

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

9 MARCH 2016

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR – EDUCATION AND TRANSFORMATION LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN PROVISION

1. Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to update and inform committee on the support being delivered to improve the educational performance of looked after children in Bridgend.

2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Objectives/Other Corporate Priorities

2.1 These proposals are related to the Corporate Plan and, in particular, in the Corporate Plan Improvement priority two and priority six:

- Working together to raise ambitions and drive up educational achievement
- Making best use of resources

3. Background

3.1 As stated in the Welsh Government strategy document, 'Raising the ambitions and educational attainment of children who are looked after in Wales' (January 2016, page 7, para 1.1), *'The negative impact of poor educational attainment of children who are looked after can, and often does, result in these children failing to take advantage of opportunities to progress to post-16 education, training and meaningful employment.'*

3.2 Across Bridgend, there is an improving trend in GCSE performance at grades A* - G for looked after children and in 2014/15 no looked after children left education at the age of 16 without a qualification. However, as corporate parent with ambition for looked after children, the local authority recognises that the proportion of grades above 'C' is still too low and so this is an area for improvement. GCSE attainment is shown in the table below:

DESCRIPTION	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Looked after children as at 1st April	34	41	23
% A* - C GCSE	41%	49%	42%
% A* - G GCSE	74%	88%	92%
LEFT WITHOUT QUALIFICATIONS	21%	2.40%	0%

- 3.3 Bridgend experiences significant socio-economic challenges. Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) has a higher proportion of looked after children than the average in communities with similar levels of deprivation. A large proportion of Bridgend's looked after children have additional learning needs. On the 31st March 2015, it was identified by the Looked After Children in Education (LACE) team that over 52% of all statutory school aged children looked after by Bridgend have additional learning needs sufficient for intervention as identified by the SEN Code of Practice. 13% of this cohort (32) had a statement of special educational need. It is important that in this context, consideration is given to the achievement as well as the attainment of looked after children with special educational needs.

Setting targets for cohorts of looked after children is problematic across Wales, given the variable nature of the looked after children population and the relatively small cohort sizes at local authority level. Pupil performance is tracked at an individual pupil level and appropriate targets are set. Central South Consortium is a school improvement service delivering school improvement functions on behalf of five local authorities, namely: Bridgend, Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil, Rhondda Cynon Taff and the Vale of Glamorgan. Within the Central South Consortium ('the Consortium'), a regional target has been established to narrow the gap in performance outcomes between looked after children and non-looked after children at the expected levels, as noted within the Local Authority Annex, as follows:

Priority	Performance in the LA (2013/14 Outcomes)	Outcomes expected in 14/15			
1. Narrow the gap in outcomes for looked after children	Percentage of pupils achieving FP - FPOI, KS2 CSI, KS3 CSI, KS4 L2+:		Gap in performance between looked after children – non-looked after children (Regional target)		
		Foundation Phase, FP	38.9%	FP	-30.1%
		KS2	58.3%	KS2	-18.1%
		KS3	47.8%	KS3	-23.4%
		KS4	13.9%	KS4	-23.8%

3.4 As part of the strategy outlined above (3.1), Welsh Government has set a national target in the educational achievement of 15 year-olds at Key Stage 4 of the Level 2 inclusive threshold from 17% in 2014 to 25% in 2016.ⁱ

4. Current situation / proposal

4.1 There is a multi-level approach to supporting and targeting the educational performance of looked after children in Bridgend. This is a priority in the Children's Directorate business plan and a key project overseen by the Children's Change Programme Board, and reported to Performance Management Board (PMB). At a local level a multi-agency group has been established to develop a strategy to improve the attainment of looked after children and other identified vulnerable groups. Funding for the multi-agency group is met from existing resources. Membership of the multi-agency group is comprised of representatives from primary and secondary school senior managers, school governors, the Consortium, BCBC data officers, members of the LACE team, colleagues from the Safeguarding and School Improvement teams and a representative from the local health board. The work of this group is closely aligned with the recently published 'Raising the ambitions and educational attainment of children who are looked after in Wales'.

4.2 Each school has a designated teacher (DT) with responsibility to monitor and promote the education of looked after children. Funding for the DT is from within each school's allocated budget. These DTs work closely with the LACE team. Furthermore, at a local authority level there are key performance indicators and targets related to the attainment of looked after children. These are reported quarterly through CPA.

