

Report title	Increasing Not Engaged in Education Employment and Training (NEET) Care Leavers in the 19 – 21-year-old Cohort	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor John Reynolds Children and Young People	
Wards affected	All wards	
Accountable director	Emma Bennett, Director of Children's and Adult Services	
Originating service	Children and Young People in Care	
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Report has been considered by	Children and Young People in Care Managers Meeting	3 March 2021
	Childrens Social Care Leadership Team	11 March 2021
	Education Leadership Team	4 March 2021
Report to be considered by	Corporate Parenting Board	25 March 2021

Recommendations for action:

The Corporate Parenting Board is recommended to:

1. Approve the support offered to those young people who have left care and are not engaged in education employment or training as proposed in section 3.0 of the report.

1.0 Purpose

1.1 In the City of Wolverhampton Council, Education, Employment or Training (EET) figures for care leavers aged 19-21 decreased from 61% in 2018 - 2019 to 57% in 2019-2020. This paper provides an update on current performance, the impact of Covid-19, and the local authority's approach to engaging and supporting care leavers who are not in education, employment and training (NEET) in order to improve their employability and life chances.

2.0 Background

2.1 In 2018 - 2019, of the cohort consisting of 190 young people in total, 32 were classified as NALM leaving a cohort of 41 NEET equating to 22% NEET.

2.2 In 2019 - 2020, of the cohort consisting of 161 young people in total, 22 were classified as NALM, leaving a cohort of 43 NEET and equating to 27% NEET.

2.3 The 4% decrease in EET figure has been impacted by the decrease in the population of care leavers aged 19-21. There were two more young people who were NEET compared to the previous year (2018-2019 to 2019-2020).

2.4 The table below illustrates, despite the recent reduction in EET performance, Wolverhampton's performance remains positively higher than statistical and regional neighbours as well as national figures.

19-21 Year Old Care Leavers in EET	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	DoT	% change
Wolverhampton	31.0	42.0	41.0	56.0	56.0	61.0	57.0	Down	-4.0
West Midlands	41.0	41.0	47.0	46.0	50.0	51.0	50.0	Down	-1.0
Statistical Neighbours	40.0	45.7	44.4	46.7	47.6	47.6	48.1	Up	0.5
England	45.0	48.0	49.0	50.0	51.0	52.0	53.0	Up	1.0

2.5 As of the end of 8 March 2021, of the cohort consisting of 153 young people in total, 23 were classified as NALM, leaving a cohort of 53 NEET, equating to 34.6%. Of the 53 NEET young people there are eight young people due to start a provision, dependent upon COVID-19 restrictions. This is 15% of the total NEET cohort.

2.6 In Wolverhampton, we have success in supporting care leavers to attend university. There are currently 27 young people attending university with up to 10 young people starting a university course in September 2021.

2.7 There has also been progress made in the number of apprenticeships which have increased from one to four apprenticeships within the Children and Young People in Care (CYPiC) Service over last two years and senior managers have committed to continue to increase this number across the service. In addition, Reconomy are offering five apprenticeship positions for care leavers.

The impact of COVID-19 on EET

2.8 Since the start of the pandemic, there has been a large increase in unemployment and a large fall in employment for young people aged 16-24 (see <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn05871/>). Comparing the latest

quarter, October-December, with the pre-pandemic quarter of January-March 2020, unemployment for young people has increased by 66,000, a 13% increase. In Wolverhampton, the NEET percentage has increased by 7.6% between April 2020 and 8 March 2021. This is less than the national impact and reflects the judicious efforts of our EET Co-Coordinator and Reach Care Leavers Team.

- 2.9 The implications of the rising unemployment figure for our care leavers is that it will be increasingly challenging to source opportunities within the sectors currently affected (hospitality, retail, leisure) and that they now face increased competition for current vacancies.
- 2.10 There has also been an increase in state benefits (£79.90 plus housing benefit) during COVID-19 so young people are better off, giving them less incentive to find EET.
- 2.11 In terms of local impact, the Reach Leaving Care Team has not been able to continue their weekly drop-in face to face service since COVID-19 and the EET Co-ordinator was the most utilised service. Young people do not want to attend a virtual drop-in as they can call primary workers directly for advice, support and guidance. The EET Coordinator however has continued to offer Friday afternoon drop-in sessions for care leavers wishing to engage for advice and guidance.
- 2.12 Talent Match, Connexions and Black Country Impact are not undertaking face to face visits. Also, young people who are hard to engage do not want to meet new workers virtually.

