

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CORPORATE PARENTING CABINET COMMITTEE

17 JANUARY 2012

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR - CHILDREN

INDEPENDENT REVIEWING SERVICE REPORT

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide a report to the Cabinet Committee in line with The Independent Reviewing Officers Guidance Wales (WAG 2006).

2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Objectives / Other Corporate Priorities

- 2.1. This report is connected to all corporate objectives relating to looked after children (LAC), its central objective being to achieve best outcomes for looked after children through high quality care planning. It is related to the Looked After Children (LAC) project objectives and informative in light of the authority's investment in the provision of appropriate placements for looked after children and young people. The authority's work with looked after children is carried out under the Children Act 1989 and related legislation and guidance documents. The Independent Reviewing Officers Guidance Wales (WAG 2006) which was issued under the Children and Adoption Act 2002 is of central significance.

3. Background

- 3.1 The Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) Guidance Wales (WAG 2006) gives IROs the duty to 'monitor' the responsible authority's performance in relation to looked after children and young people. IROs also have a duty to prevent drift and delay for looked after children and young people.
- 3.2 Within the guidance, IROs are expected to improve care planning and decision making, and make an important contribution to the consistency of the responsible authority's approach to care planning. Additionally, the IRO service has what the guidance refers to as 'an authoritative role' in assuring the quality of a responsible authority's case planning. In order to support the continuing development and review of the local strategy for children's services, the manager of the IRO service should provide an annual report to the lead member with executive responsibility for children's service and corporate parenting. The guidance states that this report must identify good practice but must also identify issues for further development, including those where urgent action is needed. The guidance urges the responsible authority to make effective use of reports from its IRO service so that it can be satisfied that its services can achieve optimum outcomes for the children concerned.

4. Current Situation / Proposal:

4.1 This report represents the Independent Reviewing Service report as required by the guidance. During the past year, a data set has been developed with a view to underpinning this report with quantitative data as a basis from which to explore the critical qualitative information. Quantitative data has been gathered under the following fields, and key areas are displayed in the power point presentation at Appendix A that accompanies this report.

- the number of Looked After children at quarter end;
- the number of children in a quarter who became looked after on a planned or emergency basis;
- the legal status of children who became looked after in a quarter;
- analysis of age / gender of the Looked After population;
- LAC population by safeguarding team;
- length of time for which LAC are looked after;
- permanence plan type;
- cease being looked after reason (new data request November 2011;)
- performance of IRO service against key PIs;
- IRO caseload.

4.2 Analysis of the quantitative data leads to two clear conclusions with which Cabinet Members will already be well familiar. Firstly the increasing trend of children becoming looked after: Bridgend's looked after population at the end of June 2010 was 295 and by the end of September 2011 it was 343. Secondly, at this later date, there were 112 looked after young people in the 11-15 year old cohort, information that will be used to inform planning for the future. The data also highlights positive performance in looked after young people having a permanence plan in place at their second review (a key PI where BCBC are regularly achieving 100% result).

4.3 The qualitative report equally requires consideration and is drawn from IRO feedback forms, supervision and team meetings. IROs are satisfied that in Bridgend there are a significant number of examples of sound care planning leading to positive outcomes being achieved for looked after children and young people. IROs have recorded compliments for workers where this is warranted. During October 2011, the IRO report to the Head of Service highlighted that IROs had noticed an improvement in the stability of the workforce and management structure. This is conducive to improving the quality of care planning. It is noticeable to the Independent Reviewing Service that work is under way to influence practitioners to improve practice where it has been identified that this is required.

4.4 Notwithstanding the improvements that have been noted, continuous improvement is required. The Independent Reviewing Service aims to have a greater impact in terms of improving the quality of the experience of being looked after and the outcomes that we assist our looked after young people in achieving. The areas for focus with continuous improvement include the following:

- improving the quality of the Care Plan document making it a needs led, outcome focused and user friendly for young people and their families;
- assisting workers in improving their preparation for a LAC Review;

- involving young people in the review of the LAC review consultation documents;
- strengthening the relationship between assessment and care planning, particularly by increasing the use of the Assessment and Progress Record;
- increasing IRO involvement in Panels that make decisions about the resources for young people;
- continuing to challenge poor practice and praise positive practice;
- contributing to the LAC Achievement awards to celebrate the achievements of BCBC's looked after young people;
- making use of the local resolution process under the Independent Reviewing Officers Guidance Wales (WAG 2006) to prevent drift and delay in cases where this occurs;
- increasing the level of IRO involvement in quality assurance and learning activity within the service.

4.5 It is proposed that the Head of Service commission an analysis of the needs and circumstances of young people who have become looked after during this past year by way of informing and predicting future service provision and to have a more in depth understanding of the reasons for the increasing trend.

4.6 It is further proposed, that close working with the leaving care team be undertaken in order to gather better information about the needs of the current 11-15 year old LAC cohort so that looked after exit strategies can be established, via sound care planning where this is appropriate, and need anticipated where this is evidenced.

5. Effect upon Policy Framework& Procedure Rules

None

6. Equality Impact Assessment

This has been considered but there are no new or changed services/ policy/ functions and it is therefore not applicable.

7. Financial Implications

All work will be carried out within existing budgets.

8. Recommendation

It is recommended that the Committee notes this report and the two proposals in section 4.

Hilary Anthony
Corporate Director Children

Contact Officer: Colin Turner
 Interim Head of Safeguarding and Family Support

Telephone: 01656 642314

E-mail: colin.turner@bridgend.gov.uk

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

Background documents

Appendix A: Independent Reviewing Service Report to Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee