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**Gwasanaethau Gweithredol a Phartneriaethol /
Operational and Partnership Services**

Deialu uniongyrchol / Direct line /: (01656) 643148
Gofynnwch am / Ask for: Mr Mark Anthony Galvin

Ein cyf / Our ref:
Eich cyf / Your ref:

Dyddiad/Date: 11 April 2017

Dear Councillor,

CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING

A meeting of the Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting will be held in the Council Chamber, Civic Offices Angel Street Bridgend CF31 4WB, on **Wednesday, 19 April 2017 at 2.00pm.**

AGENDA

1. Apologies for Absence
To receive apologies for absence from Members.
2. Declarations of Interest
To receive declarations of personal and prejudicial interest (if any) from Members/Officers in accordance with the provisions of the Members' Code of Conduct adopted by Council from 1 September 2008.
3. Approval of Minutes 3 - 12
To receive for approval the minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting dated 18 January 2017
4. Hidden Ambitions - A Children's Commissioner for Wales Report and Bridgend County Borough Council's Position 13 - 36
To be accompanied by a Presentation from a representative(s) of 'Voices From Care'.
5. Urgent Items
To consider any other item(s) of business in respect of which notice has been given in accordance with Part 4 (paragraph 4) of the Council Procedure Rules and which the person presiding at the meeting is of the opinion should be reason of special circumstances be transacted at the meeting as a matter of urgency.

Yours faithfully

P A Jolley

Corporate Director Operational and Partnership Services

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Councillors:

HJ David
CL Reeves

Councillors

CE Smith
HJ Townsend

Councillors

PJ White
HM Williams

Invitees:

E Dodd
HE Morgan

N Farr
KJ Watts

EP Foley
DBF White

Agenda Item 3

CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING - WEDNESDAY, 18 JANUARY 2017

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOMS 2/3, CIVIC OFFICES ANGEL STREET BRIDGEND CF31 4WB ON WEDNESDAY, 18 JANUARY 2017 AT 2.00 PM

Present

Councillor HJ David – Chairperson

CL Reeves

CE Smith

PJ White

HM Williams

Invitees

Cllr E Dodd

Cllr P Foley

Cllr H Morgan

Cllr D White

Apologies for Absence

Councillor HJ Townsend, N Farr and K Watts

Officers:

Susan Cooper

Corporate Director - Social Services & Wellbeing

Andrew Jolley

Corporate Director Operational & Partnership Services

Laura Kinsey

Head of Children's Social Care

Deborah McMillan

Corporate Director Education & Family Support

Pete Tyson

Planning and Contract Management Officer

143. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor P White declared a personal interest in Agenda item 6 because he sat on the Bridgend Foster Panel.

144. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting dated 19 October 2016 be approved as a true and accurate record, subject to the following:-

That the Invitees listed below be added to the list of Councillors present and that Cllr CE Smith be recorded on council business and not apologies for absence:

Cllr Ella Dodd

Cllr Neelo Farr

Cllr Peter Foley

Cllr David White

145. CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE COMMISSIONING

The Chairperson welcomed Peter Tyson, Group Manager - Commissioning Contracts and Contract Monitoring to the meeting.

The purpose of the report was to provide Corporate Parenting Committee with an overview of Children's Social Care commissioning arrangements, and highlight developments that had been made in response to the directorate restructure, and implementation of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act.

In June 2016, a report was presented to Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee, providing an update on the context, focus and structure of Children's Social Care, the achievements, and priorities/areas for development for the year 2016/17.

The Commissioning Team now oversaw commissioning activity across both Adult Social Care and Children's Social Care, where historically the team oversaw commissioning within Adult Social Care only.

In order to be able to respond effectively to the additional demands and requirements across the directorate as a whole, the team had been reviewed and restructured, and additional resources had been made available in the form of a 'Strategic Planning and Commissioning Officer', and a 'Commissioning and Contracting Officer'.

In November 2016, the Social Services and Wellbeing Directorate were able to successfully recruit into the role of 'Group Manager – Commissioning, Contracts and Contract Management', who would be responsible for the Commissioning Team in overseeing commissioning activity across the directorate.

It was recognised that there were a number of alternative definitions of commissioning. The Commissioning Team within the directorate had adopted Welsh Government's definition, taken from Welsh Government's (WG) 'Commissioning Framework Guidance and Good Practice – Fulfilled Lives, Supportive Communities':

During the summer of 2016, the Senior Management Team and the Extended Managers Group from Children's Social Care commenced work to develop and agree the content of a document entitled: Vision into Action: 2016 – 2017: 'Together - delivering better outcomes for children/young people & their families'. The purpose was to have a single clear vision in place for Children's Social Care, against which all future plans and strategies could be linked

A key strategy which would have a significant influence on any future commissioning activity and commissioning plan within Children's Social Care was the Early Help and Permanence Strategy and Action Plan, which had been developed alongside colleagues within the Education and Family Support Directorate. A draft version of the Early Help and Permanence Strategy & Action Plan was presented to Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee in October 2016, and the strategy & plan were in the process of being finalised.

Under the new Act, local authorities (and health) had to carry out and publish a Population Assessment. This assessment was intended to give organisations, services, individuals and communities an understanding of where there were 'gaps' in care and support provided by public services, and what could be put in place to address these care and support needs.

The Population Assessment was made up of a number of sub-assessments, covering all age ranges, including children and young people. This was an essential piece of work in informing any future commissioning activity, and also critical in the development of any future commissioning plan for Children's Social Care. Within BCBC, the sub-assessments had been completed, and the final Population Assessment would be published by April 2017, in accordance with WG's timescales.

Contract monitoring arrangements were in place, with contract reviews being undertaken on an annual basis, in order to ensure; contract compliance, the effective measurement of providers' performance against defined outcomes within contracts/SLA's, and ensuring value-for-money in times of increasing austerity.

Officers were looking to build on the current relationship BCBC had with Bridgend Association of Voluntary Organisations (BAVO), by strengthening arrangements with children's services providers, with BAVO looking to set-up a Children and Young People forum and partnership.

There was a strong emphasis on collaboration in the form of regional commissioning across the Western Bay area. A prime example within Children's Social Care was the work being undertaken looking at advocacy services for children and young people across the Western Bay region. Officers and senior managers from each authority were working closely together to establish a regional service and specification, which would be delivered in accordance with the requirements of the new Act and Welsh Government guidance.

Commissioning officers from BCBC were part of a 'South Wales Commissioner's Group' that had been established in response to the new Act, and also common strategic drivers. A Healthy Living Partnership Programme had also been established, which had a focus on increasing levels of physical activity, including those who were from under-represented groups. As part of this partnership programme, looked after children were being supported with free membership to leisure facilities, and a similar initiative was also being developed for young carers, in partnership with 'Action for Children'

The Chairperson asked if there were any gaps or significant changes in the Commissioning Plan. He was advised that there would be a clearer picture in April when the Population Assessment had been completed. No significant changes were anticipated but this would help shape current thinking.

A Member commented that a considerable amount of work had been completed by the whole team to take this matter forward. It was a comprehensive report which improved the way things were done.

The Chairperson welcomed the work that had been done particularly with Children and Young People and the support to help children be heard.

RESOLVED That Corporate Parenting Committee noted the contents of the report, and provided comment on aspect(s) as appropriate. A further update report to be submitted in summer 2017.

146. SECURE ESTATE

The Corporate Director, Social Services and Wellbeing introduced Caroline Dyer, Service Manager, Western Bay Youth Justice & Early Intervention Services to the Committee.

