

Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Mini task group update and recommendations

Introduction

During the 2015/2016 municipal year, the Children and Young People (CYP) Overview and Scrutiny Panel has trialled a new approach to task groups; these are smaller in scope and put members in the driving seat of undertaking research and gathering information.

Two mini task groups were set-up to investigate:

- Improving educational outcomes for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND); and
- Preparing young people leaving care with specific reference to accessing and securing employment and housing.

Recommendation

Whilst the work of the mini task groups is yet to conclude, based on the insights already gained, it is recommended that these be brought together under a single focus on routes into employment for both of these vulnerable cohorts (children with SEND and those leaving care).

No judgement has yet been made as to whether this mini task group approach has or has not been successful. This may be harder to judge given this new approach has been trialled during a period of change within the democratic services team, with some resulting loss in momentum. It is recommended that this be considered more fully as part of the work programme planning for the 2016/2017 municipal year.

Cohort information

Information available to the mini task groups supports a greater focus on routes into employment for these vulnerable cohorts:

1. Young people with SEND

At the February 2016 meeting of the CYP Panel, the Children, Schools and Families department presented the annual school standards report. This highlighted:

- There has been a 27 percentage point rise in the number of young people with SEN in the 16 – 18 cohort and a rise in the number of them who are not in education, employment or training (NEET); and
- Those most at risk of being NEET have had support with their SEN at school, were known to social care and/or were also known to youth offending teams. The largest group received support with their SEN in school but did not have a statement of special educational need.

2. Care leavers

In the July 2015 report on *Looked-After Children*, the number of care leavers who are not engaged in education, employment or training was identified as an area of focus as a year on year decline in performance had been identified. At the time the report was written, 59% (82 out of 140 young people in the care leaver cohort) were engaged in employment,

education and training, (with a remaining 41% or 58 young people in the care leaver cohort that are also defined as NEET).

An update to the report to the *Looked-After Children* report is anticipated in March 2016.

Next steps

1. Gain the agreement of the care leavers task group for this approach (by 10/03/16);
2. Gain the agreement of the CYP panel for this approach (by 22/03/16);
3. Develop a short project plan to help bring this work to fruition (by 22/03/16). This will define what information is still required, which experts should be consulted, consideration of the existing Merton routes into employment offer for these cohorts, comparison with the offer from other local authorities (with a focus on those that are award winning or have been demonstrated to be the most successful) and review the progress on existing task group recommendations that support routes into employment for these vulnerable cohorts.
4. Both task groups have already identified the importance of the vocational offer from Merton to underpin routes into employment for these cohorts with specific reference to apprenticeships and mentoring schemes. This will be a key focus of the remaining activity.

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