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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: Democratic Services

Ein cyf / Our ref:

Eich cyf / Your ref:

Dyddiad/Date: Thursday, 24 February 2022

Dear Councillor,

CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING

A meeting of the Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting will be held remotely - via Microsoft Teams on **Wednesday, 2 March 2022 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 - 8
To receive for approval the minutes of 14/10/2021
4. Update On The Remodelling Of Children's Residential Services And The Bridgend Fostering Service 9 - 18
5. Independent Reviewing Service (IRO) Report 19 - 60
6. Housing for Care Experienced Children and Young People 61 - 74
7. 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.

By receiving this Agenda Pack electronically you will save the Authority approx. £1.80 in printing costs

Yours faithfully

K Watson

Chief Officer, Legal and Regulatory Services, HR and Corporate Policy

Councillors:

SE Baldwin

HJ David

J Gebbie

D Patel

Councillors

JC Radcliffe

KL Rowlands

CE Smith

T Thomas

Councillors

DBF White

AJ Williams

HM Williams

Agenda Item 3

CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING - THURSDAY, 14 OCTOBER 2021

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 HJ David – Chairperson

SE Baldwin
HM Williams

J Gebbie

CE Smith

D Patel

AJ Williams

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)
- 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.

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

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BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE

2 MARCH 2022

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR SOCIAL SERVICES AND WELLBEING

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

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Corporate Parenting Committee with an update regarding the remodelling of Children's Residential Services and to provide updated information about Bridgend Foster Care service provision 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 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 In February 2018 Children's Social Care reported to Cabinet on the work that had been undertaken as part of the Remodelling of Children's Residential Services in Bridgend.
- 3.2 Feedback from staff engagement sessions undertaken at that time identified a number of issues with the service model and the way the homes were structured, including:

- A lack of control over resident 'mix' due to age restrictions of each home and lack of placement options.
- No alternatives to residential placements for those with complex needs.
- Insufficient move-on facilities resulting in longer residential placements than is necessary.
- Young people who are not ready for transition being placed in Newbridge House, as there are no other options available.
- No emergency beds – existing homes cannot be used for emergency placements as this is not included in their Statement of Purpose.
- Layout of the homes not encouraging a positive, psychologically informed environment.
- Staff only able to provide minimal outreach support.
- Reservations regarding services' ability to achieve certain outcomes meaning a high level of Out of County and Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) placements.
- Children being sent far away from their home area.

3.3 Other issues identified at that time included:

- The need for a model which maximised the number of stable and safe accommodation options for young people leaving care.
- The numbers and cost of children who were being placed in high cost Out of County accommodation.

3.4 The Key elements of the new model included:

- **The Hub (Maple Tree House)** which consisted of two emergency beds and four assessment beds. Based at Newbridge House this service would allow for support to be provided in a timely way and facilitate move-on to another placement option that best meets the young person's need. There would be therapeutic staff on-site and outreach support workers who could provide additional support to young people, families and carers.
- **Medium/Long Term Unit (Sunny Bank)** that would provide a four bed home to young people who need a higher level of intensive support before they were able to move on to one of the other placement options available.
- **Supported Lodgings** providing a placement for young people who are not yet ready for independent living, that does not have the same level of regulation as a foster placement, but provides the individual with a more structured family type environment.
- **Supported Living** to provide increased move-on accommodation for young people in placements prior to their 18th birthday. This would reduce delay in young people moving out from residential care and prevent young people presenting as homeless on their 18th birthday.
- **Therapeutic Services** that were readily available to support young people, including the recruitment of a Clinical Psychologist and Senior Practitioner Social Worker. The vision was for this service to expand to include Placement Support Workers and potentially a therapist with a play therapy background.
- **Transitional Foster Carers (4-6)** recruited who could act as a step down for young people who were leaving residential care, before they were placed in a long-term family placement.

- 3.5 In addition to the remodelling work undertaken, Children's Social Care also have two Residential Homes to support disabled children.
- **Harwood House** which can support three young children/young people (mixed gender) within the age range of 8-19 years with complex needs, which include a learning disability or a disability diagnosis such as Autism.
 - **Bakers Way** providing support to children with a disability and their families to enjoy appropriate and safe short breaks supporting them to remain living together. The service can offer a short break placement for children with complex medical needs who are cared for by appropriately trained staff.
- 3.6 In January 2019 Children's Social Care reported to Corporate Parenting Committee on the Remodelling of Fostering Services.
- 3.7 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).
- 3.8 The Recommendations were:
- The Fostering Service was to be separated into two distinct areas; one with responsibility for connected persons foster carers and one with responsibility for general foster carers.
 - The existing five liaison carer roles were to be maintained, with one being dedicated to connected persons carers and the other four to general foster carers.
 - In the short term, the Skills to Foster Course would be re-shaped to align with the directorate wide training programme.
 - In the longer term, it was proposed that consideration was given to strengthening Bridgend County Borough Council's (BCBC) in-house training for foster carers, through the development and delivery of in-house courses.
 - To be competitive with IFA's it was proposed that BCBC needs to pay fees to general foster carers at an earlier stage in their fostering career. The recommendation was for them to receive a fee post approval, with the expectation they complete a core training programme within their first year.
 - Introduction of a £250 bonus for a foster carers who refer a friend to Bridgend and who goes on to be approved and receive a placement.
 - Implement a new process to review all IFA placements that have been in place less than 16 weeks.
 - The Permanence Social Workers to be transferred to work within the Fostering Team where it was identified their role had a "better fit".
 - To support the recruitment of Foster Carers, a Development Officer post and an additional Social Worker to undertake Foster Carer Assessments. Targets were set for additional carers to be recruited (2019/20 – 7, 2020/21 – 8 and 2021/22 – 9).

4. Current situation/proposal

Residential Services

- 4.1 In line with the paper presented to Cabinet in 2018 Residential Services have been remodelled, with Sunny Bank now offering Medium to Long Term Placements to children and young people aged 8-17 years. The Service has provided a safe and stable home to a number of young people, two of whom have lived there for over five years, one for four years and one for three years. Of these young people one is transitioning to supported accommodation in March 2022, one is transitioning to Ty Mor in March 2022, and placement searches are currently being undertaken to identify a Foster Carer for one child to step down from Residential Care.
- 4.2 Maple Tree House (MTH) has been open since 2018 offering a two bed emergency unit and a four bed assessment unit. It offers 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 initial proposals were for there to be an on-site psychologist who would be able to be readily available to support young people and a Social Worker to undertake the Assessment. Following unsuccessful attempts to recruit to the psychologist post, a review was undertaken and a decision made to implement a model which utilised the services of an on-site Behaviour Analyst. The Behaviour Analyst undertakes a complex assessment for each young person in the Assessment Unit that will consider their Functional Living Skills, identifying areas for development, a young persons therapeutic needs and will also set out recommendations in terms of placement options. In addition to this the Behaviour Analyst will analyse the young people's behaviours and develop bespoke protocols to support staff intervention and undertake direct therapy work with young people. The aim, during a young persons time at Maple Tree House is to provide them with consistency and routines and to enable them to develop trusting relationships that will support their recovery from trauma allowing them to gain the maximum benefit of any therapy that they receive. The Service are currently working with Dr Jennifer Austin from the University of South Wales who is looking to undertake research on the impact of behaviour analysis on young people who have experienced trauma.
- 4.3 In April 2020 The Behaviour Clinic commenced in their role to support the implementation of this model until the Service was able to recruit a Behaviour Analyst. Since this time the service has 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 has continued to improve.
- 4.4 The next step is for the new Residential Hub to be built in Brynmenyn (re-locating Maple Tree House) and I am pleased to be able to report that the old Brynmenyn Primary School has 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. Consultation with young people played a significant role in the initial development of the building and we continue to engage with young people regarding the opportunity to develop the outside space (which will be quite considerable at the new build). The new building will allow for even greater

opportunities to engage with young people to support them in a positive environment. Within this building there will also be office accommodation where the fostering and placements team will be co-located to support with identifying the right placement options for a young person following their time in the residential home.

Supported Accommodation

- 4.5 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. At the present time BCBC do not have any Transitional Foster Carers. However, work has been undertaken to review the role and develop a policy which sets out in detail the expectations and also the support available. The service are currently working with Golley Slater on a targeted recruitment campaign for Transitional Foster Carers that began in February 2022.
- 4.6 Development of the therapeutic support for young people was at the heart of the remodelling work. As noted above, following unsuccessful recruitment for the psychologist, the service has now employed a Behaviour Analyst. To further support the development of this model, nine members of staff and one liaison foster carer have 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 complete the course, to undertake a competency based assessment and become a Registered Behaviour Technician with the Behaviour Analyst Certification Board. This course will provide attendees with knowledge and skills for implementing basic behavioural analytic strategies, and strategies to help young people acquire important communication, social and academic skills, how to determine some reasons why challenging behaviours occur, and how to replace problem behaviours with more appropriate skills.
- 4.7 Since 2018 the Service has identified the need to develop a new residential “pop up” service that can be made operational at short notice to provide accommodation to a young person/young adult who, due to their complex needs, cannot be placed alongside others. This provision could provide, for example, an alternative to secure accommodation. Whenever the young person moves on from this accommodation the service will be “popped down” with staff being re-deployed across the other residential homes to provide cover for staff absences. This service will be registered as a children’s home but will also be able to support young people up to the age of 25 years. BCBC have 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 has re-aligned budget to allow for the recruitment of permanent staff for the service. We are currently in the process of recruiting staff and preparing all required documentation in order to apply to Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) for registration.

Foster Wales Bridgend

- 4.8 In December 2021 the re-structure of the Fostering Service in Bridgend was completed. Bridgend Fostering is 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.
- 4.9 The service currently have 5 Liaison Carers, one of whom is a Connected Person Foster Carer. This service is 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. As part of this work the liaison carers developed a questionnaire for the service to send to all foster carers as part of a programme of engagement to ensure that we provide a high quality service to them and ensure that their voice is heard in any service improvements made.
- 4.10 Bridgend Foster Care have re-developed the pre-approval training for prospective foster carers to meet the challenges of the pandemic that have prevented face to face learning. With the permission of the Fostering Network, the training, known as Skills to Foster, has been adapted into a workbook that can be delivered remotely. In addition to this the workbooks have been tailored to the needs of the prospective carers, with one workbook to meet the needs of general foster carers and the other to meet the needs kinship carers. The Kinship Carer workbook incorporates the recommendations of the ‘Guide for the offer of Special Guardianship Support in Wales’ (published by Association for Fostering and Adoption Cymru (AFA Cymru) in 2020) to ensure that connected persons who care for children are aware of all the options available to them. We have also drafted a training workbook for those connected persons who care for children and make private law applications to court for Special Guardianship Orders and who do not want to be considered as foster carers, to ensure that they have access to the same vital information to aid them in caring for another’s child and making informed choices.
- 4.11 Post-Approval Learning and Development Framework For Foster Carers - The purpose of the Framework is to provide a basis for a national approach that can underpin a more consistent approach to learning and development for foster carers across Wales. It is hoped that the development of a more consistent approach to post-approval training for foster carers will provide a platform for fostering services to exploit the potential benefits of regional working, should they choose. The Framework recognises the importance of providing an individualised approach to learning and development for foster carers, driven by circumstances, strengths, vulnerabilities and the needs of the children they foster. Learning opportunities can be provided through formal training courses, but also through online learning, peer mentoring, self-learning or through practice learning (eg through one to one work with a therapist in relation to a specific child). The key issue is: “How did the learning/development activity contribute to your capacity as a foster carer to meet the needs and improve outcomes for the child in your care?” A national launch took place in November 2019 with over 70 stakeholders from across the Cwm Taf Morgannwg (CTM) region, including each Local Authority in attendance. Briefing sessions have been rolled out across local authority fostering teams, members of foster panel and

to the foster carers themselves regarding the framework being implemented. The framework is being phased in gradually across the CTM region in line with Annual reviews due over the year.