Response to the increase in number of NEET young people

- 2.13 Despite, the limitations posed by the national lockdown restrictions, the EET Coordinator has worked closely with CYPiC Service, colleagues across the council, and partner agencies to identify several ways to monitor and support care leavers and promote EET opportunities.
- 2.14 The EET Co-ordinator works with a cohort of 415 young people, including the 21-25-year olds who are now entitled to support, to monitor progress and provide advice and guidance. An EET Apprenticeship has been recruited to further increase support to this cohort. Young Persons Advisors (YPA) continue to support and offer additional support to their young people who are NEET to actively support them to partake in opportunities.
- 2.15 The CYPiC Service Manager chairs a monthly EET Panel meetings, which the EET Co-ordinator attends, to review the support offered to young people who are EET. The EET Co-ordinator has attended the CYPiC managers meeting once a month since September 2020 to share information and opportunities for care leavers. The EET Co-ordinator also attends the Supported Accommodation Team and the Reach Care Leavers Team meetings.
- 2.16 New activity to improve EET, since February 2021, includes:
 - YPAs complete an EET case summary for each young person specifically to look at barriers to EET, their wishes and feelings and employment aspirations (to be

able to tailor and source opportunities that are relevant to each young people). The deadline for this is the 31 March 2021 for case summaries to be returned to the EET Coordinator.

- YPAs now identify the allocated Job Centre Plus (JC+) work coach details for their young people and attend JC+ review meetings with young people to encourage and support EET activity. They also share the EET case summary to enhance and support care leavers aspirations.
- Regular review of NEET cases with the team manager and advance senior YPA to look at specific NEETs on a monthly basis to look at long term NEET cases and the support that is being offered and formulate an EET action plan for the care leaver and YPA to work towards.
- A data base of contact details for young people has been developed so opportunities can be sent directly to them without having to rely on their YPA.
- A lead YPA is working with our Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) link and Intensive support is now being offered.

2.17 The local Authority has a City-wide strategy “Relighting Our City” which aims to support all Wolverhampton citizens to access EET and reduce the impact of COVID-19. The strategy includes a workstream called “Wolves Youth Offer” which aims to deliver a package of support to help young people (aged 16-29) into employment and to retain employment through the youth hubs, Kickstart provision with the DWP and Black Country Impact. There is also a specific focus on those with Special Educational Needs, Care Leavers and the long term unemployed. The EET Coordinator has requested to join the operational group and identified 10 care leavers have been highlighted with an aspiration target of 20 care leavers being supported.

2.18 The Corporate Parenting Officer has committed to working with the EET Co-Ordinator to further explore traineeship opportunities, that lead into employment not just work experience, within the local authority. Activity includes:

- A drop-in session for partners on the Corporate Parenting Partnership Board. This drop-in session is to discuss opportunities that organisations and departments can offer care leavers as part of the REACH Care Leaver offer.
- Joint work with the Senior Manager Adult Education Service which in partnership with Wolves at Work has secured a six-month programme to offer traineeship for anyone age 19 years.
- Joint work with Head of Organisational Development to further explore internal apprenticeship opportunities within the council which are wider than business administration and with easier entry access requirements to reduce barriers to the most vulnerable learners.

- Explore further opportunities around ICT within the local authority with an initial ask of ICT to support Office 365 for purchased equipment.
- 2.19 The Virtual School Head has committed to the following activity for care leavers who are relevant and former relevant:
- Joint EET action plan with the CYPiC Service and the Virtual School which was last updated in the Autumn Term 2020.
 - The Virtual School Head vice chairs the monthly EET Panel meetings.
 - Support access to devices for a number of our care leavers who are currently NEET that do not have an appropriate device to engage in EET activity. This is now in progress, with costings being sought and devices to be purchased for approximately 25 young people.
- 2.20 Care leavers are over-represented in the increasing number of unemployment figures and we continue to work in partnership with external organisations to explore not only employment opportunities but also education and training opportunities to support our young people to be able to access suitable services to bridge the gap in allowing them to sources and actively engage in the labour market actively.
- 2.21 In July 2016, the Government published 'Keep on Caring' to support young people from care to independence. A key policy commitment in the paper is a strategic pledge to introduce a Care Leaver Covenant. The Covenant is a promise made by private, public or voluntary organisations to provide support for care leavers aged 16-25 to help them to live independently. Organisations that sign up to the Covenant make 'offers' of support relating to education, employment, training, housing, security, health, financial stability and more. To ensure Wolverhampton care leavers benefit from the Covenant and to increase partnership working the Care Leavers Covenant Engagement Advisor will be sharing national practice and ideas for development across Wolverhampton with the Corporate Parenting Partnership Board on 31 March 2021.
- 2.22 The DWP drop in for the Reach Leaving Care Team has resumed which will offer young people and staff extra support. This takes place monthly to address and support universal credit claimants.
- 2.23 Kickstart vacancies are now live and all 36 young people living in the city who are NEET have been referred to the provision, their work coach will discuss live opportunities they can apply for with in work support.
- 2.24 All young people living in the City who are NEET have also been referred to Black Country Impact if they haven't already engaged and achieved a sustainable outcome. Care leavers can access loan devices if they are engaged with Black County Impact. There is a working group looking at connectivity and devices for care leavers. The EET Coordinator will continue to work with the designated Black Country Impact advisor to highlight young people eligible for the support.

