

<b>5 September 2023</b>		<b>ITEM: 7</b>
<b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b>		
<b>After Care Service Report</b>		
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Non-Key	
<b>Report of:</b> Luke Froment, Service Manager After Care		
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Janet Simon, Assistant Director Children's Social Care and Early Help		
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Children's Services		
<b>This report is</b> Public		

## Executive Summary

This report is to update Members of the Corporate Parenting Committee on Thurrock's After Care service, its roles, and responsibilities to Care Leavers and Eligible Care Leavers who are looked after by the local authority, and how we are meeting these duties.

The Aftercare Service works with young people in Thurrock aged 16-25 who meet the criteria for care leaving services. The whole Council is a 'Corporate Parent' to our young people and continues to have responsibilities towards these young people up to the age of 25. Our ambition is that young people leaving care are prepared for independence, feel safe in their homes and encouraged and supported to reach their potential as adults.

### 1. Recommendation(s)

**1.1 That the Members of the Committee are informed about Thurrock's Aftercare service and the support offered to Care Leavers.**

**1.2 Members of the Committee promote Corporate Parenting**

**1.3 Members to provide feedback and challenge to the service in meeting its duties and achieving good outcomes for our young people.**

### 2. Introduction and Background

2.1 The Children and Social Work Act 2017 introduced 3 provisions in respect of Care Leavers:

- A duty on local authorities which requires them to offer **Personal Adviser** support to all care leavers towards whom the local authority has

duties under section 23C of the Children Act 1989, up to age 25. This includes care leavers who return to the local authority at any point after the age of 21 up to age 25 and request such support.

- A duty on local authorities to consult on and then publish their '**local offer**' for care leavers, which sets out both care leavers' legal entitlements and the additional discretionary support that the local authority provides; and
- A duty on local authorities which requires them to have regard to seven '**corporate parenting principles**', that will guide the way in which the local authority provides its services to children in care and care leavers.

### **Seven principles for Corporate Parenting:**

- To act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people;
- To encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings;
- To take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people;
- To help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners;
- To promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people;
- For those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and
- To prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

2.2 All young people receiving a leaving care service fall within one of the following categories:

- Eligible – aged 16 or 17 and currently looked after and have been for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and ending after reaching the age of 16.
- Relevant – aged 16 or 17, not currently looked after, previously Eligible but left care after 16<sup>th</sup> birthday. Relevant status ceases if a young person is living consistently for 6 months or more with a parent or someone with parental responsibility. Status resumes if this arrangement ceases.
- Former Relevant - Aged 18 up to the age of 25 who were in care on reaching 16<sup>th</sup> birthday and previously an Eligible or Relevant child.
- Qualifying for Advice and Assistance – aged 18-21 (up to 25 if in education) and were in care for less than 13 weeks on or after your 16<sup>th</sup> birthday.

### 3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 Owing to a change in government policy; since the introduction of 'Extending Personal Adviser support to all care leavers to age 25 Statutory guidance for local authorities' in February 2018, all care leavers are entitled to receive a service up to age 25, whereas prior to this, statutory involvement typically ended at 21 unless the young person remained in education.

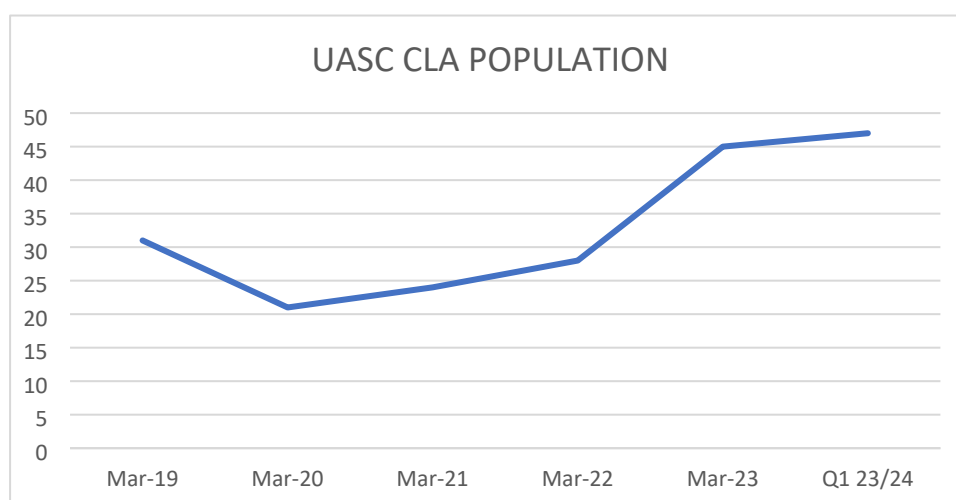
[Extending Personal Adviser support to all care leavers to age 25 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

