

For General Release

CROYDON COUNCIL

REPORT TO:	Corporate Parenting Panel 14 January 2015
AGENDA ITEM NO:	7
SUBJECT:	Report on Care Leavers, Employment, Education and Training
LEAD OFFICER:	Paul Greenhalgh, Executive Director, Children, Families & Learning
CABINET MEMBER:	Councillor Alisa Flemming, Cabinet Member for Children, Families & Learning
WARDS:	All
CORPORATE PRIORITY/POLICY CONTEXT: Corporate Parenting	
FINANCIAL IMPACT: No financial impact of this report	
FORWARD PLAN KEY DECISION REFERENCE: No	
1. RECOMMENDATION	
1.1 To note this report	

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 This report has been requested for the Corporate Parenting Panel for information about the Employment, Education and Training (EET) performance of our care leavers. The Corporate Parenting Panel previously received a report on EET for care leavers in January 2014.

3. CONTEXT

- 3.1 The LAC Leaving Care Service currently supports 729 care leavers aged between 18- 25 years. This is the largest number of care leavers in London and one of the largest numbers of care leavers nationally. In this cohort of 729 care leavers, **558 (76.2%)** are in education, employment or training (EET), and **171 (23.5%)** are not in any kind of education, employment or training (NEET). The total number of care leavers in suitable accommodation is **700 (95.6%)**. We are required to report annually to government on the EET performance of care leavers aged 18, 19 and 20 years. There are 500 care leavers in these age groups, of which **366 (72.8%)** are EET and **134 (26.6%)** are NEET. Nationally there are 30% of

care leavers who are NEET and Croydon's performance is slightly better than the national average. The number of our care leavers in University in 2014 is 116, a large increase from the last year's figure of 69. Nationally there are 6% of care leavers at university and Croydon's performance at 16% is significantly better than the national average.

- 3.1.1 As can be seen, Croydon's EET performance is in line with national averages in some respects and considerably better than national averages in some respects, but it is fully recognised that the only satisfactory performance will be to have every care leaver in EET for whom this is possible. As a good corporate parent we want to support every care leaver to access their preferred choice of education, training or employment in order to maximise their life chances. Key to achieving this are the relationships that are built and sustained with the care leavers by their social workers and personal advisers and the quality of Pathway Plans. The Leaving Care Service is formed of four units and employs a total staff of 5 managers, 1 Consultant Practitioner, 7 social workers and 21 personal advisers. There is an average of 26 care leavers for each social worker and personal advisor.
- 3.1.2 Personal advisors are not qualified as social workers but they work with care leavers to support them in continuing with their education, and by making referrals to different agencies for support in training, apprenticeship and employment. The personal advisors establish on-going contacts with colleges to support care leaver attendance and they make referrals to the floating support service, to ensure that care leavers are supported into some kind of education, training or employment. Personal advisors contribute to the Pathway Plan, which are reviewed and updated every six months by a qualified social worker. Allocated social workers and Personal advisors are in regular touch with colleges and organise meetings with tutors if there are issues regarding attendance, behaviour or progress. The allocated workers do their best to encourage care leavers to remain in education, and liaise with the Virtual School if there are issues in school or colleges. The Council's 14-19 Participation Officer currently circulates NEET reduction partnership information and allocated workers are able to make referrals to relevant colleges, apprenticeships, training and work programmes.
- 3.1.3 The education section of the Pathway Plan is similarly reviewed and updated every six months and contains information about the care leaver's education needs, chosen career path, ambitions and aspirations, and the Plan is quality assured by our Virtual School, before it is approved by the manager. The Virtual School works with the Leaving Care Service to achieve education needs assessments in the Pathway Plans that are robust, realistic and achievable. The Virtual School also supports care leavers who are in education help to sustain them in continuing education, and also by developing stronger links with education institutions. Our care leavers benefit from the study support groups run by Virtual School in Croydon College and John Ruskin College. These study support groups

are new and it is anticipated that they will help raise the attainment levels of care leavers.

