



Corporate Parenting Strategy
Progress and Update Report for Scrutiny

Bethan T James

March 2016

Contents:

1. Context
2. Strategic Aims
3. Background Data
4. Progress and Impact
5. Areas for future improvement
6. Concluding comments

1. Context

Carmarthenshire County Council has a Corporate Parenting responsibility for every child who is classed as *looked after* by the Council and for our young people leaving care. As Corporate Parents the council has the highest of aspirations for the children and young people we care for. We recognise that they are amongst the most vulnerable children in our society and therefore require us to work together to ensure that they become capable future citizens.

Our aspirations for looked after children and care leavers are outlined in our Corporate Parenting Strategy, '*If this were my child*'. The delivery of the strategy is overseen by the Corporate Parenting Panel consisting of:

- Councillor Gareth (Chair)
- Councillor Eirwyn Williams
- Councillor Jan Williams
- Councillor Sian Thomas
- Councillor Sue Allen
- Councillor Mansel Charles
- Councillor Gwyneth Thomas
- Councillor Jeff Thomas
- Councillor Ryan Bartlett
- Councillor Sharen Davies
- Robert Sully, Director of Education and Children's Services
- Jake Morgan, Director of Social Care, Health and Housing
- Stefan Smith, Head of Children's Services
- Robin Staines, Head of Housing

Service Managers, Health Colleagues and other professionals attend when discussing or presenting specific items.

The agenda ensures that members have oversight of housing, education, care and social inclusion issues and are able to make judgements as to how well the authority is meeting the needs of this vulnerable group of children and young people.

The Corporate Parenting Strategy outlines the authority's key aspirations for looked after children and care leavers and clearly sets out the actions we intend to take to achieve this. It provides a framework for all Carmarthenshire County Council Officers, Managers and Councillors in order to support them in making a real difference to the lives of looked after children and young people in leaving care services.

The Corporate Parenting Team supports the Council in meeting its Corporate Parenting duties, providing training, oversight and advice to all departments.

Every child needs a good parent who looks out for them, speaks out on their behalf and responds to their needs. For children in care in Carmarthenshire we believe this is a statutory role for **all departments** across the Council.

2. Strategic Aims

Carmarthenshire County Council is committed to:

- Supporting family life and will always endeavour for children and young people to reside within their own families and within their own community whenever it is safe to do so.
- Prioritising placements with foster carers rather than letting a child grow up in residential care or an institution.
- Proactively supporting children and young people looked after to achieve their full educational potential.
- Improving the life chances of looked after children and care leavers through the development and delivery a holistic range of services.

The seven core aims for children and young people summarized in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) form the basis for decisions on priorities and objectives nationally. They also form the basis for monitoring outcomes locally for looked after children and care leavers.

Looked after children and care leavers should:

- Have a flying start in life
- Access a comprehensive range of education and learning opportunities
- Enjoy the best possible health and freedom from abuse, victimisation and exploitation
- Access play, leisure, sporting and cultural activities
- Be listened to, treated with respect and have their race and cultural identity recognised
- Have a safe home and community which supports physical and emotional well-being
- Not be disadvantaged by poverty

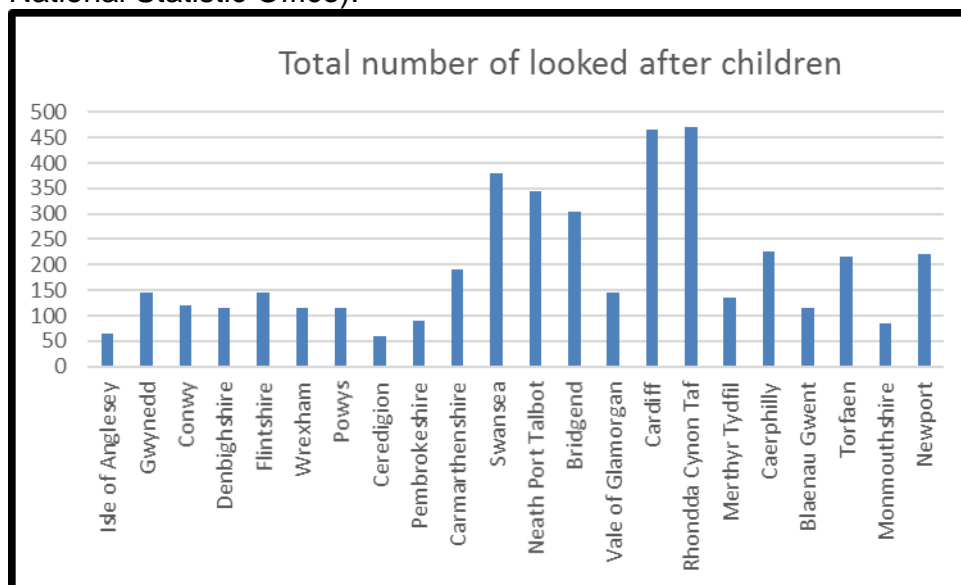
3. Background data

In Wales as of 31st March 2015

- 4, 255 children were in the care of local authorities in Wales compared to 5,756 the previous year.
- 87 children per every 10,000 under the age of 18 in Wales compared to 91 the previous year.
- Carmarthenshire were corporate parents to 240 looked after children compared to 252 the previous year.
- Carmarthenshire were corporate parents to 94 care leavers compared to 83 the previous year.

