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Bridgend County Borough Council



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Cyfarwyddiaeth y Prif Weithredwr / Chief Executive's Directorate

Deialu uniongyrchol / Direct line /: 01656 643148 / 643147 / 643694

Gofynnwch am / Ask for:

Ein cyf / Our ref:

Eich cyf / Your ref:

Dyddiad/Date: Wednesday, 31st March 2021

Dear Councillor,

CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING

A meeting of the Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting will be held remotely via Microsoft Teams on **Thursday, 8 April 2021 at 14:00**.

AGENDA

1. Apologies for Absence
To receive apologies for absence from Members.
2. Declarations of Interest
To receive declarations of personal and prejudicial interest (if any) from Members/Officers in accordance with the provisions of the Members' Code of Conduct adopted by Council from 1 September 2008.
3. Approval of Minutes 3 - 10
To receive for approval the minutes of 04 02 21
4. Update on the Establishment of a National Fostering Framework (NFF) and Current Work in relation to In House Foster Care Provision 11 - 20
5. Looked After Children in Education 21 - 26
6. Urgent Items
To consider any other item(s) of business in respect of which notice has been given in accordance with Part 4 (paragraph 4) of the Council Procedure Rules and which the person presiding at the meeting is of the opinion should be reason of special circumstances be transacted at the meeting as a matter of urgency.

Note: Please note: Due to the current requirement for social distancing this meeting will not be held at its usual location. This will be a virtual meeting and Members and Officers will be attending remotely. The meeting will be recorded for subsequent transmission via the Council's internet site which will be available as soon as practicable after the meeting. If you have any queries regarding this, please contact cabinet_committee@bridgend.gov.uk or tel. 01656 643147 / 643148.

Yours faithfully

K Watson

Chief Officer, Legal, HR & Regulatory Services

Councillors:

NA Burnett

N Clarke

HJ David

J Gebbie

T Giffard

Councillors

CA Green

RM James

D Patel

RL Penhale-Thomas

JC Radcliffe

Councillors

CE Smith

DBF White

HM Williams

RE Young

Agenda Item 3

CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING - THURSDAY, 4 FEBRUARY 2021

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING HELD IN REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON THURSDAY, 4 FEBRUARY 2021 AT 14:00

Present

Councillor NA Burnett – Chairperson

N Clarke
D Patel

HJ David
CE Smith

J Gebbie
HM Williams

CA Green
RE Young

Apologies for Absence

T Giffard

Officers:

Nicola Echanis	Head of Education & Family Support
Mark Galvin	Senior Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Lindsay Harvey	Corporate Director Education and Family Support
Laura Kinsey	Head of Children's Social Care
Mark Lewis	Group Manager - Integrated Working
Claire Marchant	Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing
Michael Pitman	Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Mark Shephard	Chief Executive
Elizabeth-Walton James	Group Manager – IAA and Safeguarding
David Wright	Family Support Services Manager
Raeanna Grainger	Independent Reviewing Services Manager

221. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

222. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of 26 November 2021 be approved as a true and accurate record.

223. UPDATE ON BRIDGEND YOUTH JUSTICE SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The Corporate Director – Education and Family Support, submitted a report, the purpose of which, was to update the Corporate Parenting Committee on progress with implementing the Bridgend Youth Justice Service improvement plan which was developed following Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP) inspection of Western Bay Youth Justice and Early Intervention Service, in December 2018.

The Group Manager Integrated Working and Family Support, by way of background information, confirmed that the Bridgend Youth Justice Service (Bridgend YJS) was a statutory multi-agency partnership that has a legal duty to co-operate in order to secure appropriate local youth justice services. The service was funded from a variety of sources including UK Government, Welsh Government and statutory partners (ie Bridgend County Borough Council, South Wales Police, the Probation Service and Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board).

The Western Bay Youth Justice and Early Intervention Service (WBYJEIS) was subject to a full joint inspection by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP) in December

2018, the findings of which were published in March 2019. The inspection concluded that the WBYJEIS received an overall rating of inadequate. The findings of the HMIP inspection concluded that nine of the twelve inspection domains were rated as inadequate, one was adequate, one was good and one was outstanding.

The Group Manager Integrated Working and Family Support advised that, on 19 April 2019, Cabinet agreed to the disaggregation of the WBYJEIS and that the new arrangement would be for the Bridgend's Youth Justice Service to sit within the portfolio of an existing group manager within the Education and Family Support Directorate.

The service now continues to be subject to monitoring by the Youth Justice Board (YJB) and significant scrutiny from a variety of sources including UK Government and Welsh Government, he added. However, due to the impact of COVID-19 it was presently unknown when a re-inspection of Bridgend YJS will be undertaken.

A restructure of Bridgend YJS was concluded in September 2019. This restructure led to the service becoming a part of the Integrated Multi-Agency Prevention of Complex Cases Teams (IMPACCT) hub working closely with the edge of care teams. This move had provided better joint working, sharing of skills and resources and reduced duplication of work for children, young people and families. The restructure had also led to the creation of lead practitioner posts, which provided the service with the opportunity to deliver robust supervision, quality assurance of work and line management of staff. These were areas highlighted within the inspection as a cause for concern. The lead practitioner posts were recruited to in October 2019, with both lead practitioners in post in January 2020.

