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## Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Pen-y-bont ar Ogwr

### Bridgend County Borough Council



Swyddfeydd Dinesig, Stryd yr Angel, Pen-y-bont, CF31 4WB / Civic Offices, Angel Street, Bridgend, CF31 4WB

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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:** Friday, 29 September 2023

Dear Councillor,

### **CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING**

A meeting of the Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting will be held Hybrid in the Council Chamber - Civic Offices, Angel Street, Bridgend, CF31 4WB / remotely via Microsoft Teams on **Thursday, 5 October at 09:30.**

### **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 20/07/23.
4. Corporate Parenting Development Update 9 - 12
5. Housing Pathways for Care Experienced Children and Young People 13 - 18
6. Foster Wales Bridgend Update 19 - 24
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: This will be a Hybrid meeting and Members and Officers will be attending in the Council Chamber, Civic Offices, Angel Street Bridgend / Remotely via Microsoft Teams. 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](mailto:cabinet_committee@bridgend.gov.uk) or tel. 01656 643148 / 643694 / 643513 / 643696.

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Yours faithfully

**K Watson**

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

Councillors:

F D Bletsoe  
JPD Blundell  
RJ Collins  
HJ David

Councillors

N Farr  
J Gebbie  
W R Goode  
M Lewis

Councillors

J E Pratt  
JC Spanswick  
T Thomas  
HM Williams

# Agenda Item 3

CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING - THURSDAY, 20 JULY 2023

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING HELD HYBRID IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER - CIVIC OFFICES, ANGEL STREET, BRIDGEND, CF31 4WB ON THURSDAY, 20 JULY 2023 AT 10:00

## Present

Councillor J Gebbie – Chairperson

F D Bletsoe  
W R Goode  
HM Williams

JPD Blundell  
M Lewis

HJ David  
J E Pratt

N Farr  
T Thomas

## Officers:

Steve Berry	Corporate Parenting and Participation Officer
Raeanna Grainger	Independent Reviewing Service Manager
Claire Marchant	Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing

### 27. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

R J Collins and JC Spanswick

### 28. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

### 29. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting dated 19 April 2023, be approved as a true and accurate record.

### 30. INDEPENDENT REVIEWING SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT 2022-2023

The Group Manager IAA Service and Safeguarding submitted a report, that detailed the work undertaken by the Independent Reviewing Service between April 2022-March 2023, in line with The Independent Reviewing Officers Guidance (Wales) 2004.

The report set out the legislative framework that governs the work undertaken by the Independent Reviewing Service.

She explained that primarily, the Independent Reviewing Officer's (IRO) role is to ensure the child's care plan is appropriate and meeting their developing needs and, that they challenge any issues of delay in achieving the objectives of the care plan and/or any issues of delay. The role has a strong emphasis on quality assurance and challenging the local authority when they are not satisfied in areas of decision making.

The IRO's in Bridgend also undertake the chairing of Child Protection Conferences, where their role is to ensure professionals make important decisions based on evidence and safeguarding procedures. Most importantly explained the Group Manager IAA Service and Safeguarding, the IRO Service must ensure the child's voice is central to decision making and that they are informed of their rights and their circumstances.

There is a strong focus on qualitative data in the annual report and compliance rates, but also, strengthened processes and how the service has met the annual plan objectives.

The report further considers how the service has responded to increased demand and rising numbers of children subject to the Child Protection registration and what is being done to reduce this figure.

The report also sets out the improvements made in relation to the child's voice being central to decision making and how the significant increase in referrals to advocacy are supporting this.

The Group Manager IAA Service and Safeguarding stated that the updated Annual Plan could be read at the final section of the report in Appendix 1 to the covering report, and this highlighted the aims for the next reporting period.

Appendix 1 therefore covered the work of the IRO service from April 2022 to March 2023. The report contained performance information in respect of the statutory reviewing of children who are Care Experienced, including children with plans for Adoption and Young People with Leaving Care LAC/Pathway Plans (under 18) by Bridgend County Borough Council. It also included information on children subject of a child protection plan and reviews of these plans at Child Protection Case Conferences.

This report further included information that related 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 2023-2024.