Graph 1: Number of looked after children by local authority (31st March 2015)

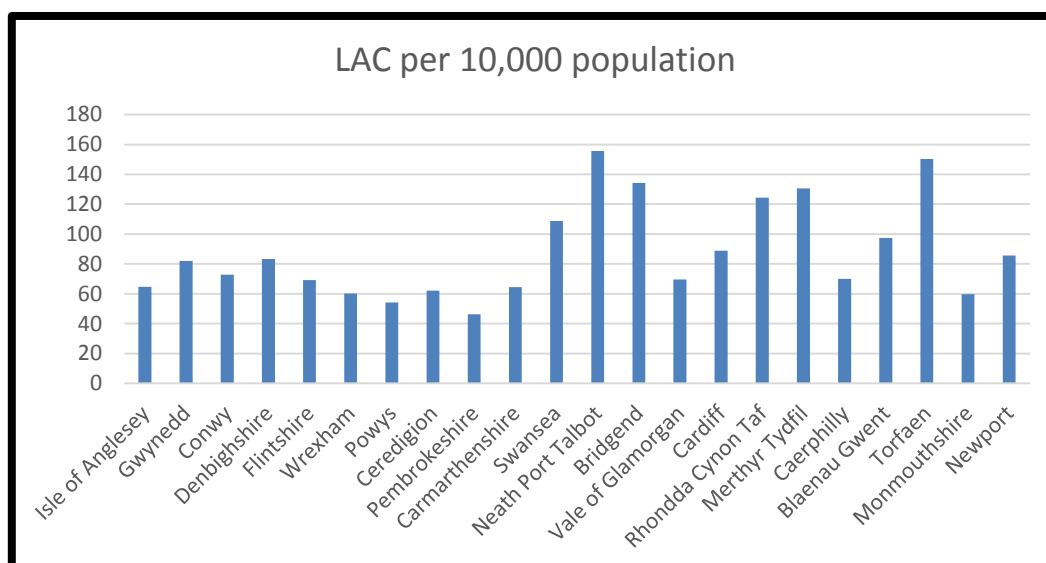
(Wales National Statistic Office).



Given the level of deprivation in Carmarthenshire it is considered that the number of looked after children is moderate when compared with the numbers in other authorities in Wales. A comparative indicator is also the number of looked after children per 10,000 of the population.

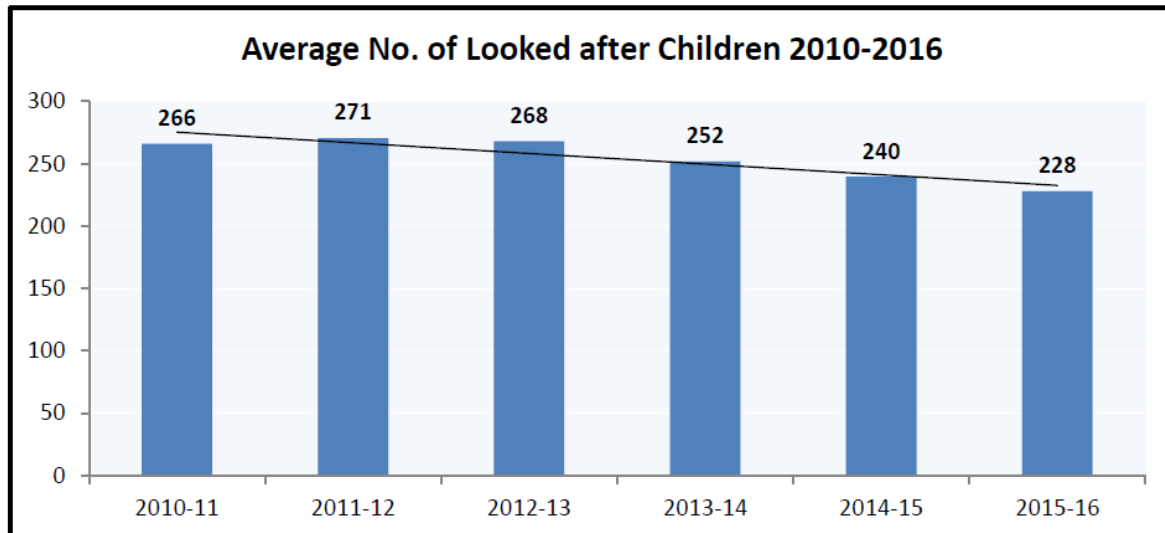
Graph 2: Number of looked after children per 10,000 of the population by local authority (31st March 2015)

The graph below shows the number of looked after children per 10,000 of the population by local authority (Wales National Statistic Office). From this data you can see that Carmarthenshire has a comparative rate with Monmouthshire, Ceredigion, Flintshire and the Anglesey.



Graph 3: Total number of children looked after by Carmarthenshire

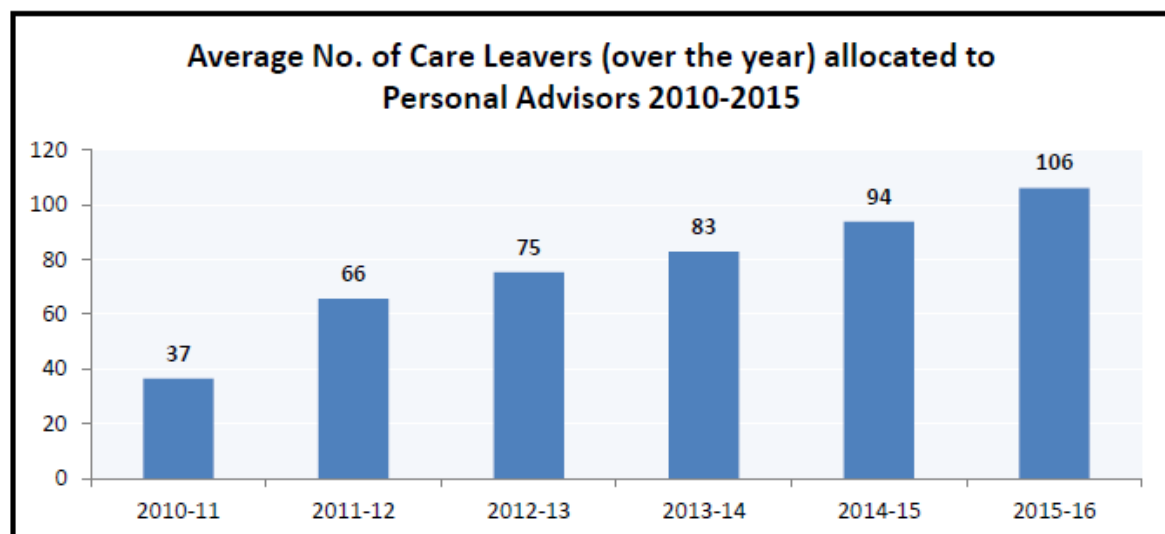
This graph shows the average number of children looked after by Carmarthenshire County Council from 2010-2015.



Currently in Carmarthenshire the number of children looked after is dropping when compared to previous years. While it is difficult to prove a statistical correlation it is felt that this is due to targeted preventive services and increased family support through flying start, families first and TAF.

