

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOMS 2/3, CIVIC OFFICES ANGEL STREET BRIDGEND CF31 4WB ON THURSDAY, 30 JULY 2015 AT 10.00 AM

Present

Councillor HJ David (Chair)

Councillors:

CE Smith
HJ Townsend
PJ White
HM Williams

Officers:

Susan Cooper	Corporate Director - Social Services & Wellbeing
Mark Lewis	Group Manager - Integrated Working
Deborah McMillan	Corporate Director - Education & Transformation
Catherine Parry	Inerim Head of Safeguarding and Assessment
Mark Shephard	Corporate Director - Communities
Colin Turner	Head of Safeguarding and Family Support

97. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from the following Members for the reasons so stated:

Councillor MEJ Nott OBE – Other Council Business
Councillor M Gregory – Holiday
Councillor E Venables – Child care commitments
Councillor DBF White – Work commitments.

98. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

99. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee of 13 April 2015 be approved as a true and accurate record.

100. THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NATIONAL APPROACH TO STATUTORY ADVOCACY FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN, CHILDREN IN NEED AND OTHER SPECIFIED INDIVIDUALS

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support reported on the development of a national approach to statutory advocacy for looked after children, children in need and specified individuals in Wales.

He stated that the Welsh Ministers in October 2014 reviewed a range of evidence provided by recent reports which concluded there was a need to bring refreshed focus and impetus to securing children's rights and entitlements ahead of the implementation of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 and the extended focus on advocacy for all ages. He informed the Committee that a draft code of practice for advocacy had been issued for consultation, which specified when local authorities must consider the needs of an individual, together with the range of circumstances where an individual may face additional risks or barriers that can heighten their needs for advocacy support.

The Association of Directors of Social Services had recognised the need to form a Strategic Leadership Group for Advocacy. A Task and Finish Group had also been established, chaired by Colin Turner which he would continue to chair on leaving the authority and he offered to provide regular updates on the project to the Committee. The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support stated that the Strategic Leadership Group and Task and Finish Group would ensure the involvement and engagement of children and young people at key stages during the development and delivery of the national approach. He also stated that the Group will drive forward the delivery of the National Approach to Statutory Advocacy, with children and young people being at the heart of this approach. Options would be delivered to the Minister in October 2015 for delivery of the National Approach by 1 April 2016. He also stated that the "Active Offer" which seeks to ensure that every child eligible for independent advocacy is actively offered this will be rolled out from 1 April 2016.

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support reported that as part of the key components there would be a performance management framework and a record of children and young people who had taken up the offer of advocacy or had turned it down. Each local authority would be inspected against the performance management framework.

The Cabinet Member Children's Social Services and Equalities welcomed the proposals for developing advocacy for children and questioned the impact of the national approach on the Council's existing contractual arrangements with Tros Gynnal Plant for the provision of independent professional advocacy services. The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support stated that the Council has a 1 year rolling contract with Tros Gynnal Plant, however due to the development of the national approach it was likely advocacy would be provided on regional or national arrangements.

In response to a question from the Committee, the Head of Safeguarding and Family Support explained the different levels at which an advocate can function and stated that most children and young people would prefer to have their teacher or youth worker represent them. He stated it was fundamentally important that looked after children are reminded that advocacy is always available to them.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and that an interim report on Statutory Advocacy for Looked After Children be added to the Informal Forward Work Programme for the next meeting of the Committee and a report on the conclusion of the project be presented to the following meeting of the Committee.

101. CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support reported on the actions and strategies adopted to respond and prevent incidences of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), in light of the recent widespread revelations concerning the plight of children living in the County Borough of Rotherham.

He stated that BCBC is committed to protecting the most vulnerable members of the community from sexual exploitation and as such all practitioners have access to a number of key documents which provide guidance and structure to their practice. He informed the Committee of the processes in place for practitioners to assist in the early identification of child sexual abuse. He also informed the Committee that CSE meetings are held on a weekly basis which identifies the level of risk posed to children and young people and the monitoring of those who present a risk to children. Such individuals are being identified within a number of cases and are closely monitored by the Police and attending agencies to assist in the protection of young and vulnerable children and in the prosecution of offenders.

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support reported on the joint working being undertaken with the police, whose priority it is to protect children and young people through the investigation and the prosecution of offenders. The police have a problem profile for the Bridgend area regarding children who are at risk of being sexually exploited and the perpetrators of exploitation. The Public Protection Department are currently reviewing past cases as well as taking new matters forward. BCBC holds a data base of all young people subject to CSE meetings and this information is now cross referenced with the Police to ensure that Police CSE markers are placed against the names of those identified as being at risk.

