

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOMS 2/3, CIVIC OFFICES ANGEL STREET BRIDGEND CF31 4WB ON WEDNESDAY, 20 JULY 2016 AT 2.00 PM**

Present

Councillor HJ David – Chairperson

MEJ Nott OBE            HJ Townsend            PJ White

Invitees:

Councillor E Dodd  
Councillor EP Foley  
Councillor KJ Watts  
Councillor DBF White

Officers:

Susan Cooper	Corporate Director - Social Services & Wellbeing
Nicola Echanis	Head of Education & Family Support
Val Jones	Regional Adoption Manager
Andrew Rees	Senior Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Zak Shell	Head of Neighbourhood Services
Natalie Silcox	Group Manager Childrens Regulated Services

129. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from the following Members:

Councillor N Farr  
Councillor CE Smith  
Councillor HM Williams

130. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following declarations of interest were made:

Councillor DBF White declared a personal interest in agenda item 5 – Implementation of the “When I am Ready” Scheme as he sits on a local British Legion Committee and agenda item 6 – Monitoring the Performance and Progress of the Western Bay Regional Adoption Service as he works for another local authority which sits under Western Bay.

131. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED:            That the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting of 7 April 2016 be approved as a true and accurate record.

132. SAFEGUARDING OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing reported on the work undertaken to safeguard children and young people in Bridgend. She stated that safeguarding is the action taken to promote the welfare of children and to protect them from harm. The Council is committed to safeguarding children and young people from harm and all

practitioners have access to a number of key documents which provide guidance and structure to their practice.

The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing outlined the current arrangements in operation in terms of providing overarching support, specialist input and monitoring a range of services, by chairing meetings and tracking issues in relation to complex cases, leading on child practice reviews and facilitating / undertaking case file audit activity. This was achieved through working with partners under the Western Bay Safeguarding Children's Board. The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing informed the Committee that core business was undertaken through established Management Groups and it was expected that these Groups review, establish, monitor and report to the Safeguarding Board against individual work plans and address individual actions set out within the Board's strategic priorities. She stated that the Independent Reviewing Service has an important Quality Assurance function and works towards ensuring all children within the care of the Council have a robust, effective care and support plan. The Independent Reviewing Officers independently review the care and support plans of all looked after children and children who are on the child protection register.

The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing informed the Committee of the current activity in relation to child protection, in that there are currently 179 children on the Child Protection Register and currently 385 looked after children in Bridgend. She highlighted the actions being taken to improve practice and to safely reduce the number of children being placed on the register. The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing also informed the Committee of the process in relation to Public Law Outline, Care Proceedings and set out the arrangements for Child Practice Reviews. She stated that Bridgend was currently undertaking three Child Practice Reviews following the identification of concerns where criteria had not been met. The purpose of the reviews is to identify learning for future practice and is intended to generate professional and organisational learning and promote improvement in future practice. The recommendations from Child Practice Reviews are reported to and monitored by the Western Bay Safeguarding Children's Board and she stated that she would share the recommendations of the current reviews with the Committee.

The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing informed the Committee of the practices in place to tackle Child Sexual Exploitation and the partnership working undertaken with the police. She stated that there are currently 37 children in Bridgend who are subject to monitoring under the CSE protocol and good collaboration with the police is essential to tackling CSE. The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing also informed the Committee that the Safeguarding Service is responsible for dealing with and managing allegations of abuse against a professional staff member or volunteer in contact with children and vulnerable adults. The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing highlighted the approach Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements which are a set of arrangements to manage the risk posed by the most serious sexual and violent offenders. The arrangements bring together lead professionals from the Probation Service, Mental Health Service, Housing, Public Protection and Children's Services on a fortnightly basis.

The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing informed the Committee that safeguarding is the responsibility of all and not the responsibility of Safeguarding service alone and is of paramount importance that all Members prioritise Safeguarding activities across the Council.

The Committee questioned whether there is a trend for children being placed on the register or whether there is one factor greater than another. The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing informed the Committee that neglect was likely to be the

highest category and she undertook to provide the Committee with details of the reasons for children being placed on the register.