Graph 4: The Total number of Care Leavers

The *Leaving Care and Social Services and Wellbeing Acts* place a responsibility on the authority to support care leavers up to the up to 25 if still engaged in education or training.



While the number of looked after children are decreasing it will take 4-5 years to see this impacting on reducing the number of care leavers that the authority supports as we have a duty to support children up to the age of 25.

4. Progress and impact of the Corporate Parenting Strategy to date

The impact of the Corporate Parenting Strategy is monitored through a range of performance targets under each of the core aims. What follows is a summary of those targets and a bullet point update as to the progress made up to the end of 2015. Where appropriate these are linked to Performance Indicators.

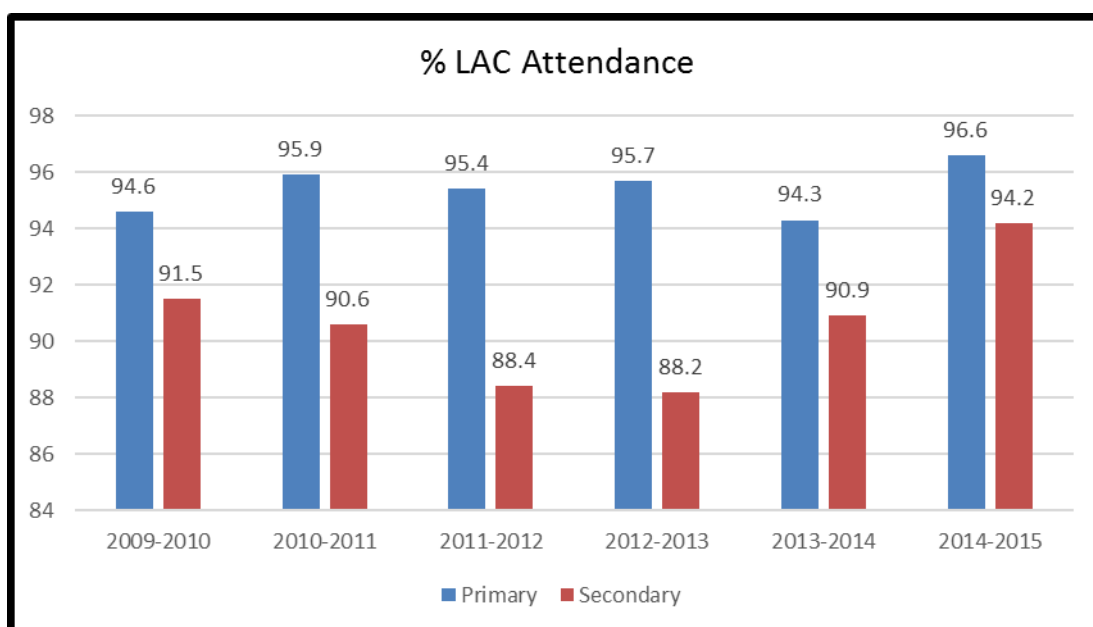
I. Every child to have a flying start in life

- a. Ensure the attendance and attainment of all looked after children is monitored and catch-up support provided where necessary.

The LAC Education Coordinator provides support, guidance and oversight for all matters related to education and attainment. Training is provided for schools, Governors, Elected Members and foster carers. The Corporate Parenting panel receive regular reports from the LAC Education Coordinator.

School Attendance of looked after children

School attendance of our looked after children is good 96.6 % attendance at Primary and 94.2% attendance at Secondary. This is better than the All Wales average.

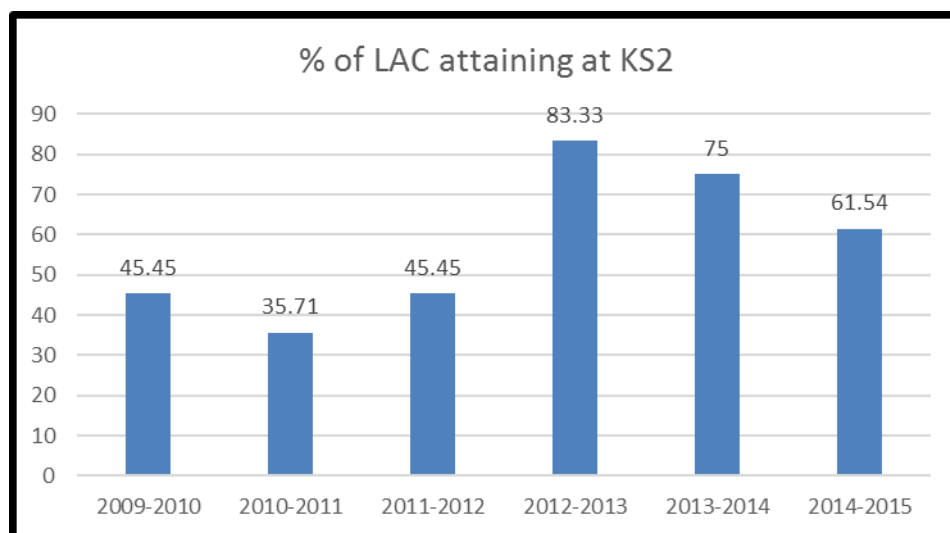


While Secondary school attendance is improving 2-3 children continue to have poor attendance and these children and their carers are being supported in order to attend school.

