

5 January 2021		ITEM: 10
Corporate Parenting Committee		
Aftercare Report		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non Key	
Report of: Naintara Khosla, Strategic Lead CLA		
Accountable Assistant Director: Joe Tynan, Assistant Director Children's Social Care and Early Help		
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director Children's Services		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

This report provides Members of the Corporate Parenting Committee with an update about the service provision by Thurrock Aftercare Service to young adults who have previously been in the Local Authority's care. The Aftercare Service transferred to Children's Social Care in July 2019 and sits within the remit of the Strategic Lead for Children Looked After and Aftercare.

Ofsted undertook an inspection of Thurrock's Children's Services in November 2019 which provided independent scrutiny confirming that overall the experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers were graded 'Good'. Ofsted noted there was a need to ensure better partnership working with Adult Social Care colleagues to support transition arrangements for Care Leavers, and particularly for those with additional needs.

Practitioners who are working with Care Leavers are committed to their young people and there are areas of good practice; there is a strong commitment to further enhance the service, and an Aftercare operational plan will be implemented to identify areas for further development.

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 This report provides Members of the Committee with an overview of the services provided to our young adults. Members are asked to note the contents of the report and the service provision to young adults in the Thurrock Aftercare Service.**

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 Thurrock Council acts as 'Corporate Parent', providing the care, services and concern for children and young people that is expected of all good parents. As Corporate Parent, we are aspirational for our children and young people in care, supporting them to achieve in all areas of their lives and ensuring a smooth transition to adulthood. Thurrock is committed to listening to children and young people, involving them in decision making and service development. As Corporate Parent, we seek to improve the opportunities for young people and ensure they have the best possible care in both their childhood and as Care Leavers.

What it means to be a 'Care Leaver' (including those young people who have been Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children - UASC):

A care leaver, as defined in the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000¹, is a person who has been 'looked after' or 'in care' for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14, and who was in care on their 16th birthday.

A young person's status as a Care Leaver can be divided into the following:

- Eligible child - a young person who is 16 or 17 and who has been looked after by the local authority/health and social care trust for at least a period of 13 weeks since the age of 14, and who is still looked after.
- Relevant child - a young person who is 16 or 17 who has left care after their 16th birthday and before leaving care was an eligible child.
- Former relevant child - a young person who is aged between 18 and 25 (or beyond if being helped with education or training) who, before turning 18 was either an eligible or a relevant child, or both.

Under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, Local Authorities are required to provide all eligible Care Leavers with a Pathway Plan and both a personal adviser and ongoing financial assistance. In May 2013 the government published further guidance for Local Authorities with regards to arrangements for facilitating Care Leavers to "stay put" in their foster placements after they reach the age of 18 years. 'Staying Put' arrangements enable young people to remain with their former foster carers to help ensure that they are adequately prepared for adulthood.

What it means to be an Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Child

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and young people have often faced significant hardship, trauma and separation from family members before arriving in this country. Arrival is by various means and methods, from families

¹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/35/contents>

paying agents to facilitate their travel by aeroplane or car, or by being smuggled, trafficked and hidden in vehicles or shipping containers.

On arrival, Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and young people often have no identified parent or family member providing care or support, making them extremely vulnerable to exploitation, trafficking, offending and ill health. The Local Authority is responsible for undertaking an assessment to understand their age and circumstances; provide care for them as Children Looked-After and subsequently to provide Aftercare support.

Legislative changes have placed additional responsibilities upon Thurrock Aftercare Services, including the duties within the Children and Social Work Act 2017. Section 3 of the Act requires Local Authorities to appoint a Personal Adviser for Care Leavers (who request one) up until the age of 25, regardless of whether the young person intends to pursue education or training. The Local Authority also has a duty to carry out an assessment of the young person's needs and to provide the necessary advice and support. Further, there is an expectation that the Local Authority publishes its 'Local Offer', detailing how it can meet its responsibilities to Care Leavers. Thurrock's local offer is in place and a review and consultation with Care Leavers is planned for June 2021.

