

Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)

To: Children and Young People Committee

Meeting Date: 9th March 2021

From: Executive Director People and Communities

Electoral division(s): All

Forward Plan ref: N/A

Key decision: No

Outcomes: To update the Committee about Actions being taken by relevant service areas to reduce the number of young people generally and young people in care and on the edge of care who are Not in Education, Employment or Training.

That actions been taken to reduce the number of young people in care and leaving care have positive impact, and that these actions also help to mitigate any impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Recommendation: The Committee is recommended to:

- a) Note the good performance in relation to the general population of young people in Cambridgeshire in respect of those Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET).
- b) Note the positive signs of impact of the renewed focus on reducing the number of young people in care and who are leaving care who are NEET.
- c) Support monitoring of continuing impact of the NEET reduction action plan for young people in care and leaving care by the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee.

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1. Background

- 1.1. The Children and Young People Committee asked for a follow up report in relation to young people who are not in education, employment or training [NEET] when the issue was last discussed at Committee in July 2020.
- 1.2. This follow up report provides some information about young people who are NEET among the population as a whole, as well as providing information about young people who are NEET and who have left care or are leaving care.
- 1.3. The report concludes by outlining the overall approach being taken to ensure that as many young people as possible are supported into Education, Employment and Training.

2. Main Issues

Summary of performance: young people who are in employment, education or training

- 2.1. For a number of years, Cambridgeshire County Council has been less successful in supporting young people in care and leaving care into sustained employment, education and training than similar authorities, regional or England averages. The table below summarises performance in relation to the percentage of young people leaving care aged 17-21 who are in education, employment or training [EET]:

Table 1: Young People leaving care aged 17 – 21 EET Birthday Check

	Cambridgeshire	Regional Ave	Statistical Neighbour Ave	England Ave
2016	28.0%	48.0%	48.8%	49.0%
2017	37.0%	50.0%	49.1%	50.0%
2018	47.0%	51.0%	54.0%	51.0%
2019	47.0%	52.0%	54.8%	52.0%
2020	44.0%	54.0%	55.1%	53.0%

- 2.2. This performance indicator provides a snap-shot of the status of a young person between 17 and 21 on their birthday. This allows for comparisons to be made with other areas but can only provide an indication of the picture, since some young people move in and out of employment, education and training quite regularly.
- 2.3. It is disappointing that the data indicates a reduction in performance for 2020 compared with 2019 and 2018. While it is possible that this may in part be linked to the change in reporting systems that took place at the beginning of 2020, this is unlikely to be the whole explanation. More positively, however, is the picture that is emerging from more recent and regularly collected performance information, as set out in the table below:

Table 2 Monthly tracking data: 17-21 year old care leavers who are EET:

Month	17-21 Care Leavers EET%
May 2020	52.4%
June 2020	52.2%
July 2020	53.1%
August 2020	54.7%
September 2020	56.0%
October 2020	55.3%
November 2020	57.4%
December 2020	57.8%

- 2.4. This monthly tracking information shows a more positive picture, with December performance above that of the average of our statistical neighbours in relation to the birthday check data in table 1. We would expect to see at least some of this improved performance feeding into the next round of national data.
- 2.5. Changes to the structure of children’s social care services following the ‘Change for Children’ programme at the end of 2018 and beginning of 2019 resulted in dedicated teams for young people leaving care. Prior to this date, care leavers were supported by teams that also supported children in care. One of our reasons for setting up dedicated teams for care leavers was because in a mixed purpose team, children in care are always likely to receive the greater priority.
- 2.6. It is to be hoped that this change, together with the renewed focus on supporting young care leavers into education, employment and training through the action plan discussed in detail later in this report, is now having impact.
- 2.7. As far as the more general population of young people in Cambridgeshire is concerned, data indicates a much more encouraging picture. National data for the proportion of young people who are NEET indicates that Cambridgeshire is in the top 20% of authorities nationally, and second in both the regional and statistical neighbour group:

