

CABINET - 26 MAY 2015

Education, Training and Employment Strategy: Putting Looked After and those Leaving Care First

Report by Director of Children's Services

Introduction

1. The strategy has been developed in response to what the national picture tells us about the life chances of looked after children and those leaving care; what the local data tell us in Oxfordshire; recommendations from the 2014 OFSTED inspection in Oxfordshire; internal reviews; learning from past practice; and most importantly young people in Oxfordshire have contributed their ideas and experiences.
2. The strategy, a copy of which is at Annex 1, outlines the key priorities for Oxfordshire to improve the life chances of these vulnerable groups and to ensure they access the highest quality education, training and employment opportunities. It also supports the council to meet its corporate parenting responsibilities.
3. At Annex 2 are examples of actions within the wider action plan that will underpin the strategy.

Financial and Staffing Implications

4. The resources to deliver the strategy are all within the existing budgets for Children, Education and Families and Environment and Economy and there are no additional staffing implications.

Legal Implications

5. There are no legal implications and the strategy assists the council to meet its statutory duties.

Equality and Inclusion Implications

6. The strategy is predicated on the importance of ensuring equality of access to education, training and employment for our most vulnerable children and young people in care and who are leaving care. The views of children and young people have helped to inform the development of this work. The report does not raise additional equality issues.

Communication and Partnership Working

7. The successful delivery of the strategy requires a high level of commitment throughout the council and strong partnership across wider external partners.

RECOMMENDATION

8. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to approve the strategy**

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Background papers: None

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Education, Employment and Training Strategy: Putting Looked After Children and those Leaving Care First

**Children Education & Families
Environment & Economy**

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1. Summary

Care Leavers in Oxfordshire report that Education, Employment and Training (EET) can give *“aspiration, a reason to ‘look up’ and motivation and provides meaningful engagement towards economic independence”*.

The strategy sets out the pathway for improving the EET participation and attainment of Looked After Children and Leaving Care (LAC/LC), enabling them to reach their full potential. The strategy and related action plan aim to make significant improvements and reach aspirational targets by 2017.

The strategy has been developed in response to what the national picture about the life chances of LAC/LC; what the local data tells us in Oxfordshire in comparison with their peers; recommendations from the OFSTED safeguarding inspection in Oxfordshire; internal reviews and learning from past practice. Most importantly, young people in Oxfordshire have contributed their ideas and experiences.

The successful delivery of this strategy requires a commitment throughout the council and strong partnership across wider external partners.

2. Vision

Our vision is that all young people over 16 who are looked after or care leavers will be engaged in Education, Employment or Training commensurate with their ability and aspirations, and be making significant progress towards recognised career ambitions.

In order to achieve this Vision, all professionals involved in supporting LAC/LC need to focus on the timely provision of appropriate services and pay special attention to the key transition points in a young person's journey.

3. Objectives

- By the age of 21, the achievement of LAC/LC is in line with the overall cohort (*Schools and Learning Service*).
- 100% of LAC/LC aged 16-18 years participate in learning and compliant with their Raising Participation Age duty (*Schools and Learning Service*).
- 85% of care leavers 18+ are in education, employment or learning (*Schools and Learning Service*).
- The destination of 100% of LAC/LC is known post 16 and these are tracked to 25th birthday (*Children's Social Care*).
- All LAC/LC 16 – 19 who are NEET receive regular support (every 30 days) to move into EET (*Schools and Learning Service*).

- All LAC/LC up to their 25th birthday who have been NEET 3 months or more receive targeted support to support their move to EET (*Schools and Learning Service*).
- All professionals working with care leavers are clear about the range of opportunities available to young people and know how to get the specialist knowledge needed to guide them (*Children's Social Care*).
- All LAC/LC receive high quality Careers Education Information Advice and Guidance in schools or college from school years 8 – 13 (*Schools and Colleges/Children's Social Care*).
- 22% of care leavers in year 14 move into higher education and sustain their courses in line with their peers (*Schools and Learning Service*).
- There is sufficient local provision for learning, training and employment and providers understand the general needs of LAC/LC and the specific needs of those young people with an Education, Health and Care plan (*Economy and Skills*).
- All care leavers are accommodated in housing suitable for their needs that provides a stable base from which they can access EET (*Children's Social Care*).

