

<b>Meeting of:</b>	<b>CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING</b>
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>7 MAY 2025</b>
<b>Report Title:</b>	<b>EDUCATION ENGAGEMENT TEAM SUPPORT FOR CARE-EXPERIENCED CHILDREN</b>
<b>Report Owner / Corporate Director:</b>	<b>LINDSAY HARVEY – CORPORATE DIRECTOR EDUCATION, EARLY YEARS AND YOUNG PEOPLE</b>
<b>Responsible Officer:</b>	<b>MEGAN APSEE – EDUCATION ENGAGEMENT TEAM MANAGER</b>
<b>Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:</b>	<b>There is no impact on the policy framework or procedure rules.</b>
<b>Executive Summary:</b>	<p><b>The report provides an update on the Education Engagement Team (EET) support for care-experienced children. The local authority must safeguard and promote the wellbeing of care-experienced children. The EET works in close partnership with schools, social services, and other professionals and agencies to ensure that every child receives the necessary support.</b></p> <p><b>We recognise that educational outcomes for care-experienced children rarely compare favourably with other children. We know that many of these learners will have suffered disrupted learning and may have missed extended periods of school. The gaps in their learning and in many cases the emotional impact of their experiences are likely to have become significant barriers to their progress.</b></p> <p><b>The complexity of this fragmented experience needs careful assessment and planning.</b></p>

## **1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting on the support provided by the Education Engagement Team (EET) for care-experienced children.

## **2. Background**

- 2.1 Nationally, care-experienced children often achieve lower educational outcomes compared to their peers. Frequent placement moves can result in school changes which can disrupt learning and relationships. Across Wales, care-experienced children have higher rates of persistent absence due to instability, emotional wellbeing issues or disengagement. Care-experienced children present with a higher likelihood of fixed-term exclusions compared to non-looked-after peers. Many pupils have experienced trauma, impacting their ability to engage in education. Care-experienced children often face significant challenges in education.
- 2.2 Local authorities must safeguard and promote the well-being of the child it looks after (section 78 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014) and this promotion of wellbeing should continue through a young person's development, which includes transition to adulthood. The EET is responsible under the Children Act 1989 and the Children Act 2004, to co-ordinate the child's educational plan and address the educational needs of care-experienced children in Bridgend. The EET is responsible for ensuring that every care-experienced child has an effective and high-quality Personal Education Plan (PEP).
- 2.3 Children who are care-experienced are likely to have experienced similar difficulties in their early years. The impact of those early negative experiences increases the risk of poor educational progress compared to other children.
- 2.4 The EET plays a vital role in supporting the education of care-experienced children across Bridgend. Educational settings have a duty under section 175 (1) of the Education Act 2002 to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.
- 2.5 Section 20 of the Children and Young Persons Act 2008 states that the governing body of a maintained school must designate a member of staff ("the designated person") as having responsibility for promoting the educational achievement of children who are looked after in the school. This duty applies regardless of whether there are looked after children on the school roll, as schools need to be sufficiently prepared to respond quickly to the needs of looked after children who they may receive at very short notice. Section 20 of Children and Young Persons Act 2008 does not apply to pupil referral units (PRUs). There is no duty for the Management Committee of PRUs to designate a member of staff for care-experienced children.

## **3. Current situation**

- 3.1 The local authority has a duty to ensure care-experienced children receive high-quality education and the necessary support to achieve positive outcomes. The local authority has a responsibility to act as a corporate parent ensuring care-experienced children have access to the best possible education. The EET works towards Welsh Government objectives on the education of care-experienced children . It supports the promotion of education for all care-experienced children for whom the local authority is the corporate parent, whether placed in or out of the county borough. As at 31 March 2025, Bridgend had 256 care-experienced children including statutory and non-statutory school age pupils in educational settings.
- 3.2 Through tailored interventions, guidance, and resources, the EET supports schools to help care-experienced children overcome barriers to learning and achieve their full potential. The EET works in close partnership with schools, social services, and

other professionals to ensure that every child receives the necessary support. Education settings provide one-on-one mentoring, academic assistance, and emotional wellbeing initiatives designed to foster positive educational outcomes. Additionally, the EET collaborates with caregivers and foster families to establish a stable, nurturing learning environment that empowers children to succeed both academically and personally.