Table 3: Cambridgeshire Overall 16-18 NEET Data

	Cambridgeshire NEET & Not Known %	Eastern Region NEET & Not Known %	Statistical Neighbours NEET & Not Known %
2016	3.7%	4.9%	5.7%
2017	3.2%	4.8%	6.1%
2018	3.3%	4.3%	5.4%
2019	3.0%	4.1%	5.4%
2020	3.3%	4.5%	5.4%

- 2.8. The most recent local data for the proportion of young people in the general population in Education, Employment or training as of December 2020 is set out below:

Table 4: Overall EET 16 – 18 Monthly Data

	Cambridgeshire	Regional Ave	Statistical Neighbour Ave
December 2020	94.4%	93.3%	92.5%

Comparison: NEET and EET for Care Leavers and the general population

- 2.9. There are a number of reasons why drawing direct comparisons between the general population of young people not in education, employment and training and those who are in care or have left care is difficult. These include:
- **The cohort sizes are very different:** There are approximately 12,500 young people aged between 16 and 18 in Cambridgeshire, compared with an overall population of care leavers of around 400.
 - **The age grouping is different:** Nationally collected data for care leavers covers the age group of 17-21, while the general NEET population indicator is for 16-18 year olds. The significant education system changes at age 19, together with the different age range make direct comparisons very difficult.
- 2.10. In terms of young people in care and aged 16-18, only a relatively small number are not in employment, education or training at any one time, which is encouraging. The most recently available figure for December 2020 was 23.

Impact of Covid-19 on NEET and EET in Cambridgeshire

- 2.11. From a statistical point of view, it is probably too early to be able to point to a concrete impact on NEET and EET numbers as a result of Covid-19. It is entirely reasonable to assume that there will be an impact from any prolonged economic downturn that follows the pandemic. Experience from past economic downturns is that employment for young people is disproportionately adversely affected. Unlike in any previous economic down turn, young people, and vulnerable young people in particular, are likely to also be striving to cope with disruptions to their schooling and educational progression.
- 2.12. While impact in respect of NEET and EET may not yet have been seen, young people have been affected by Covid-19 in other ways. The following paragraphs provide a brief summary of the some of the issues and the ways in which services have worked together to help young people leaving care to overcome these.
- 2.13. In March 2020, a Covid-19 Care Leaver Work stream was formed across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough to identify any possible impact this might have on our young people. The main risks that were identified included digital poverty, isolation, financial hardships, and adherence to restrictions.
- 2.14. Our Specialist Personal Adviser was able to link with other organisations and successfully bid for grant funding for laptops, connectivity devices and essential food supplies, while becoming an approved referral agent to the Trussell Trust Foodbank Network. We issued accessible information to our young people with regards to adherence of the restrictions and worked with accommodation providers to ensure young people were not jeopardising their tenancy agreements by breaking restrictions. Hampers of emergency essentials were delivered in line with Covid-19 restrictions to our most vulnerable young people.
- 2.15. As the pandemic has progressed, we have worked closely with our care experienced young people to continue to provide support as the national and local context of restrictions have

changed over the last 12 months. We have also sought to address areas of disadvantage facing our care leavers when compared with the general population.

- 2.16. Many of our young people were living in accommodation without access to the internet and did not own suitable devices for accessing on line information. Indeed, digital exclusion has emerged as the issue that had the potential to be the issue that had the biggest impact for them.
- 2.17. More than 100 laptops have been purchased through grant funding or distributed to care leavers from the allocation received from the Department for Education. Young people at risk of not being able to access further or higher education courses were prioritised initially. We now have an agreement with Cambridgeshire County Council IT services to repurpose any unused laptops for our care leavers, creating an on-going source of equipment for the foreseeable future.
- 2.18. There have not been any instances of Cambridgeshire care leavers supported by the service dropping out of their course or being unable to join learning as a result of digital poverty. Indeed, some young people have benefited from the move to virtual learning, and are accessing courses that they previously did not feel able to access on a face to face basis, feeling more confident in the more anonymised space of on-line learning.
- 2.19. Many young people have also found engagement with their personal advisers easier through on-line visiting, although face to face visits have also continued, particularly where young people have additional vulnerabilities.
- 2.20. While it seems inevitable that there will be a negative impact for young people from any economic downturn that follows the pandemic, there have also been some clear benefits to many from an increase in virtual learning and support. We will work hard to ensure that as we move out of restrictions, we preserve the benefits that we have learned in the last year.