The Homeless Reduction Act 2017 places a duty on Local Councils to prevent and relieve homelessness. There is increased housing support to young people supported by Aftercare Service, from Head Start Housing and Thurrock Housing Department. The 'Housing Offer' to Care Leavers has been updated with the Joint Housing Protocol 2020, ensuring good partnership working with clear pathways for young people to access housing, as well as ensuring they are prepared for their tenancies.

Transition to Adulthood

We want to ensure young people are effectively supported during their transition from childhood to adulthood, so they are fully prepared to participate in their local communities. As some Looked-After Children and Care Leavers have additional needs, there is a need for strong partnership working with colleagues in Adult Services, to ensure positive transitions for vulnerable young people leaving care. The Preparing for Adulthood team (PFA) is under the umbrella of Adult Social Care. The service offers all young people aged 14 to 25 years (with special educational and care planning needs) a professional to advise the young person and their parents or carers about options and opportunities for the future. The Joint Protocol between Aftercare and Preparing for Adulthood Team is being finalised; this Protocol seeks to improve communication and joint working. It will promote good transitional arrangements, as there will be a shared approach to implementing care packages, including specialist supported accommodation.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 Care Leavers

Table 1 Thurrock Care Leaver Population

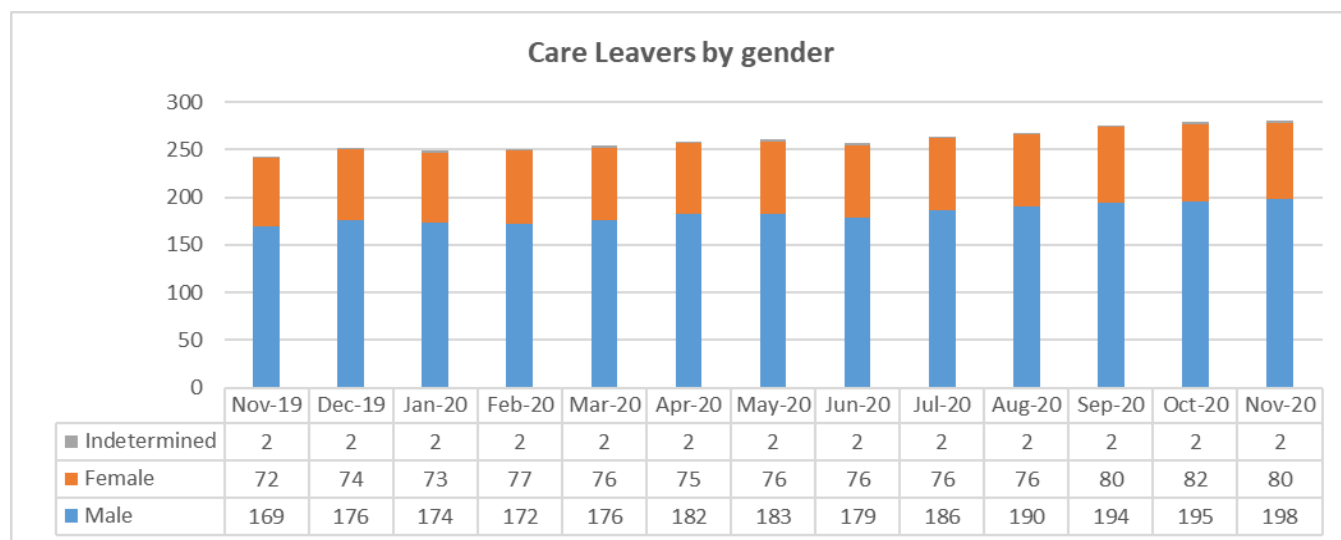
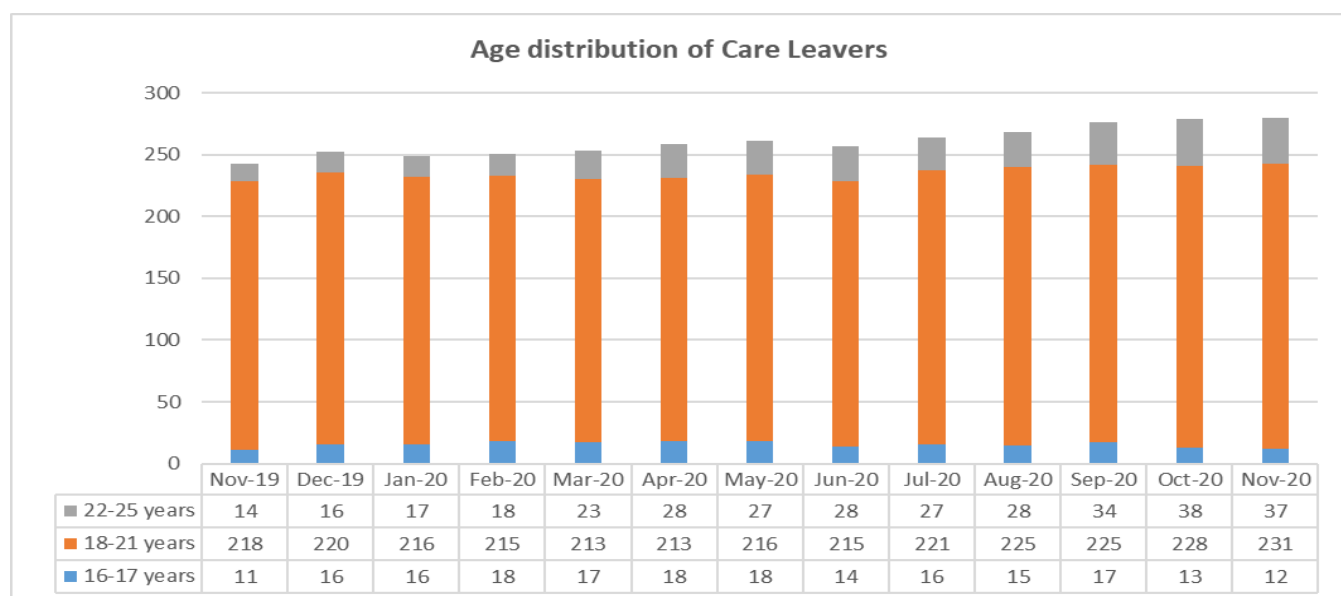