The Service Manager then presented a report informing the Cabinet Committee of the Local Authorities responsibility in respect of the secure estate following the implementation of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act in April 2016.

Bridgend County Borough Council had within its boundary, HMP and YOI Parc, which was a Category B Prison with capacity for 2000 male prisoners, the majority being adult

offenders. The prison opened in November 1997 and was the only private prison in Wales and was managed by G4S on behalf of the Prison Service. Parc's main population provided Category B and Category C prisoner accommodation for those serving in excess of 18 month sentences. There were two main sections to HMP and YOI Parc:

- Young Persons Unit – for males 15-17years
- Main Prison – for Young Offenders aged 18 to 21 years and Adult Offenders.

The Young Persons Unit accommodated up to 64 young males aged from 15 – 17 years of age. The young people at HMP & YOI Parc were accommodated in one of two units, Echo 1 and Golf 1. They generally came together each day in small groups for Education (25 hours each week) and some other activities. Each evening there was a period of association before the young people were returned to their rooms for the night.

The responsibilities of the Children's Services department towards children in Wales were contained in the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 which was implemented on 6 April 2016. There were various parts of the Act that made specific reference to children and young people in the youth justice system. Part 4 of the Act set out how needs should be met in the care planning process; Part 6 of the Act set out the functions in relation to looked after and accommodated children; children placed in secure accommodation, care leavers in the youth justice system, children detained in, or remanded to the secure estate and Part 11 contained miscellaneous and general provisions relating to children with care and support needs in youth detention accommodation, prison, approved premises and bail accommodation. Parts 4 and 6 contained legislation already in existence whereas Part 11 contained new responsibilities in the miscellaneous section.

The responsibilities of the Youth Offending Team (YOT) were defined by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999, the Powers of the Criminal Courts (Sentencing) Act 2000, the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001, the Criminal Justice and Immigration act 2008 and the Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders (LASPO) Act 2012. The principle aim of the youth justice system was the prevention of offending and re-offending by children and young people.

The Service Manager confirmed there were no young people from Bridgend in custody at the moment.

There were a number of trigger points where care and support needs could be identified and assessed when a young person arrived in custody. For example, once in custody, YOTs and secure estate staff were responsible for holding a joint planning meeting within 10 days of the custodial sentence being imposed (National Standard for Youth Justice Services 9.16) and for developing a plan for the period of time the young person was in custody.

A 'Sentence Plan' should include whether the young person had ongoing 'care and support needs'. This plan was created when a young person had received a custodial sentence by the court and was a plan as to how the young person's needs would be met during his/her period of incarceration (including health, education behavior/emotional needs).

All young people remanded into custody become Looked After under the provisions of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders (LASPO) Act 2012 and the Care Planning process would commence immediately when they arrived in custody. However, unless the young person's Looked After status was derived from a Care Order

under section 31 Children Act 1989, their Looked After status did not necessarily continue after a young person had been sentenced.

All looked after young people had to be seen by their allocated social worker within 10 working days of arrival at HMP & YOI Parc. When a looked after young person arrived at HMP & YOI Parc, the allocated social worker would be contacted immediately in order to establish any concerns and to arrange an initial visit. The young person's Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) also had to be contacted to confirm that they were in custody and a LAC Review would be arranged to take place within 20 working days of the young person's arrival at HMP & YOI Parc.

All 100 young people remanded and sentenced to HMP7YOI Parc during this period were the subject of either a Sentence or a Remand plan whilst 5 young people from Welsh Home Local Authority Areas were the subject of Care and Support Plans.

The Service Manager confirmed that he had not been asked to undertake any assessments for children in Parc to date.

The Committee asked if there was a reciprocal arrangement with English authorities. The Service Manager explained that if a Welsh child went to England, the money followed the child but not vice versa. Members asked how attention could be brought to this imbalance and were advised that this matter was being raised at various working groups with the intention of taking the message back to WG.

The Committee asked if there was a shortage of appropriate places. Members were advised that Hillside was more suitable than Parc because of the number of beds available and the catchment area it covered.

Members asked if the grant of £236,774 was enough to cover the cost of the extra duties. They were advised that it was not possible to say at this stage.

The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing reported that the bulk of the grant had been used to put a new team together to look at the additional needs as a result of changes in the Act. A review was currently taking place in relation to the first nine months.

The Chairperson requested an annual report on the outcomes of those the authority was responsible for.

RESOLVED

- 1) That Cabinet Committee noted the Content of the report.
- 2) That a report be submitted to a future meeting on the outcomes for young people in prison.

147. INVESTIGATION REPORT BY THE PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN FOR WALES

The Corporate Director, Social Services and Wellbeing introduced Jo Lloyd-Jones, Team Manager of Fostering Teams to the Committee. The Corporate Director then shared with the Committee an investigation report issued by the Public Services Ombudsman's office regarding a complaint and found maladministration by the Council.

Mr N was a looked after child with Bridgend County Borough Council and was placed with his foster carers when he was a toddler. Mr N was a fully integrated member of the

family, enjoying 14 successful years in placement. The placement broke down in 2014 and Mr N subsequently approached the Council to obtain further information about savings that his foster parents had made on his behalf. Mr N complained that:

- the Council had not managed his savings properly and in accordance with its policy;
- some of his savings were used, without consultation with him, to pay for trips for which he should have received a special allowance;
- the savings he received in January 2015 were substantially less than he believed they should have been.

In accordance with Section 17 of the Public Services Ombudsman (Wales) Act 2005, the Council published a copy of the report and made it available for inspection at its offices for a period of 3 weeks from 6th December 2016.

The Council acknowledged the report and accepted all of the Ombudsman's recommendations with the exception of recommendation (b) – to make a payment to Mr N of £3,310 to reimburse him for savings that had not been made for him during his time in foster care. The Council's position was that Mr N had not suffered injustice or hardship in consequence of this matter. Mr N was provided with the remainder of his savings and the interest accrued. Mr N had been on annual holidays with his foster care family, he had been supported to join the local rugby team and go on rugby tour, which his foster carer also had to attend to enable him to go. Mr N enjoyed attending Cardiff City football matches for which he had a season ticket and had travelled on activity and school trips throughout his time in foster care. In the one year which was referred to, Mr N went on rugby tour, attended the Local Authority Selium (outward bound activities) trip, a school trip and also the family holiday.

The Council took its role and responsibilities as a corporate parent for looked after children extremely seriously, however, there was currently no legal requirement or national policy or guidance in place regarding savings for looked after children, aside from the establishment of a junior ISA and, therefore, the Council could not enforce the need for foster carers to provide savings for looked after children and indeed could not terminate their services as a foster carer if they chose not to save for their looked after child. Bridgend foster carers were encouraged to save for looked after children for whom they provided care. Foster carers participated in regular supervision with allocated supervising social workers and had to account for the expenditure of the basic allowance provided.

The Council had ascertained from other local authorities that there was no mandatory savings policy in place, all foster carers were merely encouraged to either save themselves on behalf of children or encourage children from whom they provide care to save themselves. The Welsh Government 'National Minimum Maintenance Allowances for Foster Carers 2014-2017' made no mention of pocket money or the amount to be set aside in saving. Furthermore, the National Fostering Network which worked in partnership with Welsh Government and which was the charity considered to be the essential network for foster care did not have a policy or expectation in place in respect of savings.

BCBC had raised the issue of savings for Looked After Children (LAC) in a variety of arenas; Welsh Government, South Wales Fostering Managers meeting, Fostering Network and with leads for the National Fostering Framework. Feedback received from the Fostering Network resulted in them offering to assist in advocating for or pursuing any outcomes/actions of the above on behalf of Local Authorities to Welsh Government.

