

Cross-Party Group on Care Leavers

Thursday 27th October, 6pm – 7pm

Minutes

Present,

Jo Derrick - STAF

Kirsty Louise – Barnardo’s Scotland

Jeanette Miller

Kenny McGhee - CELCIS

Karin Heber – British Association of Social Work

Ryan McShane

Lizzie Thomson – CELCIS

Martin Canavan – Aberlour

Jen Smith

Charles Fernando – MSYP

Ruby Whitelaw -

Hannah Hawthorn – the Promise Implementation Officer, Scottish Borders Council

Marion Willshaw – Staf

Chris Walsh – Staf

Aimee Roberts

MSPs Present

Paul O’Kane

Pam Duncan Glancy

Fulton MacGregor

Paul McLennan

Invited guests

Professor Matthew Smith, University of Strathclyde

Non-MSP Group Members

List names – do not use tables

Apologies

Chris Marshall

Miles

Agenda item 1

Welcome and review of previous minutes. Minutes approved.

Agenda item 2

AGM

AGM process enacted. Paul O’Kane approved as Convenor and Fulton McGregor approved to continue as Vice Convenor

Agenda item 3

Care Leaver Input on Financial Security: Chris Marshall on behalf of Staff’s Care Leavers Forum

Chris was unable to attend the meeting

Agenda item 4

Martin Canavan, Head of Policy, and Participation, Aberlour: Care Leaver Guaranteed Income/impact of poverty on care experienced people

In partnership with STAF and RSA, Aberlour have been researching a Care Leaver Guaranteed Income (CLGI), to create financial security and stability for care leavers. A key element influencing this is an interest/ proposal of a Universal Basic Income in Scotland (UBI). This is a regular cash payment without conditions, paid to everyone in society to ensure everyone has a basic income.

This model for care leavers to prevent care leaver poverty as the leave care and move into independent living is being considered, taking guidance from 'The Promise' as the key driver for how we can do better for care leavers. This payment is unconditional with no strings attached and would be received on top of existing benefits care leavers would receive.

The Independent Care Review highlighted the care leavers experience of stress around financial instability, inexperience of budgeting, high levels of debt, and the knock-on effects of these experiences as a result. It is the corporate parent's responsibility to ensure this is prevented.

The suggested model for a Care leaver Guaranteed Income is:

- A regular cash payment
- Unconditional guaranteed income
- No threats of sanction

All at a level that provides an adequate income to thrive.

This has been progressing by working in a partnership approach.

Aberlour campaigned for this at the 2021 Scottish election, as part of the Aberlour manifesto, highlighting care leavers as a potential target group for future UBI pilot schemes.

Aberlour engaged with local authorities and decision makers, and hosted a round table to explore concerns around UBI and how we can gain support for this.

The pandemic has reinforced the need for UBI and highlighted the financial insecurity and financial hardship of care leavers shown by the increase in care fund requests.

Presently, we are creating the Care Leaver Income Advisory Group (CLAG) established to lobby for better financial support for Care leavers and encouraging the Scottish Government to introduce CLGI.

Wales has introduced a Basic income for Care Leavers and could be used as a model for the Scottish CLGI. The CLGI wrote to the First Minister of Scotland to meet with the group to discuss the CLGI. The First Minister accepted the invitation and met with the group in September 2022, where the need for this guaranteed income pilot in Scotland was reinforced. The First Minister committed to exploring how it could work in Scotland as part of the Minimum Income Guarantee research already underway.

Interest and support for CLGI has increased over the last two years, with support beginning to build politically, and increased media interest also.

Martin will return and update on how the CLGI progresses.

Discussion:

Ryan:

Caution should be given to language used. Rather than Care Leavers Guaranteed Income, we should use the term 'Care Experienced' as the 'Care Leavers' title may encourage people to leave care. Also, the term 'Basic' suggests the provision of a minimum amount, rather than the maximum of what is required.

Who would fund this payment? Would it come through Security Scotland or from another fund.

An advisory group would be useful, as Ryan ran similar group sessions during lockdown for care experienced people to get together for a chat. This resulted in discussions around recovery from covid, the rising cost of living, and a basic income.

They also discussed how future policy can be safeguarded by providing measurable evidence from the pilot and being the country that other countries use to model their own countries policy.

Paul in Response to Ryan:

The suggestion of changing Care Leavers to Care Experienced will be taken on board, as the stigma around the Care Leaver term had not been considered.

