

# Report to Childrens Services and Education Scrutiny Board

**6 January 2025**

<b>Subject:</b>	Corporate Parenting Post 16 Opportunities
<b>Director:</b>	Director of Children and Education, Sally Giles
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Skills and Employability Service Manager, Kelly Harris Kelly_harris@sandwell.gov.uk

## **1 Recommendations**

- 1.1 That the Board considers and comments upon the work being done to increase the number of young people with Care Experience 19-21 accessing employment, education and training (EET).
- 1.2 That the board reviews the academic results of young people who have been Children in Care and what barriers they face in attending higher education and employment.

## **2 Reasons for Recommendations**

- 2.1 To gain an understanding of the work being done to support young people with Care Experience accessing Post 16 Opportunities.
- 2.2 To review the figures as it relates to Care Experienced young people accessing education and employment.
- 2.3 To understand the barriers that may prevent Care Experienced young people moving into higher education or employment.
- 2.4 To understand the work undertaken to support those Care Experienced young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET).

- 2.5 To understand the figures around 19–24-year-olds with Care Experience who are NEET – what are the changes between 16-19 year olds, what changes and what are the reasons for this.

### 3 How does this deliver objectives of the Council Plan?

Growing Up in Sandwell	All children and young people have the same opportunities to achieve their full potential and are supported by adults, including parents and carers, to establish high aspirations. Children and young people have the right skills and support to take the next step in their life and are well prepared for adulthood.
Living in Sandwell	Suitable accommodation is crucial to creating a sustainable environment for young people to be able to progress on their journey into employment/education.
Thriving Economy in Sandwell	Employer engagement through social value is providing opportunities for our Care Experienced young people.
Healthy in Sandwell	There is a direct correlation between employment and health outcomes. Health and wellbeing are key elements of the EET journey to secure a sustainable destination.
One Council One Team	Corporate parenting and creating a Child Friendly borough are key Council priorities.

### 4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 There is a targeted focus on the performance of Education, Employment and Training (EET) for 19–21-year-olds who are Care Experienced young people. EET performance for 19–21-year-olds is currently 45.5%, an improvement of 3.8% from last year and an achievement of the corporate target set for this year. This remains below the national average by 16.5% but a further stretching target will be set to move closer towards our statistical neighbours and the national comparators. This is a key priority for the Corporate Parenting Board and actions are being implemented and monitored by the EET Strategy group.

4.2 Collectively, Sandwell Children's Trust and Sandwell Council are supporting the Children We Care for and Care Experienced young people into Education, Employment and Training destinations. The EET Strategy group has oversight over the key actions in place aiming to improve our EET performance in Sandwell. It is evident improvements are being made and outcomes are being realised as the percentage of those in EET at 16-24 has improved by 7.5% on last year and is 15.2% higher performance than 2022.

4.3 The process of getting Care Experienced young people into education, employment, and training (EET) can be lengthy and challenging due to several interrelated factors. Trauma, mental health issues, educational gaps, housing insecurity and financial barriers can prevent Care experienced young people from progressing to EET. Care Experienced young people at the age of 18/19 are at a transitional period of their lives which can create insecurity and exacerbate these interrelated barriers. Mental health and trauma of their lives in Care needs to be addressed prior to the young people being able to explore employment and training pathways. Additionally, secure housing needs to be in place before education, employment and training options can be considered. Whilst allowances are made by education for entry requirements, this can still be a blockage if for example Maths and English are an essential requirement of a course which would set a learner up to fail if they cannot prove they are learning at that level. Financial barriers can also prevent progression to NEET due to the affordability of destinations including University and apprenticeships which can leave Care Experienced young people worse off financially.

#### 4.4 **Academic achievement of the Children we Care for**

The academic achievement of the Children we Care for is above the national achievement levels for Care Experienced young people at Key Stage 4 but is lower than the Sandwell average for all children in this age group. There were 54 children in this cohort, of which 46% had an

Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) or were SEN support. The academic data for 2024 has not yet been released.

A further table with more detail of academic achievement is provided in Appendix 1.