- 3.3 Despite these efforts, care-experienced children in Bridgend continue to face systemic challenges that impact their educational achievement. These include trauma-related learning difficulties, inconsistent care planning, and fragmented interagency collaboration. While the EET provides crucial support, persistent issues remain, such as delays in reviewing processes, variable quality in PEPs, and inadequate long-term outcome tracking.
- 3.4 Nationally, 9% of looked-after children aged 16 or over who ceased being looked-after in the year ending 31 March 2024, achieved 5 or more GCSEs at grades A\* to C. This is significantly lower than the overall average of 66.4% in Wales. As at 31 March 2023, there were 7,210 children in the care of local authorities in Wales, an increase of 2% from the previous year.
- 3.5 In 2023-2024, 38 care-experienced pupils were entered for GCSE examinations across Bridgend. In Wales, the Level 2 threshold for GCSEs requires a student to achieve five GCSEs or equivalent at a grade C or above. Of the 38 pupils entered for examinations, only 4 of pupils achieved level two threshold. Of those pupils who met the level 2 threshold, 2 of the pupils were male and 2 were female. Additionally, 6 of the care-experienced pupils received three or more GCSEs at grade C or above. Of the pupils entered for GCSE examinations, 22 achieved at least one grade C or above.
- 3.6 Although secondary school outcomes for care-experienced children in Bridgend compare favourably with regional averages, concerns persist in relation to narrowing the gap. To address these challenges, there is ongoing work within the early years and young people's sector, focusing on the implementation and development of trauma-informed practices to better support the educational journey of care-experienced children .
- 3.7 The EET delivers children looked after (CLA) friendly training to school governors in Bridgend for school governing body members to understand the complexities for care-experienced children and to effectively consider the support mechanisms to their care-experienced children population.
- 3.8 The local authority receives funding through the Pupil Development Grant (PDG CLA) to support the educational attainment of children looked after, children who have been adopted and children who are subject to a Special Guardianship Order (SGO).
- 3.9 The local authority uses the PDG CLA to support improving outcomes for care-experienced children and young people and to reduce the difference in attainment between this cohort and their peers.
- 3.10 Bridgend schools provide tailored intervention programmes that have improved engagement and attainment. The development of leads within schools to support care-experienced children has strengthened targeted support and intervention.

These staff members have responsibility for overseeing the academic progress and wellbeing of care-experienced children. This staff member works closely with social workers and foster carers to ensure continuity of support.

- 3.11 The directorate ensures that there is priority for care-experienced children in relation to school placements and supports reduced risks linked to unnecessary school moves. There are currently 26 care-experienced children identified as being appropriate for specialist educational provision. This equates to 10.16% of the overall current population of care-experienced children. As at 31 March 2025, 60 care-experienced children were placed in out-of-county educational settings. This equates to 23.43% of care-experienced children in educational settings.
- 3.12 Some schools have embedded trauma-informed practices, by training staff to understand and respond to the emotional needs of care-experienced children. This can include creating safe spaces, using restorative approaches to behaviour management and offering flexible support. To further improve educational outcomes for care-experienced children, the local authority recognises that it can support schools to access trauma-informed training to adopt whole-school approaches to supporting care-experienced children, especially where children have experienced adverse childhood experiences (ACEs).
- 3.13 Schools tailor learning plans to meet specific needs of care-experienced children addressing gaps in education and supporting emotional resilience. There are examples where tuition, mentoring and literacy and numeracy support have helped close the attainment gaps. As at 31 March 2025, there were 61 care-experienced children with a local authority individual development plan (IDP) this equates to 23.83% of the overall population of care-experienced children in educational settings. As at 31 March 2025, 16 care-experienced children were on pastoral support plans (PSPs).
- 3.14 Care-experienced children in schools have access to counselling, nurture groups and pastoral staff teams who support and manage emotional difficulties and build resilience. The EET completes vulnerable group surgeries with all schools to ensure robust support structures to challenge schools and to obtain how care-experienced children are engaged in education. The surgeries allow schools to discuss any perceived challenges with this cohort of care-experienced children .
- 3.15 The EET, in collaboration with schools, completes both a safeguarding and attendance audit. The focus on these is for the EET to collate good practice within our schools to promote stability and engagement for our care-experienced children.
- 3.16 The EET recognises that traditional educational settings may not suit everyone. We work with the local authority to ensure alternative learning opportunities that align with individual aspirations and circumstances are explored.
- 3.17 The local authority supports schools to prevent unnecessary exclusions. In 2023-2024, there were 30 pupils permanently excluded. Of this cohort, two of the pupils were care-experienced children. As at 31 March 2025, there were 19 permanent exclusions in Bridgend schools. Of this cohort, one pupil is a care-experienced child.
- 3.18 The EET is dedicated to supporting care-experienced children and young people in accessing and succeeding in education, training, apprenticeships, and employment.