- 4.12 The proposal regarding the fee payment to all general foster carers was successfully implemented. A draft eligibility and Fostering Allowances Policy has now been developed which would allow Connected Persons Carers to be assessed against the criteria and also being entitled to an “Additional Allowance” (formerly Fee).
- 4.13 The Service did introduce the £250 reward scheme for carers who “refer a friend” however, this has had very limited impact on the number of referrals received.
- 4.14 All new IFA placements are reviewed by the placement team within 16 weeks of the placement being made. However, it has been identified that a more formal multi-agency process is needed. The Terms of Reference for the Accommodation and Permanence Panel are 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 are placed with IFA foster carers is 45 which represents a significant reduction from 70 on the 31st March 2020.
- 4.15 Permanence is now an integrated part of the Fostering Service. The Special Guardianship Policy was reviewed and updated in November 2020 and a new separate Special Guardianship Order Financial Policy was introduced in June 2021.
- 4.16 The Development Officer post was initially introduced to the Service, but following a review of options a decision was made for Bridgend County Borough to join its regional partners offering a Regional Front door offering one point of contact for foster care enquiries. As part of this service there is a regional marketing officer who, along with BCBC Communications Team lead on foster carer recruitment.

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.

Bridgend Foster Care/ Foster Bridgend

- 4.17 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 do not have a pre-existing relationship with and carers who are considered to be “connected persons”.
- 4.18 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

- 4.19 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.
- 4.20 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 of 2021/22 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).
- 4.21 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.

- 4.22 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 effects on the policy framework or procedure rules arising from this report.

6. Equality Act 2010 implications

6.1 The protected characteristics identified within the Equality Act, Socio-economic Duty and the impact on the use of the Welsh language have been considered in the preparation of this report. As a public body in Wales, the Council must consider the impact of strategic decisions, such as the development or the review of policies, strategies, services and functions. This is an information report, therefore it is not necessary to carry out an Equality Impact assessment in the production of this report. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable equality impacts as a result 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 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 focussed 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

9.1 That the Corporate Parenting 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
Corporate Director, Social Services and Wellbeing
March 2021

Contact officer: Steven Howell
Group Manager, Placements and Provider Services
Telephone: (01656) 642330
Email: Steven.Howell@bridgend.gov.uk
Postal address: Children's Directorate, Civic Offices, CF31 4WB

Background documents: None

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE

2 MARCH 2022

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR SOCIAL SERVICES AND WELLBEING

INDEPENDENT REVIEWING SERVICE (IRO) REPORT

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide a report to Corporate Parenting Committee in line with The Independent Reviewing Officers Guidance (Wales) 2004.

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

- 2.1 This report assists in the achievement of the following corporate well-being 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.

- 2.2 This report is connected to all corporate well-being objectives relating to care experienced children, its central objective being to achieve best outcomes for those children and young people through high quality care planning, which in turn helps to ensure they live in stable placements with plans for permanence in place. The care planning for these children and young people is integral to Welsh Government's commitment to reduce the number of care experienced children and young people in Wales.

3. Background

- 3.1 The appointment of Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO's) by Local Authorities is 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.

3.2 The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) service has an authoritative role, in assuring the quality of care planning is achieved. The Independent Reviewing Officers Guidance (Wales) 2004 states that the Independent Reviewing Service report must identify good practice but must also identify issues for further development, including those where urgent action is required. The guidance urges the Local Authority to make effective use of the reports from its IRO service so that it can be satisfied that its services can achieve best outcomes for the children and young people concerned.

4. Current situation/proposal

4.1 The Independent Reviewing Service report, **Appendix 1**, covers the work of the IRO service from April 2020 to March 2021. The report contains 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 includes information on children subject of a child protection plan and reviews of these plans at Child Protection Case Conferences.

4.2 The report also includes information that relates to regulatory requirements in respect of resolution of case disputes, IRO caseloads, participation and consultation of young people in their Reviews, challenges and achievements in the reporting period, and service priorities for 2020-2021.

4.3 In addition to the guidance referred to in paragraph 3.1 additional IRO guidance and practice standards were introduced at the beginning of 2019 by the Association for Fostering and Adoption (AFA) Cymru. IRO's have worked to improve tracking and monitoring as advised within the Practice Standards and Good Practice Guide.

4.4 As described in the report 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.

4.5 Following each meeting the IRO completes a quality assurance audit. The Audit is available to the Social Worker and the Team Manager to notify them of outstanding work/actions. The audit supports the IRO in the tracking of the case and supports the identification of good practice and areas for improvement. The audit also supports the Team Manager when carrying out supervision with the Social Worker.

4.6 Whilst the IRO service has worked to improve the consultation document for children and young people, challenges remain in encouraging them to complete it. Similarly, children and young people's participation at both their Child Protection Review and Looked After Child Reviews is hugely important and should always be considered an area for improvement. In Bridgend, despite virtual platforms assisting in communication with children and young people, proportionately it is only a small number of children and young people who are attending their meetings.

- 4.7 Consequently this is a priority and the team are committed to developing more creative ways of engaging with and encouraging participation of all children and young people. However it must be recognised in many cases it is not appropriate for the child to attend the Child Protection Conference. The IRO Service Manager has requested the Training Department facilitate joint training between the IRO Service and the Safeguarding Locality Social Worker teams to look at creative ways we can include children.
- 4.8 The IRO service continues to work with the safeguarding teams, education, the Health Visiting services, School Nurses and Midwifery Services to improve practice around child protection conferences. The next stage is to work at improving the quality of Looked After Children reviews on a multi-agency basis. The IRO Service Manager in this period has facilitated training on the Wales Safeguarding Procedures and the Outcomes Model.
- 4.9 Continuous service improvement is always sought after and as such the IRO Service aims 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 is incorporated towards the end of the report and reflects the areas of focus for improvement over the 12 months following the timescale of the reporting period for the service which will be under constant review. It is contained at the end of the annual report.

5. Effect upon policy framework and procedure rules

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

6. Equality Act 2010 implications

- 6.1 The protected characteristics identified within the Equality Act, Socio-economic Duty and the impact on the use of the Welsh language have been considered in the preparation of this report. As a public body in Wales, the Council must consider the impact of strategic decisions, such as the development or the review of policies, strategies, services and functions. This is an information report, therefore it is not necessary to carry out an Equality Impact assessment in the production of this report. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable equality impacts as a result of this report.

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

- 7.1 The implementation of the duties and responsibilities under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act (SSWBA) 2014, in turn, supports the promotion of two of the seven goals of the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 within the County Borough of Bridgend. By promoting an environment that maximises people's physical and mental well-being and by supporting children, young people, adults and their carers and families to fulfil their potential no matter what their circumstances, the well-being goals of a healthier and more equal Bridgend and Wales are supported.
- 7.2 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 provides the basis for driving a different kind of public service in Wales, with five ways of working to guide how the

Authority should work to deliver well-being outcomes for people. The following is a summary to show how the five ways of working to achieve the well-being goals have been considered in this report:

- **Long Term** – The IRO Service has a legal requirement to assure the quality of care planning is achieved for children and young people enabling them to reach their full potential in life.
- **Prevention** –the IRO service works closely with safeguarding practitioners and Early Help services in developing a comprehensive outcome focused plan for the child or young person, to maximise their opportunities and identify focused support at the earliest stage.
- **Integration** – the implementation of the SSWBA requires local authorities to work with partners, to ensure care, support and protection of all and more specifically its most vulnerable. The report evidences consultation between professionals and partner agencies with a specific focus to the safe care planning and protection for children and young people within the County Borough of Bridgend.
- **Collaboration** – This is currently managed in order to provide the best possible intervention for children and young people across Bridgend.
- **Involvement** – the key stakeholders are the care experienced children and young people of Bridgend. The IRO service’s engagement with these individuals is essential to ensure their voices are heard and included in their meetings. The IRO service speak to children and young people and utilise consultation documents, quality monitoring forms, complaints process and advocacy services to support this. The provision of accessible information and advice helps to ensure that the voice of children and young people is heard and responded to.

8. Financial implications

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

9. Recommendation

9.1 It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Committee notes this report and the IRO Service Action plan

Claire Marchant
CORPORATE DIRECTOR SOCIAL SERVICES AND WELLBEING
March 2022

Contact officer: Elizabeth Walton-James
Group Manager Safeguarding & IAA

Telephone: (01656) 642073

Email: elizabeth.walton-james@bridgend.gov.uk

Postal address: Civic Offices, Angel Street, Bridgend, CF31 4WB

Background documents:

None

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Independent Reviewing Service

Report between April 2020-March 2021.



Report Context:

- Introduction
- Legal Context
- Core IRO Functions
- Composition of IRO Team
- Reviewing Activity : Child Protection
- Reviewing Activity : Looked After Children
- Number of Reviews and timeliness
- Reviewing Performance
- Caseload
- Business Support

General Themes

- Consultation
- Case Dispute Resolution and Complaints
- Achievements & Challenges
- IRO Service Development and Achievements
- IRO Service Priorities

Introduction

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The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) service has an authoritative role, in assuring the quality of care planning is achieved. The Independent Reviewing Officers Guidance Wales 2004 states this report must identify good practice but must also identify issues for further development, including those where urgent action is required. The guidance urges the Local Authority to make effective use of the reports from its IRO service so that it can be satisfied that its services can achieve best outcomes for the children and young people concerned.

This Independent Reviewing Service report focuses upon the work of the IRO service from April 2020 to March 2021. As part of the service's quality assurance role, the report contains 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 includes information on children subject of a child protection plan and reviews of these plans at Child Protection Case Conferences.

The report also includes information that relates 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 2020-2021.

Legal Context

The appointment of IRO's by Local Authorities is a legal requirement and their core functions are governed by the legal regulatory framework outlined below:

- The Adoption and Children Act 2002 detailed the requirements on Local Authorities in respect of the appointment of IRO's
- The Independent Reviewing Officers Guidance (Wales) 2004
- Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014
- The Children Act 1989
- The Children Act 2004
- The Adoption and Children Act 2002
- The Human Rights Act 1998

- The Review of Children's Cases (Wales) Regulations 2004.
- Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulation 2015 (Wales)

Core Functions

The Independent Reviewing Service have an important quality assurance function and works towards ensuring all children within the care of Bridgend County Borough Council have a robust effective care plan. This plan is aimed towards improving outcomes for children and young people in providing a stable and secure childhood where their health, education and emotional well-being is promoted through effective care planning. It is the function of the Independent Reviewing Service to ensure the care plan is appropriate and progresses safeguarding for children and young people whilst ensuring all their identified needs are being met.

Independent Reviewing Officers are required to independently review the care plans of all Care Experienced children (CEC) and those children with a Child Protection Plan and subject of the Child Protection Register (CPR). The Review meeting will include consultation with and attendance of relevant agencies (health, education and Police etc) and will usually include the child/young person, their Social Worker, carers and family members. Timescales for Reviews are set out in the Children Act 1989 & part 6 of the Social Services and Wellbeing Act 2014, with the first Review taking place within 20 working days, the next Review is held within three months following the initial and then subsequent Reviews are held six months from the second Review. Subsequent Reviews are held every six months unless there has been an unplanned change of placement where a Review must be held within 20 working days.