He continued by stating that Quality assurance work had commenced within the service. Feedback from this, had highlighted that there was an improving picture in respect of the quality of assessments. However, further work in addressing risk of harm and safety and wellbeing had been identified. In response to this, independent training approved by the YJB had been commissioned to support staff in this area. In addition to assessments, development of need led plans that are timely and address issues highlighted within assessments had also been identified as an area for improvement. Developing interventions and programmes that reduce risks of re-offending are also ongoing areas for the service to enhance, the Group Manager Integrated Working and Family Support explained.

The next few paragraphs of the report, confirmed how the above was being achieved.

A self-assessment of the Bridgend YJS was conducted in April 2020. Areas identified for improvement had been added to the Improvement Plan attached at appendix 1. Some of these areas of work were still in progress, he stressed. Areas identified within this plan included the ongoing improvement of assessments, support plans, interventions, partnership working and evaluation and feedback forms from young people.

Paragraph 4.6 of the report however, confirmed how the Covid-19 pandemic had impacted upon some planned improvements being realised to a degree, though ways around this had been to a degree put in place.

Attached at appendix 2 to the report, was the performance framework report considered at monthly Youth Justice Service Management Board meetings. The Management Board was jointly chaired by the Chief Executive of the Council and the Cabinet Member for Communities. Terms of reference for the Management Board were attached at appendix 3, concluded the Group manager Integrated Working and Family Support.

The Group Manager Integrated Working and Family Support concluded his submission, by advising that some of the data attached to the report had been updated recently and he was happy to share this with Members, upon request.

The Chairperson advised that she had sat on two Youth Justice Service Management Board meetings, where she had been impressed by the level of engagement involving partners on the Board.

The Cabinet Member – Education and Regeneration advised that he was impressed with the trend of continues improvement that had been made since the Family Support team had taken over the service following the inspection and he had every confidence that these improvements would continue in the future.

The Cabinet Member – Wellbeing and Future Generations, advised that she too had also been involved for some time in the Youth Justice Service Management Board and concurred that this was going from strength to strength. She was particularly please the way the Board was operating in innovative ways, so as to overcome the pressures of the pandemic, ie including social distancing etc, which meant that it was difficult to have close interaction with clients and young people.

The Deputy Leader referred to recommendation 13 of HMIP addressing literacy and numeracy skill levels in respect of young people within the system. He asked how this was being pursued and also, if it was being achieved.

The Group Manager Integrated Working and Family Support, advised that many children and young people here were doing well, but there were some that were doing less well. Previously a speech and language therapist had been employed. There had also been an issue that had compounded progress, namely that some of statutory school age, were not receiving through their education, the minimum statutory education of 25 hours a week. The local authority had therefore challenged schools they were being educated at on this, so that such hours could be increased. Some young people also had been involved in crime and/or had challenging behaviour. Issues such as these, had also hindered their progress on core educational attainment targets. There was also an Education Engagement Team now in place, that were filling any gaps in relation to the above, so more progress was being made and this would hopefully continue in the future, he added.

The Chairperson asked how the service was ensuring that children in the system were able to have access to suitable reading material, in order to encourage them to improve their literacy skills.

The Family Service Support Manager advised that this was something that was being pursued with the library services, more detail upon which he would provide to the Chairperson outside of the meeting.

In response to a number of points made by the Leader, the Group Manager Integrated Working and Family Support, commented as follows.

In terms of the agencies that formed the Youth Justice Service Management Board, he confirmed that these comprised of statutory agency representation as well as non-statutory. He was pleased to add that attendance at meetings and overall support was strong. Though there had been poor attendance in the past at meetings, from Carers Wales and Parc Prison. However, support from these agencies had now improved. With regards to support being offered for victims of offences and crimes as well as the perpetrators, he stated that this was in place, however, improvements could be made in this area of support work he acknowledged. With regards to capacity levels in the team

to support the Youth Justice Service this was being stretched particularly in light of the service taking over the support of this on the back of a previous poor inspection (of the service). A further Social Worker had recently been recruited to strengthen the team, however this had been negated to a degree, as an Agency Worker had recently left the service. So though services were being delivered, work levels were demanding.

The Leader requested further updates on the service at future meetings of the Committee, by way of progress reports, in order that Members may be given assurance that all actions requested as part of the last inspection had been completed.

The Chief Executive concluded debate on this item, by confirming that though improvements had undoubtedly been made within the Youth Justice Service in recent months, there were still some significant challenges and pieces of work to overcome and complete in the future and before hopefully any pre-inspection which could come around fairly quickly. This however, was work in progress, he acknowledged.

RESOLVED: That the report and the work undertaken to date on the Bridgend Youth Justice Service Improvement Plan, be noted.

