

REPORT TO: Employment Learning and Skills

DATE: 7 July 2009

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director Children and Young People

SUBJECT: Employment Opportunities for Care Leavers

WARDS: All

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To provide PPB members with: -

- An update on the current situation for Care Leavers
- Information about proposals for the future

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- (1) PPB note the contents of the report
- (2) PPB members provide support for the proposals
- (3) PPB members consider how they may support the Employment Policy for Care Leavers

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 Although there has been some improvement, it has been known for some time that young people who leave care are over represented in the NEET figures in Halton.
- 3.2 Connexions data shows that in November 2006, only 20% of 19-year-old care leavers were in some form of education, employment or training. In November 2007, the figure was 39% and by November 2008, it was almost 45%. Whilst an improvement, this does not compare favourably with over 62% of the general 19 year old population who are in EET in Halton.
- 3.3 Research and experience show that young people who are in care often under achieve compared with the general population. A significant proportion of care leavers have few or no qualifications. They may have experienced a number of both placement and school moves and their low self- esteem and mistrust of adults can act as a barrier to enjoyment of school and educational success.
- 3.4 As a Corporate Parent, Halton Borough Council recognised some time ago that additional support was needed for care leavers to help them to access and sustain education, employment and training opportunities.
- 3.5 Additional resources were put in place to support the education of children in care through the Education Support Team. The focus of this service is to help young people to achieve their full potential within the education system. The service will be further developed to provide additional focus on 14-19 year olds.

- 3.6 A Connexions worker is now based within the Young Peoples Team to provided targeted planning and support for individual care leavers who are NEET.
- 3.7 A Community Support Worker, with responsibility for promoting and supporting care leavers to access EET opportunities, has also been introduced to YPT to work alongside social workers, Connexions, education and other professionals.
- 3.8 A National Employability Project for Care Leavers has recently been introduced and will seek to work with national and regional employers to influence regional and local capacity to offer employability opportunities to care leavers.
- 3.9 Some years ago, the Council also implemented an Employment Policy for care leavers in recognition that, as a major employer in the Borough and as the Corporate Parent of care leavers, there was a responsibility to help and support these young people into employment.
- 3.10 Unfortunately, the Employment Policy has had little impact. In the past 12 months, 3 care leavers have received employment training or experience. One young person went on to become an Administration apprentice within the Children and Young People Directorate. None of the others went into full time or permanent jobs. No care leavers are employed full time and permanently by the Council.
- 3.11 In the past barriers to the success of this policy appear to include: -
 - Difficulty in identifying and agreeing suitable matches of opportunity and young person
 - A lack of priority or preference offered to care leavers when an appropriate post becomes available
 - Some Human Resources policies and processes
 - Better communication with Unions
 - Limited take up from the Council and the various Directorate's
 - Limited support for and understanding of the needs of care leavers in the work place.
- 3.12 The lack of success of this policy is disappointing and calls into question the viability of having such a policy in place. Some local authorities (eg Liverpool, Warrington, Stoke on Trent) appear to have overcome the barriers that Halton faces and have successfully offered employability opportunities to care leavers. The national project will report on the good practice that is evident elsewhere and will report back to local authorities on how some of the barriers can be removed. Feedback suggests that these local authorities have simply taken the 'just do it' approach and with Senior Officer and Elected Member support, progress has been made.
- 3.13 Members of the ELS PPB may wish to consider the implementation of the Employment Policy to ensure that care leavers are given every opportunity to find employment in the Council, and eventually with LSP and Children' Trust partners.

- 3.14 Temporary funding (NRF) has in the recent past, been used to help care leavers to be prepared for employment and to experience paid work experience. This will now be incorporated into the Apprenticeship Scheme.
- 3.15 In order to improve the situation in Halton, a dedicated apprenticeship scheme for care leavers has been agreed. This will involve 10 apprenticeships being made available over the next two years, within the Council and partner agencies and involving a range of employment areas.
- 3.16 A temporary post will be created to provide the co-ordination necessary to achieve this. The post-holder will work alongside colleagues in Enterprise and Employment, Connexions and Young People's Team to identify placement opportunities and to then provide the support to both employer and young person. Written terms of reference for both the apprenticeship scheme and the support networks will be vital for the scheme to be effective and to ensure that all participants are aware of their own and each others roles and responsibilities.
- 3.17 Each employer who participates in the apprenticeship scheme will be asked to ensure that the young person undertakes an accredited qualification. It is hoped that, at the end of the apprenticeship, there will be permanent jobs made available to the young people involved. At the very least, the experience of the apprenticeship should increase the young persons employability prospects.
- 3.18 The apprenticeship scheme commenced in April 2009 and the dedicated post will be in place by the end of June. Two care leavers are currently in apprenticeships as apart of this scheme.
- 3.19 The full costs of the apprenticeship scheme will be met by WNF monies and some external funding until 2011.
- 3.20 The Government's Care Matters agenda and the recent Children and Young Person's Act 2008, emphasise the role that Corporate Parents should play in securing the best possible outcomes for Children in Care. This includes helping them to secure appropriate employment.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The proposals are consistent with National policy, the Care Matters Agenda, and Halton's Multi-agency strategy for Children in Care.

5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The proposals are consistent with the Council's responsibility as a Corporate Parent and with the aims of the NEET Strategy Group.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children and Young People in Halton. The proposals are consistent with ensuring the best possible outcomes for children in the care of the Council and in promoting their life chances.

6.2 **Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton**

The introduction of the apprenticeship scheme and the revision of the employment policy will contribute to care leavers having better access to employment and will enhance their skill and qualification levels.

6.3 **A Healthy Halton**

Improved access to EET opportunities will contribute to the emotional and physical well being of care leavers.

6.4 **A Safer Halton**

It is anticipated that greater involvement in EET activities will raise the aspirations and achievements of care leavers, providing constructive and long-term options.

6.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal**

Increased numbers of young people engaged in EET will enhance their own and the boroughs economic environment.

7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 There are no significant risks associated with the proposals.

8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 Improving the life chances of children in care and care leavers through better access to EET opportunities will contribute to ensuring that the needs of this vulnerable group are met.

9.0 **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
Children in Care Strategy		Christine Taylor
Care Matters	DCSF website	Christine Taylor
Children and Young Persons Act	DCSF website	Christine Taylor