

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING CABINET COMMITTEE
HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOM 2/3, CIVIC OFFICES, ANGEL STREET, BRIDGEND, ON
MONDAY, 28 OCTOBER 2013 AT 10.00AM

Present:

Councillor H J David - Chairperson

Councillor L C Morgan - Cabinet Member - Wellbeing
Councillor P J White - Cabinet Member - Communities

Invitees:

Councillor N C Clarke
Councillor E Dodd
Councillor H J Townsend
Councillor D B F White

Officers:

M Shepherd - Interim Corporate Director - Communities
S Kingsbury - Head of Human Resources
C Turner - Head of Safeguarding and Family Support
L Wilkinson - Principal Officer - Integrated Family Support Service
N Silcox - Team Manager - Children
K Williams - Team Manager - Adoption Team
J Monks - Democratic Services Officer - Committees

44 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from the following Members/Officers for the reasons given:

Councillor M E J Nott OBE - Other Council business
Councillor D Sage - Unwell
Councillor M Gregory - Holiday
Councillor R D Jenkins - Unwell

Interim Corporate Director - Children - Other Council Business
Head of Regeneration and Development - Other Council Business

The Chairperson informed the Committee that the Deputy Leader was making good progress in his recovery.

45 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor D B F White declared a personal interest under Item 4 (a) Integrated Family Support Service (Western Bay), as he is employed in the Social Services Department at Swansea Council and has referred a family to the IFSS.

46 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED: That the minutes of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee held on the 31st July 2013, were approved as a true and accurate record.

47 INTEGRATED FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICE (WESTERN BAY)

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support introduced a report to provide the Committee with an update on the progress made in establishing an Integrated Family Support Service (IFSS) across the Western Bay region, a Welsh Government (WG) programme designed to focus on families with complex needs, particularly those connected with substance misuse and associated social problems.

The IFSS Team delivers a holistic approach to family focused services, which enables parents to achieve their own behavioural changes and improve their parenting capacity. Bridgend County Borough Council, together with Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council submitted a joint bid to the Welsh Government and on a third attempt a year ago were awarded substantial funds to set up a regional IFSS.

The Principal Officer - Integrated Family Support Service provided Members with a presentation on the Western Bay IFSS, which was formed with Neath Port Talbot and Swansea Councils. The three local authorities had agreed to collaborate on a number of regional initiatives, including the establishment of an IFSS, due to the high number of looked after population, as well as high numbers of children's names being on the Child Protection Register.

She explained that IFSS, which operates under the Children and Families (Wales) Measures 2010, had fully prescribed statutory responsibility, placing greater accountability across children and adult services, and enhances joint working between local government and health to support the family as a unit, which requires professional and organisational challenge. She described how the therapy used to support those families with complex needs involved motivational interviewing, social work and health interventions, based on findings in the UK and America which demonstrated that support for families with the most complex problems needed to be intensive and multifaceted. The IFSS is a specialised multi-agency and multi-disciplinary service, consisting of professionals with skills and experience in working directly with children in need, their parents and adults with complex health and social care needs, which includes social workers and health visitors.

The Team operates the following referral criteria:

- Parental substance misuse;
- Families with children living at home who are in crisis at the point of referral, with a risk of the children being placed on the Child Protection Register and/or being taken into care;
- Where there is a reunification plan that IFSS may contribute to;
- Expectant parent(s) where there is identified substance misuse.

She explained that families would have to consent to a referral being made, and there must be an allocated Children's Services Social Worker who would continue to have case responsibility during the IFSS intervention.

She informed Members that in the eight months since the service became live, there had been 100 consultations as in the main, Bridgend had the lowest number of consultations across the three authorities. At a recent review, it was agreed to hold consultation surgeries each Wednesday in Bridgend, Neath and Swansea, with available advice outside of those surgeries.

She explained that all referrals are allocated as soon as they are received by the service, and throughout the intervention phase, families could withdraw from the service at any

point, for example if a referral proved to be inappropriate such as a mental health issue, or if too many services at one time may cause confusion under such circumstances, due to the intervention process being so intense. In order to determine a family's ability to engage with intervention, an initial engagement is carried out between an IFSS worker and the family; the next stage involved the intensive phase which would take between four to six weeks to complete; at the end of that stage, the family then take part in the maintenance phase plan. She advised that an IFSS worker could initially spend up to six days a week with a family when necessary, and during the programme, regular updates are carried out with the safeguarding teams. The whole process from start to finish would take approximately one year, after which booster sessions are held with the families. The aim of the programme was to encourage those families with acute needs to identify for themselves where they would like to be, and what plan would best work for them. As well as reviewing consultation surgeries, the Team are based alongside social workers who receive referrals on a weekly basis.

