

# BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

## REPORT TO CORPORATE PARENTING CABINET COMMITTEE

24 OCTOBER 2012

### REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR - CHILDREN

#### THE LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN PROJECT

##### 1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide information to the Committee on the progress of the Looked After Children Project and details of current trends in relation to looked after children.

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

- 2.1 The Council has key responsibilities for Looked After Children as Corporate Parents and these relate to the following community strategy themes:

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

- 2.2 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, outcome based 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.

##### 3. Background

- 3.1 Bridgend County Borough Council is fully committed to improving the life chances of all vulnerable children, especially those who are Looked After. The responsibility to oversee the discharge of the authority's social services functions and to ensure that the Council discharges its corporate parenting responsibilities in delivering its statutory duties to looked after children rests with the Statutory Director of Social Services. Ensuring clear accountability arrangements to Councillors and for all staff engaged/employed in delivering children's social services functions, both those who are directly accountable to the Director, as well as those in a direct line management relationship, is of crucial importance.

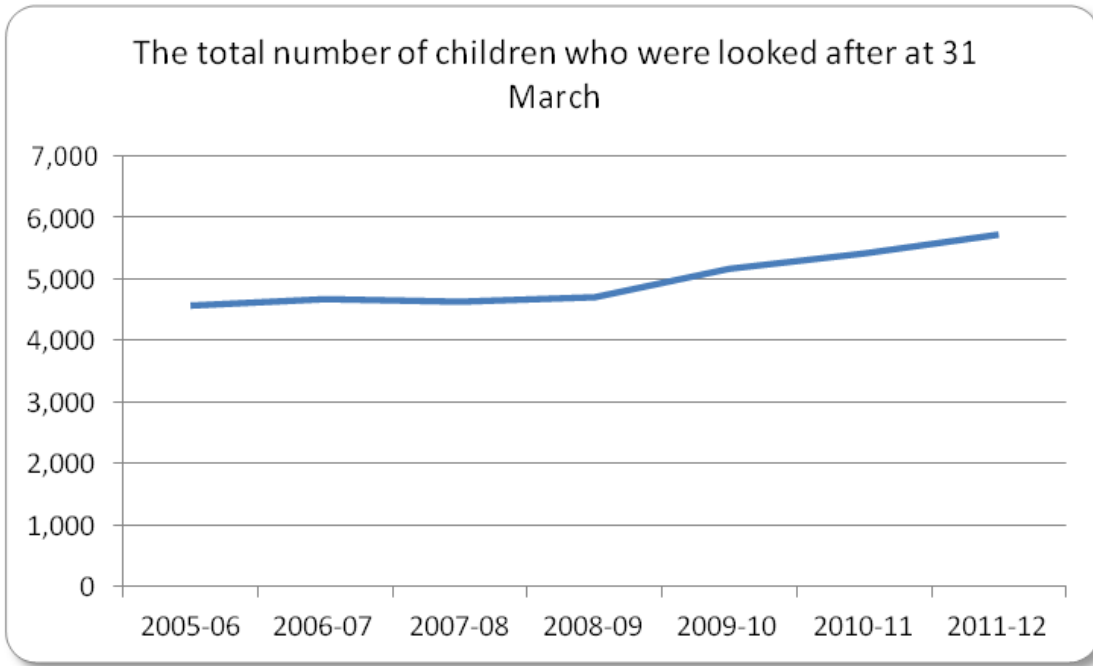
- 3.2 In Bridgend, the Council's constitution has identified Cllr Huw David, Cabinet Member for Children, as the lead member for children and young people. As chair of the Council's Corporate Parenting Committee, which is held to account through the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, he regularly seeks assurance that all agencies are co-operating and fully delivering their corporate parenting responsibilities in delivering the statutory duties placed on them.

