

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

Present

Councillor – Chairperson

SE Baldwin  
CE Smith

HJ David  
AJ Williams

J Gebbie  
HM Williams

D Patel

Apologies for Absence

NA Burnett and PJ White

Officers:

Nicola Echanis	Head of Education & Family Support
Steven Howell	Group Manager Placements & Provider Services
Claire Marchant	Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing
Nichola Rogers	Regional Adoption Services Manager - Western Bay Regional Adoption Service
Mark Shephard	Chief Executive

230. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

231. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the 08/04/2021 be approved as a true and accurate record.

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

The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing introduced the report which provided an update on performance and progress of the Western Bay Regional Adoption Service, including the Annual Report on Regional Performance Indicators for 2020/2021 which is attached at Appendix A.

She provided background on the Western Bay Adoption Service (WBAS) and the Adoption and Children Act 2002. She added that the WBAS was integrated into the National Adoption Service (NAS) as one of the five identified regional collaboratives. The aims set out in the directions were listed at 3.5 of the report. Further information on the Governance Board, Advisory Group and the Director of Operations and Central Team were at 3.6 onwards of the report.

The Regional Adoption Manager explained that the WBAS became fully operational in April 2015. Prior to this adoption services were delivered locally via the three local authorities, Swansea, Bridgend and Neath Port Talbot.

The regional adoption service provided a range of services and interventions across the five key domains to those affected by adoption. They were:

- Assessing and supporting prospective adopters
- Assessing non-agency (parent/carer, formerly step-parent adoptions)

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- Birth Record Counselling and Intermediary Services (BRC & IS)
- Adoption support (assessments and support services to anyone affected by adoption)
- Twin tracking and Family Finding (TT&FF), which involves working with birth families of children in or following care proceedings and once a Placement Order has been granted by court in searching for an adoptive placement

The Regional Adoption Manager outlined some key areas of the performance and activity of the service which were outlined in section 4.5 of the report. To note, there was a reduction in the number of children referred for twintracking to the service saw a 16% decrease on the previous year. 44 Bridgend children were referred compared to 62 in 2019-20. The number of children placed saw a slight decrease during the year mainly due to the impact of COVID during the early months of the Pandemic - 69 compared to 79 in 2019/20 but more similar in number to 2018/19 when 67 children were placed. The number of Bridgend children placed remained the same as the previous year with 20 children transitioning to their adoptive placement.

The Regional Adoption Manager noted that there had been issues identifying potential adopters in the Bridgend and Neath port talbot areas so the Marketing Officer was working closely with these local authorities.

The Cabinet Member Communities asked in relation to the marketing for Bridgend and NPT, what have we learn and what can be done to bring more adopters forward. The Regional Adoption Manager explained that making the service visible and engaging with potential adopters to make them aware of the service and provide encouragement. She added that at the end of the year the Regional Adoption Service could look at the performance and see what needed to be done going forward. The Leader stated that social media was a good avenue to look at in terms of promoting the service. She added that it was national adoption week next week and so there would be a great level of promotion and engagement work going on during this time. The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing asked if Members could promote this through their social media channels to ensure as much engagement as possible.

The Leader mentioned that the protests on forced adoption had a negative impact on adoption in Bridgend. He asked if there was any sign of improvements or was there a lack of data to make that determination. The Regional Adoption Manager stated that it was too early to tell but would be able to have a better understanding later in the year.

The Leader queried a section of the report that mentioned there was a decrease in the number of new adoption support assessments commencing. He asked for clarification on this as the team had grown and more support had been provided. The Regional Adoption Manager explained that this was due to an injection of funding for the previous year which enabled more staff to be employed, the result of which was that many families that were on the waiting list were cleared more quickly.

The Leader asked if there was data on the success of the service and any feedback following this. The Regional Adoption Manager stated that we had started to receive feedback from adopters and would be brought to fruition in next years report. She added that the adoption service had also begun to ask for feedback on closed cases to see how adopters had felt about the services they had received. The Leader added that this was beneficial to ensure that the service could understand the positive experiences that were provided while also improving the service where necessary.

The Deputy Leader asked if there were any major challenges for the regional adoption service when Bridgend switched to the Cwm Taff Health Board. The Regional Adoption Manager explained that there were some small challenges but overall, the process was seamless. The challenges that are faced did not affect the work carried out on the ground.

**RESOLVED:** That the Committee considered and noted the performance and progress of the Regional Adoption Service

**233. APPROVAL OF THE STATEMENTS OF PURPOSE FOR RESIDENTIAL SERVICES**

The Group Manager – Placement and Provider Services presented a report on the revised statements of purpose for the current children and young people’s residential services provision in Bridgend County Borough Council.

He explained that Bridgend County Borough Council currently has four children’s residential homes delivering services to children and young people aged 0-19 years:

- Maple Tree House provides a service for children and young people aged 8- 18 years who require a period of assessment to establish a long term placement plan. The assessment period is 6 months. Maple Tree house also has two emergency beds which provide accommodation for up to 28 days.
- Sunny Bank provides a medium term to long term service for children and young people aged 8-18 years who display complex needs and have been assessed as requiring a residential placement.
- Bakers Way provides a short break service to disabled children and young people aged 0-18 years. Page 43 Agenda Item 5
- Harwood House provides a medium to long term 52 week residential service for up to three children and young people aged 8 – 18 years with complex needs, including a learning disability. However continuing provision will be considered for young people aged up to 19 years who continue in educational placements.

