

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING HELD IN REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON THURSDAY, 4 FEBRUARY 2021 AT 14:00

Present

Councillor NA Burnett – Chairperson

N Clarke
D Patel

HJ David
CE Smith

J Gebbie
HM Williams

CA Green
RE Young

Apologies for Absence

T Giffard

Officers:

Nicola Echanis	Head of Education & Family Support
Mark Galvin	Senior Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Lindsay Harvey	Corporate Director Education and Family Support
Laura Kinsey	Head of Children's Social Care
Mark Lewis	Group Manager - Integrated Working
Claire Marchant	Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing
Michael Pitman	Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Mark Shephard	Chief Executive

221. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

222. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of 26 November 2021 be approved as a true and accurate record.

223. UPDATE ON BRIDGEND YOUTH JUSTICE SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The Corporate Director – Education and Family Support, submitted a report, the purpose of which, was to update the Corporate Parenting Committee on progress with implementing the Bridgend Youth Justice Service improvement plan which was developed following Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP) inspection of Western Bay Youth Justice and Early Intervention Service, in December 2018.

The Group Manager Integrated Working and Family Support, by way of background information, confirmed that the Bridgend Youth Justice Service (Bridgend YJS) was a statutory multi-agency partnership that has a legal duty to co-operate in order to secure appropriate local youth justice services. The service was funded from a variety of sources including UK Government, Welsh Government and statutory partners (ie Bridgend County Borough Council, South Wales Police, the Probation Service and Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board).

The Western Bay Youth Justice and Early Intervention Service (WBYJEIS) was subject to a full joint inspection by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP) in December 2018, the findings of which were published in March 2019. The inspection concluded that the WBYJEIS received an overall rating of inadequate. The findings of the HMIP inspection concluded that nine of the twelve inspection domains were rated as inadequate, one was adequate, one was good and one was outstanding.

The Group Manager Integrated Working and Family Support advised that, on 19 April 2019, Cabinet agreed to the disaggregation of the WBYJEIS and that the new arrangement would be for the Bridgend's Youth Justice Service to sit within the portfolio of an existing group manager within the Education and Family Support Directorate.

The service now continues to be subject to monitoring by the Youth Justice Board (YJB) and significant scrutiny from a variety of sources including UK Government and Welsh Government, he added. However, due to the impact of COVID-19 it was presently unknown when a re-inspection of Bridgend YJS will be undertaken.

A restructure of Bridgend YJS was concluded in September 2019. This restructure led to the service becoming a part of the Integrated Multi-Agency Prevention of Complex Cases Teams (IMPACCT) hub working closely with the edge of care teams. This move had provided better joint working, sharing of skills and resources and reduced duplication of work for children, young people and families. The restructure had also led to the creation of lead practitioner posts, which provided the service with the opportunity to deliver robust supervision, quality assurance of work and line management of staff. These were areas highlighted within the inspection as a cause for concern. The lead practitioner posts were recruited to in October 2019, with both lead practitioners in post in January 2020.

He continued by stating that Quality assurance work had commenced within the service. Feedback from this, had highlighted that there was an improving picture in respect of the quality of assessments. However, further work in addressing risk of harm and safety and wellbeing had been identified. In response to this, independent training approved by the YJB had been commissioned to support staff in this area. In addition to assessments, development of need led plans that are timely and address issues highlighted within assessments had also been identified as an area for improvement. Developing interventions and programmes that reduce risks of re-offending are also ongoing areas for the service to enhance, the Group Manager Integrated Working and Family Support explained.

The next few paragraphs of the report, confirmed how the above was being achieved.

A self-assessment of the Bridgend YJS was conducted in April 2020. Areas identified for improvement had been added to the Improvement Plan attached at appendix 1. Some of these areas of work were still in progress, he stressed. Areas identified within this plan included the ongoing improvement of assessments, support plans, interventions, partnership working and evaluation and feedback forms from young people.

Paragraph 4.6 of the report however, confirmed how the Covid-19 pandemic had impacted upon some planned improvements being realised to a degree, though ways around this had been to a degree put in place.

Attached at appendix 2 to the report, was the performance framework report considered at monthly Youth Justice Service Management Board meetings. The Management Board was jointly chaired by the Chief Executive of the Council and the Cabinet Member for Communities. Terms of reference for the Management Board were attached at appendix 3, concluded the Group manager Integrated Working and Family Support.

The Group Manager Integrated Working and Family Support concluded his submission, by advising that some of the data attached to the report had been updated recently and he was happy to share this with Members, upon request.

The Chairperson advised that she had sat on two Youth Justice Service Management Board meetings, where she had been impressed by the level of engagement involving partners on the Board.

The Cabinet Member – Education and Regeneration advised that he was impressed with the trend of continues improvement that had been made since the Family Support team had taken over the service following the inspection and he had every confidence that these improvements would continue in the future.