Summary of work to promote education, employment and training for children in care and care leavers

- 2.21. This section provides a brief summary of the work that has taken place since the last report to Committee to support young people in care and leaving care to remain in education, employment or training. This work is aligned with the action plan, which can be found as Appendix 1 to this report.
- 2.22. Monthly NEET reduction meetings are held at which any young person who is NEET is discussed at least on a bi-monthly basis. These discussions include information about aspirations and interests for individual young people, and the practical steps that need to be put in place to support the young person into employment, education or training.
- 2.23. This approach is having impact across the children in care and care leaving teams in Cambridgeshire, and is helping to support Personal Advisers to in turn support young people to take the steps needed to begin to achieve their aspirations. Personal Advisers have all been trained in relation the development of Personal Education Plans [PEPs], enabling them to actively contribute to PEP meetings, which identify any additional support a young person may need to achieve their goals.
- 2.24. A specialist NEET/EET Personal Adviser provides additional advice and support to case holders, and where appropriate, visits young people to discuss interests and future plans.

Such support can include helping to prepare for further education interviews, develop applications for university, and support with writing Curriculum Vitae's.

- 2.25. During the spring and summer, monthly editions of an internal education newsletter are produced, which help to keep personal advisers up to date with available training and study options on offer. In the last year, this contributed to a good take up of online courses including with the Prince's Trust and the Cambridge Regional College. Overall, Cambridgeshire saw an increase in young people accessing training opportunities in the current year compared to previous years.
- 2.26. An aspirations audit was completed and this has developed into an aspiration project that aims to provide enhanced careers guidance, quality work experience opportunities and extracurricular activities. This has resulted in the recruitment of an Aspiration Project Worker by the virtual school, who will now take the lead in coordinating this work. The service is also developing a leaving care activity offer and is linking with the Regions of Learning City Council project.
- 2.27. Work to promote Higher Education has continued with a virtual event for Foster Carers and a virtual open day for Children in Care/Care Leavers in conjunction with Anglia Ruskin University. A new Higher Education booklet has been produced in conjunction with Take your Place, run by the Network for East Anglian Collaboration Outreach.
- 2.28. The service continues to develop and promote training opportunities such as those provided by companies such as by BEATS Learning, New Meaning PACE and The Consultancy Home Counties. The service is currently working with groundworks on a project targeted at those who have dropped out of English as an Additional Language course, as a way of attempting to re-engage those young people in learning and specifically to help reduce barriers to further education, employment and training.
- 2.29. Job hunting packs have been launched to support young people who are looking for employment, with a simplified version for those who are developing their English language.
- 2.30. A Task and Finish group had been established with colleagues from the Special Educational Needs and Disability service, which is seeking to develop a better integrated offer to young people leaving care who also have Education, Care and Health Plans.
- 2.31. The service has been working with the Department for Work and Pensions to ensure that work coaches are proactively encouraging care leavers to take up opportunities under the Government's Kickstart scheme, and assist them with applications. Alongside this, we are part of the group for the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Kickstart Gateway plans, which will mean that care leavers claiming Universal Credit will be well placed to take up work placements.
- 2.32. The virtual school is developing a trauma informed programme with input from educational psychology. With a working title of Ace the Race, the aim of the programme is to work with some of our harder to engage care leavers who are NEET, aged between 16 and 18 and who are not attending education. The programme will work with them to develop resilience skills, support positive self-esteem and develop motivation and aspiration.

