

In-depth Scrutiny Project 2012-13
Final report and recommendations
June 2013

maximising outcomes for looked after children so they do not become NEET statistics



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1. Background

1.1 On 9th July 2012, the Council's Children & Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee decided to undertake an in-depth study to maximise the outcomes for looked after children so that they are given the best chances in life and that they do not become young people who are NEET (not on education, employment or training).

1.2 The Committee was assisted in this work by a dedicated project team comprising: Councillors A E Holland (Chairman), M Assenheim (Vice Chairman), A Chalk, E A Day, R E Hadley, Ann Jones, M R Grimwade, D F Russell and C W Walker

1.3 Officer / partner support was provided by:
Heather Finders (Interim Head of Children's Specialist Services)
Darren McAughtrie (Group Manager, Strategic Commissioning and Early Years)
Tim Row (Principal Committee Officer).

1.4 The aim of the Scrutiny Project was 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.

1.5 The objectives agreed for the study were:

- 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.

1.6 The Committee would like to thank all those involved with the scrutiny project and those who took the time to attend meetings, participate in the event and provide information. This input has helped to enrich the findings of the study.

2. Process

2.1 The Project Team met on three 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.

- 2.2 Appropriate witnesses were identified to give evidence to the project and a series of evidence gathering sessions were arranged. Each session comprised of a presentation by the witnesses followed by an opportunity for questions from Members. Copies of the slides used in the presentations are attached at Appendices 1 (a) –(d). The sessions were scheduled as follows:

Witness Session 1 – 7 March 2013

David Colman – 14-19 Adviser

Fleur Nichols Team Manager – 16+ Leaving Care

Jane Allen – IYSS Operations Manager

Witness Session 2 – 9 April 2013

Veronica Dewsbury – Benefits Manager

Sarah Beales – Virtual Head Teacher (VHT)

Witness Session 3 – 14 May 2013

Diane Keens – Group Manager Family Support - Fostering and Staying Put

Andrew Stallard – Southend Foster Care Council

A care leaver had also been invited to attend this session but, unfortunately, they were unable to be present. However, in their absence, they kindly gave a written submission outlining a first hand account of their experiences and the support they had received to enable her to fulfil their potential at university. This was read out at the meeting and circulated to Members of the Project Team.

- 2.3 The Chairman and Vice-Chairman also attended a meeting of the Looked After Children's Council "Voice4All", to seek their input into the study and hear their views.

3. Findings

- 3.1 The Project Team identified that there over the last few years that had been a downward trajectory in the overall numbers of looked after children in Southend. Table 1 below illustrates the analysis of the looked after children population in Southend for June 2013.

