

**SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1 - MONDAY, 6 NOVEMBER 2017**

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1  
HELD IN COUNCIL CHAMBER - CIVIC OFFICES ANGEL STREET BRIDGEND CF31 4WB  
ON MONDAY, 6 NOVEMBER 2017 AT 9.30 AM**

Present

Councillor CA Webster – Chairperson

JPD Blundell	NA Burnett	RJ Collins	SK Dendy
DK Edwards	J Gebbie	JC Radcliffe	B Sedgebeer
LM Walters	A Williams	AJ Williams	

Apologies for Absence

Officers:

Julie Ellams	Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Rachel Keepins	Democratic Services Officer - Scrutiny
Laura Kinsey	Head of Children's Social Care
Natalie Silcox	Group Manager Childrens Regulated Services
Pete Tyson	Planning and Contract Management Officer

13. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor CA Webster declared a personal interest in agenda item 3 – Approval of Minutes, as she was the NAS Treasurer and her son had LD.

Councillor B Sedgebeer declared a personal interest in agenda item 5 – Remodelling Children's Residential Services Project, because she was a friend of a young person who was in a children's residential care unit in Bridgend.

14. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Item 9, Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Reform, a Member of the Committee explained that the Educational Psychology Service was under pressure because of staffing issues and not financial restraints as reported in the minutes.

Item 9, Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Reform, the Scrutiny Officer explained that following the last meeting, officers had investigated further and realised that it was too late in the process for a number of the recommendations to be forwarded to Welsh Government and Cabinet and the minutes were corrected to reflect the latest information.

Members were frustrated that this Bill had been around for a number of years and they had not had an opportunity to influence it. It was very difficult to influence a Bill after stage 1 so scrutiny should have been consulted at a much earlier stage. The Committee agreed to include this as a future recommendation.

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting of Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 dated 14<sup>th</sup> September 2017 be approved as a true and accurate record, subject to the changes listed below.

- 1) Members noted that the Educational Psychology Service was under pressure because of staffing issues and not financial restraints as reported in the minutes.
- 2) The Committee recommended that:

- a. Funding be ring-fenced by the Local Authority and Schools to ensure it is used to meet the needs of the Bill and the needs of young people with ALN;
- b. Specific funding for Post-16 ALN provision be identified and allocated as an invest to save measure;
- c. Cabinet recognise and incorporate the significant role of the Educational Psychologist in the establishment and delivery of future support and services for those with ALN;
- d. Cabinet consider apprenticeships as a method for young people with ALN to progress into employment;
- e. Suitable support and resources be allocated to support frontline staff such as ALNCOs and Teachers in order to ensure they are able to deal with the extra responsibilities under the Bill and manage with increased workloads;
- f. Allowance be made for the associated costs for frontline staff based on the expected need for Job Evaluation on any new appointments or additional duties;
- g. Budgeted gross expenditure on ALN provision in 2018/19 is increased in preparation for the implementation of new legislation to assist in the transition period;
- h. The Authority works towards ensuring that a minimum of 80% of the budget allocated to ALN pupils is delegated to individual schools and that mechanisms should be in place to ensure those schools are using the funding for its stated purpose of supporting ALN;
- i. The Local Authority considers how home to school transport arrangements will be affected as part of the new provisions contained in the Bill;
- j. The Authority learns from best practice from local authorities from Wales and beyond in an effort to improve the academic performance of those young people with ALN achieving level 2 threshold inclusive which currently stands at 26.3%;
- k. The Authority assesses the required resources, workforce planning and training arrangements to support implementation of the Bill;
- l. The Authority looks to strengthen its relationship with the FE sector in Bridgend to make the provisions of the Bill work effectively, especially in the challenging transition to further education and work-based learning.
- m. The Authority explore whether any work has been carried out in the third sector on analysis of the resulting costs associated

with support for adults who have not had sufficient educational provision as a young person. Furthermore that if this has not already been undertaken by those in the third Sector that the Authority look to commission an independent analysis of these associated costs, both directly to the LA as well as indirectly to other public services. Such an analysis would help put the costs of supporting children with ALN into perspective;

Recommendations to Welsh Government

a) That job coaching schemes be considered for introduction in Wales, based on the success experienced in England for young people with ALN accessing work through such schemes;

That more funding and provision be provided in Wales for schemes such as 'Access to Work' to assist individuals with Additional Learning Needs in gaining employment.

15. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Corporate Director – Operational and Partnership Services submitted a report, the purpose of which was to present the items prioritised by the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee including the next item delegated to Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1; to present Committee with a list of further items for consideration using the pre-determined criteria form.

The Scrutiny Officer explained that information requested following the last meeting was still outstanding and would be reported to the next meeting. She explained that the Budget Consultation would be an opportunity for Members to put forward questions on any item with a report request.

A Member raised the issue of consultation on forthcoming legislation and asked if there were any subjects coming up which the Committee should be consulted on. The Scrutiny Officer agreed to contact the Directors to check to see if there were any items.

The Scrutiny Officer explained that an Emergency Housing Criteria form had been circulated for Members to consider suggesting that it be submitted to Corporate Scrutiny to be added to the Forward Work Programme. Members agreed that it should be put forward because it was a risk that affected the most vulnerable people.

**RECOMMENDED:** Subsequent to the Committee's discussion Members determined the following in relation to the Overview and Scrutiny Forward Work Programme:

- Advocacy Services and Safeguarding to be taken together.
- School Modernisation
- Extra Care Housing Schemes
- Early Help and Social Care

Emergency Housing Criteria Form

16. REMODELLING CHILDREN'S RESIDENTIAL SERVICES PROJECT

The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing submitted a report informing Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 of the work that had been undertaken as part of the Remodelling Children's Residential Services project and introducing a proposed new model for Children's Residential Services.

The Scrutiny Officer gave an introduction to the report following which the Invitees were invited in to the meeting.

The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing referred to a report in the press regarding this agenda item. She explained that this report was welcomed and about improvements to the service. She stressed that there would be no detriment to any child in a care home however changes had to be made to improve the service. The children in care were far more complex and challenging cases and on occasions children had to be sent far from home. Staff had identified an issue with the lack of trust from the Courts in the services ability to achieve outcomes. The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing explained that she would expect the Courts to challenge and question what was being proposed, the compatibility of children, whether therapeutic intervention could be provided and what was in the best interests of the child.

The Leader reassured Members that the courts would challenge and scrutinise the proposed placements but they had never turned down a placement proposed by this authority. Each authority in Wales had the same problems and had to look elsewhere for placements for some of their most complex needs cases. The proposals in the report included plans to develop skills locally to meet more of these needs. BCBC would not to be able to meet the needs of every child but it was hoped that the numbers sent out of county could be greatly reduced.

The Leader reported that he had met recently with the Leaders from other authorities and a spokesperson for the WLGA for Social Services to discuss a bid for better provision in Wales.

The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing explained the current arrangements for looked after children through Sunnybank and Newbridge House, the internal supported lodgings service and out of county residential placements. As part of the Remodelling Children's Services Programme, current residential placements were reviewed with a view to developing a proposal for remodelling internal residential placements. The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing explained that alternative options had also been considered including commissioning the service and building a bespoke building but discarded due to prohibitive costs and timescales for implementation. Significant background research and analysis had been undertaken and targeted engagement with all pertinent stakeholders which would feed into the final proposal to be presented to Cabinet for approval in January 2018.

The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing outlined the key elements of the proposed new model including the Hub, a medium-term unit, support lodgings, therapeutic services, training and transitional carers. She outlined the financial implications and the benefits of facilitating the return of young people currently placed out of county. The remodelling work would contribute towards the MTFS budget reductions that had been applied to Children's Services over the past three years, resulting in current projected overspends.

A Member stated that she thought the report was confusing and talked about employing staff, bringing children back from out of county places but not increasing the number of beds available. She asked if partners were putting money into the proposals and asked if some of the work should be funded by the health board.

The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing explained that the report did not show the whole system approach. There was a lot going on including a move to recruit more foster carers and to increase in house training. More flexible options were being

considered such as giving foster carers more skills, recruiting different types of carers and paying emergency families a retainer.

