

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
REPORT TO CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE

29th MAY 2019

**REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR, SOCIAL SERVICES AND
WELLBEING**

**APPROACHES TO CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT WITH CARE
LEAVERS**

1. Purpose

- 1.1 To provide the committee with an update in respect of the approaches being used within the Local Authority to engage and consult with care leavers.
- 1.2 This report provides an update to the committee following the Care Inspectorate Wales engagement event which took place with care leavers in November 2018.

2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Objectives/Other Corporate Priorities

- 2.1 This report assists in the achievement of the following corporate priorities:-
 - **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 focussed on raising the skills, qualifications and ambitions of all people in the county.
 - **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.
 - **Smarter use of resources** – ensuring that all its resources (financial, physical, human and technological) are used as effectively and efficiently as possible and support the development of resources throughout the community that can help deliver the Council's priorities.

3. Background

- 3.1 On the 19th April 2017 the committee received a report on 'Hidden Ambitions – A Children's Commissioner for Wales report and Bridgend County Borough Council's position, in relation to the recommendations within the report. One of the recommendations from the hidden ambitions report was that *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.*

- 3.2 A young person's Consultation Group began operating in BCBC in 2014. However, following the realignment and relocation of services and feedback from the young people themselves this group ceased to exist as a regularly planned meeting in 2015.
- 3.3 Care leavers advised that they would like to access services on a more informal basis. As a result Bridgend developed a 'drop-in' provision and other 'out of hours' provisions whereby care leavers can receive support and have the opportunity to share their views and wishes.
- 3.4 With regard to any specific change in our local policies, the service ensures that young people are consulted about such changes e.g. the current review of our financial policy for university fees as they occur and this has proved successful in making sure that our engagement is meaningful and current.
- 3.5 The Team Manager of the 16 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.
- 3.6 In 2016, the 16 Plus Team developed a forum for care leavers based on the Supper Club which operates in Pembrokeshire. This involved care leavers meeting at the ARC (Assisted Recovery in the Community) centre in Bridgend in the evening where they would be able to eat, whilst also being offered support from workers and professional agencies to discuss relevant topics. This forum was offered in addition to the drop-in service, but only ran for a few sessions due to poor attendance.
- 3.7 In November 2018 the Care Inspectorate of Wales (CIW) undertook an engagement event with a group of Looked After Children, care leavers and foster carers. CIW undertook these events with all the Welsh Local Authorities who did not receive a children's services inspection in 2018. The purpose of the event was to inform a national overview report on care and support available to children looked after by Local Authorities. One of the issues identified was that *'A majority of the young people felt strongly that they would have benefitted from having access to a mentor'*. Following feedback an engagement action plan was developed by the service and it was agreed to *'Re-establish the care leaver forum to explore this concept and options'* and to *'Identify potential providers and options for commissioning'*.

4. Current situation / proposal

- 4.1 In the last 6 months, there have been changes to the management arrangements for the 16 Plus Team, and therefore it has been timely to also review our arrangements for effective engagement and support of care leavers and to consult with young people about re-establishing a care leaver's forum in Bridgend.
- 4.2 The young people to be consulted with on an individual basis by their Social Workers and Personal Advisors during May and June 2019. Following this, a consultation group will be hosted by the 16 Plus Team in June 2019. This consultation group will engage with the young people

in respect of their wishes and feelings for the forum. The young people will be asked whether they wish for BCBC to facilitate this forum or whether they would prefer an independent organisation, such as Voices for Care Cymru, to undertake this role.

- 4.3 It is envisaged that during the consultation session that the young people will be able to take control of the planning for the group and shape it so that it meets their needs and wishes. Following this the plan would be to launch the care leavers forum in July 2019, and then to hold further meetings on a bi-monthly basis. The 16 Plus Team will provide a venue, and support young people to be able to travel to and from the meeting. If the young people request it the 16 Plus Team will be able to provide key note speakers and deliver workshops on specific issues. Ultimately it is hoped that this forum will give care leavers the opportunity to have a greater say in how services are delivered to them, and to be able to shape future service provision.
- 4.4 At present young care leavers, have access to a Personal Advisor (PA), whose key function is to support care leavers during their transition into adulthood. This can involve supporting a young person to live independently, and to offer support and advice to a young person after they have left care. In addition to this universal support can be accessed via the 16 Plus Inspire 2 Work drop in which is provided on a daily basis (Mon – Fri) to support young people. This provision has proven to be very useful for care leavers that we work with. An example of this is a 21 year old female care leaver who engaged with her Social Worker and Personal Advisor (PA) prior to her 18th birthday. She was experiencing a period of being Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) due to her training provider not able to support her any longer. The young person then engaged with a training programme that was offered through the college/Inspire 2 Work team and her engagement was supported by the 16 Plus Team. Following a 3 month programme this led to her going to college and she was also able to move into supported lodgings. At the time, the supported lodgings provision was seen as an appropriate step for progression into independence and was successful for 9 months when it was agreed that the young person has made such good progress in her independence that a move to Supported housing would provide more appropriate support. She was then supported to gain the independent living skills required to enable her to sign a licensee agreement and manage her own flat (within a supported housing environment). The young person has successfully maintained her college place and has now been accepted onto a Level 3 media course which will start in September 2019. The plan is for her to now move into fully independent accommodation. As the young person has mental health difficulties, she continues to be supported to access health professionals, including the GP and ARC. She has continued to engage positively with her PA and support worker from the Wallich and will continue to receive support around her independence, education and mental health from her PA whilst she transitions into full independent living.
- 4.5 Currently we provide support to young people ages 16-25 in Bridgend, by opening an area in the local council offices for young people to attend as needed, gaining access to computers, and one-to-one support from trained youth workers, who provide close links and effective working

relationships with their allocated worker. The support includes opportunities to train, gain qualifications and to offer general support with any day to day queries. Young people can attend the drop in on a daily basis within general office time (9-5) with options to engage in evening work with staff. If eligible young people are then able to sign up to the Inspire 2 Work programme they are allocated a key worker to support them on a one to one basis to break down barriers to education / employment / training to potentially enable them to enter education, employment or training.