The Group Manager IAA Service and Safeguarding outlined, that as described in the report the IRO's chaired/reviewed 406 (51% increase) Initial Child Protection Case Conferences between April 2022 and March 2023 compared to 200 the previous year. A total of 659 Review Child Protection Case Conferences (RCPC) between April 2022 and March 2023 were convened compared to 508 (23% increase) in the previous reporting period. All RCPCs were held within the statutory timescales. In this reporting period, 1,125 Care Experienced review meetings were held between April 2022 and March 2023 compared with 1,159 the previous year. This reduction is mainly as a result of greater placement stability.

She explained that 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.

Previous work had been undertaken to improve the consultation document for children and young people. However, very low response rates were still experienced. The introduction of Microsoft Teams has enabled a greater number of young people to attend their meetings, particularly their Care Experienced Review meetings. The introduction of Signs of Safety will place much greater emphasis on participation and it is expected that this will be reflected in the data.

The report did highlight a significant increase in referrals for advocacy which supports and captures the voice, wishes and feelings of the children and young people worked with.

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 partner agencies are included in the roll out of the Signs of Safety practice model and the training for this.

The Group Manager IAA Service and Safeguarding, assured that 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.

She also gave a power point presentation on the Independent Reviewing Service Annual Report for the above period, giving a resume for the benefit of Members, of the key points that came out of this, some of which are highlighted above.

The Chairperson thanked the Group Manager IAA Service and Safeguarding for the report, which she felt made for excellent reading. She then opened up the meeting for questions and these together with the responses of Officers can be located via the following [link](#)

**RESOLVED:** That the Corporate Parenting Committee noted the report and the IRO Service Action Plan.

31. **CORPORATE PARENTING DEVELOPMENT UPDATE**

The Corporate Parenting and Participation Officer presented an update report, to inform the Cabinet Committee of progress in relation to the corporate parenting activity. He stated that particular points to note, were that the Corporate Parenting Strategy had been launched and a professionals' engagement event had also taken place to undertake action planning for future work.

By way of some background, he informed Members that since he had been in post updates to the Committee had provided at meetings on the following key areas:-

- Establishing a shared vision for Corporate Parenting Responsibilities.
- Establishing a governance structure that supports the strategic and operational approach to Corporate Parenting.
- Establishing a Corporate Parenting Performance Framework.
- Establishing care experienced forums to provide our children and young people with a collective voice

The Corporate Parenting and Participation Officer then gave a resume of the work undertaken in respect of these areas as referenced in the report.

The Chairperson confirmed that the work the Corporate Parenting and Participation Officer had been carrying out since he had been in post, had been recognised as good practise within Welsh Government and that he would be developing guidance that would sit alongside our Corporate Parenting Strategy that would be used by other local authorities in Wales.

The Leader added that he hoped that as the above had been recognised by Welsh Government, then the work developed as part of this guidance would be financially supported by them. He also sought assurance that children and young people within the County Borough had 'a voice' when BCBC and its partners were considering policy changes. He was sure this was the case, as that had come through loud and clear at a recent Launch he had attended.

The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing assured Members this was the case as was evidenced at the Bridgend Youth Voice Forum.

She added that in the summer period, the Corporate Parenting and Participation Officer would be ensuring that there would be meaningful engagement undertaken with Children and young people, on the draft Sustainability Plan for Children and Families in Bridgend, something that had been raised previously through the Council's Overview and Scrutiny process.

**RESOLVED:** The Cabinet Committee – Corporate Parenting noted the progress made identified within the report and agreed to invest in the future development of Corporate Parenting activity to establish better outcomes for its children and young people.

**32. REGIONAL ADVOCACY SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT 2022-2023**

The Group Manager – IAA Service and Safeguarding presented a report, the purpose of which, was to highlight the key aspects of service delivery from BCBC's regional provider, Tros Gynnal Plant. She was accompanied at the meeting, by the Team Manager of Tros Gynnal Plant.

Detailed performance reports were included as attachments to the covering report as follows:

Appendix 1: Bridgend Annual Advocacy Report 2022-2023

Appendix 2: CTM Regional Annual Advocacy Report 2022-2023

Tros Gynnal Plant (TGP) provides a regional advocacy service in Cwm Taf Morgannwg (CTM). TGP has delivered advocacy services in Bridgend for many years and is a well-established provider locally, as well as being the largest provider of advocacy to children and young people in Wales.

The report's background information confirmed that Tros Gynnal Plant (TGP) provides a regional advocacy service in Cwm Taf Morgannwg (CTM). TGP has delivered advocacy services in Bridgend for many years and was a well-established provider locally, as well as being the largest provider of advocacy to children and young people in Wales.