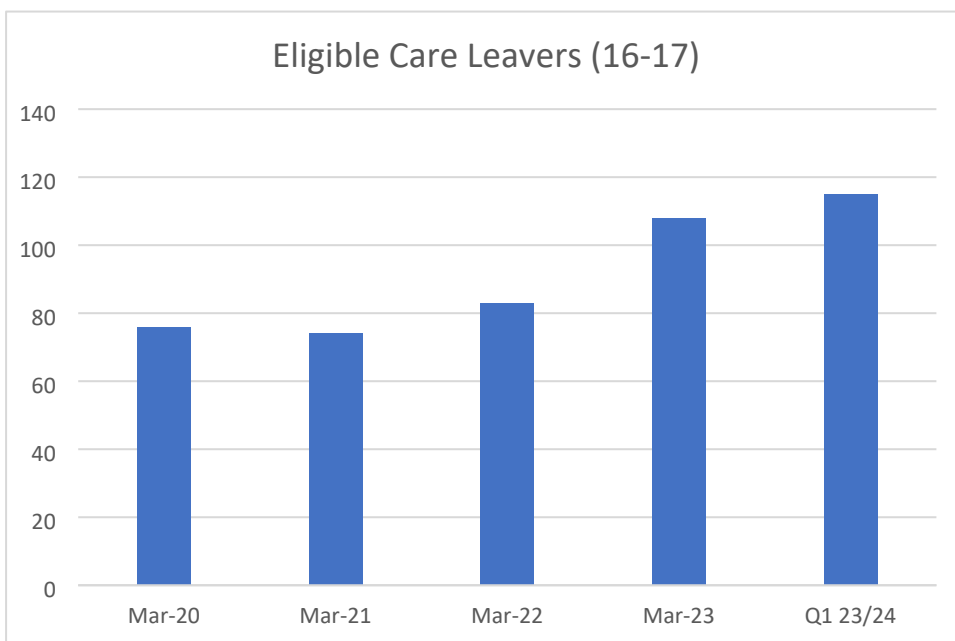
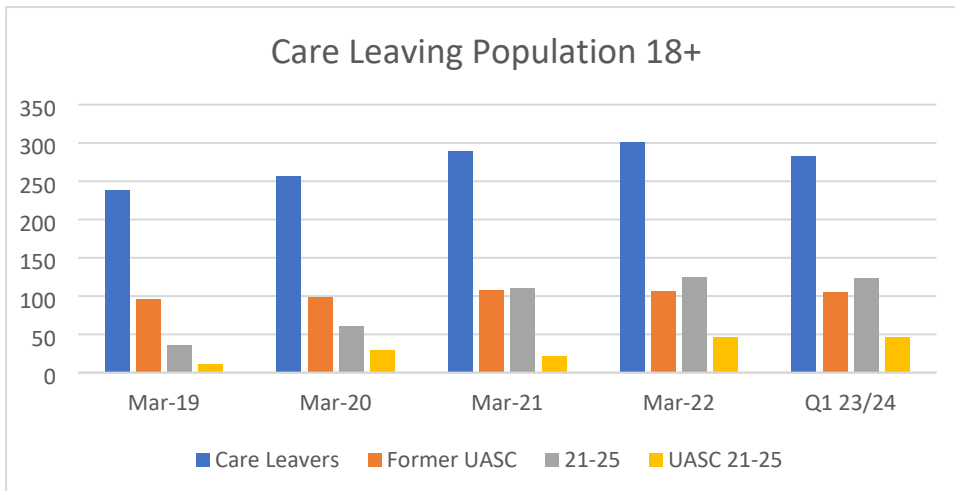
3.2 The complexity of the issues care leavers present with are vast and require personal advisors to have a range of knowledge and experience. Many care leavers reach 18 without a significant support network and the PA may well be the main support.

3.3 Supporting care leavers to lead safe and fulfilling lives whilst achieving their potential, spans across the whole Council. As Corporate Parents, it is our duty to ensure we support care leavers to live within safe and supportive communities in affordable housing and have access to the right support to achieve their outcomes. If we get the support right at the earliest opportunity, there is a stronger chance of reducing the level of our involvement with care leavers at 21 and providing a broader support offer to care leavers up to 25. Care leavers who are fulfilling their potential will be better placed to contribute to society.