School attainment of looked after children

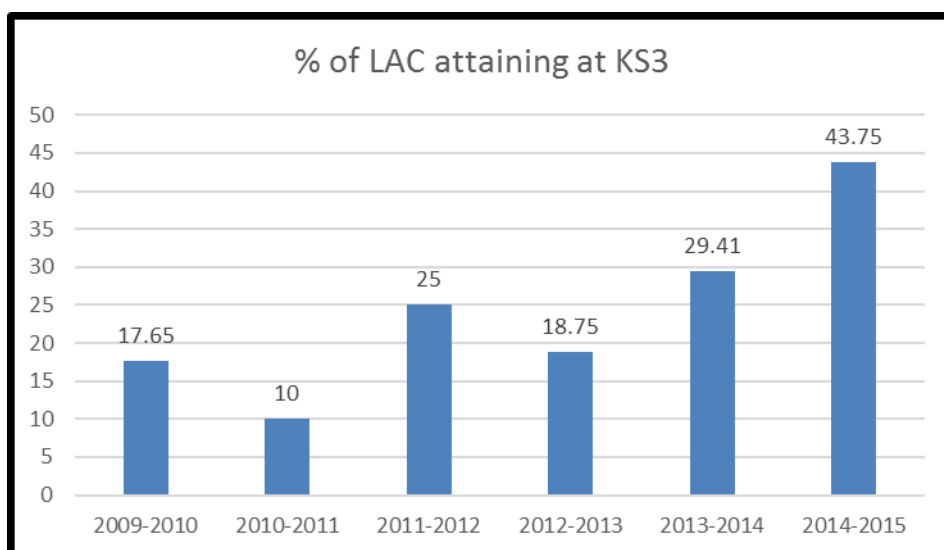
Our monitoring indicates that looked after children in Key Stage 2 may require additional support to achieve their full potential. Only 61.5% achieved the core subject indicator compared to 75% last year. It is hoped that the PDGLAC grant and the investment in Attachment Aware Schools will provide the interventions necessary to improve this in 2015/16.

At Key Stage 2 - 61.5% of LAC achieved the core subject indicator.

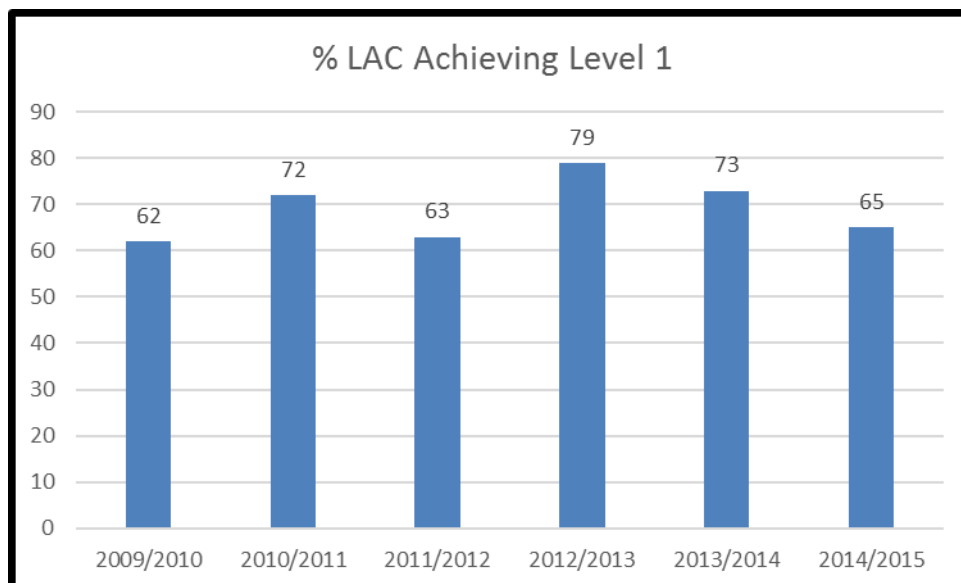


The attainment of looked after children in Key Stage 3 continue to improve. This is an area that was prioritised in 2014 and the Corporate Parenting Team have provided a range of additional educational resources for pupils and support for schools to improve this outcome.

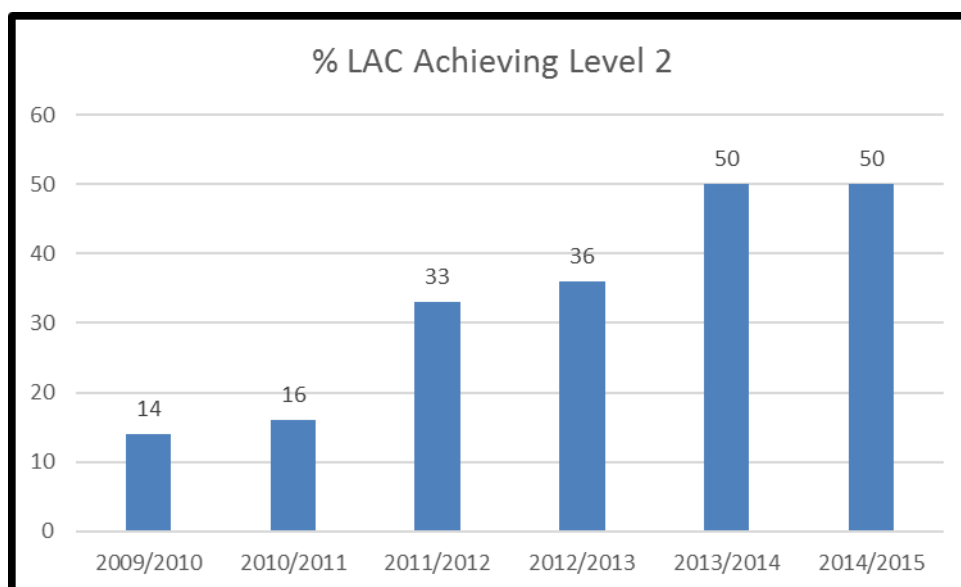
At Key Stage 3- 43% of looked after children achieved the core subject indicator.



% of LAC Pupils achieving Level 1 at GCSE (5 or more grades A*-G)



