

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CABINET

18 SEPTEMBER 2018

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR, SOCIAL SERVICES AND WELLBEING

CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE – UNIVERSITY SUPPORT PACKAGES FOR CARE LEAVERS

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To inform Cabinet (further to the report on 30th January 2018) of the methodology and findings from the consultation that has been conducted over a twelve week period in relation to financial support provided to care leavers.
- 1.2 To remind Cabinet that this report is also written in light of Welsh Government's response to the 'Diamond Review' – a review of the student support and higher education funding in Wales that will begin to be implemented in the this academic year (2018/19).
- 1.3 To seek approval from Cabinet to proceed in writing a policy pursuant to the preferred option 3.

2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Objectives/Other Corporate Priorities

- 2.1 This report assists in the achievement of the following corporate priority/priorities:-
 1. **Supporting a successful economy** – taking steps to make the county a good place to do business, for people to live, work, study and visit, and to ensure that our schools are focused on raising the skills, qualifications and ambitions of all people in the county.
 2. **Helping people to be more self-reliant** – taking early steps to reduce or prevent people from becoming vulnerable or dependent on the Council and its services.

3. Background

- 3.1 As noted in the previous report of 30th January 2018, the Local Authority has, for many years, provided young care leavers with financial assistance to attend university and higher education courses. This financial support has enabled young people to meet the costs of term time and vacation accommodation, pay for tuition fees and receive weekly maintenance payments.
- 3.2 Such assistance has been provided to young people in the absence of an agreed and ratified policy and it has been acknowledged that the approach to the levels of support offered has developed through custom and practice within children's social care. Such an approach cannot guarantee consistency of practice or ensure equity of the financial support provided to individuals.

- 3.3 There is currently no identified budget specifically from which this financial support can be drawn from and to date it has come out of the care leavers generic support budget.
- 3.4 In September 2016, the Cabinet Secretary for Education published the Diamond Report which proposed a costed package of recommendations for the future funding of higher education in Wales. Welsh Government has accepted these recommendations and plans to start implementing them in the academic year 2018/19.
- 3.5 The Local Authority is currently supporting nine care leavers to attend university, and have identified that over the next three years this number is likely to increase. This is very positive and, in order to achieve the best outcomes for young care leavers, it is necessary to devise a policy that ensures appropriate levels of financial support, fairness and consistency so that Bridgend can sustain suitable levels of support into the future.
- 3.6 The Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014, (SSWBA), lays down the Local Authority's responsibilities with regards to care leavers over the age of 18 who wish to continue their education and sets out what financial assistance the Local Authority MUST provide. This will be the basis from which the policy is developed.
- 3.7 In her Hidden Ambitions spotlight report published in February 2017, the Children's Commissioner for Wales, Sally Holland, asks local and national government to pledge their support to realising the ambitions of young people leaving care. The Commissioner wants to ensure that young people leaving care have the same expectations in terms of care and support as their peers and to have an education that helps them to fulfil their potential. To show commitment to care experienced children and young people Welsh Government wants to guarantee financial support for care leavers going onto higher education.
- 3.8 At the start of the academic year (2018/19) all care leavers attending University were entitled to a non-repayable grant of £8,100 per year from Welsh Government and the option of a £900 loan which means a total of up to £9,000 per year. (Note that these figures are for outside of London.)
- 3.9 Welsh Government will no longer be providing students with Tuition Fee Grants. Instead students will be eligible for, and will be supported to apply for
- a Tuition Fee Loan to cover the total amount of their £9000 fees each year which they will have to pay back once earning over an agreed amount;
 - the non-repayable Welsh Government Living Costs Grant of £8,100 a year;
 - the £900 loan should they require it.
- 3.10 Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) has recognised a need to devise a policy that ensures appropriate levels of financial support, fairness and consistency to its care leavers, so that they are not disadvantaged financially and encouraged to take some financial responsibility for their own education and future.
- 3.11 On 30th January 2018 Cabinet received a report which set out three financial proposals to support care leavers attending University.

- 3.12 Each proposal has been carefully considered and would enable BCBC to support them in their further education and subsequent independence and in the same way as responsible parents would ordinarily do.
- 3.13 All three options will be consistent in ensuring that BCBC is compliant with the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act, 2014 in that it funds vacation time accommodation and provides each student with a £2,000 bursary payment as a minimum. The different options proposed vary in what is provided to each student in addition to this minimum requirement.