The Ombudsman recommended that the report be shared with the Corporate Parenting Committee and that the Committee consider the arrangements it deemed most appropriate in respect of long term savings for LAC while encouraging them to save from pocket money. In doing so, the Council should have regard to the following: its duty to act as a corporate parent to give LAC the best possible start in life and other local authority schemes

The Council had provided a £250 cheque to Mr N in compensation for the way his complaint was handled as recommended by the Ombudsman.

A Member referred to the final point raised by the Ombudsman relating to what would happen if the Council failed to comply with recommendation (b) in full within two months of his report ie by 21 January 2017.

The Corporate Director, Operational & Partnership Services explained the current position. BCBC had what he considered a good relationship with the Office of the Ombudsman and this was due at least in part in the Authority being open and willing to accept when it had got things wrong. In the present circumstances the Authority had accepted the Ombudsman's findings but on one issue there was disagreement. If Members did not agree with the Ombudsman's recommendations then the Ombudsman could issue a further report. The Corporate Director, Operational & Partnership Services explained that he had considered Judicial Review but the Ombudsman could not force BCBC to comply with the recommendations and therefore it would not be in the public interest on this occasion.

He reported that the Ombudsman had recognised this raised issues at local, regional and national levels about LAC and their savings and welcomed the fact that this was now on the agenda for discussion at national level. However he considered that in recognising that this was a national issue it was wrong to seek to deal with it at a local level when no statute or statutory guidance existed. He considered it unfortunate that the issue had arisen but that the Authority should not accept a finding that it did not agree with. It was important to maintain a good relationship with the Ombudsman but on this occasion, it would be helpful if he reconsidered this point.

The Corporate Director, Social Services and Wellbeing explained that there had been a meeting with the Ombudsman and a BCBC legal representative following receipt of the report where the matter had been discussed at length. They had failed to come to any agreement at that time.

A Member stated that he was confused by the Ombudsman's report and that there appeared to be more than one person with access to the savings account and a lack of written evidence. He believed that as a gesture of goodwill, it would be appropriate to make a payment of £1100, to cover the two school trips. The Corporate Director, Operational & Partnership Services explained that the determination had been made and was no longer open to negotiation. An offer of compensation had been made during the conversations with the Ombudsman's office.

A Member raised the issue that not all foster carers could afford to save for their own children and this could be an issue if a looked after child was treated differently. This could also set a precedent and result in other claims against the Council. He also asked who had the authority to make decisions within the Authority.

The Corporate Director, Operational & Partnership Services confirmed that he had the power to settle litigation however this issue was being considered by this Cabinet Committee and therefore it was for the Committee to determine the matter before it.

Members were concerned that any offer of payment could set a precedent and the Corporate Director, Social Services and Wellbeing confirmed that correspondence had been received from another child based on the Ombudsman's report.

A Member raised queries with the Ombudsman's report in particular point (f) which recommended that the Corporate Parent Cabinet Committee consider arrangements for long term savings whilst recognising in another point that foster carers had no legal obligation to provide savings for LAC even though it was regarded as good practice. He was concerned that this was an extra responsibility for foster carers and could deter existing and new foster carers.

A Member was concerned that the family was being vilified for treating the child as a family member. Foster carers should be encouraged to act as parents and there was no suggestion that they had benefited personally.

Concerns were raised about statements in the report regarding the difference between guidance and policy and another stating that in the absence of quantifiable evidence, benefit of the doubt had been given to the more vulnerable party.

The Corporate Director, Operational & Partnership Services confirmed that the Ombudsman could produce a further report which would be public and published. If the Committee was not in agreement with the Ombudsman then the Authority would produce a full explanation of its disagreement for publication. He could not confirm that the authority would be given an opportunity to respond before the report was published. Members suggested that the Corporate Director, Social Services and Wellbeing write to WG asking for a response to this matter and also to contact the National Fostering Network.

The Team Manager, Fostering Teams confirmed that this matter was on the Agenda for the next National Fostering Network meeting. Savings for LAC did need to be considered but there was a duty of care to foster carers who had raised concerns.

The Leader referred to the need to consider arrangements in respect of long term savings for LAC and suggested that this follows engagement with foster carers and the National Fostering Network and that savings be considered in the wider context.

An Invitee moved an amendment that a one off goodwill payment of £1100 be made to Mr N on this occasion. The Invitee was advised that he could not move an amendment. Members of the committee discussed the suggestion and agreed that on the basis that the Ombudsman had determined his requirements, they would not move the amendment.

RESOLVED:

That the Corporate Parenting Committee:

- Noted the Ombudsman's report attached as Appendix A;
- Had considered the arrangements it deemed most appropriate in respect of long term savings for LAC while encouraging them to save from pocket money, in light of engagement with foster carers and the National Fostering Framework;
- Endorsed the Action Plan attached as Appendix B;

CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING - WEDNESDAY, 18 JANUARY 2017

- Supported Officers in raising and pursuing the issue of savings for looked after children with the Fostering Network, within the work streams of the National Fostering Framework and with Welsh Government and requested a report back to Committee when the work had been completed.
- Requested that the Corporate Director, Social Services and Wellbeing write to WG asking for a response to this matter.
- Authorised the Chair of the Committee to provide the Ombudsman's Office with details of the Committee's decision.

148. URGENT ITEMS

None.

The meeting closed at 3.45 pm

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BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING

19 APRIL 2017

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR, SOCIAL SERVICES AND WELLBEING

HIDDEN AMBITIONS - A CHILDREN'S COMMISSIONER FOR WALES REPORT AND BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL'S POSITION.

1. Purpose of Report.

- 1.1 To provide the Committee with a copy of the Hidden Ambitions report published by the Children's Commissioners office, which is attached at **Appendix 1**.
- 1.2 To update the Committee on the position of Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) in relation to the recommendations within the report.

2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Plan / Other Corporate Priority.

- 2.1 The report links to all of the corporate priorities:

- Helping people to be more self-reliant;
- Smarter use of resources;
- Supporting a successful economy.

3. Background

- 3.1 The Children's Commissioner has been working with the Welsh Government and the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) to explore ways that they can help care leavers to achieve their 'Hidden Ambitions'. Her report concluded with a series of recommendations which she stated, if realised, will ensure Wales becomes a country that truly enables "every young person to be the best that they can be". In Bridgend we have a Sixteen plus team who will play a pivotal role in delivering the BCBC response to the recommendations. The report recommendations were captured under three main headings: Housing, Education or Training and Support. The details of each, our current position, and areas for development, are outlined below.
- 3.2 The Children's Commissioners office produced this report to ensure that young people leaving care can have the same expectations in terms of care and support as their peers. The research arose following the appointment of the new Children's Commissioner, after many different groups of people, including care leavers, approached her office to ask for consideration as to how the transition into adulthood can be made more straightforward. In 2016 the Commissioner consulted care leavers, and surveyed every Local Authority across Wales to establish what opportunities they currently provide. The Commissioner and her team heard about

young people's ambitions and also the barriers they can face in accessing opportunities.

3.3 The report was published on the 1st March 2017 and was subsequently discussed at the All Wales Leaving Care forum, also on the 1st March 2017. This forum is attended by the Team Manager and Senior Practitioner of the Sixteen plus team from BCBC, (our Sixteen plus team was previously aligned to the youth service team and known as Just Ask Plus) and their counterparts from other Local Authorities.

