

<b>6 September 2022</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.

### **1. Recommendation(s)**

#### **1.1 That the Members of the Committee are informed about Thurrock’s Aftercare service.**

### **2. Introduction and Background**

2.1 The aftercare service works with young people in Thurrock who are formerly Children Looked After.

2.2 All children who are over 18 and leaving care fall within one of the following categories:

- former relevant child, entitled to: Personal Advisor, Pathway Plan (regularly reviewed), assistance with employment, education or training, assistance with accommodation, help with living costs.
- qualifying care leavers, entitled to: Help with living expenses, advice and assistance.

2.3 All local authorities have a duty under the Children Act 1989, and subsequent legislation, to prepare children for leaving care. Thurrock Council must publish information relating to what support it offers to care leavers (the Local Offer). It

also has duties and powers to assist care leavers depending on their age, when they left care, and for how long they were in care.

2.4 In carrying out any duty to a care leaver who is a relevant or former relevant child under the age of 25, the whole of Thurrock Council (not just children's services) must:

- act in the young person's best interests, and promote her/his physical and mental health and well-being.
- encourage care leavers to express their views, wishes and feelings, and take them into account.
- help those young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners.
- promote high aspirations in, and seek to secure the best outcomes for care leavers.
- ensure the safety of care leavers, and stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work.
- prepare them for adulthood and independent living .

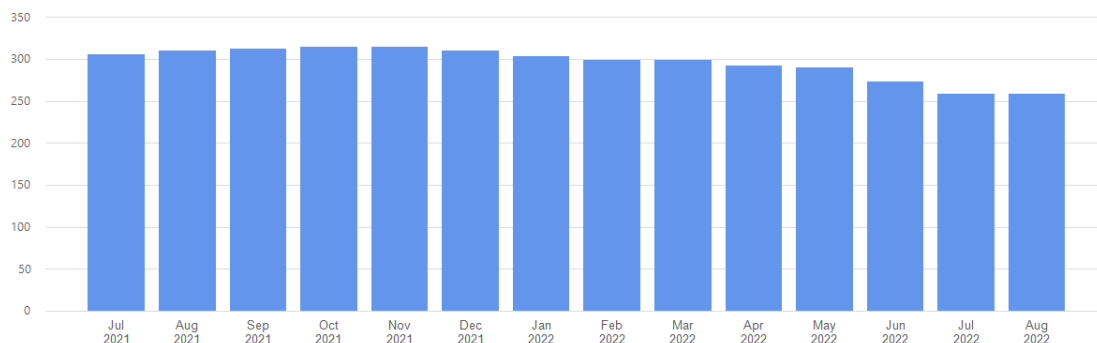
### **3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options**

3.1 The Aftercare Service is established at 12 Full time Personal Advisors (PAs) and 2 full time Senior Practitioners who supervise the PAs. Currently there are three PA vacancies in the team; a recruitment process is live with a good number of suitable applicants to fill these posts. Personal advisors are allocated to children at age 16 to support transitions planning, they continue to work with them up to the age of 25. The After Care team is currently supporting 307 children and young people aged 16-25 years. Children aged 16 and 17 years are also supported by their allocated Social Worker.

3.2 The caseloads remain higher than desirable with the total workload in the Service at 254 care leavers and 87 16–17-year-olds as of 09.08.2022 giving an average caseload of 28 when fully staffed. Case review continues for those young adults open who are aged 22-25; The Service Manager and Team Manager continue to focus on this cohort to ensure that the right young people are being supported. 25 such cases have closed to the Aftercare service since the end of May 2022.

3.3 The impact of this focus can be seen in the overall number of care leavers open to children's service. Between December 2021 and July 2022 overall case numbers have reduced by 52 cases; from 393 to 345.

## Care leavers Cohort, over 18 - Open at Month End



- 3.4 Despite this work the caseloads in the service remain higher than is optimal – this is significantly impacted upon by vacancies in the Personal Advisor (PA's) roles in the team.
- 3.5 Permanent recruitment is currently underway to address this shortfall along with exploration of increasing the number of PAs by two for a temporary period to address the increase in demand that is expected over the next 9 months. The number of young people open to after care is expected to increase based on the rising age of children currently in care and anticipated new admissions in to care over the age of 16 in the next twelve months
- 3.6 There are currently 27 children aged under 18 who are being solely held in the Children Looked After (CLA) service and do not yet have an allocated PA, this is a temporary arrangement pending recruitment of PAs.

## 4. Transitions

Planning for transitions is a key area for the after-care service. The team work with children from the age of 16 and are allocated as secondary worker between 16-18. The role of the PA in this period is to support the allocated social worker to understand the needs of the child as they approach adult hood and to ensure that appropriate plans are in place to meet needs arising out of accommodation, education, employment, wellbeing and safeguarding.

