

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING HELD REMOTELY - VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON WEDNESDAY, 2 MARCH 2022 AT 14:00

Present

Councillor J Gebbie – Chairperson

SE Baldwin
DBF White

HJ David
AJ Williams

D Patel

CE Smith

Apologies for Absence

KL Rowlands and HM Williams

Officers:

Lynne Berry	Group Manager Housing & Community Regeneration
Julie Ellams	Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Raeanna Grainger	Independent Reviewing Service Manager
Lindsay Harvey	Corporate Director Education and Family Support
Steven Howell	Group Manager Placements & Provider Services
Ryan Jones	Strategic Housing Commissioning Manager
Carys Lord	Chief Officer - Finance, Performance & Change
Claire Marchant	Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing
Iain McMillan	Group Manager - Case Management & Transition
Michael Pitman	Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Mark Shephard	Chief Executive

236. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

237. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting on the 14 October 2021 be approved as a true and accurate record.

238. UPDATE ON THE REMODELLING OF CHILDREN'S RESIDENTIAL SERVICES AND THE BRIDGEND FOSTERING SERVICE

The Group Manager, Placements and Provider Services presented a report providing an update on the remodelling of Children's Residential Services and updated information about Bridgend Foster Care service provision and developments that were underway.

The Group Manager, Placements and Provider Services provided a background on the work that had been undertaken as part of the Remodelling of Children's Residential Services in Bridgend since 2018. He identified the issues from staff engagement sessions undertaken at that time and the key elements of the new model. In January 2019 Children's Social Care reported to Corporate Parenting Committee on the Remodelling of Fostering Services. It was anticipated that the work would benefit the population of Care Experienced children, by providing improved placement choice, improved placement matching and more local placements. In addition it was identified that it would achieve cost savings contributing to the Directorate's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).

The Group Manager, Placements and Provider Services then outlined the current situation and proposals. He explained that Residential Services had been remodelled, with Sunny Bank now offering Medium to Long Term Placements to children and young people aged 8-17 years. The Service had provided a safe and stable home to a number of young people, two of whom had lived there for over five years, one for four years and one for three years. Maple Tree House (MTH) had been open since 2018 offering a two bed emergency unit and a four bed assessment unit. It offered a therapeutic environment for children and young people, using a trauma informed approach to provide the most effective support possible, enabling them to understand their individual circumstances, develop resilience and self-care skills. The aim, during a young person's time at Maple Tree House was to provide them with consistency and routines and to enable them to develop trusting relationships that would support their recovery from trauma allowing them to gain the maximum benefit of any therapy that they received. Since April 2020 the service had faced a number of challenges linked with Non-Compliance with Regulatory Requirements and the Covid Pandemic, with its impact on staffing and the young people who were living at MTH. Despite these challenges the service achieved a positive inspection outcome in October 2020 and the understanding and confidence of the staff team had continued to improve. The next step was for the new Residential Hub to be built in Brynmenyn (re-locating Maple Tree House) and the old Brynmenyn Primary School had been demolished and the site cleared in readiness for construction work to commence during spring 2022 with an anticipated completion date in January/February 2023. Within this building there would also be office accommodation where the fostering and placements team would be co-located to support with identifying the right placement options for a young person following their time in the residential home.

The Group Manager, Placements and Provider Services explained that the role of Transitional Foster Carers was developed which identified that six foster carers were required, due to the demands of the role and the need to have an opportunity post placement for a short period of recovery and to have two carers available at any time to support other Transitional Carers who had a young person in placement. However, the service was only able to recruit three transitional foster carers. Two of these later made a decision to step away from that role as they wished to provide on-going care to a young person who they were looking after and one choosing to leave the role of foster carer altogether. Work had been undertaken to review the role and develop a policy which set out in detail the expectations and also the support available. The service was currently working with Golley Slater on a targeted recruitment campaign for Transitional Foster Carers that began in February 2022. He explained that the development of the therapeutic support for young people was at the heart of the remodelling work. Following unsuccessful recruitment for the psychologist, the service now employed a Behaviour Analyst. To further support the development of this model, nine members of staff and one liaison foster carer had been offered places on the "Practical Skills in Applied Behaviour Analysis" course at University of South Wales providing them with the opportunity, once they successfully completed the course, to undertake a competency based assessment and become a Registered Behaviour Technician with the Behaviour Analyst Certification Board.