3.4 To take forward her suggested improvements the Children's Commissioner will:-

- Visit every Local Authority's executive leadership team across Wales in 2017 to discuss what they currently offer to support care leavers to achieve their 'hidden ambitions' and what they plan to put in place;
- Monitor the progress Local Authorities make;
- Monitor the progress of the Welsh Government in supporting care leavers;
- Continue to listen to care leavers about their experiences and whether they are getting the help they need.

4. Current situation/Proposal

4.1 **The report recommendations and the Council's position or planned actions are set out below:**

4.2 **Recommendation One** - *All young people leaving care should be able to access support up to the age of 25 (whether or not they are in education/training).*

The Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act, 2014, (SSWBA) states that support should be up until age 21 unless in higher education. In BCBC, assessed needs support is provided for young people up to the age of 25.

4.3 **Recommendation Two** - *There should be more focus on gaining skills for independence including practical skills such as cooking, opening a bank account and paying bills.*

The 16+ Team have, in conjunction with Newbridge House, developed a transition booklet, recognising that when leaving foster care in particular some young people are ill-equipped for independent living.

This booklet and way of preparing young people is being rolled out to foster carers and included in their training and foster carer handbooks. A small focus group has been established to identify and deliver a training programme for foster carers using an independence programme from Newbridge House Residential Unit to prepare young people in their care for independence starting at an earlier age.

Some of our young people live in Supported Living projects and with Supported Lodgings providers, those provisions also focus on teaching, enabling and supporting young people to gain independence skills.

4.4 **Recommendation Three** - *Social services, housing and education departments should all work together to help plan a young person's move to living independently.*

Education is involved as part of the Looked After Children (LAC) reviewing/Pathway Planning processes when a young person remains in education. The Looked After Children's Education (LACE) teams involvement concludes when a young person attains the age of sixteen. Education will remain involved with those Care Leavers who have a Statement of Special Educational Needs until the Statement expires. Often Care Leavers will be attending college or a life skills provision after they reach the age of sixteen. There is an established positive working relationship with Housing, however Housing legislation sometimes does not align smoothly with the SSWBA.

- 4.5 **Recommendation Four** - *Local Authorities should consider setting up forums or discussion groups just for care leavers; what is of interest or concern to a care leaver may be different to what is discussed by children still living in care. Care Leaver's Forums can be asked for their views when the local authority is planning to change how a service is offered and in deciding what issues their staff need training on.*

A young person's Consultation Group was previously established in BCBC. However following the realignment and relocation of the service in the summer of 2014 and feedback from the service users this group ceased to exist as a regularly planned meeting. Care leavers advised that they would like to access services on a more informal basis. Care leavers are currently able to access a 'drop in' provision and other 'out of hours' provisions whereby they receive support and have the opportunity to share their views and wishes. With regard to any specific change in our local policies, the service would ensure that young people are consulted about such changes e.g. the current review of our financial policy. The Team Manager of the Sixteen Plus Team regularly attends the All Wales Leaving Care Forum and the South Wales Leaving Care forum. She remains up to date with current projects, information and facilitates discussion about aligning support services where possible.

- 4.6 **Recommendation Five** - *Local authorities should be using the Welsh Government's Housing Positive Pathway and the Care Leavers Accommodation and Support Framework developed by Barnardo's as guidance for all those working with the young person.*

This framework is agreed as good practice in principle and is one that all directorates from within BCBC try to adhere to. However, there are barriers to this being fully implemented as there is often a shortage of accommodation available for this age group – supported accommodation, independent accommodation etc. is limited and provisions may often be bed-blocked as there is no appropriate move on. The Sixteen Plus team, Supported lodgings scheme within Bridgend Foster Care, Housing and Supporting People services are working closely together to try and make positive changes to improve our position. Last year housing commissioned a review of the Supported Lodgings provision which was undertaken by Llamau. This concluded that the service could be delivered and commissioned through an external provider with experience of delivering Supported Lodgings in other areas of Wales. This would be able to offer provision to both the Children and Housing departments and could lessen the overall impact on the local authority of young people becoming 'intentionally homeless' and then social services becoming involved.

- 4.7 **Recommendation Six** - *All young people should be entitled to clear information on the money and grants that they can access when they leave care, and the rules on what their money can be spent on should be the same for everyone. Information on finances should be clear, transparent and easily accessible.*

Information is provided to young people by their Social Worker and Personal Advisor (PA). Young people are supported to attend benefit / housing appointments and are often accompanied by their PA. Money management work is often completed with young people and foster carers are encouraged to do this also through the independent living literature. Our current financial policy is being reviewed and updated, incorporating consultation with young people. Ultimately a young person's version of the policy will be available to young people before they leave care so they are aware of the financial support entitlement they can access from the Sixteen Plus Team.

Although the benefit rules are set by the UK Government, it is important that young people across Wales have access to clear information on benefit entitlements, how to make a claim and who to contact for support and advice.

This information is provided by the young person's PA and Social Worker prior to leaving care and is ongoing as part of their entitlement to support and through the Pathway Planning processes whereby 6 monthly reviews are held as a minimum.

- 4.8 **Recommendation Seven** - *The Welsh Government is looking at what can be done to make council tax fairer and young people leaving care should be central to these considerations.*

There are currently no specific exemptions for Care Leavers in respect of Council tax but they do qualify for exemptions the same as any other citizen, e.g. living in shared accommodation / claiming housing benefit.

- 4.9 **Recommendation Eight** - *Local Authorities should be like a large family business in terms of their roles as Corporate Parents of looked after young people. Like any family business, they should be prepared to offer training and job opportunities in their many areas of employment, including administration, parks, nurseries, carpentry, social care and housing.*

Bridgend CBC takes its role as a corporate parent very seriously. The Corporate Plan 2016-2020 includes a specific item about the increase in apprenticeship opportunities for looked after children. Further work is planned to identify any actions which can be undertaken within existing resources to:

1. Further promote opportunities available.
2. To provide support e.g work experience; essential skills training; mock interviews; completing application forms.

- 4.10 **Recommendation Nine** - *Support for young people needs to be proactively offered, to help them to prepare for and access training schemes. Links to local businesses and partners can be valuable, as well as assistance with interview preparation and clothing and any tools or equipment needed to carry out a job.*

Young people leaving care are supported by their PA (and social worker) to prepare for and access training schemes. The Sixteen Plus Team has established and maintains positive links with a number of training provisions locally and also in neighbouring authorities. The Just Ask (youth) service facilitates job clubs where staff specifically support young people to gain training and access employment opportunities, this includes preparation for interview. The Sixteen Plus Team also access employment / engagement workers for young people needing any additional support. Financial assistance for interview clothing and any tools or equipment needed to carry out a job can be provided following a needs assessment. The young person is also supported to access any other available funding streams.

- 4.11 The Children's Commissioner for Wales is finalising a schedule of meetings with all Local Authorities across Wales and attendees from BCBC will include the Chief Executive, the Leader of the Council, the Director of Social Services and Wellbeing, the Head of Children's Social Care and other relevant Members and officers.
- 4.12 The aim of the meeting will be to reinvigorate the discussion about what services Local Authorities offer care leavers, to acknowledge what works well and explore any gaps in provision or potential for further development of opportunities. BCBC will take this opportunity to discuss its position and intention in relation to the recommendations as outlined above.
- 4.13 It is also the Commissioner's intention to invite Bridgend care leavers to the meeting to be able to hear directly from them about what is important to them or what would make a positive difference to their outcomes.

5. Effect upon Policy Framework and Procedure Rules.

- 5.1 There is no effect on the policy framework and procedure rules.

6. Equality Impact Assessment

- 6.1 This report is concerned with information rather than policy or decision making therefore, an equality impact assessment is not applicable.