Table 2 Age of Care Leaver Cohort



As of 30 November 2020, there were a total of 274 Care Leavers (open cases) aged between 16 and 25 years. Young people aged between 16 – 17 years remain Looked-After and have both an allocated Personal Advisor and a Social Worker. There has been an increase of 17 Care Leavers in the period November 2019 to November 2020. Thurrock’s UASC numbers remain steady as there is an Eastern Region Transfer Scheme in place. Local Authorities have an allocation of UASC of 0.07 of the total number of Children

Looked-After; in Thurrock this equates to 28 UASC who are Looked-After. We currently are meeting the requirements of our 0.07 allocation.

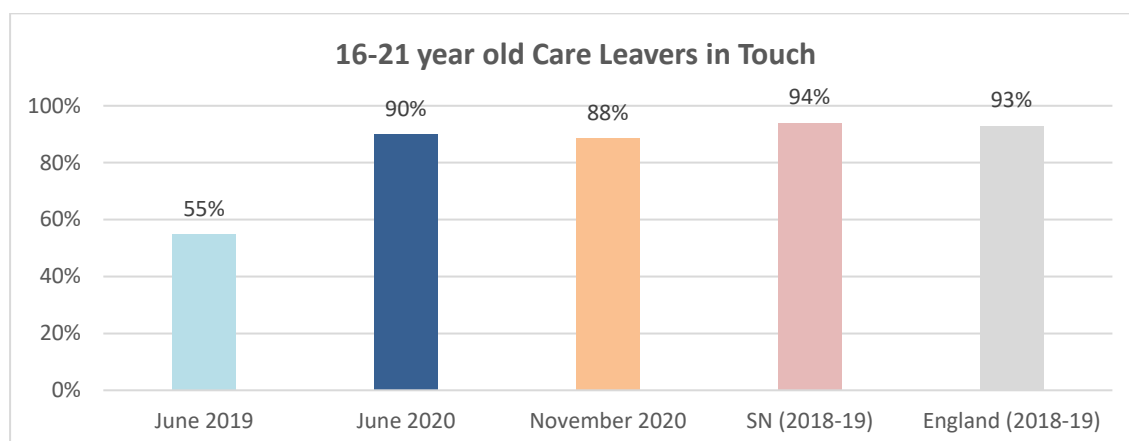
This report provides a summary of the Care Leaver cohort and the relevant data.

