

CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & LEARNING POLICY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE: IMPROVING OUTCOMES FOR CARE LEAVERS NOT IN EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT OR TRAINING

Cabinet Member	Councillor David Simmonds
Cabinet Portfolio	Education & Children's Services
Officer Contact	Steven Maiden, Administration Directorate
Papers with report	Improving Outcomes for Care Leavers Not in Education, Employment or Training

HEADLINE INFORMATION

Purpose of report	To consider the Children, Young People & Learning Policy Overview Committee's review into Improving Outcomes for Care Leavers Not in Education, Employment or Training and the recommendations contained therein.
Contribution to our plans and strategies	To improve the lives of children and young people in the Council's care.
Financial Cost	The recommendations set out in this report do not have any direct financial implications.
Relevant Policy Overview Committee	Children, Young People & Learning
Ward(s) affected	All

RECOMMENDATIONS

That Cabinet:

1. Welcomes the report from the Children, Young People & Learning Policy Overview Committee (as in Appendix 1) on the review into improving outcomes for care leavers not in education, employment or training (NEET).
2. Endorses the recommendations of the Policy Overview Committee as set out below.

Policy Overview Committee Recommendations

Identification of Need

- 1) That Council welcomes the Government's commitment to collecting data on care leavers at ages 18, 20 and 21, in addition to age 19 and commits to assessing this

data as a means through which to monitor and improve the impact of the Council's support of care leavers;

- 2) That the Cabinet Member for Education & Children Services requests that officers explore the viability of the Hillingdon Virtual School identifying the Looked After Children (LAC) most 'at risk' of becoming NEET and passing this information on to the relevant social workers, personal advisors and officers in Children's Services;

Communication of Opportunities

- 3) To ensure that LAC and care leavers benefit from the full range of services and support provided by the Council, that the Cabinet Member for Education & Children's Services requests that officers explore new ways of sharing information between frontline staff and other Council departments and report findings back to the Cabinet Member in due course;
- 4) To ensure that LAC benefit from the full range of support offered by external organisations within the Borough, that the Cabinet Member for Education & Children's Services requests that officers undertake research on the full range of externally provided services / opportunities that are aimed at, or could be used by, LAC and care leavers;
- 5) Subject to recommendation 4, that the Cabinet Member for Education & Children's Services requests that officers explore improvements to methods of communication between frontline staff and the Borough's charitable, educational and business organisations and report findings back to the Cabinet Member in due course;

Provision of Service

- 6) To expand upon the opportunities available to this vulnerable group of young people, that the Cabinet Member for Education & Children's Services encourages Members and Council departments to consider where they might be able to provide work experience opportunities specifically to LAC and care leavers;
- 7) To ensure that care leavers who are undertaking part-time courses to develop skills are not obliged to withdraw, that the Cabinet Member for Education & Children's Services requests that officers monitor the implications of the Welfare Reform on care leavers and, where necessary, put measures in place to ensure that these risks are mitigated;
- 8) In order to provide opportunities for education providers in the Borough to share best practice, that the Cabinet Member for Education & Children's Services considers whether officers should facilitate meetings between schools and Higher and Further Education providers; and
- 9) That the Cabinet Member for Education & Children's Services considers whether the issue of engaging with the Borough's schools to offer support to LAC from as early an age as possible, be referred to the Corporate Parenting Board for further consideration and progression.

Reasons for recommendations

In its recent Care Leaver Strategy, the Government recognised that "the quality of support care leavers receive is patchy and that their journey through the first decade of adult life is often disrupted, unstable and troubled". This is a point that has been acknowledged by the Council and this Committee for some time and one that Members wished to address with a view to improving support and levels of attainment for this vulnerable group. In the light of this, the Committee felt that a major review into the area was of vital importance.

Alternative options considered / risk management

The Cabinet could decide to reject or amend some or all of the Committee's recommendations.

Supporting Information

1. Information on the agreed terms of reference for this review and a list of the witnesses that provided evidence can be found at Appendix A of the report itself. In addition to formal witness sessions, the review was also steered by the information provided in a Care Leaver NEET Focus Group which ensured that the findings were based on the lived experience of young people with day-to-day knowledge of services rather than just on the views of service providers.
2. In the light of the information provided, the Committee highlighted three main areas of current service provision in which improvements and efficiencies could be made. These three areas are set out below.
3. **Identification of Need** - The Committee heard that the exact number of care leavers NEET was not known by the Council at any point in time. Data on the destinations of care leavers was collected solely at the age of 19 which left a large gap in the intelligence surrounding this cohort. For the sake of clarity, it should be noted that data has been collected at the age of 19 only in line with Government guidance which was changed at the beginning of 2014 meaning that a wider data collection will be implemented.

