



Children and Young Peoples Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Apprenticeships for Children We Look After – Interim Report

March 2020

Task Group

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Chair's Foreword and Acknowledgements

Apprenticeships are a key part of the offer for local children. The Children and Young People Services Scrutiny Panel therefore decided to focus on looking at ways of improving access to these crucial opportunities, especially for the children we look after as a Council.

Like many other authorities, St Helens has seen its number of looked after children rise considerably. Over 500 of our children and young people are under the care of the Council. Councillors have a duty as corporate parents to do everything in our power to ensure that children we look after are both safe and have the opportunity to reach their potential.

This includes looking at ways of supporting care leavers into either education, employment or training opportunities as they transition into adulthood. The Task Group welcomes the fact that different Council departments are working together to ensure care leavers are supported in this regard. We were encouraged to see the progress being made through the Ambassadors Programme and the good links being made with local businesses.

After children have left our care, it is vital that the Council, employers and other agencies work together even more effectively to ensure opportunities for our young people to have the best possible chance of success.

However, more still has to be done. A vital next step will be the production and implementation of a strategy that provides consistent support for care leavers to move into education, employment and training. The Council will also need to take into account the Government's recently announced post-pandemic funding for young people.

This interim report is therefore a first step. There is much more ground to cover and we anticipate that the CYPS Scrutiny Panel will continue to cover this topic in 2020/21.

On behalf of my colleagues, Councillors Derek Long, Linda Mussell and Lisa Preston, I would like to thank officers from across the Council who contributed to this report. Their support and dedication to children we look after and our care-leavers should always be recognised and commended.



Councillor Trisha Long
Chair of the Scrutiny Task Group

1. Introduction and Terms of Reference

- 1.1. During the process of agreeing the Children and Young Peoples Services (CYPS) Scrutiny Panel Work Programme for 2019/20, Panel Members agreed to review previous scrutiny work on apprenticeships generally and consider in more detail how the Council could support children we look after to gain, maintain and complete apprenticeships.
- 1.2. The aims and objectives of the review were to:
 - Review previous scrutiny work on apprenticeships;
 - Consider the Council's current offer for children we look after and the support offered to them;
 - Consider the support provided by schools and colleges; and
 - Investigate how employers within the borough can offer support for children we look after.

2. Method of Investigation

- 2.1. The Task Group commenced its review in February 2020. To develop this report, the task group met with various Council officers and considered the previous scrutiny work on apprenticeships; the support offered to children we look after by the Council, schools and college at present; and how employers within the borough could also support children we look after into employability.

3. Background

Apprenticeships

- 3.1. Apprenticeships are full-time, paid jobs which incorporate on and off the job training. There are over 200 different types of apprenticeship currently available in England, through existing apprenticeship frameworks available in 13 broad sector subjects. A successful apprentice will receive a nationally recognised qualification on completion of their contract.
- 3.2. For many years, St Helens Council has been supportive of apprenticeship (and graduate) positions within the authority. The current business administrator apprenticeship is a 12-month learning contract for 16-19-year olds. Apprentices are subject to standard HR procedures – such as the 37-hour working week – and are paid the national apprentice wage of £3.90 per hour. However, due to the Apprenticeship Levy that was introduced in 2017, the length of some learning contracts has been extended to 18 months.
- 3.3. Although apprentices can be recruited throughout the year, opportunities will only arise if there is a suitable role available that will develop a young person, and when a

department/section has the budget available, given that there is no designated budget in each department for apprenticeships. Including salary, on-costs and other associated costs, an apprenticeship costs around £9,000 per year.

Children We Look After

- 3.4. The term 'looked after' has a specific, legal meaning, based on the Children Act 1989. Under this Act, a child (anyone under the age of 18) is looked after by a local authority if he or she falls into one of the following:
- Is provided with accommodation, for a continuous period of more than 24 hours (Children Act 1989, Section 20 and 21);
 - Is subject to a Care Order (Children At 1989, Part IV);
 - Is subject to a Placement Order.
- 3.5. Over recent years, the rate of children we look after per 10,000 under-18 population in St Helens has risen significantly. The rate given below is for the number of children we look after at the end of the financial year and is reported to the Department for Education in the Spring by all local authorities:

Year	Rate of Children We Look After per 10,000 under-18 population
2014/15	113.0
2015/16	112.6
2016/17	117.3
2017/18	120.6
2018/19	126.7