2.25 Support is in place through Wolves at Work to support job search techniques, job matching, interview skills and reviewing and updating a CV. They also offer 12 weeks in work support. The designated Wolves at Work Coach has completed Total Respect training and so understands the barriers and challenges facing children in care and care leavers.

3.0 Recommendations

3.1 The Corporate Parenting Board is requested to support the following proposals to further enhance the EET opportunities available to care leavers:

- Local businesses in Wolverhampton to engage in further work or work experience placements for care leavers with on the job training (to make up for lack of formal qualifications). Action: the Parenting Partnership Board members will be requested to see if they can offer further additional traineeship placement experiences on 31 March 2021.
- Closer work with the Covenant for increased tailored opportunities to meet our young people's needs. Action: this is to be explored and progressed through the Corporate Parenting Partnership Board on 31 March 2021.

4.0 Financial implications

4.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report.

[JG/03032021/E]

5.0 Legal implications

5.1 The legal implications for this report are set out in the Children and Social Work Act 2017 in section 1 Corporate Parenting for children and young people in and leaving care. In carrying out its functions in relation to children and young people, the local authority must have regard to sections (a) to (g) of Section 1 and the implications of this report may also depend upon to what extent care leavers have expressed their views on the options available and to what extent the local authority has taken those views into account.

[SB/26022021/N]

6.0 Equalities implications

6.1 Care leavers are asked to begin their journey into adulthood earlier than most young people. This can make them more vulnerable, isolated and unsure how to ask for help. This experience means that nationally compared to the general population care leavers are (DoE, Published 12 August 2019):

- Less likely to be in education, employment or training - over a third of 19-year-old care leavers are not in education, employment or training.
- More likely to be attempting to live independently - some are unable to remain in their placements beyond the age of 18. They are therefore likely to experience compressed and accelerated transitions to independence.

- Impact of childhood trauma means they are more likely to suffer with issue relating to emotional health and wellbeing.
- More likely to have a criminal conviction and may have experienced unnecessary criminalisation. Care leavers are estimated to represent between 24% and 27% of the adult prison population. This is despite less than 1% of under 18s entering local authority care each year.

6.2 The demographic makeup of the care leaver population compared to their Wolverhampton peers is represented in the below tables. This shows the male care leaver cohort is 63.4% which is higher than the City-wide gender split for those age groups which is approximately 50/50 male/female City-wide.

6.3 The table below outlines, in terms of ethnicity, there is an over-representation of mixed ethnicity groups with 16.3% of the care leaver group from a mixed ethnic background, whereas 8.6% of the Wolverhampton population are from a mixed ethnic background.

	% of total Care Leavers aged 19-21	% of 18-19 yr old CWC population*	% of 20-24 year old CWC population*
Male	63.4%	50.4%	49.6%
Female	36.6%	49.6%	50.4%

	% of total Care Leavers aged 19-21
With a disability	17.0%
No disability recorded	83.0%

	% of total Care Leavers aged 19-21	% of 18-19 yr old CWC population*	% of 20-24 year old CWC population*
White: Total	58.8%	63.7%	63.5%
Mixed/multiple Ethnic Group	16.3%	10.2%	8.6%
Asian/Asian British	2.0%	17.0%	19.1%
Black/African/Caribbean/Black	11.1%	7.6%	7.1%
Other Ethnic Group	11.8%	1.5%	1.7%

* 2011 census data

6.4 There is also an under-representation of young people from an Asian background, with 2% of care leavers recorded as Asian, and a Wolverhampton population of around 18%.

7.0 All other Implications

Covid-19 Implications

7.1 As a result of the Covid-19 Pandemic, the numbers of care leavers experiencing unemployment has increased and the report outlines the level of support offered to mitigate against this.