Within Bridgend County Borough Council, the IRO Service has the following roles and responsibilities:

- The IRO service has a statutory responsibility under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014, Wales Safeguarding Procedures and the IRO Guidance for Chairing all Child Protection Conferences and multi-agency Looked After Children Reviews, including those children placed for Adoption.
- To review and oversee the effectiveness and the appropriateness of Care Plans for those Children and Young People the Council has responsibility for who are subject of a Child Protection Plan and those children and young people within its care.

- The Independent Reviewing Service are responsible for ensuring all Care Experienced Reviews (CER) and Children Protection Conferences take place within compliance as outlined in regulations and to provide a report on each CER to include recommendations as to any changes to the child/young person's Care Plan and to monitor the progress of the Care Plan by tracking cases between Reviews.
- To ensure the child/young person's rights are protected and enhanced.
- To ensure the voice of the child is heard throughout the care planning process and to monitor that the child's wishes and feelings have been recorded and documented throughout the Care Planning process.
- To support and advise through a mentoring and coaching role to social work staff in relation to effective care planning.
- To raise IRO concerns through the agreed Resolution Protocol and to escalate unresolved concerns regarding care planning to the appropriate level of the Local Authority's management structure. To consider the need to seek independent legal advice and possible referral of a case to CAFCASS Cymru. The quality assurance function of the IRO service aims to highlight concerns around specific cases and also any trends relating to care planning practice. It also has a duty to highlight good practice.
- To ensure all care experienced children and young people are subject to Health Plans to promote their health and development. The IRO's have responsibility to ensure the Health Plans are monitored and meeting the children's needs within the Looked After Children Reviewing process.
- All CEC and young people are subject to a Personal Education Plan (PEP). The Social Worker and School are responsible for ensuring this is in place but the child's IRO will ensure they check this and make a recommendation and timescale in the Review should a PEP not be in place.
- Under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014, the role of the IRO has expanded to cover responsibility for the child's case and the not just the Review and this is set out in the IRO Standards.

Composition of the IRO Service

Over the last year, there have been some changes to the composition of the service. The Independent Reviewing Service consists of 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 has 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.

The current IRO cohort have a wealth of experience and all have been qualified Social Workers for a substantial period of time. The IRO Service Manager has been in the post since June 2019.

Caseloads and Increased Demands

The average full time IRO caseload is currently between 90–100 cases whilst part-time staff are holding average caseloads of 65. Although the previous report did not raise any concerns about the numbers of cases held by the IRO's in Bridgend, the pressures placed upon the team due to sickness has highlighted the lack of capacity and resilience across the team during these times. In response to these pressures the Service Manager carried out consultation with IRO services across Wales to make comparison of caseloads. The consultation revealed the IROs in neighbouring authorities have an average caseload of 40-70 which is significantly lower than Bridgend.

The Service Manager consulted with IRO Services across Wales and obtained responses from 13 Local Authorities about their caseload numbers. In North Wales they have an average of 75 cases per full time IRO. Two of the 5 Local Authorities were funding an additional 5 IRO roles to reduce caseload numbers.

Only 2 Local Authorities from Mid Wales responded and their caseloads range from 55-64 per full time IRO. In South Wales there is quite a mixed picture with caseloads ranging from 40-100. However, only two other Local Authorities have similar caseload numbers to Bridgend and one of these areas said they were not meeting their statutory duties because of their high numbers.

Since the writing of the previous IRO annual report the IRO Service has been undertaking its duties largely virtually via MS Teams. This has worked well and anecdotally parents and many young people prefer this way of working. As a team we have successfully managed to meet our statutory duties in terms of compliance in both the Care and Child Protection arena.

However, as with many areas within Children's Social Care, we face a number of challenges and increases in workload demands.

The IRO Standards requires the IRO to undertake far greater levels of tracking in between LAC Reviews, this also includes a mid-point review to ensure the recommendations are on-track and to ensure progress is being made and the child's Care Plan continues to reflect their needs. The IROs continue to undertake Quality Assurance documents following every LAC Review or CP Conference, this document requires cross reference against the child's file and is used to identify any outstanding pieces of work or documents to which the SW and Team Manager are alerted.

This tracking and monitoring process requires the IRO to liaise with the SW and often the Team Manager and in some cases other professionals. This is a time consuming piece of work, it requires lengthy reading of the child's file and also recording of the discussions held.

It has been a committed principle of the service to maintain the same IRO wherever possible so that valuable information held by IROs, particularly knowledge of the child's history and family dynamics is not lost. This means that care experienced children have had an element of continuity in their lives, with their IRO often being the only person who has remained consistent for the child through changes of team structures, placements and often their social workers. IRO are now visiting children face to face so need to factor travel time into their week to enable them to do this.

A priority of the IRO Service as set out in the Action Plan is to increase our rates of consultation with children and young people subject to the CPR or being discussed at a Child Protection Conference for the first time. This will also impact on the workload of the conference chairs.

We have seen an increase in the complexity of cases coming through the front door in our Information, Advice and Assistance Service (IAA). This requires more input from the conference chairperson and a greater level of planning and preparation prior to the CP conference.

As a result of the challenges in recruitment and retention in Children's Services, greater demands have been placed on the IRO Service. The combination of changes of Social Worker and the generally lower numbers of Social Workers has required the IROs to undertake more tracking, increased rates of initiating concerns, chasing reports/information, addressing areas of practice.

We have seen an increase in unplanned foster placement breakdowns which requires the IRO to chair an additional LAC Review within 20 working days, this has increased the workload of the IROs considerably.

We are also aware the Public Law Outline (PLO) revised guidance will have an impact on the role of conference chair, and will require much like LAC cases, a greater emphasis on tracking and monitoring in-between conferences.

We continue to meet our statutory responsibilities, however many areas of the IRO service have not had the focus we would like and we recognise that to continue to improve standards across the board, we need to invest in the staff and provide them with the tools and time to undertake their duties to the highest standards. This includes IRO specific training, reflection time, and sufficient time in the working day to undertake meaningful work.

Process Improvement

In this period some changes have been implemented to support the LA's objectives of reducing the length of time children's names remain on the CP register.

- Monthly meetings between the IRO Service Manager and the Safeguarding Principal Officer (PO) take place to consider all the children subject of the CPR for more than 18 months.
- IRO Service Manager audits all cases of re-registration when the request for an Initial Child Protection Conference (ICPC) is received and looks at what lessons can be learnt.
- Where IRO's identify cases at the second Review Child Protection Conference (RCPC) where limited progress has been made, they inform the PO of their concerns. The PO then examines the case and where appropriate arranges a consultation with the Social Worker to consider all options to progress the plan.
- The IRO Service Manager audits all requests for CP conference to consider themes and potential gaps in support services.
- If a conference chair recommends legal advice should be sought, they will inform the PO to raise awareness of the cases being escalated
- The IRO Service is currently recruiting two additional full time IRO posts to address the challenges raised in this report of caseload numbers and this will enable the service to focus more fully on all areas of the IRO role.

Child Protection Register Population.

Children subject to the CPR in this period has continued to fluctuate and the impact of not de-registering any children due to Covid can be seen in the figures. Any children who were de-registered between March - September 2020 was as a result of them either turning 18 or an Interim Care Order being granted. This explains why there was a reduction and subsequent increase in de-registrations in September 2020.

Chart 1

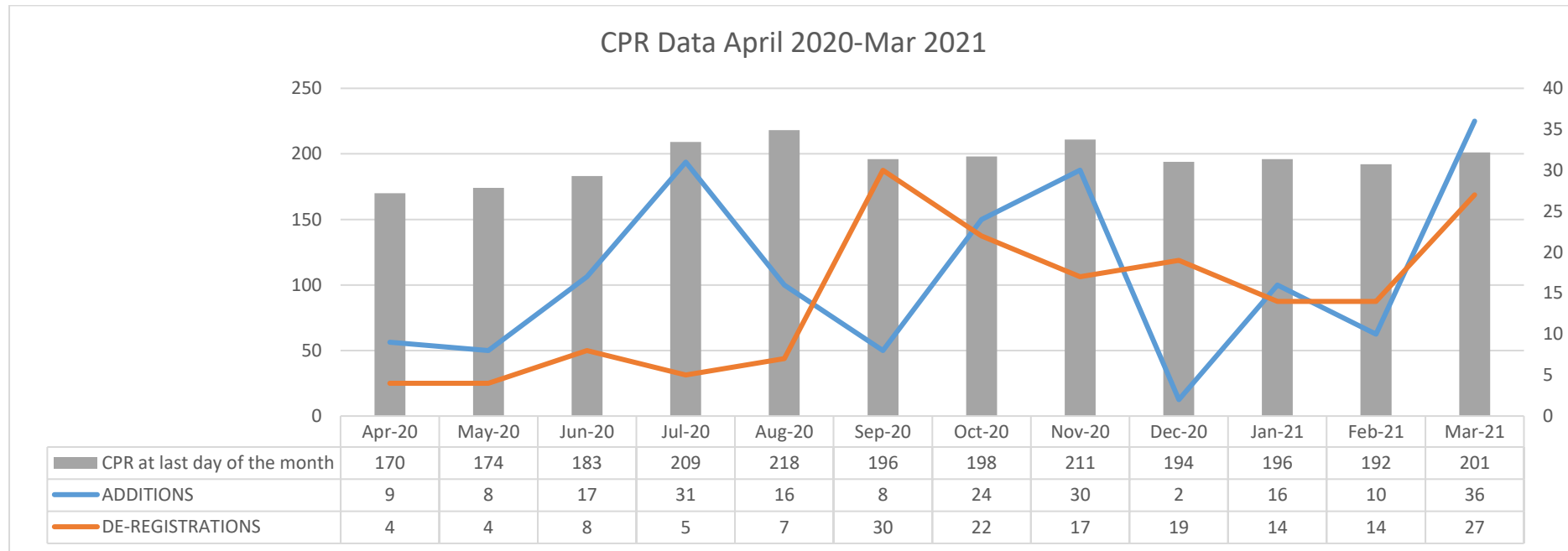


Chart 2

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How many initial conferences took place

In Compliance	ICPC April to Mar that were held & if In Compliance												Grand Total	% Held In Compliance
	Apr-20	May-20	Jun-20	Jul-20	Aug-20	Sep-20	Oct-20	Nov-20	Dec-20	Jan-21	Feb-21	Mar-21		
No	2	1	1	4	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	9	95.38%
Yes	9	10	18	25	17	8	20	26	8	11	11	23	186	
Total	11	11	19	29	17	8	20	27	8	11	11	23	195	

The IRO Service held 195 ICPCs in this period. All were held within compliance apart from 9. The reasons for the non-compliance were all due to the IRO Service not receiving the notification from the Childcare and IAA Teams informing the decision had been made to proceed to an ICPC. The IRO Service held all ICPC within 15 working days from the point of receiving the notification that a conference was required.