The Group Manager – IAA Service and Safeguarding advised that detailed quarterly performance reports were provided by TGP, as well as this provider also providing an annual report for both Bridgend locality and the CTM region. They covered the key service aspects of Issue Based Advocacy, and the Active Offer of advocacy.

Appendix 1 to the report reflected that there had been an increase in the number of people who had accessed the IBA service this year when compared to last year, including some individuals who had used it for the first time. The most popular method of using the service was via the 'self referral' route, followed by Social Services referrals.

An 'Active Offer' (AO) of advocacy was a core element of the statutory service, while the majority of young people referred for AO in Bridgend last year, being aged between years 6 and 11.

The report confirmed that TGP continued to be responsible for facilitating young people's participation and consultation groups in Bridgend, now called Bridgend Youth Voice Forum, or 'BYV' Forum. The aim of the group was to allow care experienced

young people and care leavers to have a voice in wider Bridgend forums, including the Bridgend Corporate Parenting Board.

The Group Manager – IAA Service and Safeguarding emphasised that TGP continued to develop new and innovative ways for young people to provide feedback to help improve the advocacy service, for example, through the use of a QR code that they can scan from their mobile phones and which links to a short questionnaire.

TGP had noted that social workers are not always able to respond to some case communications, resulting in some young people's advocacy cases remaining open longer than they need to be. This is noted in both the local Bridgend report (Appendix 1 of the report) and the regional report (Appendix 2). The volume of work being managed in statutory children's services will have impacted and focused work to safely reduce caseloads, which will in turn, assist in improving responsiveness.

Following recent changes in BCBC Children's Services, including the appointment of a new Responsible Individual (whose role is to promote, monitor and improve service quality), TGP had met and engaged with BCBC on a number of levels to further develop working relationships and improve awareness and understanding of referral processes for advocacy.

The Chairperson sought clarification of the methods by which we were promoting ways to encourage volunteers for TGP support in relation to the Independent Visiting Service, particularly with regards to promoting/advertising such opportunities.

The Team Manager, TGP advised that an Independent Co-ordinator post had been created for the purpose of social media, etc recruitment promotion for the above. She added that the increased number of volunteers would be matched to young people subject of referrals, in order in turn, to decrease the amount of time these individuals remain on the waiting list. The Team Manager TGP added that essential training is given to volunteers, in order that they may successfully undertake the work that comprises their role.

The Leader advised that he was pleased to note the improvement in numbers of children taking up advocacy services. This was essential he felt in order for their voices to be heard. This was crucial to older children also he felt, particularly those who had other challenges to overcome.

The Team Manager TGP assured Members that there were experienced Advocates in place who managed the situations of younger children through a number of initiatives and this also applied with anyone with for example a disability who was accessing advocacy services. There was a multi-agency approach to such services she further added.

Finally, the Team manager TGP advised that there was also a non-instructed Advocacy service, in addition to the mainstream service.

**RESOLVED:** That the Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting noted the report.

33. **URGENT ITEMS**

None.

The meeting closed at 11:25

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# Agenda Item 4

<b>Meeting of:</b>	<b>CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING</b>
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>5 OCTOBER 2023</b>
<b>Report Title:</b>	<b>CORPORATE PARENTING DEVELOPMENT UPDATE</b>
<b>Report Owner / Corporate Director:</b>	<b>CORPORATE DIRECTOR, SOCIAL SERVICES &amp; WELLBEING</b>
<b>Responsible Officer:</b>	<b>STEVE BERRY CORPORATE PARENTING &amp; PARTICIPATION OFFICER</b>
<b>Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:</b>	<b>There are no implications for the policy framework and procedure rules.</b>
<b>Executive Summary:</b>	<b>An update report to inform Cabinet Committee of progress in relation to the Corporate Parenting activity. Particular points to note are that the specialist participation service has been extended and Care Experienced young people's education and training achievements are being celebrated.</b>

## **1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting with an update on the development of Corporate Parenting in Bridgend.

## **2. Background**

- 2.1 The Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting has received an update report on Corporate Parenting Development at each meeting since the commencement of the Corporate Parenting & Participation post. Each of the reports have provided progress on the following areas:
- Establishing a shared vision for Corporate Parenting Responsibilities.
  - Establishing a governance structure that supports the strategic and operational approach to Corporate Parenting.
  - Establishing a Corporate Parenting Performance Framework.
  - Establishing care experienced forums to provide our children and young people with a collective voice.
- 2.2 It is proposed that update reports on these areas will continue to be presented to the Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting until these areas have been fully established.

