

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REPORT

Date Written	3 rd November 2020
Report Author	Taryn Hudd
Service Area	Children's Services
Committee Date	17 th November 2020

To: Chair, Ladies and Gentlemen

Transition of Young People Leaving Care

1.0 SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of transition for our care leavers.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION

2.1 Scrutiny Committee is asked to receive this report and to raise questions and challenge leading to improvement.

3.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

3.1 The Council takes its corporate parenting responsibilities seriously; we are proud of our looked after young people and care leavers. As corporate parents, we are on a continual journey of exploring ways to best support our young people.

3.2 The Children Looked After Team and Care Leavers Service sits within the Permanence service area in the Children's Services structure. Within Children's Services targeted planning for transition of our children looked after into adulthood commences when a young person is 15¾ years old, however preparing a young person for the transition into adulthood is an ongoing focus of care planning.

3.3 Sections 105 to 115 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 place duties on a local authority to provide support for children and young persons who it has looked after when they cease to be looked after (care leavers). The support provided is intended to be equivalent to that which a child who has not been looked after might reasonably expect from his or her parents.

- 3.4 The purpose of this provision is intended to assist young persons who have been looked after to move from being looked after to living independently. The advice and support that care leavers receive depends upon their age and care leaving status.
- 3.5 In order to receive support from a local authority as a care leaver, the young person must have been looked after by a local authority for the prescribed period of time within the prescribed age range (Regulation 47 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (Wales) Regulations 2015 currently sets the criteria at a requirement to be looked after by a local authority for a period of 13 weeks between the ages of 14 and 16 years).
- 3.6 The Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 placed duties on local authorities to provide support for care leavers which is “intended to be equivalent to that which a child who has not been looked after might reasonably expect from his or her parents”.
- 3.7 The overall duty is to promote well-being and specific responsibilities towards care leavers include:
- Preparing a pathway assessment and plan from the age of 16, which should build on the young person’s care and support plan and include support for preparation for adulthood and independence
 - Appointing a personal advisor to keep in touch, offer support and advice, coordinate services and to participate in implementing and reviewing the pathway plan.
 - Safeguarding and promoting their well-being by making sure they: have enough money to live on; have a suitable place to live are supported, including financially, in relation to education, training or employment.
- 3.8 Key messages and priorities from policy and research include:
- Ensuring ALL departments in the local authority and partners understand what support a care leaver needs and what they each can do to help with this.
 - Ensuring a holistic approach to planning the long-term future for care leavers by all departments and partners working together to help plan a young person’s transition to adulthood, consistent with the ways of working under the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act.
 - Helping young people in care to gain practical skills, such as cooking, paying bills, in preparation for independence at an early stage, not at the point they move on.
 - Working together to provide, in a range of accessible formats, all the information that a young person needs to enable them to make the important decisions involved in moving to independent life.
 - Involving young people leaving care in the planning and development of services and ensuring their wishes and views are heard in any decision that affects them.
 - Ensuring stability of education and training, raising aspirations and enabling young people leaving care to achieve their potential.
 - Offering training, apprenticeships and job opportunities both across the various Local Authority Departments and with local businesses.
 - Enabling young people who are leaving care to continue to live with their foster carer until they are ready to live independently under the “When I am Ready” scheme.

- Planning accommodation and support options with young people, offering choice about where they will live and who they will live with.
- Reviewing accommodation and support need and availability, working with housing services to ensure different types of accommodation and support is provided to meet the different needs of young people.
- Recognising the importance of ongoing support from a trusted adult, supporting continuation of friendships and relationships with people important to the young person and enabling young people to remain in their own areas wherever possible.
- Jointly supporting the health and emotional wellbeing needs of young people by ensuring access to mainstream support and health advice and by supporting carers and staff in the development of a therapeutic approach in their day to day contact with the young person to build and promote their resilience.
- Understanding that leaving care shouldn't be viewed as a single event or a linear process but a process where care leavers are supported to move backwards as well as forwards and to change their minds and make mistakes as other young people are.

4.0 WHERE WE WERE

- 4.1 In June 2019 Merthyr Tydfil Children's Services, following consultation with care experienced young people, devised a Care Leavers Strategy – 'Make My Own Decision'.
- 4.2 The strategy and its corresponding action plan is underpinned by the national priorities to realising the ambitions of young people leaving care in Wales and to achieving the best for them. The overall national commitment to young people leaving care is having somewhere safe to live with financial security, an active offer of education, work or training and ongoing social and emotional support.
- 4.3 The strategy and subsequent action plan are focused around the key themes from our joint strategic commitments:
- Involvement of care leavers in the development, delivery and improvement of the services.
 - Early preparation and planning for independence.
 - Somewhere safe to live.
 - An active offer of education, training and/or employment.
 - Enough money to live on.
 - Access to Mental Health support and specialist support.
 - Prepare and plan early for independence together.
- 4.4 In February 2020 we provided a full council report on the Pathway to Work Project.
- 4.5 In July 2019 there was a change in the provider of our Care Leaving Service to Llamau. When commissioning a provider for our Care Leavers Service our care experienced young people's views were central. The information they shared with us, including strengths and areas for improvement, informed the tender and specification for commissioning.