- 3.6. At the end of February 2020, a total of 511 children and young people were in the care of St Helens Council. This equated to a rate of 138.9 children per 10,000 of the under 18 population within the borough. This is substantially higher than the most recently published national average of 65 children per 10,000 population. The number of children we look after rate data is reported to Cabinet on a quarterly basis as the performance indicator CYP-02.
- 3.7. In the 2019/20 Quarter 2 Performance Report presented to Cabinet in November 2019, in the 'Performance in Focus' section of the Protecting Young People portfolio, it was reported that: *"In St Helens the rate of children becoming looked after is impacted by a legacy of poorer practice and planning and we know services have either not been in place or have not effectively responded to escalating concerns."*

Care Leavers

- 3.8. When a child we look after is 15 years and nine months old, they begin to become a Care Leaver, and the local authority (as the Corporate Parent) starts to help them plan the pathway to their future. They do this by completing a Pathway Plan. There are two parts to the Pathway Plan; Part 1 is about what the child needs (leaving care assessment of need), and part 2 is about goals and plans.

- 3.9. The Care Leavers Act states that there are different categories of Care Leavers, each entitled to receive specific support. An overview of the support available is provided on the Council's Care Leavers website <https://www.sthelens.gov.uk/careleavers/support-for-you/what-is-my-care-leaver-status/> .
- 3.10. Many young people who have been looked after by the Local Authority can experience a compressed transition from childhood to adulthood. Nationally, young people who are looked after often have poorer outcomes than those who haven't experienced the care system. They are more likely to experience disruptions throughout their lives which have an impact upon parts of their life such as academic progress. Care Leavers may have barriers that they have to overcome, including setting up their first home, potential exposure to substances, risks around becoming homeless and falling into debt on top of mental health difficulties linked to their childhood trauma. Some Care Leavers may also lack parental/adult guidance to encourage aspirations and successful progression.

Gov.uk Guidance

- 3.11. The latest Government published *Apprenticeships funding in England* document sets out the policy from April 2019 onwards. Within the document, support is outlined for care leavers and those who have a Local Authority Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). The document recognises that those who have previously been in care may need extra support and that this can represent to an extra cost to employers.
- 3.12. Employers who train an apprentice who is aged 19-24 and has previously been in care (or who has an EHCP) will receive £1,000 to help with these additional costs in the same way as the payment for 16-18-year olds.
- 3.13. Employers with fewer than 50 people working for them are able to train at no cost those aged 19-24 who have previously been in care or who have a Local Authority EHCP. These employers are not required to contribute the 5% co-investment; instead, the government will pay 100% of the training costs for these individuals.
- 3.14. N.B. this document was produced under the previous Conservative government. The current administration may amend the funding post-April 2020.

4. Findings

- 4.1. On 7th February 2020 the Task Group invited officers from various Council services to a meeting to discuss how they currently supported children we look after to access apprenticeships and the successes and challenges they face in achieving positive outcomes. Officers who attended the meeting were:
- Dominic Tumelty – Head of Service for Permeance, Care Leavers and CWD
 - Carly Quinn – Futures Team Manager
 - Paul Ross (on behalf of Sarah Platt) – St Helens Virtual School
 - Julie O'Neill – Workbased Learning Coordinator

- Jenny Pritchard – Principal Organisational Development and Workforce Officer
- Cathryn White – Place Delivery Officer

4.2. Officers who were unable to attend the meeting but contributed to this report include Helen Sharratt (CYP Consultations and Review Officer) and Monica Powell (Education, Employment and Training Coordinator).

4.3. During the meeting, officers provided an overview of their role with regards to both children we look after and apprenticeships, with Members asking questions.

2016 Scrutiny Review of Apprenticeships

4.4. In 2016, a Task Group of the Environment, Regeneration, Housing, Culture and Leisure (ERHCL) Scrutiny Panel produced a report on Apprenticeships. This was presented to Cabinet in October 2016. The report set out seven recommendations which were accepted by Cabinet, with actions attached to each. As a part of this Task Group, a review was undertaken to consider how each of the seven recommendations had progressed. A summary is provided below:

4.5. Recommendation 1 - concerned the Council fully preparing for the implications of the Apprenticeship reform to be introduced from May 2017, including the Levy. A report was submitted to Cabinet in March 2017 which set out the Council's preparedness. The then Head of HR subsequently attended a meeting of the ERHCL Scrutiny Panel in April 2018 to provide a further update on the number of apprenticeship starts and the impact of the Levy.