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support drew the Committee's attention to the joint working with the ABMU whereby the A&E Department within the Princess of Wales Hospital has direct access to the Child Protection Register as does the children's ward. He also reported on Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA), which are a set of arrangements in place to manage the risk posed by the most serious sexual and violent offenders. These arrangements within Bridgend bring together lead professionals from the Probation Service, Mental Health Service, Housing, Public Protection and Children's Services on a fortnightly basis. These professionals are experienced in this arena and are effective in the sharing of important information between agencies which is key in protecting the most vulnerable people in society. He stated that staff in schools, further education colleges and other education establishments in Bridgend are uniquely placed to recognise and refer children who are believed to be vulnerable to CSE. CSE had been recognised as one of the strategic priorities for the Western Bay Children's Safeguarding Board.

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support reported on a CSE case study highlighting the effective multi-agency procedures and practice across Safeguarding services within Bridgend is cited in the recent conviction of a male from Cardiff who has been sentenced to serve a 4 year custodial prison term for several sexual offences against a young vulnerable female who was Looked After by BCBC. He stated that there are significant blocks to young people reporting CSE due to the perpetrators of CSE being skilled and manipulative of young people and that the grooming process is very significant preying on vulnerable young people. In some cases the parents would also be groomed by the perpetrators. He informed the Committee that the proactive work undertaken by the Group Manager Safeguarding and Quality Assurance on CSE had been cited as good practice for use elsewhere.

In response to a question from the Committee on the resettlement of offenders, the Head of Safeguarding and Family Support stated that a constant risk assessment is

made of those who have been convicted and they would be subject to ongoing treatment and on licence and placed on the register. When offenders are released, MAPPA arrangements are put in place to consider safeguards and measures where offenders are housed from schools, children's homes and community and leisure centres. The Corporate Director Social Services & Wellbeing informed the Committee that the role of elected Members is crucial in their communities in raising the awareness of CSE. An awareness training session on CSE has taken place for Members and a further session was planned, the details of which would be communicated to Members. The Corporate Director Social Services & Wellbeing also informed the Committee that the NSPCC are developing a helpline and details would be forwarded to Members once it had been set up.

The Cabinet Member Children's Social Services and Equalities commented that awareness of CSE be raised at primary schools due to children being exposed to risks at earlier ages. The Interim Head of Safeguarding and Family Support informed the Committee that in addition to engagement with schools, awareness raising would also be carried out with the business community.

Members commented on the sophisticated intelligence gathering locally on CSE by the various agencies and questioned how this compared with other areas. The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support informed the Committee that CSE is a corporate priority and also a priority for the Western Bay Safeguarding Children's Safeguarding Board. He stated that the authority did not stand out as being more prolific than other authority's, but it was important that strategies are in place to tackle CSE and that the authority had taken enforcement action against taxi drivers, while the police had used exclusion orders which excluded people from going to certain localities or addresses. The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support commented on the importance of raising awareness of CSE with children of all ages due to the prevalence of online threats and the increasing use of social media sites by children and young people. The Committee considered the importance of raising awareness of CSE to every primary school at Year 6. The Corporate Director Social Services & Wellbeing informed the Committee that CSE also needed to be highlighted at the Local Service Board, CSE is also a standing item on agendas of meetings of the Community Safety Partnership. The Committee requested the Corporate Director Social Services & Wellbeing consider holding a CSE event for the Business Forum to raise awareness.

The Committee whether children had come forward with incidences of CSE as a result of the training they had received. The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support commented that it was known that 1 in 5 children had met someone in the real world whom they had first met online.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support presented a report which sought approval of the revised Statements of Purpose for the current regulated services provision in the County Borough. He stated that the Council has three children's residential homes and a fostering service delivering services to children and young people aged 0-18 years.

Statements of Purpose were required for:

Newbridge House
Sunny Bank
Bakers Way
Fostering Services

He highlighted the changes to each of the Statements of Purpose.

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support informed the Committee that all 3 homes had been the subject of inspection in the last 9 months and all of these establishments had received praise for the way in which they are managed with no compliance notices given.

The Committee commended all staff for their commitment in delivering these services.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and the statement of purpose for each of the regulated services provision be approved.

103. CONNECTING FAMILIES EDGE OF CARE

The Committee received a presentation from the Group Manager Integrated Working and Family, and Family Support Services Manager which updated the Committee on progress with the Connecting Families Edge of Care work.

The presentation provided the following information to Committee:

- Between 2007/8 and 2011/12, the Bridgend LAC population increased by 40% compared to a 24% increase across Wales
- Children under 2 and young people aged between 14 to 16 accounted for almost 50% of BCBC's LAC population between 2008 and 2013

The LAC population in Bridgend had reduced from 410 as at April 2014 to 384 as at today.