7. Financial Implications.

- 7.1 BCBC is currently undertaking a review of the way in which the service financially supports care leavers at university. This review will take into account the recommendations coming out of the Hidden Ambitions Report

8. Recommendation.

- 8.1 Committee Members to note the content of the report and support the Sixteen Plus team and other partner department and services in fulfilling the recommendations of the Hidden Ambition report for the children and young people of Bridgend CBC.

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March 2017

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Background documents
None



HIDDEN AMBITIONS

Wales' commitment
to **young people
leaving care**



Care leavers need
the same sort of
**opportunities,
assistance** and
support that all
parents try to give
their children as they
start to **make** their
way in the **world.**

HIDDEN AMBITIONS

Achieving the best for young people leaving care

The Children's Commissioner for Wales

believes that all **young people** should have an **equal chance** to be the best they can be as they **approach adulthood.**

All children and young people have rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) to be safe, cared for and have an education that helps them fulfill their potential.

Wales' commitment to young people leaving care should include **somewhere safe to live** with financial security, an **active offer of education, work or training** and **ongoing social and emotional support.** These are very reasonable **expectations that every young person** has of their parents as they make the **leap into adulthood,** and the same should be available for young people leaving care.



Young people leaving care have the same ambitions as any other young people but they can become hidden when they do not have a family behind them.

In this spotlight report, Sally Holland, the Children's

Commissioner, is asking local and national government, charities and private enterprise to pledge their support to realising the ambitions of young people leaving care. The Commissioner wants to ensure young people leaving care can have the same expectations in terms of care and support as their peers.

Following her appointment, many different groups of people, including care leavers, asked the Children's Commissioner to consider how the move towards adulthood can be made more straightforward, as a priority of her work over the next three years. In 2016, she listened to young people leaving care from right across Wales and surveyed every local authority to find out about the opportunities that they currently provide.

The Commissioner and her team have heard of the ambitions of young people leaving care to work in a whole variety of different jobs and sectors but they have also told her about the problems they have faced in accessing opportunities. These include financial barriers, lack of information and support for developing the skills necessary to access the world of work. **Three inequalities** in particular came up in a number of conversations. They include:

- Young people being moved out of foster care or residential care as soon as they turn 18, even when this is in the middle of an important year of studies such as A-levels.
- Post 18 living arrangements known as 'When I'm Ready' do not allow young people to stay in their residential care home past the age of 18, unlike young people in foster care.

- Support for care leavers ends at the age of 21 unless that young person is engaged in education or training yet those not in education, training or work are more likely to need support.

The Commissioner has raised these three inequalities with the Welsh Government and is pleased that it has agreed to work towards ending them.

Safe housing and emotional or practical support go hand in hand with accessing opportunities. We cannot expect our care leavers – some as young as 16 - to achieve their ambitions if they are worried about where they will live, how they will pay their bills or how they can find out about what help is available to them. Care leavers need the same sort of opportunities, assistance and support that all parents try to give their children as they start to make their way in the world.

Fewer than 500 young people leave care in Wales each year. At age 19, 43% are not in training, education or employment¹. These young people have shared with the Commissioner a wide range of ambitions for life.

The Children's Commissioner has been working with the Welsh Government and the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) to explore ways that they can help care leavers to achieve their Hidden Ambitions. Concluding this report are a series of actions which, if realised, will ensure Wales becomes a country that truly enables **every young person to be the best they can be.**

BACKGROUND

'Transitions' to adulthood was identified as a priority area for the Children's Commissioner for Wales to take forward, through the What Next? |Beth Nesa? survey during **2015**. This can be summed up by a quote from a Senior Transition Worker as part of the survey findings: **"18 is just a number in the young people's lives, their needs remain the same"**.

2015

During a visit to Wales in September 2015 to see how children and young people's rights are protected and upheld in the UK, a representative of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child spoke to Welsh young people in care who told her about the need for practical, emotional and financial support during the transition to independence, as well as successful traineeship schemes that are available through some but not all Local Authorities. The UN Committee published their report which is called their Concluding Observations in June 2016 and noted that the UK state parties should- 'Inform and consult with children from an early stage on plans for their care and transition and provide sufficient support for care leavers, including for accommodation, employment or further education'.

Local Authorities in Wales have statutory duties towards Care Leavers under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 including an overarching duty to pay due regard to the UNCRC in their provision of services. The duties include assessing a young person's needs for education, training or employment, and the provision of accommodation. Young people have reported that the picture is mixed in terms of the housing options available to them and the opportunities to access suitable work or learning from age 16+.

2016

During 2016 three events were held to consult with children in care and care leavers in relation to housing, support and education or training needs. There were events in South and North Wales in the summer followed by a national event in October 2016. We engaged with over 100 young people from across Wales as well as their personal advisers, to find out what was important to them and what wasn't working well currently.

During Autumn 2016 we hosted a survey online and invited a representative from each local authority to tell us what they currently offer as in-house training or work experience to their young people in care and care leavers. All 22 local authorities responded to the survey and the results are referred to within this spotlight report, but there is also an infographic available on our website which summarises the responses.

We have also engaged with other professionals that work with care leavers throughout the year and looked at the offers made to care leavers in England and Scotland, as part of this report.

This report sets out the key areas that have been highlighted to us, with case studies and examples of where things are currently working well or opportunities to work with young people in different ways in order to help them to realise their hidden ambitions.



ENTITLEMENTS

Currently young people leaving care

are entitled to the following:

Housing

- **Young people living in foster care** can stay living with their foster carers up to the age of 21 (or 25 if in continued education) under the When I'm Ready scheme, subject to agreement.
- **Local Authorities have to offer care leavers support to access suitable housing** up to the age of 21 and those leaving care should have "priority status" on housing lists until they turn 22.
- **A Leaving Care Grant of up to £2,000** should be paid to help a young person set up their first home.

Education or training

- **Young people aged 19 or over can apply** for the Assembly Learning Grant for Further Education. This is up to £1,500 for full time studies but depends on your overall income level.
- **Local authorities provide money through grants or "bursaries"**. The Higher Education Bursary is £2,000 but there are usually other discretionary amounts including support for accommodation outside of term times.
- **Student Loans and Grants** are also available but are also linked to income levels.
- **Care leavers aged 18-21 can claim Income Support and Housing Benefit** if studying below degree level provided they enrolled before their 19th birthday. Care leavers under the age of 18 cannot apply for these benefits.

Support

- **The local authority must keep in touch with their care leavers up to the age of 21** to offer advice and support – this is done by allocating a personal adviser to each young person. This is extended to age 25 if the young person is still in education/training.
- **Young people between the ages of 21 and 25 who have left education but then decide they want to go to college** or university are entitled to extra support to do so, but they will need to approach their local authority to ask for this extra help. There is no automatic arrangement for this support to be made available and no ongoing duty on the local authority to maintain contact with them.
- **Local authorities have to arrange suitable accommodation** for care leavers aged 16 or 17 and have to pay for furnishings. This is not automatically available for young people who leave care at 18 (or leave a When I'm Ready arrangement after the age of 18).
- **Every local authority must have in place a clear and transparent financial policy**, setting out what entitlements young people have, what conditions are attached to them, and how any payments will be made.