4.6. Recommendation 2 - requested that an Apprenticeships strategy was compiled and implemented. However, it is understood that no formal strategy was ever formally approved.

4.7. Recommendation 3 - was to ensure that apprenticeships were within the remit of the then developing St Helens Economy Board. Although the Future Generations programme, operated under the St Helens Ambassador Programme which reports to the Economy Board, is currently providing work experience opportunities for care leavers, the Economy Board has not taken an active role in considering apprenticeships since its inception, focusing instead on strategic issues for the local economy. Other bodies, such as St Helens Chamber, has taken a more active role in relation to apprenticeships.

4.8. Recommendation 4 - covered developing a Supported Employment Pathway for young people with SEND. As of January 2018, in an update to the action plan, improved pathways were in place and were being further developed.

4.9. Recommendation 5 - looked at a review of existing careers education/information, advice and guidance resources. This review was completed in April 2017 and was taken to the appropriate forums.

4.10. Recommendation 6 - requested that the Council collaborate with training providers to ensure the apprenticeship offer meets the needs of the local economy. This was

completed in 2017, with training providers at the time offering apprenticeships in response to employer and student demand.

- 4.11. Recommendation 7 - aimed to promote apprenticeships with existing and new employers. Apprenticeships continue to be promoted through the Invest St Helens Ambassadors Programme and the subsequent Future Generations programme, all of which promote apprenticeships to the private sector.

Identification of and Support for Care Leavers

- 4.12. Members were informed that as of February 2020, there were two care leavers who were employed by the Council as apprentices. There are no care leavers on apprenticeships outside the Council.
- 4.13. The Council employs an Education, Employment and Training (EET) Coordinator, who as a part of her role assesses whether education, employment or training suggestions put forward by key workers are suitable for care leavers. Currently, the EET Coordinator was tracking young people at 16, but the Group was informed that there were plans to work more with the virtual school to include 15-year olds. It was suggested that this would allow for a better understanding of the areas young people wanted to work in and would enable a more strategic approach.
- 4.14. The Task Group was informed that the Care Leavers Team have an employability programme that focuses on care leavers' progression to ensure that their education, employment and training (EET) journey was sustainable and meaningful. Children we look after commence learning employability skills within school, and young people aged 16-25 have their plan personalised by the EET Coordinator. An employability programme had been developed as the first progression step for young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) who require intensive support to move onto their next EET stage.
- 4.15. The pathway then includes a further employability programme for those young people who are not ready to progress onto formal training; those who are ready to commence further training will progress onto a traineeship. The final progression for this programme would include employment or further training, which includes apprenticeships. The EET Coordinator has developed networks with the Invest St Helens Ambassador Programme who will be offering traineeship work placements for our young people.
- 4.16. The Task Group was informed that there had been a recognition that some children leaving care do not have basic Maths and English qualifications and were not able to access these qualifications post-19 due to funding. There had been a collaboration with St Helens Adult Learning who will be offering Maths and English qualifications as part of the employability programme.
- 4.17. The Task Group was informed that starting an apprenticeship could often be a difficult period of transition for all young people, given that they move from a school/college environment into a workplace where they were subject to the standard

HR procedures. This period of transition can often be exacerbated for care leavers due to their personal circumstances often being more complicated than other young people.

- 4.18. To support care leavers through this transition period, the Council's Workbased Learning Coordinator worked closely with the Leaving Care Team to identify care leavers who were looking for an apprenticeship to ensure that they were supported throughout the interview process. Care leavers were supported to continue and complete their apprenticeship, with the Workbased Learning Coordinator focussing on 'in-work' support, and the Care Leavers concentrating on external factors (such as place of residence). This support was provided throughout the period of the care leavers employment with the Council.

Potential Barriers & Appropriateness of Apprenticeships

- 4.19. One barrier faced by all young people, but affects care leavers especially, was the national apprentice wage of £3.90 per hour (compared to £4.25 for under 18's; £6.15 for 18-20; and £7.70 for 21-24-year olds). The Task Group was informed that, occasionally, those care leavers who were 18-19-years old would opt for short-term, minimum wage jobs which paid more as opposed to apprenticeships. This was further complicated by the increasing roll-out of Universal Credit, as the amount of benefit received depended on the number of hours worked in a given period. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) have a responsibility to implement a Care Leavers protocol, which is currently being developed and will consider the current barriers young people face relating to Universal Credit and their education, employment and training (EET) aspirations.
- 4.20. It was suggested that Intermediate (Level 2) Apprenticeships were sometimes not appropriate for some care leavers for various reasons. These included care leavers choosing to remain in education post 16, or they were not yet work ready. Previously, the Council ran a Children We Look After's Employment Programme, which received £100,000 of funding to allow 5 care leavers to undertake a 12-week period of employment in the Council in which they would work for 16-hours per week. This allowed staff to work around any issues the individual was facing and build them up to a full 12-month apprenticeship if it was decided this was the most appropriate next step. However, this funding had ceased sometime during 2017.

Care Leavers Board

- 4.21. The Care Leavers Board is attended by various agencies who have corporate parenting responsibilities for care leavers. The Board has looked at a range of documents and strategies to formalise their approach to care leavers. The 'Stay Put' policy adopted by the Council was given as an example of the authority implementing a policy that gives young people who are in a stable, supportive foster placement the opportunity to pursue education, training and employment, without the disruption of having to move to independence during this critical period of their lives.
- 4.22. The Task Group agreed that a strategy should be produced that covered how care leavers could be supported to engage with education, employment and training

opportunities once they leave secondary school education, with statistics provided where possible that recorded destinations for care leavers.

- 4.23. The Task Group was informed that care leavers in St Helens meet as a group on a monthly basis to engage in various projects to co-produce the service they receive. They have engaged in different topics linked to the Care Leavers Local Offer, and their views have been captured with regards to employment, education and training (EET).
- 4.24. Every local authority has a statutory responsibility to publish their local offer to care leavers. This outlines the support/offer to care leavers. This offer in St Helens is available on <https://www.sthelens.gov.uk/careleavers/> and in paper form available through the Care Leavers Team. The Task Group noted that it was important that the language used on all Council webpages which provide information to care leavers be reviewed to ensure that it was user-friendly and that it fully covered the range of support available (i.e. apprenticeships and other employability options available to them).
- 4.25. The Children and Young People's Consultation and Review Officer suggested that it was important to ensure that Council apprentices, included those who were care leavers, had the opportunity to give their views before/during/after their time in the Council, so that the authority could learn from and build upon their experience. With their permission, care leavers words could confidentially be used to promote the next recruitment phase in promotional material.

Reporting and Future Planning

- 4.26. The Task Group discussed the rising numbers of children we look after and how it was important that the Council fully understood the reasons for the rise in demand, and the implications on the support the Council provides to care leavers with their next steps.
- 4.27. As an example, it was suggested that, based on the current cohort of 15-year olds, the Council would be supporting a higher number of young people into adulthood than in previous years based on the usual rate with which young people remained in services. It was agreed that it was important that targeted support for individuals most likely to remain looked after be a priority. The Task Group was informed that the post of Education, Employment and Training Coordinator only had temporary funding; this was a concern to the Task Group given the post's importance.
- 4.28. The Task Group was informed that as a part of statistical reporting arrangements to Cabinet, the Council had a target set for the percentage of former care leavers aged 19-21 years old in employment, education or training (EET) (Tier 2 performance indicator CYP-28a), as well as a target for care leavers in settled accommodation (Tier 2 performance indicator CYP-27a). The Task Group commented that further statistical information on destinations and outcomes for Care Leavers would provide Members with a greater oversight of this area.

