

Consultation responses

Questions 4, 5, 6 and 7 within the consultation enabled respondents to provide a narrative response. Below are the questions, the consultee response(s) and the service area comments in italics.

Question 4 - Do you think there are any additional factors to be considered?

- Additional support for learner-continued foster placement for practical/emotional support and holidays.

All care leavers are allocated a Personal Advisor until the age of 25yrs to provide consistent support and advice when they are in full time education regardless of whether it is in term time or holidays.

- Accommodation out of term time as many of these young people will not have family they can stay with.

Many young people who attend university will not have the support of their family to stay with out of term time. Care leavers would be able to access additional support over and above those young people who do not have supportive families to apply for grants/loans which will develop their independence and financial skills to manage a household. Additional financial support would be assessed on an individual basis to enable the student to remain in their accommodation such as halls of residence, shared housing or supported lodgings if they maintain contact with carers. They will also have access to a bursary to financially support them.

- The previous policy had seen Bridgend's care leaver cohort attending university in increasing numbers, but was unrealistic in the long term given increasing tuition fees and local government cuts. It should be recognised that in addition to loans and grants available many students are additionally supported by "the bank of mum and dad" in order to fully experience university life.

Bridgend do not have a policy with regard to financial assistance for care leavers who wished to attend university and are addressing this via this consultation. It is acknowledged that many students are financially supported by their parents to attend university but there will also be students whose parents are not in a position to financially support them. There may also be families who have the financial means to support their child/ren through university but choose not to support their child or their relationship is such that support is limited. As corporate parents the Local Authority will also be able to consider additional financial support by means of discretionary payments to the student.

- Consideration on changes to student finance and the support that can be provided from the university.

All students, care leavers or not, will be able to access support provided from the university and care leavers will be further supported by the Local Authority

both emotionally and financially on an individual basis.

- I feel university students should take some responsibility for their own finances.

The Local Authority's original preferred option would mean that care leavers take more responsibility for their own finances. This option would bring about balance in providing financial support to students but also with regard to enabling care leavers to develop independent financial life skills that are realistic and would better prepare them for their adult life when managing their home and associated finances.

- People who are already in university and have been having their accommodation paid are now left not know if they are going to be able to stay in their homes?

The financial support for care leavers who are currently attending university will not change. The Leaving Care Team have spoken with these individuals to assure them that they will not be affected by this consultation or the approved option.

- Young people leaving care already have enough obstacles to overcome without being saddled with future debt and money worries.

It is acknowledged that care leavers will have been disadvantaged in their childhood, however as corporate parents the Local Authority has a responsibility to prepare its care leavers with the skills to live independently and manage their monies responsibly. Removing any matters relating to debt or management of loans, grants etc is not realistic and would not support this.

- Yes, there is already too much debt involved for young people

Care leavers as any other young person who attends university would not start paying back their loans or grants until they are employed and reach a specific tax band. Students applying for loans would do so through The Student Loans Company (SLC) which is a non-profit making Government-owned organization set up in 1989. The SLC provides loans and grants to students in universities and colleges in the UK. From April 2018, loan repayment thresholds are as follows:

Annual income of £25,000 a year, £2,083 a month or £480 a week.

- Yes, because the student could get themselves into a difficult financial situation otherwise and this could impact on their education.

Care leavers have access to continuous support from their Personal Advisor and they would also be able to access support and advice from their university to ensure that any financial matters do not impact on their educational achievements.

Question 5 - How will the proposals affect you?

- Societal impact of less LAC children achieving university level

Financial matters should not preclude care leavers from attending university and thereafter contributing to their community and society as a whole.

- I review the support provided to these young people at their Pathway Reviews. It will not directly affect me however I do not want to see previously looked after children have to struggle because they do not have family they can rely on.

As previously noted not all children who have been brought up amongst their families have the support of their parents or wider family members.

- I felt proud of Bridgend's previous policy in terms of recognising that only 6% of care leavers' progress to university versus 50% of young people in the general populace, but appreciate this is unsustainable.

As noted earlier Bridgend does not currently have a financial policy to support its care leavers. The Local authority does have to make significant financial savings but this consultation is not to address this it is to ensure there is a balance in supporting its care leavers in achieving their potential through attending university whilst equipping them with financial management skills which they will need as adults and future parents of children within our community.

- Proposal 3 is in line with SSWBA 2014 and its ethos of supporting people to take more responsibility over their own lives.

This is what the Local Authority as Corporate Parents aims to achieve.

- I'd just be able to afford my rent.

Care leavers will also have access to a bursary to financially support them in addition to support to make applications for loans and grants and the Local Authority will also consider additional discretionary financial support on an individual basis.

- It won't but it would ensure that young people are adequately supported.

A policy to financially support young care leavers will ensure equity and consistency across this young group of people. Agreeing a financial option and thereafter developing a policy will allow care leavers the security of knowing what support options are available to them and enable the Local Authority to project its financial position in relation to this group of young people.

Question 6 - Do you have any other alternative proposal?

- I believe that option 1, plus a £25 weekly living allowance would incentivise young people to attend who may otherwise be deterred by accruing debt or struggling to manage whilst studying.

Option 1, does give the care leaver greater financial resources and even more so with an additional £ 25 weekly living allowance. However it does not support the care leaver to manage their finances or assist in the development of skills into independence with regards to money management and further development of the individual's sense of financial responsibility.

- Keep supporting the individuals who are trying their best to better themselves and go to university.

The Local Authority already ensures care leavers are supported and will continue to encourage young people who are Looked After to achieve and reach their full potential.

- You should focus on getting the young person successfully started on a graduate career, by meeting all first year costs before considering debt creation.

All care leavers have a choice to attend university and are supported with regard to all alternative opportunities available to them. Meeting all the first year costs for care leavers is disproportionate in comparison to some students who are not care leavers.

Question 7 - Further comments on this proposal

- Care doesn't stop at a certain age. These young people have already started life disadvantaged. I feel that burdening them with a large load will have a negative effect on their future.

Care leavers will be supported by the Local Authority throughout their education and a balance between loans and grants will assist them in their money management. There are many children within our communities who are disadvantaged but who have not become Looked After and who will receive less support than that available to Bridgend's care leavers.

- I feel that the Local Authority should make university as achievable for care leavers as possible to address the huge discrepancy in the percentage progressing to university.

The Local Authority takes pride in their role as a Corporate Parent and in ensuring children in their care achieve and reach their full potential. Any policy would be designed to support young people and be equitable with the majority of other young people who attend university and have to manage debts and loans.

- Free level 4 qualifications because debt puts a lot of people off. The police force now asks every applicant to have a degree so should an appropriate applicant be turned away because they're afraid of debt.

Care leavers are and will be supported to manage debt appropriately and other children who have not been Looked After may not have this opportunity if they are estranged from their family or their family are not financially secure.

- We do not have parents we can turn to for help.

The Local Authority support Looked After children and its care leavers as their corporate parents. Whilst Looked After are supported by both their Social Worker and Personal Advisor, as care leavers they continue to be supported by their Personal Advisor and will also have access to community and adult services to ensure they continue to receive support into their adulthood.

- £25 a week is pocket money – it won't meet any additional needs or special circumstances – already inflation is biting into your proposed loans/grants.

Such support is already in existence. All Care leavers do and can receive discretionary financial support for additional needs and special circumstances.

4.12 47% of responders told us that they would like to receive information on the consultation once the report is available. If “yes”, responders were asked to provide their email address for future correspondence.