Our approach is tailored to meet individual needs, ensuring that every young person can achieve their full potential. The EET works with partners to ensure wherever possible every care-experienced child has a destination post-16.

- 3.19 The school attendance of care-experienced children in Bridgend schools overall is positive. We have three identified thresholds for pupil attendance, under 90%, under 80% and under 50%. The percentage of care-experienced children with school attendance under 90% overall is 33.68%, within specialist educational settings it is 2.63% and within mainstream it is 31.05%. The percentage of care-experienced children with school attendance under 80% overall is 17.89% within specialist settings it is 2.10% and within mainstream it is 15.79%. The percentage of care-experienced children with school attendance under 50% overall is 6.31% within specialist setting 0.52% and mainstream is 5.79%. We have four care-experienced children who have moved out of the area and are waiting to start new schools. These pupils are still on-roll in Bridgend schools but unable to attend due to distance and this negatively impacts the overall attendance.
- 3.20 The EET recognises further improvements are required. The EET will complete an evaluation to enhance and review the use of the PDG CLA.
- 3.21 The EET will support improved communication and collaboration between education, social care and health services.
- 3.22 The EET would support a review of the PEP processes and complete quality assurance work on the PEPs completed by schools.
- 3.23 While challenges remain, the combined efforts of schools, the local authority and support services can lead to positive developments in the education of care-experienced children with continued investment in good practice and targeted interventions. Further improvements can be made to ensure that all care-experienced children receive the education and support they need to succeed.

#### **4. Equality implications (including socio-economic duty and Welsh language)**

- 4.1 The potential impacts of this report on the protected characteristics under the Equality Act, Socio-economic Duty, and the Welsh Language Act have been considered. As this is an information report, no formal Equality Impact Assessment is required. It is anticipated that there will be no significant or adverse equality implications arising from the contents of this report.

#### **5. Well-being of Future Generations Implications and Connection to Corporate Well-being Objectives**

- 5.1 The goals and principles set out in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 align closely with the EET approach. The five ways of working are integral to the service delivery, as outlined below:
- **Long-term:** the EET provides support to children and families, ensuring a wide range of beneficiaries are supported in the long term.
  - **Prevention:** focus is placed on early identification and ensuring appropriate services are provided to meet individual needs.

- **Integration:** the service ensures a holistic delivery of social, economic, environmental, and cultural outcomes.
- **Collaboration:** the EET fosters collaborative working with partner agencies to improve coordination and create a unified system of support.
- **Involvement:** children and families are central to the process, with their needs discussed in a person-centred manner.

## **6. Climate Change Implications**

- 6.1 There are no specific climate change implications arising from this project. However, the EET is committed to supporting 'Bridgend 2030 – Net Zero Carbon Strategy' and Welsh Government's carbon reduction goals.

## **7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications**

- 7.1 The EET maintains strong links with the Children and Families Service, ensuring collaborative working in areas such as the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and safeguarding leads. This collaboration ensures comprehensive planning and integrated service delivery for children receiving support from both EET and social care.
- 7.2 EET staff have participated in Signs of Safety training alongside social care teams, ensuring a shared framework for consistent and effective safety planning. Trauma-informed approaches are embedded within these practices, promoting safety and well-being.
- 7.3 The service's engagement with care-experienced children is integral to understanding their specific needs and providing the tailored support required.

## **8. Financial Implications**

- 8.1 The full impact of the PDG CLA on the educational outcomes of care-experienced children in Bridgend is unknown. While it provides targeted funding to address barriers faced by these children, challenges remain in fully closing the attainment gap.

## **9. Recommendations**

- 9.1 It is recommended that the Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting considers the contents of the report and provides feedback and recommendations as required.

## **Background Documents**

None