224. INDEPENDENT REVIEWING SERVICE (IRO) REPORT

The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing submitted a report, the purpose of which, was to present to Members of the Committee the Independent Reviewing Service (IRO) Report, in line with The Independent Reviewing Officers Guidance (Wales) 2004, along with the IRO Service Action Plan.

She advised that the appointment of Independent Reviewing Officer's (IRO's) by Local Authorities was a legal requirement and their core functions are governed by legislation and guidance as follows:

- The Adoption and Children Act 2002;
- The Independent Reviewing Officers Guidance (Wales) 2004.

The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) service has an authoritative role, in assuring the quality of care planning is achieved, it was explained.

The Independent Reviewing Service report (attached at Appendix A to the report,) covered the work of the IRO service from April 2019 to March 2020.

The report contained performance information in respect of the statutory reviewing of Children who are Looked After, including children with plans for Adoption and Young People with Leaving Care LAC/Pathway Plans (under 18) by Bridgend County Borough Council. It also included information on children subject of a child protection plan and reviews of these plans at Child Protection Case Conferences.

The report further detailed information that related to regulatory requirements in respect of resolution case disputes, IRO caseloads, participation and consultation of young people in their Reviews, challenges and achievements in the reporting period and service priorities for 2019-20.

As well as the guidance referred to in paragraph 3.1 of the report, additional IRO guidance and practice standards were introduced at the beginning of 2019. IRO's had worked to improve tracking and monitoring as advised within the Practice Standards and Good Practice Guide, Officers confirmed.

The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing stated, that as described in the report, the IRO's chaired/reviewed 2,022 meetings between April 2019 and March 2020. 1,506 quality assurance audits were completed relating to these meetings also.

In her conclusion of the report, she advised that the IRO service had continued to work with the safeguarding teams to improve practice around child protection conferences and this had been extended through to other agencies such as the Health Visiting services, School Nurses and Midwifery Services. The next stage of events, was to work at improving the quality of Looked After Children reviews on a multi-agency basis.

She stressed finally, that continuous service improvement is always sought after and as such the Independent Reviewing Service aimed to continue to have a greater impact in terms of improving the quality of the lives of care experienced children and young people. The IRO Service Action Plan at Appendix A, reflected the areas of focus for improvement over the next 12 months for the service, which would be under constant review in order to ensure actions proposed were being met.

In support of the report, a power point presentation (together with a short video) was given by the Group manager IAA and Safeguarding/Independent Reviewing Manager, with the support of Social Services colleagues.

The presentation covered a number of themes and key areas of work, examples of which are given below:

- The roles and remit of the Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO's)
- The child protection population the last 12 months, ie 185 average (current 189)
- Monthly average of Foster Care placements the last 12 months = 383, with those aged 10 to 15 being the largest percentage and 0 to 1, being the smallest
- Some service priorities outlined in the Action Plan:
 1. Increased contact between the IRO's and children and young people (going forward);
 2. To achieve permanency and reduce numbers of Care Experienced Children;
 3. Improvement in child consultation/participation;
 4. Improve LAC reviews and care planning processes;
 5. Developing learning themes and improve practice through QA;
 6. Develop Advocacy services/active offer to children.

The Cabinet Member – Wellbeing and Future Generations asked Officers if they could give some further information on Re-Statementing, ie why children are de-registered from the Child Protection Register, only to be re-registered sometime after and on occasions, fairly quickly.

Officers advised that this was an area of Council that was regularly the subject of auditing. If sufficient evidence was available for a decision to be made for a child to be de-registered, the main reason behind them going back on the register was usually due to the fact that, his/her parents had originally separated but then subsequently got back together. During this time however, the relationship had again once more deteriorated, hence placing the child back into a potentially hostile setting. Arising from such a situation, the child is then once more placed on the Child Protection Register in order to ensure their continued safeguarding going forward.

In cases such as this, they are then the subject of further and ongoing review and scrutiny, which includes working with the parents as well as supporting the interests and health and wellbeing of the child.

As the work of IRO's was a statutory function, the Leader asked how the service engaged with younger children in order to hear their voice and what impact had the Covid pandemic had on close engagement with young people of all age groups. He felt that with children of Infants/Primary school age, there was more opportunity, particularly at present, to hear their voice in a school based setting. During Covid, he felt that we had to continue delivering support and services particularly to the most vulnerable in society, in different ways than previous, whilst at the same time, balancing up issues such as risks and roles in terms of these individuals future welfare.

He acknowledged that Domestic Abuse was very much a problem and an issue that had become even worse during lockdown. Whilst he was aware of some of the mechanisms of support in place for victims of this, he asked if there was anything in place to help the perpetrators, as he was aware of the Perpetrator's Programme.

In terms of keeping contact with older children and the continuation of their care and care planning, Officers confirmed that regular contact was very much continuing with this age group of young people, through virtual platforms, as well as through initiatives and support such as the 16 Plus Team. Therefore, the pandemic had not so much hindered this age group in terms of their continued monitoring and support. Though face to face contact other than that arranged remotely, was still an issue due to social distancing. There were Advocacy services in place that also supported the welfare of these young people, advised the Group Manager IAA and Safeguarding.