The Group Manager, Placements and Provider Services explained that since 2018 the Service had identified the need to develop a new residential "pop up" service that could be made operational at short notice to provide accommodation to a young person/young adult who, due to their complex needs, could not be placed alongside others. This provision could provide, for example, an alternative to secure accommodation. Whenever the young person moved on from this accommodation the service could be "popped down" with staff being re-deployed across the other residential homes to provide cover for staff absences. This service would be registered

as a children's home but would also be able to support young people up to the age of 25 years. BCBC worked closely with Valleys to Coast (V2C) who identified a property where this service could be based. In 2021 V2C, supported by BCBC, successfully applied for Discretionary Integrated Care Funding (ICF) Grant, in order to renovate the property with all works being completed in January 2022. BCBC also secured Safe Accommodation revenue funding for 2021/22 and re-aligned the budget to allow for the recruitment of permanent staff for the service. They were currently in the process of recruiting staff and preparing all required documentation in order to apply to Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) for registration.

The Group Manager, Placements and Provider Services explained that In December 2021 the re-structure of the Fostering Service in Bridgend was completed. Bridgend Fostering was now divided into:

- General Fostering and Placements – Recruitment, assessing and supporting all general foster carers (including transitional foster carers) and placement services.
- Kinship and Permanence – Assessing and supporting Connected Persons Foster Carers, Permanence, "When I am Ready" carers, Supported Lodgings and Re-unification workers.

The service currently had 5 Liaison Carers, one of whom was a Connected Person Foster Carer. This service was currently being reviewed and further consideration being given to their role and its development including issues such as Out of Hours support for foster carers. He outlined the Post-Approval Learning and Development Framework for Foster Carers, the purpose of which was to provide a basis for a national approach that could underpin a more consistent approach to learning and development for foster carers across Wales. The framework was being phased in gradually across the CTM region in line with Annual reviews due over the year. He added that the proposal regarding the fee payment to all general foster carers was successfully implemented. A draft eligibility and Fostering Allowances Policy had now been developed which would allow Connected Persons Carers to be assessed against the criteria and also be entitled to an "Additional Allowance" (formerly Fee). The Service did introduce the £250 reward scheme for carers who "refer a friend" however, this had had very limited impact on the number of referrals received.

The Group Manager, Placements and Provider Services reported that all new IFA placements were reviewed by the placement team within 16 weeks of the placement being made. However, it had been identified that a more formal multi-agency process was needed. The Terms of Reference for the Accommodation and Permanence Panel were currently being reviewed and consideration being given to reviewing these placements within this meeting. At the present time the number of children and young people who were placed with IFA foster carers was 45 which represented a significant reduction from 70 on the 31st March 2020. He added that in September 2021 Maethau Cymru/Foster Wales was launched with BCBC fostering service being named Maethau Pen y Bont/Bridgend Fostering and the Fostering Website updated. In January 2022 Bridgend Fostering launched its Social Media pages on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

The Group Manager, Placements and Provider Services explained that 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

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- 88 children placed with Connected Persons Foster Carers
- 65 children placed with independent fostering agencies

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

The Chairperson thanked the Group Manager, Placements and Provider Services for the comprehensive report. She added that she was particularly pleased to see the trauma informed approach being developed and asked how long it would usually take from someone expressing an interest to actually fostering.

The Group Manager, Placements and Provider Services replied that this could be achieved on average in around 3 months however there were sometimes delays beyond their control such as enhanced disclosure from DBS or delays getting medical records. He acknowledged that health colleagues had turned the information around quickly whenever possible.

The Cabinet Member for Wellbeing and Future Generations thanked the officer for the report and also all those residents who had come forward and opened up their homes to be foster carers. She asked for reassurances around what had changed to reduce the number of placements before a young person found a permanent environment.