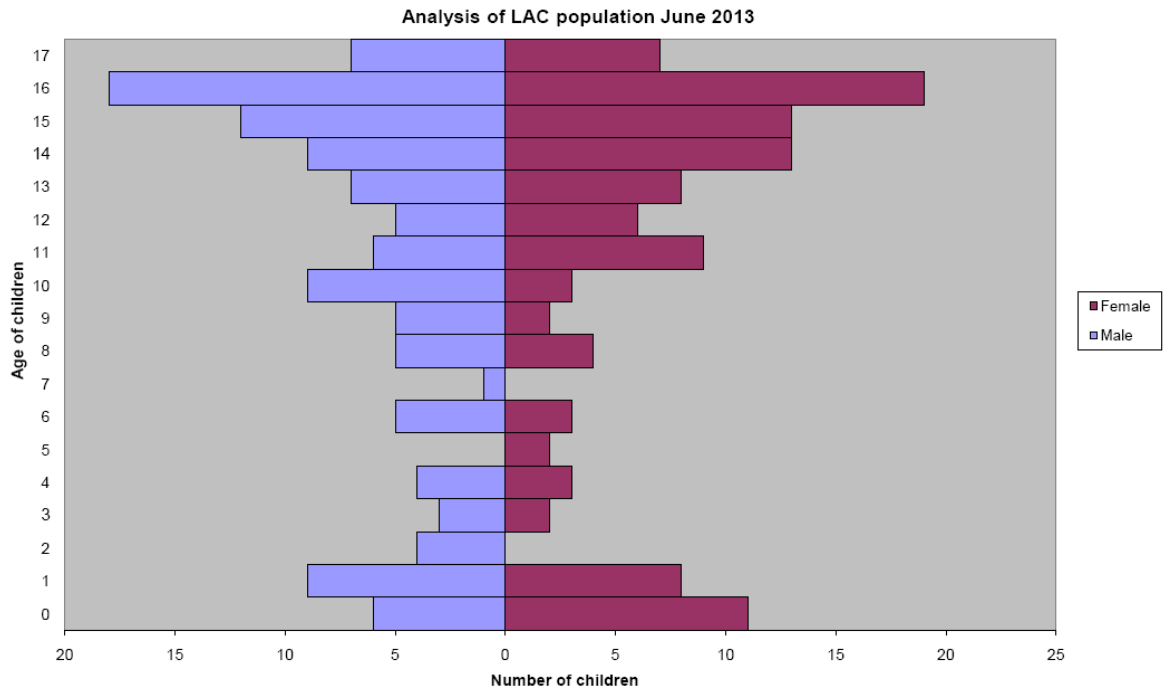


Table 1

3.2 Furthermore, the Project Team noted that Southend were performing particularly well in reducing the number of looked after children that become NEET, in comparison with its statistical neighbours and the national picture. There had however, been a “dip” in the figures in 2010/11 (see Table 2 below). This dip was a result of the cohort for Southend being low and it only took 2 or 3 young people not being engaged to make a significant difference to the overall percentage.

Children now aged 19 years old who were looked after when aged 16 years who are in Education, Employment or Training