3.4 Thurrock Aftercare Service supports Care Leavers who are Eligible children aged 16 – 17, Former Relevant, 18-25 and a small number of Relevant 16/17 year olds and Qualifying Care Leavers. Demand within the service has seen an increase over the last 5 years. Reasons for the reasons described above and demonstrated in the graphs below and include;

- Increased number of UASC (Predominantly aged 16+)
- Increased numbers of adolescents entering the care system
- Increased numbers of young people needing additional support post 21.





3.5 In response to increasing demand as higher numbers of children looked become eligible care leavers, and Thurrock’s UASC population has increased the service has adapted and is currently going through a reorganisation which will be embedded by end of September 2023. The new structure has effectively increased the number of Personal Advisors (PA) by 2 full time posts to 14. There will be 1 senior practitioner, 1 PA with housing specialism and 2 team managers who will supervise the PA’s and senior practitioner.

3.6 Personal advisors are allocated to and work with young people eligible for a care leaving service from the age of 16 to 25 establishing a positive working relationship and supporting transitions planning. At the end of Q1 2023/24 383 young people were open to CSC and eligible for Care Leaving Support and another 16 due to become eligible within 12 weeks. Children aged 16 and 17 years are also supported by their allocated Social Workers.

3.7 For young adults open who are aged 21-25 conversations are held as to how best to support them to successful outcomes as independent adults who feel safe and secure and able to manage their needs. Sometimes this includes

allocating a PA to support them in specific areas. The aim of the service is to make sure that all young people up to the age of 25 feel confident and able to seek support when needed, are assured that the service is always open and available to them and that the right young people are receiving support at the right time.

- 3.8 The number of young people open to the Aftercare Service is expected to increase based on the rising age of children currently in care, increased UASC quota from 0.07 to 0.1% of the child population and numbers of young people in care anticipated to turn 16 in the next twelve months.

#### **4. External review**

- 4.1 In June 2023 Thurrock children's services invited experienced external reviewers to undertake a "good practice stock take" with the service. The aim of this was to provide an objective benchmark from which further service development can be a focus. This has supported plans for improving outcomes for our Care Leavers and identified;

- the local authority has many of the fundamentals of good practice in place
- young people are seen regularly and spoken to
- plans are in place for young people
- managers have robust systems to monitor issues such as the timeliness of visits and the completion of pathway plans and have made improvements in these systems
- young people value the relationships that they have with their Personal Advisors
- workers show tenacity about seeing young people
- quality support with housing and practical matters offered to young people.

- 4.2 As with any review, areas for development were identified which include;

- holistic and co-produced pathway plans promote best outcomes and support young people to fulfil their potential
- recording which strongly reflect the young person's voice, identity and wishes
- improved understanding for young people aged 16 and 17 about the role of the PA
- continued improvement in transition planning and earlier engagement with Adult Services.
- Development of mental and emotional health offer to young adults.
- Promotion and development of the local offer to ensure it is well understood by young people
- Increased input from young people in service development

4.3 These recommendations have been incorporated into service development plans and which will be overseen at an Aftercare Board chaired by the Assistant Director attended by senior managers from partner organisations and council directorates, to ensure there is appropriate momentum behind ongoing development work.

## **5. Aftercare service priorities over the next 12 months**

### **5.1 Consultation with young people**

There has been some developing work alongside care leavers looking at their experiences. Some of the themes explored relate to coming into care and endings. The views and experiences of young people have been shared with social workers in order to support developing practice and have been used to create resources for other children to help them understand their journey. A Care Leaver Forum is in development following initial meetings with the service, senior managers and young people.

5.2 We continue to look at ways to embed consultation with young people into our practice and have an annual schedule of events in place to ensure that there are ongoing opportunities to get face to face engagement and to collect feedback from care leavers on a range of issues throughout the year.

5.3 We are exploring options for a youth hub which will provide a space for care leavers to support them in their independence, life skills and meet with the service – a “home from home”.

### **5.4 Personal Advisors in put 16-18**

Planning for young people prior to their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday is a key area for the after-care service. The After Care team are allocated to work with young people aged 16 and 17 who also have an allocated social worker. The role of the PA in this period is getting to know the young person supporting them to understand their rights and supporting the allocated social worker to understand the needs of the child as they approach adulthood and to ensure that appropriate plans are in place to meet needs arising out of accommodation, education, employment, wellbeing and safeguarding.

5.5 To empower the PA and bring their expertise to the fore they are asked to attend the Looked After Child (LAC) reviews from 16 in order to ensure that their expertise is included in planning that reflects the transition needs and plans for the Child. This ensures close working between the allocated social worker and the PA and means that the LAC review has an excellent understanding of issues around transition planning from early on. The PA should also be invited to supervision with the child's Social Worker at regular intervals between 16-18 to input on the Plan.

