

<b>NAME OF SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</b>	<b>Scrutiny Committee - Services</b>
<b>DATE OF MEETING</b>	<b>19 June 2014</b>
<b>ITEM TITLE</b>	<b>“When I’m Ready” Leaving Care Scheme – Gwynedd Council’s position</b>
<b>CABINET MEMBER</b>	<b>Councillor R H Wyn Williams</b>

## **1. Purpose of report**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform in relation to how young people are prepared for leaving the Council’s care and on the Council’s participation as part of the pioneer programme for “When I’m Ready”.
- 1.2 Information is provided in relation to progress made under the pioneer programme as well as providing information in answer to questions raised during the preparation meeting for this committee.

## **2. Context**

- 2.1 The consultation document for the “When I’m Ready” scheme was published in October 2012 with the intention that it became operational in April 2013. The implementation date was delayed in order to coincide with the Social Services and Wellbeing Bill and it is foreseen that further guidance will be published after this. Gwynedd Council, along with Merthyr and Rhondda Cynon Taf are part of a pioneer programme for the scheme.
- 2.2 Under the Children Act 1989 a number of duties are owed to care leavers that require their corporate parent to prepare and support young people over the age of 18 to make the transition from care to independent living. These duties were strengthened with the introduction of The Leaving Act (Wales) 2000.
- 2.3 These duties operate primarily until the young person reaches the age of 21, but may extend beyond this where they remain engaged in a programme of education or training (started prior to their twenty-first birthday) and continue until the completion of the agreed programme, provided that this is set out in the young person’s pathway plan.
- 2.4 The “When I’m Ready” scheme promotes the principle that parents often continue to offer security, protection and support beyond the age of 18 and so it should be for young people in care.

2.5 Under the “When I’m Ready” scheme, it is proposed that the responsible local authority will have an ongoing duty to support “eligible” children to remain with their foster carer/s beyond the age of 18, where the young person has requested this support. It recognised that not all young people are ready for the move to independent living at 18 and the new arrangements will offer a more gradual approach to planning the transition to adulthood, within a supportive family and household environment.

2.6 The scheme only applies to “eligible” children who are in a settled, stable, familial relationship with their foster carers. Should the placement be:

- in a children’s home; or
- in foster care and the placement is in danger of breaking down with their current carer; or
- if the young person would like to remain in a stable setting but not with their current foster carer; then a move to a new placement should be considered and implemented in sufficient time to allow the placement to become sufficiently stable prior to the young person’s 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.

### **3. The Council’s involvement in the pioneer programme**

3.1 As part of the pioneer programme the Council has:

- Introduced the scheme to the 16+ Team in order to discuss the options with young people and their foster carers.
- Provided monthly updates and data to the monitoring group, including feedback on lessons learnt in order to refine the final guidance that will be published by the Welsh Government when the scheme is rolled out across Wales.
- Developed a draft policy and practice guidance through the monitoring group.
- Held two focus groups for young people and foster carers in order to gain their views on the scheme. These meetings were facilitated by Action For Children.
- Developed a cost impact analysis led by Rhondda Cynon Taf.
- Developed a draft outcome measurement framework for young people who have been part of the scheme.

### **4. Response to specific questions raised in the preparatory meeting**

4.1 Please see below the questions asked and a short response to each question:

- a. **What are the Council’s current arrangements for preparing looked after young people for the time when they leave care?**

A statutory review is held after their 15th birthday in order to discuss their Pathway Plan. From this point onwards the Pathway Plan forms the Care Plan for the young person and is reviewed at each statutory review. The plan contains all the dimensions that need attention to prepare the young person for leaving care eg education, employment, training, independent living skills, financial information etc. On their 16th birthday the case is transferred to the 16+ Team. This is in order for the young person to get to know their leaving care worker whilst still in care and to avoid changes in workers when they move out of care.

**b. When does the planning for leaving care start?**

For young people who are in long term stable placements the planning starts on their 15th birthday. For any young person who enters care after their 16th birthday their pathway plan is discussed at their second review (young people are not eligible for a leaving care service until they have been in care for a period of more than 13 weeks in total).

**c. When was the “When I am Ready” scheme introduced in Gwynedd?  
How many young people does this affect?**

The scheme was introduced in Gwynedd in April 2013 as part of the pioneer programme. We are currently part of a monitoring group reporting to the government on its implementation. At the start of the year there were 18 young people who would turn 18 years old during the year. 10 of these young people were eligible for the scheme. 7 young people have chosen to become part of the scheme. For 2014-15 there are 13 young people who will be eligible for the scheme, although it is not yet known if all of these young people will choose to participate in it.

**d. What is the service’s assessment of the success of the scheme and any costs associated with it?**

The scheme offers young people a positive choice and we would not want to see young people leaving care until they feel ready to do so. Although it was previously possible to convert foster placements into supported lodgings when young people turned 18, there were a number of limitations to this eg foster carers were liable for income tax on the payment they received, rent was regarded as income for benefit purposes. The scheme now permits foster *placements* to be converted into fostering *arrangements* and income received by foster carers is not liable for tax purposes or benefit assessment.

Feedback from young people is positive as it provides them with security and they don’t feel under pressure to move out of the placement. Although it was possible to convert to supported lodgings placements previously, the take up was relatively low (3 in 2012-13). It is predicted, based

on this year's experience, that the take up of this scheme will be higher than under previous supported lodgings arrangements.

The cost of the scheme for 2013-14 is £47,000.

**e. What is the likelihood of the pilot scheme becoming mainstream and what would be the consequences of doing so?**

The scheme has been included in the Social Services and Wellbeing Bill and it is expected that the Government will issue regulations during 2014-15. The monitoring group will be providing a final report on the scheme's implementation in the 3 pilot areas in June 2014.

There are a number of consequences in relation to the implementation of the scheme, some of which are listed below:

- It is difficult to predict how many young people will want to become part of the scheme, and therefore what the scheme will cost.
- The cost of the scheme will vary according to the young person's individual circumstances. Some young people are eligible for benefits, or are in paid employment, and therefore contribute to their living costs, resulting in a decreased contribution from the service.
- If young people remain in their foster placement beyond their 18th birthday this will have an impact on the availability of foster placements and therefore on the service's recruitment strategy.
- Where there are other children in the placement the young person will need to undertake a DBS check.

**5.** The Committee's comments on the above information would be welcome and any comments received can be included in feedback to the monitoring group.