WHAT'S IMPORTANT

THE CARE LEAVERS TOLD US

FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING

EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

EDUCATION AND TRAINING SUPPORT

PERSONAL ADVICE

SCHOOL WORKING WELL WITH SOCIAL WORKERS

'DROP IN'

HONEST AND UNDERSTANDING
SOCIAL WORKERS

FUN ACTIVITIES

GROUP SUPPORT

HOUSING SUPPORT

PERSONAL
ADVISORS



WORRIES

OF YOUNG PEOPLE

NOT FEELING LISTENED TO

LONELINESS

HOUSING

UNAVAILABLE CARE WORKERS

EDUCATION

TRAINING

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

FINANCES

INDEPENDENCE

JOBS

HELP AFTER 21

**BETTER COMMUNICATION
FROM AUTHORITIES**

FREEDOM



WHAT SHOULD WALES' COMMITMENT BE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE LEAVING CARE?

The Commissioner believes that all care leavers, wherever they live, should receive the following support.

Support for All

■ The Commissioner is of the view that all young people leaving care should be able to access support up to the age of 25 (whether or not they are in education/training). This is an important issue that is being prioritised in Scotland² and England³ as well. Young people have repeatedly told us that they value the continued support of a trusted personal adviser and support for a range of different things.

On 31st March 2016 local authorities in Wales were in touch with 465 care leavers who had turned 19 during the last year. We also know that 280 of those care leavers or 57% were in education, employment or training at the age of 19⁴ but we do not know how many of those will still be in that group from the age of 21 onwards and therefore how many will be able to access ongoing support until they turn 25. All care leavers are entitled to support to continue to engage with education but are not readily identified or proactively offered that support.

Quotes from young people at our events in 2016

“Why is 21 the magic number?”

“When I’m Ready and education is my only option”

“Ongoing support would make me happy until I’m 25”

■ Some local authorities have forums or discussions groups just for care leavers; what is of interest or concern to a care leaver may be different to what is discussed by children still living in care. Care Leavers’ Forums can be asked for their views when the local authority is planning to change how a service is offered and in deciding

what issues their staff need training on. An added bonus is that they can also provide a space for young people to provide support to each other.

A distinct Care Leavers Forum is one of the six core components of the UK Government’s Department for Education New Belongings Programme, to enable young people to shape decisions about changes to services and to give young people “real voice and influence”.

The Phase 2 report from October 2016 recognises some of the barriers to starting up a forum but also highlights tips and good practice examples to get up and running. These include when and how the meetings take place and use of social media to plan and communicate.

There are also examples of representatives attending the Corporate Parenting Board and Senior Officers attending the Care Leavers Forum in order to directly hear and discuss relevant issues.

Young people can also gain leadership skills and confidence through their participation in a Forum.

Housing and Income

■ Moving to a new house when leaving care is a major step and it needs to be planned properly, with the direct involvement of the young person to reflect their wishes. Things that would help this are –

- i. Local Authorities using the Welsh Government’s Housing Positive Pathway and the Care Leavers Accommodation and Support Framework developed by Barnardo’s⁵ as guidance for all those working with the young person.

DiGartref support 44 young people aged 16-24 in Anglesey who are homeless and have extra support needs; very many of these are care leavers.

There is a lack of affordable housing on the island and young people experience difficulty in navigating the confusing housing system as applications for housing are very difficult to complete.

Young people and workers reported that the Discretionary Assistance Fund has been invaluable for setting up in their own home but this is a fund of last resort. It is concerning that these young people have had to resort to this in order to be able to set up their own home, as well as loans from companies like Wonga.

The Commissioner visited two of the DiGartref hostels and young people talked about how they value services where they get to know the workers and can continue to receive support after they move into their first flats.

- ii. There needs to be more of a focus on gaining skills for independence including practical skills such as cooking, opening a bank account and paying bills.

Agored Cymru offer an accredited Level 2 qualification in Skills for Independence (Moving Forward) which has been developed in conjunction with Swansea Council. One residential care provider in South Wales has been undertaking the course with their young people in order to accredit their Independent Living Programme (ILP) which prepares them for their transition out of care.

One learner completed the Certificate with 20 credits all achieved in her own time outside school and largely done over the summer holidays.

For those who need a stepping stone into this qualification a Level 1 Award has also been created.

The Commissioner met with young people who had completed the qualification and presented their certificates. They told her that they had learned useful skills, including how to manage their finances and stay healthy, and for some it has given them the confidence to move on to further education goals.

Llamau offer a pre-vocational learning programme called Learning 4 Life. They work with young people that Llamau supports to develop the independent-living and employability skills that many people take for granted. Learning 4 Life supports young people aged between 16 and 25 not currently in training, education or employment.

Learning 4 Life aims to address the barriers faced by some vulnerable young people by providing them with the first steps in improving Basic Skills, employability skills and, most important of all, confidence.

Through the Learning 4 Life programme, Llamau is an approved provider of City & Guilds Essential Skills Wales qualifications in Application of Number, Communication and ICT. Learning 4 Life operates out of 11 centres, nine of which are in south Wales and two in north Wales.

- iii. All young people should be entitled to clear information on the money and grants that they can access when they leave care and the rules on what their money can be spent on should be the same for everyone. At the moment each local authority may offer different amounts as a grant when setting up home for a young person. Young people and their personal advisers have told us they find it difficult to find information and financial policies for their local authority. There is a lack of transparency in

relation to this as we were told many financial policies are discretionary and it has not been easy to find this information online when we have looked ourselves. Young people and professionals have also highlighted to us that the 'rules' are not the same everywhere so in some areas money can be spent on a washing machine but in another area this would not be considered as an "essential" item for a starter home package.

Many young people have difficulty accessing certain types of housing, if they have had an unsuccessful placement previously or if there are limited options available to suit their needs. The private rental sector is often suggested as an alternative but many landlords are unwilling to accept a young person due to concern about the rent being paid.

In Conwy, Corporate Parenting policy states that the local authority will sign as a guarantor for a young person's tenancy. This involves only a handful of young people each year so it is not a major undertaking, but can often be the only option to allow a young person to live independently. This is a good example of the true 'Parenting' aspect of corporate parenting.

Torfaen and Swansea Councils are highlighted in the Barnardo's support framework for their "hubs" that have homelessness or housing officers working in the same place as personal advisers and support workers, giving access to specialist housing advice and support, as well as being able to work together and plan ahead if there is a risk of accommodation breakdown.

"Drop in" support was also important to the young people we met. The Commissioner has visited the Torfaen hub and heard from young people there about how it helps them.

■ Young people need help to know what bills they need to pay, when and how much they will cost, as they will not have been responsible for doing this when in care. Many young people experience a real drop in living standards when they move from foster or residential care to independent living. Many live on around £8 a day, for all their needs, including clothes, transport and bills. The Financial Inclusion Strategy for Wales 2016 reflects that care leavers need access to online or other resources to help with budgeting and finances.

My office has developed an App entitled My Planner which includes a budget calculator, as well as information on rights and entitlements.⁶

However the biggest monthly bill by far is for council tax. The Welsh Government is looking at what can be done to make council tax fairer and young people leaving care should be central to these considerations.

The New Belongings Programme run by the Department for Education (DfE) in England highlights the views of care leavers that Council Tax is a "particularly challenging bill for them to pay". The pilot suggests that a blanket exemption may not be fair on other vulnerable groups but that a transparent financial support package for care leavers, created with their input, would be "little different from the support that parents or guardians might provide to their own children in similar circumstances."⁷

This issue was also recognised in UK Government's Communities and Local Government inquiry into Homelessness which heard evidence that 24 per cent of homeless people have been in care.⁸

North Somerset has taken the decision that its care leavers should not have to pay Council Tax until they reach age 22. They also have a lot of clear information available on their website in relation to financial policies.⁹

■ The rules around who is entitled to claim benefits and how much they can claim are very complicated and there is no single place that a young person can go to find out this information. Although the benefit rules are set by the UK Government, it is important that young people across Wales have access to clear information on entitlements, how to make a claim and who to contact for support or advice. Up to date information should be published on the rules so that young people can make informed decisions on their future together with their personal advisers.