The Cabinet Member – Wellbeing and Future Generations, advised that she too had also been involved for some time in the Youth Justice Service Management Board and concurred that this was going from strength to strength. She was particularly please the way the Board was operating in innovative ways, so as to overcome the pressures of the pandemic, ie including social distancing etc, which meant that it was difficult to have close interaction with clients and young people.

The Deputy Leader referred to recommendation 13 of HMIP addressing literacy and numeracy skill levels in respect of young people within the system. He asked how this was being pursued and also, if it was being achieved.

The Group Manager Integrated Working and Family Support, advised that many children and young people here were doing well, but there were some that were doing less well. Previously a speech and language therapist had been employed. There had also been an issue that had compounded progress, namely that some of statutory school age, were not receiving through their education, the minimum statutory education of 25 hours a week. The local authority had therefore challenged schools they were being educated at on this, so that such hours could be increased. Some young people also had been involved in crime and/or had challenging behaviour. Issues such as these, had also hindered their progress on core educational attainment targets. There was also an Education Engagement Team now in place, that were filling any gaps in relation to the above, so more progress was being made and this would hopefully continue in the future, he added.

The Chairperson asked how the service was ensuring that children in the system were able to have access to suitable reading material, in order to encourage them to improve their literacy skills.

The Family Service Support Manager advised that this was something that was being pursued with the library services, more detail upon which he would provide to the Chairperson outside of the meeting.

In response to a number of points made by the Leader, the Group Manager Integrated Working and Family Support, commented as follows.

In terms of the agencies that formed the Youth Justice Service Management Board, he confirmed that these comprised of statutory agency representation as well as non-statutory. He was pleased to add that attendance at meetings and overall support was strong. Though there had been poor attendance in the past at meetings, from Carers Wales and Parc Prison. However, support from these agencies had now improved. With regards to support being offered for victims of offences and crimes as well as the perpetrators, he stated that this was in place, however, improvements could be made in this area of support work he acknowledged. With regards to capacity levels in the team to support the Youth Justice Service this was being stretched particularly in light of the service taking over the support of this on the back of a previous poor inspection (of the service). A further Social Worker had recently been recruited to strengthen the team,

however this had been negated to a degree, as an Agency Worker had recently left the service. So though services were being delivered, work levels were demanding.

The Leader requested further updates on the service at future meetings of the Committee, by way of progress reports, in order that Members may be given assurance that all actions requested as part of the last inspection had been completed.

The Chief Executive concluded debate on this item, by confirming that though improvements had undoubtedly been made within the Youth Justice Service in recent months, there were still some significant challenges and pieces of work to overcome and complete in the future and before hopefully any pre-inspection which could come around fairly quickly. This however, was work in progress, he acknowledged.

RESOLVED: That the report and the work undertaken to date on the Bridgend Youth Justice Service Improvement Plan, be noted.

224. **INDEPENDENT REVIEWING SERVICE (IRO) REPORT**

The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing submitted a report, the purpose of which, was to present to Members of the Committee the Independent Reviewing Service (IRO) Report, in line with The Independent Reviewing Officers Guidance (Wales) 2004, along with the IRO Service Action Plan.

She advised that the appointment of Independent Reviewing Officer's (IRO's) by Local Authorities was a legal requirement and their core functions are governed by legislation and guidance as follows:

- The Adoption and Children Act 2002;
- The Independent Reviewing Officers Guidance (Wales) 2004.

The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) service has an authoritative role, in assuring the quality of care planning is achieved, it was explained.

The Independent Reviewing Service report (attached at Appendix A to the report,) covered the work of the IRO service from April 2019 to March 2020.

The report contained performance information in respect of the statutory reviewing of Children who are Looked After, including children with plans for Adoption and Young People with Leaving Care LAC/Pathway Plans (under 18) by Bridgend County Borough Council. It also included information on children subject of a child protection plan and reviews of these plans at Child Protection Case Conferences.

The report further detailed information that related to regulatory requirements in respect of resolution case disputes, IRO caseloads, participation and consultation of young people in their Reviews, challenges and achievements in the reporting period and service priorities for 2019-20.

As well as the guidance referred to in paragraph 3.1 of the report, additional IRO guidance and practice standards were introduced at the beginning of 2019. IRO's had worked to improve tracking and monitoring as advised within the Practice Standards and Good Practice Guide, Officers confirmed.

The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing stated, that as described in the report, the IRO's chaired/reviewed 2,022 meetings between April 2019 and March 2020. 1,506 quality assurance audits were completed relating to these meetings also.

In her conclusion of the report, she advised that the IRO service had continued to work with the safeguarding teams to improve practice around child protection conferences and this had been extended through to other agencies such as the Health Visiting services, School Nurses and Midwifery Services. The next stage of events, was to work at improving the quality of Looked After Children reviews on a multi-agency basis.

