

31 July 2024		ITEM: 7
Corporate Parenting Committee		
Education, Employment and Training for Care Leavers		
Wards and communities affected: All	Decision: Non-key	
Report of: Kate Kozlova-Boran, Head of Service, Employability and Skills Luke Froment, Service Manager, CLA and Aftercare		
Accountable Assistant Director: Janet Simon, Assistant Director, Children's Social Care and Early Help		
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy, Executive Director, Children's Services		
This report is: Public		
Version: Final		

Executive Summary

Care experienced young people should be supported to access education, employment or training by the Local Authority under The Children and Social Work Act 2017. This report sets out how Thurrock Council is executing its duties in relation to supporting young people over the age of 16 and entitled to a leaving care service to engage in education, employment, and training. This is a vital role given the challenges care experienced young people can face.

This report sets out the legal duties on Thurrock Council and the steps being taken to support Care Experienced Young People to access education and employment. It makes recommendations for further work.

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 Members to be aware of the target of 70% of Care Experienced Young People to progress into Employment, Education or Training (EET) following the end of year 11 Studies.

1.2 Members are invited to consider and offer challenge to the service about how it is proactive in supporting young people to access EET opportunities including apprenticeship and work experience opportunities as a corporate parent. These opportunities will be brokered via the Inspire hub.

1.3 Members identify and pursue areas where the offer of apprenticeship and work experience opportunities could be improved within the Council and wider community.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 Thurrock Council has Corporate Parenting responsibilities to care experienced young people. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 introduced three provisions:

- 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 and 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.
- A duty on local authorities which requires them to have regard for seven 'corporate parenting principles', that will guide the way in which the local authority provides its services to children in care and care leavers¹.

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 16th 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 16th birthday and previously an Eligible or Relevant child.
- Qualifying for Advice and Assistance – aged 18-25 and were in care for less than 13 weeks on or after their 16th birthday.

2.3 Nationwide statistics indicate the difference care experienced young people face compared to the general population:

- Nationally, 38% of care leavers aged 19-21 years are not in education, employment, or training (NEET), compared to 11.9% of all 19- to 21-year-olds.
- Nationally, just 6% of care leavers enter Higher Education by their 19th birthday, compared to 46.8% of the wider population.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a93eb3ae5274a5b87c2fde4/Applyin_g_corporate_parenting_principles_to_looked-after_children_and_care_leavers.pdf

2.4 Thurrock Council works with young people to develop plans and access resources that would enable them to reach their potential and achieve their ambitions. We have an aspiration for opportunities to be of good quality, appropriate to the young person interests, abilities, and goals.

3 Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 The following provides an overview of local performance:

- In June 2024 63.2% of care leavers aged 17-18 were in Education, Employment and Training.
- In June 2024 49.1% of Care Leavers aged 17-21 were in Education, Employment and Training.
- In June 2024 43% of care leavers aged 22-25 were in Education, Employment or Training.

3.2 Colleagues from the Aftercare Team and Employability and Skills team work cross-departmentally to enable care experienced young people to have the best possible outcome in their careers by eliminating barriers to the Employment, Education or Training (EET) and providing appropriate opportunities when the young people are ready.

3.3 The Local Offer sets out support that is available to all care leavers to engage them into education, employment, or training. The current offer includes LA's commitments to:

- Support Young Person with their Personal Education Plan (PEP).
- Help to get onto study/training courses.
- Support on young people's pathway to university and higher education.
- Provide a defined careers advice offer from our Inspire Youth Hub Service.
- Ensure a personal adviser/foster parent attends university open day visits and all travel is paid.
- Ensure your university holiday accommodation costs are arranged in advance and paid for by a grant of up to £2,750 during year 1, 2 and 3.
- Provide a careers mentor from The Inspire Hub.
- Support through our Inspire Hub to prepare a CV, complete job applications, prepare for interviews, identify apprenticeship, and job opportunities.
- Provide a financial payment to assist with interviews, e.g., travel costs and clothing.
- Provide travel costs to attend work or university until first pay cheque or student loan is available.
- Work with colleagues from Inspire to identify training or employment opportunities.

And the provision for:

- £100 per year towards books and materials for young people attending college or university.
- £500 to support living costs for young people deciding to take a gap year before attending higher education.
- £100 towards cost of clothing for first job interview.
- £100 towards prom and graduation costs.
- Support with travel costs to College or University.
- University Higher Education Bursary; £2,000 per course.
- Laptops, dependent on relevance to the study course.
- University holiday accommodation cost: £2,750 per year over the first three years of the course along with support to identify appropriate holiday accommodation if required.
- Support to apply for university bursaries and other charitable funding,

There is a weekly panel which focuses on post-18-year-olds who do not have an EET offer. The panel seeks to strengthen oversight and planning; to ensure young people have opportunities into EET, to understand the issues for individual young people and align their interests to an EET offer. Each young person is regularly reviewed at panel to monitor impact and progress. The Personal Advisors in the aftercare team have an excellent understanding of the young people's needs and seek to take a trauma informed approach to meeting their needs for education and employment. The aim is to match each young person with an offer that enthuses and motivates them. The Virtual School officer for post-16 attends this Panel to promote smooth transitions, along with the adult community college. Currently the aftercare team is in liaison seeking to add with the Recovery College based at Thurrock Inclusions to the EET panel. This is a team providing an educational learning environment for young people who experience difficulties with mental health or have an interest in mental health and well-being.

Fifteen young people have been identified to receive more targeted support into Education, Employment and Training. Progress is reviewed each month in a cross departmental monthly meeting with a focus on work placements, internships and apprenticeships within the LA and its partners. The discussions in this forum seek to address issues such as self-esteem and social anxiety that can act as barriers towards employment or education for care experienced young people. An evaluation of this will be undertaken to identify key points of learning and ways of imbedding this in future work.