■ Social services, housing and education departments should all work together to help plan a young person's move to living independently. No one person will be an expert on all of these matters so everyone needs to work together to help the young person make these big decisions with all of the information that they need to do so.

Only six of the local authorities that responded to our national survey answered the question *“Are apprentices or trainees able to claim benefits, and if so what benefits are they entitled to claim?”*

Of those six, two were uncertain exactly what was on offer or what the criteria were, simply stating “housing benefit”.

Young people also have problems with lack of childcare for attending courses such as 12 week access to work courses. Sometimes job centres will pay for childcare but these young people are not always on the “right” benefits (i.e. not on job seekers’ allowance).

Housing and Finances are issues that have been repeatedly raised as being difficult to get information for young people from departments other than social services and that departments do not always approach care leavers’ situations and needs in the same way. Corporate Parenting is surely failing care leavers in any scenario where a leaving care team has worked hard to find suitable accommodation for a young person, but a few months later, the young person is receiving threatening letters from the housing department due to rent or council tax arrears. Council departments should be checking with each other the status and support options of these young people before just sending out these letters which can be very worrying for a young person to receive.

Opportunities

Local Authorities should act like large Family Businesses in terms of their role as Corporate Parents of looked after young people. Like any family business, they should be prepared to offer training and job opportunities in their many areas of employment, including administration, parks, nurseries, carpentry, social care and housing. Additionally, ALL departments in the local authority should understand what support a care leaver needs and what they can do to help with this. This is what corporate parenting means in practice and all departments and councillors have a role to play, whether that is making decisions that will help or offering a service or support directly to a care leaver in their area.

Caerphilly Council has recently set up a new training scheme for care leavers with the support of the Corporate Management team and presentations to each service area across the council are currently underway to share this information.

The Progress Scheme will provide work experience within the Council as part of the national Traineeship programme which is funded by ESF money and backed by Welsh Government. A wide variety of placements will be offered to young people, age 16 to 18 across a range of Council departments. In addition to this, young people will also undertake a Level 1 qualification with the provider. Those attending will receive a weekly allowance of between £35 and £50 plus travel expenses. At the end of the placement, the Council will endeavour to provide an apprenticeship or employment although where this is not possible, ongoing support will be provided via the provider and/or a Youth Mentor from the Communities First employment team.

The first cohort of trainees will develop publicity materials for wider circulation which will be able to be based on their individual experiences of the scheme.



In Monmouthshire, two care-experienced trainees are currently employed to set up and run a care leaver and looked after children's group. They are expected to organise for the group to meet on a regular basis. This gives them direct control over the group as well as additional skills in organising and running the sessions.

■ From our survey we learnt that 11 local authorities across Wales already guarantee that a child in care or care leaver will be offered an interview for an in-house training or apprenticeship scheme if they apply. In addition another authority told us that they always offer feedback on the interview if the young person did not get the job. Seven local authorities reserve a certain number of places each year for care leavers, to make sure that they have access to a range of opportunities.

These are things that will not cost local authorities a lot of money but that will go a long way to offering that initial opportunity or foot in the door to a care leaver or child in their care. As long as the rules and eligibility criteria of the scheme are clearly set out then this is a simple and fair way to offer a bit of extra support.

■ Links to local businesses can be extremely valuable to extend the range of placements available.

Conwy have linked up with Venue Cymru, a theatre and conference centre, in their area for work experience opportunities.

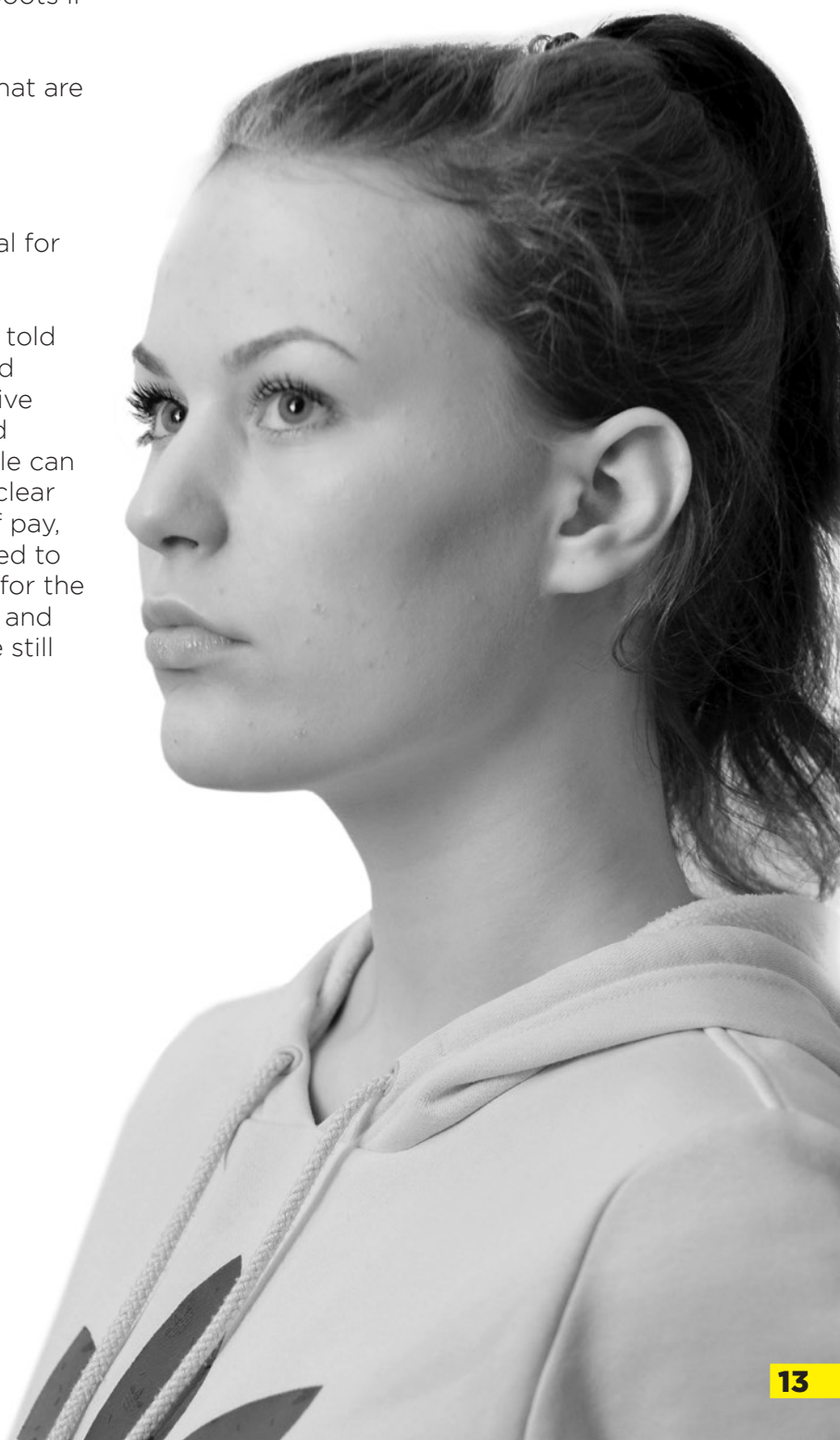
Information sessions are held in the Venue Cymru Theatre in Llandudno advertising the schemes available. Placements at the local Leisure Centre were also designed specifically for children in care and care leavers and marketed to them directly. They then also designed a similar offer at Venue Cymru to offer a range of experiences such as catering, restaurant, front of house, events and technical jobs. Placements have been shaped to suit individual young people's needs. One young man was interested in a catering work placement, which he then followed. Conwy then supported him in an application for a role with the Council and he was successful in securing a permanent role at Venue Cymru.