She stressed finally, that continuous service improvement is always sought after and as such the Independent Reviewing Service aimed to continue to have a greater impact in terms of improving the quality of the lives of care experienced children and young people. The IRO Service Action Plan at Appendix A, reflected the areas of focus for improvement over the next 12 months for the service, which would be under constant review in order to ensure actions proposed were being met.

In support of the report, a power point presentation (together with a short video) was given by the Group manager IAA and Safeguarding/Independent Reviewing Manager, with the support of Social Services colleagues.

The presentation covered a number of themes and key areas of work, examples of which are given below:

- The roles and remit of the Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO's)
- The child protection population the last 12 months, ie 185 average (current 189)
- Monthly average of Foster Care placements the last 12 months = 383, with those aged 10 to 15 being the largest percentage and 0 to 1, being the smallest
- Some service priorities outlined in the Action Plan:
 1. Increased contact between the IRO's and children and young people (going forward);
 2. To achieve permanency and reduce numbers of Care Experienced Children;
 3. Improvement in child consultation/participation;
 4. Improve LAC reviews and care planning processes;
 5. Developing learning themes and improve practice through QA;
 6. Develop Advocacy services/active offer to children.

The Cabinet Member – Wellbeing and Future Generations asked Officers if they could give some further information on Re-Statementing, ie why children are de-registered from the Child Protection Register, only to be re-registered sometime after and on occasions, fairly quickly.

Officers advised that this was an area of Council that was regularly the subject of auditing. If sufficient evidence was available for a decision to be made for a child to be de-registered, the main reason behind them going back on the register was usually due to the fact that, his/her parents had originally separated but then subsequently got back together. During this time however, the relationship had again once more deteriorated, hence placing the child back into a potentially hostile setting. Arising from such a situation, the child is then once more placed on the Child Protection Register in order to ensure their continued safeguarding going forward.

In cases such as this, they are then the subject of further and ongoing review and scrutiny, which includes working with the parents as well as supporting the interests and health and wellbeing of the child.

As the work of IRO's was a statutory function, the Leader asked how the service engaged with younger children in order to hear their voice and what impact had the Covid pandemic had on close engagement with young people of all age groups. He felt

that with children of Infants/Primary school age, there was more opportunity, particularly at present, to hear their voice in a school based setting. During Covid, he felt that we had to continue delivering support and services particularly to the most vulnerable in society, in different ways than previous, whilst at the same time, balancing up issues such as risks and roles in terms of these individuals future welfare.

He acknowledged that Domestic Abuse was very much a problem and an issue that had become even worse during lockdown. Whilst he was aware of some of the mechanisms of support in place for victims of this, he asked if there was anything in place to help the perpetrators, as he was aware of the Perpetrator's Programme.

In terms of keeping contact with older children and the continuation of their care and care planning, Officers confirmed that regular contact was very much continuing with this age group of young people, through virtual platforms, as well as through initiatives and support such as the 16 Plus Team. Therefore, the pandemic had not so much hindered this age group in terms of their continued monitoring and support. Though face to face contact other than that arranged remotely, was still an issue due to social distancing. There were Advocacy services in place that also supported the welfare of these young people, advised the Group Manager IAA and Safeguarding.

The Independent Reviewing Manager confirmed that there were Consultation documents that were used in order to provide continued support and engagement with young individuals and these were varied in that they were also 'age appropriate'. With plans in place for the possible re-opening of schools at half term, in the first instance for younger pupils, interaction would take place with the schools, in order to ensure ongoing support is continued for the most vulnerable and foster care children. There was also a provision in their Personal Education Plans (PEP's) that accounted for their continued support also, she added. This assisted and to an extent overcome any reduction in visits by IRO's in a more one to one public setting.

Officers advised also, that there were a number of programmes in place that addressed domestic violence, through both working with the victim and the perpetrator, including the Inspiring Families Programme.

A Member noted from the report's supporting information, that there was proposed as part of the future MTFs considerations, a reduction in office support staff for the Child Protection Team. She asked if this would detract from current support levels in place for foster children, etc.

The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing advised that this was something that was being considered, however, regular Management meetings were held within the Directorate on a continuous cycle, to meet all services as pressures arise in teams, with support always being put in place for any change in such pressures, moving forward. This included for the IRO's, particularly in order to ensure that there is adequate support in place for their work including their number of caseloads at any given time.

The Chairperson noted that a common factor amongst LAC was neglect. She asked if there was any data available that would reflect the number of children who are the subject of neglect and how many of these qualify for free school meals.

Officers stated that they did not have this data to hand, however, the Head of Children's Services confirmed that she would liaise with the Children's Directorate and in turn provided some data on this to Members, outside of the meeting.

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RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the Independent Reviewing Service report, the contents of the power point Presentation and the IRO service action plan (attached at Appendix A to the report).

225. **URGENT ITEMS**

None.

The meeting closed at 16:30