### **3. Current situation / proposal**

#### **3.1 Establishing a shared vision for Corporate Parenting Responsibilities**

- 3.1.1 The Corporate Parenting Board's fifth meeting took place on 14<sup>th</sup> September 2023. The Board received several presentations for Board members to consider their Corporate Parenting responsibilities as single agencies and as a collective body.
- 3.1.2 One of the aspirations of the Board is to have all of the agencies working to support our children and young people to have the knowledge and skillset to support our children and young people in a cohesive manner. The Board received a presentation at their meeting from Public Health Wales where they were offered the opportunity to use research led learning tools on trauma informed practice. It is hoped that these resources can be utilised by Bridgend Corporate Parenting Board to train all staff across the locality and region so that our children and young people are worked with using consistent approaches.
- 3.1.3 Alongside their peers, our children and young people have to work extra hard to overcome the obstacles that they have been presented with to achieve in their education and training. As a Corporate Parenting Board, we have committed to recognise and celebrate our children and young people's endeavors and achievements. Following on from their exams, tests, and courses a Celebration Dinner was held for those young people aged 16 and above who deserve recognition for their education and training attainment and engagement and commitment in learning based activities. The Celebration Dinner took place on 21<sup>st</sup> September 2023 at the Heronston Hotel in the presence of the Julie Morgan MS, Deputy Minister for Social Services and Corporate Parenting Board members.
- 3.1.4 In addition to the Education and Training Celebration Dinner, the Board is also planning to recognise the achievements of all our care experienced children, young people and care leavers at an event on 16<sup>th</sup> February 2024 in Halo Leisure Centre, Bridgend. An update on this event can be provided at the next Cabinet Committee meeting.

#### **3.2. Establishing a governance structure that supports the strategic and operational approach to Corporate Parenting**

- 3.2.1 At the Board meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> September 2023, members were invited to consider the action plan proposed by the Corporate Parenting Officer produced from the discussions held at the professional's engagement event held in June 2023.
- 3.2.2 Members were invited to decide how to take the action plan forward which is underpinned by the Corporate Parenting Strategy commitments and priorities. Members were invited to make comments via email to a deadline set after the meeting and to nominate a representative to sit on a task and finish group who will finalise the action plan to be shared at the next Board meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> November 2023.

#### **3.3. Establishing a Corporate Parenting Performance Framework**

- 3.3.1 At the last Corporate Parenting Board meeting held in March 2023, it was agreed that housing, education, children services and health would seek to provide regular

data to the Board. The November Board meeting will seek to rationalise what data is going to be requested on a quarterly basis to formulate a Corporate Parenting dataset.

- 3.3.2 The Councils housing department presented how they carry out their corporate parenting duties and highlighted areas for improvement and opportunities for collaboration with other agencies.
- 3.3.3 Education and Social Services and Wellbeing Council departments, along with the regional Health Board, will be invited to present in the November Corporate Parenting Board meeting. With the Board having received the 3 statutory bodies presentations of how they intend working to the Corporate Parenting Strategy, the Board should be in a good position to write their annual report with proposals for the new financial year.
- 3.4. Establishing care experienced forums to provide our children and young people with a collective voice
  - 3.4.1 The Specialist Participation Service, contracted to TGP Cymru, was for one year with the open option to carry through 6 more months. Considering the work achieved through the production of the co-produced Corporate Parenting Strategy and the Bridgend Youth Voice's facilitation of the launch event, the contract has been extended to the full 18<sup>th</sup> months as proposed when the contract was first agreed.
  - 3.4.2 The end of this 18 month contract will also fall in line with the end of TGP Cymru regional advocacy contract. This provides an opportunity for Bridgend County Borough Council to align its advocacy offer and specialist participation service regionally. These opportunities will be considered in the coming months and proposed when appropriate to regional commissioning partners and Children's Services Senior Management Teams.
  - 3.4.3 The youth forum is currently deciding upon what projects and priorities they wish to focus on alongside their ongoing discussions on creating an information resource on rights for care experienced children, young people and care leavers.

#### **4. Equality implications (including Socio-economic Duty and Welsh Language)**

- 4.1 An initial Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) screening has identified that there would be no negative impact on those with one or more of the protected characteristics, or socio-economic disadvantage or the use of the Welsh Language. It is therefore not necessary to carry out a full EIA on this policy or proposal.