- 4.6 The Children's Rights and Participation worker based in the Education and Family Support Directorate has carried out a review of the Bridgend Youth Council. As a result work is underway to ensure that membership of the Youth Council is more representative, and that young people who are in receipt of local authority services, have a platform to influence delivery and policy. In respect of these representative groups, the Children's Rights and Participation worker has been working to support personal advisors and young people from the 16+ team specifically those involved in the 'voices from care' initiative. Over the coming months, this group will be meeting to identify and discuss issues that are specific to them as care leavers or care experienced young people. These will then be fed back to the main Youth Council membership for consideration and action where appropriate.
- 4.7 In respect of our young people's engagement with Voices from Care Cymru, there is regular attendance by our care leavers at their events. For example, in February 2019, 10 Care leavers attended the Proud To Be Me conference at the Swalec Stadium which was hosted by Voices from Care Cymru. We have also identified a number of care leavers to represent Bridgend on the Voices from Care Cymru advisory group. Those care leavers who are keen to represent Bridgend are being engaged with by their Personal Advisor's in order to decide who will initially represent Bridgend. This new Advisory Group which consists of 'care experienced representatives' from all areas of Wales will bring together a wealth of knowledge and experience from each of the different regions.
- 4.8 The Advisory Group meets four times per year in different parts of Wales to discuss the future of Voices from Care Cymru and how they can better improve the lives of care experienced young people. It creates an opportunity for the representatives to meet other care experienced young people and find out all about the great things happening in their area, as well as to discuss the things they would like to change. A member of this group represents care experienced children and young people at the Welsh Youth Parliament. The young person who is representing Voices from Care Cymru at the Welsh Youth Parliament has now been nominated, as part of the Advisory Group young people will play a huge part in driving change for Care experienced young people in Wales
- 4.9 The CIW report also commented that '*some of the young people told us they have not been offered advocates*'. However, some of the young people involved in the session subsequently told us that they were confused in respect of what the inspectors were referring to when they were asking about advocacy. Staff within the 16 Plus Team have also advised that numbers of referrals to advocacy for care leavers are often

lower as the young people often feel that they are able to advocate for themselves or have a close relationship with their Personal Advisor who will ask to advocate on their behalf.

- 4.10 However, in order to ensure that there is a more active offer from skilled staff in the area of advocacy, and to enable a choice of support for young people the plan is to use the launch of the new regional advocacy service which is being run by Tros Gynnal Cwm Taff Morgannwg and due to commence on 1.5.19 to undertake further awareness and promotion of the service with care leavers. The evidence of this being effective would be an increase in the active offer being taken up by care leavers, and an overall increase in the use of advocacy by the same group of young people. It is planned that Tros Gynnal will be invited to speak at the launch of the Young Carers forum. In addition the Team Manager of 16 Plus is undertaking work with her staff to ensure that there is greater understanding of the role of the advocate being shared with care leavers.
- 4.11 The Team Manager of the 16 Plus Team is currently looking at how the team can engage with the young people they support in a more innovative way. This includes looking at technological options, as many of the young people prefer to engage via these forms of devices. As part of the consultation with the young people regarding the possibility of a care leaver's forum, discussions will take place in respect of alternative ways in which the team can engage with the young people.

5. Effect upon Policy Framework & Procedure Rules

- 5.1 There is no impact 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. Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 Implications

- 7.1 The implementation of the duties and responsibilities under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 (SSWBA) 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 Well-being 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 sustainable prevention and wellbeing outcomes for the

future. As a corporate parent the Local Authority has responsibility to support care leavers up until the age of 25, it is during the key years of 16-25 that a robust package of support to care leavers can have a significant impact on improving outcomes for care leavers in the short, medium and long term.

- Prevention – By offering care leavers support at the earliest opportunity when a need is identified it should prevent this need from escalating. The care leaver’s forum will allow care leavers to be engaged in terms of having a greater say over service delivery. By tailoring services to the assessed needs of care leavers, we should be able to ensure that needs are met at the earliest possible opportunity.
- Integration – The implementation of the SSWBA requires local authorities to work with partners. This report evidences consultation with care leavers, and with the third sector.
- Collaboration – A collaborative approach is being used in terms of setting up and implementing the care leaver’s forum, as the young people will be collaborated with throughout the process.
- Involvement – The key stakeholders are the care leavers, and potentially a third sector provider if this is requested by the care leavers.

8. Financial Implications

- 8.1 There are minimal financial implications. There may be costs incurred for the venue, the running costs of the group, travel arrangements, and refreshments for the care leaver’s forum. Costs attributed to supporting care leavers to attend the forum could be reimbursed from the St David’s day grant. The service is currently investigating whether the forum could be funded via an element of the Children and Communities Grant. If funding cannot be accessed via the grant, it will need to be funded from the core revenue budget.

9. Recommendation

- 9.1 It is recommended that if it’s in line with the wishes, feelings and requirement of the young people that the Care leaver’s forum is re-established in July 2019, and that a report is brought back to Corporate Parenting at a date in the future in order to update on progress

Susan Cooper
Corporate Director, Social Services and Wellbeing
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10. Contact Officer:

Name Iain McMillan
Title Group Manager Case Management & Transition
Email Iain.McMillan@bridgend.gov.uk
Tel No 01656 642376

11. Background documents None