

19 January 2016		ITEM: 11
Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny 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 Manager: Andrew Carter, Head of Children's Services		
Accountable Director: Carmel Littleton, Director of Children's Services		
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*

Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 To support the development of the programme to enable care leavers to take up ambitious opportunities to take part in education, employment or training.**
- 1.2 To recommend to Cabinet any suggestions for change that may enhance outcomes for care leavers.**
- 1.3 To recommend the activities continue to be delivered by representatives across the Council, as well as making use of external agencies/services.**

2. Introduction and Background

Local Policy Context

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

1. Create a great place for learning & opportunity

National Policy

In October 2013, The Princes Trust in partnership with Catch 22 submitted a campaign report for central Government to create a joined up approach that supports young people's journey from Care into adulthood. The report, 'Access All Areas' requests the following

- positive discrimination for Care leavers;
- an entitlement to services to the age of 25;
- priority access to services for Care leavers up to the age of 30;
- a robust system of information and data sharing between agencies; joint working and personalised and responsive training.

"Finding their Feet, equipping Care Leavers to reach their potential", by The Centre for Social Justice, urges central and local Government to implement a series of recommendations so that young people taken into care do not just survive but thrive in adulthood.

Their report cites the following:-

- 24% of the adult prison population have been in care;
- 11% homeless people have been in care
- 70% sex workers have been in care;
- 22% are teenage parents, with 1 in 10 (age 16-21 years) having a child taken into care (source: ONS) – three times the national average.
- 36% of Care leavers aged 19 are NEET (source: DfE) which is double the national average and has been for the last 10 years.
- 38% of Care leavers aged 19-21 years are NEET (source: DfE).

The report concludes that Care leavers should be in a position when they leave care to contribute to society and lead fulfilling lives.

Local Arrangements

In May 2011, the Learning & Skills team secured funding to create a pilot to enable vulnerable young people to access apprenticeships 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 4 years, the model has changed to improve outcomes for Care leavers into EET but earlier this year, we recognised that we need to consider how to improve outcomes even further. As a result of this 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 the marginalised population's reliance on the benefits system and ensure that we are continuing to ensure that inequalities are addressed at a local level.

Progress to date

At the time of forming this group, 30% of Care leavers (aged 16-19 years) were in EET. At the end of November 2015, 54% Care leavers are in EET, which is above the national average for 2014/15. Our ambition is to reach 70% and place Thurrock care leavers as the best in the country.

The changes have provided opportunities to ensure that we have a strategic joined up approach to data collection and are in a position to report in relation to individual young people. We have taken the opportunity to extend the former Diversity in Apprenticeship review group to include staff from different teams as 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 Thurrock Careers have direct experience of Care leavers and work closely with colleagues from other service areas to support young people into EET. We recognise the challenges that are faced by this group and as a result each experience triggers cross directorate conversation, reallocation of resource, different approaches to enable access into EET.

Developing this strategic approach has sharpened our focus to consider the suitability of every programme we offer/will create in the future 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 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 – this has been written with Care leavers in mind.

Specialised Support

We have 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.

We have an adult programme that targets parents for education into employment via the Children's Centres. Care leavers are actively 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 the Russell Group of Universities to enable a small cohort of gifted students, including gifted Care leavers, to access universities – the 11-19 Strategy Group will be overseeing this work and reporting that to the Thurrock Education Alliance.

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.

If we are successful in our funding application for the Youth Employment Initiative, it will enable additional capacity to tackle some of the below challenges and extend targets for Care leavers to set up their own business.

The Challenges

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

Many Social Workers, FE/HE partners fail to prioritise/contribute meaningful information required for the Pathway Education Plans (a statutory requirement that is already labour intensive).

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.

There remains a lack of awareness by some local partners on how to best support Care leavers in their studies. This has resulted in the appointment of inexperienced teaching staff, class sizes that have too many students speaking

different languages at different levels, insufficient learner progress leading to disengagement and lack of confidence 'in the system'. This additional work is placing pastoral teams under strain.

Young people 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). Many of Thurrock's UAS children do not eat Western food and cannot eat sufficiently well on £7 a week.

The key priority growth sectors are extremely focused on business development. Their staffing structure is very lean which makes investing sufficient time, to Care leavers in the workplace, very challenging.

The employer engagement team has insufficient capacity to dedicate time to target/prepare employers that may be suitable to host Care leavers for work experience/apprenticeships.

Despite this effective, targeted approach, Care leavers continue to face significant challenges. We 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 we can improve 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 actively participate in courses for benefits to continue. The 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.

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

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: **Kay Goodacre**
Finance Manager

This reports 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

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: **Natalie Warren**
Community Development and Equalities Manager

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. Section 17, Risk Assessment, Health Impact Assessment, Sustainability, IT, Environmental

None

Appendices to This Report:

None

Report Author

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Learning & Universal Outcomes, Learning & Skills, School Improvement