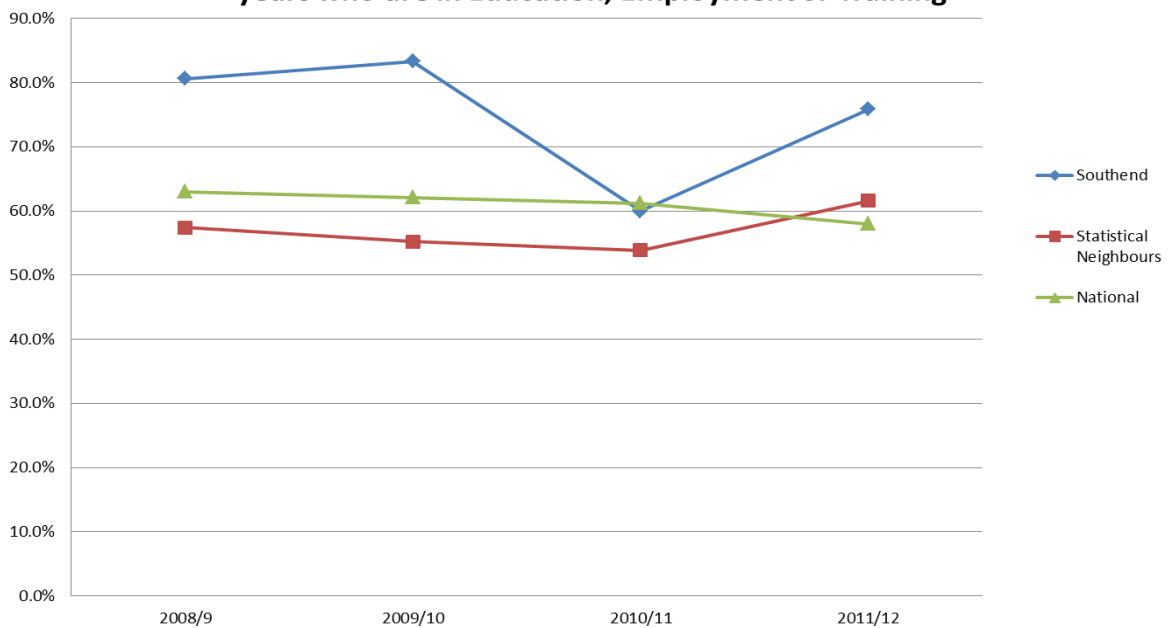


Table 2

3.3 In terms of the statistics for the 2011/12 reporting year it was noted that:

- In the three months to September 2012, there were more than a million (1,027,000) young people classed as NEET in England. This equated to 17% of all 16-24 yr olds. In comparison to 2011, this was a drop of 136,000, or two percentage points.
- Over-18s were the highest represented group, with 19.6% classified as NEET. This figure was down from the previous year (21.5%) but up from 18.6% in 2010.
- When looking at gender, 18.7% of young females were classified as NEET, compared to 15.4% of young males.
- The figure for the East of England was 88,000 (14.6%). The region with the highest percentage of NEET young people was the West Midlands (21.3%), and the lowest was the South East (14%).
- Last year, the figure for Southend was 6%. This was below the Council's target of 7%.
- There are currently 30 looked after young people in Southend in year 11. This equates to 5.4% of the overall looked after population. Although one of these young people is the responsibility of another local authority and is placed in Southend, the Virtual Head in Southend does undertake a liaison role with the school and home local authority.¹
- In the "Leaving Care 16-25" cohort there were 147 young people. In terms of age group, this equated to 43 16-17 year olds, 86 18-20 year olds and 18 21-25 year olds.
- Of the 43 16-17 year olds – 25 are in full-time education, 7 are employed (2 of who are apprentices) and 11 are NEET. Of these, 3 are young mothers, 3 are out of the county, 4 are working with Connexions and 1 is in prison.
- 18 of the 29 looked after young people in year 11 this year had turned 19 years of age, 4 of whom were NEET, 4 were employed, 8 were at college or university and 2 were in training. Of the other 12 approximately half were in education, employment or training.

3.4 The risk factors for becoming NEET at the end of Year 11 include:

- Coming into care during Year 11 or late in Year 10
- Exhibiting very challenging behaviour at school and home
- Disengagement education and other support services which may also result in low attendance, fixed term exclusions, reduced timetable and/or managed moves
- Lack of engagement with Alternative Education provision
- A history of social, emotional and behavioural difficulties
- Mental health issues
- Drug and/or alcohol misuse
- Absconding
- Criminal activity
- Becoming pregnant

¹ This young person is in residential school until the end of 2013 and is accessing education on site.

- 3.5 The risk factors for becoming NEET in Years 12 or 13 before the age of 18/19 also include:
- Lower/under achievement or lack of qualifications at the end of Key Stage 4
 - A desire to leave care early i.e. before 18th birthday
 - Living out of the area post 16 (which may be linked to living out of area pre-16)

3.6 Pledge to Looked After Children

The Council, as an active part of the Southend Children's Partnership, is committed through its pledge to maximising opportunities for it's looked after children. A copy of the pledge is attached at Appendix 2.

3.7 The Virtual School

- 3.7.1 The Virtual School² in Southend promotes the education of looked after children from Reception Year (aged 4/5 yrs) to Year 11 (15/16 yrs) i.e. to the end of statutory schooling age.
- 3.7.2 No child can be considered NEET until the start of the school year following the year in which they became 16 years of age and are no longer of statutory school age i.e. after Year 11. A child's propensity to become NEET however, is influenced by many factors that affect their lives, upbringing and education prior to reaching this stage. These include poverty, family dysfunction, neglect and abuse. Interventions, such as becoming 'looked after', should, over time, serve to reduce the risk of a child becoming NEET later in life. The Virtual School therefore plays an important role in this area.
- 3.7.3 The Key focus of the Virtual School is to narrow the gap between the educational outcomes of looked after and non-looked after children, particularly by the end of Key Stage 4. The team monitors looked after children's attendance and academic progress, and provides practical support and challenge to the schools they attend. The team also works to build capacity among teachers, social workers, carers and school governors to better understand and respond to the specific educational needs of looked after children, and to increase awareness of the strategies that help looked after children learn and succeed at school. This includes the use of the individual pupil premium which schools get for any looked after child. This supports particular aspects of academic development and nurtures particular talents and potential.
- 3.7.4 The end of Year 11 (and statutory schooling) is an important transition point for all children and young people. Children in care are particularly vulnerable at times of transition and change. The Virtual School therefore works with other agencies and services to ensure that looked after children achieve a smooth transition from the end of Year 11 into further education, training or employment, including apprenticeships.