The Virtual School

- 4.29. When a young person becomes looked after, they become a pupil of the Virtual School. The aim of the Virtual School is to ensure that children we look after had the opportunity to fulfil their educational potential. Although not a 'physical' school with buildings and classrooms, the Virtual School brings together information about all children who are looked after by the Council - as if they were in a single school. It allows the Virtual School Headteacher and the local authority to closely track each child's progress and ensure the Council can identify the specific support a child may need at an early stage, so the virtual school can then work with individual schools to implement any actions.
- 4.30. The Group was informed that school staff (e.g. teachers) often have well-established relationships with looked after children and can provide a level of stability in their lives. This stability can often be disrupted when care leavers leave secondary school and it can be hard for care leavers to establish new relationships including Council Officers who support them.
- 4.31. It was suggested that there could often be a lack of understanding from both secondary school children and teachers/staff in relation to the apprenticeship and traineeship routes that were available. The Task Group discussed whether there was an assessment tool that could be used with children we look after to ensure that all next step options have been discussed with the young person, that they have understood all their options, and have identified what they see as their best next steps. Officers proposed that this assessment tool could be included within a looked after child's Personal Education Plan (PEP). The PEP included three meetings with a young person per year, with the Headteacher of the Virtual School having oversight of this process.
- 4.32. It was stated that not all children we look after attended the Virtual School as some children we look after were educated in alternative education establishments (such as the KS3 Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) base). It was agreed that consideration needed to be given as to how best to engage children we look after who are in these alternative education settings in career planning.
- 4.33. The Group was informed that following meetings between the Virtual School Headteacher, secondary schools, and the University of Liverpool, a pilot programme of academic mentoring commenced at the start of February. Two schools had so far engaged with the project, with 18 children we look after receiving support. Mentoring support involved undergraduates from the University going into schools to provide one-to-one support within core subjects. The mentors focus on developing confidence within the subject and enhancing the skills and knowledge the young person learns within the classroom. Each mentor works with each child for one hour per week.

St Helens Ambassadors Programme

- 4.34. The Task Group was informed about the Ambassadors Programme which formed an important part of the 'Invest St Helens' brand. According to the Invest St Helens

website, the Ambassadors scheme *“brings together the knowledge, networks and determination of businesses, organisations and individuals to help the borough to compete by attracting investment, business and visitors to create a more successful economy for the benefit of everyone”*.

- 4.35. Over 130 businesses, schools, and organisations have signed up as Ambassadors since the programme’s launch in 2017. Whilst a large majority of schools were members of the Ambassadors Programme, there is still a minority who were not engaging. The Task Group agreed that Councillors who were governors at schools not engaging with the Ambassadors programme should encourage their schools to sign up.
- 4.36. The Task Group was informed about the Future Generations Programme. This was an innovative and unique offer developed to utilise the Invest St Helens platform, in particular Ambassadors, to improve the lives of young people. The Programme had developed a series of objectives in respect of work with young people:
- To raise aspiration and ambition for young people
 - To link schools and businesses together
 - To link young people to the future economy
 - To create a positive perception of St Helens
- 4.37. Ambassadors were extremely supportive of the Future Generation Programme and many had pledged their support to use their role as an Ambassador to improve outcomes for young people in St Helens. The Invest Team aimed to work with Ambassadors to encourage the commitment to support young people leaving care, in hope that the support given will help support Care Leavers to make a positive transition to independence by providing practical support with the following:
- Traineeship Programme – together with Council Social Work Teams
 - Careers advice – from local business leaders
 - Work experience opportunities – with Ambassadors
 - Interview Preparation – with recruitment consultants
 - Increased access to local offer – accessing facilities in their local area such as bowling, cinema, Saints games, and sports facilities.
- 4.38. The programme was reported to have been a success to date and had delivered many positive outcomes. Ambassadors and Economy Board Members had pledged their support, enabling officers to deliver several projects including:
- 12-week confidence building programme for all ages (aimed at LAC & Care Leavers)
 - ‘Believe & Achieve’ careers event delivered to Year 11 Children we look after
 - ‘Rewrite the Stars’ Celebration event delivered for LAC/Care Leavers in St Helens
 - Commissioned Education Consultants to rewrite the Curriculum in St Helens to bridge the gaps identified with local place-based knowledge and heritage information

- Commissioned publication of 'The Canary Sings' project with Primary School Ambassadors
- Design and development of a Traineeship Programme for Care Leavers

- 4.39. The Task Group was informed that links had been established between the Ambassadors Programme and the Education, Employment and Training Coordinator to explore how local employers could offer work experience opportunities for children we look after. Although an apprenticeship or job offer was the ideal scenario, it was recognised that there was a higher chance of ensuring cooperation and buy-in from businesses if work experience opportunities were offered initially, with apprenticeship opportunities to be explored moving forward as relationships developed further.
- 4.40. The Task Group was assured that for any apprenticeships offered by external employers in the borough, employers were held to account by training providers who accredit the apprenticeship. If the apprentice was not being given tasks to complete that met the criteria of the qualification, then this would be highlighted in the apprentice's progress reports and escalated appropriately.
- 4.41. It was agreed by the Task Group that it would be beneficial to hear an external employers' perspective of the Ambassadors Programme and their perceptions of how more opportunities for children we look after could be provided, and what the potential barriers are from a local businesses point of view / standpoint.

