

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CORPORATE PARENTING CABINET COMMITTEE

17 JANUARY 2012

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR - CHILDREN

LOST AFTER CARE

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee with information about the recently published report, 'Lost after Care', and to explain how 'My Planner' will be implemented to enhance work with care leavers known to Bridgend.

2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Objectives / Other Corporate Priorities

- 2.1. As the report will refresh and build upon existing knowledge and the planner represents a tool for young people, our view is that dissemination of the report and using the planner will enhance all areas aimed at improving outcomes for older looked after young people. The area of work falls within the Children Act 1989 and the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 which enshrines the following broad principles:

- to delay young people's discharge from care until they are prepared and ready to leave;
- to improve the assessment, preparation and planning for leaving care;
- to provide better personal support for young people after leaving care;
- to improve the financial arrangements for care leavers.

- 2.2 Cabinet members may wish to also consider this report in light of the 2009 Welsh Government and Welsh Local Government Association document, 'If this were my child. A councillor's guide to being a good corporate parent'

- 2.3 The report is relevant to the Young Voices priority in the Council's Corporate Plan.

3. Background

- 3.1. During July 2011, Gwenda Thomas, Deputy Minister for Children and Social Services at Welsh Government wrote to Local Authorities highlighting that the report 'Lost After Care' had been published and recommended that the accompanying Planner be adopted. The documents arrived in Bridgend in September 2011 and have already been disseminated.

- 3.2 The report itself was coordinated by the Children's Commissioner's Office and is endorsed by Keith Towler (Children's Commissioner for Wales). It is informed by contributions from looked after young people, their social workers and other key professionals including young peoples' carers, elected members, Welsh

Government, heads of service and Fostering Network. The report can be found at:

<http://childcom.org.uk/uploads/publications/250.pdf>.

3.3 'Lost After Care' illustrates the experiences of older looked after young people and the difficulties they face when they start planning their move into independent living. Although it contains many examples of professionals and practitioners carrying out their duties diligently, the report also highlights the disparity in services and information provided to this vulnerable group of young people.

3.4 Of particular resonance to the Safeguarding and Family Support Service was the importance that young people place upon time spent with their social workers in order to resolve issues and make sound plans for the future, for example, the report states that:

The relationship between the young person leaving care and their social worker is fundamental to that young person being properly supported and guided through the transition from care to independence....Chief amongst the reasons for the young people expressing dissatisfaction with their social worker would appear to be the lack of time spent with the individual young person, coupled with a lack of understanding about what the young person really wanted.

3.5 We are equally struck by the experience of poverty that care leavers describe in this and other studies. We are keen to use the report as a catapult to further enhance the quality of our care planning long before care leaving is a consideration in order to give young people the best chance possible to draw upon the emotional and practical skills that they require to move towards stability as an independent adult.

3.6 The 'My Planner' document arises out of the study and is a paper tool aimed at increasing young people's understanding of their rights and entitlements. It can be found at:

<http://childcom.org.uk/uploads/publications/238.pdf>

3.7 'Lost After Care' suggests a number of service improvements to facilitate a better coordinated response in identifying and responding to the rights and entitlements of young people moving on to independent living. These are considered in section 4 of the report.

4. Current Situation / Proposal

4.1 Practice in Bridgend is compliant with the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 Guidance Wales. In Bridgend, there are currently 126 young people open to the Leaving Care Team. Each young person known to the Leaving Care team has a personal adviser and the team works with a range of statutory, independent and third sector services in aiming to achieve best outcomes for care leavers. Pathway plans are informed by a needs assessment that is carried out in partnership with the young person and reviewed by an Independent Reviewing Officer at statutory intervals.

4.2 'My Planner' is being disseminated to all young people who are known to the Leaving Care Team. It will be shared with young people who become known to the team as part of the needs assessment. This will allow workers to use My Planner as a feature of their work aimed at informing young people about their rights and entitlements.

4.3 There are 29 priorities for improvement recommended by 'Lost After Care'. The first six relate to actions required by Welsh Government and CSSIW. We have highlighted in Appendix 1 a table that includes the priorities that concern elected members and officers of the Council. The table is populated where existing practice meets with the 'Lost after Care' recommendation. For those areas where further work is required, a meeting will take place in early 2012 in order to fully populate the table and ensure that practice within Bridgend is either compliant with or better than the priorities identified. This will be attended by relevant managers from Safeguarding and Family Support and Councillor Alana Davies, the lead member for children.

