

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CORPORATE PARENTING CABINET COMMITTEE

22 JUNE 2010

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR - CHILDREN

RESIDENTIAL REVIEW REPORT: SAFEGUARDING AND FAMILY SUPPORT

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To seek approval for the implementation of the Residential Services Review presented to the Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee on 15th September 2009 (Appendix 2) as amended by the feasibility study report at Appendix 1.

2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Plan / Other Corporate Priority.

- 2.1 Residential provision within Bridgend for our looked after children is linked to the theme of "Young Voices" as part of the community strategy.

3. Background

- 3.1 In May 2007, "Creative Exchanges," a consultancy firm, produced a report and an action plan for the council (*Bridgend Children Deserve the Best*), identifying reasons for the difficulties at that time in children's services and the steps that should be taken to improve Bridgend's social work service to children and young people. The action plan was to be progressed over a two to three year period, with all actions interdependent in terms of having the necessary impact i.e. better quality services, reduction of placement costs and the removal of the serious concerns protocol. One of the key elements of the plan was to review residential provision and the needs of children in residential care. It also recommended that consideration be given to the realignment of services and budgets so that resources could be reinvested to increase family support services, as part of the prevention and early intervention agenda.
- 3.2 Bridgend has three in-house residential homes offering 14 places to children and young people between the ages of 11 and 17 years. This includes two emergency beds. There is also a flat attached to one of the units to support a young person into independent living. Bridgend also makes use of external residential placements and a snapshot at 30th June 2009, whilst the review was ongoing, showed that a further 10 looked after children were placed in external residential placements, with a contribution to the funding of residential placements for six other children, at a projected cost (at that time) of £1,315,586. This was the net cost after contributions from Education and Health budgets. There was some movement during the year but, at 3rd March 2010, there were 17 placements (including one short-term assessment) and a net cost of £1, 384,000 for the year. As not all these external placements are for the full year, the equivalent net cost of these placements remaining in place for a full year would be £1,962, 000. This amounts to an average unit cost of approximately £127, 600 per year compared with £100,000 in-house (2009/10), although this cost is as a result of lower occupancy levels. At full occupancy, the average in-house placement unit cost would be £74, 000.

- 3.3 The Residential Services Review was initiated in September 2008, endorsed as part of the corporate *Supporting Vulnerable Children* programme. Its brief was:
- “To examine the provision of residential services within Bridgend’s community homes to identify whether a redesigned service can improve the outcomes of children and young people who become looked after”.**
- 3.4 The review included:
- (i) review of key documents such as the statement of purpose for each home, inspection reports and a sample of case files;
 - (ii) data that included occupancy rates, admission and discharge information and financial costs;
 - (iii) interviews and discussions with residential staff, young residents and young people who had left the residential provision and were living elsewhere, parents and carers;
 - (iv) questionnaires to social work staff and managers and other professionals from health, Police, Youth Offending Service, Education and the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service.
- 3.5 One of the more significant findings includes data that indicated a high number of unplanned admissions, resulting in some cases in a mismatch of provision and occupancy rates ranging from 99% to 64% across the three homes, with an average, over three years, of between 80 and 85% occupancy. This under-occupancy increased actual unit costs over a four year period from £1,425 per week in 2005/6 to £1,932 in 2008/9. In-house provision was nevertheless calculated, albeit in simplistic terms, as incurring the lowest cost against other comparator local authorities as well as external provision. However, a value-for-money comparison requires a wider analysis that takes proper account of overheads and the level of individual needs as well as the quality of outcomes. Bridgend’s staffing ratios are also lower than those in other authorities’ establishments.
- 3.6 The key findings from the case analysis indicated three main common themes in relation to factors that contributed to the young people becoming looked after:
- lack of educational opportunities/attainment;
 - challenging behaviour;
 - placement disruptions.
- 3.7 The first two of these themes were areas of concern prior to the young people becoming looked after and continued to be the main challenges throughout their care history. Also of note is that, of the 36 children whose files were analysed, 18 (50%) had statements of special needs. Overall, the statementing rate for all pupils in Bridgend is 1.5%. All the children had experienced disruptive patterns to their education and found education challenging. This often led to children refusing to engage in education and sometimes to school exclusion. Alternative provision was frequently not enough to maintain the placement in-house, resulting in out of county specialist placements where integrated services supported children to make progress.
- 3.8 The residential staff concluded, in line with the findings from research and the case file analysis, that:

- (i) some young people will be better served by being placed in a residential home;
- (ii) early intervention and preventative work from support services is critical to the success of any residential provision;
- (iii) there is a growing need for a transition service to meet the needs of the young people who are 16+.

- 3.9 Some young people and parents felt that a residential setting was the right one as the young person did not want to “fit in” with another family. Parents and practitioners highlighted the safety, security and stability of our in-house residential care and some young people, who had also experienced external residential care felt strongly that they had been too far from family and friends, preferring local provision.
- 3.10 Research in this area particularly emphasizes the need for integrated service provision, including foster care and family support services, with a multi-skilled staff mix.
- 3.11 The report concluded that residential care should not be seen and used as a last resort but as a flexible alternative solution, viewed positively for the outcomes it can achieve in the right circumstances. Children and young people who require residential care will have complex needs and it is essential that all services meeting those needs are of a high quality and readily available in order to achieve the best possible outcomes. As such, all agencies with responsibility for working with children and young people should be involved both in strategic planning and in delivering services for individual children.
- 3.12 The Review put forward four options for Committee to consider following its extensive consultation with residential staff, children and young people and other stakeholders. The preferred option was Option 1, retaining the three in-house units, but redesigning their purpose to provide:
- an emergency/assessment facility
 - a complex needs unit
 - a transition unit.
- 3.13 Options 2 and 3 included the same provision for complex needs and transition but closing the provision for emergency/assessment placements and either commissioning or spot purchasing emergency provision. It was agreed that a further option of retaining the status quo was not the best use of resources and could be ruled out.
- 3.14 Committee agreed that further work was needed in relation to the arrangements for residential provision in other local authorities, with some costings on the different options, before a final decision could be made.

4. Current Situation

- 4.1 Although outsourcing is not recommended at this point as there appears to be no financial advantage, it would be possible to reconsider in the future if it appears viable. The information sought as to the arrangements in other local authorities indicates that a number had disinvested from in-house provision in recent years but

that some are now commissioning private providers, recognizing that there will always be some children and young people who require group living.

4.2 Common messages were:

- a. the majority of local authorities only choose to outsource when they have no in-house provision and no in-house expertise (seven local authorities in South Wales alone have no in-house provision);
- b. independent providers felt it would be risky financially for a local authority such as Bridgend with a significant looked after population to outsource all provision;
- c. independent providers were not prepared to give costings without a service specification but agreed, when a figure was put to them, that it might cost approximately £350,000 per year to run a four bed provision against the an average in-house cost of £361, 511 (2009/10).
- d. these providers advised caution when comparing costs of outsourcing to the face value costs of providing a unit in-house as not all overhead costs are explicit given the way that local government budgets are organized.

4.3 While anecdotal evidence might indicate that outsourcing of residential provision could provide value for money, it is not overwhelming and has to be considered alongside the excellent resources and the quality of staff that currently manage our in-house provision, evidenced by positive inspections year after year. Reshaping of existing provision does not exclude the possibility of outsourcing in the future. Reshaping is essential as, despite Bridgend having a high number of in-house residential beds, they are not able currently to meet the needs of some children and young people, who are then placed with independent residential providers. While the highly specialist needs of some children will require spot purchasing arrangements or regional commissioning, by streamlining our provision and closing one unit we would be able to deploy some staff into a strengthened complex needs resource. The focus of other staff could then be reconfigured, as happened some years ago when another unit closed, to enhance current outreach crisis interventions to prevent admission to care, assist rehabilitation and offer support to foster carers. Demand for these services outstrips existing resources. These staff would increase our capacity to respond out of hours and would require only a minimum level of training to work effectively with this client group.

4.4 **Emergency provision** would be spot-purchased in the short-term with commissioning of beds with other local authorities in due course via the South East Wales Improvement Collaborative rather than retain in-house provision. Research indicates that there are problems in respect of emergency provision:

- where the facility of in-house emergency beds exists, there is the danger that this becomes the first option rather than a strong focus on crisis intervention to prevent family breakdown;
- the availability of such a provision can lead to an avoidance of rigorous preventative work and result in many more emergency placements than are strictly necessary;
- maintaining empty beds so that they are widely available for emergency placements is prohibitively expensive;
- there is clear evidence that a critical success factor in placement stability is getting it right in the first place. Mismatched initial placements tend to lead to a cycle of placement breakdowns;

- emergency placements are not only problematic for the child being placed, they can cause turmoil for children already placed;
- if emergency placements are not managed rigorously it is more likely that such beds will be required.