- 3.3 Close collaboration between professionals and agencies is essential to improve outcomes for vulnerable children, especially where a child is placed in care and particularly when a child is placed out of authority when the complexity of arrangements and range of agencies involved increases. Whenever a child becomes looked after, our overriding aim is to ensure that decisions are made in the best interest of the child, that placements are made close to home, wherever possible, and in the child's best interest and that services are coordinated between agencies and delivered by the right people.
- 3.4 In Bridgend, as part of the Looked After Children project, we have introduced a range of measures to modernise services and improve outcomes for looked after children and other children in need.
- 3.5 Welsh Government guidance, "*Towards a Stable Life and Brighter Future*" sets out the arrangements and functions that statutory partners must undertake in discharging their duties of co-operation with local authorities in respect of arrangements for placement, health, and education of looked after children and care leavers.
- 3.6 In 2007-2008, the Supporting Vulnerable Children Programme was confirmed as a corporate programme and responded to the Authority's then top risk in the context of the Joint Risk Assessment exercise "Failure to sustain improvements in Children's Services following invocation of the intervention protocol".
- 3.7 Within that programme, there are three elements:
- a) reduction in the numbers of Looked After Children;
  - b) increasing the recruitment of foster carers;
  - c) improve adoption outcomes.
- 3.8 In 2008, to ensure that these remained focused a single project was set up – the Looked After Children Project.
- 3.9 In 2010, the project ceased to be managed under the council's Supporting Vulnerable Children Performance Review Board, however, due to the rising number of LAC and the associated pressures on resources, it was agreed that the project was still required but would be subsumed into Supporting Vulnerable Children 2, which broadened the focus to early intervention, prevention and family support. Oversight is provided by the Head of Service, Safeguarding and Family Support.

#### **4 Current Information relating to Looked After Children**

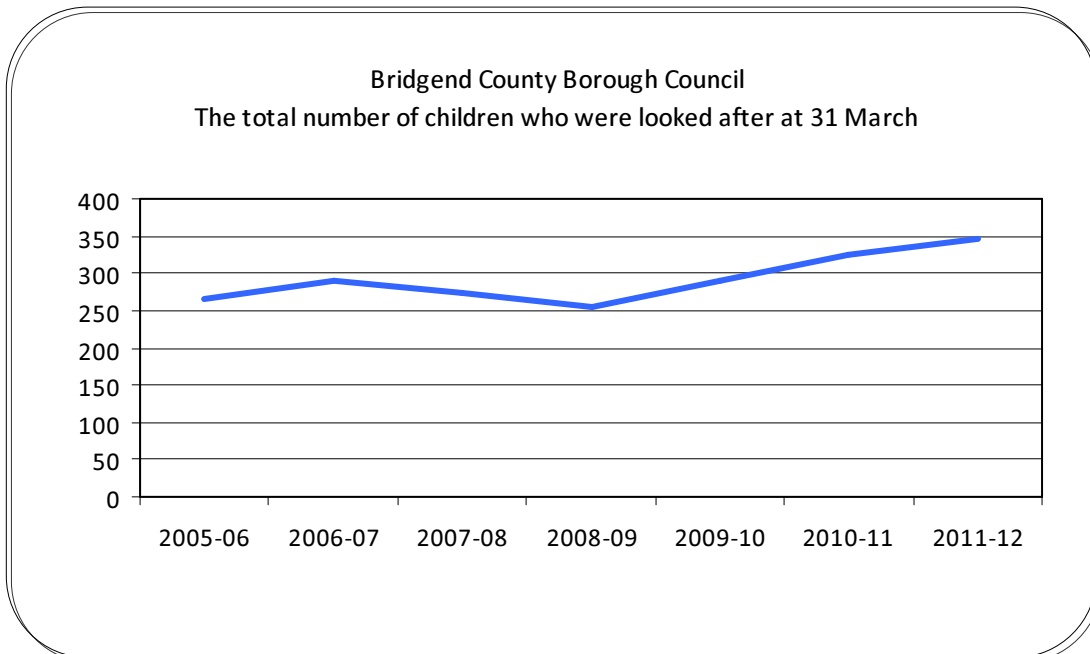
- 4.1 As corporate parents, local authorities are required to ensure the safety and wellbeing of looked after children, and ensure that they are given the same opportunities as their peers. There were over 5,700 children in the care of Welsh local authorities at the end of March 2012. Since 2005, the majority of local authorities in England and Wales have experienced a year on year increase in the number of children who have become looked after. Table 1 below provides detail of the rising numbers of LAC across Wales since 2005/6

Table 1.