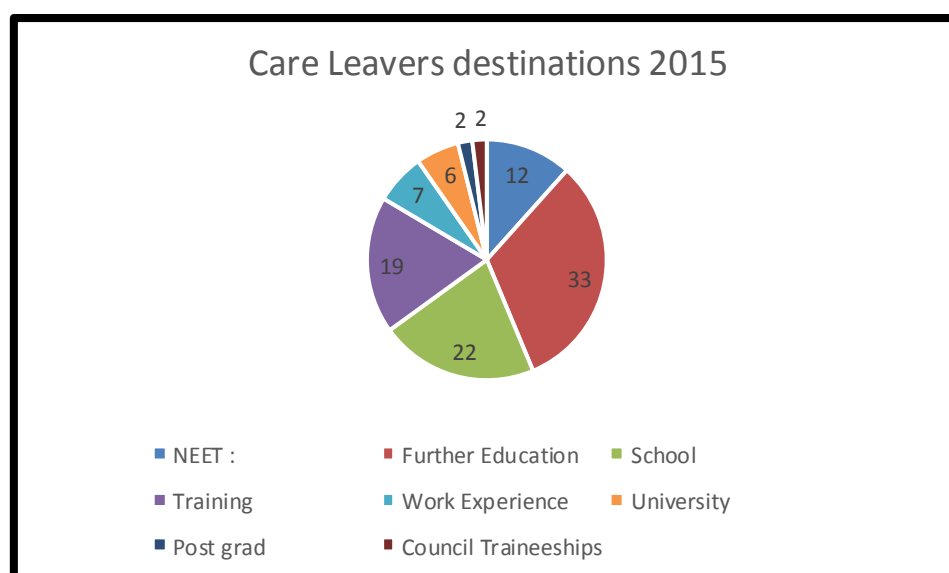
% of LAC Pupils achieving Level 2 at GCSE (5 or more grades A*-C)



b. Ensure every care leaver follows an accredited independent living training programme.

A new accredited training programme has been developed and 58 accredited life-skills modules have been delivered to care leavers by the Personal Advisers. The Personal Advisers focus on developing budgeting skills, practical life skills and emotional resilience as well as helping secure employment and training.

12 Care Leavers were NEET in 2015. Of these 4 were young mothers. Most are engaged in learning and training. It is very positive to see 6 care leavers accessing Higher Education and a further 2 following Post Graduate qualifications. This year the team are developing training courses where young parents can also bring their children in order to re-engage them in learning.



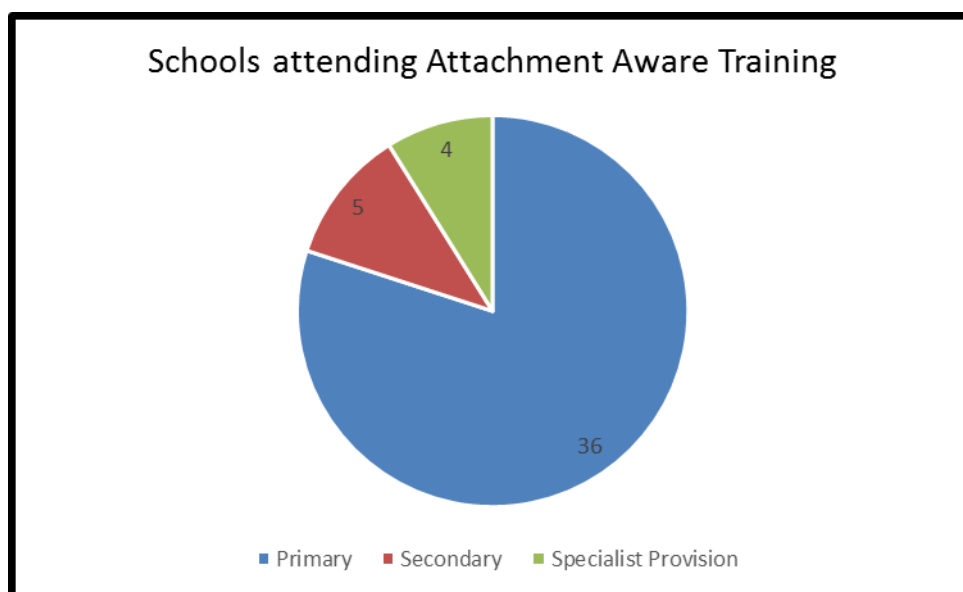
c. Provide training and support for foster carers and schools in order to ensure that they are able to support the development of young people experiencing loss, attachment issues, trauma, abuse and neglect.

There is an annual training programme for foster carers, support groups and 1:1 support available on request. The training and support focuses on meeting the emotional needs of looked after children, dealing with challenging behaviours and supporting their educational attainment.

In addition to this schools have received an enhanced training programme through the LAC Pupil Deprivation Grant. There is a regional LAC Pupil Deprivation Grant plan that provides an annual training programme for schools and governors on Attachment Aware Schools.

Parenting with PACE and Attachment Awareness training is provided to Foster Carers and Adopters.

Schools in Carmarthenshire can work towards Attachment Aware School Status and access intensive training from the Corporate Parenting Team. So far 36 Primary Schools are accessed training, 5 Secondary Schools, 2 Special Schools and the Pupil Referral Units.



- d. Ensure that emotional health support is provided for looked after children and care leavers as and when necessary.**

The Emotional Health Team provides advice and therapeutic support for social workers, foster carers, looked after children, children placed for adoption and care leavers. The team also work closely with schools to offer support and advice for school staff.

The team consists of a Child Psychologist, therapeutic social worker/ counsellor and a thera-play practitioner. This team is supported by a range of support and engagement workers who are able to provide additional support for young people in the community.

Looked after children are also able to access the School Counselling Service provided by Area 43 and Specialist CAMHS services.

The Emotional Health Team sit within the Corporate Parenting Services and every looked after child who is new to care has an emotional health plan. This plan outlines

how the adults around the child can work together to support the child's emotional wellbeing.

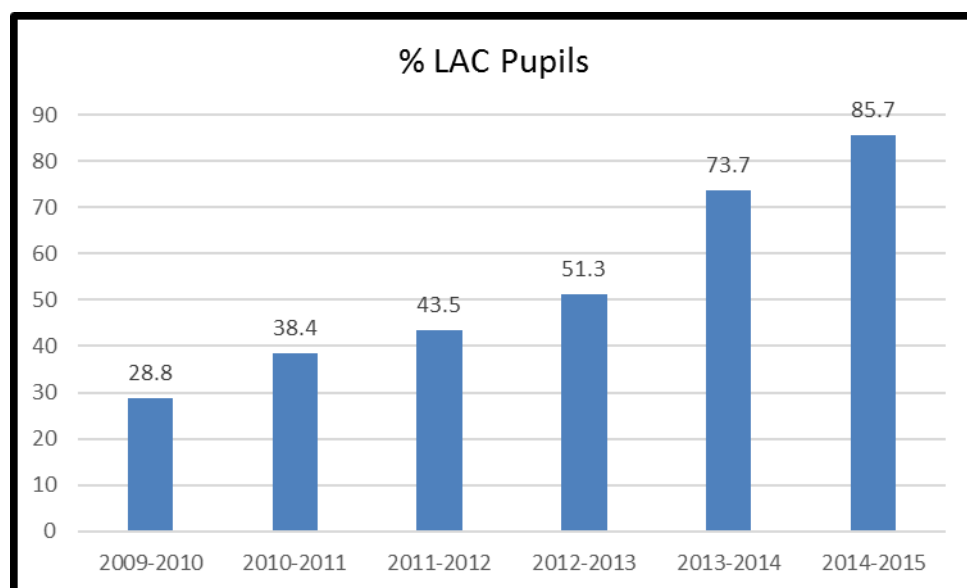
II. Every child to have a comprehensive range of education and learning opportunities