The Independent Reviewing Manager confirmed that there were Consultation documents that were used in order to provide continued support and engagement with young individuals and these were varied in that they were also 'age appropriate'. With plans in place for the possible re-opening of schools at half term, in the first instance for younger pupils, interaction would take place with the schools, in order to ensure ongoing support is continued for the most vulnerable and foster care children. There was also a provision in their Personal Education Plans (PEP's) that accounted for their continued support also, she added. This assisted and to an extent overcome any reduction in visits by IRO's in a more one to one public setting.

Officers advised also, that there were a number of programmes in place that addressed domestic violence, through both working with the victim and the perpetrator, including the Inspiring Families Programme.

A Member noted from the report's supporting information, that there was proposed as part of the future MTFS considerations, a reduction in office support staff for the Child Protection Team. She asked if this would detract from current support levels in place for foster children, etc.

The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing advised that this was something that was being considered, however, regular Management meetings were held within the Directorate on a continuous cycle, to meet all services as pressures arise in teams, with support always being put in place for any change in such pressures, moving forward. This included for the IRO's, particularly in order to ensure that there is adequate support in place for their work including their number of caseloads at any given time.

The Chairperson noted that a common factor amongst LAC was neglect. She asked if there was any data available that would reflect the number of children who are the subject of neglect and how many of these qualify for free school meals.

CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING - THURSDAY, 4 FEBRUARY 2021

Officers stated that they did not have this data to hand, however, the Head of Children's Services confirmed that she would liaise with the Children's Directorate and in turn provided some data on this to Members, outside of the meeting.

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the Independent Reviewing Service report, the contents of the power point Presentation and the IRO service action plan (attached at Appendix A to the report).

225. URGENT ITEMS

None.

The meeting closed at 16:30

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BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE

8 APRIL 2021

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR, SOCIAL SERVICES AND WELLBEING

UPDATE ON THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A NATIONAL FOSTERING FRAMEWORK (NFF) AND CURRENT WORK IN RELATION TO IN HOUSE FOSTER CARE PROVISION

1. Purpose of report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to :

- provide the Corporate Parenting Committee with an update (further to the report presented on 18th April 2018) regarding the progress of work undertaken on establishing a National Fostering Framework in Wales.
- provide the Corporate Parenting Committee with updated information about Bridgend Foster Care service provision and the fostering service review and developments that are underway.

2. Connection to corporate well-being objectives / other corporate priorities

2.1 This report assists in the achievement of the following corporate well-being objective/objectives under the **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015**:-

1. **Supporting a successful sustainable economy** – taking steps to make the county borough a great place to do business, for people to live, work, study and visit, and to ensure that our schools are focussed on raising the skills, qualifications and ambitions for all people in the county borough.
2. **Helping people and communities to be more healthy and resilient** - taking steps to reduce or prevent people from becoming vulnerable or dependent on the Council and its services. Supporting individuals and communities to build resilience, and enable them to develop solutions to have active, healthy and independent lives.
3. **Smarter use of resources** – ensure that all resources (financial, physical, ecological, human and technological) are used as effectively and efficiently as possible and support the creation of resources throughout the community that can help to deliver the Council's well-being objectives.

3. Background

National Fostering Framework

- 3.1 As stated previously for many years, key stakeholders have advocated for greater collaboration across all sectors, to address strategically the growing concerns about the overall effectiveness and sustainability of fostering services in Wales. The creation of a National Framework was seen as a means of ensuring that known concerns were addressed and introduced greater consistency without sacrificing the acknowledged strengths and diversity of local accountability within the existing system.
- 3.2 Phase One of the work (2015) saw the Minister for Health and Social Services endorse the proposed framework and provided funding from Welsh Government, and reflected both the scale of people's concerns and also the need to support effective change which could only be addressed at a strategic level.
- 3.3 Following a programme of engagement and consultation a Phase One report was produced and submitted to Welsh Government that set out recommendations for how the National Fostering Framework work should be taken forward. These were as follows:
- Develop a National Fostering Framework, including the allocation of functions at national, regional and local levels and begin putting in place the appropriate structures. (Year one).
 - Introduce a national performance and resource framework aligning this with the work to deliver the Welsh Community Care Information Service (WCCIS). A phased approach to implementation will be developed. A distinct performance framework to be developed for the independent sector (commercial and Third Sector providers). (Year one).
 - Introduce a national website, social media, brand identity for foster care in Wales, to underpin a marketing strategy for recruiting foster carers and improving communication. (Year one).
 - Ensure greater consistency in the use of Kinship Foster Care for Children who are looked after, building on the initial scoping paper in Phase One. (Year One).
 - Develop national arrangements for the commissioning of all placements regardless of sector, but building on the work of the 4Cs (Childrens Commissioning Consortium Cymru). (Year one).
 - Benchmark best practice in corporate parenting across Councils and other public services to improve outcomes for children and increase resilience for foster care placements. (Year one).
 - Establish the right balance between Local Authority foster care, third sector providers and commercial providers in terms of national policy objectives, service quality considerations and value for money requirements. (Year two).
 - Produce a national policy framework for fostering services, to include the training and support of foster carers. (Year two).
 - Establish an all-Wales public service fostering collaborative, delivering services regionally and locally, incorporating all the relevant services directly provided by Local Authorities. (Year three).