Although frontline staff did remain in contact with care leavers and would be aware of their current status, this was not captured to a level that would allow for the monitoring of improvements and changes to the service. Consequently, this aspect of the report explores how better monitoring and passing on of intelligence could be developed in order to bridge any gaps in the current support.

4. **Communication of Opportunities** - It was clear throughout the review that there was need for improvements to the level of communication that took place both between Council teams working with LAC / care leavers and with external organisations providing services to this cohort. It was felt that the improvement of these communication channels would expand considerably the range and take up of opportunities available to care leavers and could, in turn, have a positive impact on their attainment and outcomes. This section sets out what types of opportunities are available internally and externally. Furthermore, it sets out what the Committee believed should be done to communicate these opportunities better to improve awareness and take up.
5. **Provision of Services** - Although the Committee was largely impressed with the range of opportunities and support available to care leavers and LAC, there were three areas that Members wished to highlight for further investigation and development. These were the provision of internal work experience opportunities across Council departments, the

monitoring of the implementation of welfare reforms and the engagement of schools in improving outcomes.

6. The broad scope of this review led to wide ranging recommendations with implications for a number of service areas. In considering their implementation, the following comments are provided by officers for Cabinet to consider:
 - a. **Recommendation 1:** It is envisaged that the role of monitoring this data will be undertaken through the Performance & Intelligence Team. Officers currently monitor and report on data from 19 year old care leavers which can be expanded to include this wider age range. It is likely that this data will be reported variously across the Council but it will, as a matter of course, also be reported to the Corporate Parenting Board and the POC itself in their regular LAC and care leaver performance updates.
 - b. **Recommendation 2:** During the course of the review, officers advised the Committee that the Virtual School was likely to have intelligence on LAC at risk of going on to become NEET later in life. It is proposed that officers from the Virtual School report this information to the relevant parties to ensure that these children are adequately supported and exposed to the full range of opportunities for skills / experience development set out within the report. This recommendation should have no impact on a related report on this Cabinet agenda in respect of the School Improvement Service, as it relates purely to good information flow.
 - c. **Recommendations 3-5:** A major step in achieving these three recommendations has already been taken in the form of the review itself. As can be seen from the report, a wide range of opportunities have already been explored that could be taken up to the benefit of LAC and care leavers. Further research and the modelling of better methods of communication will be undertaken by officers in the Children & Families Team.
 - d. **Recommendation 6:** Should the Cabinet Member wish to pursue the development of internal work experience opportunities, it is proposed that the initiative could be promoted to departments through senior management meetings, all-staff emails and team briefings. Departments able to provide such opportunities would be put in contact with relevant officers from the Policy & Performance and Children & Families teams.
 - e. **Recommendation 7:** The details of Welfare Reforms and the implications for care leavers undertaking study whilst on benefits are not yet known. Officers from the Children & Families and Policy & Performance teams will be monitoring developments closely. Once a fuller picture is available, officers will propose measures to ensure that LAC and care leavers are not adversely affected for further consideration by the Cabinet Member for Education & Children's Services.
 - f. **Recommendation 8:** Meetings would be co-ordinated through the Education Team and with relevant officers in Children & Families. It should be noted that the Council has a changing relationship with the Borough's schools and that it is no longer possible to require them to attend or engage in such meetings. Consequently, any such meetings would have to be done on a voluntary basis and may have to seek engagement on a longer term basis.
 - g. **Recommendation 9:** Officers in Democratic Services will ensure that the necessary business is referred on to the Corporate Parenting Board, if agreed.

Financial Implications

The recommendations set out in this report do not have any direct financial implications.

EFFECT ON RESIDENTS, SERVICE USERS & COMMUNITIES

What will be the effect of the recommendations?

As is suggested by the title of this report, the recommendations contained here have been drafted in order that outcomes for care leavers are improved. In the immediate term, it is hoped that this group of vulnerable residents will benefit from better levels of support and a wider range of opportunities to get into employment, education or training.

However, these recommendations have also been proposed with a view to improving outcomes for future generations of LAC and care leavers more generally. By increasing the work experiences, educational and apprenticeship opportunities available to care leavers currently NEET, it is expected that this will necessarily lead to improvements to other vulnerable groups using these services.

Consultation Carried Out or Required

The Committee heard evidence from a wide range of witnesses, further details of which can be found at Appendix A of the report itself. In order that Members were informed of the issues facing LAC and care leavers on a day-to-day basis as well as some of the more strategic issues, a small number of representatives from the Committee attended a focus group with a Hillingdon care leaver.

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Corporate Finance

Corporate Finance notes the recommendations and concurs with the financial implications set out above.

Legal

In relation to care leavers, the local authority has significant obligations which may continue until the child reaches the age of 21 years. Duties to care leavers can include the provision of financial support, advice, assistance and accommodation. There are no other significant legal implications arising out of this report to bring to Cabinet's attention.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

NIL