- 3.1.4 The service has commissioned Bluetouch Consultancy to provide a bespoke package of support and help to over 30 long term NEET care leavers with challenging and complex needs through targeted and sustained engagement with these young adults. Of the 30 care leavers with whom Bluetouch has engaged on referral from the Leaving Care Service, 23 (70%) are now in EET. We anticipate improved outcomes for this cohort as they improve their employability skills and gain necessary qualifications. 2 care leavers are currently in custody and Bluetouch will engage with them on their release. The service continues to work closely together with Job Centre Plus, and an Employment Worker from the Job Centre/ DWP is based within the Leaving Care Service and also working together with the Income Maximisation Team, to ensure that care leavers who are on benefits (JSA / ESA) are supported into employment and training opportunities. This partnership with Job Centre Plus began in March 2014 and is making good progress, 7 care leavers have gained full employment, 6 care leavers have gained work experience, 2 care leavers have achieved apprenticeships, 7 care leavers have returned to full time education, and 22 care leavers have accessed either part time education or part time employment.
- 3.1.5 The Leaving Care Service continues to also work in partnership with the Care2Work Scheme from Catch 22, to develop the best employability support to care leavers. This includes working with practitioners and managers to identify the training / employment needs of care leavers, identifying the diverse groups who require additional support, providing staff training, and linking care leavers to the new Catch22 Route to Work programme which provides pre-apprenticeship and employability opportunities. The Leaving Care Service is developing partnership with Drive Forward, which works with care leavers to provide them with career opportunities, particularly care leavers who are mothers and long term NEET mothers and care leavers who have no recourse to public funds (NRPF).
- 3.1.6 Croydon Council has recently made progress towards implementing an apprenticeship and work experience scheme. Croydon has made a commitment through its community strategy to support young people in the borough to find employment, education and training. Care Leavers have also been included in this scheme and referrals are now being made by allocated social workers and personal advisors. This scheme is open to anyone over the age of 16 and hence those care leavers who have left the system can also benefit from this. An initiative just about to be progressed is to provide mentoring to care leavers from employees across the council. The mentoring scheme will be coordinated from the Leaving Care Service and it is hoped that by recruiting mentors widely across the council, more opportunities for work experience, apprenticeships and jobs will be offered to care leavers. Mentors from the council's workforce will enable care

leavers to meet with people who are motivated and aspirational about their careers and can offer direct skills learning to care leavers.

- 3.1.7 The strong partnerships that the Leaving Care Service has established with its commissioned provider Bluetouch and with Job Centre Plus, Catch 22 and Drive Forward and internally with the Virtual school and with the council's Human Resources staff and Housing Strategy staff has led to the creation of the NEET Reduction Strategy Partnership, a monthly meeting of the partners, chaired by the Head of Service to progress actions to achieve improved EET performance. The Leaving Care Service also holds a "NEET to EET Panel" every two weeks chaired by the Head of Service, where care leavers who are NEET are tracked and their allocated workers present complex NEET cases. The aim is to develop actions to help these care leavers who are not achieving their potential. Members of the NEET Reduction Strategy Partnership have recently met with colleagues in Hampshire County Council to learn from their NEET reduction work. The NEET Reduction Strategy Partnership has submitted a preliminary application to the National Grants Prospectus Programme 2015-16 in the care leavers theme, for funding to provide the bespoke EET support package provided by Bluetouch Consultancy to a much larger cohort of care leavers.
- 3.1.8 The Leaving Care Service continues to run the Asylum Group and University Day for care leavers, where guest speakers talk to young people about different aspects of their lives. There are sessions on preparing for interviews, skills needed for employment, information on higher / further education. An 'Achievement Party' was organised for care leavers who did well in the last academic year.
- 3.1.9 The team's Income Maximisation Team continues to work with staff, external agencies and partners to ensure that young people are financed in a way that maximizes all financial entitlements through welfare benefits and other mainstream sources such as student finance. In promoting financial wellbeing and stability of care leavers, the team provides comprehensive financial advice and support service including organising take-up and management of welfare benefits claims whilst minimising financial risks and promoting savings. Other key tasks include implementing legislation into internal systems and procedures, staff training, consultant service to managers and staff on welfare rights and LA financial duties in accordance with relevant legislation; developing savings strategies, dealing with complex claims advocacy; and advocating in discretionary financial decisions affecting former relevant young persons in education. Benefits Casework includes basic claimant support, advocacy, representation, general liaison, claims overpayment resolutions, backdate appeals, reimbursements and key role in recovery of deposits and rent advances. Benefit support officers also provide financial drop-in surgery for young persons, dealing with individual benefits and financial queries including debt management. This support is needed to ensure care leavers have a sound financial base so that they can achieve positive outcomes.