4.2 On the 21<sup>st</sup> of September the LAC population in Bridgend was 363. Table 2 on the next page shows the trend of increasing LAC population in Bridgend since 2005/6.

Table 2



#### Looked after Children costs analysis

4.3 Table 3 on the next page shows the breakdown of the costs of LAC Children across all local authorities in Wales. This information is available from the Stats Wales website and shows the total spend for each authority for Looked after children.

Table 3: Comparison of spend on Looked After Children (LAC) across Wales 2009-10 to 2010-11

Year	2009-10	2010-11	2009-10	2010-11	2009-10	2010-11	2009-10	2010-11	2009-10	2010-11	
	Children's homes		Secure accommodation (welfare)		Fostering services		Other children looked after services		Total LAC		% Increase
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	
Isle of Anglesey	1,680	599	0	0	1,213	760	380	2,097	<b>3,273</b>	<b>3,456</b>	5.6%
Gwynedd	2,671	2,525	253	51	3,480	3,610	580	1,116	<b>6,984</b>	<b>7,303</b>	4.6%
Conwy	1,701	1,636	0	0	2,582	2,673	150	133	<b>4,433</b>	<b>4,442</b>	0.2%
Denbighshire	1,722	1,895	0	0	2,712	2,660	272	323	<b>4,706</b>	<b>4,878</b>	3.7%
Flintshire	2,923	4,593	0	0	4,766	3,359	323	464	<b>8,012</b>	<b>8,416</b>	5.0%
Wrexham	3,148	3,320	0	0	2,027	2,048	1,592	1,219	<b>6,767</b>	<b>6,586</b>	-2.7%
Powys	901	675	0	0	4,912	3,874	429	-5	<b>6,242</b>	<b>4,545</b>	-27.2%
Ceredigion	302	312	0	0	1,573	1,739	68	134	<b>1,943</b>	<b>2,185</b>	12.5%
Pembrokeshire	1,066	1,179	0	0	2,929	3,257	184	165	<b>4,179</b>	<b>4,601</b>	10.1%
Carmarthenshire	2,011	2,077	0	0	3,692	4,260	970	1,328	<b>6,673</b>	<b>7,665</b>	14.9%
Swansea	7,650	8,364	0	0	9,816	12,602	0	0	<b>17,466</b>	<b>20,966</b>	20.0%
Neath Port Talbot	3,077	2,948	-1	-45	7,607	9,401	0	0	<b>10,683</b>	<b>12,304</b>	15.2%
<b>Bridgend</b>	<b>2,450</b>	<b>3,163</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>6,301</b>	<b>6,470</b>	<b>1,422</b>	<b>958</b>	<b>10,209</b>	<b>10,632</b>	<b>4.1%</b>
Vale of Glamorgan	1,664	2,217	33	11	3,331	3,871	411	464	<b>5,439</b>	<b>6,563</b>	20.7%
Rhondda Cynon Taf	5,077	5,940	0	0	9,002	10,968	1,816	1,915	<b>15,895</b>	<b>18,823</b>	18.4%
Merthyr Tydfil	162	183	0	0	4,088	4,497	0	102	<b>4,250</b>	<b>4,782</b>	12.5%
Caerphilly	1,962	1,816	104	50	7,629	8,477	76	59	<b>9,771</b>	<b>10,402</b>	6.5%
Blaenau Gwent	703	725	0	0	3,573	3,546	127	473	<b>4,403</b>	<b>4,744</b>	7.7%
Torfaen	2,015	2,424	43	52	1,531	1,971	869	1,299	<b>4,458</b>	<b>5,746</b>	28.9%
Monmouthshire	89	91	0	0	1,817	1,292	257	360	<b>2,163</b>	<b>1,743</b>	-19.4%
Newport	4,253	3,768	0	0	4,682	4,962	542	587	<b>9,476</b>	<b>9,318</b>	-1.7%
Cardiff	6,137	6,624	294	412	12,186	12,183	438	377	<b>19,055</b>	<b>19,596</b>	2.8%
<b>Total Unitary Authorities</b>	<b>53,364</b>	<b>57,073</b>	<b>762</b>	<b>574</b>	<b>101,449</b>	<b>108,480</b>	<b>10,905</b>	<b>13,569</b>	<b>166,481</b>	<b>179,696</b>	<b>7.9%</b>