In Touch

Local Authorities are expected to stay in touch with Care Leavers and provide statutory support to help the young person transition to living independently. The In Touch record for Thurrock has been reflecting an improving trend. In November 2019, the In Touch record for all Care Leavers aged 16-25 was 85.2% and in November 2020 this increased to 90.1%. The trajectory of improvement has been consistently over 90% since May 2020.

In Table 3 the cohort of Care Leavers referenced are those aged between 16 to 21 years which is the data provided to the Department of Education and allows for comparison to statistical neighbours and to the England average. This is an area where continued focus should support improvement so Thurrock is in line with statistical neighbours and the England average.

Table 3 16 - 21 year old Care Leavers In Touch



Pathway Plans

Pathway Plans being completed in timescales have been on a trajectory of improvement. In November 2019 the completion of Pathway Plans (for the total cohort 16-25 years) in timescales, was at 42.0% and in November 2020 this was at 86.3% which equates to six Pathway Plans completed out of timescales. Four of these were within the CLA service where they cannot be completed in timescales due to a glitch in the reporting system; there is a plan for this to be remedied. Two plans were out of time for those Care Leavers over the age of 18 years. This is overall good performance.

Suitable Accommodation

The majority of Thurrock Care Leavers aged 16 - 25 years are in suitable accommodation. In November 2019 this was 82.8%, with a slight increase to 89.1% in November 2020. There is a good Offer to Care Leavers, supporting them to access suitable housing. Twenty-one Care Leavers are not recorded as being in suitable accommodation; these are made up of young people who do not wish to be in contact with the service, and long-term, missing UASC. This cohort is recorded as not being in touch, or in education, employment and training.

Table 4 Care Leavers aged 16 -21 in Suitable Accommodation

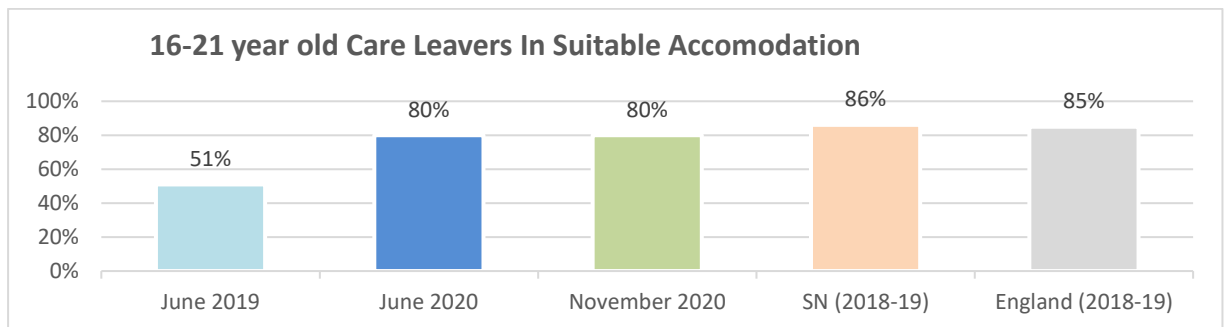
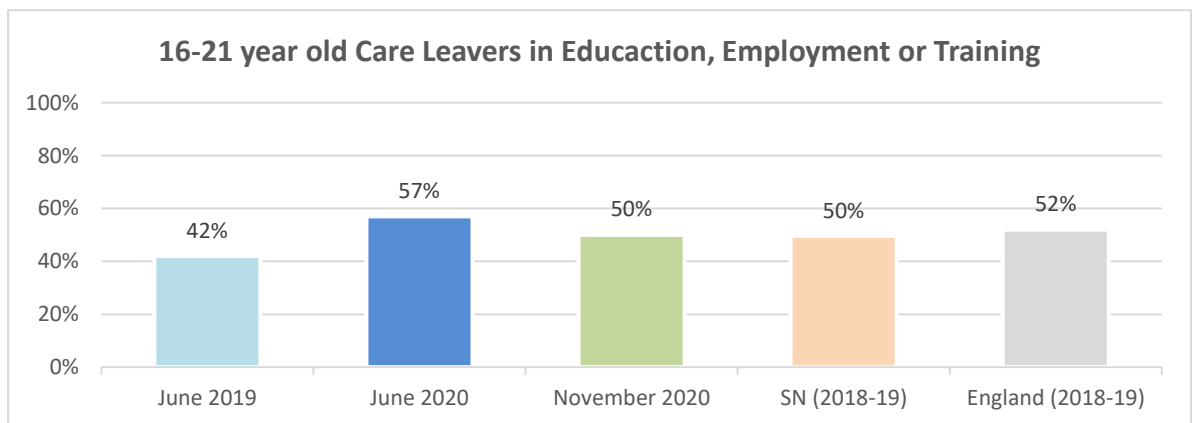