Other Local Authorities

- 4.42. The topic of support for children we look after with regards to apprenticeships has been considered by numerous other local authority scrutiny functions. A short summary is provided below. Common threads in the summaries below are that councils firstly offer opportunities to Looked After Children to help them with readiness for employment skills and secondly with opportunities to progress into an internship, work experience, a traineeship or an apprenticeship within the Council.

Dorset County Council

- 4.43. Dorset County Council's Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviewed apprenticeships in respect of children we look after and care leavers in 2017 following an Ofsted inspection report. The report recommended that the County Council develop a full range of opportunities for work experience, traineeships and apprenticeships for care leavers to increase the number in employment, education or training.
- 4.44. Following a pilot project that offered four 16-year old children we look after work experience, the scheme was expanded to 16 Year 11 Virtual School pupils who were approached by the County Council with an offer of work experience. Year 10 pupils were also approached with an offer of work familiarisation in preparation for their Year 11 work experience.

- 4.45. The County Council also identified 16-21-year olds who were previously children we look after and not in employment, education or training (NEET) to assess those who would benefit from work experience or a traineeship.

Wirral Council

- 4.46. Wirral Council's Families and Wellbeing Policy & Performance Committee undertook a review into the *Outcomes for Children we look after* in August 2013. Despite the years that have past, the recommendations still hold weight in 2020.
- 4.47. The importance of building self-confidence in Children we look after was heard repeatedly throughout the Scrutiny Review in Wirral. Members were informed that, for some children in care, there was a need to improve self-esteem and confidence levels, for example, to help with interview skills. This could be a significant problem at the age of transition (16–17 years old) when the young person was moving to semi-independence; a period which could be particularly difficult when there was no parental input. One way of achieving increased confidence levels was to identify and promote opportunities for internships and work experience for children we look after and care leavers within the Council.
- 4.48. Further recommendations set out within the 2013 report included increasing the capacity of the Employment Team with a peer mentor and apprentice.

Nottinghamshire County Council

- 4.49. Although the review by Nottinghamshire County Council's Health And Wellbeing Standing Committee, *From Care to Independence*, was published 10 years ago, it's recommendations still are relevant today. The report recommended that children we look after and care leavers should have access to a range of employability opportunities including:
- Work inspiration and taster events;
 - Priority for work experience opportunities;
 - Priority for any places on future Council apprenticeship schemes;
 - A guaranteed interview for any job for which they have the appropriate qualification.
- 4.50. In addition, the report recommended that contractors for County Council services be encouraged to offer employability opportunities to children we look after. It was also recommended that a system to monitor the key outcomes for care leavers at the point of case closure be implemented and used to inform future policies for children we look after.

5. Conclusions

- 5.1. There are several issues that the Task Group would have liked to address further. However, there was insufficient time remaining in the municipal year to continue its work. As such the Task Group recommends that its work be continued by a further task group. The Task Group believes this work is critical to our care leavers and

looked after children and councillors' roles as corporate parents. This section details the Task Group's conclusions in relation to work it has carried out and where it feels further work is required.