Chart 3

In Compliance	CP Reviews that were held & if In Compliance												Grand Total	% Held In Compliance
	Apr-20	May-20	Jun-20	Jul-20	Aug-20	Sep-20	Oct-20	Nov-20	Dec-20	Jan-21	Feb-21	Mar-21		
No	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	2	99.61%
Yes	39	48	38	39	25	44	50	56	41	57	53	26	516	
Grand Total	39	48	38	39	25	44	50	56	41	58	54	26	518	

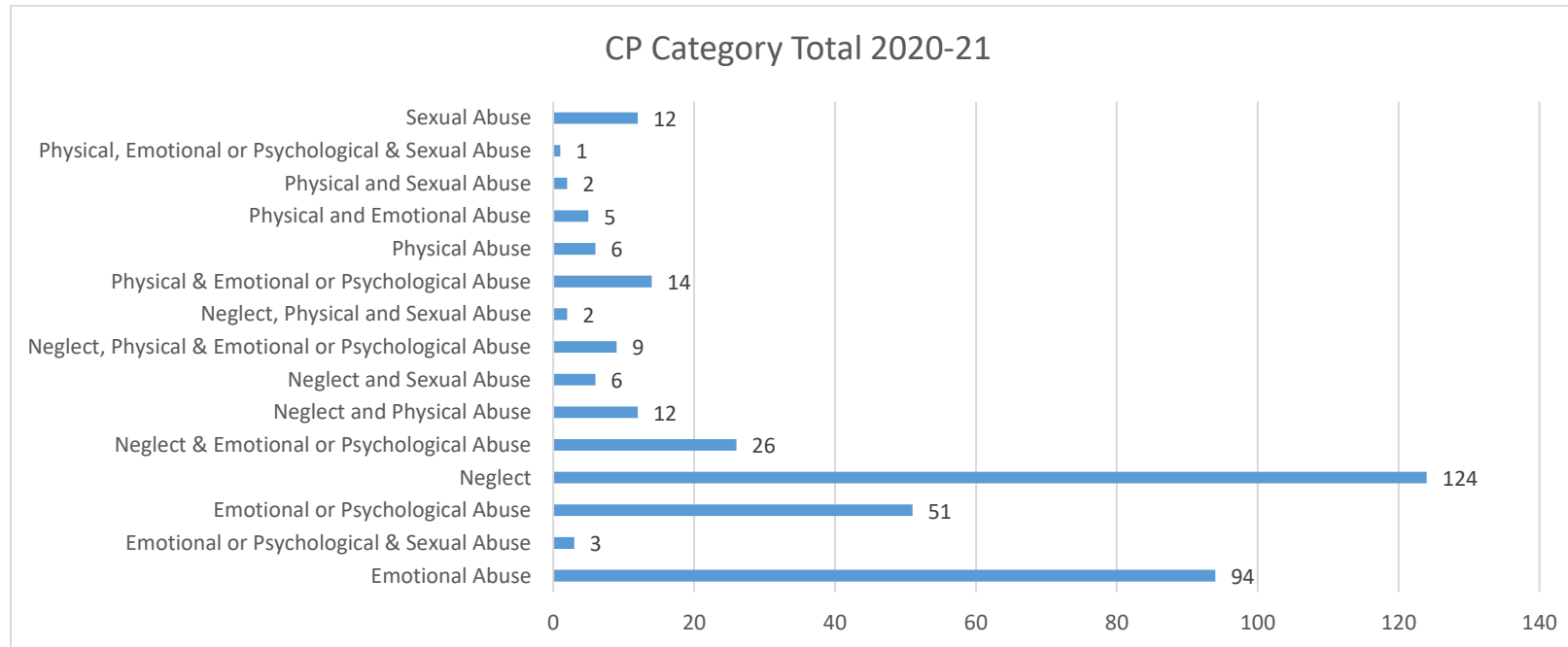
The IRO Service held 518 RCPCs and only 2 were out of compliance. The reason for the non-compliance in both cases were as a result of conference being cancelled on the day due to no reports having been completed by the Social Worker and the parents requesting time to read the reports and consult legal advice if they wished. In both of these instances the IROs and or the Child Protection clerks had no availability to reconvene within the compliance date.

Comparing the CPR figures to previous years, less conferences were convened. It is highly likely the Covid pandemic had an impact on these figures as there were less opportunities for children to be seen by professionals and the length of time the schools were shut naturally would result in less referrals.

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Chart 4

CPR Categories



As can be seen from chart 4, the greatest number of children were placed on the CPR under the category of Neglect.

In this period we have not had any children registered under the category of Financial Abuse since the introduction of this category.

Neglect

This means a failure to meet a person's basic physical, emotional, social or psychological needs, which is likely to result in an impairment of the person's well-being (for example, an impairment of the person's health).

Physical abuse

Physical abuse means deliberately hurting a child or young person. It includes: physical restraint; such as being tied to a bed, locked in a room, inflicting burns, cutting, slapping, punching, kicking, biting or choking, stabbing or shooting, withholding food or medical attention, drugging, denying sleep, inflicting pain, shaking or hitting babies, fabricating or inducing illness (FII).

Emotional or psychological abuse

This describes physical, sexual, psychological, emotional or financial abuse (and includes abuse taking place in any setting, whether in a private dwelling, an institution or any other place).

Sexual abuse

There are 2 different types of child sexual abuse. These are called contact abuse and non-contact abuse. Contact abuse involves: touching activities where an abuser makes physical contact with a child, including penetration. It includes: sexual touching of any part of the body whether the child's wearing clothes or not, rape or penetration by putting an object or body part inside a child's mouth, vagina or anus, forcing or encouraging a child to take part in sexual activity, making a child take their clothes off, touch someone else's genitals or masturbate. Non-contact abuse involves: non-touching activities, such as grooming, exploitation, persuading children to perform sexual acts over the internet and flashing. It includes encouraging a child to watch or hear sexual acts, not taking proper measures to prevent a child being exposed to sexual activities by others, meeting a child following sexual grooming with the intent of abusing them, online abuse including making, viewing or distributing child abuse images allowing someone else to make, view or distribute child abuse images showing pornography to a child sexually exploiting a child for money, power or status (child exploitation)

Financial abuse

Financial abuse includes theft, fraud, pressure about money, misuse of money.

Chart 5
CPR chart showing Gender & Ages

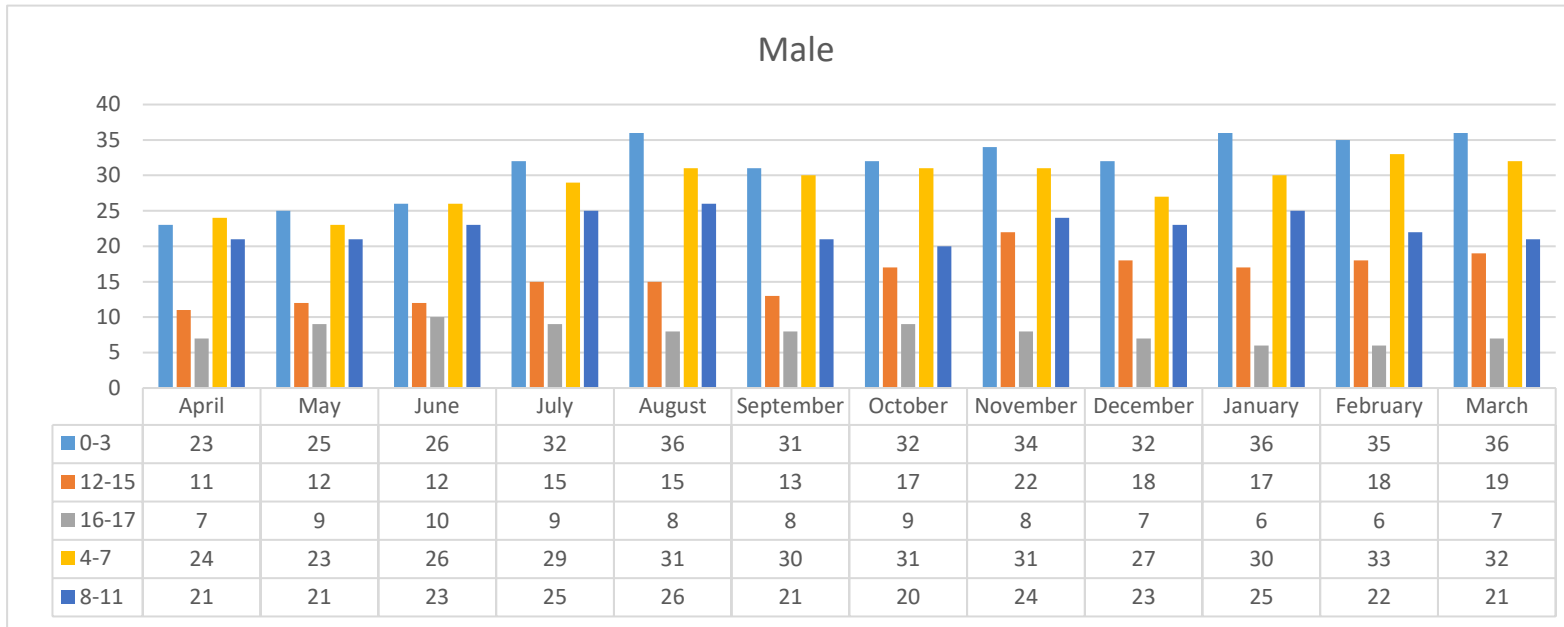


Chart 5 identifies it is male children aged 0-3 years and 4-7 years who are the largest proportion of male children subject to Child Protection registration. The smallest age group is 16-17 yrs. These statistics have not changed from the previous year.

Chart 6 identifies some differences for female children on the CPR, similarly to male children the age group 0-3 and 4-7 feature highly, however, there is a much larger proportion of female children aged 12-15 years subject to the CPR in comparison to male children. The female population is much more evenly distributed in terms of age for females than for males.

Chart 6

CPR chart showing gender and ages

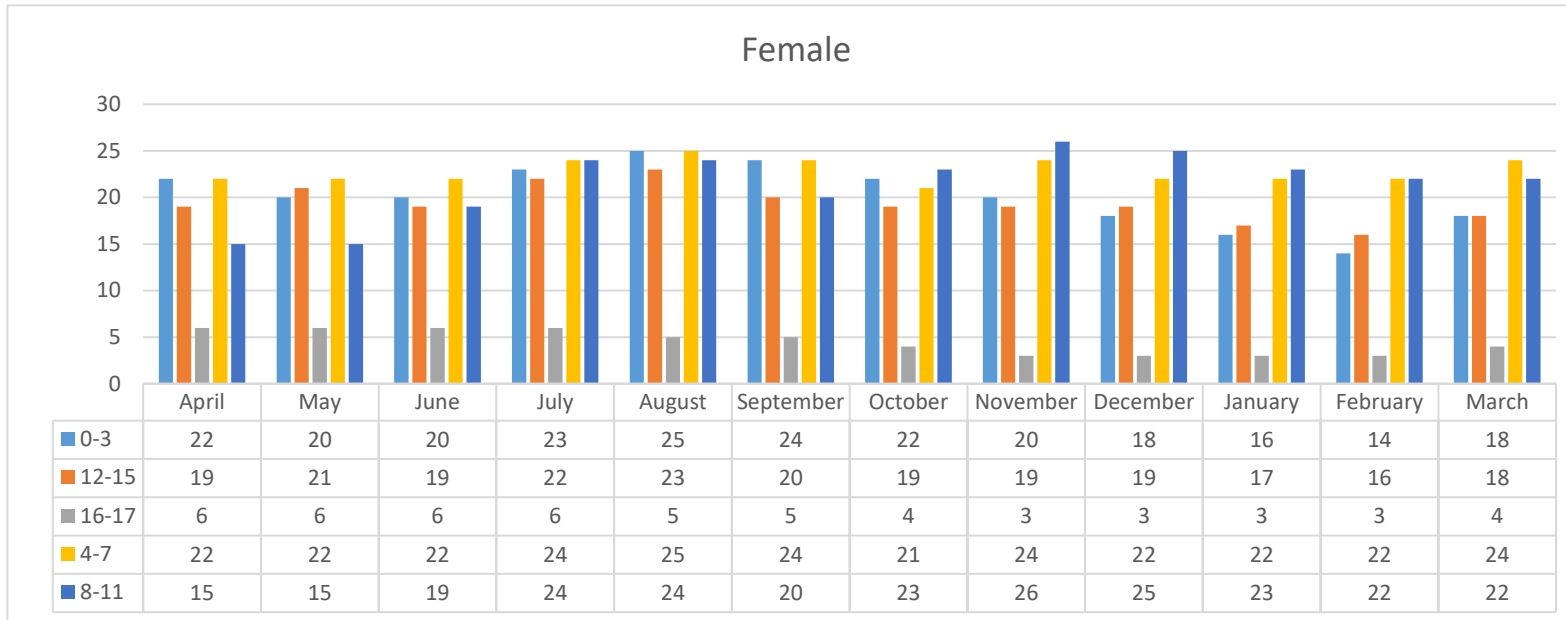


Chart 7 records the number of children being re-registered within a year of de-registration.

**Re-registration figures within 12 months
of being De-registered**

Metric Description	April 2020 - March 2021												Grand Total
	Apr	Ma y	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Ma r	
The number of Children that have been previously registered under any category, at any time during the previous 12 months	0	0	0	1	0	0	7	0	0	0	0	0	8

Any case that returns to an ICPC within 12 months of being de-registered will be audited by the IRO Service Manager to scrutinise the processes that were followed and consider themes and any lessons that can be learnt.

The child who was re-registered in July was a case of domestic abuse, both parents completed all work with the Local Authority, however disguised compliance was a concern but no evidence to substantiate this. The child was de-registered as there was no evidence of significant harm, however 10 months later there was a further incident of domestic abuse which led to a further period of registration.

The 7 children re-registered in October involved a sibling group of 4 and a sibling group of 3. The risks relating to the sibling group of 4 were physical chastisement, emotional abuse and one child being beyond parental control. The family worked well with services during the initial period of registration but following de-registration one child alleged being physically assaulted by a care giver in the family home. The children were all later accommodated and remain 'looked after' to date.

289640 The risks in the case of the sibling group of 3 was poor home conditions, poor parental mental health, parent's generally feeling overwhelmed and unable to cope. The Social Worker recognised in the second period of registration that there was a pattern of the parents working superficially with support services and no meaningful change had been maintained. During the second period of registration services worked more intensively with the family, and they were monitored for longer. Prior to de-registration services withdrew more slowly and the family were monitored to evidence sustained change while not under the strict scrutiny as at the start of the involvement. This approach appeared to be more successful and the children have since been de-registered. However, I did note the case was closed at the first Care and Support meeting following de-registration and not kept open for the recommended 3 months to ensure sustained change without the scrutiny of a Child Protection plan.

Children subject to the CPR for more than 18 months.

The IRO Service Manager and the Principal Officer (PO) meet on a monthly basis to consider the children who have been subject to the CPR for more than 18 months. The IRO Service Manager completes a comprehensive audit of these cases prior to the meeting and during the meeting actions are agreed to progress these cases. General themes have become apparent from undertaking the audits:

- No stand-alone Child Protection Plans
- Core Group meetings not held within time scales
- No supervision or management oversight
- Delay in making a Court application where the children are safe with family member/s
- Older children cases become 'stuck' with support either not engaged with or not effecting change and professionals unclear about what intervention is required
- Changes in allocated Social Workers creating a delay while the new Social Worker gets to know the case and the family
- Many of these cases are within the Public Law Outline (PLO) process, however the IRO Service has noted there has been a lack of timetabling in this process with many Social Workers not knowing when the next PLO meeting is or when they have to complete assessments by. This should be resolved via the new PLO Review guidance which is much clearer about the objectives of the PLO process and the timetabling of these cases.

The lack of stand-alone child protection plans is a concern. This is the document that sets out the objectives, the expectations on a parent and what will be provided by Children's Services and partner agencies to mitigate the identified risks. This plan should be provided to all parties and discussed, reviewed and amended at the 4-6 weekly Core Group

meetings. Without this plan there is no clear direction and simply put, progress cannot be achieved if nobody is clear about what the objectives are for the child. The IRO Service identifies all cases that do not have a stand-alone Child Protection Plan and highlights this to conference and in their Quality Assurance document which informs the Team Manager of the child care team. A request has also been made to the Performance and Development Team to collate the numbers of children subject to CPR without an up to date plan.

The IRO Service Manager held discussions with the ICT and Performance Team to consider ways WCCIS could support the completion of stand-alone plans for example, preventing the user putting a Core Group document on the system without there being a stand-alone and in date Child Protection plan thus preventing the next stage of work while previous work remains incomplete. Unfortunately it has recently been confirmed the system doesn't allow for this currently, but discussions are continuing between the IRO Service Manager, ICT and the Business Support Development Officer to find a way forward, such as utilising the practitioner Dashboards to embed prompts and alerts.

There are currently 25 children (12 families) who have been subject to the CPR for 18 months or more.

One proposal to reduce this number moving forward would be for:

- Team Managers to ensure they discuss these cases in monthly supervision with the Social Worker
- The PO to hold a consultation with the Social Worker and the Team Manager for all cases where children have been subject to the CPR for 12 months
- Team manager to ensure they read the IRO QA document which is completed following all conferences as this will inform them of out of date or missing documents

It is also hoped with the implementation of the Care Experienced Team this will free up Social Workers in the Child Care Teams to undertake their duties towards children subject to the CPR more robustly and progress their plans more effectively.

The IRO Service now has a procedure of informing the PO at the 2nd RCPC (child will have been subject to the CPR for approximately 9 months) if there is risk of drift in the case and or where it is clear the Child Protection Plan isn't effecting positive change and reducing risk. This has been working well and the PO will then ensure he discusses these cases in supervision with the Childcare Team Manager.

Children's participation at Child Protection Review Conferences.

Children's participation at their ICPC and RCPC is hugely important, however it is recognised it may not be appropriate for children or young people to attend any or all of the meetings but there are mechanisms in place to enable them to attend part of the meeting and meet with the chairperson separately. This is an area for improvement in Bridgend as it is only a very small proportion of children and young people who are attending their meetings. The Wales Safeguarding Procedures have placed greater emphasis on the importance of the child's attendance at their conference.

The IRO Service is committed to consulting with young people subject to the Child Protection Register, however this will require greater coordination with the Child Care Teams. Many children subject to the Child Protection Register do not know they are subject to such meetings. The IRO Service Manager has raised this with the Training Department and requested joint training with Social Workers in the Child Care Teams around how they are explaining the Child Protection process to children, advocacy and how we can include them in their Child Protection Conference. IROs are now routinely making contact with the Social Workers to ascertain what the young person's understanding is of their situation and making contact with the young person where appropriate. As detailed earlier, the Performance and Development team were not able to provide data around children's participation in their conferences due to the new forms and difficulties extracting this information. They hope to resolve this issue and provide this data for next year's report.

The Performance and Development Team were not able to provide data around children's participation in their reviews due to the changes in the forms following the Outcomes Model being implemented.

Care Experienced

All children who are placed with Foster Carers are allocated a named IRO on the same day the IRO Service receive the notification from the Childcare Teams.

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Care Experienced population

Chart 8

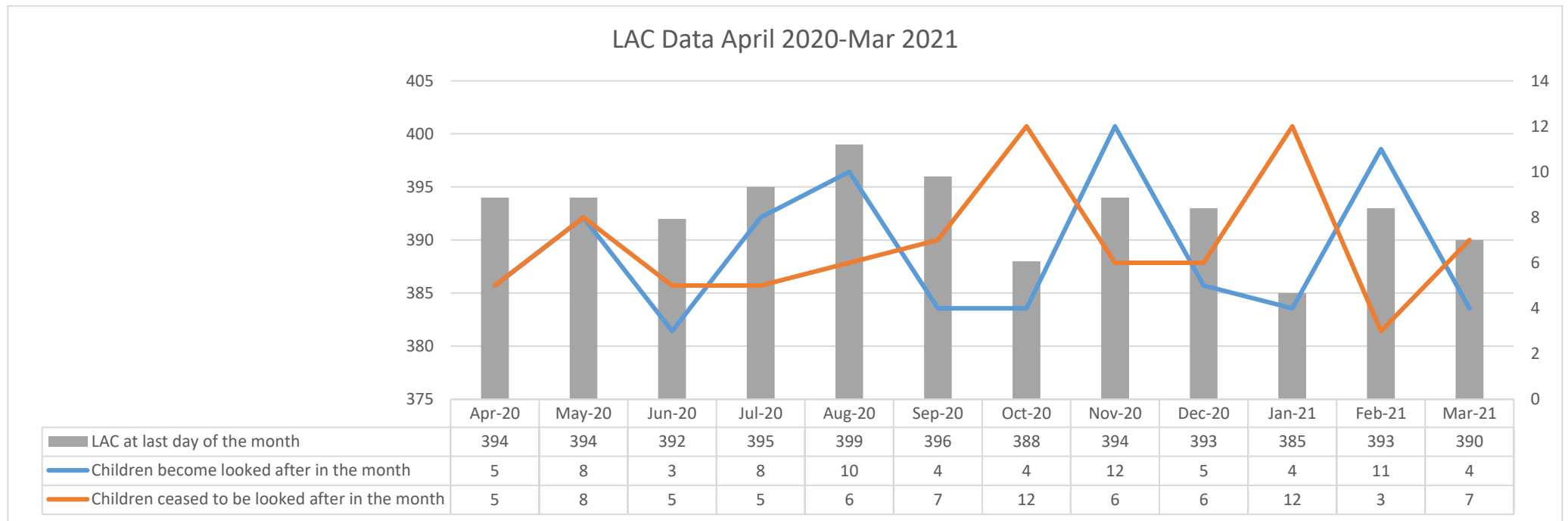


Chart 8 details the number of care admissions and discharges between April 2020-March 2021. Given this period was during the height of the Covid pandemic it is pleasing to see there wasn't a significant fluctuation in the number of children and YP being accommodated by the Local Authority. The monthly average figure in this period was 392 children, in comparison to the previous year there was an increase of 8 children who were looked after.

Chart 9

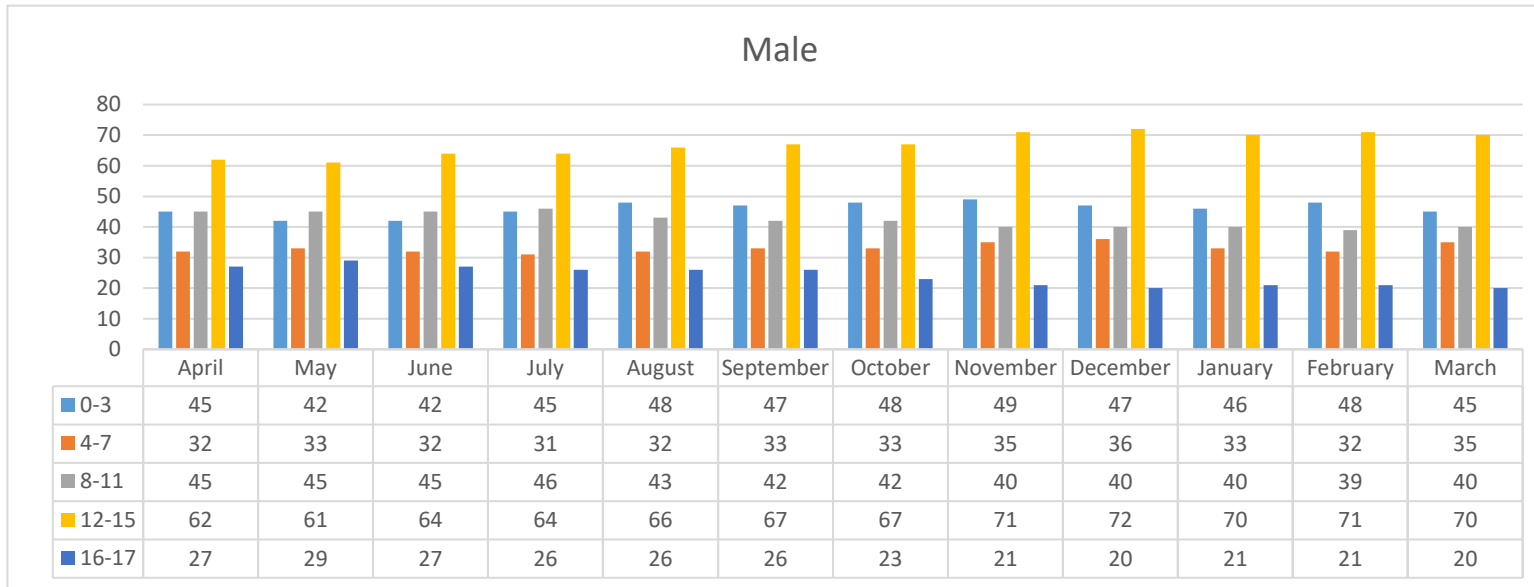
How many LAC reviews took place

April 2020 - March 2021														Grand Total	% Held In Compliance
In Compliance	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar			
No	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	2	0	0	5	99.57%	
Yes	95	82	129	88	89	85	102	124	117	81	41	121	1154		
Total	95	82	129	88	89	85	102	125	119	83	41	121	1159		

As can be seen from the above data, 5 children’s reviews were outside of the timescale. One was due to IRO error in calculating the next date and this was subsequently not identified by the LAC clerks. The other 4 were a result of the Social Worker not informing the IRO Service of a significant change in the child’s circumstances requiring a LAC Review within 20 working days. Given this period has been during a pandemic resulting in remote working, the compliance figure of 99.57% of LAC reviews being held within compliance is very pleasing. The previous year the figure of out of compliance LAC Reviews was 17 so this is a significant improvement.

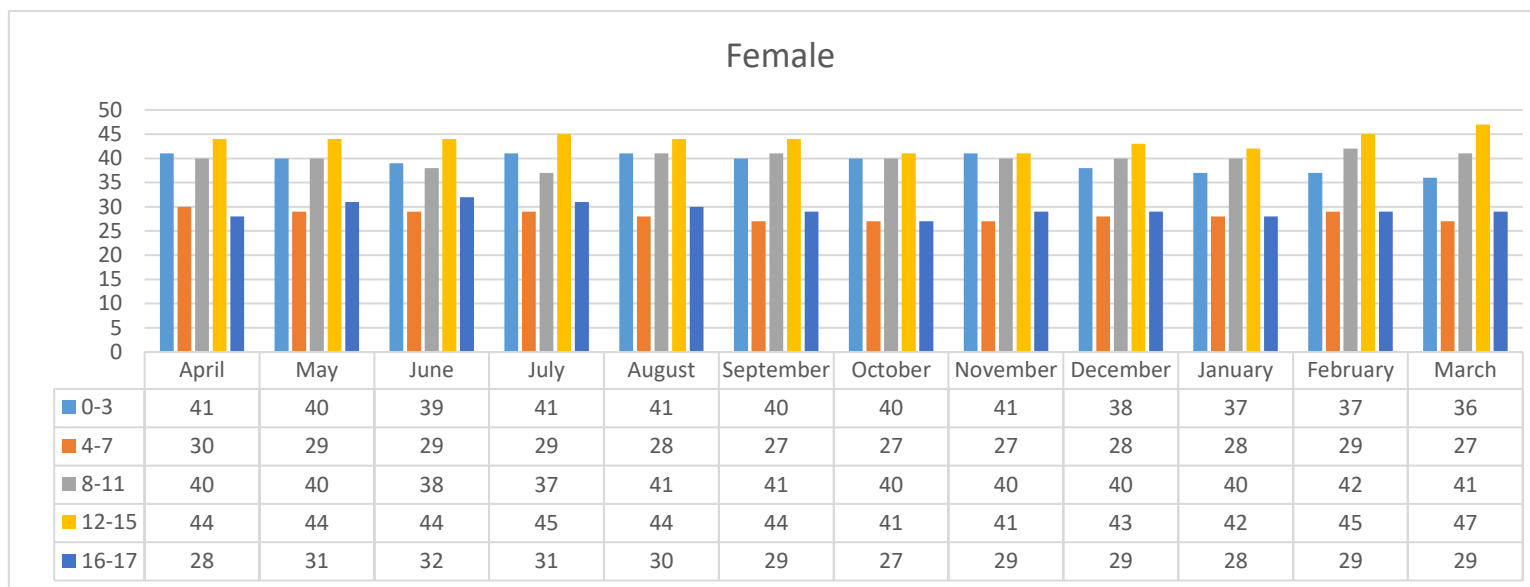
Chart 10

Care Experienced Children Male and Age.



As can be seen from chart 10 for male CEC, the greatest age group continues to be 12-15 years. This data set replicates last year's data.

Chart 11



As can be seen above, the female population mimics the male population in terms of age figures, with 12-15 being the highest. However, for female CEC there is less disparity than between the other age groupings.

Advocacy.

In the period of Apr-Sept 2020 a total of 135 referrals were made to Tros Gynnal Plant Advocacy Service for ongoing advocacy support. Of the 135 referrals, 72 were in respect of CEC, 47 children subject to child protection, 14 Care and Support and 2 Care Leavers. This is an overall reduction from the previous year of 203 referrals, however this was to be expected given children were seen less during the lockdown periods, they were not in schools and Social Work visits were less frequent. Some children may have also refused advocacy support during this time as the support was provided via virtual platforms and they may not have wanted to engage in this way.

Some positive feedback was received from young people about the advocacy support they received including:

“I have someone who will speak to people about my feelings and opinions”

“It’s good to tell my Social worker how I am feeling”

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It remains a priority for the IRO Service to ensure all children involved in the child protection process or care experienced children have the opportunity to access advocacy support. The IRO’s ensure they discuss this when they consult with children and young people. They raise the issue of advocacy at all meetings and record advocacy numbers in the quality assurance audits. The IRO’s ensure every child or young person receives an Active Offer for Advocacy services. The Active Offer ensures the Social Worker has explained what Advocacy is and how it can support them. Children and young people who become looked after and/ or are being discussed at a Child Protection Conference are entitled to receive an Active Offer of advocacy support. However, the Active Offer should be consistently and regularly revisited with children and young people.

Business Support.

Business Support have continued to support the core functions of the IRO Service during this period and have done so by adapting to new ways of working due to Covid restrictions. The IRO Service and Business Support have a quarterly interface meeting to address any challenges and monitor any issues of compliance.

Team Meetings

During this period and as a result of the pandemic some meetings with external agencies have been placed on hold, however the IRO has had monthly interface meetings with Western Bay Adoption Service and monthly quality assurance meetings with partners in Cwm Taff Morgannwg. Once restrictions allow for face to face meetings to resume the IRO will meet on a quarterly basis with CAFCASS Cymru We would usually plan for the Head of Service to attend the IRO Service Team Meetings on a quarterly basis but during the pandemic this has not been achievable at this frequency.

Case Dispute Resolution and Complaints

In this period the IRO’s monitored 1 case under the IRO resolution protocol. One case relates to a child residing under PWP regulations and the concerns are around drift and a lack of assessment. This case has since been resolved and the IRO protocol has ended.

There were no complaints in relation to Child Protection Conferences that required resolution via an independent panel.

Changes were made to the electronic consultation document and it was hoped the process was more user friendly ensuring children and young people are engaging in their reviews and their voices are being heard throughout the care planning

process. The IRO Service Manager has worked with the Fostering Team to consider ways foster carers would assist in children completing consultations questionnaires more frequently. The Fostering Team now discuss this during supervision with their carers to ensure it stays on the agenda and is encouraged.

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IRO Quality Assurance Audit

The IRO's complete quality assurance audits after every LAC Review and CP Conference. The quality assurance audit form provides data on practice standards and captures data and information relating to the IRO standards. Once completed by the IRO following the meeting, the form automatically goes to the Safeguarding Team Manager of the case holding team for their scrutiny and management oversight. This form also alerts the Safeguarding Team Manager to any outstanding pieces of work, compliance issues and identifies areas of good practice and this has continued during this period.

In this period the IRO Service Manager has been involved in facilitating training to Social Workers and partner agencies on the Wales Safeguarding Procedures. This has involved facilitating sections of the training around Conferences, Core Groups and major changes from the All Wales Child Protection Procedures.

The IRO Service Manager also sits on the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Quality and Performance sub-group. This group undertakes audits and seeks to identify themes, learning and improve practice. In this period a Domestic Abuse audit was undertaken and at our next meetings we will share the learning from this. The shared learning event has been delayed due to the Covid pandemic.

IRO Standards

The IRO guidance and practice standards were introduced at the beginning of 2019 by the Association for Fostering and Adoption (AFA) Cymru funded by Welsh Government. On behalf of the Ministerial Advisory Group for Improving Outcomes for Children. IRO's have worked to improve tracking and monitoring as advised within the Practice Standards and Good Practice Guide. Arrangements for Independent legal advice for IRO's have been agreed with a reciprocal arrangement between Bridgend and Neath Port Talbot legal departments. The IRO's have accessed this support on a number of occasions. However, the standards have introduced a new process to completing CERs which includes the involvement of the Team Managers. This is achieved when the IRO sends the Team Manager the meeting recommendations within 5 days of completing the Review and that Team Manager has 5 days to respond to these recommendations. This is now embedded and working well within the service quickly identifying any area of disagreement and enabling these issues to be resolved at the earliest stage. IROs are holding mid-point meetings with the allocated Social Worker and this is also supporting the identification of drift early.

Challenges

Page 49
Consultation with children and young people needs to be improved to ensure their voice is being heard. Whilst the IRO's have worked to improve the consultation document for children and young people, challenges remain in encouraging them to complete the document. It is a priority for the IRO Service to develop creative ways of engaging and encouraging participation of all children and young people. The development of an App has been placed on hold due to the Covid pandemic.

Some young people have informed their IRO that they prefer consultation via a virtual platform and now these systems are in place moving forward the IRO's will be able to give greater choice to children about how they discuss their wishes and feelings.

CAFCASS Cymru

The IRO service has a direct relationship with CAFCASS Cymru and can, if required, refer matters of concern or report directly to CAFCASS Cymru where deficits in care planning for care experienced young people cannot be resolved locally but are sufficiently significant as to impact on the outcomes for children and young people. To date, the IRO service has had no cause to refer to CAFCASS Cymru but liaises with them regularly on individual cases within the public law arena. IROs in Bridgend work to a standard that has improved liaison between the CAFCASS Cymru children's guardians and Safeguarding Social Workers within family proceedings. As a result, IROs are alerted more quickly to issues arising in the court process and can liaise at an earlier stage where disputes arise with the Local Authority. This relationship enables the means to communicate issues arising directly with the IRO that are relevant to the on-going development and monitoring of a care plan, either during proceedings or following an order being granted. A CAFCASS Cymru IRO event is planned for February 2022 to support the strengthening of relationships and further develop our processes for improved collaborative working.

Service Priorities

- To increase the contact between the IRO with children and young people.
- To work alongside safeguarding colleagues to achieve permanency for all children and reduce the numbers of care experienced children within a safe and appropriate plan.
- The development of child consultation and participation through a more accessible medium.
- To work alongside Safeguarding Teams and SCWDP to improve practice around Looked After Children Reviews and the Care Planning Process.
- To ensure appropriate care plans are progressing in a timely manner to prevent and avoid drift in children's cases.