² The Virtual School Team consists of a Virtual School Head Teacher (Part-time: 0.4), an Education Liaison Officer and an Administrative Assistant

(Note: With the introduction of RPA³ from September 2013, until age 17 (later on 18) 'employment' in this context must include an element of part-time education or training.)

- 3.7.4 In particular, through regular monitoring, the Virtual School aims to ensure that looked after children at risk of becoming NEET at the end of Year 11 are identified as early as possible from around age 14, and receive targeted support from the Virtual School's Education Liaison Officer.
- 3.7.5 All looked after children have a qualified Social Worker assigned to them who is responsible for their overall Care Plan⁴ which includes plans for the child's education. This aspect of the Care Plan is known as the Personal Education Plan or PEP. The social worker, designated teacher, foster carer and young person themselves are all involved in the development and implementation of the education plan to meet the child's individual needs. All Care Plans and PEPs are regularly reviewed and updated.
- 3.7.6 The PEP and the targets it contains are seen as an important tool for raising the educational achievement of looked after children and the Virtual School is pro-active in supporting the PEP process. For example, the quality and effectiveness of the PEP targets is currently a key focus for the Virtual School.
- 3.7.7 From their 16th birthday (some time during Year 11), looked after children become known as 'Care Leavers'. From this point on there is an increased emphasis on planning for the time when they will no longer be 'looked after' (between 16th and 18th birthday) and will eventually become intellectually, emotionally and financially independent (usually around the age of 21). The difficult circumstances that some young people start off in before they come into care combined with the challenges of being in care, can often mean that young people who have experienced being in care need additional support and guidance as they transition to adulthood. Southend has a good track record of supporting young people to have high aspirations for themselves and their futures and of providing the support and mentoring these young people need to achieve this. At this time, the Care Plan is incorporated into a "Pathway Plan" which must be in place within two months of the looked after child, or Care Leaver's, 16th birthday (i.e. during Year 11).
- 3.7.8 The Pathway Plan is very important in terms of transition at the end of Year 11. It maps out how, over time, the young person will be supported to develop the specific skills and attitudes they need to live as an independent adult, and the type of accommodation

³ Raising the participation Age - The Government is increasing the age to which all young people in England must continue in education or training, requiring them to continue until the end of the academic year in which they turn 17 from 2013 and until their 18th birthday from 2015. Young people currently in Year 11 and below are affected.

⁴ This contains all the details about how the child will be cared for in the immediate future and also in the longer term e.g. return to family, long-term fostering, adoption and so on.

which can be provided on route to full independence. It also places a strong emphasis on helping and maintaining the young person into education, training or employment, including a focus on catching up of some of the opportunities they may have missed on earlier in the educational pathway

3.7.8 The Virtual School Head Teacher reports to the Corporate Parenting Group each October on the educational outcomes of looked after children at the end of Key Stage 4 and their Post 16 destinations in addition to a termly progress report on the effectiveness of all looked after children's outcomes in line with their PEP targets.

3.7.9 Looked after children for whom there is a care order will remain in care (i.e. retain their 'looked after' status) until their 18th birthday (when all children cease to be looked after), as long as the care order remains in place. If there is no care order, some care leavers feel ready to leave care before their 18th birthday.

3.7.10 All Care Leavers continue to be entitled to a level of support from the local authority however, until they are at least 21, and until 25 if they remain in full-time education. The level of support depends on whether they are under 18 and still 'looked after' (known as eligible), under 18 and no longer 'looked after' (known as relevant), over 18 and under 21 (known as former relevant) or age 21 to 25 and in full-time education (also known as 'former relevant').