In order for our looked after children to be active citizens as adults services must work in partnership as Corporate Parents to ensure that they have every opportunity to engage in education and learning.

a. Ensure that every child has a meaningful Personal Education Plan.

The authority has developed a more person centred approach to educational planning for looked after children and this has been acknowledged as best practice by the CSSiW, Estyn and ERW. Most schools are now completing the Personal Education Plans for children. Training and support is provided by the LAC Education Coordinator.

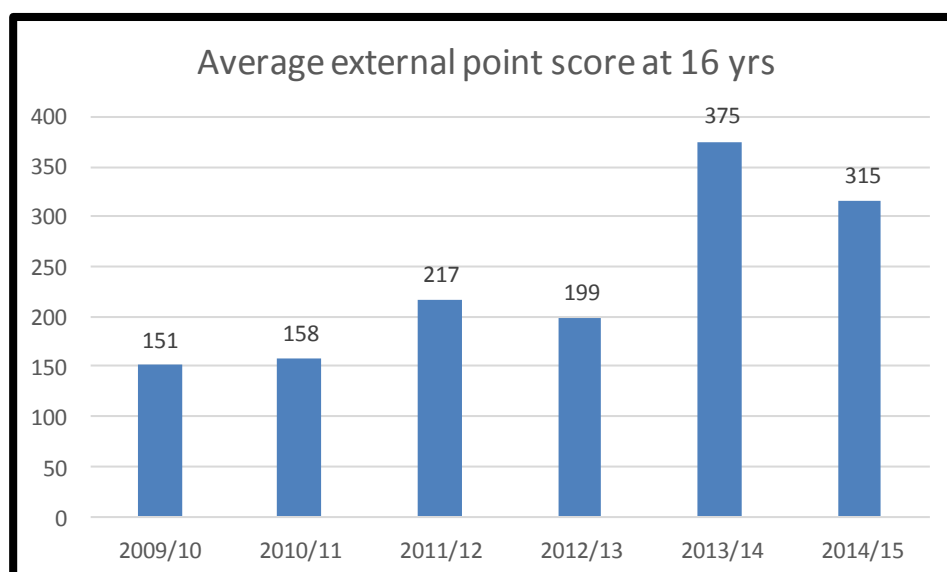
All children have a personal education plan (PEP). 85.7% of children had one within 20 working days in 2014/15. This compares to 73.7% in the previous year.



b. Support every looked after child to leave school with a recognised qualification.

The authority expects every looked after child to reach their full academic potential. Many of our children do this. For some their vulnerability and emotional instability

impacts on learning. Our children are more likely to underachieve if they experience school moves.



- c. Monitor and maximise the number of care leavers who are not in education, employment or training (NEET).

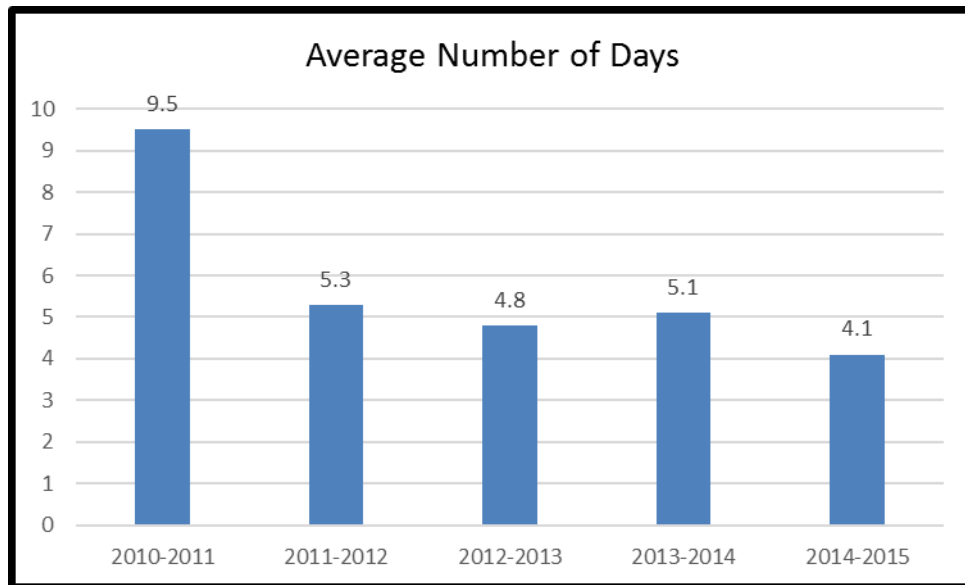
Providing in-house training and traineeships has contributed to significantly reducing the number of care leavers who are NEET. The authority is committed to offering care leavers work experience opportunities and traineeships in order to ensure that our young people are 'work ready'.

The Corporate Parenting Team utilise in-house resources to deliver training programmes for care leavers to ensure that all our young people have every opportunity to find work in these challenging economic times.