[001985] Social services revenue expenditure subjective analysis, by authority (£ thousand) (Welsh UAs, service)

- 4.4 The total spend on LAC across the whole of Wales has increased by 7.9% from 2009/10 to 2010/11 and continues to rise. Bridgend has also had an increase with the total spend on LAC increasing by 4.1% for the same period.
- 4.5 This increase in spend is reflected in the increasing LAC numbers which are currently rising year on year. Table 4 shows the total LAC placement figures for each authority across Wales. The table shows that whilst LAC figures have risen overall across Wales over the last 2 years, in Bridgend they have risen above the Wales average – by 13.7% in 2010 and 12.1% in 2011, rising from 255 to 325 and as previously stated, currently 363. However, a number of other authorities, especially those with significant socio-economic disadvantage, have had similar large increases over the two year period.

Table 4: Total number of Looked After Children (LAC) across Wales 2009 to 2011

Year	2009	2010	% increase	2011	% increase
Isle of Anglesey	70	75	7.1%	80	6.7%
Gwynedd	160	175	9.4%	175	0.0%
Conwy	160	170	6.3%	165	-2.9%
Denbighshire	140	165	17.9%	175	6.1%
Flintshire	150	160	6.7%	160	0.0%
Wrexham	130	145	11.5%	160	10.3%
Powys	140	145	3.6%	170	17.2%
Ceredigion	70	75	7.1%	80	6.7%
Pembrokeshire	140	145	3.6%	155	6.9%
Carmarthenshire	225	245	8.9%	260	6.1%
Swansea	430	560	30.2%	580	3.6%
Neath Port Talbot	290	390	34.5%	410	5.1%
<b>Bridgend</b>	<b>255</b>	<b>290</b>	<b>13.7%</b>	<b>325</b>	<b>12.1%</b>
Vale of Glamorgan	175	185	5.7%	200	8.1%
Cardiff	520	530	1.9%	520	-1.9%
Rhondda Cynon Taf	440	480	9.1%	550	14.6%
Merthyr Tydfil	160	165	3.1%	165	0.0%
Caerphilly	315	335	6.3%	300	-10.4%
Blaenau Gwent	125	120	-4.0%	130	8.3%
Torfaen	205	235	14.6%	290	23.4%
Monmouthshire	110	85	-22.7%	80	-5.9%
Newport	290	295	1.7%	285	-3.4%
<b>Wales</b>	<b>4705</b>	<b>5160</b>	<b>9.7%</b>	<b>5415</b>	<b>4.9%</b>

Table 5 below illustrates the breakdown of Bridgend's LAC population by age at the 21<sup>st</sup> of September 2012;

**Table 5 – LAC population by age**

Age group	Total
0 to 4	93
5 to 10	102
11 to 15	128
16+	40
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>363</b>

4.6 In Bridgend, as part of the Looked After Project, we have developed a data set with the quantitative data as a basis from where to explore the critical qualitative information. Quantitative data has been gathered under the following fields, and key areas:

- 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
- performance of IRO service against key PIs;
- IRO Caseload.

4.7 Analysis of the quantitative data leads to two clear conclusions with which Members will already be well familiar. Firstly, the increasing trend of children becoming looked after; in Bridgend. (The number of LAC rose from 286 on the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010 to 326 in 2011. (14% increase) and to 346 on the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2012, a (5% increase). On the 21<sup>st</sup> September 2012, Bridgend's LAC had again risen to 363. Secondly, Members will be familiar with the trend of increasing numbers of LAC in the 11 – 15 old cohort. On the of 21<sup>st</sup> September 2012, there were 128 looked after young people in the 11-15 year old cohort, 40 looked after young people age 16 plus, information that will be used to inform planning for the future.