- Harmonise policies for paying fees and allowances to Local Authority foster carers (Year three).
- 3.4 To support the further development of the National Framework (Phase Two) a national strategic steering group was established and a further series of consultations took place across Wales about what a 'National Fostering Framework' and its components should look like and an implementation plan was developed for 2017–2020.
- 3.5 The work programme from phase 2 carried out during 2016-17 included:
- Work stream 1: Develop a National Fostering Framework including the allocation of functions at national, regional and local authority levels and begin putting into place the appropriate structures.
 - Work stream 2: Introduce a national performance framework aligning this with the work being done to deliver the WCCIS.
 - Work stream 3: Introduce a national website, social media, brand and identity for Local Authority foster care in Wales, to underpin a marketing strategy for recruiting foster carers and improving communication.
 - Work stream 4: Ensure greater consistency in the use of Kinship Foster care for children who are looked after.
 - Work stream 5: Develop national arrangements for commissioning of all placements regardless of the sector and building on the work of the 4 Cs
 - Work stream 6: Benchmark best practice in corporate parenting across Councils and other public services to improve outcomes for children and increase the resilience of foster care placements.
 - Work stream 7: Harmonise policies for paying fees and allowances to local authority foster carers.
- 3.6 Phase 3 commenced in 2017 and regional development managers were appointed throughout Wales to engage with the national work streams and coordinate plans for delivery in their areas. Swansea hosted this post for Western Bay.
- 3.7 The work programme at that time is outlined below:
- Work stream 1: Create capacity for an extended National Adoption Services central team to provide the co-ordination and leadership for the National Fostering Framework (NFF).
 - Work stream 2: Development of Regional work programmes based on the regional priorities identified by the national performance framework.
 - Work stream 3: Implement the national performance framework across all Local Authorities to help shape the regional priorities.
 - Work stream 4: create an All Wales brand for Local Authority fostering. Establish a marketing strategy at regional and central level for the brand.
 - Work stream 5: Increase capacity within the regions to respond to additional enquiries following the market activity.
 - Work stream 6: develop a national approach to commissioning of fostering services:

- Work stream 7: develop consistent standards and Best Practice Guide for Kinship Care and Implementation Plan.
- Work stream 8: continue work on harmonising fees and Allowances for foster carers.
- Work stream 9: Develop a national training framework for foster carers.

4. Current situation/proposal

4.1 Since April 2019 Bridgend has moved from being part of Western Bay to become part of Cwm Taf Morgannwg Regional Partnership/Health Board. The Regional Development Manager post for this region is hosted by Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) CBC.

4.2 To support the implementation of the National Fostering Framework across the region a strategic group has been established to provide overview and scrutiny in order to monitor the performance of the NFF work-streams at a local and regional level. The strategic group is supported by an operational group to deliver the identified priorities.

4.3 A Regional Work Programme has been agreed that supports the National Fostering Framework and has identified the following priority tasks:

- **Improve recruitment and retention of foster carers across the region**
 - April 2019 saw the launch of a regional (RCT and Merthyr (MTCBC)) foster care website and “front door” for fostering which included a new team to handle all enquiries and visits.
 - Implementation of Regional Skills to Foster started in June 2019. Bridgend continue to co-ordinate their own training but places are made available to RCT and MTCBC applicants when required.
 - During September 2020 an options paper was developed with a view to BCBC joining with its regional partners and deliver one point of contact for foster care enquiries. The Regional Front Door was approved at BCBC’s Cabinet on 9th March 2021 and “went live” from 1st April 2021.
 - A Regional Marketing Officer was appointed in March 2021 who will be responsible for developing a Marketing Strategy.
- **Implementation of new National Brand across all 3 Local Authorities**
 - A national brand (Maethau Cymru/Foster Wales) has been developed. Each Local Authority will maintain an individual identity within this, recognising the need to connect with local people. Bridgend will be known as “Maethau Pen y Bont/Foster Bridgend”.
 - To support the implementation of a national brand/identity a national website has been developed and it is anticipated that it will be launched during summer 2021. Sitting beneath and linking directly to this each Local Authority will have its own fostering webpage.
- **Develop a regional ‘Local Authority Offer’ for foster care**