#### **5. Well-being of Future Generations implications and connection to Corporate Well-being Objectives**

- 5.1 Long term – the establishment of the Corporate Parenting Board will address how agencies can address their responsibilities for Corporate Parenting in a strategic manner to make robust plans for the future.
- 5.2 Prevention – the proposals that have been made mean that the responsibilities we all have for Corporate Parenting are identified and established into what we need to

report on. Measuring and reporting on these responsibilities through the Corporate Parenting Board will enable us to take early action on any issues identified.

- 5.3 Integration – the Corporate Parenting Board has a multiagency membership, along with an extended multiagency membership through its 5 subgroups. This membership is intended to provide sufficient representation to cover who has specific responsibilities for our children and young people in particular circumstances. The purpose of the next Board meeting and the subgroup meetings being held within this quarter, is to identify where professionals and agencies need to work together in the future to forge a coherent approach to the care of our children and young people.
- 5.4 Collaboration – the success and effectiveness of our Corporate Parenting in Bridgend is dependent on how well agencies work together to achieve shared goals and aspirations for our children and young people. These goals and aspirations are cited within the ‘Bridgend Corporate Parenting Strategy – Our plan for you....’
- 5.5 Involvement – due consideration has been given to how different ‘providers of care’ are involved in the proposals around Corporate Parenting. Specific attention and proposals are given to enabling the voice and lived experience of our children and young people.

## **6. Climate Change Implications**

- 6.1 There is no direct impact on Climate Change through the implementation of this report.

## **7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications**

- 7.1 All safeguarding implications have been fully considered within Corporate Parenting development. No safeguarding issues were raised within the work cited in this report.
- 7.2 The subject matter of this entire report relates directly to corporate parenting and any implications are discussed within it.

## **8. Financial Implications**

- 8.1 Corporate Parenting development does not have a specific allocated budget. Where costs have arisen to support participation of children and young people, engagement, meetings and training of professionals the costs have been met from within the Children’s Services core budget.

## **9. Recommendation(s)**

- 9.1 It is recommended that Cabinet Committee notes the progress made identified within this report.

### **Background documents**

None

<b>Meeting of:</b>	<b>CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING</b>
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>5 OCTOBER 2023</b>
<b>Report Title:</b>	<b>HOUSING PATHWAYS FOR CARE EXPERIENCED CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE</b>
<b>Report Owner / Corporate Director:</b>	<b>CORPORATE DIRECTOR SOCIAL SERVICES AND WELLBEING AND CHIEF OFFICER FINANC, PERFORMANCE AND CHANGE</b>
<b>Responsible Officer:</b>	<b>Pete Tyson – Group Manager, Commissioning</b>
<b>Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:</b>	<b>There is no effect upon the policy framework or procedure rules</b>
<b>Executive Summary:</b>	<p><b>This report outlines the accommodation pathways available to care experienced young people and care leavers from the age of 16+. The information shows that there are a number of accommodation options available to young people between the ages of 16 to 21 but the main challenge is moving young people on from these and into settled/permanent accommodation in a timely way and reducing the risk of them becoming homeless.</b></p> <p><b>Welsh Government have asked all Councils to examine their corporate parenting response in relation to the future accommodation needs of care leavers. The Care Leavers' Accommodation and Support Framework for Wales provides a model that local authorities can adapt to inform housing strategies.</b></p>

## 1. Purpose of Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to:

- Update Corporate Parenting committee on progress of work from a paper taken by Housing Services in March 2022.
- Provide information on care leavers pathway, including how many children are currently waiting for permanent accommodation.

## 2. Background

2.1 Councils have 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.

- 2.2 To enable Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) to consider its future response, work was undertaken across Housing Services and Children's Social Care to look at current joint working and commissioning practises. A report outlining the key findings of this work was taken to Cabinet Corporate Parenting Committee on 2nd March 2022.
- 2.3 Whilst the findings showed that joint working does take place across these services, more detailed work was required. It was proposed that the work be classified under the following headings and a working group be established consisting of officers across social care and the housing service, to progress the proposed actions:
- Corporate outcomes
  - Commissioning
  - Joint working
  - Projecting need
  - The experience for young people
- 2.4 To support this work a Children and Young Peoples Planning Group has been established to enable regular dialogue and liaison between representatives of the Social Services and Wellbeing Directorate and our key internal partners within BCBC, to help inform the strategic planning and future commissioning of services.
- 2.5 The remit will cover specific areas of children and young people which includes children leaving care. A workstream with officers across children's social care and housing are due to meet at the beginning of October 2023 to undertake more detailed work noted within this report.

