

4 January 2022		ITEM: 9
Corporate Parenting Committee		
National Care Leaver Advisor's Visit		
Wards and communities affected: ALL	Key Decision: N/A	
Report of: Naintara Khosla, Strategic Lead, CLA		
Accountable Assistant Director: Janet Simon, Assistant Director Children's Social Care and Early Help		
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy Corporate Director Children's Services		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

Mark Riddell MBE is the National Implementation Adviser for Care Leavers appointed by the Department for Education and was invited to Thurrock to conduct an external review of Thurrock's After Care Services on 26 and 27 October 2021. Mark is an advocate for Aftercare Services and supports Local Authorities to imaginatively fulfil and extend their corporate parenting responsibilities.

During his visit to Thurrock, Mark Riddell met with senior leaders including the Chief Executive, Corporate Director for Children, Lead Member for children and the Leader of the Council. He also met with young people, and staff members.

In his feedback, Mark Riddell reflected on the positive Council wide approach to Corporate Parenting that Thurrock undertakes; he also suggested some areas for innovating our Corporate Parenting approach. This report outlines the feedback and recommendations made by Mark Riddell towards an outstanding Care Leaving Service.

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 Members of the committee note the feedback provided and the recommendations for Corporate Parenting Committee made by Mark Riddell.**
- 1.2 Members note the work of Officers to progress these recommendations.**

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 Mark Riddell visited Thurrock in October 2021 and met with the Aftercare Service operational staff and the senior leadership team. He was also able to meet with our young people who are Care Leavers. Following the visit Mark provided feedback on what he considered was going well in the service and, the areas where Thurrock could develop and enhance their offer to young adults as they leave care.

2.2 In his letter¹ to the Chief Executive Mark Riddell stated:

‘I was very impressed by the leadership and management approach that was ambitious, aspirational and I got a real sense of passion and commitment to have a better offer for care leavers across the whole service area. What I also saw and heard was many examples where I felt the service was ‘pitching’ above good and that the corporate approach and in particular the team approach stood out with workers who were highly responsive to the needs of care leavers’;

He also noted

‘The Corporate Parenting Board has strong buy-in from elected members and a few key partners.’

2.3 Mark Riddell outlined principles for Thurrock to consider which would enhance the Aftercare offer to young adults. Mark Riddell’s promotes a Corporate Parenting approach that is active, participative and challenging, with elected Members ‘championing’ specific areas (Housing, IT, Adult Services) to enhance the life chances and opportunities afforded to care leavers.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 Mark Riddell has set out a detailed suggested framework for Thurrock to implement which will create the conditions for the Aftercare Service to become great. He proposes the development of a ‘Champion Model Approach’ which introduces themed Boards, with a strengthening of Board Membership.

3.2 The Champion Model Approach supports elected Members championing a particular themed area: Health, Housing, Employment, Education, Training (EET) voice of the young people. The Members have the opportunity to meet with operational staff and also care leavers to fully understand their journey and story that will inform policy review and change. The Champion Model approach proposes up to eight Boards a year, with the potential for one Board celebrating the successes of a multi-agency approach to the local offer and another Board looking at the data and outcomes for Care Leavers. In respect of understanding the voice of care leavers in the Champion Model

¹ Mark Riddell letter to Lyn Carpenter National Advisor Feedback Letter Thurrock 26 and 27 October 2021

Approach Thurrock could consider employing a Care Leaver Champion/Ambassador who would involve care leavers and represent their views and assist in driving forward the offer from each partner agency.

- 3.3 He suggest that adopting a Champion Model approach would mean a refresh of the membership of the Corporate Parenting Board to ensure that all key partner agencies are represented at the Board level. This would include Department for Work and Pensions, Housing and Health formalising the offer from these agencies would also benefit Care Leavers.
- 3.4 Whilst there would be representation on the Board from these agencies, key work streams would be progressed; which would be reported to the Board. These areas include:-
 - a) To develop a 'whole council' offer by organising an event to co-ordinate Council departments being asked to make an offer to care leavers.
 - b) To hold an event with key partner agencies to detail and formalise their care leaver offer.
 - c) Undertake work with the IT department to develop and create a digital offer to care leavers, ensuring this is part of the Local Offer.
- 3.5 Mark Riddell outlines examples and outcomes from the focus on these areas through the themed Boards as follows:-
 - a) A Health offer to care leavers 18yrs to 25yrs, the offer would be specific about the support to care leavers and would be pitched below the threshold for an adult service or adult mental health service intervention. The health offer being supplement for example with free prescriptions, financial support for dental prostheses and glasses.
 - a) An emotional wellbeing worker could assist with supporting care leavers with their mental health.
 - b) Consider a Care Leaver Champion or Ambassador being employed, to provide insight into the voices of care leavers.
 - c) A joint Housing and DWP Protocol which outlines the offer to Care Leavers.
 - d) Review the Council Tax Exemption so that it includes young people up to age 25 and to include young people who are working.
 - e) A Leisure Pass for all care leavers with a Plus One.
 - f) A 21yrs to 25yrs offer which includes UASC, care leavers entering and leaving custody and young parents.

- g) A university offer that is above the statutory offer, allowing support for post graduate study.
- h) Additional capacity to reduce caseloads further and/or create avenues for career progression in the leaving care service.
- i) To review paperwork that PA's have to complete.
- j) To consider a 'strengths based' approach to Pathway Plans that incorporates the use of scaling questions.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 Members to comment on and the suggested proposals outlined by Mark Riddell.

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

- 5.1 Mark Riddell met with young people who were Thurrock experienced care leavers. They were very positive about the relationships with their Personal Advisors (PA) and they make a real difference to young people. They would like to have the potential for going out more with their PAs to have lunch or coffee. These opportunities for young people would be part of a regular parent / child relationship and replicating this sense of normality would enhance the positive relationship that young people have with their PA.

They raised some issues in relation to areas that could be improved for Care Leavers:-

- a) The university offer was an area young people felt strongly could be improved and support young people, not only for the degree course, but to enhance the offer for post graduate study.
- b) There was a desire for more information for young people who were parents themselves; how and where to access early help parenting support.
- c) Increase the choice of accommodation options
- d) Publicise the Local Offer, ensure this is well known promoting it whilst young people are still looked after and before they becoming Care Leavers. The local offer to include gym membership opportunities, and driving lessons.
- e) Increase Employment, Education and Training (EET) opportunities so they match with the interests of young people.

The Aftercare Service will be addressing the areas for development to ensure feedback from young people is taken into consideration and there is a clear response to the issues they have raised.

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

6.1 Mark Riddell's proposals outline a cohesive Council approach to Corporate Parenting which challenges all Council departments to become focussed on providing an improved Corporate Parenting offer to Care Leavers.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: Implications To Follow

Financial implications of all the recommendations will need to be fully reviewed and costed.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Lindsey Marks**
Deputy Head of Law

There are no legal implications directly arising from this report.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Natalie Smith**
Strategic Lead Community Development and Equalities

Thurrock has an inclusive approach to all its Care Leavers with an offer that ensures all young people are treated with respect, their individual diversity needs are considered including LGBTQ, race, ethnicity, religion, nationality and culture.

7.4 Other implications: Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, and Impact on Looked After Children

Improving the offer to Care Leavers will support better outcomes ensuring there is a focus on Council work experience, employment opportunities, stability in the accommodation offer and a review of the university offer.

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):

- N/A

9. Appendices to the report

- None

Report Author:

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