

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING CABINET COMMITTEE
HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOMS 1/2/3, CIVIC OFFICES, ANGEL STREET, BRIDGEND,
ON TUESDAY 2 NOVEMBER 2010 AT 4.30PM.

Present: -

Councillor A E Davies - Chairperson

Councillor M E J Nott - Leader
Councillor D Sage - Deputy Leader
Councillor H J David - Cabinet Member - Resources
Councillor L C Morgan - Cabinet Member - Wellbeing

Invitees:

Councillor K R T Deere
Councillor K S Hunt
Councillor R D Jenkins
Councillor M Thomas
Councillor K J Watts

Officers:

H Anthony - Corporate Director - Children
C Turner - Interim Head of Safeguarding and Family Support
M Shephard - Head of Healthy Living
V Watkins - Service Manager - Safeguarding
K Williams - Team Manager - Children
P Williams - Human Resources Officer
C Belliss-Williams - Senior Solicitor - Family Team
C Branford - Democratic Services Officer - Committees

72 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from the following Members for the reasons stated:

Councillor J C Spanswick - Family Bereavement

73 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

74 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 7 September 2010 be approved as a true and accurate record.

75 THE LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN PROJECT

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Deere to her first meeting of the Committee, and also the Team Manager - Children.

The Interim Head of Safeguarding and Family Support introduced a report the purpose of which was to provide the Committee with information on the Looked After Children (LAC) Project. He explained that the report had been produced by the Service Manager – Safeguarding who would be presenting it to the Committee.

The Service Manager – Safeguarding explained that the initial LAC Project had been successful in reducing the numbers of Out of County foster placements and so it had been agreed to revise the project and run it a second time. Suitable LACs had been identified for the project and it was managed by the Principal Officer - Accommodation. She explained that the three desired outcomes of the project were a reduction in LAC numbers, improved fostering recruitment and improved adoption outcomes.

Members questioned whether the figures provided in the report for the current LAC numbers in Bridgend, the projected number of LACs by end of March 2011, the budget for independent foster placements and the budget for out of county residential placements were accurate and, if so had the decision to close a Children's residential home in Bridgend been the correct one?

The Interim Head of Safeguarding and Family Support advised that it was difficult to predict the exact numbers of LACs even in the short term especially as a single incident such as the Baby P case could cause the numbers of children taken into care to increase considerably. The predicted numbers provided in the report were based on current trends and numbers were likely to increase due to recent cases of serious injuries to babies. This increase in the LAC population only served to underline the need for the LAC Project.

He confirmed that out of county placements were expensive, however, funding for these placements derived from three separate budgets, Health, Education and Social Care. Although 18 children were currently placed out of county, steps were being taken to return a number of these children to Bridgend, and in fact, 82% of children in out of county placements across the UK were returned to their local areas. At present Bridgend did not have the necessary resources to meet the specialist needs of many children who therefore had to be placed out of County. To enable a more holistic approach and, in order to meet more specialist needs within Bridgend in the future, the closure of one Children's Residential Home would be accompanied by a reconfiguration of another unit.

The Chairperson left the meeting at 4.35pm and the Chair was taken by Councillor D Sage.

The Service Manager - Safeguarding explained that the out of county placements included both fostering and residential.

Members noted that 12 adoption orders had been granted and questioned the cost of going to court to obtain these.

The Service Manager Safeguarding advised that there were no costs associated with adoption orders, however, there were costs associated with care proceedings and these depended on a number of variables such as whether they were

processed by County Court or Family Court, the length of the proceedings and the number of children involved.

The Cabinet Member – Wellbeing clarified that the closure of a Children's Residential Home would be accompanied by a reinvestment of resources in existing facilities in order that they could meet more specialist needs and so avoid out of county placements. The surplus beds in Bridgend's residential homes could be sold to other local authorities.

The Corporate Director – Children drew Members' attention to Table 2 of the report, the final column of which showed that Bridgend was not top of the list of local authorities in terms of its LAC population per 10,000 of the population. The significant rise in LAC numbers between 2009 to 2010 experienced by other local authorities had not occurred in Bridgend, however, reducing LAC numbers remained an important goal for Bridgend.

The Deputy Leader noted that it was evident from rota visits that Bridgend's Children's Homes were not fully occupied; therefore closure and reconfiguration of services were the right steps to take. He advised that other local authorities were spending much more than Bridgend on out of county placements, and he was pleased with the way in which the LAC Project had reduced out of county placements in Bridgend.

Members asked whether collaboration with other local authorities was being fully explored.

The Service Manager – Safeguarding advised that there was a group of 10 local authorities known as SEWEIC who collaborated in order to achieve a mutual tendering process, and to standardise the process of identifying available placements. Regular meetings were held to make the arrangements more robust and although SEWEIC had only been in existence for 6 months improvements were already evident.

