

**BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**  
**CORPORATE PARENTING CABINET COMMITTEE**

**24 OCTOBER 2012**

**REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR CHILDREN**

**CARE AND SOCIAL SERVICES INSPECTORATE WALES'S INSPECTION (CSSIW) REPORT ON THE ARRANGEMENTS FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL.**

**1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 To provide Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee with the above inspection report and the directorate's action plan arising from it.

**2. Connection to Corporate Plan**

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

- 2.2 Corporate Parenting supports the following corporate priorities:

- Children today, adults tomorrow,
- Supporting our disadvantaged communities,
- Creating learning communities;

and is connected to the following community strategy themes:

- Young Voices;
- Healthy Living;
- New Opportunities.

**3. Background**

- 3.1 During April 2012, as required by the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009, an inspection was carried out by CSSIW of "The Arrangements for Looked After Children and Young People in Bridgend County Borough Council". The focus of the inspection was determined by the analysis of evidence provided by the Council for last years Annual Reporting Framework (ACRF) and CSSIW's Chief Inspector's letter with the accompanying performance evaluation.

- 3.2 The inspection, carried out by two inspectors, considered performance indicators for 2010 – 2011, caseload information for the period April 2011 – March 2012, data on supervision, a number of committee reports, protocols and information on looked after children services. Inspectors adopted a methodology that involved reading a range of case files relating to young care leavers, cases relating to children and

young people who had become looked after, and a number of cases relating to children and young people who were being supported by the local authority to live at home under care or a special guardianship orders.

- 3.3 Inspectors carried out a number of interviews with senior officers, the Chairs of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny and Corporate Parenting Committees. Team managers, social workers and senior representatives of statutory and third sector agencies were also interviewed. Inspectors also undertook a group interview with two safeguarding teams; and observed the Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee held on the 6<sup>th</sup> March 2012. In addition, inspectors interviewed a number of service users and their families.
- 3.4 On the 30<sup>th</sup> of July 2012, CSSIW provided the Council with its final report, now published on the CSSIW web site. This report is attached at Appendix 1.
- 3.5 The report provides an overview of the inspectors' conclusions and a summary of their key findings. It highlights both strengths and areas for improvement in terms of our arrangements for Looked after Children and Young People (LAC) in Bridgend.
- 3.6 In response to the areas noted for improvement, an action plan has been written which can be found at Appendix 2.

### **Summary of the inspection report**

- 3.7 The report states that there is good corporate support for children's services in Bridgend and that the Council continues to make the improvements of children's services a priority. It acknowledges the considerable work undertaken to stabilize the workforce and reorganise workloads to improve efficiency and to manage high caseloads of social workers.
- 3.8 Inspectors commented on the pressures for social workers in prioritising work for looked after children and the challenge for staff in protecting time to ensure all looked after children always receive the support they need.
- 3.9 The proactive approach taken to rising numbers of looked after children is commended but inspectors suggest that there needs to be improved communication about the strategies taken to reduce looked after children numbers.
- 3.10 The report highlights that specific information needs to be published for looked after children and their families about their rights and the authorities corporate parenting responsibilities.
- 3.11 Whilst inspectors noted considerable improvement in the timeliness of both initial and core assessments, they noted that the quality of some assessments was inconsistent. That said, assessment and progress

records for looked after children were observed to be of good quality.

- 3.12 The quality of care plans was described as inconsistent with some requiring more evidence that the child had been involved in the planning process. Pathway planning for care leavers was described as good.
- 3.13 Inspectors noted the improvements made in the percentage of LAC cases managed by qualified social workers and the timelines of statutory visits. They also commended social workers for the high level of commitment demonstrated to looked after children and stated that there were examples of good quality direct work being carried out with looked after children, noting however that the recording of such work was inconsistent. Notwithstanding this, inspectors also saw some excellent examples of recording which clearly evidenced the progress of care planning.
- 3.14 The inspectors noted that looked after children were doing well and achieving educationally and that personal education plans were completed for the majority of children. It was noted that the current number of looked after children presents a challenge to the delivery of education support services for all, but they commented that the provision and quality of the service in the cases reviewed was good.
- 3.15 In respect of child protection, inspectors evidenced that the All Wales Child Protection Procedures are being followed in a timely way but acknowledged that the recording of assessment of risk and decision making could be improved. Of significance, however, inspectors stated that there are arrangements in place to ensure that looked after children were being kept safe.
- 3.16 Inspectors saw evidence that families were being supported to parent their children in the community and financial arrangements for looked after children under special guardianship orders were being reviewed. It states that support provided for looked after children to develop independence skills needed to be clearly outlined and agreed with carers.
- 3.17 Inspectors commended the initiatives that the Council has to celebrate the achievements of looked after children. They also acknowledged the good arrangements to work with looked after children who have been engaged with offending behaviour and were of the opinion that care leavers have been well supported to achieve positive outcomes.
- 3.18 In terms of the workforce, inspectors acknowledged the commitment of frontline staff and managers, noting that staff morale is mostly good, newly qualified staff are welcomed with effective support, mentoring and protected caseloads. Improvement in the stability of the workforce since 2010 was also highlighted. Notwithstanding these observations, inspectors concluded that the volume and complexity of the safeguarding cases was stretching the capacity of workers to undertake pro-active work with looked after children and consequently, some staff had not been able to access an appropriate level of training.

- 3.19 Inspectors cited good examples of consulting with service users and carers about what they want from staff.
- 3.20 In terms of the Council's ability to ensure that staff and services meet the standards that have been set for them, inspectors noted the effective performance management framework in place with good availability of data on looked after children. Improved permanency planning for looked after children was also noted with effectively resourced services, acknowledging that further work needed to be completed, backed up with training.
- 3.21 Members will be pleased to hear that inspectors recognised the strong corporate support for looked after children with Members being well informed about the performance of the services being provided. The report also noted the commitment of the senior management team to specific projects concerning looked after children.
- 3.22 Whilst inspectors stated that Members had visited front line teams, they also indicated that some staff reported that they did not have the opportunity to communicate with them individually. It remains unclear what exactly is meant by this since inspectors were unable to elaborate. Senior managers are of the view that Bridgend has an ethos of openness and accessibility but clearly not all staff would have been available to meet members when they have visited.
- 3.23 The report concludes by noting a range of strengths and areas for improvements and details two priorities for improvement specifically for the Corporate Parenting Committee to consider:
- Members should have opportunity to meet with children's services staff individually on a systematic basis;
  - Members should consider how corporate influence could further improve the opportunities for availability to looked after children and young people.
- 3.24 Committee will be pleased to read in the report that, "The Corporate parenting Committee Cabinet had shown excellent commitment to improving the life chance of looked after children which would be enhanced with involvement from all directorates".

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

- 4.1 None

#### **5. Equality Impact Statement**

- 5.1 Not applicable

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

- 6.1 None

## **7. Recommendations**

- 7.1 It is recommended that Committee notes this report and agrees its actions in response to the 'priorities for improvement' that are detailed in paragraph 3.23 of this report.

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### **Background Documents**

Appendix 1 – CSSIW Inspection Report  
Appendix 2 – Inspection Action Plan