Martin in Response to Ryan:

Ryan's comments are appreciated, and these points are important. In terms of a Care Leavers Income or support, the proposal is intended to ensure financial security, and not seen as an alternative type of support.

Agreed language is important, but this is why the term 'Guaranteed' was included when discussing the UBI. The title should describe the provision of a maximum amount of income which will allow a young person to thrive, so language used should be an ongoing focus.

The UBI concept in general is becoming more mainstream and is a policy ambition in Scotland. The CLGI concept can be used as a measurable pilot for the support for all people in Scotland, but our focus is primarily how we can make sure young people leaving care can be supported

Kenny:

Consideration should be given to how the proposed scheme is paid and how it intersects with other forms of financial support, as well as the counterproductive effects of this.

Assurance should be provided around the safeguarding of other reductions and navigating the complex system to ensure a regular income, whilst considering the emotional, practical, and timeous elements, and alleviating anxiety about financial unpredictably and precarity.

Kirsty Louise:

Her counterpart in Wales has confirmed that they have grappled with the logistical issues. We should meet and engage with them and use their experience and learn from them.

Karin (in chat): Would need to be considered on how care experienced is being evidenced to get the basic income as it currently proves a difficulty for university bursaries.

Lizzie:

Regarding the language used, we should be careful of using Care Leavers for the pilot, as there may be backlash from other groups who will not be included. Also, a pilot will finish, therefore consideration should be given to how the recipients will develop their income and not go back to living in poverty.

Ryan (in chat) “why you getting that but not me..” than the conversation about care etc etc

Martins’ response to Kenny:

In Wales, the pilot scheme explored how much they could provide, and that the payment would be recognised as a form of social security. The UK government disagreed and have taxed the amount. The Welsh payment has been set at £1600 which allows for the tax decrease, therefore the amount received will be £1250. This equates to a national living wage, full time, income.

Scotland should be bolder and set the level regardless of reductions, leaving young people with an income which will allow them to thrive not just survive. These are considerations which can be made around the discussion of the Pilot.

Martins’ response to Kirsty Louise:

We have wanted to and have engaged with Welsh government. Gaining insight around problems, setting levels and value which was helpful. It would be worthwhile to invite someone from the Welsh pilot for a discussion.

Response to Lizzie; Apologies, Martin forgot his response but will have further discussions with Lizzie around this.

We do not have all the answers yet, it is a developing and evolving proposal, but we are closer to having better financial support for young people. Also, thanks to the Care leavers Advisory Group and their influence on creating a Care Leavers income.

Jo:

Thank you for all the thoughts and comments made.

We should recognise there is a need for a timeline for these discussions and outcomes. Although there is no pressure intended, we must acknowledge the urgency around this pilot.

Paul:

Agrees it would be useful to have discussions with our counterparts in Wales.

Agenda item 5

Professor Matthew Smith, University of Strathclyde: The impact of financial insecurity on mental health.

Thank you for my invitation to this meeting.

There were a series of workshops titled 'Peace of Mind: Exploring Universal Basic Income's Potential to Prevent Mental Illness (2021)' funded by Scottish Universities Insight Institute.

It brought together people with lived experience of mental illness and/or poverty, as well as people in basic income pilot schemes, and used storytelling workshops to share experience of financial insecurity and mental health, and how a basic income would help this. Discussion included the inability to afford shopping, the stress of completing benefits forms, and how financial insecurity has a major impact on mental

health.

There have been a number of connections between inequality and poverty, and mental health conditions, and the link goes back centuries. In 1970 / 80's there was a shift away from the environmental factors and a move towards biological factors for explanations for mental illness.

There is a notion that the poor need to be 'fixed' or educated on how to spend money appropriately. There is also the 19th century idea of the deserving and undeserving poor in conjunction with a lack of political will, with less focus of environmental factors. Professor Smith would argue that all these points still influence how people think of young people in care.

The research conducted around a UBI and the effect this would have on mental health says the number one recommendation is the provision of a guaranteed basic income.

Social Psychiatry indicated that the three key factors relating to mental health have shown to be poverty and stress, social inequality and social disintegration or isolation, and that a basic income can lift people out of poverty. The basic income allows mothers to leave toxic domestic circumstances and keeps families together and can eliminate the need for 'gate keepers' for those in care, who rather than just focusing on how to get care leavers an income, can help them with other problems and issues such as abuse, trauma, and accommodation.

Basic income is also key to alleviate diseases of despair allowing people to have hope and move onto the next step in their life and their aspirations. This can become a possibility when the foundation of income is there.