### **3. Current situation / proposal**

#### The Care Leavers' Accommodation and Support Framework for Wales

- 3.1 A new Care Leavers' Accommodation and Support Framework for Wales launched by Welsh Government (WG) and developed by Shelter Cymru in May 2023, superseding the former 2016 framework. It aims to guide local authorities in helping young people to transition from care to settled housing by helping local authority commissioners, team managers of leaving care/housing and providers that support young people to plan for transition.
- 3.2 The framework identifies 5 key stages listed below:
- Preparing for the reality of housing options
  - Planning young people's accommodation and support options with them
  - Reducing housing emergency
  - Accessing housing and support as needed
  - Accessing and successfully managing longer-term move-on and support options
- 3.3 It is in place to help local authorities think, plan and work through the range of areas in which young people will need support and accommodation as they leave care.
- 3.4 The framework is not prescriptive but gives consideration on how young people can be supported as they leave care. It is designed to ensure that care leavers have the

flexible support they need so that no care experienced person falls out of the framework. The framework recognises that care leavers are among the groups likely to be more at risk of homelessness than others and they need support from their corporate parents throughout and beyond this transition.

### Accommodation options/pathways for Care Experienced Children and Care Leavers

- 3.5 Local authorities have a statutory duty to provide suitable accommodation for care experienced children and care leavers up to their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, where the accommodation pathway and options is robust for these young people within BCBC.
- 3.6 Inclusive of care leavers over the age of 18, young people are entitled to support in the form of structured pathway planning, and this includes support to find suitable accommodation and access to education or training which we rely on our partners to support. The pathway and options in this area within BCBC are not as effective or robust as for those young people under the age of 18, for a number of reasons outlined in section 3.8 onwards.
- 3.7 On leaving care, some young people exercise their rights as an adult and choose to return home to live with family or move in with friends or partners. Some progress on to higher education and stay in university halls or student accommodation. Others want to live independently and therefore will either look for a private rental, which is increasingly challenging to obtain or too expensive or make an application to the Common Housing Register (CHR).
- 3.8 Young people can access a range of supported accommodation options, for example Foster Care/When I'm Ready, residential care, returning home or living with other connected persons. Children's Social Care commission supported accommodation and semi-independent options and also host a supported lodgings scheme. A specialist supported service (Ty Mor) was developed by the Social Services and Wellbeing directorate to support care leavers aged 18-21 who have complex needs.

### Challenges

- 3.9 BCBC's care experienced children population remains high, with children aged 10 to 15 making up the largest proportion of this (39%). Despite the range of accommodation options available to care leavers, demand still outweighs capacity and there is no safety net post 18, which can result in homelessness.
- 3.10 All local authorities are part of the mandated National Transfer Scheme, and to date, the majority of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children referred have been aged 16+ and their needs have been primarily met in supported accommodation. Due to their immigration status and no recourse to public funds, accommodation options and move on from these placements are extremely limited, which results in lengthy stays in supported environments, impacting on availability.
- 3.11 Many care leavers choose to return home to family, or move in with friends/partners on leaving care, but quite often these relationships subsequently break down. A desktop audit of care leavers who experienced homeless during 2021-22 identified that 40% of these were as a result of relationship breakdowns after care leavers had

returned home to family or moved in with partners. This correlates with information in the Housing Support Strategy which is out for consultation it suggests that care leavers are not presenting as homeless directly after leaving care, but on average within the first 2 years of doing so (at an average age of 19 years and 7 months).

- 3.12 For many care leavers, applying for social housing through the CHR is their only option for future move-on. However, with current numbers on the CHR exceeding 2,600 and the Rapid Rehousing Programme absorbing a large proportion of allocations, waiting times on the CHR are lengthy. Time spent in supported accommodation services within Children's Services are therefore much longer than their identified need, due to the lack of move-on. This is not optimal as it means that care leavers are delayed in living independently and from a financial perspective it is not good use of scarce resource as more support is being provided than is required. These challenges are shared by other temporary and supported accommodation services the Council delivers to other residents, including young people who are homeless, but have not been in care and other categories of homeless persons.
- 3.13 Data collection and information on children leaving care is challenging, particularly between the ages of 18-25, and there is no integration of information systems between housing and social care systems to identify where a young person is residing, or if they have applied for housing or are homeless.
- 3.14 As a snap-shot, there are:
- a total number of 6 young people across our commissioned and internal services waiting for permanent accommodation;
  - three referrals for young people requiring 24 hour supported provision, but no vacancies available due to lack of options within general housing; and
  - one young person has been served notice from a When I'm Ready placement who has since presented as homeless.