	4+ English & Maths			
	2020	2021	2022	2023
LAC Sandwell	26	21	30	32
LAC National	24	29	22	NA
ALL Sandwell	61	62	61	55
ALL National	71	72	69	65

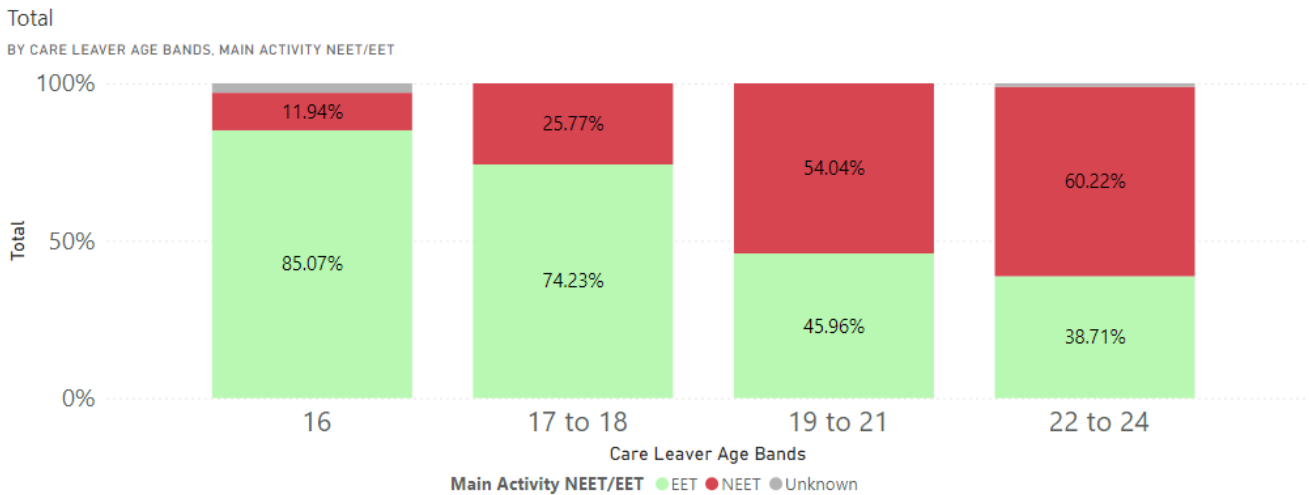
#### 4.6 Sandwell's EET performance from 16-25 years including age range and national comparators.

Age	Children we care for (Nov 24)	EET (Nov 24)	% EET (Nov 24)	Children we care for (Dec 23)	EET (Dec 23)	% EET (Dec 23)	National comparator 2023
16	67	57	85.1%	67	43	64.2%	N/A
17-18	194	144	74.2%	159	114	71.7%	70%
19-21	198	90	45.5%	204	85	41.7%	62%
22-25	93	37	39.8%	84	25	29.8%	N/A
	552	328	59.4%	514	267	51.9%	N/A

The overall EET percentage for 16–24-year-olds is an improvement on last year's performance of 7.5% and 15.2% higher than in 2022.

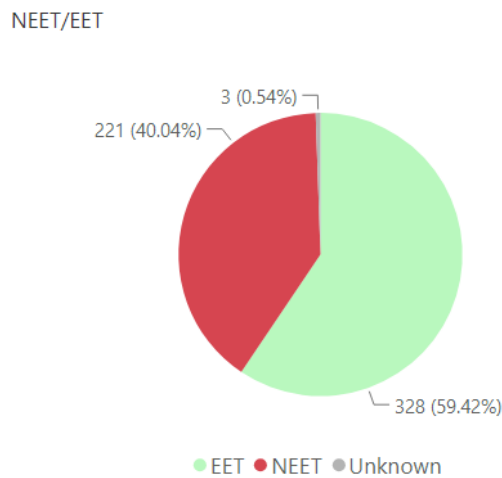
EET performance has also improved for 19-21 year olds to 45.5%, an increase of 3.8% from last year and 6.6% in 2022.

## 4.7 Percentage of EET in age bands



There is decline of EET from those in mandatory education (16–18-year-olds) to those who are post 19.

## 4.8 Overall percentage of EET/NEET



There are currently 328 Children we Care For/Care Experienced young people who are EET, with 221 NEET and 3 Unknown.

## 4.9 Destinations

Activity Type by Age	Nov 2023		Nov 2024	
	Total	%	Total	%
F1 - Young person engaged full time in higher education (i.e. studies beyond A level)	32	6%	46	8%
F2 - Young person engaged full time in education other than higher education	156	29%	185	34%
F4 - Young person engaged full time in an apprenticeship	8	1%	14	3%
F5 - Young person engaged full time in training or employment (not apprenticeship)	38	7%	34	6%
G4 - Young person not in education, employment or training because of illness or disability	28	5%	36	7%
G5 - Young person not in education, employment or training: other circumstances	169	31%	161	29%
G6 - Young person not in education, employment or training due to pregnancy or parenting	25	5%	24	4%
P1 - Young person engaged part time in higher education (i.e. studies beyond A level)	1	0%	0	0%
P2 - Young person engaged part time in education other than higher education	19	4%	16	3%
P5 - Young person engaged part time in training or employment (not apprenticeship)	25	5%	31	6%
Parent engaged full time in training or employment	1	0%	2	0%
Parent engaged part time in higher education (i.e. studies beyond A level)	1	0%	0	0%
Not Known	34	6%	3	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>537</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>552</b>	<b>100%</b>

The most popular EET destination is full time education at 34%, with 8% going into higher education and 3% into apprenticeships. The numbers entering apprenticeships is increasing, with 8 in November 2023 to 14 November 2024.

### 4.9 The Sandwell offer for Children We Care For and Care Experienced young people

4.10 The EET panel is used to refer young people to the Multi Agency team to determine the package of support to progress them to Education, Employment and Training. The EET panel consists of Sandwell Childrens Trust, Connexions, Employment and Skills and the Virtual school. The package of support is tailored to the individual and can involve multiple teams.

4.11 Sandwell Children's Trust Personal Advisors encourage CEYP to take up EET opportunities. Personal Advisors are kept up to date with

opportunities available via Connexions and the Employment and Skills team.

- 4.12 The main focus of the panel is to support an action plan for young people who are NEET. The panel is chaired by a SCT Team Manager and each manager including partner agencies is responsible for identifying any young people who are NEET or who may be EET and need additional support to fulfil their aspirations. NEET young people referred to the panel are regularly reviewed, and panel members may be set tasks to complete in order to prepare and promote individuals access to EET. The nature of the panel enables individual needs to be considered in order to maximise success and this includes the exploration of bespoke plans. The panel is attended by the allocated social worker or SCT Personal Advisor, who will then feedback any ideas, actions or advice directly to the young person.
- 4.13 Connexions offer a Careers Advice and Guidance service for CEYP from year 8 onwards. The service aims to ensure destinations are in place at the age of 18 to prevent the potential of them becoming NEET in the future. Aspire to HE is facilitated by Connexions in Sandwell and is offered to inspire the young people and to expand their knowledge of Higher education as a future destination. This is offered at year 8 and year 11 and is delivered in partnership with a local University.
- 4.14 The Council's Employment and Skills team provide dedicated job search sessions for Care Experienced young people in which they receive support in looking for opportunities and the application process. These sessions have proved invaluable in building the trust of the young people and improving confidence.
- 4.15 The Council offers ringfenced opportunities for Work Experience. Work experience opportunities can be generated according to individuals' aspiration. Currently, there is also funding to provide paid work placements for Care Experienced Young people utilising funding from the Commonwealth Games legacy programme.

- 4.16 Care experienced young people are offered apprenticeship opportunities within the council that are generated to match their individual aspirations through 'ring fenced' vacancies. These are made accessible by a relaxation of the Maths and English requirements (if necessary), and by an individualised application process. Where an opportunity is matched to a young person, working with an advisor, they can access a period of work experience, and receive support to complete the application form and undergo an informal interview. Currently, there are 6 CEYP on apprenticeships in the Council and Sandwell schools. There are a further 3 undertaking work experience looking to progress into an apprenticeship.
- 4.17 Social value and employer engagement is an important element of the offer available to our Care Experienced young people. Social value indicators are used to target employers to generate opportunities including work experience, apprenticeships and jobs. This work was recently showcased at the Business Growth and Employment Summit with employers including Morgan Sindall, Doocey's and Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospitals presenting best practice examples.
- 4.18 The impact of Care experienced young people going into education, employment and training can be transformative with improvements in mental health and wellbeing, self-confidence, health outcomes and can lead to a more positive trajectory for their future prosperity. Care Experienced young people who have gone into EET are great ambassadors to showcase to other young people the wider benefits and realities of the range of opportunities.

#### 4.19 **Case studies**

Young person at the age of 22, had gained some educational qualifications but not the entry qualifications required for employment. She was disillusioned by the employment opportunities available, had high aspiration but lacked direction and knowledge of how to get there. After meeting with the team, was advised how to gain the entry qualifications



and how an apprenticeship opportunity can open doors to further opportunities. She completed a Customer Service L2 apprenticeship, and successfully completed with a distinction grade. She has moved into a higher apprenticeship with another Council department, whilst continuing to improve on her functional skills.

Young person with SEN who lacked confidence and had anxiety about the world of work and social interaction completed a period of work experience prior to starting her apprenticeship. She has settled in well and feels supported in all different aspects of the role, including having a supportive network in the service.

Young person at the age 23, with no work history, completed paid work experience within the youth service. The service worked with him to build professional skills that an employer would expect. He has now demonstrated that and now has an interview for an apprenticeship.

Young person at 20 years old and currently lives alone in an HMO. He was evicted from his previous sheltered premises due to not complying with the general upkeep of the property. He has struggled with his view of his body and was previously teased and bullied by others. He has had difficulties with finances and budgeting, retaining relationships and his general confidence with his peers and others and uncertain about what his working/education pathway looks like.