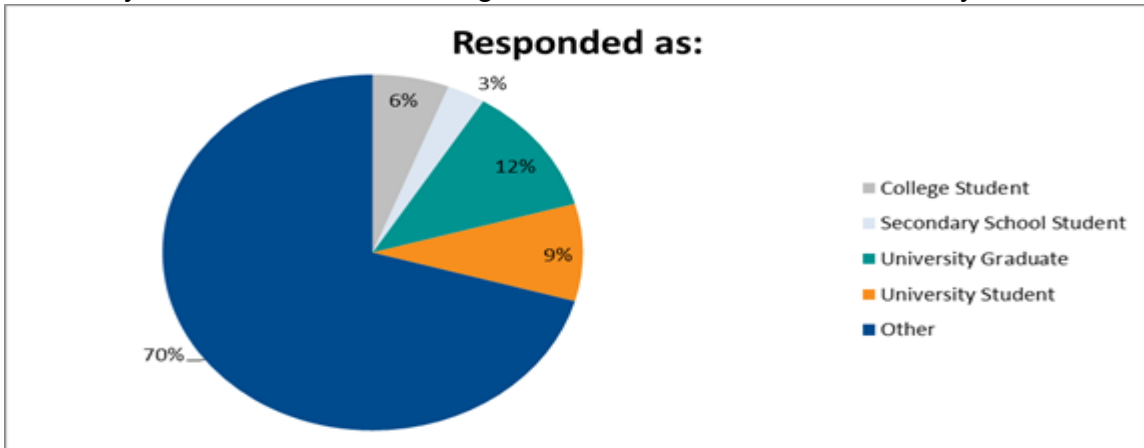
4 Current Situation/Proposal

- 4.1 A consultation on the proposals was conducted over a 12 week period between 23 February 2018 and 18 May 2018. The consultation was available to complete online via a link sent by the Leaving Care Team to those who would be interested in or impacted upon by the proposals and was available in English, Welsh and as an accessible version.
- 4.2 The consultation provided a background to the proposals and provided three options. Respondents were asked to select their preferred option and then asked if they had an alternative proposal. The council's standard set of equalities monitoring questions were also included with the survey, as it is now recommended good practice for all public facing consultations carried out by the council. The content of the consultation remains available online in closed consultations.
- 4.3 Children's Social Care also emailed the link to the consultation to Children's Social Care practitioners and managers, students (past present and future), Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members, Education and family support staff and schools. The consultation document can be found at **Appendix 1**.
- 4.4 The data collection method and the online consultation, was developed using plain English to maximise understanding and although Welsh was offered, all responses were in English.
- 4.5 In total, there were 34 responses, all responses were received via the online survey. The Leaving Care Team directed all young people that they had engaged with during the live consultation period to the survey.

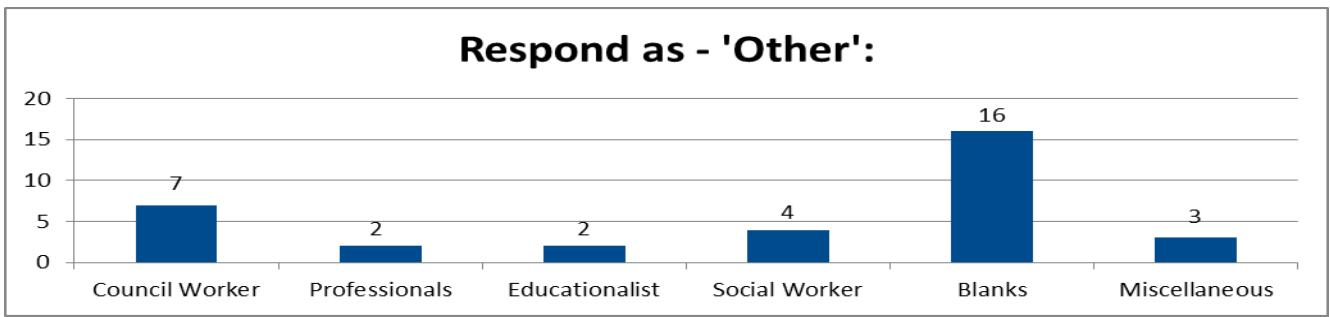
Profile of respondents

- 4.6 The information below shows the key data and response information in relation to questions 1, 2 and 3 of the consultation document.
- 4.7 **Headline figures**
- 18% of respondents were current students, 12% were graduates and 70% other.
 - The majority of respondents were aged 25-44 (35%)
 - The age group 16-24 made up 18% of respondents
 - 58% of responders selected option one as their preferred option
 - Option three (the preferred option) was selected by 28% of responders as their preferred option.
- 4.8 The data below identifies the number and type of respondents:

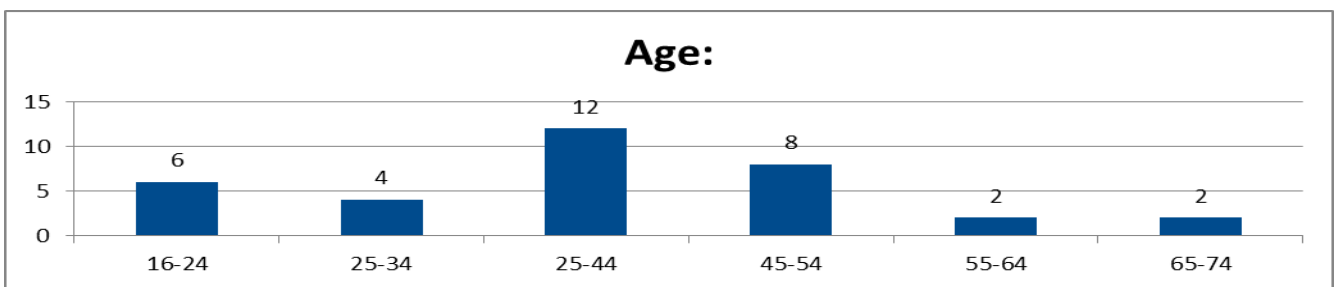
- Respondents were asked in which capacity they were responding. The majority (70%) responded as “other”. 12% responded as university graduates, 9% current university students, 6% as college student and 3% as secondary school student.



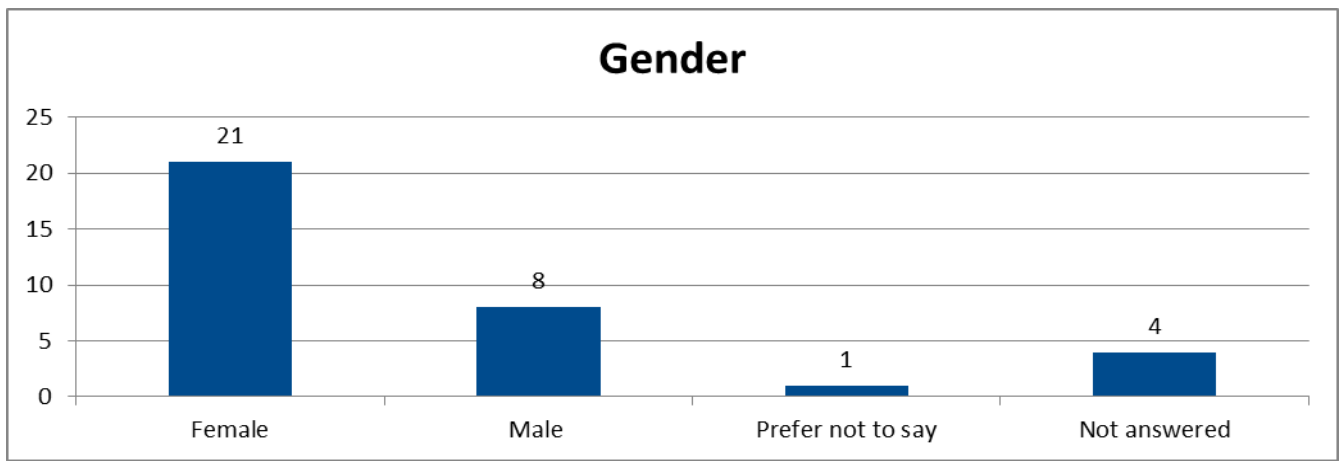
- Of those who responded other (24 respondents) there were 16 responders who did not give the capacity in which they were responding.



- The majority of respondents were aged 25-44 (35%), followed by age 45-54 (24%) and then age 16-24 (18%).