- 4.1 To empower the PA and bring their expertise to the fore they are asked to attend the Looked After Child (LAC) reviews from 16 and to work with the social worker to complete a report identifying 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.

## 5. Accommodation

- 5.1 Accommodation 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.
- 5.2 To strengthen practice in this area a panel is meeting 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.
- 5.3 In the final quarter of 2021/22 a joint piece of work was completed between Children’s services and Headstart to move young people on to secure tenancies through a direct offer. Housing services provided significant support to prioritise these properties to ensure young people could move on. The continued joint working between Aftercare, Headstart and Housing Solutions is focussed on ensuring young people are supported to apply for, bid for and are supported to move into Thurrock Council property where they are eligible to do so.
- 5.4 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. We are exploring creative solutions to ensure that care leavers are able to move on into social housing at the point they are ready to do so.
- 5.5 One such piece of work is a two-bedroom accommodation let to the local authority and subsequently licensed to two 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 HSH resource available to other care leavers. It is hoped that this can be replicated to give our cohort of former UASC the ability to move on into independent living while Home Office decisions are pending.

- 5.6 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.
- 5.7 In September, the After-care service and Housing will be delivering the initial training session open to care leavers aimed at providing information about the process of obtaining and maintaining a social housing tenancy. There is a commitment to deliver regular sessions, providing access to recorded sessions to care leavers and carers/accommodation providers and facilitating targeted training for those young people on the verge of receiving their own social housing.
- 5.8 The whole of Thurrock Council has a statutory duty to provide housing to care leavers. Monthly meetings are established with key teams and strategic leaders in within Thurrock Council to ensure that this duty is met.

## **6. Pathway Planning**

- 6.1 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.
- 6.2 A new pathway plan is being developed by the aftercare team in conjunction with our systems team, Care leavers have been consulted. The new format seeks to achieve a number of outcomes:
- 6.3 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.
- 6.4 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.
- 6.5 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
- 6.6 The document is currently with the systems team for final amendments before it undergoes a period of testing with practitioners and will be in use by the end of September.

## **7. The Local Offer**

- 7.1 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 now includes a specific financial offer setting out very clearly what care leavers can expect to receive as part of their support package.
- 7.2 There were some recommendations made by government advisor, Mark Riddell, at the end of 2021 following a visit to Thurrock. These recommendations are being considered alongside the outcome from a piece of consultation work with some of our Care Leavers attending university. We are seeking to explore what recommendations could be added to our current Local Offer to strengthen the support we are able to offer across the board taking into consideration value to the care leaver cohort alongside cost to the local authority. The aim is to have as effective a local offer as possible within the resources available.

## **8. Education**

- 8.1 Data in relation to engagement of our Care Leavers in education and employment shows that the Covid 19 pandemic had a significant impact. We are working hard alongside colleagues from the inspire youth hub to recover from this and ensure that care leavers need, 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. Performance**

- 9.1 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.
- 9.2 Timeliness of Pathway plans continues to be an area of focus. Since July 2021 85% of pathway plans undertaken in the after-care service have been completed within timescale – this is slightly above the current target of 80% however it is recognised that there is room for improvement. In July and August 2022 over 90% of plans have been completed within timescale.
- 9.3 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 consistent over the last twelve months with Thurrock staying in touch with over 90% of care leavers. It should be noted that we do have a cohort of long term historical missing UASC where we have no means to contact, and this does impact on this area of performance. Nevertheless, this is very good performance.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/young-people-leaving-care/when-you-leave-care>

## **10. Reasons for Recommendation**

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

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

11.1 None

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

12.1 None

## **13. Implications**

### **13.1 Financial**

Implications verified by: **Michelle Hall**  
**Senior Management Accountant**

In 2021/22 Headstart Housing spent approximately £0.972m on accommodation with support. In this financial year the contracts for these providers have ended and the young people have been transferred to Adults Social services to prepare them for independent living.

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

### **13.2 Legal**

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

The Local Authority 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. This Act also require the Council to publish its Local Offer for care leavers.

The Local Authority must have regard to the statutory guidance on this duty. Applying corporate parenting principles to looked-after children and care leavers ([publishing.service.gov.uk](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)).

The duties to care leavers are set out in the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, associated regulations and statutory guidance DfE

(publishing.service.gov.uk). The Council is under 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.

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.

### 13.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Rebecca Lee**  
**Team Manager - Community Development and Equalities**

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.

Happy otherwise to verify subject to the report writers willingness to agree the small changes. As an aside, I advise a CEIA for both the Statement of Purpose and Joint Housing Protocol if they haven't already been completed by the service.

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

None

### 14. **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>.



**15. Appendices to the report**

- None

**Report Author:**

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Children's Services