



Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol
MERTHYR TUDFUL
MERTHYR TYDFIL
County Borough Council



MAKE YOUR OWN DECISION

Young People Leaving Care
Strategy and Action Plan



Our strategic aim

In Merthyr Tydfil we are passionate about ensuring that our young people leaving care achieve stability and success; and that they transition well into adulthood. We want young people leaving care to have every opportunity to positively fulfil their ambitions and reach their personal goals in life. Key to this is our need to ensure that all young people in Merthyr Tydfil have equal opportunities and the best support throughout their journey towards independence and their transition into adulthood.

National context

The Social Services and Well - being (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”**.

The overall duty 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.



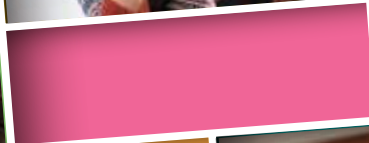
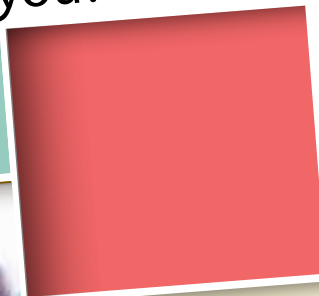
This strategy and action plan is underpinned by the national priorities to realising the ambitions of young people leaving care in Wales and to achieving the best for them. The overall national commitment to young people leaving care is having somewhere safe to live with financial security, an active offer of education, work or training and ongoing social and emotional support.

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

WHEN I AM READY: What does it mean for you?



....."I hope that 'WIR' will nurture a new generation of care leavers, who have a place to belong and someone to belong to, until the time is right for them to leave care"

(A Care Leaver 2014).

Local context in Merthyr Tydfil

Historically, the average number of looked after children across Merthyr is higher than that of the Welsh average.

On 31st March 2018, there were 155 children and young people who were looked after by Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council. Of these, the majority (120) were placed with foster carers, with the next highest number (25) being placed with a parent or family member. Of those in foster placements, 58 % were placed outside of Merthyr Tydfil. 68 % were young people over the age of 10 years with nearly 20 % being aged 16-17 years.

The majority of our young people ceasing to be looked after in 2018 remained living with their foster carer under When I am Ready with the next highest number moving to supported accommodation. For young people aged 18 years and older, 24 % lived with their family, with 18 % in supported lodgings, 16 % in supported accommodation and 14 % having their own tenancy. 64 % of our care leavers live outside of Merthyr, either in neighbouring, (29 %), or non-neighbouring, (35 %), Local Authorities.

At the time of writing, approximately 34 % of our care leavers are not in education, training or employment, which is less than the national average. 14 % are working, 26 % are undertaking college courses and a further 7 % are attending university.

We are committed to developing and improving our support offer to our care leavers and to exploring how we can work better together to ensure stability and fulfilment of the ambitions in their lives. Much has already been initiated and developed to achieve this and we will bring together these existing work streams and new developments into this strategy and action plan to provide overall direction, clarity and governance of our approach. Examples of developments and ongoing work include:

- ✓ Revising Transition arrangements
- ✓ Re-tendering for the Young Persons Advisor Service, co-produced with care experienced young people
- ✓ Increase in resources – 0.5 FTE PA for 21-25 year olds
- ✓ Drafting the Pathway to Work
- ✓ Improving accommodation options through the Housing Innovation Grant
- ✓ Care Leavers Conference
- ✓ Drafting “Hidden Ambitions - Merthyr’s offer to young people leaving care”

This strategy for support for young people leaving care also interlinks with and complements our other related strategies including our strategy for Stability, Success and Transition; our Not in Education Employment and Training Strategy and Raising Standards and Aspirations.

What Young People Have Told Us

This strategy and action plan has been developed in co-production with care experienced young people. Young people have told us that what is important to them is:

- Motivation, drive and belief – you need to believe in us to help us succeed
- Having mutual trust with someone like a mentor, teacher, support worker or friend, particularly when settling into independent living - foster carers who keep in touch are really important
- Having the right information and advice, help with managing money and tenancies, our entitlement and how to challenge
- More support and education on services available - we want to find out what is out there to help us
- Being told what the options are and asked what we think we need and want
- Environment and location of accommodation is important
- Opportunities for meeting new people and taking part in things that make us feel happy and improve our emotional well-being
- Emotional support is important
- Putting us in touch with specialist help when we need it – benefits, employment, housing, emotional well-being
- Better training and understanding of our situation from all agencies



Our Joint Strategic Commitments

We will;