3.8 Strategies for ensuring no looked after child becomes NEET where this could be avoided

3.8.1 The Virtual School strives to ensure the best possible educational outcomes for all looked after children by the end of Key Stage 4 (Year 11), raise self-esteem and aspiration among all looked after children and raise the expectations of teachers, social workers, carers and everyone involved with looked after children in terms of what children with experience of the care system can achieve. Through regular monitoring looked after children at risk of becoming NEET are identified as early as possible from around age 14 and receive targeted support from the Virtual School's Education Liaison Officer.

3.8.2 Early involvement during Year 11 with Personal Advisers from the Care Management 16+ Team, who have the expertise and responsibility for developing Pathway Plans, support transition to adulthood and independence for looked after children from age 16, particularly those who have been identified as being at risk of becoming NEET.

3.8.3 Looked after children also benefit from the recently strengthened 'Fair Access Protocol' in Southend, which has been designed to reduce the amount of time that children and young people with challenging behaviours spend out of school or educational provision, whether they are looked after or not.

- 3.8.4 Another strategy currently under development is the Targeted and Specialist Provision for pupils with Behaviour, Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD) which aims to ensure that looked after children have access to improved targeted and specialist provision for pupils in Southend with complex social, emotional and behavioural needs at Priory School and The Renown Centre for Learning.
- 3.8.5 The On-Track team, which evolved from the 14-19 Team in September 2009 with the aim of developing Apprenticeships, Diplomas and Functional Skills with Southend providers, holds weekly sessions at the Focus Centre, where booked appointments are available on Mondays on a 1-1 basis with an experienced and easily approachable mentor. These have now been extended and sessions can now also include CV workshops and CV writing, job applications and mock interviews and identification of possible work based placements. 60 minute mentor sessions are also available on a monthly basis, where representatives from large companies volunteer their time for care leavers, supported by the IYSS team, to give advice and guidance. Between September to December 2012 30 young people have been seen. A Careers Fair was held on 13 March 2013 at the Shoebury Youth Centre providing guidance and support under one roof for employment, education and training opportunities.
- 3.8.6 The following innovative approaches within the CM16+ team illustrate some of the schemes/opportunities in place in Southend to support this vulnerable group:

Oakwolf

The "Oakwolf" Project runs from 22nd April 2013 until 21st October 2013 working with 6 or more looked after children who are NEET between the ages of 16-21 years. The aim of the project is to give them confidence and self esteem, life skills, resilience, practical skills, anger management and a BTEC level 2 qualification after successfully completing the course. This project involves weekly sessions to include:

- Martial arts (where appropriate)
- Mentoring 1-1 sessions
- Leadership & Coaching
- Group discussions
- Scenario based lessons
- Outward bound visits
- Questionnaires & quizzes
- Multimedia presentations

Employability

The aim of this project is to provide the necessary training for looked after children to obtain a BTEC Level 2 Award in Breakaway & Self-Defence. It provides also employment advice including a CV writing workshop and interviewing skills and provides the opportunities for preparation for entry into the security and health and fitness sectors.

DJBaldie

This project provides training in DJ'ing and DJ mixing and includes lyrical writing and multi sports. The course is scheduled for 10 hours spread over a 5 week period. Most of the sessions are made up of group courses however, one has been specifically tailored for a hard to reach individual with mental health issues. The project leads to a formal Open College Network (OCN) certificate in sports leadership.

Turnaround

This project is aimed at raising self esteem and giving young people the skills to move on into full time education, employment or training. This year's programme starts in July 2013 and can take up to 4 young people. It is a year long programme which includes outward bound courses, mentoring – 1-1 for the year and beyond, monthly training and activities and group workshops.

Southend Adult Community College (SACC)

The Council works closely with the College and other local resources to engage looked after children to maximise their opportunities in gaining employment, training or education.

Examples of the courses promoted include

A 12 week Paediatric First Aid Accredited course for young mums (creche facilities provided free of charge) running initially May- June 2013, but will run again later in the year subject to demand.

A one off 90 minute "Cook 4 Life" session led by an experienced chef and teacher focusses on "Healthy eating on a budget". The session is aimed not only to support care leavers moving into independence but as an initial taster for looking at further education catering courses.