- 62% of responses were received from females, 23% from males. 3% stated that they preferred to not give their gender and 12% did not respond to this question.



Analysis of responses

4.9 University support packages for care leavers survey options

Option 1

- BCBC pays the student's tuition fee of £9,000.
- The student pays for their accommodation and living costs during term time through loans/grants.
- Any additional maintenance / discretionary payments made to individuals will be based on an individual assessed need basis.

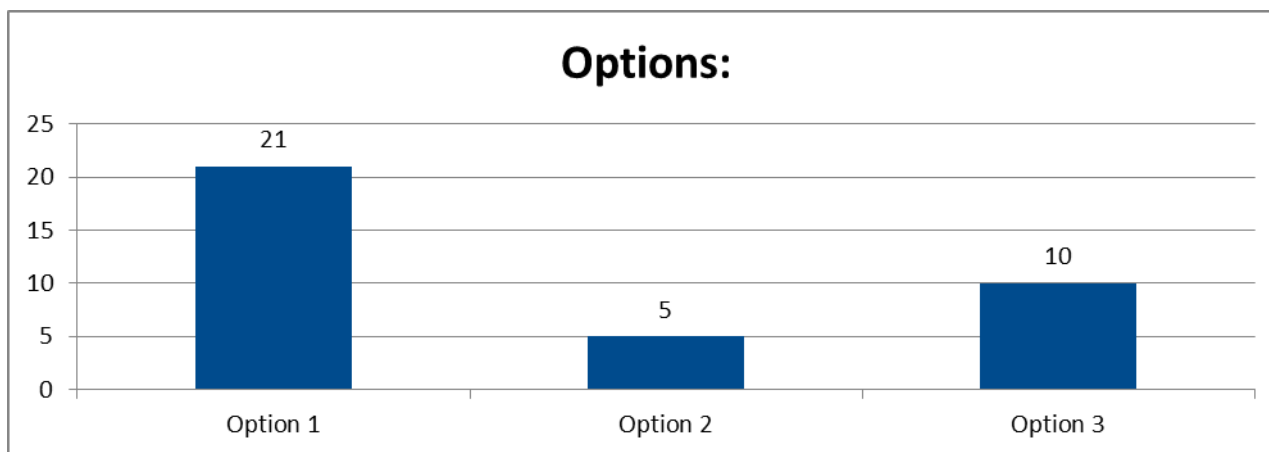
Option 2

- The student pays their tuition fee of £9,000 per year through a repayable loan.
- The student pays for their accommodation and living costs during term time through loans/grants.
- Any additional maintenance / discretionary payments made to individuals will be based on an individual assessed need basis.

Option 3 (Original Preferred option)

- The student pays their tuition fee of £9,000 per year through a repayable loan. BCBC provides the student with a weekly incentive payment during term time (e.g. £25 per week).
- The student pays for their accommodation and living costs during term time through loans/grants.
- Any additional maintenance / discretionary payments made to individuals will be based on an individual assessed need basis.

4.10 The most popular option among responders was option one (58%). Option three was the second most popular (28%). Option two was favoured by 14% of responders. Two respondents' selected two options and one respondent did not select an option, commenting that "these options will not be affordable".



One “other” response was received when respondents were asked which option they would prefer.

4.11 Responses to questions 4, 5, 6 and 7 of the consultation are attached at **Appendix 2**.

Current Situation

4.12 In the academic year 2016/2017 Children’s social care supported 8 care leavers who were attending university totaling approximately £108,560. This was reduced by £3,900 due to the exception of one care leaver whose tuition fees were paid by Social Care Wales as she is completing her social work degree.

BCBC average estimated cost per student in 2016/17

Annual Costs	Paid by BCBC	Paid by Student
Tuition Fees top up (as per 16/17)	£3,900	Nil
Accommodation Costs (term time) *assumed average	£5,532	Nil
Weekly maintenance (term time)	£4,138	Nil
Bursary	£0	Nil
Total	£13,570	Nil

4.13 In the academic year 2017/2018, Children’s Social Care supported nine care leavers to attend university. The Local Authority provided full financial support for four of these care leavers costing approximately £54,280. Three of these care leavers were in their final year of study and one was in her second year of study. With regards to the other five care leavers, three were first year students and two were second year students.