- 4.5 **A complex needs unit** is proposed with the aim of meeting the needs of some of the children who might otherwise be placed in independent provision. It would provide four beds. The staff profiling undertaken as part of the review indicates that there is already a broad skills base amongst current residential staff, with a range of skills and disciplines not being fully utilized. Training in direct work and other therapeutic techniques would be necessary, but the staff resources to run the unit are largely in place. The success of the unit would also depend on significant levels of engagement from a multi-agency partnership. This would need to include education, CAMHS and other health services and schools. Appropriate education provision and specialist mental health services are key elements. While CAMHS already supports looked after children as a priority and school support, home tuition and other resources are available, investment of approximately £100,000 would be required to employ a teacher and some therapeutic input. Research indicates that care leavers from the more therapeutic residential units are four times as likely to find employment and three times less likely to be convicted of a crime than those from more generic residential settings.
- 4.6 **A transition unit** is also proposed: this would be a 16+ unit dedicated to preparing care leavers for independence. This could provide five beds and would require a lower staff : child ratio given its semi-independent brief. Support would be needed from a range of professionals, including the careers service, benefit agencies, aftercare team and housing. This is in line with our development of a multi-agency, post 16 service to support young people into adulthood. Only appropriate young people would be placed in this unit, not those with high support needs who will need adult services post 18.
- 4.7 Taking all the additional information into account, together with findings from the Residential Review, and coupled with the fact that we currently have quite a high level of residential provision compared to similar sized authorities, it is proposed that we close one unit and spot purchase **emergency provision** in the short term. In the longer term, in-house emergency fostering provision will be developed, together with joint commissioning of residential beds.
- 4.8 It is also proposed that two of the units are redesigned as **a complex needs unit** and **a transition unit**, strengthened by re-deployment of staff, with further re-deployment if appropriate into the Family Support Team to increase its effectiveness in delivering packages of support to parents in crisis and to families where a child or young person is rehabilitated home.
- 4.9 If this proposal is approved, further work will be undertaken to determine the best location for the units, taking into account the needs of the children and young people, cost of refurbishment and suitable space and equipment. One unit would be released for disposal or other council uses.

5. Effect Upon Policy Framework and Procedure Rules

- 5.1 None.

6. Legal implications

- 6.1 The proposals set out in this report enable the Authority to continue to meet its statutory obligations. An equality impact assessment has been undertaken in respect of the residential review.

7. Financial implications

- 7.1 The restructuring of the existing three units into two specialist units would require the reconfiguration of staffing teams. It is anticipated that this would result in estimated savings of £137,000 through the overall reduction needed in staff to support the two units and consequential reductions in running costs.
- 7.2 The Safeguarding & Family Support budget for 2010-11 includes an anticipated saving of £100,000 for the Review of Residential Services. This figure is based on the assumption of returning placements from more expensive out of authority residential settings to the refocused in-house service. Therefore the savings is £37,000 more than originally estimated.
- 7.3 The service is keen to reinvest expertise and staffing into preventative services aimed at reducing the number of family breakdowns and hence placements required. Ideally, the service would wish to reinvest any savings into at least two full time equivalent staff to be refocused on preventative interventions, at a cost of £64,000. The net saving that might be achieved of £37,000 would only enable investment in one staff resource.
- 7.4 The release of one of the current homes (yet to be identified) could generate a capital receipt, a small amount of which would be required for refurbishment.

8. Recommendation

- 8.1 It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee:
- i) approve the proposal that Bridgend's residential provision for looked after children is reconfigured to create a complex needs unit and a transition unit, with closure of a third unit, redeploying staff where appropriate to strengthen the reconfigured units and the family support service;
 - ii) notes, if i) above is approved, that implementation will be managed as a project as part of the corporate Supporting Vulnerable Children programme.

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Background Documents

Residential Review report for Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee held on 15th
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