The Group Manager, Placements and Provider Services replied that with regard to placement stability, looking at the experience, knowledge and particular skills of the foster carers and ensuring they matched the needs of the child was a key issue. They were getting better at this and developing foster care profiles around families. If there were not enough foster carers then matching was tougher but they were continuing to work on and develop this area. There were Placement Support Workers within the teams who provided bespoke training, advice and guidance. There were also Reunification Workers to promote placement stability. The whole point of that was rather than allowing a placement to breakdown and a child having to move to a different foster placement, they tried to support the carers and the child to get to a point where that placement continued. They also had to put in some interim steps and guidance around things like increased visits at that time.

The Cabinet Member for Wellbeing and Future Generations asked if there was data available to show how the impact of training and support services had reduced the breakdown of relationships.

The Group Manager, Placements and Provider Services replied that he did not have the information to hand but he would be able to track it if required.

The Chairperson referred to a time in the previous year when there were 437 accommodated in a foster placement which was an immense achievement for the service.

The Leader echoed the words in regard to achievement and progress and asked about the lack of interest in becoming a foster carer and if they had any idea what was causing this, the size of the problem and what could be done to address this. He also asked what

the conversion was for referrals to assessments and about support for siblings of foster children. He asked if the number of children about to leave provision to transition to independence gave flexibility to bring out of county children back into the Borough.

The Group Manager, Placements and Provider Services replied that from the initial phone call expressing an interest to an assessment, the dropout rate was around 60%. Then from the initial visit to the assessment, 80 to 85% would be approved. With regard to numbers dropping off, there had been considerable uncertainty with the pandemic. There had been challenges around recruitment and different jobs available with well-paid salaries. Inflation and energy costs were creating uncertainty and people were asking if they could afford it. A new Fostering Finance Policy was being submitted to Cabinet. He would be undertaking a review of allowances for foster carers to ensure they were not expected to look after children at their own expense.

The Cabinet Member for Communities thanked the team for their hard work and referred to the needs of the child and matching the appropriateness of that individual being placed with the right individual or couple. He asked what the service was doing around diversity of foster carers and how they were reaching minority groups and organisations of interest to see how they could promote fostering. With regard to the 60% dropout figure, he asked what barriers were in place.

The Group Manager, Placements and Provider Services replied that 60% was not an unusual figure. Some of the initial calls were general enquiries regarding the need for a spare bedroom or someone looking for a property in an area or wanting to understand more about the process. He thanked the Member for some of the ideas regarding support groups and added that they had been offered a vacant unit in a nearby shopping centre to offer support and recruitment activity. He was unable provide figures in relation to the level of diversity but would look into it. He added that recruitment did target myth busting taking away the idea that they had to be a stereotypical type of person. They welcomed applications from all backgrounds and areas.

The Chairperson referred to the complexity of some of the foster children and asked if the Behaviour Analysts were available to the foster carers and their skills could be utilised in that area.

The Group Manager, Placements and Provider Services replied that they had limited availability as there was currently only 1 analyst who had recently increased her hours from part time to full time to increase capacity. They would consider this on a case by case basis moving forward. As of January 2022, there was a maps service to support care experienced children where there were placement stability issues.

RESOLVED That the Corporate Parenting Committee noted the updated information contained within the report and supported the further development of the Bridgend Foster Care service as set out in the report.

239. **INDEPENDENT REVIEWING SERVICE (IRO) REPORT**

The Independent Reviewing Service Manager provided a report to Corporate Parenting Committee in line with the Independent Reviewing Officers Guidance (Wales) 2004. The report covered the period April 2020 to March 2021, just as the pandemic started and this presented a number of challenges across the Council.