- To continue to focus on increasing participation of children and young people at their meetings.
- To ensure every care experienced child and young person has a stand-alone and in date Care Plan.
- To collate thematic practice issues identified from the QA's and use these to develop learning themes and improve practice
- IROs will continue to promote advocacy services and the active offer to children and young people and make these referrals where consent has been given to support the child/young person's voice.

Please see below service priorities Action Plan

B	Completed
R	A problem needs serious attention and action now
A	Issues are being managed and if addressed should not affect delivery
G	On track, in progress, any minor risks/ issues being managed
NYS	Not Yet Started

Independent Reviewing Service Action Plan 2021/2022

IRO Service								
	Owner	Due date	Recommendation	Action	Evidence	Update	Last RAG	RAG
1	IRO Service Manager and each IRO.	Sept 2021	To increase the contact between the IRO with children and young people.	IRO Service Manager will continue to be involved in the progress of the MUSE App.	IRO Service Manager will attend all consultation meetings in relation to the development of this APP.	Due to the Covid pandemic work focussing on a consultation APP ceased and is yet to be restarted. However, progress has been noted in terms of	Amber	Amber

				Each IRO will ensure they give the child/YP the opportunity to meet with them to discuss their LAC review or CP Conference.	Data collection of consultation rates will be included in the 6 monthly IRO Report.	IRO consultation with young people and this is felt to be as a result of virtual platforms being preferred by many children and teenagers. Low rates of consultation documents. Service Manager has liaised with the Fostering Team to ask Foster Carers to encourage the children in their care to complete the consultation form. The Fostering Team have made it a standing point of discussion at their Foster Carers supervision, however, we have yet to see an improvement in the return rates.		
2.	IRO Service Manager and each IRO.	Sept 2021	To work alongside safeguarding colleagues to achieve permanency for all children and reduce the numbers of care experienced children within a safe and appropriate plan.	IROs to check at the 2 nd LAC Review the plan for the child is clear. If the plan isn't clear, the IRO will track the case and inform the appropriate Safeguarding Team Manager.	IRO Service Manager to attend the LAC reduction Strategy Meeting held on a bi-monthly basis. IRO Service Manager will identify any children who may be suitable for	This process is currently working well. IRO Service Manager has identified a number of cases where alternative care options could be considered resulting in the child no longer being Looked After. In IRO Supervision the IRO Team Manager ensures discussion takes place around the children	Green	Green

				IROs to ensure they consider all appropriate options for care experienced children such as SGOs.	alternative Orders and will discuss this with the allocated IRO.	who have been identified as possible candidates for an alternative Order such as a Special Guardianship Order which would end their LAC status. The IRO Service Manager attends the bi-monthly LAC Reduction Strategy meetings and provides updates. Cases where there isn't a permanency plan at the second review are due to care proceedings not being finalised.		
3.	IRO Service Manager	Sept 2021	The development of child and young persons consultation and participation through a more accessible medium.	IRO Service Manager will continue to be involved in the progress of the MUSE APP. Each IRO will ensure they give the child/YP the opportunity to meet with them to discuss their LAC review or CP Conference.	IRO Service Manager will attend all consultation meetings in relation to the development of this APP. Data collection of consultation rates will be included in the 6 monthly IRO Report.	Due to the Covid pandemic work focussing on a consultation APP ceased and is yet to be restarted. However, progress has been noted in terms of IRO consultation with young people and this is felt to be as a result of virtual platforms being preferred by many children and teenagers. Low rates of consultation documents. Service Manager has liaised with the Fostering Team to ask	NYS	NYS

						Foster Carers to encourage the children in their care to complete the consultation form. The Fostering Team have made it a standing point of discussion at their Foster Carers supervision, however, we have yet to see an improvement in the return rates.		
4.	IRO Service Manager and each IRO.	Sept 2021	To work alongside Safeguarding Teams and SCWDP to improve practice around care experienced children and their meetings.	<p>IROs will ensure they complete the IRO Quality Assurance document following every LAC Review. This will automatically be sent to the Safeguarding Team Manager for their scrutiny.</p> <p>Should the IRO identify concerning practice, they will raise this with the IRO Service Manager and the Safeguarding Team Manager. They will track the progress to a resolution and initiate the IRO</p>	The rates of completed QA forms will increase in the next year and the data will be included in the IRO 6 month report. IRO Service Manager will attend all IRO protocol Meetings to support the IROs and facilitate resolution.	<p>IRO Service Manager continues to raise cases of concern with the individual Social Workers, their Team Managers and the PO where appropriate.</p> <p>IRO Service Manager continues to present training alongside the training department and is facilitating introductory sessions to new starters and newly qualified staff.</p>	Green	Green

				<p>Protocol where necessary.</p> <p>IRO Service Manager will facilitate training alongside the Training Department to support and improve practice.</p> <p>IRO Service Manager will facilitate induction sessions to new starters and newly qualified Social Workers to support their professional development.</p>				
5.	IRO Service Manager and each IRO.	Sept 2021	To ensure appropriate care plans are progressing in a timely manner to prevent and avoid drift in children's cases.	At every LAC Review the IRO will check the child has a Care Plan that is up to date and meets the child's needs. The IRO will recommend at each LAC Review that the Care Plan is updated to reflect the changes agreed at the	<p>The rates of IRO Quality Assurance forms being completed is increasing and this will continue moving forward.</p> <p>IROs are holding mid-point meetings for each child who is Looked After, however, there are times the child's SW does</p>	In this period the IROs identified all children whose Care Plan was out of date and informed the respective Social Workers and Team Managers and provided a timescale for completion. On the whole progress was made but not in every case. IROs will continue to monitor all children's Care Plans and where there is a Care Plan that is out of date or not reflective of the child's circumstances they will	Amber	Green

				<p>current LAC Review.</p> <p>The IRO will track each child and ensure their Care Plan has been updated. The IRO will hold mid-point meetings to prevent drift and take action where drift is identified.</p> <p>Each IRO will complete the IRO Quality Assurance form following each LAC review as this informs the SW and their Team Manager of any out of date Care Plans.</p>	<p>not respond. In these cases the IRO will raise this with their Service Manager and the safeguarding Team Manager.</p>	<p>raise this appropriately and track to ensure completion.</p> <p>IRO Service Manager ensures when attending the LAC Reduction Strategy meeting and monthly Performance meeting that for any child who is discussed, the date of their Care Plan is checked to ensure it is up to date and where not it is flagged with the Safeguarding Team Manager.</p>		
6.	IRO Service Manager and each IRO.	Sept 2021	To continue to focus on increasing consultation and participation of children and young people at Looked After Children Reviews.	<p>IROs to ensure they offer to consult with each LAC child as appropriate for their age and level of understanding and to use a means of communication that the child</p>	<p>The IRO Quality Assurance form captures the consultation data and this will be included in IRO 6 month report.</p> <p>IRO Service Manager will during</p>	<p>Since Covid restrictions have been in place IROs have found many young people prefer to be consulted via virtual means such as Skype.</p> <p>IROs report many young people have attended their LAC reviews while in the lock down period as they</p>	N/A	Amber

				<p>choses. This includes face to face meeting, phone, Skype and MS Teams.</p>	<p>supervision sessions discuss the importance of consultation and ensure it remains a priority for each IRO.</p>	<p>have had greater availability to attend.</p> <p>IRO Service Manager has added consultation as a supervision agenda item to ensure it is discussed in supervision sessions with each IRO.</p>		
7.	IRO Service Manager and each IRO.	Sept 2021	<p>To ensure every care experienced child and young person has a stand-alone and in date Care Plan.</p>	<p>At every LAC Review the IRO will check the child has a Care Plan that is up to date and meets the child's needs. The IRO will recommend at each LAC Review that the Care Plan is updated to reflect the changes agreed at the current LAC Review.</p> <p>The IRO will track each child and ensure their Care Plan has been updated. The IRO will hold mid-point meetings to prevent drift and take action where drift is identified.</p>	<p>The rates of IRO Quality Assurance forms being completed is increasing and this will continue moving forward.</p> <p>IROs are holding mid-point meetings for each child who is Looked After, however, there are times the child's SW does not respond. In these cases the IRO will raise this with their Team Manager and the safeguarding Team Manager.</p>	<p>In this period the IROs identified all children whose Care Plan was out of date and informed the respective Social Workers and Team Managers and provided a timescale for completion. On the whole progress was made but not in every case. IROs will continue to monitor all children's Care Plans and where there is a Care Plan that is out of date or not reflective of the child's circumstances they will raise this appropriately and track to ensure completion.</p> <p>IRO Service Manager ensures when attending the LAC Reduction Strategy meeting and monthly Performance meeting that for any child who is discussed, the date</p>	Amber	Green

				Each IRO will complete the IRO Quality Assurance form following each LAC review as this informs the SW and their Team Manager of any out of date Care Plans.		of their Care Plan is checked to ensure it is up to date and where not that this is flagged with the Safeguarding Team Manager.		
8.	IRO Service Manager and each IRO	Sept 2021	To collate thematic practice issues identified from the QA's and use these to develop learning themes and improve practice.	The data will be scrutinised for the 6 monthly IRO Report.	Any practice themes identified will be provided to the Training Department and Team Managers at the weekly Team Meeting. If required the IRO Service Manager will be available to support the Training Team in facilitating training sessions to address these deficits.	The Quality Assurance forms are being used currently to identify out of date Care Plans as a theme and this is being addressed by the IROs with the Social Workers and their Team Managers.	NYS	Green
9.	IRO Service Manager and each IRO.	Sept 2021	IROs will continue to make children and young people aware of the advocacy service.	This is currently monitored via the IRO Quality Assurance form and will be scrutinised for the	The referral numbers to Tros Gynnal from Bridgend are the highest in the Western Bay area.	Advocacy referral rates continue to be pleasing with 135 children having been referred in this period.	Green	Green

				<p>IRO 6 month report.</p> <p>IROs will ensure when consulting with young people they ask if they would like the support of the Advocacy Service.</p> <p>IRO Service Manager will liaise with the Group Manager for Case Management and Transition periodically to check the referral rates have not decreased.</p>	<p>IROs report good evidence of advocacy discussions and offers being made between Social Workers and Children.</p>			
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Author: Raeanna Grainger
Independent Reviewing Service Manager

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BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING

2 MARCH 2022

REPORT OF THE CHIEF OFFICER - FINANCE PERFORMANCE AND CHANGE

HOUSING FOR CARE EXPERIENCED CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide 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.

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**:

- **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 All Welsh Councils have 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.
- 3.2 Care leavers in Wales have a range of entitlements set out in social services legislation to ensure that they are properly accommodated. These are detailed in Appendix A to this report.

4. Current situation/proposal

- 4.1 In response to the legislation, Councils should respond to the need for:
- An active identification process to ensure care experienced young people presenting as homeless can access all the support they are entitled to in cooperation with children services;

- Multi agency reviews to be undertaken to identify any gaps within the system or interventions that could have taken place to ensure future similar cases are prevented for care experienced young people presenting as homeless;
- Granting local connection status for care experienced young people who are placed out of county when moving on ; and
- Extending Personal Adviser support up to the age of 25

4.2 Work has been undertaken across housing and social care to consider current joint working and commissioning practises. Whilst joint working does take place across these services in relation to this matter, more detailed work is required. It is proposed that the work will be classified under the following headings:

- Corporate outcomes
- Commissioning
- Joint working
- Projecting need
- The experience for young people

The details of the work to be undertaken are contained in the action plan within Appendix A

4.3 To progress this action plan a working group is to be established consisting of officers across social care and the housing service. The first meeting of this group will agree terms of reference, agree the ongoing membership of the group including which external agencies could be involved with this work and agree timelines for completion of the works included within the action plan.