The Committee questioned whether more awareness raising could be done in schools on the issue of Child Sexual Exploitation. The Head of Education and Early Help informed the Committee that every child in year 8 receives training in the subject, the potential for increasing awareness raising amongst other year groups has been discussed but there was a capacity issue in pursuing this. She stated that teachers also receiving training in CSE. The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing informed the Committee that the SCDWP also deliver CSE awareness raising training which would be delivered to Members in the near future. The Committee commented on the effectiveness of the training delivered to schools and were keen to see it delivered and reinforced to year 10 pupils. The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing informed the Committee that a corporate safeguarding policy had been developed, with corporate leads in each Directorate and a safeguarding group established to get a better understanding of safeguarding. It was intended to roll out this training corporately. She also informed the Committee that Cabinet /CMB meetings have a standing item on safeguarding which highlights corporately the importance of safeguarding. The Cabinet Member Resources informed the Committee of her involvement in leading the Domestic Violence Group in the Llynfi Valley where children receive healthy relationship training and that she would link in the Head of Education and Early Help on the potential for delivering this training to children across the Borough.

The Committee referred to a recent case in Pembrokeshire which involved a child was home educated and had suffered neglect and questioned whether this Council has powers to monitor children in the Borough who are educated at home. The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing informed the Committee that there is no requirement on local authorities to monitor children who are home tutored. She stated that attempts were made by professionals in the Pembrokeshire case to visit the child which was met with resistance by the child's parents. The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing informed the Committee that she would bring a report on the recommendations made in this case which suggested annual checks of children who are home educated to the Committee. She stated that where officers are met with resistance by families to see children who are home educated would be discussed by the Directors of Social Services and Regional Board. The Head of Education and Early Help informed the Committee that the authority has no statutory powers to have access to children who are home educated; however a network has been developed locally with parents who educate their children where parents can also have peer support. She stated that approximately 70 children in the Borough are home educated.

A member of the Committee questioned how access could be gained to Child Practice Reviews. The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing informed the Committee that Child Practice Reviews are always publicised and there is an agreed protocol for the release of information on Child Practice Reviews and lessons learned would be looked at.

**RESOLVED:** That the developments in safeguarding of children and young people across the County Borough of Bridgend be noted and a report be brought to the Committee on the outcome Child Practice Reviews.

**133. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 'WHEN I AM READY' SCHEME**

The Group Manager Childrens Regulated Services provided the Committee with an update on the implementation of the "When I am Ready" scheme and sought approval to of the "When I am Ready" Policy and accompanying "When I am Ready" Financial Policy.

The Group Manager Childrens Regulated Services informed the Committee that the Scheme had been implemented as of 6 April 2016 and developed by the Welsh Government in partnership with local government and key third sector partners to enable eligible care leavers to have the option of continuing to live with their foster carers once they attain 18 years of age. She stated that all looked after children are eligible to be considered for "When I am Ready". The Council must through a pathway assessment, ascertain whether a young person and their foster carers wish to make a post-18 years of age living arrangement, regardless of whether the young person is undertaking full or part time education, training or employment or none of these activities. There is an expectation that the young person commits to undertaking skills development to prepare for their future.

The Group Manager Childrens Regulated Services informed the Committee that there were now 4 "When I am Ready" arrangements in place within the Borough, 7 arrangements had been agreed, with a further 9 arrangements to go ahead in the next year. She stated that each placement will cost the authority £185 per week, minus all relevant claimable benefits and as appropriate, contributions from the young people themselves which was contained in the policy. Housing benefit is dependent on the circumstances of individual applications, with contributions from young people being a minimum of £20 per week. The Group Manager Childrens Regulated Services informed the Committee that the Supporting People Programme Grant provided funding of £69,252 for the year and further placement costs funded through the Just Ask Plus team budget.

In response to a request from the Committee, the Group Manager Childrens Regulated Services would circulate to the Committee the leaflets which had been produced by the Welsh Government on the scheme.

The Group Manager Childrens Regulated Services informed the Committee that the scheme starts when the young person reaches 15 ½ years and that worked had been undertaken with Newbridge House where there is a personal adviser who advises on budgeting.

The Committee requested that an amendment be made to the policy to take into account young people who have undertaken basic training in the armed forces and who wish to have a living arrangement with their foster carers.