4.8 Table 6 below illustrates the placement type of the 363 children looked after on the 21st September 2012.

**Table 6 - LAC placement type at 21st September 2012**

<b>Placement Type</b>	<b>Total</b>
Placed for adoption	9
Foster Placement With A Relative Or Friend	72
LA Foster Carer	138
Independent Foster Care Agency	78
In house Residential Care	7
Out of Authority Residential Care	14
Placed With Own Parents Or Person With Parental Responsibility	37
Independent living , e.g. in flat, lodgings, bedsit, B&B or with friends, with or without formal support	7
Missing From Placement:-Whereabouts Known	1
Other Placements	1
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>363</b>

## 5. In house residential care placements

5.1 As the table above states, seven young people are currently placed within BCBC's own residential care provision, three at Sunnybank and four at Newbridge House. Whilst only one of these young people has been

returned from an out of county residential care home, all the others have been admitted since the Council redesigned its residential care provision. Without doubt, had the residential redesign not taken place, some of these children may have had to be placed in out of authority residential care placements as a result of their complex and challenging needs.

## **6. Out of authority placements**

- 6.1 As of the 21<sup>st</sup> September 2012, 14 looked after children were placed in out of authority residential care establishments. In addition, a further 4 non-LAC children were placed in residential schools for continuous periods exceeding the school term year. (i.e. for periods longer than 3 school terms in one year). These are children with severe learning disabilities and complex health needs.

## **7. The process for approval and review of looked after children placements**

- 7.1 In Bridgend, as part of the Looked After Children Project, we have well established robust arrangements and processes for considering requests made by social workers to accommodate children, either in foster care, our own residential provision or out of authority placements. All our processes have been reviewed as part of the looked after children project.

- 7.2 Our recently renamed “Accommodation and Permanence Panel” (APP) has co-ordinated access to accommodation for children within Bridgend and ensures that all looked after children have a plan for permanence.

- 7.3 The APP is a multi-agency mechanism for the scrutiny of assessment and care planning for children and young people who need to be accommodated. It works in conjunction with the “Out of Authority Panel” whose role is to authorise and monitor the provision of out of authority placements. When necessary, the accommodation and permanence panel refers cases to the out of authority panel when it has been assessed that an out of county placement is likely to be the most appropriate plan to meet a child’s needs.

- 7.4 In line with standards set out by the Welsh Government in “Towards a Stable Life and Brighter Future”, one of the primary roles of the accommodation and permanency panel is to ensure that:

*‘All placements are grounded in robust assessment and effective care planning. A child should only be accommodated in exceptional circumstances and following completion of a core assessment, using the domains of the Assessment Framework and the development of a care plan’.*

- 7.5 The AAP panel provides a framework for a co-ordinated multi disciplinary approach to placing children in care that is informed by sound assessment. It ensures that all appropriate preventative community based options to support the family have been thoroughly explored prior to a decision being made to accommodate a child. Of prime consideration, the panel is tasked with exploring the provision of

all necessary services and intervention to retain children within or in contact with their own families

- 7.6 The panel ensures that outcome focused care planning is in place and, if necessary, will recall cases prior to the second LAC Review to ensure that permanence planning is being progressed. In all cases, the plan will consider the potential return and rehabilitation of children to their own families where it is safe and in keeping with their best interests to do so.
- 7.7 The panel takes a proactive stance to ensure that there is no drift in children being appropriately placed. It promotes a shared responsibility between Safeguarding and Family Support, Health and Education professionals who work with children and young people to meet their needs by acknowledging the skills and expertise of partner agencies and utilising these skills appropriately to meet the additional support needs.
- 7.8 The panel seeks to reduce the number of emergency placements so that, where appropriate, children who need to be looked after by the local authority are accommodated in a planned and supportive way. When a child has to be accommodated in an emergency, agreement for the placement has to be given by a group manager within safeguarding and family support and the case must be considered at the next panel. It is inevitable that the local authority will always have children that need to become looked after in emergency situations, for example, due to family breakdown, child protection issues or when they have become subject to police protection. Between April 2011 and April 2012, 48 children were accommodated in an emergency. All were placed within foster care, with either in-house carers or independent fostering agencies (IFA).
- 7.9 The panel is tasked with monitoring placements and works in cooperation with the independent reviewing service to prevent drift and promote permanence for children.
- 7.10 The panel ensures that looked after children who are accommodated have due consideration given to their health and educational needs and ensures that all agencies are aware of their placements.
- 7.11 The panel meets weekly and is attended by the following
- Principal Officer Accommodation and Regulated Services (Chair)
  - LAC Education Co-ordinator
  - LAC Clinical Nurse Specialist
  - Commissioning and Placement Officer
  - IRO Manager
  - Service Manager, Safeguarding Teams, or their representative
  - Safeguarding Team Manager on a rota basis for minimum of 3 months
  - Adoption Team Manager
  - Team Manager, Family Support Team
  - Representative from Connecting Families Service



