

Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

20 January 2015

**Name of Cabinet Member:**

Cabinet Member for Children and Young People – Councillor Ruane

**Director Approving Submission of the report:**

Executive Director of Resources

**Ward(s) affected:**

All

**Title:**

Options to Increase the Number of Looked After Children Accessing Council Apprenticeships.

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**Is this a key decision?**

No

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**Executive Summary:**

The Council currently has a well-established apprenticeship programme in place. This report makes recommendations as to how the Council can adopt measures to encourage and support the participation of current and former Looked After Children (LAC) in the programme.

**Recommendations:**

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People is requested to approve the following recommendations:

1. The Council will aim to increase the overall number of Looked After Children applying for Council apprenticeships to 20% by 2017 with an interim target of 10% by the end of 2016.
2. The Council currently runs an Access to Apprenticeship programme. The Council will expand the programme to include experience placements up to 2 months in length and additional education components. Looked After Children will be supported to apply for the programme. This will enable them to gain knowledge and skills to support their application to access a Council apprenticeship.
3. The Council will introduce a 'Buddy System' where Looked After Children who have successfully completed six months of their apprenticeship programme, can be given the opportunity to become a 'Buddy' to a new Looked After Child starting on their apprenticeship.
4. All Looked After Children will be given a full financial assessment, before starting their apprenticeship. A 'Hardship Fund' to be set up to support Looked After Children in an emergency, where other financial options are not available, enabling the individual to

carry on with their apprenticeship. The payments would be made on a loan basis. To set aside £5,000 from the Apprenticeship Strategy to cover this.

5. The Council will develop an apprenticeship talent pool, that will enable Looked After Children, who have successfully completed their Access to Apprenticeship programme to register their interest for future apprenticeship vacancies across the Council.
6. The Council will improve its communication strategy surrounding its apprenticeship programme with particular focus on increasing the number of Looked After Children joining the programme.

**List of Appendices included:**

None

**Other useful background papers:**

- Coventry City Council's Apprenticeship Strategy 2011 - 2014
- Future of Apprenticeships in England: Implementation Plan.  
[www.gov.uk/government/consultations/future-of-apprenticeships-in-england-richard-review-next-steps](http://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/future-of-apprenticeships-in-england-richard-review-next-steps)
- Care Matters: Time for Change – Department for Education and Skills.

**Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?**

No

**Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?**

No

**Will this report go to Council?**

No

**Report title: Options to Increase the number of Looked After Children (LAC) accessing council Apprenticeships.**

**1. Context**

- 1.1 The Council developed its apprenticeship programme in 2011. Over a number of years discussions have taken place as to whether the Council should take measures to try to increase the number of Looked After Children accessing apprenticeships within the Council. Nationally there has been an on-going debate about increasing the number of Looked After Children applying for and accessing apprenticeship programmes.
- 1.2 The Council currently has 102 apprentices on its Apprenticeship programme of which 6% have LAC status.
- 1.3 Since the Council adopted its Apprenticeship Strategy in 2011, 17 Looked After Children have accessed the Council's apprenticeship programme. Of those 17, 6 are currently on the programme, 6 have completed the programme and gained jobs within the Council, 2 have completed the Apprenticeship programme but were unsuccessful in gaining employment with the Council and 1 progressed onto Higher Education.
- 1.4 For any young person the transition from education to employment is challenging. For Looked After Children they often face additional challenges such as lack of confidence, motivation and career aspirations. There is also an apprenticeship requirement for minimum entry grades in Maths and English which can be a challenge for those Looked After Children who may not have been successful in school. 'Soft Skills' such as poor communication and interview skills have also proved to be barriers for Looked After Children. In common with other young people, lack of experience in a workplace means that care leavers can have a general lack of understanding of the types of behaviour that are considered acceptable.
- 1.5 The Council's Entry to Employment Team work in partnership with Route 21, CSWP, Careers Guidance and other agencies to promote the benefits of the Council's apprenticeship programme to young people. To support Looked After Children in gaining apprenticeships the Entry to Employment Team has developed a pre-apprenticeship training programme called, 'Access to Apprenticeships'. This programme currently runs for two weeks and focuses on employability skills, confidence building, motivation, and aspirations.
- 1.6 To improve new ways of working the Entry to Employment Team have also started a Twitter account to increase communication with younger people. With high youth unemployment in the City it is essential that every opportunity is taken to increase the number of young people accessing programmes.

**2. Options considered and recommended proposals**

- 2.1 The Council wants to increase the number of Looked After Children accessing apprenticeship programmes. The Council will implement a phased approach to reaching its 20% target of all apprenticeship applications to its scheme being from Looked After Children. By 2015/16 the aim is that 10% of Council apprentice applications will come from Looked After Children and by 2016/17 the Council is aiming to reach its target of 20%.
- 2.2 Financial security for Looked After Children is one of the major challenges when considering education or work experience opportunities. Department for Education guidance requires all local authorities to have a policy in place to support care leavers undertaking vocational learning, work experience and apprenticeships. This policy 'must allow the local authority to assess whether the young person requires additional financial

assistance, so that they benefit fully from taking part in a broad range of training opportunities or employment'. Work with Route 21 and Social Workers will be able to ensure that financial assessments are completed in full and as a result bursaries can be given to Looked After Children who require this support.