- 5.2. Given the increasing number of children becoming looked after in recent years, the Task Group believes that securing good outcomes for care leavers is more important than ever. Although it is right that the Council works to reduce the numbers of children becoming looked after, tracking young care leavers and their destinations/outcomes should remain a priority for the authority. Further statistical information on destinations/outcomes would provide Members with a greater oversight of this area and clarification on the effectiveness of the Council's work.
- 5.3. The Task Group believed it was important that the knowledge and processes employed by Officers and recounted to them in the Task Group meeting, were documented so that the policies and procedures could be clearly understood and passed on to others. This should be covered in a strategy that covers how children we look after can be supported both in school and when they become care leavers to fully access education, employment and training opportunities.
- 5.4. The Task Group was encouraged to hear that both the Council and members of the Ambassadors Programme were working cooperatively to support care leavers into employment by providing work experience and apprenticeship opportunities.
- 5.5. The Task Group was pleased that many schools in the Borough were signed up to the Ambassadors Programme. However, the Group noted that it would wish for all schools to be engaged and hoped that Councillors who were governors at schools that were not a part of the St Helens Ambassadors Programme would encourage their schools to sign up to it.
- 5.6. The Task Group recognises that for some care leavers, an apprenticeship may not always be the most appropriate step following leaving secondary education, and that work experience opportunities and traineeships may be required. The Task Group was reassured to hear that work was being done by officers, through the Future Generations programme, to pursue opportunities to increase the number of work experience opportunities for care leavers and children we look after.
- 5.7. The Task Group was pleased to hear from officers about the experience some young people and employers had had engaging with our services. However, the Task Group would welcome the opportunity to meet with both care leavers and members of the Ambassadors programme to understand from their perspectives what any current barriers were and what further support could be provided that would make a difference.
- 5.8. The Task Group was reassured that the Virtual School was tracking the progress of children we look after, and that schools had well-established relationships with their pupils. However, the Task Group would welcome further consideration as to how the Council can support those children we look after including those in alternative education establishments to ensure that they are fully supported to understand the options available to them post-16 and their choices.

- 5.9. The Task Group was pleased to be told that the plans were in development for the Education, Employment and Training Coordinator to work more with the Virtual School to engage 15-year olds who are looked after. A better understanding of the areas young people would want to work in will help to facilitate a more strategic approach to apprenticeships and post-16 employment generally. The Task Group believed it would be beneficial for an assessment tool to be implemented in a young person's Personal Education Plan, to establish whether they understand the all progression routes, including supported internships, traineeships and apprenticeships, which route is best for them, and what their choice is.
- 5.10. The Task Group agreed that the Education, Employment and Training Co-ordinator post was essential to ensuring that the children we look after and care leavers are given the right advice, guidance and support to progress into education, employment and training. Members would therefore recommend that this post was made permanent.
- 5.11. The Task Group was concerned to hear that some young people were more encouraged to look for short term financial gain through employment, rather than long-term security through apprenticeships due to the disparity in wages between the national minimum wage and the apprenticeship wage. The Task Group would welcome further reassurance that care leavers undertaking apprenticeships who were eligible for Universal Credit, were not losing money due to the way the benefit is paid. The Task Group wished to speak with local representatives from DWP for clarification on this issue.
- 5.12. Although it was good to see that there was a dedicated children we look after and care leavers website, the Task Group believed that it was important that the language used on Council webpages be reviewed to ensure that the target audience of care leavers were not discouraged and able to fully understand the range of support available to them at the Council, in the borough and further afield.

6. Recommendations

The Task and Finish Group recommends:

- 6.1. That further and clear statistical information on destinations and outcomes for care leavers be collected and monitored to ensure a better understanding of the effectiveness of Council interventions.
- 6.2. The production of a strategy to show the processes employed by Officers, and recounted by them in the Task Group meeting, which ensure that the children we look after and care leavers are fully supported to access education, employment and training opportunities.
- 6.3. That this strategy is informed by feedback from children we look after and care leavers on what works well, what the barriers are to their successful progression and what improvements could be made.

- 6.4. That a review be undertaken regarding further traineeships, apprenticeships and work experience opportunities that Council services could offer to care leavers and looked after children.
- 6.5. That the pages on the Council's website relating to care leavers be reviewed to ensure the language used is engaging and accessible to the target audience.
- 6.6. That an assessment tool is developed to ensure that the children we look after and care leavers understand the full range of progression routes available to them and records their chosen destination, and that it is included in Personal Education Plans.
- 6.7. That the post of Education, Employment and Training Co-ordinator is made permanent.
- 6.8. That the Cabinet encourages all Councillors who are governors at schools not signed up to the Ambassadors Programme to speak to their schools about doing so.
- 6.9. That the CYPS Panel commissions a new task group to enable members to continue this review including:

A – a meeting with care leavers to understand the types of opportunities they are looking for in employment, training and education; what they feel the barriers to their progression are; and what help is effective and what improvements could be made.

B - a meeting with members of the Ambassador Programme to discuss the barriers to the provision of work experience and apprenticeship opportunities to care leavers and looked after children.

C. a review to establish the extent to which the children we look after participate in extra-curricular activities, often invaluable in the development of wider skills to support positive progression.

D a meeting with local representatives from DWP for clarification on the implications of Universal Credit on the wages and benefits received by care leavers.