- 7.12 In order to progress with business, quoracy has been determined as being: one representative from Safeguarding and Family Support plus one other agency. Referrals to the panel are accompanied by an up to date core assessment and care plan.
- 7.13 In all cases, the social worker and/or team manager attend panel meetings. Cases being presented by social workers who are in their first year of practice are always accompanied by the team manager. Social workers who are new to the authority are encouraged to observe Panel as part of their induction and attend with their team manager on the first occasion that they present a case. Independent reviewing officers can also attend to observe or contribute to decision making.
- 7.14 The minutes of panel meetings always reflect the views of those present, including differences of opinion. Where there is disagreement about whether a child should become looked after or the type of placement that is required and these differences cannot be resolved at the meeting, the matter is referred to the Head of Safeguarding and Family Support for final decision. If the panel decide that a child should be placed in an out of authority placement, the child case is referred to the Council's out of authority panel.

## **8. The role and function of Bridgend's Out of Authority Panel (OAP)**

- 8.1 The overriding aim of this panel is to ensure that placement decisions are made in the best interests of children, that placements are made close to home, wherever possible, and that services are co-ordinated between agencies and delivered by right people. The panel recognises that close collaboration between professionals and agencies is essential to improve outcomes for vulnerable children, particularly where a child is placed out of area and the complexity of arrangements and range of agencies increase.
- 8.2 Section 25 of the Children Act 2004 imposes a general duty on Children's Services Authorities (which includes Local Education Authorities) to promote co-operation between the authorities and their statutory partners to improve the well-being of Children in Wales.
- 8.3 '*Towards a Stable Life and Brighter Future*' sets out the arrangements and functions that statutory partners must undertake to discharge their duties of co-operation with local authorities in respect of arrangements for placements, health and education of looked after children and care leavers. It is relevant to those working in statutory, voluntary and independent sectors.
- 8.4 All members of the OAP, who meet at least on a monthly basis, recognise the importance for children to remain within their own area whenever this is possible and appropriate. It is recognised, however, that there will be occasions when a placement outside of Bridgend will be in the child's best interest. It is accepted that children cared for in out-of-authority placements are more vulnerable to placement breakdown and interrupted schooling. Consequently, it is important

that a corporate approach is maintained to health and educational provision for such children once they are placed outside of Bridgend.

- 8.5 Regulation 5(2)(a) of the Placement of Children (Wales) Regulations 2007 places a duty on Bridgend, where it considers placing a child outside of the authority, to refer the child's case to an out of authority panel before making a placement or as soon as practically possible after placement. The reasons for not referring the child's case to the panel prior to placement must be recorded in writing and endorsed by a senior officer of the local authority and a copy placed on the child's file. Following deliberations about the appropriateness of the placement, the panel has to agree the suitability of the placement or make arrangements for the child to reside in a more suitable alternative placement.
- 8.6 Regulation 5(4) stipulates that the responsible authority must not place a child outside the area in which the child normally lives unless it is satisfied that there is no alternative placement within the area that meets the child's needs or that a placement outside the area is more consistent with the child's welfare than any available placement within that area.
- 8.7 In Bridgend, it has been agreed by all agencies that the primary functions of the out of authority panel are to consider all placements made (within 28 days) or proposed placements of children and young people outside of Bridgend County Borough to;
- i) determine that there is no placement in the area capable of meeting the child's needs;
  - ii) determine that the out of authority placement is more consistent with the child's welfare;
  - iii) seek reassurance that the identified holistic social care needs of the child can be met by the proposed provider, paying particular regard to how any special educational or health needs, especially mental health needs can be met in conjunction with the placement;
  - iv) seek reassurance that appropriate arrangements have been made for contact with family members, for time to be spent with friends, for maintenance of sporting, social and leisure pursuits and that consideration has been given to the child's racial, cultural, religious and language needs;
  - v) set timescales for required actions and agree dates for cases to return to panel to review progress;
- 8.8 The above applies to all placements made outside of Bridgend and includes placements made in:
- another local authority
  - a kinship foster placement
  - a resolutions foster placement