4.3 In partnership with the Consortium's looked after children Lead, local authorities developed a strategic and operational plan for looked after children. The plan is to develop capacity in schools and build on good practice across the five local authorities with an emphasis on provision of funding to support strategic services managed by the Consortium and those at local authority level which have a proven impact on outcomes. The operational plan for looked after children is funded through existing resources.

4.4 At a national level there has been a change to the allocation of the Pupil Deprivation Grant for looked after children. Grant distribution is now administered by regional education consortia instead of schools. The grant is allocated via the Consortium to facilitate more strategic working and to ensure the grant funding has greatest impact. For each looked after child, as reported in the April 2014 Children in Need census, the regional consortium will receive £1050. In addition to children presently looked after, under revised arrangements of the grant children who have left local authority care for one of the following reasons may also be eligible:

- adoption
- a special guardianship order
- a child arrangement order
- a residence order

4.5 It is expected that the Pupil Deprivation Grant for looked after children will be used to support interventions and practices that are proven to have the greatest impact and sustainability in raising the attainment of looked after children.

4.6 One element of Pupil Deprivation Grant for looked after children was set aside for allocation to schools on a case by case basis. A multi-agency panel met on the 27th November to consider all school requests for this grant money. The panel scrutinised all applications rigorously to determine whether applications met the criteria for the grant and in addition whether proposals :

- were sustainable – e.g. do they offer match funding to demonstrate this?
- accelerate attainment
- make a difference to well-being

Pupil Deprivation Grant for Looked After Children school funding 2015/16

4.7 The following schools were successful in obtaining grant funding:

<p>Archbishop McGrath To provide additional numeracy/literacy and emotional support. 'Talkabout emotional literacy' intervention, together with additional support in maths and language (Learning Support Officer to receive communication training from a training company)</p>
<p>Abercerdin Primary To improve the wellbeing/confidence and social skills of each child.</p>
<p>Brynteg Comprehensive 'Achievement for All Cymru' programme for schools. Develop strategies to build 'resilience' to support students responsibility for their own learning through the introduction of 'Growth Mindset' across the school. Purchase 'show my homework' software for schools. Additional tutoring through 'Love to Learn'.</p>
<p>Bro Ogwr Whole staff training on Attachment Disorder. Individual resources.</p>
<p>Cefn Cribwr Primary Lego therapy staff training and resources.</p>
<p>Coleg Cymunedol Y Dderwen To provide additional English and Maths session per week.</p>
<p>Cynffig Comprehensive Train and upskill Learning Support Assistant (LSA) to work with looked after children to support emotional and academic development. Fund additional tuition.</p>
<p>Ffaldau Primary Extra phonic work. Catch up reading. Rapid writing. Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD) group. Fine motor group.</p>
<p>Croesty Primary Digital literacy boosting programme.</p>
<p>Highfield Hall Primary – Derbyshire* Whole school training on 'Attachment Disorders' Extra phonic catch up programme.</p>

Héronsbridge The purchase of specialist equipment and resources.
Hyde Park Infants School – Plymouth* Catch up Numeracy and Literacy programmes Additional resources. Staff training Attachment Disorders.
Llangewydd Primary Lego Therapy training and resources.
YGG Llangynwyd GCSE Art Pack and additional resources.
Nottage Primary Language links concepts and associations programme. Resources. Therapeutic interventions.
Oldcastle Primary Reading Dog Programme. Formula One Goblin car.
Pencoed Primary Lexia computer programme. Additional tuition.
Penybont Primary LSO to be trained in 5 specific therapeutic strategies.
Porthcawl Comprehensive 'Link up Care.' Additional tuition.
Tondu Primary Additional English and maths programmes. Behaviour support intervention .
Tremains Primary Training for staff emotional and nurture support to pupils identified by National Behaviour & Attendance Review (NBAR).
Ysgol Bryn Castell Play Therapy Support. Anger management training course for x1 staff.
Maesteg Comprehensive School Sports Leadership Programme for looked after children and related training for teachers to build capacity.

* Schools outside of Bridgend may qualify for funding where they provide education for Bridgend's looked after children who are educated out of county.

In addition to the element of the Pupil Deprivation Grant for looked after children allocated to schools as above, another element of the grant was made available to support wider initiatives to promote the attainment of looked after children. The criteria for this element of the grant was that initiatives would have proven outcomes and would build capacity for future improvement.