The Head of Children's Social Care explained that they would not be increasing provision for 11 to 17 at the moment. There was currently a four bed home for children aged 11 to 16 and a transition unit for young people aged 15 to 17 consisting of four residential bedrooms and two bedsits. There were only 4 beds available for those under 15 but in future there would be more. They were considering alternative types of accommodation for those already there so the model did extend the number of beds. They were proposing to employ staff to provide services but needed to discuss plans with colleagues in health. There was no agreement to jointly fund the proposals and discussions were ongoing. There were challenges accessing therapeutic services for children which was why they were trying to develop the service in house.

The Group Manager, Children's Regulated Services explained that fostering training was not time limited but ongoing. There would be a basic training session followed by a two year rolling programme with 9 mandatory programmes. There would also be a 16 week programme in addition to the others. The intention was for one consistent approach to be taken in every case no matter where the child was placed

A Member suggested that it could be beneficial for experts to deliver the training across two authorities.

The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing welcomed the comments and agreed that it was important to take advantage of good training packages.

A Member referred to a case where a foster carer was taking a local authority to court regarding entitlement to annual leave etc and asked if the impact of any decision had been taken into account and was there an option to move towards permanent employees.

The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing explained that payment for foster carers was an all wales issue and a National Fostering Framework was under development and would cover these issues.

The Group Manager, Children's Regulated Services explained that transitional carers were not aware that they had been identified and the job descriptions were being looked at. Recruitment events were ongoing in addition to radio and newspaper adverts, flyers, badges, meet and greet events and specific campaigns depending on demand.

The Leader added that social workers were out and about in supermarkets talking to residents about fostering. Members could play a useful role and fostering could be a rewarding experience. There could be significant implications if the test case was successful including a change to state benefits if foster carers became employees. They should not be included with those exploited in zero hours contracts because they all had placements with children continually coming into the system.

A Member asked how effective the campaign was. The Group Manager, Children's Regulated Services explained that it depended on the time of year with very few showing an interest in the summer or around Christmas. BCBC was consistent with between 6 and 10 families in the process at any time. There were currently 87 household approvals and 11 outstanding.

A member asked to what extent the proposals were based on best practice. The Group Manager – Commissioning explained that there had been extensive research in to best practice, and a model from the north of England had been adapted. A lot of

work had been undertaken locally especially in Swansea then refined for a Bridgend perspective.

A member asked how many children were placed out of county and with private companies and if all spaces were already full, wouldn't that force more children to be placed out of county. A Member welcomed anything that improved the lives of vulnerable children but couldn't see how bringing children back from out of county without additional beds could work. This was a volatile system and had been debated a number of times. Foster carers dipped in and out and left to work for private agencies. In previous years a children's home had been closed down and this resulted in more out of county placements with increased costs to the authority. He suggested that the need to make savings was part and parcel of the reasoning behind these proposals and he was not convinced that the methodology would work.

The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing explained that the closure of the home was before her time but this was a sensitive area with increasing demand with more children coming into care. These proposals were about providing more flexibility with the right support at the right time. Early help services were being developed to stop children coming into care although the priority was always to keep children safe. She had seen a pattern of investment into private foster care possibly because there were no alternatives. This should not be ignored and sometimes it worked but sometimes the placements did break down. It was harder to monitor these and they could cost between £5,000 and £7,000 per week. It was not always clear what positive outcomes were achieved in terms of therapeutic intervention. There would always be a need for some children to be placed out of county but efforts were being made to reduce the numbers. The child was always the priority but the budget had to be controlled.

A member stated that the recruitment of carers and ongoing training had to be factored into the initial costs and needed to be in place before the out of county children came back. The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing explained that they could not stop doing something until an alternative was in place. The reality was they would have to continue to deliver and support children which made the process more complicated.

The Group Manager-Commissioning explained that the new provision would have greater flexibility. There were currently 10 beds and there would be 10 in the new scheme. There would be more efficient use of facilities and more provision but not at a cost to the authority if funding streams could be utilised.

The Head of Children's Social Care explained that the intention was to use resources more efficiently, to increase bed capacity by providing alternatives for children who had outgrown the residential setting but this was the only option currently available. A bespoke building had been considered but this was the option that met requirements in terms of timescales.

A Member noted that the authority was more dependent on people that it did not have control over with more children in specialised care. The Corporate Director - Social Services and Wellbeing explained that the proposal was to deal with children locally and to develop specialist knowledge and skills.

