

# BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

## REPORT TO CORPORATE PARENTING CABINET COMMITTEE

2 November 2010

### REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR - CHILDREN

#### WELSH AUDIT OFFICE LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN EDUCATION ACTION PLAN

#### 1. Purpose of Report.

1.1 To provide a progress update on the pilot phase of the Welsh Audit Office (WAO) study to review arrangements to improve the education of Looked After Children.

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

2.1 Looked After Children are a key responsibility for the Council as corporate parents and connect with the theme 'Children Today Adults Tomorrow.'

Corporate Parenting supports the following community strategy themes:

- Young Voices
- Strong Communities
- Healthy Living
- New Opportunities

#### 3. Background.

As previously reported to the Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee on 13<sup>th</sup> July 2010, Bridgend has participated in a study alongside Cardiff, Pembrokeshire, Powys and Gwynedd to consider the education arrangements and outcomes for Looked After Children. This Authority completed a detailed self assessment which was designed to enable the Authorities taking part in the study to judge their performance against a wide range of areas. This included checking whether there were robust arrangements in place that would ensure that the Authority was able to effectively discharge its duties. These related to the following key areas -

- Standards of Strategy and Leadership
- Standards of Effective Management and Successful Implementation
- Standards of Educational Experience
- Standards for Supporting Educational Attainment through the Care Planning System
- Standards of Residential and Foster Carer Support
- Standards of Health, Safety and Wellbeing
- Standards Involving Children and Young People
- Standards of Reliable Data and Information.

#### 4. Current situation / proposal.

Bridgend responded to the study and using evidence and commentary, rated itself against each of the defined measures as one of the following; *not met*, *partially*

*achieved, largely achieved and fully met.* The report was returned to the WAO in 2009. WAO concluded that Bridgend's self-assessment was accurate across all the dimensions. It was disappointing that this verdict did not appear to be based on any further observations or commentary. The final WAO report remains outstanding, as is any update about the project. Notwithstanding this, in Bridgend, the Authority has used its own self-assessment to develop a detailed action plan to address shortfalls. There has already been much activity to progress improvements in relation to the education of our Looked After Children, a key corporate parenting responsibility in supporting them to secure the best life chances available to them as they make the transition into training and employment.

Within this work to improve education outcomes for Looked After Children, a key factor has been the creation of the LAC Education group. This group has managers from Education and Safeguarding and Family Support who have been working together closely to look at the main areas to address to create improvements in performance and outcomes for the Authority's Looked After Children. The Authority has agreed:

- A commitment to assist with the provision of transport, where possible, for children placed away from their school, even if the transport is just for a stabilising period. The group will be kept advised of any changes and consider individual cases to try and maintain the school placement;
- To endeavour to have no permanent exclusions across schools in Bridgend for our Looked After Children by strenuously exhausting other education arrangements;
- Plans to monitor and support children at risk of fixed term exclusions and to regularly review, and if necessary update their Personal Education Plan (PEP), as part of facilitating this endeavour;
- Arrangements whereby when there are 2 fixed term exclusions in 1 term or a temporary exclusion of 6 days or more that this will trigger a review of the PEP to consider whether more support could be made available to reduce the risk of further exclusions and difficulty integrating into school life;
- To review arrangements for PEPs to ensure that they are completed within timescales and effectively address the child or young person's needs. The Authority will also target and work closely with schools where performance needs improvement to comply with National Performance Indicator Guidance from WAG. The Authority is also revising data captures arrangements on DRAIG to improve management information;
- Undertake specific additional support and monitoring arrangements for those children and young people undertaking key stage 2, 3, 4 and transition. This will include utilising additional support from Learning Support Officers (LSOs). It will also involve reviewing PEPs more regularly;
- Continue to offer training to designated teachers, heads, foster carers, residential staff and social workers to support their understanding of the importance of PEPs. The Authority will also be introducing quality assurance checks to monitor the quality of our PEPs;
- To undertake an audit of local schools who are offering young people in care an alternative curriculum which does not have approved accreditation in order to identify where to target future actions. The Authority wants its Looked After Children to gain recognisable and creditable qualifications and will seek to identify a suitable curriculum to achieve this
- To ensure that the annual Mayor's award ceremony will grow from strength to strength each year.

- That further work is needed to encourage every school to have an identified Governor who will take a special interest in LAC issues. We are also undertaking to create a database to capture information about the identity of all the nominated LAC governors in Bridgend's 70 schools so that we can ensure that we can reach them with news and advice. The Authority has recently appointed a Disability Index Coordinator to develop a multi agency database. This links with the Disabled Children's strategy and Autistic Spectrum Disorder Strategy. Though in its early stages, it will aid service mapping to consider location of need regarding disability, gender, location, etc.

A copy of the action plan including a progress update is included as an appendix to this document.

#### **4. Effect upon Policy Framework & Procedure Rules.**

None

#### **5. Equality Impact Assessment**

This has been considered but any equality issues are assessed in relation to each individual child and is not applicable.

#### **6. Financial Implications.**

None

#### **7. Recommendation.**

It is recommended that the Committee notes this report on the progress of our actions in respect of the Welsh Audit Office Education of Looked After Children study.

**Hilary Anthony**  
**Corporate Director Children**  
**4<sup>th</sup> October 2010**

**Contact Officer: Vikki Watkins, Service Manager: Safeguarding.**

**Telephone:** 01656 642319  
**E-mail:** vikki.watkins@bridgend.gov.uk

**Postal Address** Children's Directorate  
Safeguarding & Family Support Services  
Sunnyside Offices  
Sunnyside  
Bridgend  
CF31 4AR

## **Background documents**

Corporate Cabinet Committee Report dated 13.7.10 'Welsh Audit Office Study regarding the education of looked after children: Progress Update.'