

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

19th MARCH 2019

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 present to Cabinet the Policy on University Support Packages for Care leavers for approval. The Policy is attached at **Appendix 1** and was presented to the Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting on 6 March 2019.

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 stated 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 is implementing them during the academic year 2018/19.

- 3.5 The Local Authority is currently supporting nine care leavers to attend university, and has 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 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 £9,000 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 and an additional £1,125 maintenance is also available should they require it.
- 3.9 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.
- 3.10 On 30th January 2018 Cabinet received a report which set out three financial proposals to support care leavers attending University.
- 3.11 All three options were 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.
- 3.12 On 6th March 2019, Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting received the Policy for comment. The outcome of that committee was that the committee noted the report. The Committee requested during the meeting that the financial impact of the policy be reviewed in 12 months' time and the findings brought back before the Committee for comment.

4 Current Situation/Proposal

- 4.1 On 18th September 2018, Cabinet received a report on the consultation and the three options. Option 3 was approved, namely:
- 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.
- 4.2 The policy that has been developed outlines the arrangements to deliver this approach. 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.
- 4.3 The tuition fee will be the largest cost repayable as per the conditions noted above.
- 4.4 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.
- 4.5 The policy promotes 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.
- 4.6 The policy also enables 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.
- 4.7 The policy will 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.
- 4.8 The policy 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. 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 organisation 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.

5. Effect upon Policy Framework and Procedure Rules

5.1 There is no impact on the Policy Framework and Procedure Rules.

6. Equality Impact Assessment

6.1 An EIA was completed which shows there will be an impact on a small group of young people. The EIA is attached at **Appendix 2**. However the intention of the Policy is to ensure this cohort of young people receive financial support.

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. The table below refers:

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 Financial implications are within the body of the report above.

8.3 In summary

- 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
- Discretionary payments will also be considered

8.4 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.

8.5 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.

8.6 There will be no additional cost to the Local Authority by the introduction of this Policy.

9.0 Recommendation

9.1 It is recommended that Cabinet:

- approve the University Support Packages for Care Leavers Policy
- note that the financial impact should be reviewed in 12 months' time and the findings taken back to the Cabinet Committee Corporate parenting for comment.

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11. Background Documents
None