- 3.1.10 Croydon Council promotes Staying Put Arrangements for care leavers to remain with their foster carers until age 21 where this is consistent with their needs and agreeable to both the care leaver and the former foster carer. Report on the new regulations and requirements came to the Corporate Parenting Panel in July 2014 This provision enables stability for the care leaver and promotes better outcomes.

3.2 CONCLUSION

- 3.2.1 With the above strategies, joint partnerships and projects in place, and with constant support and guidance provided to each care leaver from the allocated social workers and personal advisors, we are confident that we can continue to increase the number of our care leavers in EET. No single agency or service can achieve this alone. It is a corporate parenting responsibility for us all. The NEET Reduction Strategy Partnership is a very positive coming together of agencies to assist our care leavers.

3.3 CASE STUDIES

3.3.1 From the DWP worker:

I have been working with TN since June of this year. I referred him to DWP work experience which he started at Purley JCP. He only continued this for a few days and decided he didn't like it. I referred him to LNK which he attends weekly. He is back living with his Mother which gives him a bit of stability. He is not confident in applying for jobs, and I spend a lot of time supporting him. He was successful at SBWA for Waitrose and will need to complete a few job search sessions with them, and hopefully secure employment with Waitrose.com. I have recently referred him to BELs as I feel he needs an intense job search support.. .

I have been working with AT since September of this year. He is looking for office work. He has done work experience at Thornton Heath JCP which I had excellent feedback. He attend a Youth event and was referred to BT Traineeship, he is continuing to do this as is making excellent progress with a view to be working with them.

3.3.2 From Bluetouch – Apprenticeships for Care Leavers:

KPMG were introduced to Bluetouch Consultancy by Paul Chadwick, Head of Service in April 2014. Bluetouch Consultancy selected appropriate Leaving Care candidates to apply for Business Admin & Graphic Design apprenticeships for October 6th 2014 start. Bluetouch prepared them fully on: building confidence and self-esteem, body language, telephone interviews, personal branding & presentation, interview techniques, researching KPMG. Further to effective telephone screening, 5 Care leavers were invited to attend an invitation day at KPMG, Canary Wharf. They were accompanied and supported by Ian Willard (Bluetouch Consultancy). For all parties, the day proved a great success “the excitement, energy and buzz from all the young people as we left was fantastic. It was so inspiring to be able to tap into their new-found positivity and optimism. Please thank everyone that participated – the young people

all said how nice you all are. Those committed will be sending their applications off early next week.”

Ultimately of the five eventually interviewed, having been ably prepared, one Business admin position & 2 Graphic Art apprenticeships were offered. Remarkably, the two Care Leavers offered Graphic positions both had criminal records as Youngsters but this obstacle was overcome. The other two Care Leavers were considered over-qualified and offered recommendations to re-apply for other KPMG positions.