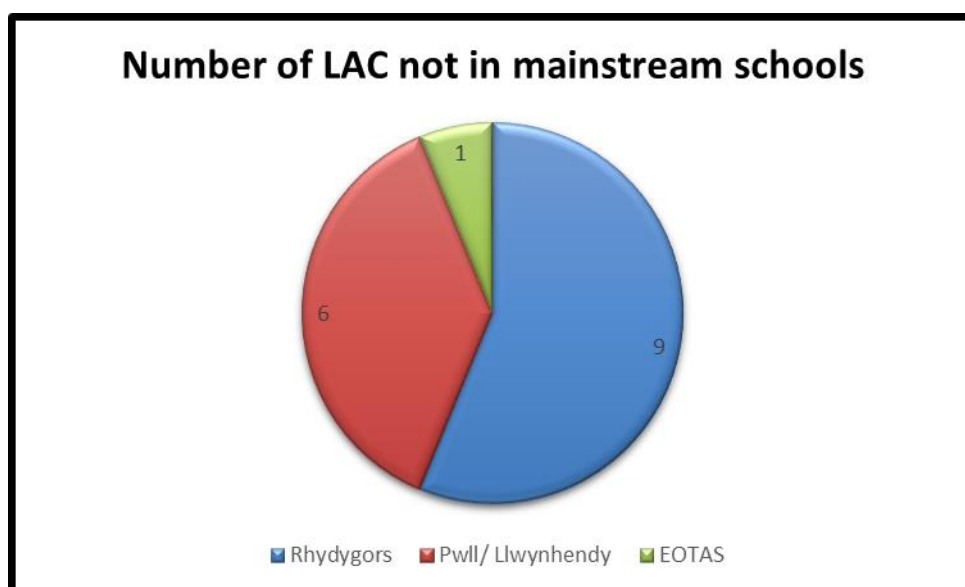
- d. Ensure that no looked after child misses out on education due to being excluded.

Every effort is made to provide support, advice and guidance for schools in order to prevent exclusion and maximise engagement with learning. While exclusions have reduced since 2010, and there have been no permanent exclusions, it is still felt that too many of our looked after children are placed in provisions that are not socially inclusive.

Average number of school days missed due to exclusion



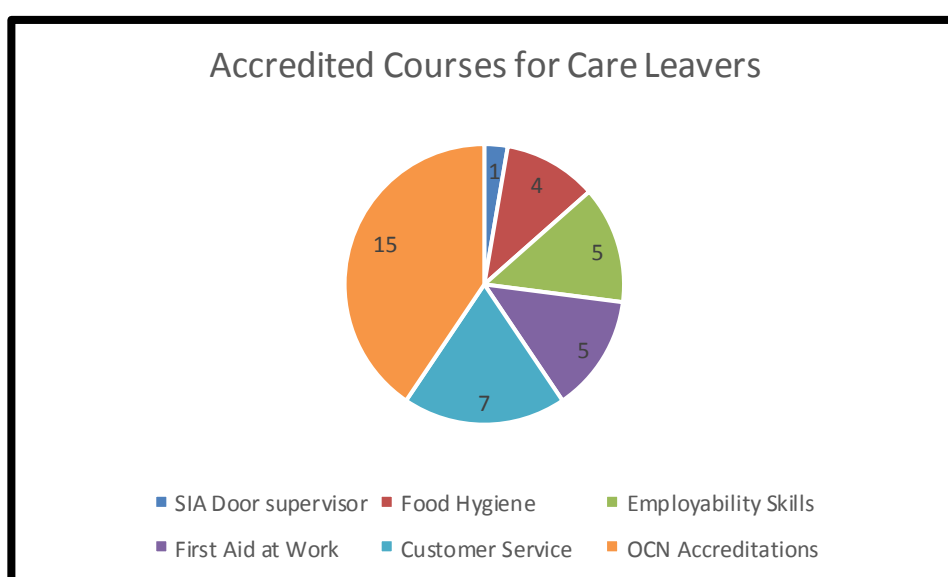
The authority needs to ensure that looked after children remain in mainstream schools and that schools are supported to appropriately meet their emotional and behavioural needs through the Attachment Aware Schools programme. Schools that are nurturing environments where looked after children thrive will also be positive environments for many vulnerable learners.



- e. That every care leaver receives appropriate support for employment, education and training via their Pathway Plans.

100% of care leavers have Pathway Plans. Consultation is taking place to ensure that these are more person centred and meaningful for the young person. Care Leavers are supported into employment, education and training. When training courses or traineeships aren't available elsewhere, the Corporate Parenting Team arrange and deliver these based on assessed needs of young people.

In 2015 the team delivered a range of additional accredited course for Care Leavers in order to support their access to employment.



III. Every child to have access to play, leisure, sporting and cultural activities

- a. Providing one annual event to ensure that foster carers, looked after children and care leavers are aware of services available to support them.

Over 200 people attended the annual Ffos Las event to celebrate the successes of looked after children and care leavers. 136 of these were children and young people.

IV. Children are listened to, treated with respect, and have their race and cultural identity recognised

Securing the voice of the child, being person centred and building on a young person's strengths underpins all our work with looked after children.

- a. Every looked after child and care leaver to be aware of advocacy and participation.

The Independent Reviewing Service ensures that every looked after child is aware of advocacy services. 53% of care leavers have participated in an evaluation of the services they receive. All looked after children are consulted with as part of their care planning and review processes.

b. Encourage active engagement in a participation programme.

The Independent Reviewing Service consult with all looked after children as part of their care plan review. 53% of care leavers have participated in a questionnaire. Voices From Care (charity) meet regularly with looked after children and young people and consult with them on the quality of services they receive. Young people have told us that they would like simpler plans that are easier to understand and some help and support in relation to parenting skills. The department are working towards developing these in 2016.

c. Provide training for teachers, social workers, foster carers, youth workers and related professionals on children's rights and corporate parenting.

There is an annual training programme in place.

d. Provide information for looked after children and care leavers on the CCC website

The information for the website is complete and it should be on the council website shortly.

e. Ensure looked after children and care leavers have a say in the plans made for them.

Children and care leavers have a say in the care plans for them and their personal education plans. The format and process of plans for children is being reviewed to ensure that they are more person centred and easier for children to understand. Looked after children and care leavers are being consulted with as to how they can contribute more proactively to their plans.

f. Ensure looked after children and care leavers contribute to interview panels for relevant staff being appointed.

Young people have accessed training as 'Young Commissioners' and interview training and are part of the commissioning and interview processes for children's services.

g. Ensure the views of looked after children and care leavers on the service they receive is shared with Elected Members.

Training is planned for elected members and young people are contributing to this training. Voices From Care are working with children to develop the skills to be part

of Attachment Aware School reviews and Corporate Parenting Panel. Visits of Elected Members to children's groups have been arranged and Elected Members attended the annual Celebrating Success Day for looked after children.