4. Why We Must Take Strong Action

4.1 Local Oxfordshire drivers

Closing the Gap - LAC/LC are less likely to obtain good GCSEs. For 2013 leavers passes at A* - C for English and Maths for the overall cohort is 54.6% and for LAC/LC, 7.7%.

13% LAC eligible for 6 months for Pupil Premium obtained 5A*-C GCSEs incl. English and Maths compared with 15% nationally only 6% eligible for 12 months for Pupil Premium obtained 5A*-C GCSEs incl. English and Maths compared with 12% nationally.

LAC/LC are far more likely to be Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). In February 2015 3% of the 16 – 19 cohort were NEET compared with and 20.3% for LAC/LC.

LAC/LC are less likely to remain in learning. In February 2015, for the general cohort 82.2% of young people in school years 12- 14 were 'in learning' whilst for LAC/LC this was 68.8%.

LAC/LC are for less likely to be compliant with the Raising Participation Age (RPA) duty to participate in learning up to their 18th birthday. In February 2015, 91.6% of the overall age group were participating in learning whilst for LAC/LC this was 77.8%.

LAC/LC are more likely to have additional vulnerabilities. November 2014 data shows that 42.7% of LAC/LC, 16years - 25th birthday, have an SEN statement or Education, Health and Care plan and 3.1% are young parents.

At 10 January 2015 there were 373 care leavers in Oxfordshire aged 16 to 25, 71 of these are Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC).

In May 2014 Ofsted highlighted that the *"Proportion of care leavers who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) has increased and is significantly higher than the proportion for all young people in Oxfordshire"*.

4.2 National drivers

LAC/LC are four times more likely to have a mental health disorder (National Care Advisory Council).

LAC/LC are five times less likely to achieve five good GCSEs, eight times more likely to be excluded from school and less likely to go onto University (National Care Advisory Council).

One in five homeless young people are care leavers (DfE 2007).

Children who go missing and/or are in care are at a heightened risk of sexual exploitation (Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre 2011).

Care Leavers are four times more likely to commit suicide in adulthood (ITV 2013).

A third of children, young people and adults who died in custody between January 2011 and December 2014 had been in care or living away from family ('Stolen Lives and Missed Opportunities' Inquest and Barrow Cadbury Trust Report March 2015).

Statutory duties (see appendix 1).

5. **What Young People tell us...**

Young people recognise the importance of education and learning and it has been identified as a key priority by the Children in Care Council (CiCC):

"Importance of EET as this is what gives aspiration, a reason to 'look up' and motivation".

"EET as important protective factor in future life, provides economic independence, meaningful engagement".

Key issues identified by Looked After Children and those Leaving Care:

While at school

- Ensure young people know who to go to for support, including meeting the designated teacher for looked after children;
- Support young people to be active players in their education plan, including helping them choose their GCSE options and career path;
- Encourage young people to achieve their dreams and aspirations. Celebrate their achievements and give encouragement and support if they don't succeed.

While at college, work placements and apprenticeships

- Ensure young people know who is there to help and support them;
- Ensure staff are aware of confidentiality issues and respond sensitively to any issues;
- Provide learning mentors to support young people and who, with the consent of a young person, will speak to tutors/employers if someone needs help and support;
- Ensure young people have access to computers, if needed;
- Give good advice and help with budgeting, debts and life skills;
- Provide support if it all goes wrong and stay with the young person until they are more settled.

While at work

- Develop good practical opportunities for young people entering employment, such as apprenticeship, taster sessions, etc.;
- Ensure there is practical support and mentors when necessary
- Give good advice and help with budgeting, debts and life skills;
- Provide advice and support, or signpost, so young people can update their CV/Skills for employability;
- Never give up on a young person until they are settled and sorted.

6. Challenges

Oxfordshire is home to internationally acclaimed establishments for academic and educational opportunities and is a vibrant area of growth and employment opportunity. This is not matched in the life opportunities and experience of many looked after children and those leaving care.