■ Young people should be given any extra help they need to apply for a placement or job, or to get there every day. There are lots of things that local authority staff and personal advisers can do to help with this. Nine of the Local Authorities who responded to our survey told us of different things they can already offer, including –

- interview training and feedback
- clothing allowances (smart clothes for an interview or work clothes such as safety boots if needed)
- allowances for tools or other equipment that are needed to do the job
- travel passes or money for travel costs
- money for driving lessons if this is essential for the job.

■ Our consultations and survey results have told us that apprenticeships are not always talked about or offered to young people as a positive career option. Schools, careers advisers and carers or others who work with young people can all play a role in helping to change this, but clear information about how to apply, the rates of pay, hours worked and support available is needed to do this. Young people living independently for the first time will need to work out their budget and transport options in a different way to those still living in the family home.



In Rhondda Cynon Taf, employment, education and training for looked after children is called Step in the Right Direction, under the Care 2 Work scheme. It is a 2 year paid traineeship programme for young people aged 16-21 living in and leaving care in Rhondda Cynon Taf. The Council has recognised, as part of its corporate parent role, the importance of offering young people leaving care an opportunity for employment and training experience.

Each year, 6 trainees join the scheme and are given the opportunity (ranging from 6 weeks to 18 months) within a variety of Council departments and private employment settings. Places are offered in a very wide range of departments including education, highways, early years, parks, primary schools, HR, planning and regeneration, day services and residential care, street care and cleansing, finance, security and elections.

Managed by the Traineeship Coordinator, supported by an allocated Aftercare Worker and overseen day to day by a Placement Manager, these young people have all the support needed to gain the work experience and training required to help them gain full time employment at the end of the programme. Here are their identified benefits:

■ **BENEFITS TO ORGANISATIONS/BUSINESSES**

- Develop skills, knowledge and experience of existing staff through mentoring
- Additional staff resource to support your department/business
- Development of young people into potential long term employees
- Enhanced reputation as an employer
- Evidences commitment to social responsibilities
- To support the career pathway of young people and allow them to contribute more positively to society

■ **BENEFITS TO YOUNG PEOPLE**

- Greater confidence and self esteem
- Raised skill levels and aspirations
- Progression into employment/further education
- Gain practical skills/qualifications
- Increased work ethic and self-belief
- Increased financial stability
- Greater independence

WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE

Although there are many good examples of support in Wales, as have been highlighted in this report, the following should be available for all, no matter where they live.

Support for all

- All young people leaving care should be able to access **support up to the age of 25** (whether or not they are in education/training).

- There should be more of a **focus placed by local authorities and carers on developing young people's skills for independence**, including practical skills such as cooking, opening a bank account and paying bills.

- Social services, housing and education **departments should all work together** to help plan a young person's move to living independently, consistent with the ways of working under the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act.

- Local authorities should consider setting up **forums or discussions groups just for care leavers**; what is of interest or concern to a care leaver may be different to what is discussed by children still living in care. Care Leavers' Forums can be asked for their views when the local authority is planning to change how a service is offered and in deciding what issues their staff need training on. They can also provide peer support for each other.

Housing and Income

- Local authorities should be using the Welsh Government's Housing Positive Pathway and the **Care Leavers Accommodation and Support Framework** developed by Barnardo's as guidance for all those working with the young person.

- All young people leaving care should have a consistent and transparent package of financial support, underpinned by **clear information on the money and grants that they can access when they leave care** and the rules on what their money can be spent on should be the same for everyone. Information on finances should be clear, transparent and easily accessible. Although the benefit rules are set by the UK Government, it is important that young people across Wales have **access to clear information on benefit entitlements, how to make a claim and who to contact for support or advice**.

- The Welsh Government is looking at **what can be done to make Council Tax fairer for people in Wales. Young people leaving care should be given priority within this work and consideration given to schemes used in England**, such as allowing an initial period of time when it doesn't have to be paid or a reduced amount to be paid.

Opportunities

- Local Authorities should be like **large Family Businesses** in terms of their role as Corporate Parents of looked after young people. Like any family business, they should be **prepared to offer all of the children under their care bespoke access to training and job opportunities in their many areas of employment, including administration, parks, nurseries, carpentry, social care and housing**.

- **Support for young people needs to be proactively offered by carers and support workers**, to help them to prepare for and access training schemes. Invaluable links to local businesses and partners should be developed, as well as assistance with interview preparation and clothing and any tools or equipment needed to carry out a job.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

To take forward these suggested improvements, the Children's Commissioner will:

- Visit every local authority's executive leadership team across Wales in 2017 to discuss what they currently offer to support care leavers to achieve their hidden ambitions and what they plan to put in place.
- Monitor the progress local authorities make.
- Monitor the progress of the Welsh Government in supporting Care Leavers.
- Continue to listen to care leavers about their experiences and whether they are getting the help they need.

The Welsh Government has already taken strides forward in its commitment to care experienced children and young people by forming a Ministerial Advisory Group. It has also agreed to work towards:

- Ensuring that young people leaving residential care get equivalent levels of support to those leaving foster care.
- Making sure that no young person has to leave their accommodation on their 18th birthday when this is in the middle of an important year of studies such as A-levels.

- Securing the right to a Personal Adviser for all care leavers up to the age of 25.
- Guaranteeing financial support for care leavers going into higher education.
- Publishing clear information on care leavers' entitlements through the tax and benefits systems.
- Finding new ways to reduce poverty amongst care leavers.

Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) have made a commitment to:

- Encourage all local authority members, as Corporate Parents, to provide training and apprenticeship opportunities for looked after children and care leavers, in their 'family business'.
- Support awareness raising so that all Local Authorities are able to meet the housing needs of care leavers, using the guidance from the Welsh Government and Barnardo's.
- Work with all Local Authorities to ensure that care leavers receive clear information and the financial support they are entitled to when setting up their first home.
- Encourage all Local Authorities to actively involve care leavers in developing and monitoring the support that they offer.
- Find new ways to reduce poverty amongst care leavers by exploring travel subsidies and additional support such as allowances for clothing or tools needed for a traineeship

The Children's Commissioner for Wales would like to thank the young people and professionals who contributed to this report; your input has been invaluable.

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FOOTNOTES

¹<http://gov.wales/docs/statistics/2016/161018-adoptions-outcomes-placements-children-looked-after-local-authorities-2015-16-revised-en.pdf>

²<http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0048/00483676.pdf>

³https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/535899/Care-Leaver-Strategy.pdf

⁴<http://gov.wales/docs/statistics/2016/161018-adoptions-outcomes-placements-children-looked-after-local-authorities-2015-16-revised-en.pdf>

⁵http://www.barnardos.org.uk/16905_su_care_leavers_accom_and_support_framework_english_digital__3_.pdf

⁶The My Planner App can be downloaded here <https://www.childcomwales.org.uk/our-work/resources/>

⁷https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/562139/DFE-RR616-New_Belongngs_programme_evaluation.pdf
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⁸http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmcomloc/40/4009.htm#_idTextAnchor046

⁹<http://www.somerset.gov.uk/childrens-services/care-and-chaperoning/leaving-care/>

Young people featured in this report are models from Wales