She advised that as yet none of the families had completed a whole year as the service had only become operational in February. However, one family intervention had already seen positive outcomes, with the parents' relationship having improved, resulting in discussions around the couple's five children's names being taken off the Child Protection Register. She stressed that there remained unfinished work to do with that particular family and their progress would be monitored.

Training had been carried out amongst the wider workforce with staff undergoing two sessions, each of them working with parents who were substance dependant. As well as the four students enrolled on the programme, they were also considering taking on a nursing student and a health visitor student.

In response to a question from Members, the Head of Safeguarding and Family Support explained that motivational intervention originated in the United States and had already been piloted in various local authorities throughout the UK. The best support staff are identified and individual plans for each family are regularly reviewed to establish whether goals were being achieved. Evidence had shown that step changes could be seen relatively quickly using this form of intervention.

One Member asked whether the referrals had proved to be in line with what was expected.

The Principal Officer - IFSS advised that the Welsh Government had given every IFSS a target of 100 families, which Bridgend would achieve, however the number of referrals received so far were less than expected.

RESOLVED: That the Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee noted the progress made in the establishment of the regional IFSS.

48 DELEGATION OF AUTHORITY TO FOSTER CARERS AND RESIDENTIAL CHILD CARE STAFF

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support introduced a report on the proposed Delegated Authority policy, attached at Appendix 1. The policy related to foster carers and residential child care staff invested with the responsibility of looking after those children who were under the care of the Authority. The Welsh Government produced a paper for fostering agencies in 2011, attached at Appendix 2 to the report, which had informed the development of the Authority's draft policy.

He reported that on a number of occasions, young people who in long term foster care had either made representations in the form of complaints to himself, or to a corporate parent,

as they believed that the Authority had over interfered in the way they led their lives. He provided an example where teenagers in foster care were frustrated by the fact that they were required to obtain the permission of their social worker if they wanted a sleep-over with a friend. They also needed a consent form signed by the social worker for routine medical examinations and treatments, which the youngsters believed was oppressive. Foster carers had also indicated that they were not being given the day to day responsibility, as both they and residential staff did not have the authority to make those decisions for looked after children. As a result, the Foster Team had rightly believed that the existing policies needed updating with regard to Foster Carers' delegated responsibilities.

In order to address those issues, it was proposed that formal discussion and agreement regarding the delegation of authority should be part of the care planning process. She advised that it was important to ensure a reasonable and appropriate level of responsibility in each aspect and at the same time not to lose sight of the fact that there may be specific issues. The looked after children reviews would be the forum to discuss these issues with children/young people, parents and foster carers/residential staff to understand and agree what decisions they could be responsible for. In effect the Authority would become the facilitator; however there would need to be a clear agreement in place, with any disagreements being recorded, together with the reasons why, in order to ensure a balanced judgement was effected. She informed Members that foster carers had already been consulted on the proposal and had provided their feed-back.

One Member asked whether medical consent would be recognised by medical professionals under the delegated authority.

The Team Manager - Children explained that in terms of looked after children documents, the parents would sign to allow for emergency medical treatment. She advised that health professionals would accept it for routine treatments, but whether it would work in practice would not be known until it had been tried and tested. She would be consulting with the medical advisor in Bridgend, as the overall aim was to make everything as clear as possible.

RESOLVED: That the Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee adopted the Authority's Delegated Authority Policy document.

49 DEVELOPMENT OF A NATIONAL ADOPTION SERVICE

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support introduced a report to update Members on the current plans to establish a National Adoption Service for Wales, supported by Regional Adoption collaborates.

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support reported that the creation of a National Adoption Service is one of the Welsh Government's key policies, and since this report was written, the Welsh Government had taken the decision to allow Ministers to prescribe arrangements by local authorities. He explained that the intention was to introduce a step change to improve the throughput of children receiving permanency plans within a timelier manner. He advised that despite the fact that the national media had documented a huge shortage of adopters, with 17 children to every one adopter, Bridgend had already achieved its target for this year and by the end of the year would be in excess of some 30 children who had been either placed or were in the process of being placed for adoption. He explained that within the establishment of a National Adoption Team the structure would be a national government model, with an overarching senior and political officer representation who would set standards and desired outcomes with measures in place. It was also recognised that in the delivery of the adoption service, based on the original footprints,

Bridgend would be required to collaborate within the Western Bay partnership. In addition, it had also been recognised that there would still be some regard towards local adoption, as decisions to place children for adoption would be made by Bridgend's Head of Safeguarding and Family Support, in his role of "Agency Decision Member". The matching of children with approved adopters would also be made locally. A group of senior officers from across the three authorities had been working on the formulation of the Adoption Service over the past year. However, there was an outstanding fundamental issue as to which local authority would host the service and a collective decision would be made within the next three weeks.