Inspire attends CLA reviews when asked to be part of transition planning. The Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Child (UASC) lead meets monthly with the virtual school to review planning around education for this cohort of young people. The UASC service is being further developed with specialist Personal Advisors working with these young people alongside their allocated social worker from 16-18 to strengthen planning and support including around education.

Job and Skills club is now delivered and managed by Inspire. Referrals from DWP, Personal Advisers and other professionals are steadily growing. DWP are happy to add to clients' commitments in journal. A three-week club runs Tuesdays 10am – 12pm focusing on CV updating, cover letters, interview preparation. Two Care Leavers are attending.

The next course in development, 'Preparing for Adulthood', focuses on budgeting and preparing food on a budget. All courses are co-produced with care experienced young people and focus on an identified need and run in close partnership with the DWP and the Care leaver. Job Coach encourages the young person to attend and commit through their universal credit framework.

Music Sessions have been running in the Inspire professional Music Studio since July 2023 aimed at young people aged 15 years – 24 years. One care leaver attends regularly whose ambition is to work in the music industry. The other Care leaver moved away so could no longer attend. The sessions are run by a qualified musician upskilling the young people for their future career.

Mind currently use Inspire Youth Hub to deliver wellbeing sessions. The workshops are popular and growing. Self-referral or referral by a professional are welcomed. Government financial support to encourage employers to take care experienced young people on as apprentices, and an increase to the Apprenticeship Bursary, have recently been introduced but it is too early to judge their impact. Historically, care leavers have felt discouraged from gaining qualifications through an apprenticeship by often low wages compared with unskilled work, for example in construction or logistics, to the detriment of their longer-term employment and earnings potential. One Care Leaver has started a traineeship with NHS through the Anchor Programme sourced by Inspire with initial positive feedback.

Care leavers can now book in with CVS at Inspire. CVS search for vacancies, promote the importance of gaining new skills through volunteering, enhancing a care leaver's CV. The CVS worker supports clients in applying every step of the way to the final application. This service is available at Inspire Grays Hub monthly on a Friday. Three care leavers have engaged in appointments.

'Level up' programme with the Mid and South Essex Health and Care Academy will be available to partake in from October 2024 (originally booked for June '24 but funding being held until October '24). Two Care Leavers are interested in this course.

Professionals are signposting Care Leavers to 'Forward Trust' to encourage Care leavers and clients of Inspire to discuss alcohol or drug concerns. This service is a confidential online chat and advice service (9am-5pm weekdays) supporting young people with concerns regarding alcohol, drugs, mental health or issues around housing, employment and staying well. As this is a confidential service, we cannot show how many young people are engaged.

Central Training Group and Inspire have partnered to deliver a tailored programme 'Next Steps' that combines practical training with real-world experience. Central and Inspire understand that every learner is unique. This programme is designed to be flexible and supportive, catering to client's

individual needs and aspirations. Each Client will receive personalised guidance and support every step of the way. We have had two care leavers interested and one who wanted to attend but fell outside the age bracket. This young person is looking at attending The Adult Community College instead.

Inspire currently updates and sources new information for their Professional Padlet used by colleagues in the council. All colleagues from Aftercare Team and Inspire have access and can discuss information, courses, volunteering, mental health opportunities with care leavers.

To ensure Care Experienced Young People are supported into Education, employment and or training and we, as the Corporate Parent, are ambitious about the outcomes for our Care Leavers, it is recommended that an ambitious target of 70% is adopted to Care Leavers aged 17-21.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 To support Members to be aware of the target of 70% of Care Experienced Young People to progress into Employment, Education or Training following the end of year 11 Studies.
- 4.2 To support Members to be sighted on the offer to Care Leavers in relation to apprenticeship and work experience opportunities.
- 4.3 To support Members understanding of the role of corporate parent across the whole of the council.

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

- 5.1 As noted in the report above, young people have been consulted on the training courses and local offer for Care Leavers.

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

- 6.1 Children Looked After

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Michelle Hall**
Finance Manager

In line with the Council's Corporate Parenting responsibility, this report advises Members to be aware of the target of 70% of Care Experienced Young People to progress into Employment, Education or Training following the end of year 11 Studies.

There are no additional costs associated with this proposal, and all costs should be met from within existing budgets in cost centre CA061, CA062 and CA064 a total net amount of £2.194m inclusive of grant funding.

7.2 Legal

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

This report provides Corporate Parenting Committee the opportunity to explore how the Council meets the needs of care experienced young people to access education, employment, or training.

The Council has a legal duty under the Children and Social Work Act 2017 to set out in its Local Offer information about such services it offers to care leavers and this should include, among other things, information about services which may assist care leavers in, or preparing for, adulthood and independent living in relation to education, training, and employment.

In carrying out functions in relation to care experienced young people the Council must have regard to the corporate parenting principles.

The Children Act 1989 sets out the legal duties for a Council to provide support to the extent that the care experienced young person's welfare requires it and his education or training needs require it. This is supported by The Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010 and the statutory guidance Volume 3 of the Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations: Planning transition to adulthood for care leavers. Chapter 5 of this guidance states that care leavers should be offered work experience and other opportunities to allow them to test their career aspirations and needs, along with high quality advice, which should be included in the pathway plan. The Council should have policies and processes that support care leavers in undertaking apprenticeships, traineeships, vocational courses, or employment.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**
Community Engagement and Project Monitoring Officer

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 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.

The Local Offer informs each needs assessment and will be informed by a Community Equality Impact Assessment. The Anti Racist Practice standards set by Thurrock Children's Services are applicable to this report and service.

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

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 Authors:

Kate Kozlova-Boran, Head of Employability and Skills
Luke Froment, Service Manager, Children Looked After and Aftercare