Additional local authority initiatives funded through the Pupil Deprivation Grant for looked after children are as follows:

4.8 Thrive training

As part of the BCBC philosophy to meet the needs of all children belonging to the authority through early intervention and sustained support, BCBC has commissioned Thrive, to provide training to a member of staff in each secondary and special school and a member of staff from each cluster in order to support looked after children within their own schools and within their cluster. Funding for Thrive training is fully met through the Pupil Deprivation Grant for looked after children

- 4.9 Thrive is a rigorous, scientifically informed approach that is differentiated carefully to address children's emotional development in a systematic and specific way. It trains staff to recognise the root causes of behaviour in children which can interrupt their learning. The programme is designed to address the children's needs with specific targeted interventions.
- 4.10 The main objective of Thrive is to support children's engagement and progress in learning so that they are ready for school, willing to join in, curious and keen to learn. It is a dynamic, developmental approach which draws on the latest developments in neuroscience, attachment theory, child development and the role of creativity and play in development emotional resilience.
- 4.11 The benefits of Thrive are that looked after children at risk of exclusion can be maintained in education, and helped to re-engage with learning to achieve their potential. It also helps young people to take responsibility for their behaviour and to increase their attendance and attainment.
- 4.12 Thrive offers an evidence based programme to address the needs of all BCBC's looked after children. The programme caters for the children's well-being and educational needs and has been trialled and well-received in neighbouring LAs. Its approach meets the aims of BCBC to ensure sustainable improved outcomes for looked after children.
- 4.13 Ten days of training for selected staff has begun and each member of staff will support the school with Thrive delivery, supported by the Inclusion Service.
- 4.14 **Appointment of Virtual Head Teacher for looked after children**

A virtual head teacher is someone appointed by a local authority to promote the educational achievement of all children looked after by that council. Those children are on a 'virtual' school roll, even though they are physically spread across the schools in the borough and beyond. At present this post will be 100% funded via the Pupil Deprivation Grant for looked after children.

- 4.15 The idea is that each local council employs an experienced teacher to oversee the educational progress of all children under the care of that local authority. A single school may have only one or two children in care on their registers and be unfamiliar with the issues.
- 4.16 The virtual headteacher will have the specialist knowledge to provide extra support to designated teachers. They also have a 'bigger picture' remit to work with all professionals in the Children's Services department of the council and with all schools in the area on initiatives to promote the education of children in care.

4.17 BCBC intends to appoint a part-time Virtual School Head Teacher and to develop a Virtual School for looked after children, funded from the looked after children PDG. This will be a phased approach initially with a part-time secondment of a Head Teacher with the additional responsibility to commission the development of a Virtual School website and tracking system, to rigorously track and monitor the progress of looked after children, challenging schools on under performance. This role will be supported by the LACE Coordinator and the LACE team who will become an integral part of a Virtual School.

4.18 **Case Studies to demonstrate local authority support for looked after children**

Case Study 1: Local authority corporate parent support to facilitate the progression of a former looked after child to Higher Education:

Supported by a stable foster home from the age of 12 years in 2004, this female pupil attended mainstream schools in Bridgend. In 2008, she gained a place at Bridgend College to study Fine Art. However, after successfully completing this course, she lacked the necessary skills and confidence to move away from home to go to university.

Just before reaching 18 years of age, she moved into approved supported lodgings to help her develop these vital skills. In these lodgings, she was able to socialize with other young people who had been to university, helping to raise her ambition and aspiration. She was supported by a number of agencies (LACE team, Just Ask Plus, supported lodgings and Bridgend College) for eighteen months (beyond her 18th birthday) until she was sufficiently skilled and confident enough to progress to Stafford University in 2011 where she studied Art and Design. She continued to receive support during her years of study facilitating a successful transition. She graduated in 2015.

4.19 **Case Study 2: Feedback from a successful young person who was formerly a looked after child in Bridgend.** He regularly returns to Bridgend to help motivate other looked after children (September 2015):

