

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

**CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND EDUCATION
CABINET BOARD**

26th January 2017

**REPORT OF THE HEAD OF CHILDREN AND
YOUNG PEOPLE SERVICES
- A. JARRETT**

MATTER FOR DECISION

**Agreement of the proposals for the updating and implementation of the Route
16 (16 and Leaving Care) Team Financial Policy**

WARDS AFFECTED: ALL

1. Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to seek agreement for the implementation of the updated and amended Route 16 (16+ and Leaving Care) Team Financial Policy to come into effect from 1st April 2017. This forms part of the saving proposals required to set a balanced budget for 2017/18 and to fulfil our duties under the Social Services and Well-being Act 2014.

2. Executive Summary

Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council currently provides a comprehensive and generous financial support package for young people in and leaving Local Authority Care. With due consideration to the need to reduce expenditure, whilst continuing to meet our statutory duties and duty of care, it is proposed that the existing policy is

amended and updated in line with the requirements of the Social Services and Well-being Act 2014.

3. **Background**

The current financial policy was approved by Cabinet on the 14th September 2006 and has not been subject to review or update since this time. The policy requires review to ensure that we meet our legislative duties under the Social Services and Well-being Act 2014 and are able to do so within budget constraints.

Current support provided -

Maintenance Allowance is currently paid to category 1 and 2 young people at a baseline rate of £60.50 when they are living independently. In addition, we have paid a **Participation Premium** of £12.10 per week for young people in training, education and voluntary or unpaid employment. However, it is noted that such young people will continue to be entitled to an Education Maintenance Allowance, benefits or a training allowance, and will be supported to access such funds by their allocated Social Worker or YPA. In addition, the Local Authority supports with enrolment fees on discretionary basis.

One option that is proposed, is that the participation premium is no longer provided.

Setting up Home Payments (Leaving Care Grant) are provided on the basis of assessed need and the maximum grant payable is £1,750.00. This may be paid in instalments or (exceptionally) in a lump sum. This is not an entitlement and is available to support independent living, accommodation costs, furniture, and appliances. I note that some people may not need this money and may never access this grant. We are not proposing any changes to this grant.

Utilities Allowance of £15 per week is currently provided to assist young people in paying for basic household amenities, such as gas and electric. This is paid in

addition to the £60.50 weekly maintenance allowance. We are not proposing any changes to this allowance.

Housing and Accommodation Support is currently provided to young people aged 16-17 who live independently and therefore they are not yet entitled to associated benefits. The Local Authority pays reasonable rental rates and may assist with a bond (accessed from the Setting Up Home Grant) if this is unavailable via the Bond Board. We are not proposing any changes to this support.

Higher Education Support is provided by assisting young people to access their maintenance payment, WAG grant loans (such as the WAG Learning Grant and Child Care Grant), bursaries, allowances (such as the Disabled Students Allowance and Parents Learning Allowance) and / or part time work. In addition, the participation premium and utilities allowance was provided. It is proposed under the new policy that the participation premium is stopped. However, utilities and vacation accommodation costs and discretionary payments to meet course requirements (e.g. books and essential equipment) will remain available. Young Persons Advisors will also continue to assist young people in accessing all other entitlements as outlined above.

When I'm Ready Payments of £189.00 per week are also made to Foster Carers who agree to continue to care for Looked After Children beyond their 18th birthday under an Excluded License Agreement. Historically, such placements would have become Supported Lodgings Arrangements when the child turned 18 and the carers payments would reduce to . This scheme allows for improved payments post 18 and the aim is for an increased likelihood of young people remaining in stable placements beyond this birthday. In addition, such placements are required to meet fostering regulations and have greater responsibilities. No changes are being made to this scheme, which is supported by national guidance (When I'm Ready 2016). If further information is needed about this scheme, please contact route16admin@neath-porttalbot.gov.uk for a copy of the associated policy.

Reconnect to Care is the policy whereby young people (who were previously category 1-3 and are now between the ages of 21 and 25) can be re-opened to have

a Pathway Assessment, Plans, and Reviews in relation to their Education and Training needs. Following an Initial Assessment by a Social Worker the Team Manager has discretion to support with college or university fees, fees for work based training, maintenance allowances, accommodation costs, study and work based items (tools, books, and so on). It is not proposed that this policy be changed in any way. If further information is needed about this scheme, please contact route16admin@neath-porttalbot.gov.uk for a copy of the associated policy.

Transition Support is provided for young people who are awaiting support from other processes. For example, if young people are awaiting benefits, community care provision, their first wage packet, or student loans. This may include one off grants for housing deposits, the first month rent, books and equipment, travel or removal costs. We are not proposing any changes to this discretionary support.