RESOLVED: The Cabinet-Committee Corporate Parenting noted the report on the LAC project and agreed to receive updates on the project's progress as identified in the Informal Forward Work Programme schedule.

76 **WELSH AUDIT OFFICE LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN EDUCATION ACTION PLAN**

The Service Manager – Safeguarding presented a report the purpose of which was to provide an update on the pilot phase of the Welsh Audit Office (WAO) study to review arrangements to improve the education of Looked After Children.

She advised the Committee that the situation was unchanged from 6 months' ago as the WAO had not provided any further updates on their intentions. However, BCBC had continued work with its Action Plan which was attached as an appendix to the report. The pieces of work which had been fully achieved were not included in the Action Plan and progress was on target for the majority of the work. Regular meetings were held with colleagues in Education and Social Services and cases were tracked and PIs monitored which was leading to improved outcomes for Looked After Children.

RESOLVED: The Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting noted the report on the progress of actions in respect of the Welsh Audit Office Education of Looked After Children study.

77 QUALIFICATIONS AND PERFORMANCE ACHIEVED BY LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN FOR THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2009/10.

The Interim Head of Safeguarding and Family Support presented a report the purpose of which was to update the Committee on the progress made over the past three years in relation to qualifications achieved by looked after children who had reached the age of 16.

He explained that looked after children did not tend to achieve academic success because the problems they had experienced before they entered local authority care meant that they were already disengaged with education. For the academic year 2009/10 there were 19 looked after children who were at the end of Key Stage 4. Of these 19 children, 9 had statements of special educational needs, and their achievements could not be compared to those of children without special needs. The attendance of looked after children was good and the fact that there were no exclusions over the three year period was a cause for celebration.

The Corporate Director – Children suggested that it would perhaps be helpful if in future information was provided on how well these children did in comparison to expectations about their achievement.

Members welcomed the achievements of looked after children and congratulated the team on the excellent work being done, however, they questioned whether early intervention remained a priority for the Safeguarding Service.

The Corporate Director – Children advised that early intervention and prevention was a priority across all vulnerable groups. She explained that many children who entered local authority care were classified as children in need, and as there was now a greater focus on this group that there had been in the past, earlier intervention was easier to achieve.

Members asked if it was possible to provide a comparison between the achievements of LACs and children who were not looked after but were experiencing social deprivation.

The Service Manager – Safeguarding explained that although data capture was constantly improving the data was not available to make these comparisons.

RESOLVED: The Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting noted the report on educational attainment and outcomes for looked after children in 2009-10.

78 PERFORMANCE DATA UPDATE

The Service Manager – Safeguarding presented a report the purpose of which was to provide the Committee with current data on adoptions, outcomes and placements for Looked After Children. She explained that this was the second report to the Committee on this topic and an attempt had been made to improve

the information provided. A further update would be provided in six months' time. The data showed that steady improvements were being made, and Bridgend had performed above the Welsh average on a number of the indicators. It was important to be aware that when dealing with small numbers of children any changes could cause a significant fluctuation in the percentages. Performance Indicators were monitored on a monthly basis to identify any areas which required further attention.

Members asked if actions had been identified to improve the PI for the percentage of statutory visits to looked after children that took place in the year, given that disappointing performance in this area was likely to lead to the Authority being criticised, particularly following the high profile media coverage of child protection cases.

The Interim Head of Safeguarding and Family Support advised that Safeguarding Services had been reconfigured to work more collectively, and improved monitoring systems were in place to review performance. There was an emphasis on team work and key figures within the service took the lead responsibility for performance.

Members asked what actions had been identified to improve the PI on the percentage of looked after children with an allocated social worker.

The Interim Head of Safeguarding and Family Support advised that the recruitment and retention of Social Workers remained a challenge and it was difficult to achieve a 100% staff complement, however, this was an area that would be focussed on over the coming 6 months.

RESOLVED: The Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting noted the report on the performance of the Safeguarding and Family Support Service in meeting the needs of children and young people within its care against the other 21 local authorities in Wales.

79 INFORMAL FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME DECEMBER 2010-APRIL 2011

The Interim Head of Safeguarding and Family Support presented a report the purpose of which was to seek approval for the proposed Informal Forward Work Programme covering the period December 2010 – April 2011. He advised that the topics accepted for inclusion were presented in Appendix One.

RESOLVED: The Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting approved the proposed Informal Forward Work Programme.

80 REVISED SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS

The Corporate Director – Children presented a report the purpose of which was to seek approval for revisions to be made to the schedule of meetings of the Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee.

She advised that the revision was considered necessary in order to allow for a transition period of key officers in the Children's Directorate and to facilitate amendments to the work programme which reflected the availability of the information presented.

CORPORATE PARENTING CABINET COMMITTEE – 2 NOVEMBER 2010

RESOLVED: The Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting approved the revised Schedule of meeting dates as outlined in Paragraph 4.2 of the report.

The meeting closed at 5.05pm.