- a residential care placement

8.9 In addition to the above, the panel also seeks to agree funding arrangements for placements.

8.10 The composition of the OAP panel will depend on the particular circumstances of each case but the expectation is that there will always be core membership. This includes senior officers of Bridgend's safeguarding and family support service, education department and the local health board who have responsibility for commissioning services and are budget holders. Other members include professionals and other service agencies that will need to contribute to the child's care plan and the decision to place (or not) a child out of the area. In Bridgend, the core membership of the panel is as follows;

Head of Safeguarding and Family Support (Chair)  
Head of Learning  
Chief Educational Psychologist  
Child Psychologist  
Designated Nurse for LAC  
LAC Education Coordinator  
Group Manager, Adult Services (Responsible for transition planning)  
Service Manager (Safeguarding and Family Support)  
Placement Co-ordinator (Safeguarding and Family Support)  
IRO Manager

8.11 Decisions about plans for children are never deferred because a member of the panel is unavailable to commit his/her organisation to an agreed plan. In these situations, appropriate delegation of authority must be in place. Local health boards must co-operate with the arrangements and ensure that they provide both appropriate representation and professional advice.

8.12 During the panel meeting, when considering the potential placement of a child out of authority, all panel members give due consideration to the following:

- the views of the child (where he/she is of sufficient understanding) and the child's parents (where this is consistent with the child's welfare);
- all available plans including the Care Plan, the Health Plan, the Personal Educational Plan and all relevant assessments including the core assessment, health assessment and any statement of special educational needs;
- detailed information about the proposed placement.

8.13 In the event of statutory agencies not being able to agree arrangements, the case can be referred to the Chief Executives of BCBC and ABMU for resolution.

8.14 All panel meetings will be minuted and circulated within ten working days of the meeting. Under regulation 5(5), any decision to place a

child outside of BCBC must, with reasons, be recorded in writing and endorsed by a senior officer of BCBC. This will normally be the Head of Service or in exceptional circumstance, a deputy acting with his/her authority.

## **9. Aims of the Looked After Children Project**

9.1 The aim of the project is to reduce the numbers of Looked After Children, to be achieved through various activities and work streams.

- A. A revision of the Threshold to Care Panel (now known as the Accommodation and Permanence Panel. (APP) will be undertaken to ensure that:
- there are robust arrangements in place when making decisions to accommodate a child and ensure that appropriate care planning is in place;
  - we can reduce the number of emergency placements so that where appropriate, children are brought into care in a planned, supported way;
  - children/young people who are in an out of authority placement are monitored and reviewed to ensure that the placements remain appropriate.
- B. Permanency planning meetings are convened to ensure that permanency plans are appropriately identified in a timely manner;
- C. The project team will work with the quality assurance project to ensure that auditing of cases will be robust, arrangements are in place to effectively meet the child/young person's assessed needs and, if required, consider other arrangements that should be made.
- D. When a rehabilitation home is being considered we ensure that clear, outcome focused care plans are in place which will be regularly reviewed and monitored within supervision and the LAC review process.
- E. Alternative legal orders to care orders are proactively considered, such as Special Guardianship Orders and Residence Orders and care order discharges.
- F. Family and friends are properly explored and assessed where necessary as potential carers for children who are unable to remain in their parents care.

9.2 The desired outcomes of the LAC project include evidence that:

- Looked after children are thriving and are in stable and supportive environments;
- Looked after children are able to access and take up the same opportunities as other children and young people;
- the rate of looked after children being discharged is increased through robust permanency planning which enables children to be rehabilitated back to the care of their parents, care orders being

discharged and adoption, Special Guardianship and Residence Orders are used appropriately to meets the needs of the child;

- Looked after children admissions are appropriate and appropriately planned;
- the number of children placed with Independent Foster Agencies is reduced;
- out of authority residential placements have outcome focused contract arrangements and these are monitored and reviewed to ensure that the placement is meeting the child's needs and represents best value to the authority.