Following Barnardo's support the young person is now more independent and confident about his abilities to feel able to manage in different spaces. He is very involved in different groups and went onto complete work experience which has led to him securing an apprenticeship, working with younger children and implementing the positive approach model, he himself was a beneficiary of.

## 4.20 Barriers to EET

- 4.21 A deep dive was conducted in January 2024 into the Education, Employment and Training offer for Care Experienced young people. As part of the deep dive the barriers to progressing into EET were explored. Further exploration has taken place by the EET strategy group of the reasons for the drop in EET in the 19 plus age group.
- 4.20 Trauma, Mental Health and Wellbeing were highlighted as a key barrier to young people accessing support. This has been addressed by the Barnardo's mental health and wellbeing service project. Barnardo's Wellbeing Workers provide a range of child and young person led assessments, support and interventions designed to meet the emotional and mental health needs of children and young people, helping them to reach goals, manage their emotions, understand how their experience and trauma can affect their well-being and feel more settled in their lives. This has led to positive outcomes including employment, education and apprenticeships for young people who previously were not engaging.
- 4.21 Barnardo's use an Outcome Rating Scale to measure the overall well-being/distress of care experienced young people. According to the outcome rating scale, it is reported that 82% of young people's scores have improved with a 21% overall improvement of mental health and wellbeing.
- 4.22 Care Experienced young people post 19 are in a transitional period of their lives. This may be the first time they live independently, and they may move to a location unfamiliar to them. Sandwell Childrens Trust are working to ensure a more seamless transition to prevent the potential of becoming NEET due to this instability. Projects such as the House Project and Live and Work scheme, and the close working arrangements with Housing Management are enabling a successful transition.
- 4.23 Financial barriers have also been cited since particularly for those who are post 19 and living independently, financially they can be worse off when

choosing an apprenticeship or higher education. For an apprenticeship, there is a bursary available of £3000. However, this is paid in instalments and cannot be counted upon as a regular income. The apprenticeship wage at £8.60 per hour (£16,546.40 per year) compared to the Real Living Wage at £12.60 per hour (£24,242), leaves a shortfall of £7,695.60 per year.

4.24 Engagement of the Children we Care for and Care Experienced young people was also explored as a barrier. The Sandwell Childrens Trust Local offer articulates the education and employment support available. However, gaining meaningful engagement and building trust takes time and it is important the way in which opportunities are showcased include the voice of the child. The Forum for Independent Adults (FIYA) have been integral in acting as ambassadors for Education, Employment and Training with their peers. They have attended the Youth Employment Summit, conferences with employers and recorded videos of their experiences.

#### 4.25 **Next steps**

4.26 The EET strategy group and Education subgroups are being merged to form the Education and EET group. This group will be responsible for monitoring the academic achievement and aspiration of the Children we Care for and Care Experienced young people including NEET prevention activities from year 7 onwards.

4.27 A key focus of our plan of action going forward is focussing on transition points at years 11-13 to ensure EET pathways are in place for the Children we Care for to prevent NEET at post 19.

4.28 We will continue our focussed delivery on 19-21 Care Experienced young people, including encouraging local employers to generate opportunities and ringfencing work experience and opportunities in the Council and Children's Trust.

## 5 Implications

<b>Resources:</b>	The average cost of an apprenticeship is between £25,000 to £30,000. Current budget constraints are limiting the numbers of new opportunities which can be created.
<b>Legal and Governance:</b>	<p>Care experienced young people have a legal right to education up to the age of 25 which is the same as all young people. Care experienced young people should also be supported during their transition into adulthood with housing, further/higher education, financial assistance and employment options.</p> <p>EET performance figures are monitored at the Corporate Parenting board and within the Council's Performance Management framework.</p>
<b>Risk:</b>	<p>Unrealistic expectations – moving Care Experienced young people into a destination too quickly not allowing them the time to prepare which can result in them struggling to cope/leaving the opportunity. It is crucial the young person's voice is included, and they are comfortable with their journey.</p> <p>Potential lack of support in education/employment destination – ensuring appropriate support is in place for mental health/trauma, mentoring and financial.</p>
<b>Equality:</b>	The proposal positively supports Care Experienced young people.
<b>Health and Wellbeing:</b>	The proposals support health and wellbeing outcomes, employment has a positive impact on health.
<b>Social Value:</b>	Social value is a key element of the offer for Care experienced young people.

<b>Climate Change:</b>	Green industry careers are showcased as part of the careers and employment offer.
<b>Corporate Parenting:</b>	EET is a key priority of the Corporate Parenting Board. Ring fenced work experience and apprenticeship opportunities support our corporate parenting duties.

## **6 Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Academic Achievement data

## **7. Background Papers**

N/A