

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING

4th September 2019

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR, SOCIAL SERVICES AND WELLBEING

FEEDBACK ON CARE LEAVERS WHO ATTEND UNIVERSITY

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide the committee with an overview in respect of the care leavers currently attending university or who plan to attend university, their experiences and support provided from the local authority.
- 1.2 To receive a presentation from young people about their experiences of attending university and ambitions for the future.

2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Objectives/Other Corporate Priorities

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.

3. Background

- 3.1 On the 6th March 2019 the Corporate Parenting Committee received a report regarding the Policy on University Support Packages for Care Leavers. This subsequently received Cabinet approval on 19th March 2019. A key priority for Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) is to ensure that those young people who aspire to attend higher education are able to achieve this and that once they are attending courses that their support needs are fully met.
- 3.2 The policy was developed to ensure appropriate levels of financial support, fairness and consistency to its care leavers, so that they are not disadvantaged financially but also encouraged to take some financial responsibility for their own education and future. The key areas of the policy are;
 - 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 are based on an individual assessed need basis.
- 3.3 Care leavers are now supported to apply for loans and grants to pay for their tuition fees whilst the local authority provides them with a weekly allowance and a bursary in addition to the grants they are entitled to access. Students are not 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. This allows greater independence and financial security by enabling the student to manage a weekly allowance giving them the flexibility to manage monies for food and social activities.

4. Current situation / proposal

- 4.1 Within Childrens Social Care the 16+ team support care leavers during a transitional period in their life encouraging them to be aspirational and to plan for their future. This planning is completed through direct work that the social workers and personal advisors (PAs) undertake with young people. This work includes close liaison with school /college tutors and Careers Wales. Once a plan is agreed with the young person this is formalised in a Looked After Children's (LAC) Review or Pathway Planning review if the young person is aged over 18 years.
- 4.2 The Cardiff University and First Campus Confident Futures Project is accessed by care experienced young people and care leavers ages 14 to 19 years aiming to raise aspirations and confidence. The sessions run monthly from October through to April on an annual basis. They are administered at Cardiff University and consist of group as well as individual support by Cardiff University Students. The workshops are aimed at supporting care experienced young people with their existing studies as well as any applications to university. It is open to all young people regardless of their academic ability, as the aim is also to increase confidence and self-esteem for care experienced young people. In the last academic year 3 students from Bridgend have attended these sessions with staff from the 16+ team providing transport and support. The University is currently considering the development of satellite mentoring sessions within localities, as it recognises that travel can be the barrier that prevents some young people from attending.
- 4.3 Confident Futures Summer School is a yearly summer school which aims to raise aspirations, devote one-to-one time with young people who are looked after to mentor them about the next stage of their academic life, to have some taster sessions from University lecturers/professors and to find out what University social life is like. Participants spend time and stay in student accommodation with current undergraduate and postgraduate students and have academic taster sessions with experts in their chosen fields. Sessions include advice on personal statements writing, mock interviews, budgeting and talks from support services. There are also taster sessions for

opportunities outside of study, including societies and sports clubs. Finally they experience a mock graduation. All of our care experienced young people who are considering applying for University are encouraged to attend. The Summer School that took place on the 9th and 10th July 2019 was attended by 6 participants from Bridgend Schools, 5 of whom are open to the 16+ team. The feedback we have had from one care experienced young person was that they “really enjoyed the 2 days, meeting new friends was important and they are going to stay in touch, missed home but happy to stay and get involved, would want to do confident futures again”.

- 4.4 If a young person makes the decision that they wish to attend University they can receive support from their current educational establishment in respect of completing their Universities and Colleges Admission Service (UCAS) application. In addition they receive support from their PA to complete their application, in particular their personal status information. On their application a care experienced young person is able to indicate to UCAS their status as being care experienced. Ticking this box means that the University can ensure that the young person can access the support they are entitled to. This will often include finance, accommodation and pastoral support services. It also allows admission staff to consider a care leavers achievements and potential within the context of them being a looked after child.
- 4.5 Every year, from April onwards the 16+ team support existing and potential University students with applications for student finance for the next academic year. They also support students to visit, choose and secure their accommodation although foster carers often undertake these roles with young people who are in their care. The principle is that the support that would normally be offered by a parent is mirrored by Bridgend Council where it is required by the young person. In each University there is a named point of contact for care leavers, who is responsible for supporting care leavers in that establishment. Not all young people wish to engage with this named person but they can be a valuable source of support for some individuals.
- 4.6 There are currently 9 young people who are attending University with the courses they are attending including MSc, MA, BA, HND & PGCE. This compares to figures in previous years of;

Academic Year	Number of care leavers attending University at the start of the academic year
2014/15	2
2015/16	6
2016/17	5
2017/18	10
2018/19	11

Our current figures indicate that 3 Young people will be entering University from September 2019 bringing the total to 12, which demonstrates that we are continuing to increase the number of young people who attend University. Care leavers who have recently graduated from University have achieved qualifications in an MA, BA and BSC. For

example, there is a young person who has just qualified with a degree in Social Work from Cardiff Metropolitan University.

- 4.7 The majority of our young people in University have chosen to live in their own independent accommodation. However, if a young person wished to return to their 'When I am Ready' Placement outside of term time we are able to arrange this. The 16 + team support young people in respect of their accommodation and whilst it is ultimately the young person who has the final say, professionals involved will try to guide them to make the best possible choice when considering their needs.
- 4.8 The young person's PA will regularly check in with the young person and the team are acutely aware that the young people are at an age where they wish to be independent and may also feel the stigma of being a care experienced young person. The team work hard to get the balance right in terms of being supportive, allowing independence to develop, whilst trying to ensure they are available to the students when required. University can be a time when some young people choose to disengage from the 16+ team. Whilst this is understandable it can also increase the risks if a young person begins to struggle in University, which is why our PA's will always continue to attempt to keep in touch. Even if a young person does choose to leave their course, this does not mean it is the end of their further education career. The team have successfully supported young people to change courses during the academic year or to reapply for the following year. For example, a young person who withdrew from their course this year has been supported to return again in the next academic year.
- 4.9 Managing finances continues to be an area which young people can struggle with, particularly when they become independent for the first time. Our policy promotes the students personal financial investment in their own education and by encouraging them to make applications for loans and grants places them on a similar platform as the majority of other students. However, in recognition of the Local Authority's corporate parenting role, the policy enables BCBC to make discretionary payments to students who may find themselves in times of hardship depending on their personal circumstances. The Council have also been able to use the St David's Day fund to provide support with rent, bonds, equipment and course materials.

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 focuses 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 robust support packages throughout university, the Local Authority are able to ensure that there is a reduction in the number of young people who choose to leave their courses.
- 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– The key stakeholders are the care leavers, and the providers of Higher education. The 16+ team work closely with care leavers in respect of their plans for higher education, and have also built up positive relationships with higher education providers across South Wales.
- 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. Financial Implications

8.1 The financial implications in relation to the University financial policy was considered by this committee on the 6th March 2019 and was approved by cabinet on the 19th March 2019. There are no additional financial implications in respect of this report.

9. Recommendation

9.1 That committee notes the report and supports the work that has been done to date in this area and the continuation of this support.

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Background documents

- 6/03/19 – Corporate Parenting Report – Policy on University Support Packages for Care Leavers
- 19/03/19 – Cabinet Report – Policy on University Support Packages for Care Leavers