4.14 Prior to the start of the academic year 2017/18, all nine care leavers were supported to consider all the financial options available to them at that time including loans and grants through student welfare services. The three care leavers entering into their 3rd and final year of study chose not to apply for personal loans or grants and as Corporate Parents the Local Authority supported their decision and continued to financially support them fully. One care leaver entering into her second year of study also chose not to make applications for loans and grants and again was financially supported by Children’s social care. The remaining five students out of the nine noted made a personal choice to apply for loans and grants to support their education and lifestyle.

- 4.15 BCBC continued to pay accommodation fees for one care leaver who was living in a supported lodgings placement and have provided discretionary financial assistance to two of the first year students. Discretionary payments were utilised to support payments for rent and living costs.
- 4.16 Two care leavers dropped out of university during the past two years but this is not attributable to any changes in the financial support they received.
- 4.17 Whilst the number of care leavers studying at university has been comparable over the past two academic years, the amount of financial support Children's social care have provided has been mixed but based on the needs of the students themselves.
- 4.18 BCBC, when providing full financial support have paid on average £13,570 per student per year. By the five students mentioned above who chose to take out loans and grants this year and with BCBC supplementing this with additional financial support tailored to meet their needs, the Council has reduced expenditure in the region of £67,850.
- 4.19 **Option 1** – 58% preferred this option. This option would mean that the student's tuition fees are paid by BCBC. As a result the Local Authority would have to give even greater consideration to requests by the student for discretionary payments. This option could have wider implications if the student is in financial crisis or hardship.
- 4.20 This option would mean that the care leavers would continue to be dependent on the Council and could lead itself to singling out the student as a care leaver when many do not want to share their background and upbringing with others. It also in some cases could act as a barrier to achievement given the student will have no personal financial investment in their education and depending on how the student manages their finances could bring about additional spending for the Local Authority through discretionary payments would not mature into learning new skills or managing finances as his/her peers.
- 4.21 **Option 2** – this option was putting all the cost onto the care leavers and therefore was discounted as the Council would not be acting as responsible corporate parents.
- 4.22 **Option 3** - Within this option the care leavers would be supported to apply for loans and grants to pay for their tuition fees. Children's social care would provide the student with a weekly allowance and a bursary in addition to the grants they are entitled to access. The student would not be expected to start repaying the loan until they are in full time employment and receiving a salary which enables them to do this without compromising them financially. The repayment of such a loan would not commence until the individual is in receipt of an annual income of £25,000 a year.
- 4.23 The tuition fee will be the largest cost repayable as per the conditions noted above. All 3 options lend themselves to a smaller loan/grant option for accommodation fees.
- 4.24 This option would allow greater independence and financial security on a weekly basis by enabling the student to manage a weekly allowance provided by Children's social care giving the student the flexibility to manage monies for food and social activities.

- 4.25 This option will also promote the students personal financial investment in their own education and by making applications for loans and grants will place them on an even financial platform as the majority of other students.
- 4.26 This option will also enable Children’s social care to financially support care leavers by making discretionary payments to students who may find themselves in times of hardship depending on their personal circumstances.
- 4.27 Option 3 will still encourage money management which is in line with the ethos behind the Diamond Report. This report emphasizes a “move towards improved maintenance and support arrangements for all full time and part time undergraduate students, with the highest level of grant support covering the full cost of maintenance for those most in need, together with subsidised loans to cover full cost of tuition fees.’ There is a clear principle of ‘no upfront fees’ within the report that also encourages financial support equivalent to the national living wage.
- 4.28 As part of this review and associated proposals other Local Authorities listed below were contacted in terms of their financial assistance to care leavers and their responses are within the data below.

LA	Tuition Fees	Term-time Accommodation	Weekly maintenance	Non term time Accommodation	Non term time Maintenance	Bursary	Other
RCT	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Merthyr	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	
NPT	No	No	Yes (£75)	Yes	Yes	No	
Ceredigion	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	£1500 per year
Bridgend	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	

- 4.29 The consultation concluded that the preferred option was Option 1. The rationale based on the comments submitted by the participants was to primarily reduce cost for this group of young people. However, this option is not in keeping with the ethos of the Diamond Report nor does it support young care leavers to learn about personal responsibility and financial independence.
- 4.30 Option 3 allows the student financial independence and security on a weekly basis by means of a weekly allowance not forgetting that the student will have access to a substantial grant and bursary to the sum of £10,000. The care leaver will be supported financially but there will be a more equitable balance between a loan (from the student loan company), a grant and discretionary payment from BCBC. Loans would be accessed through the student loan company which is a non profit making government owned organization set up in 1989. Care leavers will also continue to receive emotional and practical support. Students as care leavers will be eligible for on-going support and advice from Children’s Social Care and they will also be able to access the same from student welfare services to support them in the management of these monies.