The Cabinet Member for Wellbeing and Future Generations reminded Members that a huge amount of work had been carried out before this stage. Children with more complex needs were coming into care in addition to the usual number of other children.

The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing added that feedback received during the consultation had been included in this model. The next consultation would be

on this proposal and would help shape the final plan. One young leaver has asked to lead the consultation group because her life was in chaos and she had an interesting perspective on what would have worked for her.

A Member asked how it would work if two families were taken out of fostering for emergencies when all placements were full and for the number of children placed with private foster families. Officers agreed to forward details to Members following the meeting. Numbers had decreased recently because a number of foster carers had transferred to the authority because they provided better support.

The Leader explained that they would not move children out and the two emergencies would come from either new foster carers or families where children had moved on. They were currently assessing 6 to 12 families to see if they had the skills to provide transitional care. The authority was opening 3 bed units at Heronsbridge providing 52 week provision for children with very complex needs previously placed out of county and this had not been included in the report. One was already in use, another was about to be occupied and a placement was being considered for the third.

A Member asked how emergency cases would be dealt with and how the fluctuations in demand would be dealt with. The Group Manager – Children’s Regulated Services explained that they were working through this detail with payments and retainers being used to keep children in the county. The level 3 carers were already paid more than independent foster carers.

A Member asked what the occupancy levels were for the current 10 bed provision and what was predicted. The Head of Children’s Social Care explained that both units were full at the moment. Conversations were ongoing with CSSIW to change the purpose and they were looking at trends, the length of stay and other options available.

A Member added that any proposals had to be safeguarding but the budget could not be ignored. Compatibility had been hugely difficult and the authority had been faced with the choice of sending children far from home or providing additional support. It was not always clear what added benefits there were and some of the youngsters had very complex needs.

The Group Manager- Commissioning explained that “what if” scenario planning had been used. Before they had only had Sunnybank and Newbridge so out of county placements were required. In future they would have more options including transitional carers to be included in the planning and profiling providing greater options and more independence.

A Member commented that assumptions had been made and that detailed data had not been included in the report so it was difficult to effectively scrutinise. They needed tangibles rather than vague statements.

Another Member asked what success looked like and how we should support children to take part in the world. The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing thanked the Member for the question and said that each child had different potential. It was important to support a child to have the opportunity to reach its own potential, express themselves and what they wanted and to remain in school. The Social Services and Wellbeing Act helped the authority to focus on both the child and the foster carers. The authority had not been able to offer foster carers respite and plans were being considered to introduce this.

The Group Manager, Children’s Regulated Services explained that they were not expecting foster carers to be therapists but giving them basic tools to help them access the right services.

The Leader explained that there were social workers to support the foster carers providing support and advice when needed. The current foster carers were sons and daughters of foster carers themselves who got involved because foster caring could be rewarding. A specific support group had been created to provide time away for cared children and support for fathers etc.

The Head of Children's Social Care reported that the children placed out of county had experienced lots of moves, crises and emergency placements and options for them were limited. It was hoped that by providing more options this link could be broken and the child offered more stability. It would be a challenging role for the carer and for those in the household. The carer was not expected to be the expert and a team would be "wrapped" around the household. A Member stated that some out of county children had settled and it would not be right to move them again. The Head of Children's Social Care explained that there was a panel that monitored arrangements and discussed each child to see if any should be moved back and when this should take place.

A Member asked if there was any data available to demonstrate how some of the young people were integrating and coping two years after they had left foster care. The Head of Children's Social Care explained that the team continued to stay in touch and links had been strengthened with adult social care and a transition panel had been put in place. The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing added that transition planning started at 14 and proactive work was undertaken with different initiatives such as apprenticeships to improve their options.

A member asked for more information about the assisted lodging programme. The Group Manager, Children's Regulated Services explained that they advertised for them in the same way they did for foster carers. They could work full time and offer support for young adults up to the age of 21. They were not regulated but overseen and subject to the same checks as foster carers.

A Member raised the issue of compatibility and was concerned that vulnerable young children were in unsuitable placements and asked what work was being done to avoid this happening. The Head of Children's Social Care explained that by increasing capacity this would enhance the chances of improving compatibility. Matching issues were considered and sometimes were the reason for placing a young person out of county. This model should give more flexibility to respond to children individually.