- 4.6 In 2019/20 as part of 'Make My Own Decision' we started to actively plan for our care leavers at an earlier juncture with Personal Advisors being allocated to children looked after at 15¾ years. Under previous commissioning arrangements a Personal Advisor was allocated when our looked after children turned 17 years. Personal Advisors being allocated at an earlier juncture allows for the development of a meaningful relationship between the young person and their Personal Adviser offering the best opportunity for a smooth transition at 18. The transition process is carefully mapped via individual Pathway Plans for our children looked after in place by the individual's 16th birthday. The plan is co-produced with the young person and all those involved in their support network. It considers the young person's views, wishes and aspirations and how we together plan to achieve these.
- 4.7 The offer we make to our care experienced young people extends to their 25th birthday with a dedicated part- time Young Persons Advisor for care experienced young people from the age of 21- 25.

5.0 WHERE WE ARE NOW

- 5.1 In 2020/21 we have continued to build upon the ethos of early transition planning for our looked after young people. Subsequently Children's and Adult's Services have worked with multi-agency partners to establish a Transition Planning Panel.
- 5.2 The purpose of the Transition Planning Panel is to bring relevant professionals together to enhance the transition process to achieve the best outcomes for young people who are transitioning to adulthood. The panel aims to achieve this through:
- Identifying those individuals who will be transitioning from Children's services support and agree how in the future young people will be supported to achieve their individual outcomes, if required through a multiagency discussion.
 - Providing oversight of the transitional process.
 - Providing a mechanism for identifying future commissioning requirements.
 - Providing a forum for oversight and co-ordination of complex transition arrangements.
- 5.3 Children's Services and Adult's Services have worked closely together to develop a draft Transition Guidance which is currently with partners for consultation purposes. Once the draft guidance is agreed by partners the Transition Guidance will be presented to Council in order to be ratified.
- 5.4 The Local Authority's offer to our young people to support their transition into adulthood includes accredited independent living skills training, which contains sessions on managing a tenancy. Preparing our young people for independence, including ensuring our young people have somewhere safe to live is supported by a whole gambit of options from When I'm Ready support arrangements to Independent living. Children's Services have worked collaboratively with other areas of the Local Authority, notably Housing, and third sector providers to promote our care experienced young people have access to good quality affordable properties. There remains within the Local Authority insufficient capacity of affordable one-bedroom housing options. However, a significant achievement and opportunity for our care experienced young people is the Housing First Project. Currently five care experienced young people reside within the provision. Housing First offers high quality flats with access to onsite 24hr support.

- 5.5 Ensuring there is an active offer of education, training and/or employment for every care experienced young person is fundamental. The Looked After Children's Education Service (LACES) continue to work closely with education, personal advisors and the third sector to promote the attainment of our child looked after and care experienced young people.
- 5.6 During the past three years the LACES team has been central to the development of the innovative CLA Friendly School's project. The Cwm Taf project now comprises three elements, the CLA Friendly Schools Handbook a three-tier training programme and the CLA Friendly Schools Quality Mark Framework. As a service we are incredibly proud that this project is now nationally recognised, with the Welsh Government using the resource as the basis of their recently launched online 'Looked after Children in Education Resource for Wales'. At July 2020, 96% of all Merthyr Tydfil schools had accessed the CLA Friendly Schools training and 74% had rolled it out as whole school training. The remaining schools are scheduled to undertake the training in 2020/21, however further planning is required to support delivery given the COVID pandemic restrictions.
- 5.7 In 2020 the 'Work opportunities for young people in our care or leaving our care' policy document was launched. It outlines our targets over the next 3 years as part of our Pathway to Work Project.
- In Year 1, 2020/21 we aim to place 4 care experienced young people in Council settings to undertake work experience.
 - In Year 2, 2021/22 we aim to have created one traineeship for a care experienced young person.
 - In Year 3, 2022/23 we aim to have one care experienced young person completing an apprenticeship with the Council.
- NB. COVID will impact on Year 1 targets.
- 5.8 In line with our Pathway to Work Project, through the Integrated Care Fund, an Employment Mentoring & Support Officer role has been developed to support care experienced young people. During 2020/21 the role has been embedded within the Employability Team in the Local Authority, working in conjunction with the Looked After Children team to enhance the opportunities for CLA and Care Leavers. The role of this post is to build relationships with the internal CLA team, Employability Service staff and local training providers. In order to achieve and maximise opportunities, the Employment Mentoring & Support Officer works closely with Communities for Work and Communities for Work Plus to identify additional support for participants that can assist them in moving closer to the labour market. The COVID pandemic has detrimentally impacted the reach of this post to support the transition of our young people into paid employment, given the level of employers who have needed to reduce operations. Despite this there have still been clear successes.
- 5.9 We have continued to work collaboratively with Voices from Care Cymru who facilitate local group meetings, and opportunities to meet, albeit virtually at this time. This forum offers extensive opportunities for Children's Services to listen to, hear and consult with our looked after children in order to understand their experience of transition to further inform service developments.