V. Every child to have a safe home and a community which supports physical and emotional wellbeing

Most children reside with foster carers. Care Leavers access Supported Lodgings and Supported Accommodation. Despite the preparation provided in relation to independent living some young people still experience difficulty.

In relation to living in a community that is conducive to emotional wellbeing, some accommodation provision is not in the most appropriate geographical areas.

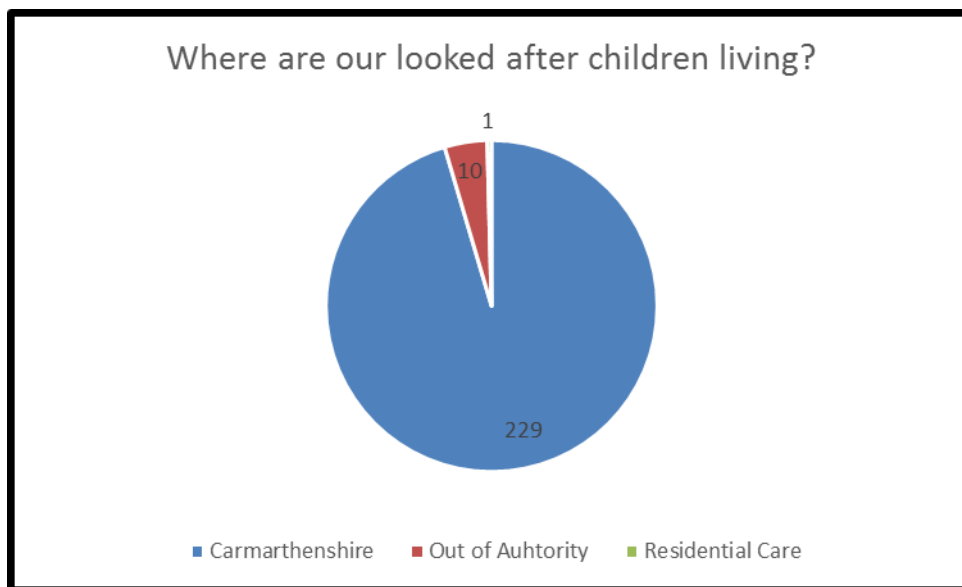
Some of our young people have involvement with the police, community services and schools that does not take into consideration their vulnerability and lack of parental support.

There is further work necessary in ensuring that all partners are aware of the vulnerability of looked after children and care leavers and understand how to safeguard and protect them.

- a. Ensure every looked after child is accommodated with foster carers in Carmarthenshire.

Out of the 240 looked after children on 31st March 2015 229 children were accommodated with foster carers or relatives in Carmarthenshire. 1 was in a specialist children's home, 6 were living with their families in England and 4 were with Foster Carers bordering Carmarthenshire.

Graph 13: Accommodation type for looked after children



There is ongoing work with the Housing Department and Supporting People to ensure that there are appropriate accommodation and support available for those young people leaving care. Many care leavers value the provision of Supported Lodgings, in which they can live with a family and benefit from the additional care that this can provide and these have been expanded over the last year.

'When I am ready' guidance from Welsh Government outlines the plans that Corporate Parents must implement to ensure that looked after children are not entering independent living when they are not ready to do so.

In supporting young people in the community there is a need to work collaboratively as Corporate Parents with housing providers, community services and the police in order to ensure that our young people receive the support that they need.

VI. Looked after children and care leavers are not disadvantaged by poverty

Ensuring children leave school with the appropriate qualifications for employment and training is essential in addressing poverty.

The quality, location and provision of accommodation is also a critical factor.

- a.** Provide financial support for care leavers to be in appropriate accommodation.

The authority is responsible for ensuring that care leavers reside in appropriate accommodation. Most care leavers feel that they are in appropriate accommodation but a small number are. In collaboration with the Housing Department options for shared housing are being explored. Many young people will reside in shared housing and it is more cost effective to share living costs with other young people.

Young people have identified a need for outreach support when they first move to independence. They have also indicated that they would welcome the option to return to a higher level of support should independent accommodation fail.

5. Areas for Future Improvement 2016/17

There are a number of areas that the authority needs to improve on moving forward. Looked after children and care leavers need to be a priority for all departments across the Council and there needs to be shared commitment to improving outcomes for these children.

Having higher aspirations for social and academic inclusion and striving to break the cycle of abuse, neglect, poverty and deprivation is beneficial for the individual, local authority and communities.

- Improved collaboration of early intervention and social inclusion agendas with Housing, Leisure Services and Communities First is required to maximise the impact of services and ensure targeted interventions.
- Improved information sharing, training and collaboration with public protection and community services to ensure that our children and young people are appropriately safeguarded and protected.
- Further training and support for Schools, Governors and Education staff in the best methods of supporting children who are looked after will contribute to further improving their educational attainment and social inclusion. More schools to engage in Attachment Aware practice. More Governors monitoring the outcomes of looked after children.

- A consistent, therapeutic approach to the emotional and behavioural management of looked after children in schools and specialist behaviour settings would ensure that fewer looked after children are excluded and miss out unnecessarily on education.
- In order to be healthy every child to have access to play, leisure, sporting and cultural activities and the strategy outlines the following targets in this area which needs to be developed further given some of the budgetary constraints on the leisure services.
 - a. Every foster family to have a free leisure saver card.
 - b. Every foster family to have access to free swimming.
 - c. Every care leaver to have a free leisure saver card.
 - d. Every care leaver to have access to free gym membership.
 - e. Promoting engagement in local activities.

6. Concluding Comments

The Corporate Parenting Strategy emphasises the need for every department across the council to work collaboratively in order to meet the needs of looked after children and care leavers. The Corporate Parenting Panel oversees the targets set and is required to satisfy itself that we are doing all that a reasonable, responsible parent would do for our looked after children and care leavers.

It is clear from the data provided that over the last few years outcomes for looked after children and care leavers have improved: particularly in the areas of improving academic attainment, reducing NEET, completing PEPS and engaging young people. But there are still improvements that can be made through ensuring that corporate parenting is on the agenda for every department within the council and that departments work together on this priority area.