The Group Manager, Children's Regulated Services explained that there were specific packages to help young adults become independent. This was more challenging for foster carers but work was being done to help with improving independence skills.

Members raised concerns about the options that 4 beds would allow, the need for a bespoke building and the difficulties of transitioning to the new arrangements whilst still continuing to provide a service. The Group Manger – Commissioning replied that work in the long term would include looking at alternative buildings in line with a whole system model. The extra care schemes, supported living, lodgings, and other beds used more effectively would increase the total number of beds available. A member commented that this information should be included in the report.

The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing welcomed the debate and agreed that the information had not been presented in a helpful way. The scrutiny process had provided valuable feedback.

**Conclusions:**



**Remodelling Children's Residential Services Project**

Further Report

The Committee requested that the item be re-considered at a future Special meeting of the Committee to receive more detailed information. The Committee overall felt they needed a greater understanding of the current situation in order for them to be confident in making informed comments and recommendations to Cabinet on the proposed model going forward.

The Committee therefore requested that this report include the following information:

- Occupancy levels for residential homes and over past 12 months.
- Numbers and types of in house and OOC foster placements for last 1-2 years.
- Detail on the approximate length of placements in Sunnybank? If extending the age that young people can be there, is this extending the length of time they are there and if so where would any other young people go who need the same support – ie. is 1 home/ 4 beds enough? How many (if applicable) with similar needs are being sent OOC?
- How many OOC placements are likely to remain due to being best placed and likewise how many are we likely to be able to bring back in house? Is it only future potential OOC that are being looked at for in house placements rather than placing them OOC following remodelling?
- Upfront costs for staffing and training relies on OOC being reduced but how will this be achieved without the services and changes first in place?
- What evidence is there that young people will be eligible for supported people grant funding and if not, would they still be able to be supported through supported lodgings? What are the associated savings for supported lodgings in comparison to residential home placements?
- Whilst supported lodgings may suit some young people 16-18, what about those who it would not be suitable for?
- Members requested more information on the Business case behind the remodelling – ie. it was reported that this is part of a bigger picture but what is the bigger picture? What evidence is there that there are prospects for income generation – how would this be possible if all our residential places are full anyway? How are business efficiencies going to be improved? What does success look like? What targets are there and expected outcomes for the remodelling project?
- Information on care leaver destinations – where are they 2 years after leaving care for example? (if we have this information).
- How is the issue of compatibility addressed in placements – given the rising numbers and pressure for placements, what assurances are there to ensure compatibility and that young people are not being placed in even more vulnerable situations? One example is that the homes have previously been reported as not in suitable locations being in areas at risk of CSE, criminal damage, threats to kill and child abuse.
- If all foster placements are full, how will 3 be freed up to undertake up-skilling to become transitional carers?
- Do all Foster Carers need specialist training or should this only be targeted to a small number? – If we cannot sign them in with a contract the Authority could be

paying out for a lot of training which may then benefit IFA should foster carers transfer over.

- Examples of LAC feedback to consultation and engagement – what are their responses to the proposed model?
- Evidence of workforce planning – what do we have and what do we need?
- What evidence is there that the Authority has looked at best practice elsewhere?
- Could the Committee be provided with the most recent Rota Visiting report to get an idea of the types of issues/comments being raised by Members in the recent past.

**Recommendations so far**

1. The Committee recommend that the Authority look towards providing joint regional training with other Local Authorities and that consideration be given to looking within these LAs for experts to provide this. This joint training would not only assist in hopefully reducing the cost of training but would also help build relationships between staff, residential staff and foster carers regionally not just within our own LA.
2. The Committee recommend that the Authority incorporate a clause within Foster Carer contracts where they are receiving specialist training, in order to maintain them in house and not potentially lose very qualified Foster Carers to IFAs.

**Further Comments**

The Committee requested that they be provided the opportunity to be involved in any LA response to the work being carried out by the National Fostering Framework and the All Wales Fostering Network on the subject of Foster Carers becoming permanent employees of a LA.

17. **URGENT ITEMS**

There were none.

The meeting closed at 12.30 pm