“The communication and close partnership work between KPMG, Bluetouch and From Care2Work has demonstrated that to successfully create pathways into employment for care leavers it is vital there are three key elements. Firstly someone to be the main point of contact to recruit and prepare suitable participants. In this case this was provided by Ian Willard of Bluetouch Consultancy using LNK as resource. Secondly an organisation that provides staff training that can reduce the anxieties of staff within the organisation. Thirdly an organisation that has a flexible approach to their set entry requirements making allowances for those that can demonstrate the key qualities required.

3.3.3 **Tricia Madden, Head of Business Support, KPMG**

Ian recruited and prepared the young people for a successful information day at KPMG. It is notoriously difficult to encourage care leavers to attend information days and with KPMG being based in what could be construed as an intimidating corporate setting, the obvious key to the success was Ian’s direct involvement in making sure the young people were able to attend. It was clear that the young people had knowledge of the opportunities available and had an interest in KPMG. This was evident by how they conducted themselves in front of the employer and actively engaged in the session. This is difficult to achieve and in my opinion is likely to be as direct result of recruiting the correct young people.

Jethro Picton (From Care2Work)

3.3.4 **From Personal Advisors – MA:**

I was introduced to MA after he had completed a year at John Ruskin College on Creative Media Level 2 IT Course, further to moving from Nigeria. He had not enjoyed the experience and urgently sought employment. MA has great inter-personal skills and a friendly, obliging personality. His ambition was to travel and he therefore took into consideration our suggestion that a career in hospitality was his potential “passport”. I took him to Big Hospitality Conversation at City Hall, South Bank where he excelled and impressed. He was at ease in conversation with industry leaders (CEO Baxter Storey, CEO Whitbread) and committed to pursue a career in London. Further to an induction at Hilton Olympia with the hospitality charity, Springboard, MA attended daily classes in central London, working both back & front of house. This week, MA secured a full-time apprenticeship with Intercontinental Hotel, Park Lane. He writes:

“Well right now am doing a 4 weeks job experience in the kitchen at Intercontinental Hotel, Park Lane hopefully this will lead to me getting a job. It’s not really what I wanted but it’s all hospitality and it will help me to my next step in life. Which is being a cabin crew. It’s my dream job. Thank you very much. “

The employer writes:

“MA is doing very well. From speaking to him he is happy and is learning, which is the key thing for his development. Our Executive Sous Chef has given me some very good feedback about MA. They are going through a very busy period in the kitchen at the moment, so cannot afford to carry any passengers and MA is pulling his weight.”

3.3.5 TO

TO completed BSc Business Management 2:1 at Plymouth University in February 2014. Although a Croydon Care Leaver, she was living out of borough in Thamesmead and was finding it difficult to get on the work ladder. Whilst on JSA, she attended our work-readiness course at LNK and we made an application for positions at KPMG. She was unsuccessful and became increasingly more frustrated to find a position that maximised her educational qualifications. The cost of travel and the pressure to find work led to us liaising closely with her JSA Advisor to avoid the threat of sanctions.

“I was first introduced to Ian at the LNK by my social worker from the (Care Leaver Team). Ever Since I have met Ian, things have been different for me. Ian and Monique have arranged several work opportunities and have been so helpful in getting me into work whilst I improve my skills and knowledge to surge my employability.”

We were able to find her some work experience which truly reflected her skills and massively improved her confidence. TO takes up the story....

“Recently, I completed a 3 weeks work experience with Croydon Business Improvement District, which was an amazing experience that I thoroughly enjoyed as well as gaining invaluable skills. With this experience I am hoping to find a permanent position in HR/ Marketing, in line with my degree. I also wants to further my study into doing a PG course in HR in order to develop more understanding of the field and to make myself more attractive to prospective employers.”

4. FINANCIAL AND RISK ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS: None

5. COMMENTS OF THE COUNCIL SOLICITOR AND MONITORING OFFICER None

6. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPACT: None

7. EQUALITIES IMPACT: None

8. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT: None

9. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPACT; None

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BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS: *None*