**Targets set include**

9.3 In response to the desired outcome of the LAC project, a number of targets were set which included:

- a reduction of the number of LAC children in out of county residential homes to a total of 8 by the end of March 2012;
- reduction in the number of LAC placed in Independent Foster Agency (IFA) placements from 89 to 67;
- 10 additional foster carers are approved by the local authority by the end of March 2012;
- sustain adoption outcomes, with 13 adoption orders per year, 13 children being placed for adoption and 13 prospective adopters approved by the end of March 2012. These figures are based on the national average compared to the current LAC population of Bridgend.

9.4 The adoption figures also took into account the increasing number of children who are being referred for twin tracking. (this is a process where there are two options for permanence, one being the potential of the child being rehabilitated home, but in the event that this is not feasible, adoption will be the other.) In these cases, the adoption process begins alongside activity to establish whether the child can return home with parents or to friends and family. A revised set of realistic targets are currently being set for this year to reflect the increase in looked after children in Bridgend.

9.5 The table below indicates how twin-tracking has increased since 2008.

	2007/8	2008/9	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Number of children referred to adoption for twin tracking	25	36	54	42	46

9.6 The previous targets referred to in paragraph 9.3 above have been revised for this financial year. New targets are as follows;

- a reduction of the number of LAC children in out of county residential homes to a total of 10 by the end of March 2013;
- a reduction in the number of LAC placed in Independent Foster Agency (IFA) placements from 78 to 65;
- 10 additional foster carers are approved by the local authority by the end of March 2013;
- Children placed for adoption – 14
- Children in placements to be adopted – 14
- Adopters approved – 16

## **Identified Risks**

9.6 Risks that could affect the success of the project have been identified as:

- plans for revocation of care orders or rehabilitation home may have to be halted and reassessed due to changes in the circumstances of the children and their families which result in them remaining a LAC for longer;
- legitimate surges in admissions may impact on the net decrease in looked after numbers, for example, the admission of a large sibling group can skew figures significantly and unexpectedly;
- inability to give high priority to discharge work through the failure to retain staff and managers and the impact of protected case loads for newly qualified social workers commencing in the authority;
- loss of potential links to adopters due to the time taken to complete the adoption processes;
- currently the existing teams have higher priorities, therefore the work needed to identify and complete all of the processes involved in the various discharges of the LAC is delayed;
- high demand on Legal Services which leads to the revocation of care order work having a lower priority than other, more urgent work;
- reduced rate of recruitment of local foster carers.

## **Progress update**

9.7 A principal officer for accommodation and regulated services has been in post to manage the project and ensure that all related project documents are regularly reviewed and updated and work streams progressed to ensure that the aims of the project are achieved. The role and function of the former “Threshold of Care Panel” has been reviewed and renamed the “Accommodation and Permanency Panel” as detailed in section 7 above.

9.8 Training has been refreshed for social workers to ensure outcome focused care planning is promoted.

9.9 All LAC cases have been reviewed to establish those which can be considered for alternative Care Orders. A spreadsheet has been developed that provides key data and the ability to track progress of children progressing through court proceedings or permanency planning.

- 9.10 An additional fulltime social worker has been appointed to specifically pursue plans for children to cease to be LAC. Adoption targets have been met and exceeded with new targets set for this year.
- 9.11 Foster carer marketing and recruitment is ongoing, though targets are still to be achieved.
- 9.12 The review of in-house residential child care services has been undertaken leading to the redesign of residential care provision.

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

- 10.1 None

## **11. Equality Impact Assessment**

- 11.1 This has been considered but it is felt that as this is an update on the progress of the project and not a report about policy or decision making and each child's needs are assessed on an individual basis, it is not applicable.

## **12. Financial Implications**

- 12.1 The rising numbers of looked after children continues to place further pressure on the already stretched budget of the Safeguarding and Family Support Service. As at 30 September it is projected that the overspend on Looked After Children will be £991k, despite the budget have been increased over recent years as a result of increased pressures in this area. An earmarked fund has been set aside of £700k but this is insufficient to meet the current budget pressures. These pressures have been identified in the current Medium Term Financial Strategy planning process and work is underway to seek a realignment of the base budget to meet the ongoing pressures in this area.

## **13. Recommendation**

- 13.1 It is recommended that the Committee notes the progress of the LAC project and the related information contained within this report.

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**Background documents**

None