Emergency Payments are provided to category 3-6 care leavers. Small payments may cover monies for matters such as food and electricity, in an emergency. We are not proposing any changes to this discretionary support.

Other Miscellaneous and Discretionary Payments include 18th birthday payments (equivalent of birthday allowance in foster care), maternity payments (of £500 for young people under 18 who cannot claim the maternity grant), gym passes, and enrolment fees for college where young people live independently. No changes are proposed to the financial support in these areas. For detail of what support is available please refer to the draft financial policy.

Young People from Elsewhere / Living Elsewhere will receive financial support from the Local Authority who last cared for them at the rate agreed by that authority. The Local Authority where the child lives will support to allocate a YPA, assess, and review the plans. However, financial arrangements are agreed between the two Local Authorities. We are not proposing any changes to this support.

Qualification Payments are currently provided when young people attain new qualifications. Such payments are made for GCSEs at grades B-G (£20), GCSEs grades A or A8 (£30), AS Levels (£30), A Levels (£50), GNVQs (£30), Diplomas (£30 per annum and £100 on completion), Degrees (£30 per annum and £250 on completion), and Masters (£30 per annum and £400 on completion). This money is

paid for each award received. Therefore, a young person who has 10 B's at GCSE would receive £200. In addition, young people in higher education also receive all grants, bursaries, maintenance payments, and participation allowances throughout their course. It is proposed that qualification payments are reduced under the new policy.

I have tried to include the changes we are proposing above. However, for ease of reading I would outline the following as a summary of proposed changes –

- The Participation Premium would be removed.
- The Qualification Payments would be revised.

4. **Financial Impact**

Route 16 currently supports 182 young people, of which at least 137 could be eligible to receive participation payments if they engage with education or training. This would equate to a £64650 per year.

According to data gathered earlier this year, we have an average of 106 young people in education or training, 50 of which could be eligible for participation allowance at a cost of £31460.

These savings are based on a maximum number of people engaged in training or education and is subject to flux due to the changing circumstances of our client group.

In 2015/2016 Route 16 spent:

£82000 on Weekly Maintenance Allowances including utilities and participation allowance

£9500 education costs

Route 16 were over budget by £41,672 for the financial year 2015/2016. It was on this basis that the decision was made for proportionate cost saving methods to be considered within the updated Financial Policy.

Following a change of management and the implementation of closer budgetary oversight, resulting in more focused and stream-lined spending within the team, Route 16 is currently on target to be under budget by £60,083 for the financial year 2016/2017.

5. **Equality Impact Assessment**

The Equality Act 2010 requires public bodies to “pay due regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act;
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristics and persons who do not share it.”

The full assessment has been undertaken to assist the Council in discharging its Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act 2010 and with due consideration to the current service group. The protected characteristics of this group are subject to change. Please see EIA attached.

6. **Workforce Impacts**

After consideration this is not applicable.

7. **Legal Impacts**

Under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 (referred to as 'The Act' throughout) Route 16 offer support to young people who are (or have been Looked After) within 6 main "categories" –

1. Looked After Children (aged 16-18);
2. Care Leavers (under 18);
3. Care Leavers (18-25);
4. Young Persons who Reconnect to Care (for education or training);
5. Young Persons who were previously under a Special Guardianship Order;
and
6. Young Persons who were Looked After for less than 13 weeks.

The rights of young people (and powers of the Local Authority) vary under these categories. I note that Social Workers and Young Persons Advisors (in the team) assist with a range of transitions and fulfil the following broad functions under the Act –

1. To provide advice (including practical advice) and support;
2. To participate in assessment and preparation of pathway plans;
3. To participate in reviewing the pathway plan;
4. To liaise with the local authority in implementing the pathway plan;
5. To coordinate the provision of services and take reasonable steps so that care leavers make use of services;
6. To keep informed about care leavers' progress and wellbeing;
7. To keep full, accurate and up to date records of contacts with the care leaver and services provided;
8. Budget holding and financial assistance (accommodating and maintaining care leavers);

9. Education, training, and employment support; and

10. Specialist support (for disabled young people, unaccompanied asylum seeking children, and care leavers in the youth justice system).

(Part 6 Codes: WAG 2014)

479. Young people need to know what practical and financial support they will receive from their local authorities. Each authority should, therefore, have a written policy they give to looked after children and care leavers, detailing the financial support they will receive when they participate in any further or higher education. Information about the financial support each care leaver can expect, as set out in their responsible authority's policy, should be complemented by information setting out what support the young person will be entitled to from the universal student funding sources.(p101)

Social Services and

Well-being (Wales) Act 2014

Part 6 Code of Practice (Looked After and Accommodated Children)

8. **Risk Management**

If the current policy is not updated that we are at risk of not adhering to our statutory responsibilities and the Route 16 service is at risk of not being able to provide services in line with legislation within budgetary constraints.