4.31 Finally this option also allows each student's individual circumstances to be considered for discretionary payments should they find themselves under increased economic pressures or crisis which could impact on study.

5. Effect upon Policy Framework and Procedure Rules

5.1 The outcome of this consultation will result in a new policy on financial support for care leavers attending university.

6. Equality Impact Assessment

6.1 An EIA has been completed which shows there will be an impact on a small group of young people. However the intention of the Policy is to ensure this cohort of young people receive financial support.

6.2 Appropriate consultation will be arranged ensuring that relevant policies are applied throughout the process.

7. Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 Implications

7.1 The implementation of the duties and responsibilities under the Social Services and Wellbeing Act (Wales) (SSWBA) 2014, in turn, supports the promotion of two of the seven goals of the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 within the County Borough of Bridgend. By promoting an environment that maximises people's physical and mental well-being and by supporting children, young people, adults and their carers and families to fulfil their potential no matter what their circumstances, the wellbeing goals of a Healthier and more equal Bridgend and Wales are supported.

7.2 The Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 provides the basis for driving a different kind of public service in Wales, with five ways of working to guide how the Authority should work to deliver wellbeing outcomes for people. The following is a summary to show how the five ways of working to achieve the well-being goals have been considered in this report:

- Long Term – Social Services is demand led and the SSWBA focusses on wellbeing outcomes for the future. There is a requirement to meet the needs of people in the longer term and, as such the Local Authority has acknowledged the need to develop a policy to financially support its care leavers to attend university.
- Prevention – the report is about the consultation on three financial options. This will ensure that need is anticipated and resources can be more effectively directed to better support care leavers and manage demand.
- Integration – the implementation of the SSWBA requires local authorities to work with partners, to ensure care and support for its care leavers who wish to attend university is provided. The report evidences consultation with education professionals with this regard and with a view to enabling care leavers to access employment.
- Collaboration – This will be managed in order to provide the best possible intervention for care leavers wishing to attend university.
- Involvement – the key stakeholders are the people who use social care. There is considerable engagement including surveys, stakeholder meetings, feedback

forms and the complaints process. The provision of accessible information and advice helps to ensure that the voice of adults, children and young people is heard.

8.0 Financial Implications

8.1 Those young people who are already in University continue to receive support as per our current arrangements as outlined in the table below:

BCBC Current Position

Annual Costs	Paid by BCBC	Paid by Student
Tuition Fees top up (as per 16/17)	£3,900	Nil
Accommodation Costs (term time) *assumed average	£5,532	Nil
Weekly maintenance (term time)	£4,138	Nil
Bursary	£0	Nil
Total	£13,570	Nil

8.2 **Option 3** (original preferred option of the service-see Cabinet report 30th January 2018)

Annual Costs	Paid by BCBC	Paid by Student
Tuition Fees top up (as per 16/17)		£9,000
Accommodation Costs (term time) *assumed average		£5,532
40 week incentive payment	£1,000	
Bursary	£667	
Total	£1,667	£14,532

* £9,000 applies to Welsh Universities and would be £9,250 for outside of Wales.

- The Authority pays weekly incentive for 40 weeks (e.g. £25 per week)
- Student receives tuition fee of £9,000 from Tuition Fee Loan
- Student funds accommodation and maintenance costs from Living Costs Grant.

As with all students there will be a risk that the student will find it hard to manage financially. However they will continue to receive emotional and practical support from the leaving care team.

The student will benefit from the weekly incentive payment in addition to the loans and grants available to them. The Bursary (one third of £2,000) will be provided at the completion of each academic year to support the student over summer vacation from university. The incentive payment can be made weekly or monthly to support the student.

9.0 Recommendation

9.1 Cabinet is asked to approve option 3 as described in this report to enable implementation of a new policy.

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August 2018

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- 11. Background Documents**
None