5. Effect upon policy framework and procedure rules

5.1 There is no impact on the policy framework and procedure rules.

6. Equality Act 2010 implications

6.1 The protected characteristics identified within the Equality Act, Socio-economic Duty and the impact on the use of the Welsh language have been considered in the preparation of this report. As a public body in Wales, the Council must consider the impact of strategic decisions, such as the development or the review of policies, strategies, services and functions. This is an information report, therefore it is not necessary to carry out an EIA in the production of this report. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable equality impacts as a result of this report.

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

7.1 The implementation of the duties and responsibilities under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act (SSWBA) 2014, in turn, supports the promotion of two of the seven goals of the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 within the County Borough of Bridgend. By promoting an environment that maximises people's physical and mental well-being and by supporting children, young people, adults and their carers and families to fulfil their potential no matter what their circumstances, the wellbeing goals of a healthier and more equal Bridgend and Wales are supported.

7.2 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 provides the basis for driving a different kind of public service in Wales, with five ways of working to guide how the Authority should work to deliver wellbeing outcomes for people. The following is a summary to show how the five ways of working to achieve the well-being goals have been considered in this report:

- Long term: The improved service will ensure the Council is better placed to meet the needs of the current and future looked after children population.
- Prevention: Improved planning between departments and agencies will prevent care experienced young people from experiencing homelessness.
- Integration: Improved planning for care experienced young people is integrated across the authority
- Collaboration: Collaboration will be critical to achieving the best outcomes for care experienced young people.
- Involvement: The knowledge of care experienced young people will be key to informing the work that needs to be undertaken.

8. Financial implications

8.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report.

9. Recommendation(s)

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

Carys Lord
Chief Officer Finance, Performance And Change
February 2022

Contact officer: Carys Lord
Chief Officer, - Finance, Performance and Change

Telephone: (01656)) 643249

Email: carys.lord@bridgend.gov.uk

Background documents:

None



Housing for Care Experienced Children & Young People (16-25)

A corporate response – Bridgend Council

30th January 2022
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Introduction

All Welsh Council's including Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) have recently been tasked by Welsh Government to examine their corporate parenting response in relation to care experienced children and young people (CYP) and their future accommodation needs. Specifically, it requests that council's respond to the need for:

- An active identification process to ensure care experienced young people presenting as homeless can access all the support they are entitled to in cooperation with children's services.
- Multi-agency reviews to be undertaken to identify any gaps within the system or interventions that could have taken place to ensure future similar cases are prevented for care experienced young people presenting as homeless;
- Granting 'local connection' status for care experienced young people who are placed out-of-county, when moving on;
- Extending Personal Adviser support up to the age of 25.

To enable BCBC to consider its future response to the needs of care experienced CYP the following activities were undertaken in January 2022:

- A desktop appraisal of existing and emerging policy
- A desktop appraisal of good practice
- A facilitated workshop with BCBC housing and social services managers
- Self-assessments in relation to joint working and joint commissioning
- A review of previous work undertaken for BCBC in relation to homeless 16 & 17 year olds.

Key Findings & Information

Existing and emerging policy

The last 6 years have seen significant changes in the Welsh legislative and policy landscape relating to young people at risk of homelessness, in a context where both Housing and Homelessness are identified as top priorities within the current Welsh Government Programme for Government.

Care leavers in Wales have a range of entitlements set out in social services legislation to ensure that they are properly housed. In addition, care leavers receive some additional support through the general homelessness legislation. This section sets out the key legislation/case law and its intended impact.

The Housing Wales Act 2014 (HWA 2014)

The HWA 2014 requires local housing authorities to work alongside other public authorities and voluntary sector to ensure that services are designed to meet the needs of groups at particular risk of homelessness – including young people.

Duty to Collaborate

Section 60 of HWA 2014 requires local housing authorities to work alongside other public authorities and the voluntary sector to ensure that the service is designed to meet the needs of groups at particular risk of homelessness. Such groups include people leaving prison or youth detention accommodation and young people leaving care.

Duty to Prevent Homelessness

The emphasis on prevention in the HWA 2014 is supported by a number of programmes and policy areas such as the Housing Support Grant Programme, the Social Services & Wellbeing Act 2014, The Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 and Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014.

The Social Services & Wellbeing Act 2014

The current legal and policy framework for looked after children and care leavers in Wales is primarily drawn from the Children Act 1989 and the Children Leaving Care Act 2000. Support currently offered to care leavers in Wales includes: structured pathway planning from care to independence; the right to a personal advisor; and support to find suitable accommodation and access education and training.

The Social Services & Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 (SSWBA 2014) – places a greater emphasis on ensuring services are more person centred, promoting independence and reducing reliance on more intensive services. One of the SSWBA 2014 National Wellbeing Outcome Areas – covers the suitability of living accommodation.

'I live in a home that best supports me to achieve my wellbeing'

Section 37 contains the duty to provide care and support for a CYP in the local authority's area if s/he has an eligible need for care and support. These include the powers to accommodate and support the CYP's carers and other family members.

The Southwark Judgement

In May 2009, the House of Lords made a landmark judgement in the case of R (G) v London Borough of Southwark 57 which affects how local authorities provide accommodation and support for homeless 16 and 17-year-olds. The judgement ruled that:

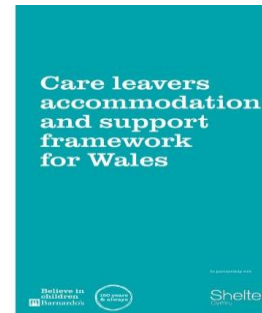
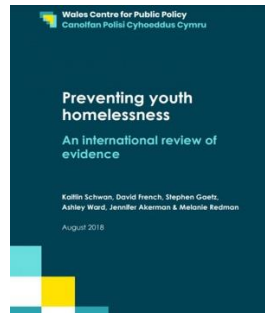
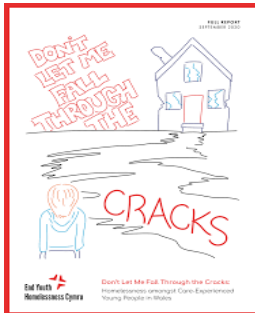
- the primary duty to a homeless 16 or 17-year-old is under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014, and the ongoing duty to accommodate and support that young person will fall to children's services. This will include the range of support available as a looked after child and a care leaver.
- a homeless 16 or 17-year-old who applies to a housing authority should be provided with interim accommodation under the homelessness legislation. They should then be referred to children's services for an assessment of their needs under section 21 of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014.

The Programme for Government

The Programme for Government outlines key commitments to legislate in line with the key recommendations in the documents below in relation to homelessness and care experienced young people. Specifically Welsh Government has committed to:

- Explore radical reform of current services for looked after children and care leavers;

- Fundamentally reform homelessness services to focus on prevention, rapid rehousing and;
- Support innovative housing developments to meet care needs
- Improve joint working across housing and social services, utilising corporate parenting responsibilities



More details on the policy context and legal framework are available in Annex 1 in this [link](#).

Good practice

[The Care leavers accommodation and support framework for Wales](#) (Appendix 1)

outlines several good practice examples in line with the five areas below

- Prepare for reality of housing options
- Plan young people’s accommodation and support options with them
- Reduce housing crisis
- Access housing and support as needed
- Access and successfully manage longer-term move on options and support options

Specific good practice examples that might be of interest to BCBC in relation to multi agency approaches

Project	Details
Getting Ready	A collaborative project between Children in Wales, Voices from Care Cymru and three local authorities in Wales (Ynys Mon, Carmarthenshire and Rhondda Cynon Taf), Getting Ready seeks to support young people as they prepare to leave the care system, with a focus on considerations around delaying leaving care and reducing the risk of homelessness and housing instability.
MyST	MyST (My Support Team) is a multiagency partnership working to help children who are looked after to remain in their local communities. It works seamlessly across statutory agencies to provide an effective alternative to residential care for children who are looked after with highly complex needs. MyST is commissioned by the Gwent Children and Families Partnership Board. This service is already established in Torfaen and Caerphilly and will be regional across all of Gwent by 2021. They are included in this report due to their focus on a multi-agency approach, which connects all elements of what they refer to as a child’s ‘ecosystem’.



Joint working and joint commissioning in BCBC

Two self-assessments were carried out in a workshop with managers across housing and social care in relation to joint working and joint commissioning. The following actions are proposed from the self-assessments and merged with relevant actions proposed previously in relation to a BCBC protocol for homeless 16/17 year olds:

Action Plan

Area for action	Actions
Corporate outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop a corporate parenting strategy that explicitly outlines how BCBC will plan for future accommodation needs for care-experienced CYP ▪ Put in place a learning and development plan to support to include all key partners to ensure strategy is understood at both strategic and practice levels
Commissioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop a joint commissioning strategy between housing and social care ▪ Map existing accommodation/costs/criteria for accessing - to inform the strategy ▪ Ensure good information flow and proactive information from social services for CYP in care with more complex challenges ▪ Develop a coherent joint move-on strategy ▪ Ensure development priorities are aligned and complementary ▪ Ensure flexibility in funding arrangements ▪ Ensure youth offending teams are involved in commissioning and planning for CYP being released - around short-term accommodation options



Area for action	Actions
Joint working	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A joint protocol needs to be established for care leavers, building on the existing protocol for 16-17 year olds in BCBC. ▪ Joint assessments should be timely and collaborative ▪ Re-establishment of a proactive multi-agency panel that focuses on care experienced young people with more complex situations
Projecting need	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Agree a corporate suite of data that provides an intelligent projection of future needs ▪ An information, advice and accommodation pathway for looked after young people aged 14+ should be considered
The experience for young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensure all services that CYP access are psychologically informed – to include locations, buildings and practice across housing and social care ▪ Consider developing a separate physical hub for young people presenting as homeless ▪ Develop a proactive programme of prevention and early intervention for young people at risk of homelessness. The following activities should be streamlined: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pre-crisis education ▪ Early advice

Appendix 1: Care Leavers accommodation and support framework



Supporters	Framework stages and options				Activity and approach
Career/residential worker Personal adviser Housing worker	1. Prepare for reality of housing options				Identify and plan with young people on the framework <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leaving care 16-18 and 18+ Leaving custody Out of authority UASC/NRPF
	Tenancy and life skills training schemes	Education including peer and from carers	Preparation for leaving custody		
	2. Plan young people's accommodation and support options with them				Involve young people in decision making and offer housing and support choice
	Training flats	Visit housing types	Family group conferencing for returns home and leaving custody	When I'm Ready	
	3. Reduce housing crisis				Plan early and have contingency plans in place to prevent crises from escalating
Respite/short breaks	Staged exits from care	Short-term placements from custody	Family mediation		
4. Access housing and support as needed				Commission a range of housing and support options with access for care leavers	
Short-stay/Emergency Nightstop Short breaks Respite Short-term supported lodgings Emergency assessment bed	High support Small units 24/7 Small group homes Specialist supported lodgings Housing First	Medium support Floating support Specific accommodation leased by local authorities	Low support Shared houses with floating support Peer landlords On-call concierge		
5. Access and successfully manage longer-term move-on and support options				Develop a range of move-on options Work with landlords to reduce evictions Work with partners to develop a range of housing options	
Suitable shared and self-contained options	Mixture of tenancy types available	Affordability checks and preparation	Support as needed to set up and sustain tenancy		

- Underlying principles – young people are:**
- given a much information choice and control as possible
 - able to make mistakes and never 'fall out' of the framework
 - helped to succeed
 - offered flexible support that adapts to meet their needs
 - offered supportive and unconditional relationships
 - the shared responsibility of their corporate parent.