5. Effect upon Policy Framework & Procedure Rules

None

6. Equality Impact Assessment

6.1 This has been considered but there are no new or changed services/ policy/ functions and it is therefore not applicable.

7. Financial Implications

7.1 All work will be carried out within existing budget.

8. Recommendation

8.1 It is recommended that the Cabinet Committee notes this report and the progress that has been made.

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Background documents: Lost After Care, My Planner

Appendix 1: Lost After Care Priorities for Improvement

Lost After Care priority Number	Issue Raised in Report	Solution proposed within Lost After Care	Whose Responsibility as Identified in Lost After Care	Proposed Response	Bridgend
6.	Lack of a co-ordinated response to identifying and responding to the rights and entitlements of young people moving on to independent living	As part of the Annual Council Reporting Framework (ACRF) Directors of Social Services to ensure that their analyses of current effectiveness includes a self assessment about services providing information about young people moving on to independent living accommodation destinations; their employment; training; and education destinations; the interface with social workers / Personal advisers, arrangements for transition to adult services where appropriate, and feedback from those young people who have moved on to independent living during the previous year	Directors of Social services		
7.	The term "Leaving Care" is viewed by some children as being threatening and "Scary"	Heads of Children and Family Services to change the name of leaving care / aftercare teams to Future Care Support Team	Local Authority Children's Services		
8.	Lack of a co-ordinated response to identifying and responding to the rights and entitlements of young people moving on to independent living	ADSS Cymru, WLGA, Local Government Data Unit and CSSIW, make reference to the key messages from this report in developing new datasets to support service improvement as part of the ongoing work they are progressing in relation to the performance improvement framework	Local Authority lead member for children and young people		
9.	Lack of a co-ordinated response to identifying and responding to the rights and entitlements of young people moving on to	Following publication of the ACRF the relevant overview and scrutiny committee (likely Children's)to include young people moving on to independent living within their published forward work programme	Local Authority lead member for children and young people		

	independent living			
10.	Young people moving on to independent living lack of qualifications and work experience	Lead member to initiate discussion within the council regarding the development of work experience / apprenticeship / educational opportunities for young people moving on to independent living who would otherwise be categorised as not in education, employment, or training (NEET). Local authority to develop an action plan with clear targets for improving outcomes for this group of young people	Local Authority lead member for children and young people	Progress is being made with regard to providing work experience opportunities within the Council and good partnerships are being forged with other departments – e.g. parks, highways. Work has also progressed regarding improving data capture on Raise Draig to more effectively monitor the opportunities and outcomes for young people, and to try and ensure that they are engaged in meaningful training, education or employment. There is consultation underway on a NEETs strategy for Bridgend.
11.	Shortage of suitable accommodation options for young people moving on to independent living	Lead members for children and young people to ensure that local authority services provide and promote a range of suitable accommodation options for care leavers to assist their move to independence	Local Authority lead member for children and young people	
12.	Young people moving on to independent living are not aware of their rights and entitlements	Lead member and head of children and family services to ensure that a hard copy of “My Planner” is provided to all young people in care on their 15th birthday and to ensure “My Planner” is accessible to all young people moving on to independent living on the local authority website	Local Authority lead member for children and young people and Head of Children and Family Services	‘My Planner’ is being distributed to relevant young people in Bridgend County Borough
13.	Young people moving on to independent living do not have their own social worker and Personal Adviser	Local authorities to adhere to the legislative provisions of the Children (Leaving Care Act) 2000 ensuring that all care leavers have access to a personal advisor and social worker	Local Authority Children’s services	All young people open to the Aftercare Team have a named Personal Adviser who maintains regular contact with the young person.
14.	Young people	Young people moving on to independent living require ongoing	Local Authority	Personal Advisers remain

	moving on to independent living require ongoing practical/ emotional support beyond the age of 18	practical/ emotional support beyond the age of 18	Children's Services	allocated to young people until at least their 21 st birthday.
15	Young people moving on to independent living wishing to pursue further education unclear as to what financial and accommodation support they will be entitled to when they leave school and care	Future Care Support teams to publish clear up to date guidance re financial on accommodation support at the start of each financial year	Local Authority Children's Services	BCBC is currently undertaking a review of financial support arrangements to young people leaving care to reflect recent legislative changes in this area. Young people accessing further and higher education are being supported with accommodation and weekly maintenance payments.
16.	Foster Placements end at age 18	Heads of Children and Family Services to plan conversion of foster placements to supported lodgings placements to age 21 for all young people and their foster carers requesting this option	Local Authority Children's Services	This good practice has operated for several years in Bridgend. Foster Carers are invited to become supported lodgings providers for young people well in advance of turning 18 as part of Pathway Planning to continue to provide stability. However, financial support reduces considerably with conversion and this sometimes impacts on care planning.
17.	Independent Visitor service is poorly resourced and difficult to access	Heads of Children and Family Services to review their current arrangements and make necessary adjustments	Local Authority Children's Services	
18	Young people moving on to independent living not able to return to care setting if attempts to live	Heads of Children and Family services to ensure young people know they can return to care setting if independent living fails	Local Authority Children's Services	