5.6 Independent Reviewing Officers now lead the first pathway plan review after the age of 18. This allows their continued oversight and support as plans they have overseen pre-18 are put in to place.

## 6. Accommodation

6.1 Accommodation for young people where they feel safe is an area of focus for the Aftercare service. There are two strands to this work:

- Seeking to match young people appropriately and to reduce the need for multiple moves post 18
- Sufficiency of accommodation for care leavers

6.2 To strengthen practice in this area a panel meets weekly to consider the “transition pipeline” and ensure that:

- Young people approaching 18 have a clear plan in relation to their accommodation
- Young people in Head Start Housing (HSH) accommodation are making progress with applications and move on into social housing
- Former Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) are making progress in regard to asylum applications, and we are aware of any negative decisions from the Home Office that mean the young person is Appeals rights exhausted (ARE)
- Young people who are eligible to apply for social housing do so
- Young people in prison have support at the point they are due to be released

6.3 We are also working closely alongside housing colleagues and meet regularly at a joint housing forum to ensure close and more effective working to ensure that care leavers receive the best housing offer possible.

6.4 The agenda for this meeting is informed by the expressed views and needs of our care leavers, where they have experienced difficulties relation to acquiring social housing or in the practicalities of maintaining their property and tenancy the aftercare team are able to raise issues on behalf of care leavers, advocate and work with housing colleagues to find effective solutions.

6.5 A current example of a joint piece of work is a two-bedroom property let to CSC and subsequently licensed to former UASC who, given they have no recourse to public funds, would otherwise be residing in HSH accommodation. This has enabled the young people to move on into a more appropriate living arrangement and increased capacity in HSH resource available to other care leavers.

6.6 By the end of June 2022 there were 45 care leavers over the age of 18 who had achieved their own social housing with the support of the Aftercare Service and housing team, by the end of June 2023 this number had risen to 63. During this same period a further cohort of young people have been housed in alternative accommodation including specialised placements funded by adult social care where additional needs have been identified.

6.7 Over the last year, the After-care service and Housing have been delivering training sessions open to care leavers aimed at providing information about

the process of obtaining and maintaining a social housing tenancy. There is an ongoing commitment to deliver regular sessions as part of our annual schedule of events. This includes a presence from PA's and increased support for young people to attend these sessions. With this additional support, engagement from our young people has increased, with 17 young people in attendance at the most recent session.

- 6.8 A further avenue of support for care leavers is to prevent homelessness but, where young people do find themselves homeless past the age of 21 a strengthened offer has also been agreed between children's services and housing colleagues which means that any Care Leaver in this position will be temporarily housed without delay and will be offered a private tenancy following the statutory period of assessment (56 days).
- 6.9 Thurrock Council seeks to ensure that all care leavers have suitable accommodation either through our own provision or by the young person's own arrangements. Monthly meetings are established with key teams and strategic leaders within Thurrock Council to ensure that this accommodation needs are met.

## **7. Pathway Planning**

- 7.1 The pathway plan is the document at the heart of all practice to support care leavers. The plan is regularly reviewed and identifies the needs of the young person and actions to meet those needs.

7.2 A new pathway plan has been developed by the aftercare team in conjunction with our systems team, Care leavers have been consulted. The new pathway plan covers the information that is required by Section 23E of the Children Act 1989, the Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010 as amended by the Care Planning and Care Leavers (Amendment) Regulations 2014. The new format seeks to achieve a number of outcomes:

- To bring the voice of our young people to the fore in their own planning and support through the use of language in the document which addresses the young person directly and provides them an opportunity to be clear about their views and wishes in all areas.
- To reduce duplication for social workers and PA's by incorporating a number of documents into one overarching piece of work – this includes housing needs, transition planning, risk assessment and triple planning for those young people awaiting a decision regarding their immigration status.
- To strengthen and further embed signs of safety practice in the work that we do with care leavers through the use of language in the document and the use of “scaling questions” that can be used to understand the progress made by each young person from one pathway plan review to the next.

- 7.3 The document is now live and the impact of this is being assessed in practice. There is an ongoing focus in relation to pathway planning and a number of strands in order to ensure plans reflect the current circumstances of the young



person, champions the young person's voice and is a good reflection of the work that is taking place to support the young person's wishes and ambitions. The changes in the structure within the service will provide greater management oversight to support this work.