The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough NEET Strategy Group

- 2.33. In October 2020 a NEET Strategy group was formed across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough with the aim of developing a cross system strategy which harnesses every

opportunity to drive down the number of NEET Young People in Peterborough and Cambridgeshire particularly in existing and newly vulnerable groups.

- 2.34. The work of the NEET strategy group is informed by and feeds in to both the Early Help Strategy and Best Start in Life programme. Primary reporting is to the Health and Wellbeing and Early Help Partnership Boards, which are chaired by the Director of Children’s Services. The lead officer for the strategy is the Head of Service for Think Communities. This is because addressing NEET is a cross cutting issue that requires a whole system approach. The priority is to deliver NEET interventions through place based approaches into the future. The following schematic summarises governance arrangements and key relationships with other boards and activities:



- 2.35. The aim is to pull together engagement by the Combined Peterborough & Cambridgeshire Authority, Adult Education and learning, Children’s Social Care, Early Help and Special Educational Needs and Disability services and create much closer links with the community, voluntary and faith sectors as well as District, Parish and Town Councils, to seek out opportunities to support NEET young people.

- 2.36. The strategy group identified the need for more focus, collaboration and synergy in the way NEET issues were tackled and agreed the best way to achieve this was with an overarching NEET plan. The plan links to individual service NEET reduction plans and aims to:

- Identify cross cutting issues;
- Develop a unified and holistic set of actions to reduce NEET;
- Increase cooperation and efficiency
- Reduce duplication;
- Increase the profile of NEET to draw in additional funding.

- 2.37. Four work streams have been identified to support the above aims, Individual Responsible Officers have mapped service level actions under these:

- Data and Impact;
- Early Intervention, Identification and Tracking;
- Support Vulnerable Young People;
- Development of Opportunities.

2.38. The strategy group is leading the development of a cross-cutting NEET Reduction Strategy, which should be completed by April 2021. The draft vision is:

“All young people in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough will be encouraged to meet their full potential and get the support that they need to make a positive transition in to Education, Employment and Training. Young People are placed at the centre of a co-ordinated system that makes sense to them with focus given to those Young People who face multiple barriers to EET to ensure they get the support that they need to progress”

2.39. As is illustrated by the above examples, there has been a continued and considerable focus of supporting all young people, and young people leaving care in particular, into education, employment and training. More information on actions can be found in the action plan appended to this report.

2.40. There are positive signs that this work is having an impact for our care leavers and while the full impact of any economic downturn is yet to be felt, this continuing focus does mean that we have made good preparation for the challenges that are likely to lie ahead.

3. Alignment with corporate priorities

3.1 A good quality of life for everyone

The following bullet points set out details of implications identified by officers:

- Supporting young people into continued education, employment or training has long term benefits for them as individuals as well as for the broader community. Engagement in these activities builds independence and resilience and is associated with higher levels of self-regard and independence.

3.2 Thriving places for people to live

The following bullet points set out details of implications identified by officers:

- Ensuring that young people are successful in remaining in education, employment and training contributes to broader community wellbeing, increasing economic activity and helping to address poverty and economic and social disadvantage.

3.3 The best start for Cambridgeshire's children

The following bullet points set out details of implications identified by officers:

- As corporate parents, we share responsibility for ensuring that our children and young people in care and young people leaving care are supported to develop the skills and resilience they need in order to successfully make the transition into adulthood; being in education, employment or training is a vital aspect of this transition.

3.4 Net zero carbon emissions for Cambridgeshire by 2050

- There are no significant implications in this report that relate to this priority,

4. Significant Implications

4.1 Resource Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

4.2 Procurement/Contractual/Council Contract Procedure Rules Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

4.3 Statutory, Legal and Risk Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

4.4 Equality and Diversity Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

4.5 Engagement and Communications Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

4.6 Localism and Local Member Involvement

There are no significant implications within this category.

4.7 Public Health Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

5. Source documents

5.1 None

6. Appendices

6.1 Appendix 1 – Action Plan. Accessible version available on request from lou.williams@cambridgeshire.gov.uk