### Homelessness

- 3.15 Welsh Government's statutory homelessness Code of Guidance states that care leavers are among the groups likely to be more at risk of homelessness than others. In Bridgend 15% of our care leavers (between the ages of 18 and 25) experienced homelessness between April 2021 and March 2023.
- 3.16 Many of our care leavers have experienced extreme adverse childhood experiences and quite often need intensive support and sometimes therapy whilst in our care to help them make sense of their worlds and overcome these difficulties in the short, medium and long term. Presenting as homeless and being placed in temporary accommodation is at the detriment of a young person's wellbeing.

### Work to Progress

- 3.17 To progress this work further and find some solution to the challenges outlined from section 3.8 onwards of this report a workstream has been set up and will meet monthly, chaired by the Group Manager of Case Management and Transition and will report into the area planning groups chaired by the Head of Children's Service bi-monthly.



3.18 Areas required for action are detailed below, where an action plan and timescales will be discussed and agreed in October 2023:-

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

#### **4. Equality implications (including Socio-economic Duty and Welsh Language)**

4.1 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.

#### **5. Well-being of Future Generations implications and connection to Corporate Well-being Objectives**

5.1 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 care experienced 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

#### **6. Climate Change Implications**

6.1 There are no specific climate change implications arising directly from this report.

#### **7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications**

7.1 Young people leaving care are more at risk than their peers. They need somewhere safe and suitable to live to help them make a positive transition into adulthood.

Good housing plays a critical role in supporting these vulnerable young people to achieve better outcomes, by underpinning success in other areas of life.

## **8. Financial Implications**

8.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report.

## **9. Recommendations**

9.1 It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Committee:

- Note the information contained in the report and the further work required.
- Give consideration to the priority given to care experienced children in line with the Council's corporate parenting responsibilities when reviewing the Social Housing Allocation Policy.

## **Background documents**

None

# Agenda Item 6

<b>Meeting of:</b>	CABINET COMMITTEE – CORPORATE PARENTING
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	5 OCTOBER 2023
<b>Report Title:</b>	FOSTER WALES BRIDGEND UPDATE
<b>Report Owner / Corporate Director:</b>	CORPORATE DIRECTOR – SOCIAL SERVICES AND WELLBEING
<b>Responsible Officer:</b>	LAURA KINSEY HEAD OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES
<b>Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:</b>	There are no implications for the policy framework and procedure rules.
<b>Executive Summary:</b>	An update on development within Foster Wales Bridgend to meet placement needs. The update includes the outcome of engagement sessions with the fostering and Care Experienced Teams, contextual information regarding placements for care experienced children, an update on general foster carer approvals and numbers of children who have become subject to Special Guardianship Orders. Additional information is provided regarding ongoing recruitment activities and the roll out of Signs of Safety.

## 1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Cabinet Committee - Corporate Parenting with an update on Foster Wales Bridgend Service Developments.

## 2. Background

- 2.1 As part of the Welsh Government's Programme for Government 2022-2027, there are a number of commitments that taken together describe a new vision to transform children's services. The delivery of these commitments will effect change across the whole care system here in Wales.
- 2.2 A key component of this new vision for children's services is the Programme for Government commitment to remove private profit from the care of care experienced children. Foster Wales was launched in 2021, which enables:
- Shared governance and leadership at national level across all 22 local authorities in Wales
  - Investment in local and regional capacity for delivery of services
  - A shared approach to National Recruitment Challenges in foster care

- 2.3 Our Vision Statement within Foster Wales Bridgend is:  
*We aim to ensure that Foster Carers are recognised as professionals whose views are actively sought and considered when decisions are being made about children in their care. Foster Carers will be provided with the right support at the right time to ensure that children and young people in their care achieve the best possible outcomes.*