- All 3 LA's have completed the national core offer template designed by the Regional Development Manager, who collated and highlighted consistencies/differences across the region.
 - Consultation taken place with all foster carers in the Cwm Taf Morgannwg area to consider what would be important to them in a core offer and the region is to work towards implementing the core offer set out by the National Fostering Framework.
 - Work has been undertaken to develop a new HR policy for each LA with a view to establishing them as "Fostering Friendly Organisations."
 - Work needs to be undertaken to align current offer across the region before promoting and publicising through the website and social media.
- **Adapt the Post Approval Learning and Development (L&D) Framework to meet local needs**
 - The Regional Development Manager met with training co-ordinators in Bridgend and the Cwm Taf region during February 2019 to discuss what already exists and implementation of the national L&D framework.
 - A national launch took place in November 2019 and a Cym Taf Morgannwg launch took place with over 70 stakeholders from across the region in attendance.
 - The Framework is now operational across all three local authorities.
 - An audit/review is to take place in April 2021 to ascertain current use across the region.
- **Harmonise fees and allowances**
 - Early scoping work has been undertaken in relation to harmonising fees and allowances.
 - All three LA's have linked with the national working group for this area of development.
 - We are in the early stages of considering options that would support a Regional approach to payment of carers.
- **Develop a local performance management framework that enables reporting nationally and tells us what we want to know locally**
 - Regionally all are completing the NFF return as required.
 - Fostering team and performance leads in BCBC met with the Regional Development Manager in December 2020 to look at embedding the performance framework.
 - BCBC have aligned the initial visit and recruitment process with RCTCBC and MTCBC.
 - Further work is required to embed other elements of the new NFF return and Key Performance Indicators (KPI) tool onto WCCIS.
- **Develop regional principles for Fostering panel**
 - A working group considered the options for a Regional Approach in respect of the Foster Panel. The Working group decided against full regionalisation of the Panel,

but agreed to align the recruitment and appraisals process for panel members, share training and good practice and share foster carers (on the Panel) mutually across the LA's.

- Agreement reached to establish a forum for panel chairs and members to share good practice. However, as a National Forum has been established this is the preferred option that is being followed.
 - Team Managers in each local authority are to identify foster carers that would be suitable and in agreement to attend foster panel in other LA's and share their details with regional colleagues.
 - Discussion is needed with training leads to identify joint training for panel chairs.
 - Further consultation needed with fostering panels in each area to gather their views collaborative working.
 - A new scoping exercise to be undertaken to consider the potential for regional mainstream panels to be held.
- **Embed the AFA Cymru Best Practice Guidance for Kinship care across the region**
 - Identified in L&D Framework sub group in October 2018 that training for kinship carers needs development, particularly pre approval training.
 - Need to establish a separate kinship care task and finish group to align processes and practice and develop a Cwm Taf approach.
 - Regional Development Manager is currently developing pre-approval training for Kinship carers that can be used across the region.
 - Need to decide where kinship care and SGO carers fit within the development of fostering services.
 - **Communication and Collaboration with all LA's in the region**
 - Quarterly Meetings taken place since July 2019 between LA's.
 - Representation from each LA in regional task and finish groups.
 - Regional strategic group (to be held quarterly) was launched in September 2020.
 - Operational group is launching on 08.04.21 and will meet Bi-monthly

Bridgend Foster Care/ Foster Bridgend

- 4.4 Bridgend Fostering Service continues to offer a wide range of fostering services for children who need to be Looked After and this includes carers who are able to offer care to children and young people who they do not have a pre-existing relationship with and carers who are considered to be "connected persons".
- 4.5 As at 23rd March 2021 within Bridgend Foster Care there were:
- 99 approved Fostering households for general foster placements
 - 129 children placed with in-house general foster carers
 - 56 approved Connected Persons fostering households
 - 88 children placed with Connected Persons Foster Carers
 - 65 children placed with independent fostering agencies

4.6 Bridgend Fostering has faced significant challenges during 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic but during this time has sought to provide on-going support to carers.

4.7 In November 2019 funding was secured to recruit 4 re-unification workers whose main aims were to:

- support foster placements at risk of placement breakdown,
- support children to transition into step down provision (from residential and out of county placements) and
- support children to be reunified into the care of their birth family

During quarters 1-3 there were some notable outcomes achieved:

- 56 Referrals received
 - 26 placement Stability
 - 23 re-unification
 - 2 transition between placements
 - 4 inappropriate referrals
- 11 cases where re-unification home has been achieved
- 3 cases where support and intervention has contributed to a plan for Special Guardianship Order
- 1 case which supported a grandmother to obtain a Child Arrangement Order
- 1 case which supported a young person to transition to a Connected Person Foster Carer
- 6 cases where placement stability was achieved
- The number of children having 3 + placement moves as at 31st December 2020 was 7.12% (6.72% 31st December 2019).

4.8 As part of Children's Services re-modelling of Residential Care in 2018 it was proposed that 6 Transitional Foster Carers would be recruited who would act as a step-down for young people coming out of the residential units before being placed in a long-term family or independent placement. They would be therapeutically trained and therefore able to address issues that occurred as a result of a transition into a different environment, increasing the chances that the long-term placement will be successful and reducing multiple placement breakdowns and reliance on out-of-county placements.

The scheme was only successful in recruiting 3 Transitional Foster Carers who were approved at the beginning of 2019 and this did have an impact upon the overall success. Since this time one of the Transitional Carers resigned and another made the decision to step down from her role as a transitional carer in order to continue to provide a long term placement to a child who was in her care.