- 5.10 The global COVID pandemic has been a significant barrier to transition planning for our young people. Whilst our Children Looked After Team and Care Leavers Service continue to work closely with our looked after and care experienced young people, in line with Welsh Government restrictions, there has been a decline in the level of face to face contacts. Many of our young people have already established relationships with their Personal Advisors, however those 15 years of age this year will have experienced a different start to their relationship with their Personal Advisor.
- 5.11 The pandemic has placed pressure on a number of Local Authority and third sector services. Housing have seen a significant increase in the number of 16 to 24-year olds requiring accommodation support. Naturally this has had implications for the availability of housing for our care leavers.
- 5.12 Our children looked after have seen significant education success this year with increased levels of attainment for those receiving GCSE and A level results. Whilst this is an area to celebrate many of those young people have unavoidably not ending or transitioned between education settings in a manner we would have previously anticipated. LACES, Social Workers and Personal Advisors have been mindful and ensured additional support is in place for these individuals.
- 5.13 We have recently undergone a Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) inspection in October 2020. One of the areas they considered was service to care leavers and several care leavers were interviewed. Although the feedback to date has been verbal it is worth noting that they commented that Corporately Children Looked After is a high priority. Corporate Parenting is visible with good political support. Care Leavers are in appropriate accommodation, with good support and are well supported. Good feedback was received about their Children Looked After Social Worker and Llamau support worker. They did state however that transition Planning could have been earlier.

6.0 WHERE WE WANT TO BE

6.1 We want to ensure that our care experienced young people are:

- Afforded the transition they deserve through effective multi-agency working.
- Provided with same opportunities as their peers.
- That support is “intended to be equivalent to that which a child who has not been looked after might reasonably expect from his or her parents”.

7.0 WHAT WE NEED TO DO NEXT

7.1 We will work with our young people in a way that:

- Continues to ensure that we coproduce our services with young people to ensure that we promote smooth transitions into adulthood, offering our young people the same opportunities it would be reasonable for any young person to expect.
- Ensures that how we structure and deliver our services promotes early preparation and planning for independence.
- Further builds upon our successes of enhancing the range of housing options that offer our care experienced young people ‘Somewhere safe to live’.

- We will continue to support our young people in releasing their ambition through promoting the educational opportunities afforded to our young people as they transition into adulthood, this includes continuing to develop links with employers to enhance apprentice opportunities.
- Reduces the level of social isolation that many of our care experienced young people face and supports working with mental health services to ensure our young people access the right mental health support at the right time.
- Continues to prepare and plan for early independence together with our young people.

7.2 Following consultation with the third sector we will present the Local Authority's Transition Guidance to Council for approval.

7.3 In 2021/22 we will review the Transition Planning Panel established in 2020 to critically reflect on its successes and areas for development.

7.4 The Pathway to Work Project will continue to be built on in the coming years to ensure that we as a council continue to develop and offer job opportunities in line with our corporate parenting responsibilities. The Integrated Care Funding is in place for 2021/22 to support this project, during 2021/22 the sustainability and financing of the Pathway to Work will require further planning.

7.5 We will continue to work closely with housing to explore further developing housing provision that promote our young people's transition into independent living.

7.6 We need to ensure the celebration of our care experienced young people is always to the fore on an individual and corporate level.

8.0 CONTRIBUTION TO WELLBEING OBJECTIVES

8.1 This area of business is located in the following wellbeing objective:

- People are empowered to live independently within their communities, where they are safe and enjoy good physical and mental health.

LISA CURTIS-JONES
CHIEF OFFICER (SOCIAL SERVICES)

COUNCILLOR CHRIS DAVIES
CABINET MEMBER FOR
SOCIAL SERVICES

BACKGROUND PAPERS		
Title of Document(s)	Document(s) Date	Document Location
Pathway to Work Project	26 th February 2020	Online
Does the report contain any issue that may impact the Council's Constitution?		No