The Group Manager – Placement and Provider Services explained that in the Autumn of 2018 all of our services were registered to meet the requirements of the new legislation. Each in-house service provision has its own statement of purpose which is attached as an Appendix as follows:

- Appendix 1 – Bakers Way
- Appendix 2 – Harwood House
- Appendix 3 – Sunny Bank
- Appendix 4 – Maple Tree House

In line with Regulations the Statements of Purpose have now been subjected to their annual review. Changes to the statement were listed at 4.4 of the report.

The Leader welcomed the report and stated that the statements of purpose were an everchanging document that reflected the needs of the children and young people that were living at these facilities. He was pleased to welcome the change of age that a resident can stay in Sunny Bank to 7 days after their 18th birthday but that did not mean that support would stop after this time as support packages were put in place once that person moved on.

The Group Manager – Placement and Provider Services highlighted that all children from 16 years old who are residents at one of the homes, will have a plan put in place for them so that they were prepared for their departure. They had an advisor assigned to them which was available past the age of 18 and up to the age of 25, giving them as much support as possible and said that it was important that care experienced children did not experience homelessness. The Leader stressed the importance of this as the children in care were the most vulnerable of children and support was very important for when they leave.

The Deputy Leader asked what the staffing situation was like in the service area and what work was being done around ensuring the service continuity. The Group Manager – Placement and Provider Services explained that the situation surrounding staffing was much improved in recent months. Aside from staffing illness, there was currently full staff at Sunny Bank as well as Maple Tree House, with 2 vacancies at Harwood House at a senior level that were due to be filled shortly. He added that there was a number of vacancies at Bakers Way for some time, however 3 of those posts had recently been filled.

The Cabinet Member Communities asked in relation to the part time posts that had been vacant for some time, had this limited a potential candidate from filling the posts due to it not being full time and had it been considered to merge the posts into 1 full time post. The Group Manager – Placement and Provider Services explained that while ordinarily a full time position would be more beneficial, due to the situation surrounding rota patterns in care homes, it was more beneficial to have higher part time posts instead. The Leader added that it was clear a lot of work had gone into discussing the rota situations and the recruitment and changes had been made which had proven beneficial.

**RESOLVED:** That the Committee noted the content of the report and approved the statement of purpose for each of the residential services provision.

**234. CARE INSPECTORATE WALES INSPECTION OF RESIDENTIAL HOMES**

The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing presented a report which outlined the Action Plan following the Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) inspection of Maple Tree House in October 2020.

The Group Manager – Placement and Provider Services advised that CIW undertook a focussed inspection at Maple Tree House on 28th October 2020; the full inspection report is attached at Appendix 1. A verbal update was provided to the committee following this but at that time the final inspection report had not been received. He Inspection was carried out to test the outstanding non-compliance raised at the previous three inspections in September 2019, February 2020 and August 2020, relating to wellbeing, care and support and leadership and management of the service. The service was deemed a service of concern and a notice of decision was issued to restrict admissions.

The Group Manager – Placement and Provider Services stated that there were no areas identified in the inspection where improvement was required. And highlighted an extract of the findings made by CIW. They found that there had been positive changes and developments to processes and structures and to some of the internal systems supporting staff to care for young people. The Group Manager – Placement and Provider Services added that a comprehensive Action Plan was developed by the Service in 2019 to address identified areas of non-compliance from previous Inspections which had now been completed and was a contributing factor to the changes made.

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The Group Manager – Placement and Provider Services added that they now had the Behaviour Analyst employed 4 days a week which had helped embed the structures in place to support the environment needed for children to thrive. He added that a goal of the service was to continue to make improvements year on year and even with the challenge that comes from Maple Tree House in terms of its location, he believed that improvements could still be made to ensure that it was providing the best service possible.

The Leader welcomed the report and said it was pleasing to see the rapid improvements being made in such a short space of time. He personally thanked the staff at Maple Tree House for their commitment to the children and the services provided. The Cabinet Member Wellbeing and Future Generations echoed the comments made by the Leader and it was pleasing to see that Maple Tree House was able to bounce back from the challenges it was facing. The Group Manager – Placement and Provider Services stated that it was indeed the team and their commitment that made the changes possible.

A Member mentioned that the failings of Maple Tree House were headlined in the local papers. She asked how we have promoted the changes and improvements since then as well as reassuring potential future users of the service. The Group Manager – Placement and Provider Services explained that it was always a challenge to promote a place whereby it was many vulnerable children's homes and therefore did not want to give out too much information. He explained that the service was recently promoted through a presentation through ADSS Cymru and taking opportunities like this when they arise was always the best way to promote the services.

The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing stated that they would be submitting a social care accolade application with the aim of further promoting the positive work that had been carried out. She added that rota visits were aimed to be reintroduced when safe to do so as this was a very important part of the quality assurance process.

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the content of the Inspection report and received and approved the updated action plan

### 235. URGENT ITEMS

None

The meeting closed at 3:17pm