

Decision Maker: CARE SERVICES POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date: Wednesday 4 March 2015

Decision Type: Non-Urgent Executive Non-Key

Title: SUPPORTING LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN IN UNIVERSITY AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Contact Officer: Kay Weiss, Assistant Director Safeguarding and Social Care
E-mail: kay.weiss@bromley.gov.uk

Ian Leadbetter, Head of Social Care, Care and Resources
E-mail: ian.leadbetter@bromley.gov.uk

Chief Officer: Executive Director of Education, Care & Health Services

Ward: (All Wards);

1. Reason for report

This report highlights the support that the Council, as Corporate Parents, provides to care leavers to enable them to access higher education within the statutory framework for support to all former relevant children.

2. **RECOMMENDATION(S)**

Members of the PDS committee are asked to:

Note the content and comment upon the report.

Corporate Policy

1. Policy Status: Existing Policy:
 2. BBB Priority: Children and Young People:
-

Financial

1. Cost of proposal: N/A
 2. Ongoing costs: £97,580 University Support Grants & £12,300 Bursary Payments
 3. Budget head/performance centre: 807110
 4. Total current budget for this head: £2.7m
 5. Source of funding: Revenue Support Grant
-

Staff

1. Number of staff (current and additional): N/A
 2. If from existing staff resources, number of staff hours: N/A
-

Legal

1. Legal Requirement: Statutory Requirement:
 2. Call-in: Applicable
-

Customer Impact

1. Estimated number of users/beneficiaries (current and projected): Approximately 16 per annum
-

Ward Councillor Views

1. Have Ward Councillors been asked for comments? No
2. Summary of Ward Councillors comments:

3. COMMENTARY

3.1 The London Borough of Bromley as 'Corporate parents' have high aspirations for our looked after young people to ensure that they can enter adulthood as secure, productive and economically independent members of society. We want to support their own aspirations and goals and our vision as corporate parents includes

'We want (them) to achieve their potential.... This includes making the transition to adulthood with continuity of support, access to good jobs and higher education, while living in good housing and being financially secure'

3.2 It is clear that without further financial support from the local authority, many young people would be excluded from accessing higher education, as the weekly combined loan and grant provision would be insufficient to meet the day to day accommodation and living expenses. As well as being at odds with our clear aspirations for our looked after and former looked after children that they are successful in education and are supported to make progress and equipped with the life tools to make appropriate choices to progress through education and into employment, we would also be in breach of our statutory duties if we do not provide sufficient support.

3.3 Research evidence shows that children who do well in education, and in particular those that go onto to further and higher education, are more likely to become successful adults, reducing the demand on the public purse, and promoting independence.

3.4 In any given year, the local authority supports around 16 former relevant young people (care leavers over the age of 18) to pursue higher education, normally through an accredited university course. Details of those supported in the present year, and their courses is given at appendix 1.

3.5 Sections 23C and 24B of the Children Act 1989 (as amended) set out clearly who former relevant young people are and the support to be provided. The local authority must:

- Keep in touch with the young person
- Keep the young person's Pathway Plan under regular review (at least every 6 months)
- Continue to provide the young person with a Personal Adviser to offer advice and support
- Provide financial assistance to help with employment, training or education expenses
- Pay a higher education bursary if the young person is at University

3.6 Whilst the Children Act places a duty on the local authority to provide financial assistance it is for the local authority to determine the level of support to be provide, except for the bursary whereby The Children Act 1989 (Higher Education Bursary) (England) Regulations 2009 require that all Former Relevant care leavers attending university are to be provided with a higher education bursary to the value of £2000 over the life of the course they are attending.

3.7 The legislation is specific insomuch that it states:

'The £2,000 bursary is a minimum amount which is over and above any money and support that young people are entitled to under Section 23C(4) of the 1989 Children Act, or which local authorities already provide for care leavers who pursue a course of higher education. It must not be in place of existing support.'

Bromley pays the minimum amount of £2000, in three equal payments of £666.66 yearly for three years.

- 3.8 Bromley's financial assistance is based on the assumption that all London Borough of Bromley looked after children students have applied for all available grants and loans. Students must apply for a Tuition Fees Loan which pays for their course fees which they repay once they are in employment and earning more than £21,00 per year. This money goes directly to the university. At the same time a young person will apply for a Maintenance Grant, which is not repayable, and is paid directly to the student. Students can also apply for a Student Maintenance Loan which is repayable at the end of the course, in the same way as the repayment arrangements for the course fees. Repayment is based on earning and not level of debt.
- 3.9 In addition, to the grant and loan available from the student loan organisation Bromley also support our young people in higher education with a grant of £6,000 per annum.
- 3.10 The amount available to our former relevant young people in higher education is:

	Student Loan/Grant	Bursary	Bromley Local Grant	Total	Weekly amount
London University	£9,703	£666	£6,000	£16,369	£314.78
Outside of London University	£7,434	£666	£6,000	£14,100	£271.15

- 3.11 Whilst these amounts may appear generous, it should be borne in mind that, as a minimum, accommodation in halls for first year students averages £450 per month (£5,400 pa). Private rented accommodation ranges from £500 - £650 for basic one bed or shared two bedroom accommodation (£6,000 – £7,800 per annum).
- 3.12 Former relevant young people, unlike the majority of students have to ensure that their grant can support them for 52 weeks of the year as opposed to the normal of 40 weeks for young people who return to their families for the holiday periods. In addition, it is often the case that they do not have families to fall back on who will offer additional financial support and they are totally reliant of the grant and local financial support packages on offer to meet all of their needs.
- 3.13 In addition to the financial support offered above, students also receive a 'one off' grant to a maximum of £700 to enable them to purchase a computer, printer etc. Young people are expected to make use of the extensive library and on-line services available at University. Specific books and journals should be purchased using the maintenance grants, loans and bursary as above.
- 3.15 A survey undertaken by the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum (nlcbf) in 2012 identified that the average amount paid by local authorities by way of financial support was £6,000 per annum, with London authorities more likely to pay in excess of this. Bromley's current package is, therefore, broadly in line with other local authorities.
- 3.16 Finally, it should be noted that within the Children & Young Person's Act 2008 the duty to support care leavers wishing to return to education or training was extended from 21 up to a person's 25th birthday. As such former relevant young people may approach the local authority for financial assistance to support access to education and training, including higher education, at any point before their 25th birthday irrespective of whether they have attended any form of education post 18.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

University support grants £97,500 and Bursary payments £12,300 per annum

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Sections 23C and 24B, of the Children Act 1989, as amended, provides that the local authority shall have a duty in respect of support for former relevant children in particular S24B in relation to financial support for former relevant children to have the costs associated with education and training met.

Non-Applicable Sections:	Policy implications Personnel implications
Background Documents: (Access via Contact Officer)	N/A