

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Report of Corporate Director for Corporate Services
to

People Scrutiny Committee

9th July 2013

Report prepared by: Tim Row
(Principal Committee Officer)

Agenda
Item No.

**In depth Scrutiny Final Report and Recommendations
Maximising Opportunities for Looked After Children So They Do Not Become NEET Statistics
A Part 1 Agenda Item**

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To seek formal approval to the draft report of the in-depth scrutiny project "Maximising opportunities for looked after children so they do not become NEET statistics".

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the report and the recommendations from the in depth scrutiny project attached at **Appendix 1** be agreed.
- 2.2 That the Chairman of the Project Team be authorised to agree any final minor / typographical changes to the draft report.
- 2.3 That in accordance with Scrutiny Procedure Rule 10 (Part 4 (e) of the Constitution), to agree that the Chairman of the Project Team present the final report to a future Cabinet meeting.

3. Background

- 3.1 The former Children & Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee selected this topic at its meeting on 9th July 2012 (Minute 136 refers).
- 3.2 The project plan was agreed by the Project Team and then the Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 17th September 2012 (Minute 276 refers) with the following objectives:
- To gain an understanding of educational achievements / unemployment rates for looked after children in Southend and how the local position compares to the regional and national picture;
 - To consider, assess and evaluate the effectiveness of the role of the Council as Corporate Parents and suggest (where appropriate) other action or initiatives that can be implemented to support looked after children into gaining employment or training opportunities;
 - To consider and compare what other initiatives are in place within other Local Authorities and identify best practice; and
 - To ensure that the outcomes from the project supports the work already being undertaken as part of the recent Ofsted Inspection.

- 3.3 The outcomes/aims agreed by the Committee were to seek to reduce the numbers of looked after children becoming NEET in Southend, share and highlight best practice and to explore how the Council could better prioritise the looked after children population for opportunities through the Council and the local community by means of work based placed placements and work experience..
- 3.4 The Member Project Team, which was Chaired by Councillor Ann Holland, met on 3 occasions and considered a wealth of evidence, including the details of the current levels of young people who were NEET, including those for looked after children, and how they compared nationally, regionally and with the Council's statistical neighbours. The Project Team also considered how the figures were calculated, the comments made by Ofsted following the outcome of the recent inspection of the Looked After Children Services in Southend and the focus of the Council's work in relation to looked after children not becoming NEET. This information provided the context to the witness sessions and stimulated questions to be asked of the witnesses.

4 Recommendations

- 4.1 The draft scrutiny report is now attached at **Appendix 1**. The report shared with the Members of the project team. The conclusions and recommendations from the project are set out in Sections 5 & 6 on pages 12 and 13 of the report.
- 4.2 Scrutiny is recommended to endorse the following conclusions from the review, for approval by Cabinet:

1	Ensure that the Council as a whole fully understand that Corporate Parents do not just include Members of the Council and Children's Services Staff. It covers all aspects/departments of the Council. The Council as a whole must take the lead in clearly illustrating what a good parent is by identifying and prioritising its opportunities for looked after children and care leavers.
2	Ensure the Pledge to Looked After Children is embedded in all the Council's services and is clearly understood.
2	Consideration should be given to increasing the 'Virtual Head' remit to monitor children/young people up to the age of 18 and not 16 as currently provided.
4	Continue to build on the success highlighted in the Ofsted inspection and monitor the progress of the Action Plan for the areas identified where there is potential for improvement.
5	Consider including the Council's Equality Impact Assessments consideration of the impact on looked after children

5. Other Options

Not applicable.

6. Corporate Implications

6.1 Contribution to Council's Vision and Critical Priorities – Becoming an excellent and high performing organisation.

6.2 Financial Implications – there are no direct financial implications as a result to the recommendations. However, any actions that may require additional finance or have final implications will need to go through the annual budgetary process before implementation, as currently no revenue or capital budgets exist for the proposals.

6.3 Legal Implications – none.

6.4 People Implications – none.

6.5 Property Implications – none.

6.6 Consultation – as described in report.

6.7 Equalities Impact Assessment – it is recommended in recommendation 5 of the final report that consideration be given to including the Council's Equality Impact Assessments consideration of the impact on looked after children.

6.8 Risk Assessment – none.

7. Background Papers

- Project team meeting notes.
- Agreed notes from witness sessions – meetings held on 7th March 2013; 9th April and 14th May.
- Written evidence received from a care leaver
- Other evidence as described in the report

8. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Draft project report