The SACC Progression Project is a bespoke 12 week programme for care leavers targeting our long term NEET's, who are some of the hardest to engage. The course introduces young people to work experience whilst providing mentoring and accreditation through local providers. Each week includes:

- 10 hours Work experience
- 10 hours teaching
- Mentoring through the turnaround project for the course duration and beyond
- Job Seeker Allowance compliant
- Residential weekend focused on team building
- Incentives and support in finding work
- Basic Maths & English where required to help raise core level to meet apprenticeship criteria

The first course started in March 2013 involving 6 young people and a further course will start in the early autumn. It has been successful in engaging some difficult to engage young people and had followed on from a request by the young people themselves to

enable them to gain some work experience / work tasters. 6 young people were employed in various different fields such as construction, seasonal work at Adventure Island, local perfume shop, Superdrug, Miller & Carter restaurant (Catering), 1 young person was on an apprenticeship and 1 young person was on the Turnaround programme.

Apprenticeship

There are currently 2 young people on apprenticeships. Many who are NEET do not meet the requirements for level 2 apprenticeships and it is hoped that through the additional Maths and English incorporated into the SACC programme, more of our care leavers will meet the minimum criteria to access apprenticeships through the Council.

University

There are currently 13 young people at University. These young people receive:

- A dedicated personal advisor
- £2000 per year bursary for living costs paid as a weekly allowance
- £2000 bursary for the duration of the course paid as a termly allowance over three years
- Allowance towards accommodation costs in term time and vacations of up to £100 per week
- Up to £200 one off payment for books
- Cost of an annual young persons rail card or coach card
- Mobile phone top up of £20 per term to encourage young people to keep in contact
- Provision of a computer
- £200 for graduation expenses

4 Looking Forward

- 4.1 New legislation means that for the past few years, any care leaver who returns to education whilst under 25 years of age can request support from the Local authority. If their interest in a career path was flagged up in their last Pathway Plan or under special circumstances Southend will support on a case by case basis to help them to achieve.
- 4.2 One such case is a care leaver who is currently being supported by the 16+ team to train as a social worker. A first hand account of her experiences are set out below:

"The support that Southend gives care leavers with education

As a looked after child I found education as a young teenager dull. I had little support from the school, the teachers seemed to have no idea why I kept kicking off or misbehaving and just put me on report. Eventually aged 15 I was taken out of high school and put into the local crown college. This again was not suitable for my needs and I was moved onto Southend college and studied Art, finally something I enjoyed. Looking back I had a number of issues to deal with, isolation, loneliness, lack of belonging, being scared

and unloved. These issues overshadowed the importance of my education and future, I needed someone to believe in me and empower me to do well.

I continued with education at Southend College and worked my way up from an NVQ Level 1 in Art and Design to a NVQ Level 2 in Childcare. During this time I had no idea what I wanted to do. I always said I wanted to be a social worker just so I could show those social workers who let me down how much better at it I could be! But the thought of me attending University was laughable. My school teachers made it very clear I wouldn't become anything!

The Leaving and After Care Team (16+ team now) was my turning point, Ruth Baker was manager at the time and my social worker was the first social worker to genuinely listen to what I wanted. Ruth and the social worker empowered me and believed in me. Ruth encouraged me to complete my childcare course and she agreed if I did then I would receive financial support with applying for a provisional licence and a number of driving lessons. So I completed the course top of the class with distinction. During this time I fell pregnant with my son. Ruth still believed in me and I began to plan my future, I wanted to train to be a youth worker, I started volunteering and I wanted to become something so that my son could be proud of me. When Trevor took over the team this support continued I got into Havering College and I successfully undertook the Diploma in Youth and Community work. This was financed by the leaving care team and I received a weekly allowance which enabled me to pay for childcare and travel to the college, I had passed my driving test during the summer so I was able to drive to college.

I had to study the course part time as I wanted to balance my parental responsibilities with my own aspirations and again the leaving care team understood and supported me to achieve this. I qualified and graduated at the top of my class and became a qualified youth and community worker.