- Work together collaboratively and with a shared approach to ensure **all** partners are actively committed to achieving the outcomes set out in this strategy with a clear focus on jointly enabling young people to fulfil their personal ambitions.
- Prepare and plan early for independence together
 - Provide early support for the development of key practical independence skills
 - Ensure robust joint pathway planning leading to successful transitions and continuation into adulthood
 - Provide stability and continuity for young people to remain with their foster carer as they prepare for independent living when they are ready
- Ensure young people have somewhere safe to live
 - Work together to improve accommodation and support options and ensure accommodation that meets the different needs and choices of young people.
 - Provide accredited training on the skills required to manage a home and access to support with living independently and managing the tenancy/home
- Ensure young people have enough money to live on
 - Provide clear information on entitlements and financial support and advice to help manage money, obtain the right benefits and/or support continuation of education and training.
- Ensure an active offer of education, work or training
 - Celebrate achievements and recognise distance travelled and the diversity of “success”
 - Access to employment, training programmes and apprenticeship schemes with Merthyr County Borough council and through the networks of private business and industry.
 - Support to attend college or go to university
- Ensure ongoing social and emotional support and promote well-being
 - All young people leaving care will have the personal support of a Young Person Advisor from age 16-25 years
 - Ensure opportunities for linking into general community activities, connections and supports
 - Offer opportunities for care leavers to meet up to share experiences and support each other.

- Ensure care leavers have access to general health and health promotion information and support
- Ensure access to Mental Health support and specialist support
 - Provide Information about mental health issues and how to get advice and support for mental health concerns
 - Work with partners in health to improve access to therapeutic interventions and counselling to help with the impact of trauma and neglect
 - Access to specialist support as appropriate for alcohol/ substance use, domestic abuse or exploitation
- Involve care leavers in the development, delivery and improvement of supports and services
 - Always listen to the voice of the young person and ensure they are supported to participate in decisions affecting them
 - Provide opportunities to get involved in what matters to young people and have a say about available services and supports



Governance and reporting arrangements?

An Operational group will oversee the development and implementation of this plan. The Operational group will report to the Corporate Parenting Board and will provide highlight reports about progress and produce regular performance reports which will include measures that will track the effectiveness of the action plan. An annual report will be presented to scrutiny committee in relation to the achievements and challenges involved in delivering this Strategy. The operational group will be led by a Chair and include membership from:

- Care Experienced Young People
- Housing
- Adult Services
- Children's Services
- Llamau
- Children's Services
- Employability
- Education and Inspire to achieve

What we will do – our action plan

We will focus our actions 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**
- **Social and emotional support and wellbeing**
- **Access to Mental Health support and specialist support**



Action Plan

Outcome	Action	Responsible	Progress & evidence
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Early preparation and planning for independence

Young people feel well supported in planning for their future.	Develop improved transition planning and pathways involving all relevant agencies.	Principal Officer for Permanence	Revised Policy Signed off at Corporate Parenting Board December 2019
	Develop the skills of foster carers and others to help with basic skills when children are younger	Registered Manager for Fostering Team	Published Guidance and Training Plan for Foster Carers in relation to transition Revised contracts with IFA to include expectations in line with this. Bring plans to Dec 2019 Corporate Parenting Board.

Involvement of care leavers in the development, delivery and improvement of supports and services

Young people are equal partners and are always involved in the development of services	Continue to provide different opportunities and encouragement for involvement including workshops, members of CPB	Voices from Care	Corporate Parenting Board Young People's Agenda Item
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Somewhere safe to live

Different types of accommodation and support options are available to meet differing needs and situations	1. Work with housing to develop clear information for care leavers regarding housing options and the practicalities securing/maintaining tenures. Publish information for young people. 2. Develop the provision of suitable supported accommodation		Published Information for Care leavers Completed market position statement for supported accommodation
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	Review and update the local arrangements for When I'm ready	Principal Officer for Permanence	Signed off at Corporate Parenting Board
An active offer of education, training and/or employment			
Young people are supported to identify their ambitions and fulfil their potential	<p>Finalise the Pathway to Work which will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embed regular ways to celebrate achievements and positive steps. • Improve links with colleges and local businesses to develop and understand increased opportunities for young people . • Increase opportunities for more apprenticeships/ traineeships 		Pathway to work signed off at Corporate Parenting Board September 2019
Enough money to live on			
Young people to be supported to manage well financially	To increase ways to provide clear information about entitlements and managing money via a range of media	PO for Permanence in collaboration with MTCBC benefits colleagues to set up pathway for advice and support	Pathway signed off at Corporate parenting Board 1.12.19
	To develop savings policy for CLA with foster carers and IFAs (Cabinet Report with finance required)	PO for Permanence, Fostering Manager and Finance	To be brought to Corporate Parenting Board 1.12.19

	Revise policy for care leaver's grant and publish information for young people.	PO for Permanence and Llamau	To be brought to Corporate Parenting Board 1.12.19
	Revise arrangements for St David's Day Grant	PO for Permanence and Llamau	Sign off at Corporate Parenting Board

Social and emotional support and wellbeing and Access to Mental Health support and specialist support

Young people know where to get help and support when they most need it	Development of informal drop in sessions	Llamau	Contract Monitoring evidences establishment of support in line with young people's request.
	To be developed with health colleagues Work with Health to develop and improve access to emotional well-being services	To be agreed with LHB Colleagues	