There were some concerns regarding the transfer arrangement for staff across the three authorities as a result of collaboration, and it is therefore being proposed that staff would remain employed by their own local authority, with some regional posts.

The Adoption Team Manager advised that compared to the two neighbouring local authorities, Bridgend had the smallest Adoption Service. The Looked After Children (LAC) population was higher per head of population and yet performance was comparable if not better in some areas. She explained that figures varied as to the shortage of approved adopters nationally, and Bridgend was actively involved in the launch of the campaign "Adopt Wales", published on the BCBC website. This had resulted in a small increase in the number of enquiries this year from people who were considering adopting.

She reported that approximately 4% of children in Wales were adopted each year and the number of adopters had increased over the last three years, from 8 to 22. She informed Members that 17 children had been placed for adoption two years ago; 23 were adopted last year, and the service was on target for 30 children to be adopted this year. She commented that this was achieved without additional resources, but by rearranging the service. She concluded by saying that teams were upbeat with a "can do" attitude, their ethos being that it was all about the best outcome for those children. She added that the service was undergoing inspection this week.

In response to a question from Members, she advised that the ratio of 17 children to every one adopter across Wales was marked by those placed on the National Adoption Register (NAR). However, the Team's experience over the last seven years had been that the NAR was not always effective, and this had resulted in Wales establishing its own register, as adopters in Wales were matched in a matter of weeks of being approved. She explained that five years ago there would be two or three adopters per child, now the Team had the ability to phone around 150 adoption agencies in Wales to find links. The Team in Bridgend had built up some positive networking with agencies over the years and had established a good reputation resulting in those agencies preferring to do business with this Authority.

One Member asked what the timescale was for an adoption to be completed.

The Adoption Team Manager advised that there were a number of procedures which impacted on timescales. The Family Justice Review 2011 had considered the Court proceedings and this had led to the adoption process being reduced to 26 weeks, which had a huge impact on the service. Out of the first 14 children placed for adoption this year 11 were under the age of two, and contrary to media reports, the Team were finding it harder to place babies. She informed Members that the Team tried to approve adopters from outside the County Borough, which would result in more work for social workers who would be required to travel further afield. Children were placed on average within 4 - 18 months; two children were placed within 4 weeks, two within 18 months.

One Member asked whether the adoption staff employed by this Authority would be retained.

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support advised that some of the Adoption Team, including the adoption social workers would still be employed by the Authority, but would undergo some restructure. The Adoption Team Manager informed Members that the transfer of staff had been raised with the Welsh Government, as a risk of losing expert staff, but it had not yet been discussed at national level.

One Member asked why adopters were reluctant to adopt babies.

The Adoption Team Manager explained that there were various reasons, e.g. many of the adopters had established careers and usually preferred to adopt an older child. It was also generally known that very young children often came from parents with alcohol or drug abuse problems, and the underlying risk factors, such as learning difficulties and medical issues, did not always emerge in the child until they were older. She informed Members that anyone, irrelevant of age or marital status, could apply to adopt.

RESOLVED: That the Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee:

- (1) Noted the report.
- (2) Endorsed the proposals for achieving a National Adoption Service in Wales as detailed in the report of the Association of Directors of Social Services (ADSS) Cymru.

50 DEVELOPMENT OF THE PERMANENCE SERVICE WITH BRIDGEND'S ADOPTION TEAM

Councillor Morgan chaired the meeting for this item as Councillor David was called away.

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support introduced a report to raise awareness of the development of the Permanence Service which is to be embedded within the current Adoption Team.

Bridgend Adoption Service is well established and provides for a wide range of service users from children placed for adoption, to adults who were adopted as children and seeking to be re-united with their birth families. The provision is proactive, responding to local and national trends, increasing the number of children from care being adopted, as well as the number of approved adopters.