When communities disintegrated, people do not have a community to be part of. A basic income would allow people including care leavers to redirect their energies in a positive way and give back to the community. If emotional and social growth are poor, this is reflected in economic growth, therefore rather than care leavers focusing on their economic growth, they can concentrate on their emotional and social growth.

For evidence linking basic income and mental health outcomes there is a Canadian study which showed a reduction of mental illness hospitalisations, as well as ongoing research by Kate Picket's Wellcome Trust funded project looking at basic income in fourteen- to twenty-four-year-olds.

Finally, where basic income pilots have been conducted, although not studied, the mental health effects are apparent, therefore the mental health effect outcomes of any pilot should be measured.

Discussion

Kenny:

Very struck by comments of how we perceive care experienced young people and care leavers as a cohort, such as the deserving or undeserving label and the connotations of this. This was apparent when we were looking at the challenges of the implementation of the Care Experienced Bursary. The lack of political will to address specific issues is across several areas where improvements can be made, such as in the implementation of continuing of care and the lack of cultural and political will to drive through the legislation.

We must also avoid this just being about care and using this as another type of stigma against young people.

Work has been carried out around emerging adulthood and benchmarking the narrative around that with the general population against the emerging adulthood for care experienced young people. The outcomes gap such as employment, housing, and mental health, can only be closed if we close the input gap, including relational stability, home and accommodation predictability and consistency, and the financial safety net, which would normally be provided by parents. Until we address the component parts together, it can be an incentive to get away from a care system that has failed in other areas. It should be seen as part of the whole approach for young people to grow, nurture and heal, particularly if they have experienced specific trauma. Consideration should also be given to how financial and relational unpredictability

destabilises a person's mental health when emerging into adulthood, becoming independent as support reduces.

Reply from Professor Smith:

This has a cross political spectrum, and the key word is that this is a pilot. Building in a physical and / or mental health element into the pilot will allow for a measurement of its success.

The health aspect will provide a saving to the NHS due to the prevention of mental ill health and unleashing the huge resource of 'gatekeepers. Also, asking people to tell their stories of the before and after scenarios will make people change their mind set and think differently towards the pilot.

Comment from Karin (in chat)

I really liked the point that if you take away the necessity for economic growth a person can thrive in their social and emotional development which consequently has a huge impact on one's mental health.

Comment from Lizzie (in chat):

That's another area of language for us to take care around - while there is learning from a pilot, it's also not an 'experiment' done to people.

Jeannette (in chat): agrees with Lizzie

Kenny (in chat): We need to see this as an investment rather than a cost

Comment from Jeanette

If you limit people's ability to socialise then their mental health and outcomes will be poorer than those who have the financial stability to do other extra-curricular activities.

Professor Smith:

Not everyone has these same opportunities to experience outdoor activities to improve mental health. If they did, the potential to be producers to the economy rather than just consumers would be there, and as well as giving back to the community.

Jo:

Thank you for all the contributions and content for this meeting.

We are asking our MSPs that they amplify the financial precarity of the Cross-Party Group, and we all do not lose sight of that.

Kenny (in chat): There is a very pressing 'here and now' issue that does need political leadership and sustained political will to address

We are aware of other initiatives that are being addressed, such as the Care Experienced Grant and the Minimum Income Guarantee, which are not going to be complete soon or immediately, but we still need to emphasise the importance and urgency. We should also recognise the impact of what we are discussing, and that these initiatives do not remain as minutes from a meeting, but that action is taken.

Anything that we want to take forward to the next meeting?

As a result of the discussion that we had with our care leavers in our Forum topics for discussion could include education and finance and reducing stigma.

Jo:

Follow up with Paul regards to the conversation around today's cross-party group.

Ryan:

Is there potential to write to the social justice and social security committee at the Scottish Parliament to give feedback to the Parliament or other bodies or committees

Lizzie:

Agrees with Ryan and suggests emphasising their commitment and duties as corporate parents.

Kirsty Louise (in chat):

Great point Ryan - a potential ask around a future member's debate on this issue in Parliament seems like a good idea to me

We would like to hear if this cross-party group has met your expectations and if there are things we could do differently for the next meeting. If there are any other thoughts, you have on this conversation please contact us. We will keep you informed and updated on this cross-party group.

Close of meeting

Thank you to all and appreciate your attendance in the evening

Thank you to our speakers, and everyone for their contributions and discussion the commitment to action and action going forward.