In January 2021 a review of this scheme was undertaken, with one of the previous transitional foster carers central to and informing our discussions/decisions and we are currently seeking to recruit an additional 5 carers. It is recognised that the Transitional Foster Care Scheme plays a key role within the wider Placements

Service to reduce the number of children who need to be placed outside of BCBC and to prevent children and young people experiencing numerous placement breakdowns.

- 4.9 Bridgend's Fostering Team is also going through a re-structure at the present time with a view to continue to provide timely and high quality support to our general foster carers, whilst promoting a focus on permanence options for children and young people within their own extended family.

5. Effect upon policy framework and procedure rules

- 5.1 There are no implications on the policy framework and procedure rules arising from this report.

6. Equality Impact Assessment

- 6.1 There are no direct equality implications as a consequence of this report.

7. Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 implications

- 7.1 As stated above stakeholders have advocated for greater collaboration across all sectors, to address strategically the growing concerns about the overall effectiveness and sustainability of fostering services in Wales. The creation of a National Framework was seen as a means of ensuring that known concerns were addressed and of introduced greater consistency without sacrificing the acknowledged strengths and diversity of local accountability within the existing system.

- 7.2 Both the regional and local work programmes seek to support BCBC Children's Services Aim that where children and young people are looked after this is done in placements that are within the local authority boundary enabling them maintain links with and access their school, GP, dentist, friends and family. These work programmes also recognise the impact on Health and Education when children and young people are placed in outside of BCBC.

- 7.3 From the outset one of the key drivers in the development of a National Fostering Framework has been the recognition that Local Authorities across Wales did not have sufficient numbers of foster carers, with sufficient support and skills to meet the increasing demand for placements for children and young people with increasingly complex needs. The work that has and continues to be undertaken is focusses on this to prevent any further deterioration in the ability of Local Authorities to meet this demand.

8. Financial implications

- 8.1 There are no specific financial implications arising directly out of this report.

9. Recommendation(s)

- 9.1 That the Cabinet Committee notes the updated information contained within the report and supports the further development of the Bridgend Foster Care service as set out above.

Claire Marchant
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March 2021

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Background documents: None

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BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE

8 APRIL 2021

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR of EDUCATION AND FAMILY SUPPORT

LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN IN EDUCATION

1. Purpose of report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Corporate Parenting Committee with an update on the support for Looked After Children in Education (LACE) across the local authority. The report will specifically focus on the support provided to Bridgend's Looked After Children (LAC) for the school year 2020-2021.

2. Connection to corporate well-being objectives / other corporate priorities

2.1 This report assists in the achievement of the following corporate well-being objective/objectives under the **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015**:-

- **Supporting a successful sustainable economy** – taking steps to make the county borough a great place to do business, for people to live, work, study and visit, and to ensure that our schools are focussed on raising the skills, qualifications and ambitions for all people in the county borough.
- **Helping people and communities to be more healthy and resilient** - taking steps to reduce or prevent people from becoming vulnerable or dependent on the Council and its services. Supporting individuals and communities to build resilience, and enable them to develop solutions to have active, healthy and independent lives.
- **Smarter use of resources** – ensure that all resources (financial, physical, ecological, human and technological) are used as effectively and efficiently as possible and support the creation of resources throughout the community that can help to deliver the Council's well-being objectives.

3. Background

3.1 It is well researched and documented that looked after children (LAC) often under achieve compared to their peers in terms of educational attainment and are less likely to progress into further education or training. There are a range of reasons for this, but, in general, where a child is struggling at an early stage of their education, not attending school regularly, with little support and encouragement at home, they will generally do less well at later stages.

- 3.2 Children become looked after often as a last resort and only where there are significant concerns related to their safety. The impact of this in terms of a child's development can be significant and in particular on their ability to engage in education. Research conducted by Public Health Wales in respect of Adverse Childhood Experiences notes that children who have experienced trauma are at significant risk for impairments including IQ, memory, attention and language/verbal ability poorer academic performance and school-related behaviours such as discipline, dropout and attendance; and higher rates of behavioural problems and internalising symptoms.
- 3.3 In May 2018, the role of supporting Looked After Children's Education (LACE) moved into the previously named Vulnerable Groups Team, now called the Education Engagement Team (EET). The EET has responsibility as a single point of contact for all professionals where concerns present for a vulnerable learner relating to their education. This includes children on the child protection register, LAC, home educated learners, young carers and any other learner as identified by Estyn's vulnerability criteria. This single point of contact assists by ensuring there is clarity on support for vulnerable learners as information is contained within one team and is easily disseminated to professionals as and when issues present.
- 3.4 The local authority has a statutory duty to promote and ensure looked after children's educational needs are met through the Children Act 1989 and 2004. Responsible authorities are required to designate a specialist practitioner (the LACE Coordinator) to coordinate the child's education plan and address the education needs of looked after children and care leavers in the local authority area. In addition, the responsible authority must ensure that every child looked after by them has an effective and high quality personal education plan (PEP). This duty is discharged via EET.
- 3.5 In addition, the EET team offers advice, support and training to schools while also working in close partnership with Children's Social Care (CSC) and other services to ensure LAC are accessing good quality education that meets their needs. The team also works with school clusters around a consistent approach in utilising the LAC Pupil Development Grant (PDG).

