

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

INFORMATION REPORT TO CORPORATE PARENTING CABINET COMMITTEE

14 JULY 2009

REPORT OF CORPORATE DIRECTOR - CHILDREN

WORK EXPERIENCE

1. Purpose of the report

The purpose of the report is to inform the Committee of the current position with regards to work experience placements for our children and young people, including those 'looked-after' by the Council and to explore what could be done to improve these arrangements.

2. Connection to the Corporate Improvement Plan and other Corporate Priorities

2.1 This report relates directly to the Council's 7 Corporate Priorities and in particular:

- Creating learning communities
- Children today, adults tomorrow

3. Background

3.1 At present, the arrangements for work experience for looked after children are the same as for all pupils of the same age. There are two categories of work placements pupils can experience during Key Stage 4, namely:

- a five day 'block' placement for all year 10 pupils, organised by Careers Wales, and;
- an 'extended' placement during Year 11.

3.2 The five day block placement is an opportunity for all Year 10 pupils to experience the world of work. In many cases, where schools identify that a complementary curriculum is the preferred learning pathway, the same employer can be approached to consider taking the pupil on an extended work placement in Year 11.

3.3 An extended work placement can be defined as follows:

"A work placement extending over a mid to long-term period, normally between one to three days a week, term time only."

3.4 Extended work experience placements may be sought by schools, to support the curriculum requirements of particular pupils such as those on vocational courses, those following complementary curriculum arrangements, or those young people who require additional support in their transition to work, training or further learning. Entitlement to extended work experience should be part of a young person's curriculum.

4. Current situation / Proposal

4.1 The Children's Directorate has a designated Work Experience Co-ordinator, located within the Learner Support Team to arrange and monitor extended work placements, in liaison with schools, Careers Wales and employers. In the case of a young person looked after by the Council the education worker within the LAC Team is normally involved in the planning process.

4.2 Referrals are generally initiated by schools as part of an agreed learning pathway for the young person. In all cases, the school will obtain parental consent. For young people looked after who are subject of a care order to the Council this can be given by the authority. The Work Experience Co-ordinator will then interview the young person and discuss prospective placements. An 'interview' is then arranged with a prospective employer and the placement confirmed. The Work Experience Co-ordinator will share with the employer relevant information regarding the young person which could affect the placement.

4.3 The Council has a wide range of employers who are willing to participate in the programme, but there are limited opportunities in certain trades/professions, for example, plumbing. Working in collaboration with Careers Wales the Council continually strives to expand the number of opportunities for our young people.

4.4 During the placement, the Work Experience Co-ordinator will monitor progress and provide feedback to the school. The frequency of visits should reflect the risk level of the placement, bearing in mind the nature of work and environment, the behaviour and specific needs of the young person.

4.5 At present there are no specific support mechanisms in place for a young person looked after by the Council over and above those in place for any vulnerable young person on an extended work placement. What is different for the looked after child is the support of the LAC Team and also the designated teacher at each school. There is a danger that the young person may feel stigmatised if they perceive that they are being treated differently to their peers.

- 4.6 In looking at a recent case of a looked-after child who was experiencing considerable difficulties at her school, the LAC education worker approached the Work Experience Co-ordinator with a view to setting up a work placement. The young person was interviewed by the Work Experience Co-ordinator and a placement agreed with a local retailer. The employer was made aware of the circumstances and the young person was supported both by the LAC Team and the Work Experience Co-ordinator. Unfortunately in this case, despite the support available, the placement failed after a two week period.

Suggestions for improvement

- 4.7 At present the referral form does not specifically ask whether the young person is looked after. This can be amended and may assist in the planning process.
- 4.8 The Work Experience Co-ordinator can, subject to capacity, increase the frequency of monitoring visits and provide regular feedback to both the designated teacher and the LAC Team, especially in cases where there is a higher risk of the work placement breaking down.
- 4.9 The role of the designated teacher at the school needs to be clarified where a looked after child attends a complementary curriculum, off-site, programme.
- 4.10 At present there are limited opportunities for our young people to access 'in-house' placements, particularly within Building Maintenance. It is accepted that there are health and safety risks and also the question of CRB checks for employees who may be supervising the young person. Further discussions could be held with Service Managers and HR colleagues to establish whether these issues can be addressed but it is unlikely that it will be possible to make significant progress in this respect for the Autumn term.
- 4.11 This would be a useful area about which to secure the views of looked after children who have previously had the opportunity to undertake work experience and also to identify anxieties and concerns of those who have yet to have the experience.

6.0 Effect upon Policy Framework and Procedure Rules

- 6.1 There is no effect upon the policy framework or procedure rules.

7.0 Legal Implications

- 7.1 There are no legal implications regarding this report.

8.0 Financial Implications

8.1 There are no financial implications regarding this report.

9.0 Recommendations

9.1 It is recommended that the Committee:

- note the current situation;
- note the suggestions for improvement including the amendment of the referral form to ask whether the young person is looked after;
- note that further discussions will be undertaken with service managers and HR to identify ways in which opportunities for looked after children to access “in-house” placements can be extended;
- receive further reports on looked after children attending work experience placements.

H. Anthony
Corporate Director – Children

Mark Beauchamp
Group Manager, Learner Support Services
Sunnyside, Bridgend
Telephone Number 01656 642087
Mark Beauchamp@bridgend.gov.uk

Background Documents:
None