## 8. The Local Offer

8.1 Thurrock Council's local offer to young people leaving care is published on the council website<sup>1</sup>. It can be accessed at any time by our care leavers and includes a specific financial offer setting out very clearly what care leavers can expect to receive as part of their support package.

8.2 We are updating our current Local Offer to strengthen the support we offer across the board taking into consideration value to the care leaver cohort alongside cost to the local authority. To inform this piece of work we have considered feedback from young people.

## 9. Education

9.1 Data in relation to engagement of our Care Leavers in education and employment that the Covid 19 pandemic had a significant impact.

9.2 Thurrock is slightly below statistical neighbours and national performance at the end of Q1 2023/24:

	Thurrock	Statistical Neighbor	National
Education, Employment or Training (EET): 17–18-year-old	64.7%	66%	66%
Education, Employment or Training (EET): 19–21-year-old	56.6%	57%	55%

9.3 We are working alongside colleagues from the Inspire Youth Hub to ensure that care leavers needs, and interests are understood and that they are appropriately matched to opportunities that they are likely to want to engage in and that they find motivating and stimulating.

9.4 There is a weekly meeting currently between Inspire and the Aftercare team where plans to provide support to young people who are currently NEET are agreed and tracked. This forum is being strengthened with the introduction of greater input from inspire.

9.5 There is also a pilot project ongoing to identify a small cohort of young people and work alongside them intensively to support them into employment of training.

## 10. Performance

- 10.1 Alongside the substantial developmental work within the service, we are mindful of the need to ensure best quality practice in our support of care leavers.
- 10.2 Timeliness of Pathway plans continues to be an area of focus. Performance in this area has been consistently good for a sustained period. In the last year, from the end of June 2022 – end of June 2023 92% of pathway plans have been completed in time in the Aftercare Service. This performance has been maintained in the first quarter of 2023/24.
- 10.3 It is incumbent upon the Local Authority to stay “in touch” with care leavers. This means that we need to make contact with them at least every three months and understand the current circumstances relating to their accommodation and employment status. The practice in this area is consistently good but has improved further in recent months with the service staying in touch with over 95% of care leavers at the end of June 2023.

## **11. Reasons for Recommendation**

- 11.1 Members of the Committee are sighted on developments within the aftercare service.

## **12. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)**

- 12.1 None

### **13. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact**

- 13.1 All local authorities must have regard for 7 corporate parenting principles when discharging its functions to children cared for and care leavers. This offer needs to set out what support local authorities will provide to care leavers across the council/commissioning partners.

### **14. Implications**

#### **14.1 Financial**

Implications verified by: **David May**  
**Strategic Lead Finance**

Included in the 2023/24 budget is funding to support young people transition to independence. This is a combined approach between, Children Social Care, Housing and Adult services.

The ongoing issue in regard to sufficiency of accommodation for care leavers poses a financial risk to the Local Authority.

#### **14.2 Legal**

Implications verified by: **Judith Knight**  
**Interim Deputy Head of Legal (Social and Education)**

This report provides Corporate Parenting Committee the opportunity to review and monitor the Council's performance as a Corporate Parent. The Council is under a duty to have regard to the corporate parenting principles under Section 1 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 in relation to young people aged under 25 who are relevant or for relevant children in addition to children who remain looked after.

The duties to care leavers are set out in the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, associated regulations and statutory guidance. This includes a duty to arrange a personal advisor for each Looked After child who is an 'eligible' child i.e. a child who is 16 or 17, who has been looked after for a period of 13 weeks. The personal advisor role can continue until the age of 25. Further the Council is under a duty to undertake an assessment of an eligible child's needs and prepare a pathway plan. This must be kept under review. The Council has a duty to take reasonable steps to keep in touch with a former relevant child.

### 14.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Natalie Smith**  
**Strategic Lead for Community Development**

The Service is committed to practice, which promotes **equality, diversity and inclusion**, and will carry out its duties in accordance with the Equality Act 2010, **Public Sector Equality Duty** and related Codes of Practice and Anti-discriminatory policy. The service recognises that care leavers may have experienced obstruction or the impact of prejudice when accessing services including Social Care.

The Child Looked After and Aftercare services are committed to support all children in the care of Thurrock Council to be safe and well and to reach their potential. Individual needs assessments and plans are made for each care leaver taking consideration of their identity, culture, history and social needs.

### 14.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e., Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, and Impact on Looked After Children

- None

### 15. 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):

Big Wide World guide (Local Offer): <https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/young-people-leaving-care/leaving-care>.

### 16. Appendices to the report

- None

### Report Author:

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