The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing informed the Committee that a progress report would be brought to the Committee to include case studies of families who had entered into the scheme and to include where care leavers had moved on to.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and the policies as amended be approved and that a progress report be brought to the Committee in 12 months' time.

134. MONITORING THE PERFORMANCE AND PROGRESS OF THE WESTERN BAY REGIONAL ADOPTION SERVICE

The Regional Adoption Manager reported on the performance and progress of the Western Bay Regional Adoption Service. She highlighted the key achievements of the regional adoption service, which had seen 15 placements taking place in Bridgend, as opposed to 7 placements made in the previous year. There had been a reduction of the use of Inter-agency placements and an increase in placements within Western Bay providing significant savings. She stated there had been an increase in the number of prospective adopters from 45 in 2014/15 to 53. There had been a reduction in the

number of children whose plan for adoption changed from 21 in 2014/15 to 4; however this may increase during the year due to decisions being made by the courts. A unified Adoption Allowance Policy had been developed and approved across the Region, which would be rolled across Wales. The Regional Adoption Manager informed the Committee that the Adoption Panel is well organised and very busy.

The Regional Adoption Manager highlighted the challenges facing the service in that performance reporting requires further development in light of new Performance Indicators and to ensure the accurate reporting on all data sets and the introduction of national and regional performance indicators in adoption support. She also informed the Committee that policies and procedures require review. The life story work requires development to comply with the target set by the National Adoption Service. She stated that adoption support is a key priority for the regional service and is high on the national agenda.

The Committee questioned the time taken for a child to be placed for adoption shown in Quarter 4 Year End Performance Report. The Regional Adoption Manager informed the Committee that the figures contained in the performance report relate to when a child is placed for adoption. Once a Placement Order is granted the service can begin the process of searching for a placement for a child. She stated that persons adopting a child can apply for an Order to adopt a child no sooner than 10 weeks which is contestable by the birth parents and once granted, the child is legally adopted. The Regional Adoption Manager informed the Committee that period of 10 weeks relates to from the child being looked after to a placement being made. The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing informed the Committee that a decision to place a child for adoption is a difficult one to make with a significant amount of information to be considered in order to make the right decision.

The Committee questioned the composition of the Panel as it did not list representation from Bridgend Members.

The Committee questioned whether a member of staff could be tasked with championing the life story work. The Regional Adoption Manager informed the Committee that life book champions are being considered. Child Care Social Workers support children to understand their life journey.

The Committee questioned whether there would be a shortage of children to adopt. The Regional Adoption Manager informed the Committee there was no shortage of children to adopt, however more adopters had been found to meet the needs of children. She stated there had been an increase in the number of sibling groups requiring adoption and who had been placed by the regional service. The Regional Adoption Manager informed the Committee there is a need to re-focus the needs of adopters and to ensure the right support is available at the correct time. The National Adoption Service is looking at a pilot to adopt children who were harder to adopt. The Committee questioned whether work could be done to encourage foster parents to adopt.

The Committee questioned the reason for the number of children waiting for adoption increasing from 51 in 2013/14 to 92 in 2015/16. The Regional Adoption Manager informed the Committee that a number of children had been on the waiting list for a long time, but had since been found a home. The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing informed the Committee that the explanation of the figures in the Annual Report would be altered so that it was made clearer to the lay person. The Regional Adoption Manager informed the Committee that the number of children referred in 2015/16 was 58 and not 64 as reported resulting in a total of 195 children being referred and not 2012 as reported.

The Committee expressed concern at the lack of democratic accountability within independent adoption agencies as they did not local authority representation on their boards. The Committee did however note that the regional service complimented the national service.

The Committee questioned what had happened to the staff employed by the three local authorities prior to the establishment of the regional service. The Regional Adoption Manager informed the Committee that bringing the service together had been a challenge and initially, the service did not experience staff leaving when the service was co-located, however, staff had since left the service. She stated that interim measures had been put in place as initially morale was low. She stated that the Adoption Team Manager had driven forward change and staff now feel confident and skilled to provide support. She informed the Committee that all staff within the service are employed by their own local authority, however she is employed by the City and County of Swansea.

The Committee complimented the regional service on achieving permanency for many children.

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the performance and review of the adoption service and its ability to meet the needs of those affected by adoption within the region.

135. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

The meeting closed at 3.56 pm