"I was brought into foster care at the age of 13, at this age I was an irregular attendee at secondary school and had already floated around double digits of primary schools. When this occurred obviously I had to start attending, I was at the start of year 9 (pre GCSE). ...my estimated grades were given to me as DEFU's. This is also the year that I was brought into the LACE after school clubs and invited along to there summer trips to Sealyham. After just 9 months of being in the care system I was brought forward a year into sitting my maths GCSE, which I passed. I'd go to LACE after school clubs ... Needless to say, it all paid off. So throughout the years of attending these clubs and multiple other activities setup by the LACE team I grew my confident within my self and with others around me who were in exactly the same situation, LACE was a place we could meet up and just chat and keep up with each other because we were all in the same boat. With the help of ... the LACE team I went on to pass all my GCSE's with ABC'S! This was the year they introduced the Cardiff Uni mentor sessions and Cardiff Uni stay over, my mentor ...from the sessions I am still in contact with and definitely pushed me! The visits to the uni were amazing and really inspiring to visit, knowing that only a minority of

children in care actually go on to higher education. The LACE team taught us a lesson that anything is possible if you want it that badly, this was the most valuable thing I've ever learnt. I had a small time YouTube channel posting videos of music I had created, ...Now my channel is a platform channel with over 35,000 subscribers ...and has it's on radio show on local frequencies and online radio station! ...I'm taking this into the big time now with all the work we're putting into it, our demographic just keeps expanding! A side to the LACE team pushing me to keep that going they also made sure my main focus was on school work and achieving my A Levels which I decided to stay on to do. Needless to say I passed them all and go into the University of Portsmouth where I now reside for the next 4 years of my life in the study of Television and Broadcasting. It's such a great feeling being within the minority of achievers amongst so many people who have fallen victim to the horrible system they were put in. If it wasn't for the support and backing of the LACE team I can hand on heart say I wouldn't be in the position I'm in now. I've also planned with [a member of the LACE team] to produce a weekly blog/VLOG/podcast on a weekly basis to help inspire and push the children that are currently in the position I was in. I feel it is important for them to hear back off of someone who has fought the system, become a minority and is doing well with even all the background stuff which occurred. They need to know that is not what defines them, and for them not to become a product of their old environment but to strive for greatness no matter what!"

4.20 **Case Study 3: Ongoing educational support for a looked after child who changed placement:**

The LACE team are responsible for supporting and monitoring the education of looked after children. The team work closely with schools and the Safeguarding teams to ensure continuity for the child. Personal Education Plans are devised for each child when they are placed in care and/or move placements/schools. If a looked after child has to move placements but remains within the locality then there is no disruption to their education. The school are made aware of the situation and transport is arranged accordingly. When a child is placed in a long term stable placement they may change school to attend the school in their locality but this decision is taken in partnership with the social worker, school and parent or carer and is only taken in the best interests of the child i.e. never to save the cost of transportation.

The Safeguarding Team notify the LACE team of any change of school/placement and transfer forms are completed to include details of a child's educational background and needs. This information is shared with pupil services and any new school to minimise disruption caused by the transfer. Admission meetings are attended by the carer and the young person and a member of the LACE Team, if requested. In complicated cases or where a child is statemented then decisions about changes are made on a multi-agency basis.

In a recent case where a placement broke down for a looked after child attending a mainstream school in a neighbouring local authority, a suitable placement was sought to meet their needs. The new placement was further out of county. After discussions with the new foster carers and the LACE team in that area, the Bridgend LACE team applied for the most appropriate school. A pre-admission meeting was arranged due to the complexities of the young person. The young person was out of education for a number of weeks during the admission process .

The previous school kept the young person on roll and provided work to be completed during that time.

The DT from the previous school plus all the other agencies involved attended the admission meeting to devise a package of support to be put in place to avoid the new school placement breaking down and minimise any disruption to the young person's education. The LACE Team, the social worker and the foster carer were in constant communication to ensure the plan worked. Since then the foster carer and the school continue to communicate and monitor the position.

- 4.21 Interventions and new initiatives are monitored by providers who are expected to report to BCBC/ the Consortium by completing Impact Evaluation forms (**Appendix A**) using the Guidance Notes for the Impact Evaluation (**Appendix B**)

5. Effect upon Policy Framework & Procedure Rules

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

6. Equality Impact Assessment

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

7. Financial Implications

- 7.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report as the initiatives described throughout this report are met through a combination of Pupil Deprivation Grant for looked after children and existing resources.

8. Recommendation

- 8.1 It is recommended that the Committee note the content of the report.

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Background documents

- Raising the ambitions and educational attainment of children who are looked after in Wales' (January 2016) Strategy and Action Plan accessible via:

<http://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/deprivation/educational-attainment-of-looked-after-children/?lang=en>

Appendices

- Impact Evaluation forms (**Appendix A**)
- Guidance Notes for the Impact Evaluation of Pupil Deprivation Grant for looked after children 2015-16 (**Appendix B**)

ⁱ Raising the ambitions and educational attainment of children who are looked after in Wales' (January 2016, page 35, para 3)