

25th January 2024		ITEM: 8
Corporate Parenting Committee		
Education and Employment for Care Leavers		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-key	
Report of: Kate Kozlova-Boran, Head of Service, Employability and Skills, and Luke Froment, Service Manager, After Care		
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		

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 are invited to consider agreeing a target of 70% of Care Experienced Young People to progress into Employment, Education or Training following the end of year 11 Studies.**
- 1.2 Members are invited to consider and agree that Thurrock Council takes a proactive role in offering apprenticeship and work experience opportunities as a corporate parent. These opportunities will be brokered via the Inspire hub.**
- 1.3 Members agree to support identifying other potential opportunities for our care experience young people in the wider communities of Thurrock.**

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:
1. 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.
 2. 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.
 3. 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 18-21 (up to 25 if in education) 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, 41% of care leavers aged 19-21 years are not in education, employment, or training (NEET), compared to 12% of all 19- to 21-year-olds.
 - Nationally, just 13% of care leavers enter HE by their 19th birthday, compared to 45% of the wider population.
- 2.4 Thurrock Council works with young people to develop plans and access resources that enables 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.

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a93eb3ae5274a5b87c2fde4/Applying_corporate_parenting_principles_to_looked-after_children_and_care_leavers.pdf Pg8

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 The following provides an overview of local performance

- In September 2023 58.6% of care leavers aged 19-21 were in Education, Employment or Training (compared to 54.1% in September 2022) and against a national figure of 55%.
- In September 2023 63% of care leavers aged 17-18 were in Education, Employment and Training against a national figure of 66%.

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 exciting 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, dependant 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,
- 3.4 There is a weekly panel which focuses on post-18-year-olds who do not have an EET offer and a separate monthly panel focusing on pre-18 year olds. 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.
- 3.5 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.
- 3.6 Inspire meets monthly with the Virtual School to identify support for Children Looked After (CLA) who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) and attends CLA reviews when asked to be part of transition planning.
- 3.7 **The 'Unlock Your Potential' Job club** started in October 2023 with young people from different backgrounds (SEND, Traveller community and Care leavers) attending. The course is run in partnership between Inspire and Thurrock Adult Community College (TACC). The course focuses on teamwork, resilience, budgeting, CV writing and career paths.
- 3.8 The next course in development, 'Preparing for Adulthood', focuses on budgeting and preparing food on a budget. TACC will provide each young person with an air fryer at the end of the course.
- 3.9 All courses are co-produced with care experienced young people and focus

on an identified need; are run in close partnership with the DWP and the Care leaver Job Coach to encourage the young person to attend and commit through their universal credit framework.

- 3.10 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 sessions are run by a qualified musician upskilling the young person for his future career.
- 3.11 Mind' currently use Inspire Youth Hub to deliver wellbeing sessions. The workshops are becoming very popular and growing.
- 3.12 One Care Leaver has completed their Construction Skills Certificate Scheme (CSCS) training with 360 Training, a further six Care Leavers have signed up for the next intake. The incentive is that each young person receives all the appropriate PPE to be able to access and attend work.
- 3.13 Inspire have been working with Make Happen (NCOP) on a programme for Care-experienced young people in Year 9-13 to access HE and Apprenticeships. This included the delivery of workshops (in person and on-line) to care experienced young people and to carers, aimed at increasing participation by highlighting available support and challenging myths. Individual support has also been provided, for example with Student Finance and bursary applications, and with Personal Statements.
- 3.14 Care experienced young people are still experiencing longer term effects of Covid measures, which led to severe disruption to education and employment. The return to traditional exams has led to many students receiving lower grades than expected, and not being able to progress onto desired courses. This may lead to higher drop-out rates. Care experienced young people are also reporting mental health challenges. For some, this is having a negative impact on their ability to engage in EET.
- 3.15 Government financial support to encourage employers to take care experienced young people on as apprentices, and an Apprenticeship Bursary, has 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.
- 3.16 The Aftercare service have been working with commissioners to develop an expectation that an offer is made to provide care leavers with opportunities for education or employment by those who are facilitating services for Thurrock

council. Initial communication has been made with providers to Children's Services to see if they can assist. It is being explored if this can be taken on for all corporate contracts.

- 3.17 The Chair of the Corporate Parenting Committee and the Cabinet member for Education have been consulted regarding the role of members in championing the cause of Care Leavers in Thurrock and the expectation that all parts of the Local Authority will have a formal offer to support the education and employment needs of Care experienced young people. It is proposed that members of this committee review whether this can be raised with all members.
- 3.18 To ensure Care Experienced Young People are supported into Education, employment and or training, it is recommended that a target of 70% is adopted. This is line with national and statistical neighbours performance and is ambitious

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 Members of the committee are sighted on the work done to ensure care experienced young people are supported to access employment education and training.
- 4.2 Members of the committee are able to comment on and provide challenge on the steps taken to reduce the gap between care experienced young people and the general population in terms of education employment and training.

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: **David May**
Strategic Lead Finance

The support and associated costs identified within the report are funded from Children Services core budget or Department for Education additional and specific grants.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Nicola Monerville**
Principal Solicitor – LB Barking & Dagenham

This report provides Corporate Parenting Committee the opportunity to review and monitor the Council's performance as a Corporate Parent and to set future targets.

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 defines the role of corporate parents, in addition to expanding and extending support for care leavers.

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.

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 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.

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)

- Looked After Children

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

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