Table 5 Education, Employment and Training Opportunities for Care Leavers



We are reviewing the needs of our Aftercare population to ensure they have the opportunities necessary for ongoing education, training and employment. The November 2020 data for the total number of Care Leavers (age up to 25) not in education, employment or training is 49.8%, with no significant change in the last 3 months. A working group is linked with Inspire to review individual young people, their work placement needs, and their individual profiles are being developed. There is a close alignment between the Aftercare Service and the Inspire Youth Hub, a partnership which aims to bring about improvements in the number of young people in education,

employment and training. The On-Track Thurrock Programme continues to offer a bespoke programme to ensure that Care Leavers can access education, employment and training. The offer of one-to-one support from the Inspire Hub is continuing for both emotional wellbeing and employment advice.

Thurrock offers access to the Prince's Trust programme, which enables young people to build their confidence and have access to apprenticeship opportunities so they can engage in the local communities in which they live.

3.2 General Update on Activities and Support for Care Leavers

Through the pandemic there has been a focus on the wellbeing for Care Leavers and particularly their mental wellbeing. The Wellbeing Offer was launched during Care Leavers' week, 27 October 2020. The offer includes WhatsApp groups, mindfulness sessions and Zoom meetings. The Inspire Youth Hub is open for direct one-to-one sessions, as well as virtual sessions to support young people. The information and service offer to young people is provided with a monthly newsletter (Appendix 1). The Aftercare Service is supporting vulnerable young people in a variety of ways to stay connected, keep them informed and to reassure them of the availability of services.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 Members of the Committee are updated and aware of the Aftercare Service Offer to young people who are Care Leavers. Members to note the performance and the services, including the Wellbeing Offer, provided to Care Leavers.

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

- 5.1 Care Leavers are consulted on the service provision and the Wellbeing Offer with a monthly newsletter and Zoom meetings.

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 6.1 The work undertaken with Care Leavers, as noted above, is set within the statutory expectations which are also aligned with Thurrock priorities of People, Place and Prosperity. The work within the Aftercare Service supports our Care Leavers to access the opportunities, including work and education, provided by Thurrock and its community.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **David May**
Strategic Lead Finance

The report outlines the statutory expectations for Care Leavers that are delivered from core budget provision.

7.2 Legal

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

The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 amends the Children Act 1989 and sets out the Local Authority's functions in relation to children leaving care.

The Local Authority must have regard to the corporate parenting principles in the Children and Social Work Act 2017 when carrying out its functions in relation to Looked After Children, Relevant Children and former Relevant children.

The Corporate Parenting principles are:

- (a) to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people;*
- (b) to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings;*
- (c) to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people;*
- (d) to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners;*
- (e) to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people;*
- (f) for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work;*
- (g) to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.*

7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**
**Community Engagement and Project
Monitoring Officer**

The Aftercare population includes Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children whose needs are met by the Children Looked After Service and the Aftercare Service. This cohort of young people have particular needs which are addressed through the work of the Personal Advisors in the care leaving service. The Personal Advisors ensure young people have their immigration needs met through legal representation and liaison with the Home Office.

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

- None

8. **Background papers used in preparing the report**

- None

9. **Appendices to the report**

- Appendix 1 - Care Leaver Newsletter

Report Author:

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