E - scrutiny of the supported internship programme.

7. Sources

St Helens Council Cabinet report - 2019/20 Quarter 2 Performance Report

<http://modern.gov.sthelens.gov.uk/documents/s93363/Q2%20Performance%20Monitoring%20Report.pdf>

St Helens Council Environment, Regeneration, Housing, Culture and Leisure
Scrutiny Panel – *Apprenticeships Review July 2016*

<http://moderngov.sthelens.gov.uk/documents/s58743/Apprenticeship%20Report%20to%20Cabinet.pdf>

St Helens Council Care Leavers Webpage

<https://www.sthelens.gov.uk/careleavers/>

St Helens Council Care Leavers Group Webpage

<https://www.sthelens.gov.uk/careleavers/listening-to-you/children-in-care-council-care-leavers-group/>

Gov.uk website - *Apprenticeship Funding in England April 2019*

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/788312/Apprenticeship_funding_in_England_from_April_2019.pdf

St Helens Council Performance Indicator Database

<http://applications01.sth.net/PerformanceIndicators/Indicators/AllIndicators>

St Helens Virtual School webpage

<https://www.sthelens.gov.uk/schools-education/virtual-school-for-looked-after-children/>

Invest St Helens Ambassadors Programme website

<https://www.investsthelens.co.uk/ambassadors/>

Dorset County Council Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee - *Apprenticeships in respect of Looked After Children and Care Leavers*

<http://moderngov.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/Data/279/201701191000/Agenda/Apprentice%20report%20190117,%20item%207..pdf>

Wirral Council Families and Wellbeing Policy & Performance Committee – *Outcomes for Children we look after*

<https://democracy.wirral.gov.uk/documents/s50031324/Appendix%202.pdf>

Nottinghamshire County Council Health And Wellbeing Standing Committee – *From Care to Independence*

<https://www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/DMS/Document.ashx?czJKcaeAi5tUFL1DTL2UE4zNRBcoShgo=%2BHj%2FSit8d0ZKIXbkJvVFmYdMB9mWkH11GtwV7J6RO0uCXBGZiD2uw%3D%3D&mCTIbCubSFfXsDGW9IXnlG%3D%3D=hFflUdN3100%3D&kCx1AnS9%2FpWZQ40DXFvdEw%3D%3D=hFflUdN3100%3D&uJovDxwdjMPoYv%2>

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Apprenticeships for Children We Looked After

Rec No	Recommendation	Responsible Officer	Agreed Action and Date of Implementation
1	That further and clear statistical information on destinations and outcomes for care leavers be collected and monitored to ensure a better understanding of the effectiveness of Council interventions.		
2	That a strategy is produced to show the processes, employed by Officers, which ensure that the children we look after and care leavers are fully supported to access education, employment and training opportunities.		
3	That this strategy is informed by feedback from children we look after and care leavers on what works well, what the barriers are to their successful progression and what improvements could be made.		
4	That a review be undertaken regarding further traineeships, apprenticeships and work experience opportunities that Council services could offer to care leavers and looked after children.		
5	That the pages on the Council's website relating to looked after children and care leavers be reviewed to ensure the language used is engaging and accessible to the target audience.		
6	That an assessment tool is developed as part of Personal Education Plans, to ensure that the		

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	children we look after and care leavers understand the full range of progression routes available to them and identifies their chosen destination.		
7	That the post of Education, Employment and Training Co-ordinator is made permanent.		
8	That the Cabinet encourages all Councillors who are governors at schools not signed up to the Ambassadors Programme to speak to their schools about doing so.		
9	<p>That the CYPS Panel commissions a new task group to enable members to continue this review including:</p> <p>A - meeting with care leavers to understand the types of opportunities they are looking for in employment, training and education, what support is effective and how it could be improved.</p> <p>B - a meeting with members of the Ambassador Programme to discuss the barriers to provision of work experience and apprenticeship opportunities to care leavers and looked after children.</p> <p>C - a review to establish the extent to which the children we look after participate in extra-curricular activities, often invaluable in the development of wider skills to support positive progression.</p> <p>D - a meeting with local representatives from DWP for clarification on the implications of Universal</p>		

Apprenticeships for Children We Looked After

	Credit on the wages and benefits received by care leavers. E - scrutiny of the supported internship programme.		
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