9. **Consultation**

Following the decision of Cabinet to approve consultation on the proposals for the updated Financial Policy a 60 day consultation period on the proposed policy took place from 8th November 2016. A detailed consultation plan was developed, to ensure that all stakeholders had the opportunity to comment, with particular consideration to current and future recipients of Route 16 Support.

In line with the Consultation Plan, Consultation Booklets were sent out to all identified stakeholders including the 190 young people open to Route 16. To date, no consultation booklets have been returned. Discussions with individual worker's indicate that the booklets have been received and support offered to complete them has been offered.

Consultations documents were also sent to professional stakeholders, including IRO Service, Looked After Children Education, Looked After Children Team, The Fostering Team and Dewis.

Three open access consultation sessions for professionals and young people were held across the Local Authority. The only attendee was the Assistant Manager: Student Support (Student Services) representing NPTC Group.

Feedback provided by a representative on behalf of NPT and Afan Colleges.

Feedback provided verbally at consultation session on the 28th November 2016 and transcribed from notes:

NPTC Group representative advised that, speaking as a representative of the college, she and her colleagues recognised that financial pressures on the Local Authority and the need to make continued savings, they felt that it would be inappropriate and punitive to withdraw the qualification rewards payments in their entirety. Representative noted that LAC and Care Leavers continue to achieve less well academically than their counterparts (put in reference) and that academic and vocational achievements are often made in spite of disadvantageous circumstances. The financial rewards provided by Route 16 are not only monetary payments but a recognition of these achievements, of the distance travelled by the young person and a symbol of our support.

Representative stated that they recognised that the current Qualification Payments needed to be revised as they were significantly above that which a 'normal family' would be able to provide. Representative suggested that the payments were retained but at a lower rate that would be more sustainable and reasonable given the current economic climate. This should also reduce the sense of indignation from young people who are coming through a system where a precedent has been set in terms of financial reward provision.

Given that no booklets have been returned, no contact made with the Team to raise any objections (directly or indirectly) and the lack of engagement with the open access consultation sessions, we can therefore assume there are no other matters of dissent.

With due regard to NPTC Group's feedback, a revised list of Qualification Payments has been provided for consideration. This will form an addendum to the Financial Policy if approved.

Given that the team is projected to be under budget for this financial year, and with due consideration to the EIA, CYPE may wish to consider the retention of the Participation Premium as an incentive for young people to engage in education, employment and training. I have provided scope for this to be considered within the recommendations.

Assuming CYPE approve the proposed Policy, a letter confirming the changes will be sent out to all affected individuals to give them due notice of the changes prior to the Policy coming into effect on the 1st April 2017. Should the decision be that we proceed with withdrawing the Participation Premium, I respectfully request that Participation Premium continues to be paid to those young people already in receipt of this payment until the end of this academic year (no later than 22nd July 2017) to allow them time to budget for the changes.

This item has been included in the Forward Work Programme.

10. **Recommendation**

It is requested that members consider approval for one of the following options –

(1) The revised Route 16 Financial Policy with the Participation Premium retained and amended Qualification payments for implementation from 1st April 2017.

(2) The revised Route 16 Financial Policy and amended Qualification Payments to include the removal of the Participation Premium from Financial Policy from 1st April 2017, with the Participation Premium being retained for a transition period of no more than 4 months (the end of the 2017 academic year) to allow for young people to prepare for the reduction in income

(3) The revised Route 16 Financial Policy and amended Qualification Payments to include the removal of the Participation Premium for implementation from 1st April 2017.

11. **Reason for Proposed Decision**

To enable the Local Authority to adhere to its statutory obligations.

12. **Implementation of Decision**

The decision is proposed for implementation for the three day call in period.

13. **Appendices**

Appendix 1: Draft Route 16 Financial Policy – section for additional consideration in italics

Appendix 2: Draft Qualifications Payments

Appendix 4: EIA Full Assessment

14. **List of Background Papers**

CYPE Report - Consultation on proposals for the updating and amendment of the Route 16 (16 and Leaving Care) Team Financial Policy dated 3rd November 2016.

15. **Officer Contract**

Rebecca Jones – Team Manager. Route 16

Tel: 01639 685581 Email: r.jones2@npt.gov.uk

Andrew Jarrett – Head of Service

Email: **a.jarrett@neath-porttalbot.gov.uk**