

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE

8 APRIL 2021

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR of EDUCATION AND FAMILY SUPPORT

LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN IN EDUCATION

1. Purpose of report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Corporate Parenting Committee with an update on the support for Looked After Children in Education (LACE) across the local authority. The report will specifically focus on the support provided to Bridgend's Looked After Children (LAC) for the school year 2020-2021.

2. Connection to corporate well-being objectives / other corporate priorities

2.1 This report assists in the achievement of the following corporate well-being objective/objectives under the **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015**:-

- **Supporting a successful sustainable economy** – taking steps to make the county borough a great 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 for all people in the county borough.
- **Helping people and communities to be more healthy and resilient** - taking steps to reduce or prevent people from becoming vulnerable or dependent on the Council and its services. Supporting individuals and communities to build resilience, and enable them to develop solutions to have active, healthy and independent lives.
- **Smarter use of resources** – ensure that all resources (financial, physical, ecological, human and technological) are used as effectively and efficiently as possible and support the creation of resources throughout the community that can help to deliver the Council's well-being objectives.

3. Background

3.1 It is well researched and documented that looked after children (LAC) often under achieve compared to their peers in terms of educational attainment and are less likely to progress into further education or training. There are a range of reasons for this, but, in general, where a child is struggling at an early stage of their education, not attending school regularly, with little support and encouragement at home, they will generally do less well at later stages.

- 3.2 Children become looked after often as a last resort and only where there are significant concerns related to their safety. The impact of this in terms of a child's development can be significant and in particular on their ability to engage in education. Research conducted by Public Health Wales in respect of Adverse Childhood Experiences notes that children who have experienced trauma are at significant risk for impairments including IQ, memory, attention and language/verbal ability poorer academic performance and school-related behaviours such as discipline, dropout and attendance; and higher rates of behavioural problems and internalising symptoms.
- 3.3 In May 2018, the role of supporting Looked After Children's Education (LACE) moved into the previously named Vulnerable Groups Team, now called the Education Engagement Team (EET). The EET has responsibility as a single point of contact for all professionals where concerns present for a vulnerable learner relating to their education. This includes children on the child protection register, LAC, home educated learners, young carers and any other learner as identified by Estyn's vulnerability criteria. This single point of contact assists by ensuring there is clarity on support for vulnerable learners as information is contained within one team and is easily disseminated to professionals as and when issues present.
- 3.4 The local authority has a statutory duty to promote and ensure looked after children's educational needs are met through the Children Act 1989 and 2004. Responsible authorities are required to designate a specialist practitioner (the LACE Coordinator) to coordinate the child's education plan and address the education needs of looked after children and care leavers in the local authority area. In addition, the responsible authority must ensure that every child looked after by them has an effective and high quality personal education plan (PEP). This duty is discharged via EET.
- 3.5 In addition, the EET team offers advice, support and training to schools while also working in close partnership with Children's Social Care (CSC) and other services to ensure LAC are accessing good quality education that meets their needs. The team also works with school clusters around a consistent approach in utilising the LAC Pupil Development Grant (PDG).

4. Current situation/proposal

- 4.1 As at 19 March 2021, there were 271 statutory school age pupils who were looked after by the local authority.
- 4.2 As indicated earlier in the report, the role of supporting LACE sits within the Education Engagement Team (EET). The EET provides a single point of contact for all agencies including schools, Children Social Care (CSC) and other services for information, advice, training and guidance for vulnerable learners including LAC. The team deliver training to the schools and remain a point of contact for the schools designated teacher related to Personal Education Plans (PEPs) and any other issues presenting for LAC.

- 4.3 The EET works with each school cluster to develop a clear and coherent plan to support LAC via their PDG. Examples of some of these plans created by schools to support LAC include the appointment of a school-based counsellor to acknowledge the impact becoming looked-after can have on learning, Learning Support Officers (LSO) delivering 'Thrive' training to promote educational attainment for looked-after children and mental health and trauma training for staff to consider how behaviour can present itself within school for children who have entered the care system. These approaches are intended to assist schools in supporting and promoting the attendance and attainment of looked after children.
- 4.4 In addition to this, and to support LAC, the local authority via EET has access to PDG funding. This year, the funding has been used to offer additional education to those looked after children most in need of extra support. To date, 33 looked after children have accessed additional tuition via a school teacher over the course of the pandemic. This support has ranged from one hour a week to six hours per week dependent on their needs. Support has focussed on literacy, numeracy and practical skills such as forest schools and online music projects.
- 4.5 Further to the above support and through the statutory responsibility of LACE, the EET deliver training to schools and partners in respect of the impact of trauma and how this can affect a child's ability to engage in learning. The team have facilitated mental health first aid training to schools in response to the impact on LAC emotional wellbeing.
- 4.6 PDG plans produced by schools in Bridgend have been noted in a recent Estyn thematic review regarding good practice with looked-after children (eg tracking of pupils and dedicated transition work). In particular, Brynteg School and Penybont Primary School were identified as implementing good practice models for those learners.
- 4.7 The local authority has also been central to the development of work experience and apprenticeship opportunities for LAC. This opportunity was developed as a pathway for those learners leaving education in the summer with the aim of securing an employment opportunity. All Year 11 looked after learners are presented with the opportunity to engage in work experience over their summer holidays.
- 4.8 With the impact of COVID-19, multi-agency working has been key to ensure that all children continue to access education during this period. For looked after children this has included the opportunity to access on site provision within schools when national restrictions were being implemented. Digital equipment has been provided for those learners who have required it to assist with home learning. There has been regular monitoring and liaison by schools and children's social care to ensure looked after children's needs continued to be met during the pandemic.
- 4.9 As part of that multi agency working, all looked after children were considered for on site school provision. However, emphasis and priority was given to those children in foster placements that were at risk of placement breakdown. Since January 2021, an

average of 50 looked after children were accessing on site provision (primary school age through to Year 8) each week. These children were those deemed by schools, social care and foster carers to be most in need of accessing on site support during the height of the pandemic.

4.10 Moving forward, improvements will be made to the PEP process for look after children via EET. This work will focus on the plans being tailored to be more child centered and reviewed consistently within LAC reviews. Joint work between children's social care and Education and Family Support is being undertaken on this area.

4.11 Further to this, ongoing support will be offered to schools in respect of PDG. This will include the re-introduction (following Covid-19 restrictions) of the termly designated LAC leads forum facilitated by EET. The aim of this is to share good practice across schools in Bridgend with each other.

5. Effect upon policy framework and procedure rules

5.1 There is no effect upon the policy framework and procedure rules.

6. Equality Impact Assessment

6.1 There are no direct equality impact issues arising from this report.

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

7.1 Summary on the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 assessment is listed below:

Long-term	The long term aim is to improve outcomes for children, young people looked after by the local authority related to attendance, attainment, health and wellbeing
Prevention	Intervening early to prevent issues escalating for lookd after children in education is key. It is well documented that engagement in education can be a challenge for looked after children. The LA works with partners to promote this and ensure understanding of looked after children's needs are well understood and considered within Personal Education Plans.
Integration	The approach to supporting looked after children's education is an integrated once across the authority and schools.
Collaboration	Collaboration will be critical to deliver outcomes for looked after children. Joint working is key in ensuring the needs of looked after children are met.
Involvement	Participation and engagement is a central aspact as part of looked after children's reviewing processes.

8. Financial implications

8.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report. However, the Committee may wish to note that the LAC PDG which is distributed to schools for 2020-2021 amounts to £304,227.44

9. Recommendations

9.1 It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Committee note the content of the report.

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Background documents

None