	independently have failed			
19.	Young people moving on to independent living do not know about and/ or cannot access advocacy services	Head of Children and Family services to ensure that advocacy services for care leavers are effectively promoted and readily available to all young people moving on to independent living to age 21	Local Authority Children's Services	Personal Advisers notify young people of their right to an independent advocate, and promote the Tros Gynal Advocacy Service to young people.
20	Young people moving on to independent living lack the essential skills for successful independent living	Social Services training staff develop a suite of accredited independent living skills for young people moving on to independent living. Training resource to include financial management, cooking, cleaning, personal hygiene, emotional resilience, neighbourliness, problem solving skills, health advice. Future Care Support team staff provide the opportunity for all LAC preparing to leave care to access relevant training	Local Authority Social Services Training Departments and Leaving Care Managers Future Care Support team	
21	Foster Carers and residential care staff unaware of the range of issues and supports that young people moving on to independent living may have and need in relation to their move to independence	Social Services develop and provide a "transition planning" training module for all foster carers and residential staff looking after children who will be moving from care to independence. The purpose of this module will be to ensure that all care staff are working to improve the chances of a successful transition from care to independence, and that the work that foster carers/ residential staff undertake with the young person complements that of the social worker and personal adviser	Local Authority Social Services Training Departments	The residential re-design is in part addressing this issue with one unit being especially developed to assist young people with transition arrangements. Fostering Services assist foster carers in their responsibilities toward looked after children in preparation for the transition to independence.
22.	Young people moving on to independent living deemed intentionally homeless following breakdown of first tenancy	Housing departments to amend where necessary local policy to ensure that care leavers are given a second or third chance to make a success of a tenancy	Local Authority Housing Departments	
23.	Young people moving on to independent living struggle to manage the responsibilities	Housing Departments to offer tenancy support to all young people moving on to independent living to the age of 21	Local Authority Housing Departments	

	of managing their own tenancy			
24.	Social workers / Personal Advisers' lack knowledge about housing options, tenancy support, and other housing related issues and therefore not able to offer advice to young people moving on to independent living that will be in their best interests	Housing Department to offer annual training/ briefing events to social workers / personal advisers to provide them with information necessary for them to be able to effectively advise/ support young people moving on to independent living in relation to move on accommodation	Local Authority Housing Departments	Work is progressing to develop an integrated 16-25 Service to co-locate staff with different disciplines which will help address this issue.
25	There is insufficient appropriate housing stock available for young people moving on to independent living	Housing Departments in partnership with Children's Services to review stock levels, project likely demand and plan accordingly	Local Authority Housing Departments	
26	Social workers / Personal Advisers' lack knowledge about routes into further and higher education and training and therefore not able to offer advice to young people moving on to independent living that will be in their best interests	Education/ Careers Service to offer annual training / briefing events to social workers / personal advisers to provide them with information necessary for them to be able to effectively advise / support young people moving on to independent living in relation to education, training, and employment issues	Local Authority Education Departments / Local Careers Services	Development of an integrated 16-25 Service will help address this issue within Bridgend
27.	Designated LAC teachers role not properly understood or consistently	Director of Education and Social services to agree best practice guidance for the role of the designated LAC teacher within local schools and to jointly develop and deliver a training package for all designated LAC teachers	Local Authority Education and Children's Services	

	applied in school settings			
28	Young people moving on to independent living report that the quality and review of pathway plans is inconsistent	Independent Reviewing Officers to ensure they maintain an overview of pathway plan reviews for relevant children and if arrangements are not satisfactory convene an additional review	Independent Reviewing Officers	Existing practice within Bridgend is compliant with this recommendation. However, Lost After Care and this recommendation will be shared at next team meeting.
29	Looked after young people sometimes experience difficulty in registering with a GP	Local Health Boards to consider issuing guidance to GPs outlining best practice in relation to looked after children	Local Health Boards	