- Ensure the educational experience of LAC is aspirational including a positive and proactive multi-agency response from the very outset;
- Ensure children who may come into care later experience the same level of support;
- Increase the range of alternative educational provision to ensure that resources meet a range of need;
- Improve and enhance Careers Information Advice and Guidance and deliver this earlier;
- Provide a wider range of post 16 provision.

7. Opportunities

- Oxfordshire's initiative to make it the most Foster Friendly County in the Country creates an opportunity to enhance the training and support of Foster Carers to ensure they are best placed to support the best outcomes for their children and young people.
- The re-commissioned Housing Pathway creates opportunities to ensure that housing provision better meets need, providing a solid base for effective learning.
- The investment in edge of care/homelessness interventions, therapeutic support and the new residential provision allows us to keep our most vulnerable closest and build local capacity to support with EET activities.
- The changed statutory duties for schools on Careers Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) provide opportunities to ensure there is a strong foundation for EET support.

- The development of the Oxfordshire 100% Participation Strategy to drive forward improvements in overall numbers of young people in EET.

8. Strategic Priorities

The following priorities have been identified to drive the strategy. These priorities are developed further in the action plan that accompanies this document.

Priority 1: Ownership and Commitment

Aim: To ensure that all key managers, Elected Members and staff in Oxfordshire County Council understand their and others role and responsibilities and the responsibility of others for raising the aspirations and achievement of Looked After Children and those Leaving Care.

Priority 2: Enhancing Data consistency

Aim: To ensure that data is accurate and consistent and that detailed analysis is used to inform actions relating to participation, progression and achievement.

Priority 3: Growing the market

Aim: To ensure that there is a high quality and wide range of alternative education provision and post 16 opportunities for all vulnerable groups.

Priority 4: Preparation for the transition from school

Aim: To ensure better support within schools for LAC during transitions at Key Stages 4 and 5, and at the end of Key Stage 5.
To enhance the Careers Education Information Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) framework and support schools in offering this at an earlier point.

Priority 5: Post-school support

Aim: To ensure support is in place for care leavers once they have left school or college so they are able to take advantage of and sustain learning and employment opportunities.

Priority 6: Targeted Support for Vulnerable groups of LAC/LC

Aim: To put in place targeted support for the most vulnerable groups including those with disabilities and those not participating in learning to ensure they are offered a suitable place in learning.

Priority 7: Sufficiency and accessibility of EET provision

Aim: To develop relevant and appropriate provision that meets the needs of care leavers in the local labour market.
To ensure training providers and employers understand the specific needs of care leavers and the local 'market' has sufficient openings for this group.

Priority 8: Earlier identification of risk of NEET

Aim: To ensure robust processes are in place to track all children looked after and young people leaving care so those at risk of NEET, or who are NEET, are identified at an early stage enabling targeted support to be put in place.

Priority 9: Improve Communication

Aim: To maintain strong links across all OCC services who have a responsibility for supporting LAC/LC to achieve in EET.

9. Conclusion

Our Looked After Children and Care Leavers all need aspiration, a reason to look up and motivation to achieve. Within Oxfordshire they must be able to access the highest quality education, training and employment opportunities. This goal can be achieved by addressing the nine priorities set out in the strategy. Elected Members are asked to endorse these priorities and support the partnership approach which will be required to achieve them.

Appendix 1: Statutory Duties

Local authorities have many statutory responsibilities relating to the education and training of young people aged over 16, including the need to:

- Secure sufficient suitable education and training provision for all young people aged 16-18. (*Education Act 1996*)
- Make support available to young people that encourages and enables them to participate in education and training and make arrangements to identify young people who are not participating. (*Education and Skills Act 2008*)
- Schools to secure independent careers guidance for pupils in years 8-13. (*Education Act 2011*)
- Ensure 16-17 year olds receive an offer of a suitable place in post 16 education. (*Statutory Guidance 2012*)
- Must make arrangements to identify 16 and 17 year olds who are not participating in education or training, i.e. maintain a tracking system. Putting in place robust arrangements to identify young people who are not engaged in education or training or who have left provision enables local authorities to offer support as soon as possible. (*Education and Skills Act 2008*)
- Track the destinations of young people in Years 12 – 14 and up to 25 for young people with learning difficulties/disabilities using a Client Caseload Information System (CCIS). (*Education and Skills Act 2008*)
- Must promote the effective participation in education and training of 16 and 17 year olds in their area with a view to ensuring that those persons fulfil the duty to participate in education or training. (*Education and Skills Act 2008*)
- Identification, engagement and participation of young people with a Learning Disability Assessment. (*Statutory Guidance, March 2013*)