My Final and current goal is to become a qualified social worker and again I was encouraged and supported by the current manager Fleur and Ben (my Personal Adviser). I can truly say that without their support I would not be where I am today. The support I have received has included emotional, educational and financial without this I wouldn't have achieved what I have today. I never believed I would attend University but here I am in my second year getting A's and B's in my assignments and exams. I aim to qualify with a 2.1 a first would be a dream come true but with all my other commitments I am aware this might not be possible.

To end my point is that every young person is unique and that their needs should be assessed on an individual basis. There is no age when a young person should take education seriously I was 19 when I realised I needed to make my own future and I was nearly too late to receive the support I needed to get where I am today. I have received support with my essays from Ben (PA) whom thankfully used to be a teacher so is an excellent proof reader. The financial support has ensured that my son can attend after school clubs and I have enough money for petrol to get me to university and placement. Part time University students are not entitled to student loans but luckily I have a bursary which every social work student gets but without extra support for books etc from the

16+ team I would be lost and unable to complete my course and make a future for my family.

Finally I would like you to think of what support you would offer your own children when they leave home to go into education, then I would like you to think of ways in which Southend can ensure looked after children receive that same support. Every child deserves the opportunity to achieve their full potential and you can make that happen.”

- 4.3 As part of the annual commissioning cycle of small projects to contribute to the partnership priorities, the Success for All Children Group have this year commissioned a local education company to develop and information film for hard to reach communities on the changes to the benefits system. In agreeing to fund this project, we have also asked that the provider works with one of our young people in care or care leaver who have an interest in media to give them the experience on working as part of such a project.
- 4.4 Following the attendance of the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Project Team at one of its meetings, the looked after children’s Council “Voice4All” has now appointed a smaller working party to discuss ideas to provide opportunities for in more detail. Their main idea is to organise a social enterprise month which would include extended work experience opportunities for young people. Local companies/employers would be approached and asked to offer work experience opportunities during this month. Young people could then sign up to this at a launch event. This would help up skill them, give them an insight into employment and at the end there might be potential employment opportunities.

5. Concluding Remarks

- 5.1 The figures show that the vast majority of Year 11 looked after children continue their education in their school 6th Form or at College at the end of KS4. In the last two years, relatively few looked after children were NEET at the end of Year 11 or have become NEET subsequently.
- 5.2 Reducing the need for young people to be looked after and reduce the number of young people not in education, employment or training is one of the key priorities in the Children and Young People’s Plan and it is particularly pleasing to note that Southend is performing well in this regard. This is acknowledged in the Inspector’s report arising from the Ofsted Inspection which notes that “Economic well-being outcomes are outstanding. The Borough ensures that all care leavers have outstanding opportunities to achieve their best and move successfully into adult life. Care leavers have high aspirations to remain in education and training or to be employed due to the excellent range of opportunities provided by schools for vocational pathways and to the borough for providing a wide range of different interventions to support them into further education, employment or training (EET).” The report also states that “Care leavers do access a wide range of interventions to support them in achieving well via further

education, employment or training. High priority is given to looked after children progressing well from their educational starting points, and they are well supported by clear transition arrangements when transferring between schools. Schools receive good support from the looked after children liaison officer.” A full summary of the outcome of the inspection gradings for Southend and the national and regional comparisons are attached at [Appendices 3 and 3](#) respectively.

- 5.3 It is however, important not to become complacent but to recognise and build on the successes achieved and focus on the areas identified by Ofsted where there is potential for improvement. For example, although the excellent work of the CM16+ Team and Virtual School is well documented, the Inspector noted that the role of the virtual head teacher is less well understood and the timeliness of personal education plans (PEPs) is improving but the quality of them remains inconsistent.” An Action Plan to address areas for improvement identified in the inspection has been published and most, if not, all of these actions are already now in place. A copy of the Action Plan is attached at [Appendix 5](#)

6. Recommendations

- 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.
- Ensure the Pledge to Looked After Children is embedded in all the Council’s services and is clearly understood;
- 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.
- 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.
- Consider including the Council’s Equality Impact Assessments consideration of the impact on looked after children.

DRAFT