The Independent Reviewing Service Manager explained that the Independent Reviewing Service had had some real successes within that time. They were able to keep a very high level of compliance in terms of Child Protection Case Conferences and Looked

After Children reviews. The IRO's chaired/reviewed 195 Initial Child Protection Case Conferences between April 2020 and March 2021 compared to 235 in the previous year. A total of 518 Review Child Protection Case Conferences between April 2020 and March 2021 were convened compared to 595 in the previous reporting period and 1,159 Looked After Child review meetings were held between April 2020 and March 2021 compared with 1,191 the previous reporting period. They had to take on a completely new way of working, utilising new technologies to ensure that everybody who participated in conferences and LAC reviews could take part. She was pleased to report the level of compliance in terms of those meetings and that COVID had not stopped consultation.

The Independent Reviewing Service Manager explained that Conference Chairs consulting with children who were party to a Child Protection Conference was an area they were working to improve. They successfully overcame various challenges to enable parents to take part in all conferences and LAC reviews and often had to be quite pragmatic and think outside the box. They were now undertaking all midpoint reviews across the board for all care experienced children as per the standards, and that was an achievement as not all local authorities had been able to do that. The Independent Reviewing Officers continued to undertake quality assurance exercises after every single meeting to provide a wealth of information to identify what was outstanding and help the Team Manager to make sure that they were aware of what work needed to be done. The number of children on the Child Protection Register and those that were looked after, fluctuated over the period but did remain stable. It was lower at the date of the meeting than it was in that period but pleasing to see that the numbers had not increased. Another real positive was that they had managed to significantly reduce the number of children that had been on the Child Protection Register for over 18 months which at its highest had been 44 children but it was currently 8. Various processes had been implemented to bring the figure down and it was really positive and not just due to the Independent Reviewing Service but due to Team Managers, the Principal Officer and everybody working together to really move the cases on.

The Independent Reviewing Service Manager explained that there were various new processes in place to ensure coordinated working and she was working very closely with the Safeguarding Officer looking at ways that they could develop their escalation of concerns process and that was working well. They had greater use of case mapping and family group conferencing supporting families and helping to bring those numbers of children on the register for a long period of time. Also over the same period, the Independent Reviewing Service received no complaints and they had managed to maintain stability in the team.

The Independent Reviewing Service Manager explained that there was a full time Team Manager, four full-time and four part-time IRO positions. In this period one part-time IRO has been on maternity leave. The service had experienced higher levels of sick leave compared to the last report and this had a significant impact on IRO caseloads and the use of agency IROs. They had one agency member of staff that had been really helpful and they had agreement for two additional posts currently being advertised.

The Independent Reviewing Service Manager concurred with the comments made by the Group Manager, Placements and Provider Services about the work of the reunification workers. There was a new process in place to get them involved at an earlier stage when a placement had been identified as being unstable and that was working well.

The Independent Reviewing Service Manager explained that in terms of figures, as a comparison from today to the period covered by the report, the LAC population was 375

and the number of children on the Child Protection Register was 173, the lowest it had been for a very long time

The Cabinet Member for Wellbeing and future Generations was pleased to see that the Conferences had taken place and asked if this was an opportunity to bring them forward and if the service was more or less efficient. She also asked what partners contributed and if relationships had improved.

The Independent Reviewing Service Manager replied that the timescales were set out in legislation and they did not bring them forward but they ensured that they were within the timescales. If the risk had reduced then they could bring them forward. They had not seen a difference in terms of efficiency but it was quite rigid in terms of legislation. Partnership working had improved and they made sure all the agencies were fully onboard.

The Chairperson was pleased to hear about hybrid working and asked if the team had enough time to process the information in between.

The Independent Reviewing Service Manager replied that they had talked at length about the importance of reflecting and with 2 more IRO's in the teams, there would be more opportunity to check in, to reflect, offload and discuss.

The Chairperson thanked the team for working above and beyond on traumatic and complex cases.

The Leader said he was pleased to see the action points were green. He was aware they were under acute pressure at the moment and pleased to see additional capacity and asked what action they would be taking in terms of safeguarding children. There were areas where they needed to make rapid improvements and was there anything they could do to help. He asked for information regarding the process from the first point of contact.