The Family Support Services Manager highlighted the Edge of Care proposal to Committee which was:

- The high number of children coming into the care system was a focus of an LSB workshop in January 2014
- There was an agreement to subsequently to focus some Connecting Families resources on targeting those children on the edge of care to avoid LAC status
- An Annual target set of working with 20 children (and their families) aged 11-16 years at high risk of entering the care system
- Initial age focus informed by high numbers of teenagers entering the care system

He further added that the approach Connecting Families would take would be targeted support that would be offered based on research of the current data to include:

- children of high risk of becoming looked after
- children currently or previously on the Child Protection register or previously LAC
- Families known to the probation service
- Families affected by domestic violence, substance misuse and mental health
- Families with a history of School Exclusions
- Families affected by housing issues

The Family Support Services Manager informed the Committee of progress of the Edge of Care project and explained that the service went live on the 1st May 2014. He also stated that 30 families accessed the Edge of Care service during 2014-15 which included 52 children (including siblings) which significantly exceeded the target. He added that those families are now utilising support via Early Help Hubs.

He added that prior to intervention each family on average had cost Public Services approximately £40k per annum. Following public intervention the average costs avoided for public services was reduced to a projected £23k per annum. He stated that the total costs avoided to the Public Sector were approximately £707k once the service costs of £135k for Connecting Families were deducted, producing significant cost avoidance / savings.

The Family Support Services Manager concluded that the developments and next steps for the Connecting Families Service were:

- The Family Support Team has been amalgamated into Connecting Families
- All eight Family Support Workers/ Intervention specialists now completing work around children at risk of entering care system. Those in care (including rehab home) and general family support work
- Group work developed including Parenting, Sexual Exploitation Prevention, Attachment and Dads Group

The Committee thanked the officers for their informative presentation.

The Chairperson of the Children & Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee expressed the Committee's concern regarding the burden on Social Workers' caseloads. The Interim Head of Safeguarding and Family Support informed the Committee that the authority aimed to have children at home with their families and there was a balance to be struck between reasonable caseloads for Social Workers and for children to be supported appropriately at the right time and place to enable them to be safe. The Chairperson commented that the authority had invested in the Safeguarding Team and that if the LAC population continues to fall, the caseloads of Social Workers would become more manageable which would enable them to do more direct work with families. The Group Manager Integrated Working and Family informed the Committee that his team works very closely with the Safeguarding Team and that targets were set to reduce the numbers of Looked After Children. The Corporate Director Education and Transformation informed the Committee that good progress had been made, despite that the integrated teams had only been up and running for the past 3 months. She stated there is pressure to reduce the budget for non-statutory functions. If the pressure on children's social services were alleviated there would be an opportunity to utilise resources more flexibly.

The Corporate Resources and Improvement Overview and Scrutiny Committee Champion questioned the sufficiency in the budget for looked after children; the latest numbers and costs of looked after children; whether the trend is increasing or decreasing and also, the impact on the increase in the number of adoption placements on looked after children. The Corporate Director Social Services & Wellbeing informed the Committee that it was about the service does in relation to its resources and ensuring value for money. She stated that looked after children are very clearly a statutory requirement which is at the top of the agenda corporately. A whole systems approach had been adopted for looked after children which involved working with partner agencies. She explained that children come into care for various reasons due to substance and alcohol abuse and also due to court orders. The numbers coming into care is very volatile which would also attribute to the budget for the service being volatile. She stated that there was now a downward trend for looked after children numbers and this needed to be the case over a sustained period. The biggest cost was out of county placements which is the focus of attention for the service. The number of looked after children had reduced from 410 in April 2014 down to 388 and as at today stood at 384. There was a need to reduce looked after numbers safely which was uppermost for the service. The Corporate Director Social Services & Wellbeing informed the Committee there is a need to invest in early intervention services. There is tracking of children of where they are placed and the cost of their placements. The Corporate Director Social Services & Wellbeing informed the Committee there is an overspend on fostering services due to an increase in in-house fostering which had seen a reduction in the amounts paid to fostering agencies.

In response to a question from the Committee, the Head of Safeguarding and Family Support informed the Committee that it was a challenge to attract foster carers for teenage children due to very complex behavioural issues they may have. The Cabinet Member Children's Social Services and Equalities complemented the work of the Fostering Panel in placing large sibling groups with foster carers.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

104. INFORMAL FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME - JULY 2015 TO OCTOBER 2015

The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing presented a report which sought approval of the proposed Informal Forward Work Programme (IFWP) covering the period from July 2015 to October 2015. She stated that the topics detailed had previously been accepted for inclusion in the Informal Forward Work Programme.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Informal Forward Work Programme be approved;
- (2) That the report on Services to Young Carers in Bridgend report be moved to the April 2016 meeting and reports on Child Sexual Exploitation and Residential Review be added to the Informal Forward Work Programme;
- (3) That officers be requested to review the frequency of meetings in view of the number of reports on the Informal Forward Work Programme.

105. URGENT ITEMS

The Chairperson informed the Committee that Colin Turner was leaving the authority today; he thanked him for his contribution in turning around the service from one which had previously been subject to a protocol to the service it is today.

Mr Turner thanked the Committee for its support and stated that it had been a pleasure to have worked with the Members who had always been very supportive of the service he had led.

The meeting closed at 12.00 pm