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support reported that the number of children being looked after as a result of abuse and/or neglect continued to escalate and the Authority was in the process of refreshing strategy, which would involve buying from other agencies to reduce the number of Looked After Children (LAC). He explained that one initiative was to secure a permanent plan for each LAC within weeks of them coming into the care system, as it was recognised that adoption was not always the permanent option for some children.

He informed the Committee that there had been a significant increase in the number of children under the age of two who were entering the care system, as well as an increase in the number of 14 to 15 year olds. He highlighted the importance to act quickly on considering adoption for looked after babies. Also assessments on suitability were carried out on family relatives to be considered as permanent placements, either through a Residence Order or Special Guardianship Order. He reported that there were a number of children in the Borough who had been reunited with their families, but were still subject to a Care Order so that the parenting responsibility is shared. He advised that a lot of resources went into monitoring those placements, and after a period of 18 months to two years, the

decision would then be made as to whether the Care Order should be withdrawn. He concluded by saying that the Adoption Team had made great strides in securing the permanence of a number of children.

The Adoption Team Manager explained that whilst the Adoption Team formed part of the Adoption and Permanence Service, they were two distinctive teams around collaboration with Western Bay, and would not therefore be adversely affected by collaboration. She reported that during the last two years, the Adoption Team had looked at the adoption process mirrored around permanence. It was hoped that the service would receive grant funding next April for additional workers, and through the recruitment process form a joint Adoption Team by the summer of next year. She advised that the Team was going through a step process to address the Authority's concerns on expenditure and a number of LAC who no longer needed to remain under the care of the local authority. She explained for Members the difference between an Adoption Order (AO) and a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) which provided the carer with full parental responsibility without having to consult the birth parents, but would not be permitted to take children in their care abroad; all power would be invested in them without the State being involved. She advised that the only difference between an SGO and an AO was that parents do not use their Parental Responsibility (PR). A Residence Order (RO) does what it says, in that it permits the holder to have care of children and affords them shared responsibility. The Authority had been using SGO's and SRO's for a number of years, but had not been able to divide that work into one area to make it uniform. She commented that neighbouring authorities looked to Bridgend for guidance.

The Adoption Team Manager informed Members that her proposal was in three parts:-

The first part was to alleviate pressures in the Safeguarding Teams by removing 75 cases from those teams where there was no ongoing contact or additional orders; also where a team provides advice and support and oversees any financial maintenance that is in place. She explained that the current system limited the capacity to undertake discharge work as there was only one member of staff carrying out that work. The discharge process was in two stages: those children placed with parents under the 1991 Regulations as the Authority wanted to retain some involvement, and those cases are targeted immediately as they are resource-hungry. Out of 39 cases, there were 15 potential discharges. She explained that children were subject to Orders from 18 months to 9 years. There were currently three cases involving four children going through Court proceedings, which usually took around four months to complete. She anticipated that numbers would start to reduce around March/April next year. The Team currently had 17 such cases and on each one, the families were supportive of discharge. However, some children would still require support from some of the services provided by the Authority during the transition period.

The second part was the cohort of SGOs and ROs. She reported that there were approximately 70 LAC living with relative carers and advised that those carers were opposed to opt for a variance order or discharge order as they feared they would lose support from the Authority as well as financially. She explained that the Authority is entitled to pay carers until a child reaches the age of 18 as long as they underwent financial reviews, and proposed that the SGO policy be revised to update it locally, as money should not be a barrier for those carers.

She reported that the Authority now had a dedicated team for carers, as there was concern that they were not receiving the practical support they needed. She advised that overall, in the medium to long term there would be significant financial savings by reducing the number of looked after children.

RESOLVED: That the Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting noted and endorsed the proposals for the short, medium and long term general aims of the service.

51 INFORMAL FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME - OCTOBER 2013 TO JANUARY 2014

Councillor David re-joined the meeting.

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support presented a report which sought approval of the proposed Informal Forward Work Programme (IFWP) covering the period from October 2013 to January 2014.

He informed Members that the Adoption Inspection was due to take place over a two week period and the Inspection Plan in the New Year would focus on the Young People Team, involving various forms of exploitation, particularly child sexual exploitation, with the report coming before the Committee in the summer.

The Cabinet Member - Children and Young People informed Members of a booklet called "Dylan's Story" which was launched this week at the Senedd by the First Minister. The booklet was created by the sons and daughters of foster parents in the Borough, in conjunction with Foster Services for the UK.

RESOLVED: That the Informal Forward Work Programme was approved.

The meeting closed at 11.38