In addition to their EET responsibilities for all children aged over 16, a local authority has further responsibilities which relate specifically to care leavers. These are wide ranging and cover:

- the importance of using the Pathway Planning process to develop career aspirations and ambitions
- the need to work with partners to address the employment, education and training needs of care leavers in the area, including joint work with Integrated Youth Services/Connexions and Careers Advisers
- improving the employability of care leavers, by ensuring they get access to work experience, apprenticeship and other training and employment opportunities
- ensuring appropriate financial support is in place
- supporting placement stability and planning future accommodation needs

(The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations. Volume 3: planning transition to adulthood for care leavers. Revision date: January 2015)

Around 70 per cent of children looked after and leaving care have some form of Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND), and many of these will have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHC). Therefore the *Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years (Department for Education, Department of Health, July 2014)* has particular relevance to this group. The responsibilities set

out under this guidance are broad and cover local authorities, schools and post-16 institutions, including:

- schools to ensure the implications of the child being both looked after and having SEN are fully understood by the relevant school staff
- local authorities must promote the educational achievement of the children they look after, regardless of where they are placed
- post-16 institutions to admit a young person if the institution is named on an EHC plan
- use best endeavours to secure the special educational provision the young person needs, whether or not the students have EHC plans.

Appendix 2: Definitions

All Appeal Rights Exhausted (ARE)	An Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Child whose application, and appeal, for asylum has been refused. They have no legal right to remain in the UK, but as a looked after child or care leaver the local authority continues to have some responsibilities towards them until they return to their country of origin.
Care leaver	Overarching term for young people aged 16 and over, who have been in care for a qualifying period of time and who are either still in care, or have left care. The local authority has responsibility to care leavers until they are 25. Within legislation, the term care leaver is broken down into four different categories: <i>Eligible child</i> <i>Relevant child</i> <i>Former relevant child</i> <i>Qualifying child</i>
Careers Education, Information Advice and Guidance (CEIAG)	Services intended to assist people of any age and at any point throughout their lives to make educational, training and occupational choices to manage their careers. Career guidance helps people to reflect on their ambitions, interests, qualifications and abilities. It helps them to understand the labour market and education systems, and to relate this to what they know about themselves. Comprehensive career guidance tries to teach people to plan and make decisions about work and learning. Career guidance makes information about the labour market and about educational opportunities more accessible by organising it, systematising it and making it available when and where people need it.
Children in Care Council (CiCC)	Oxfordshire's Children in Care Council (CiCC) is a group of children and young people who are, or have been, in care. They help to make sure services are doing the best they can for all children and young people in care and care leavers
Designated Teacher	Each school must have a designated teacher for looked after children. Their role is to ensure that the needs of individual looked after children are met.
EET	Education, Employment or Training
Eligible child	Young person aged 16 or 17, who is still looked after, and meets the criteria for becoming a care leaver. The criteria are that <i>they were in care for a total of 13 weeks or more since they were 14, including some point when they were 16 or 17.</i>
Former relevant child	Young person aged 18-21 who was previously Eligible