4. Current situation/proposal

- 4.1 As at 19 March 2021, there were 271 statutory school age pupils who were looked after by the local authority.
- 4.2 As indicated earlier in the report, the role of supporting LACE sits within the Education Engagement Team (EET). The EET provides a single point of contact for all agencies including schools, Children Social Care (CSC) and other services for information, advice, training and guidance for vulnerable learners including LAC. The team deliver training to the schools and remain a point of contact for the schools designated teacher related to Personal Education Plans (PEPs) and any other issues presenting for LAC.

- 4.3 The EET works with each school cluster to develop a clear and coherent plan to support LAC via their PDG. Examples of some of these plans created by schools to support LAC include the appointment of a school-based counsellor to acknowledge the impact becoming looked-after can have on learning, Learning Support Officers (LSO) delivering 'Thrive' training to promote educational attainment for looked-after children and mental health and trauma training for staff to consider how behaviour can present itself within school for children who have entered the care system. These approaches are intended to assist schools in supporting and promoting the attendance and attainment of looked after children.
- 4.4 In addition to this, and to support LAC, the local authority via EET has access to PDG funding. This year, the funding has been used to offer additional education to those looked after children most in need of extra support. To date, 33 looked after children have accessed additional tuition via a school teacher over the course of the pandemic. This support has ranged from one hour a week to six hours per week dependent on their needs. Support has focussed on literacy, numeracy and practical skills such as forest schools and online music projects.
- 4.5 Further to the above support and through the statutory responsibility of LACE, the EET deliver training to schools and partners in respect of the impact of trauma and how this can affect a child's ability to engage in learning. The team have facilitated mental health first aid training to schools in response to the impact on LAC emotional wellbeing.
- 4.6 PDG plans produced by schools in Bridgend have been noted in a recent Estyn thematic review regarding good practice with looked-after children (eg tracking of pupils and dedicated transition work). In particular, Brynteg School and Penybont Primary School were identified as implementing good practice models for those learners.
- 4.7 The local authority has also been central to the development of work experience and apprenticeship opportunities for LAC. This opportunity was developed as a pathway for those learners leaving education in the summer with the aim of securing an employment opportunity. All Year 11 looked after learners are presented with the opportunity to engage in work experience over their summer holidays.
- 4.8 With the impact of COVID-19, multi-agency working has been key to ensure that all children continue to access education during this period. For looked after children this has included the opportunity to access on site provision within schools when national restrictions were being implemented. Digital equipment has been provided for those learners who have required it to assist with home learning. There has been regular monitoring and liaison by schools and children's social care to ensure looked after children's needs continued to be met during the pandemic.
- 4.9 As part of that multi agency working, all looked after children were considered for on site school provision. However, emphasis and priority was given to those children in foster placements that were at risk of placement breakdown. Since January 2021, an

average of 50 looked after children were accessing on site provision (primary school age through to Year 8) each week. These children were those deemed by schools, social care and foster carers to be most in need of accessing on site support during the height of the pandemic.

4.10 Moving forward, improvements will be made to the PEP process for look after children via EET. This work will focus on the plans being tailored to be more child centered and reviewed consistently within LAC reviews. Joint work between children's social care and Education and Family Support is being undertaken on this area.

4.11 Further to this, ongoing support will be offered to schools in respect of PDG. This will include the re-introduction (following Covid-19 restrictions) of the termly designated LAC leads forum facilitated by EET. The aim of this is to share good practice across schools in Bridgend with each other.

5. Effect upon policy framework and procedure rules

5.1 There is no effect upon the policy framework and procedure rules.

6. Equality Impact Assessment

6.1 There are no direct equality impact issues arising from this report.

7. Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 implications

7.1 Summary on the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 assessment is listed below:

Long-term	The long term aim is to improve outcomes for children, young people looked after by the local authority related to attendance, attainment, health and wellbeing
Prevention	Intervening early to prevent issues escalating for lookd after children in education is key. It is well documented that engagement in education can be a challenge for looked after children. The LA works with partners to promote this and ensure understanding of looked after children's needs are well understood and considered within Personal Education Plans.
Integration	The approach to supporting looked after children's education is an integrated once across the authority and schools.
Collaboration	Collaboration will be critical to deliver outcomes for looked after children. Joint working is key in ensuring the needs of looked after children are met.
Involvement	Participation and engagement is a central aspact as part of looked after children's reviewing processes.

8. Financial implications

8.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report. However, the Committee may wish to note that the LAC PDG which is distributed to schools for 2020-2021 amounts to £304,227.44

9. Recommendations

9.1 It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Committee note the content of the report.

Lindsay Harvey

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30 March 2021

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Background documents

None

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