- 2.3 A full financial assessment will be completed for a Looked After Children when they apply for a work placement or an apprenticeship. An option is to ring-fence £5,000 from the Apprenticeship Strategy Fund to develop an Apprenticeship Hardship Fund. This Fund would have clear criteria for claims. Any financial assistance provided to a Looked After Child would be to cover a one-off emergency only. In addition to any financial assistance the young person would also be offered support to access financial advice which would aim to reduce the chances of the same incident reoccurring. This payment would be on a loan basis.
- 2.4 The Entry to Employment Team sends a survey to all apprentices that exit the programme. The team will review the experiences and challenges faced by existing Looked after Children during their time on placement and establish clear reasons as to why they may have been absent or considered dropping out. The team will offer all Looked After Children the opportunity to complete a questionnaire seeking their views for future development of the Council's apprenticeship programme.
- 2.5 The option to extend the 'Access to Apprenticeship programme' was considered enabling a lengthier work experience placement of up to 2 months with additional educational components. Looked After Children will be supported and encouraged to gain a place on this programme as part of the Council's Corporate Parenting responsibility. The programme will also include full recruitment and selection process for each individual providing relevant experience and knowledge in readiness for making an apprenticeship application. The programme will also include sessions in Maths and English to enable our Looked After Children to gain the required access levels for an apprenticeship programme.
- 2.6 As part of a wider apprenticeship communication strategy consideration has been given to how we communicate and who we communicate with. To promote the apprenticeship programme we need to enhance communication with Schools, Social Workers and their teams, Foster Carers, and Young People.
- 2.7 To increase the opportunity for Looked after Children to be informed about vacant Apprenticeship posts. Develop a Talent pool, where individuals can register their interest and then the Entry to Employment Team will inform all registered young people of each vacancy.

### **3 Results of consultation undertaken**

- 3.1 None

### **4. Timetable for implementing this decision**

- 4.1 The full consultation which will include discussions with Looked after Children already on programme and other stakeholder will be completed by end of February 2015.
- 4.2 All other areas of development within the Apprenticeship Programme will be implemented by April 2015.

### **5.1 Financial Implications**

5.1.2 To Ring-fence £5,000 of the Apprenticeship Strategy funding to support the recommendation of a hardship fund.

## **5.2 Legal Implications**

5.2.1 Under the Equality Act 2010 young people who are Looked After Children are not given a protected status in terms of selection for employment as an apprenticeship. The Council would therefore be open to legal challenge should it set a quota for the number or percentage of its apprentices who are present or former Looked After Children and recruit on this basis as doing so may disadvantage other young people who do have a protected characteristic under the Act such as disability or race.

5.2.2 Work experience is not usually classed as employment because there is no mutuality of obligation and financial reward is limited to expenses alone. The 'Access to Apprenticeship' programmes may be considered to be further or higher education courses and if this is the case selection onto them cannot give preference to a Looked After Child if this discriminates against a young person with a protected characteristic such as race or disability.

## **6.1 How will this contribute to achievement of the Council's key objectives / corporate priorities (corporate plan/scorecard) / organisational blueprint / Local Area Agreement (or Coventry Sustainable Community Strategy)?**

The recommendations being made will aim to increase the number of Looked After Children on the Council's apprenticeship programme and reduce youth unemployment. This action will support the Council in achieving its Corporate Parenting responsibility.

## **6.2 How is risk being managed?**

No risks identified

## **6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?**

The impact on the organisation would be a positive one and would assist the Council in ensuring that it is able to grow its own talent and succession plan for the future which forms part of the Council's wider Workforce Planning Strategy.

## **6.4 Equalities / EIA**

An increase in the number of Looked after Children on the Council's apprenticeship programme will support the reduction of Youth unemployment. When recruiting to the programmes outlined in this report the Council will offer support and guidance to Looked After Children in its role as a corporate parent.

## **6.5 Implications for (or impact on) the environment**

None highlighted

## **6.6 Implications for partner organisation**

None highlighted

**Report author(s):**

**Name and job title:**  
**Lynn Bassett – Manager Vocational Qualifications**

**Directorate:**  
**Resource**

**Tel and email contact:**  
**Tel: 024 7678 5358**  
**Lynn.bassett@coventry.gov.uk**

Enquiries should be directed to the above person.

<b>Contributor/approver name</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Directorate or organisation</b>	<b>Date doc sent out</b>	<b>Date response received or approved</b>
<b>Contributors:</b>				
Suzanne Bennett	Governance Services Officer	Resources	05/01/14	05/01/14
Other members				
<b>Names of approvers for submission: (officers and members)</b>				
Finance: Carolyn Prince	Lead Accountant	Resources	05/01/2015	
Legal: Gillian Carter	Senior Solicitor	Resources	05/01/2015	07/01/2015
Assistant Director: Shokat Lal	Assistant Director	Resources	05/01/2015	
Members: Councillor Ruane	Cabinet Member	Children and Young People	05/01/14	08/01/14

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## Appendices