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	or Relevant, ie <i>they were in care for a total of 13 weeks or more since they were 14, including some point when they were 16 or 17.</i>
In care	See Looked after child.
Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG)	Exploring ideas & options about post 16 education, employment or training
Looked after child (LAC)	A child aged under 18 who is in the care of local authority. The local authority has a 'Corporate Parenting' responsibility to ensure the wellbeing of the child.
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training. Is used to refer to a young person who is not involved in any of these activities.
Participating (in learning)	A young person is considered to be participating if they remain in learning (in school, college, training or work with learning). Under the Raising Participation Age legislation all young people up to 18 years must be in learning
Qualifying child	A young person who was been looked after between the ages of 14 - 18, including some point when they were 16 and 17 years, but for less than 13 weeks. They are entitled to a limited service from the local authority. Note - if the care period was less than 13 weeks and the child was under the age of 16, they are not qualifying children. Note - if an <i>eligible</i> or <i>relevant</i> child returns home successfully for 6 months, while under the age of 18 they become qualifying children.
Raising Participation Age (RPA)	The age to which all young people in England are required to continue in education or training has increased. The change was introduced in 2 stages: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pupils who left year 11 in summer 2013 had to continue in education or training for at least another year until June 2014 • pupils who left year 11 in summer 2014 or later have to continue until at least their 18th birthday This does not mean young people must stay in school. They will be able to choose from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • full-time education (e.g. at a school or college) • an apprenticeship or traineeship • part-time education or training combined with one of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ employment or self-employment for 20 hours or more a week ○ volunteering for 20 hours or more a week
Relevant child	Young person aged 16 or 17 who is no longer looked after but meets the criteria for becoming a care leaver,

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	ie <i>they were in care for a total of 13 weeks or more since they were 14, including some point when they were 16 or 17.</i>
Personal Advisor	The person from within Children's Social Care who is the lead worker for the care leaver. They have a responsibility to remain in contact with them, offer support, advice, and in some instance financial support, on all aspect of their lives.
Pathway Plan	These are the plans that are developed by the care leaver and their Personal Advisor which set out how the support needs of the care leaver will be met to prepare them for living independently.
Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Child (UASC)	A child aged under 18 who is seeking asylum and arrived in the UK without their parents and other family members. These children become looked after by the local authority.
Virtual School	Under legislation each local authority must have a Virtual Head teacher for looked after children. They lead work within the Virtual School which aims to raise the achievements and aspirations of looked after children by working in partnership with schools.

Annex 2**Examples of Actions within wider Action Plan**

The Education, Employment and Training strategy outlines the key priorities for Oxfordshire to improve the life chances of vulnerable children and to ensure they access the highest quality education, training and employment opportunities. It also supports the council to meet its corporate parenting responsibilities.

An action plan to accompany the strategy is currently being developed. Examples of actions within the action plan include:

1. Ownership and Commitment

- Ensure a strategic group from Children Social Care, Early Intervention, the Virtual School, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and Schools and Learning meets quarterly to review progress and detail additional action.
- Work with the Children in Care Council to identify issues, consider progress and ensure dissemination to looked after children and those leaving care across the county.

2. Ensuring Data consistency

- Create accurate reports from Frameworki for care and pathway plans
- Ensure reports going internally and externally to the Department for Education are consistent across all data systems using Child Care Information Services (CCIS) as the key system for reporting.

3. Growing the Market

- Map the provision that fulfils the identified gaps for looked after children – identify any gaps or barriers to access.

4. Preparation for transition from school

- Ensure discussion with schools about implementation of this agenda in their institution and support them to develop a plan for implementing actions.
- Work with school Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) leads and Designated teachers to understand the need for excellent Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) for looked after children and those leaving Care.

5. Post School Support

- Ensure looked after children and those leaving care are followed up after gaining an Education, Employment or Training (EET) placement and supported to sustain their participation.

6. Targeted support for vulnerable groups of Looked After Children/ Leaving Care

- Provide reporting to show additional vulnerabilities – Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, teenage parents, young carers, homeless etc.
- Ensure links are made with colleagues responsible for other areas of vulnerability – Youth Offending Service, Young Carers etc.

7. Sufficiency and accessibility of Education, Employments or Training provision

- Ensure training providers understand the different needs of looked after children and those leaving care and sufficient provision is in place.
- Work with schools to consider the appropriateness of their sixth form provision given delayed attainment.

8. Earlier identification of risk of Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)

- Ensure all looked after children and those leaving care who are Not in Education, Employment or Training are tracked every 30 days (once a month), and those who are in Education Employment or Training every two months to ensure timeliness of support

9. Improve communication

- Put in place communication links to lessen the potential for looked after children and those leaving care getting different messages from different professionals.