The Independent Reviewing Service Manager replied that a case would come to MASH and a decision would be made if a Child Protection Conference had been convened and she would be informed of this. She would do a quick audit to look at the suitability of that case and if there were immediate concerns she would discuss them with the Team Manager, Social Worker and the Chairperson. The first audit started at that point when they checked if all the steps had been followed correctly and if not they would address it. They would then do an outline child protection plan which was crucial in ensuring that the case was going to progress in the right way. The reviewed guidance was important in terms of the role of the Chairperson and put a lot more emphasis on the Chairperson, tracking and monitoring. There was also a very good escalation process in place thanks to the Principal Officer, Case Management. If she or the Chairperson escalated concerns to him, he would work with other people to map out a course of action. He had consultations with the social worker and sometimes the team manager to look at why some cases were stuck and then would take action to move them on. This had been fundamental in moving cases and bringing down the number of children on the Child Protection Register.

The Corporate Director for Social Services and Wellbeing stressed that the essential role of the IRO service was to provide quality assurance for their practice, and that was a real safety net in terms of the challenges around child protection and safeguarding work to ensure the service was stable, well led and managed. They were increasing capacity in the service because it was critically important that the caseloads in the IRO service were closer to the level of best practice. She paid tribute to the Independent

Reviewing Service Manager in terms of the work that she had been doing to support some of the challenges they had.

The Chairperson added that she was really encouraged to hear that there would be an IRO following a child. One of the biggest criticisms of children's social work was that they changed the social workers too often and would have to start all over again which could be very disruptive.

RESOLVED: The Corporate Parenting Committee noted the report and the IRO Service Action plan

240. **HOUSING FOR CARE EXPERIENCED CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

The Chief Officer, Finance Performance and Change presented a report providing information to the Corporate Parenting Committee regarding the work being undertaken with regards to care experienced children and young people and their future accommodation needs. She explained that all Welsh Councils had recently been tasked by Welsh Government to examine their corporate parenting response in relation to care experienced children and young people and their future accommodation needs. Care leavers in Wales had a range of entitlements set out in social services legislation to ensure that they were properly accommodated. These were detailed in Appendix A to the report. The requirements placed on local authorities in this regard were detailed in section four of the report. It demonstrated a need for joint working not only across the authority but also with other agencies to ensure the cohort of young people received the level of support they required. There was joint working across social services and housing to support this cohort and more recently, work had been undertaken to consider how this may be improved to ensure a better understanding between the two services with regards to current service demand, current service availability and also future service provision. A proposed action plan to deliver these improvements was attached to the report. This would look at corporate outcomes, commissioning, joint working and projected needs to ensure the experience and outcomes for young people who required these services to progress, was improved. An Action Plan Working Group would be established at the first meeting to agree Terms of Reference. The membership of the group would include external agencies and they could also agree timelines for the completion of the works included within the action plan. She suggested that progress against that action plan should then be reported back to the Committee.

The Cabinet Member for Communities referred to the Action Plan and asked if the individuals concerned would be involved in the process. He said that it looked like they were trying to develop housing and not including individuals in the design of the service.

The Corporate Director for Social Services and Wellbeing replied that this was a fundamental point. There had been managerial workshops looking at the Barnardoes framework and a desktop exercise had been undertaken involving the young children. The supported accommodation projects were key in terms of quality assurance. They had also just appointed a new Corporate Parenting Officer and his role would be to take forward participation.

The Cabinet Member for Wellbeing and Future Generations added that it was really pleasing to see this area under the spotlight in a Cabinet meeting. Young person's accommodation was important to all members and especially with care experienced children and young people. She asked if it would be possible to see timescales in the meeting so that they could get an understanding of when progress would be made. She

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was really pleased that they were extending personal advisors support up to the age of 25.

The Leader asked for more information around timelines in the action plan.

The Corporate Director for Social Services and Wellbeing replied that it would be the role of Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting to monitor the delivery of the action plan. This would be submitted with timescales and progress made, to the next meeting where further monitoring of the Action Plan could be agreed.

RESOLVED: Corporate Parenting Committee noted the content of the report.

241. **URGENT ITEMS**

None

The meeting closed at 15:30