.

Planning for care leavers has been significantly improved with joint visits, faster progression and increased expertise/contacts for the care leaver ongoing. Qualified Personal Advisers from Inspire - Careers have direct experience of care leavers and work closely with colleagues from other service areas to support young people into EET. The service recognises the challenges that are faced by this group and as a result each experience triggers cross directorate conversation, reallocation of resource, and different approaches to enable access into EET.

Developing this strategic approach has sharpened the focus on the suitability of every programme on offer and whether it will be accessible by care leavers and how we secure their engagement. We continue to consult with care leavers in the development of Inspire.

There has been a number of individualised programmes generated to re-engage those looked after young people who are not yet ready for full time commitment with education on a five day per week basis. The Department for Education has recognised this characteristic of looked after young people and is encouraging local authorities to re-engage these vulnerable young people in bite sized programmes, individually tailored to their needs with a clear progression to more substantial training and education in the future. This has had the most positive effect on the NEET figures for looked after children.

There is increased awareness, amongst teams outside of children's services of the need to create positive employer encounters for care leavers. As a result, many are willing to create work experience placements, along with constructive feedback to this group to enable targeted support.

The senior management team is committed to creating an environment where care leavers can experience 6 months employment to develop useful skills in the workplace. In May 2014, Thurrock Council reviewed its pay policy to provide national minimum wage rates to apprentices whose performance is satisfactory after 6 months employment. For an 18-20 year old, this almost doubled their salary. We have created a useful resource to support apprentices to manage their low income, which has been written with care leavers in mind.

Specialised Support:

The service includes a Careers Adviser who specialises in support for teenage parents. There are effective mechanisms in place for care leavers accessing appropriate services utilising the children centres and the programmes that they offer.

In addition there is an adult programme that targets parents for education into employment. Care leavers are encouraged to join the programme that provides English and Maths refreshers, skills workshops and volunteering opportunities to build confidence to lead to employment

The Careers and Enterprise Company funding secured in Thurrock is already creating ideas/plans for different types of employer encounters that may appeal to care leavers (such as World at Work days, mock interviews, work shadowing for building skills and citizenship).

We are working with National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP) to increase entry into HE for young people in nine wards in Thurrock by providing access to individualised support, advice and guidance as well as workshops and summer schools. This programme starts in January 2017 and focuses on care leavers.

We have formed a partnership with UCL (in its second year) to enable a small cohort of gifted students, including gifted care leavers, to access 'Thurrock UCL Summer Challenge', an innovative outreach programme delivering skills for entry into a Russell Group University.

We are working with high profile, local key priority sector employers that are actively contributing to Thurrock's regeneration programme to create opportunities for local young people including care leavers. The Royal Opera House, Port of Tilbury, London Gateway, Intu, Park Inn, Wates, Keepmoat are adept at securing funding that translates into the delivery of workplace skills.

The successful funding application for the Youth Employment Initiative enables additional capacity to tackle some of the challenges and extend targets for care leavers to set up their own business.

There are two innovative programmes in addition to Diversity into Apprenticeships programme, both run by two personal advisers from Inspire Careers. The first programme (in its second year) is within the Duke of Edinburgh framework where personal advisers have been working with a cohort of looked after or care leavers young people. The group currently consists of 8 boys (aged 15 and 19 years) working towards completing a Bronze Duke of Edinburgh award meeting weekly on Thursday evenings at the Inspire Youth Hub. The four areas of the awards being worked on are expedition, physical, skill and volunteering. The programme is designed to broaden the young people's outlook on life and the opportunities available to them increasing their self-esteem and promoting their engagement in EET. The outcomes of this programme is significant re-engagement with the eight most vulnerable looked after young people which provides a positive

destination and takes them off the NEET register as a re-engagement programme.

The second programme, Independent Living Skills programme, aims to assist young people's transition into becoming independent adults who are actively engaged with local communities. This programme will be delivered in partnership with Inspire Careers and the Leaving & Aftercare Team and meets a developmental need identified in the recent OFSTED inspection.

Inspire Personal Advisers have prepared a scheme of work and accompanying lesson plans, activities and teaching materials. Weekly sessions will focus on practical issues facing young people leaving care, such as accommodation, managing bank accounts, food shopping and budgeting. There is a focus on EET and on the support available to care leavers in this area, such as discretionary housing payments. Activities deal with real life scenarios and should help to equip participants with some of the knowledge and skills they will need to avoid or overcome potential barriers to entering or remaining in EET. The aim of the programme is to build up independent living skills of the looked after young people, increasing their confidence and preparing them for the world of independence and employment.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 The Challenges:

Tracking care leavers across directorate, where services have responsibility for different age ranges (Inspire Careers 16-19 years, After Care 17-21 years, Virtual School 4-18 years, Employability & Skills 16-24 years) and two unconnected databases is time consuming.

There are fewer low entry level courses available, roll on roll off in Thurrock. A direct result of changes in Government funding/strategic decisions by delivery partners where the most vulnerable young people are high risk for college success rates.

Young people's bursaries are processed by FE/HE providers. South Essex College is removing the cost of transport and food at source whether or not the care leaver accesses these. This has resulted in weekly payments to students of £7 (£30+ in 2014/15).

The key priority growth sectors are focused on business development. Their staffing structure is very lean which makes investing sufficient time, to care leavers in the workplace, very challenging, however the work of the employer engagement team has continued to support local employers in the recruitment and ongoing development of care Leavers into work experience and apprenticeships.

Despite this effective, targeted approach, care leavers remain a vulnerable cohort. The service recently prepared a case study detailing the

support/interventions provided over a 4 month period to one local care leaver to explore where further modifications should be made, so improvements can be made to the number of Care leavers into EET and break the patterns of negative behaviour.

JobCentre Plus do not formally recognise regular engagement/training by this group as 'preparation for work' which means that care leavers must participate in JCP courses for benefits to continue. The sometimes haphazard lives of care leavers often results in stop start payment of benefits. Support by the Corporate Parent is time consuming and causes delays in other work/positive progress.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 To ensure we fulfil our corporate role and responsibility to our young people and help engage the young people back into employment, education or training, whilst taking advantage of Thurrock's regeneration opportunities.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 6.1 This report contributes to the following corporate priorities:
- Create a great place for learning and opportunity

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Jo Freeman**
Management Accountant

This report has no financial implications, but recognises the realignment of services to support young people in the care of the Local Authority.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Lindsey Marks**
Principal Solicitor Children's Safeguarding

The Committee is asked to note the report content under the remit of the Committee's terms of reference and powers.

7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Becky Price**
Community Development Officer

Supporting our young people in our care is a key strategic priority for Thurrock Council, we ensure that we can utilise our powers to positively discriminate in supporting young care leavers into education employment or training. Where possible we actively promote the recruitment of care leavers recognising the need to provide additional support to the children in the Local Authority's care. We actively seek the views of young people to shape the programmes on offer and continue to utilise partnership approaches to secure positive outcomes.

7.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

- None.

8. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- None.

9. **Appendices to the report**

- None.

Report Author:

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Learning & Skills