### **3. Current situation / proposal**

- 3.1 The aim of the Programme for Government commitment is to ensure that public money invested in accommodation for care experienced children does not lead to profit, but instead any surpluses are reinvested into children's services to deliver better outcomes, service improvement and further professional development. This means, by 2027, care of children that are looked after in Wales will be provided by public sector, charitable or not-for-profit organisations.
- 3.2 In accordance with the eliminating profit priorities, and to strengthen the therapeutic model and capacity to implement, BCBC submitted an application for, and secured funding, to strengthen residential staffing structures and develop and implement a dedicated support team in fostering and residential services from Welsh Government.
- 3.3 Engagement sessions have been completed with our foster carers, fostering and care experienced teams to both inform the shape of the service and consider how we may build on existing support mechanisms to improve services for foster carers and care experienced children.
- 3.4 Following from these engagement sessions we plan to ensure prospective Kinship Carers, who are supporting children whilst being assessed, have access to a dedicated support worker to provide practical support and guidance. Such support will better enable children to remain within their families and better enable a permanent order to be made at the conclusion of proceedings, where children are unable to return to the care of a parent.
- 3.5 We will also work with our colleagues within Foster Wales and Social Care Workforce Development to create an induction programme for new Foster Carers, to enable our carers to provide Trauma Informed support to children and young people. 57% of Care Experienced Children in BCBC are supported by BCBC Foster Carers at the present time, 107 children being placed with general foster carers and 109 with kinship carers. 12% of children are currently placed with independent fostering providers (45 children) and 19% (72 children) placed with their parents.
- 3.6 It is positive to note that children placed with connected persons has increased steadily over time, with 87 children placed with connected persons in 2020 and rising to 109 currently. Numbers of children placed with independent fostering providers has also decreased from 69 in 2020 to 45 currently.
- 3.7 The number of children looked after has fallen by 4% from 390 at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017 to 374 at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022. However, latest data as at 18<sup>th</sup> September 2023 indicates that there are 385 children looked after by Bridgend which is an increase of 3% since March 2022 when there were 374 children looked after.

- 3.8 The area of highest demand (39% of all children looked after) is the age category 10 – 15 years (153 children), which is problematic as there is a national shortage of placements for this cohort. This indicates that there will be high demand for leaving care services as the high levels aged 10-15 move through the care systems for the next 3-6 years. This trend has been visible over the past 2 years and across the Cwm Taff region, and this is therefore likely to continue.
- 3.9 We are in the process of recruiting 2 new posts funded via Foster Wales within the team. One post will support placement finding and matching for children, the other will be a dedicated post to focus on Foster Carer Recruitment.
- 3.10 So far this year we have approved the same number of foster carers, as we did for the whole of last year, 5 carers for 11 children.

Year	Carers	Placements
31/03/19	6	6
31/03/20	8	13
31/03/21	16	22
31/03/22	4	6
31/03/23	5	7

- 3.11 We are currently assessing 2 of our existing Kinship carers to convert to General Fostering and provide additional placements.
- 3.12 16 children have ceased to be looked after so far this year via the granting of Special Guardianship Orders. Our Kinship Team Manager is working with the Association for Fostering, Kinship and Adoption (AFKA) to develop a national transfer protocol for Special Guardians to ensure that they experience consistency of service when they move to another local authority area. Such arrangements will better enable family members to support children under the auspices of Special Guardianship Orders.
- 3.13 Over the past year, Foster Wales has worked with local authorities to enable National Brand Recognition, secured Welsh Government investment, and accessed free media opportunities to further promote fostering recruitment.
- 3.14 Foster Wales are making use of technology to enhance services via the enhancement of the local Foster Wales Websites and development of Apps. Such methods better enable foster carers to access a variety of training, to refer their friends to fostering (the referral scheme will **pay £250** to any carer who has referred an applicant or applicants that are successful in their application) and create profiles about themselves to share with children before they arrive in placements.
- 3.15 Foster Wales Bridgend continue to promote our foster friendly policy, with our Group Manager having delivered a presentation to education colleagues on 14<sup>th</sup> September 2023 and our Regional Development Officer, presenting to the Public Services Board on 21<sup>st</sup> September 2023.
- 3.16 Foster Wales have launched a consultation with foster carers taking place on 29<sup>th</sup> September 2023 about fostering allowances to feedback to Welsh Government. This is a long term workstream aimed at enabling consistency in the offer of support to foster carers across Wales and reduce competition between local authorities.

- 3.17 Foster Wales have also developed forums where those working within fostering to support foster carers can meet to share ideas and resources.
- 3.18 Within Foster Wales Bridgend we have established coffee support groups for general and kinship foster carers, where they are able to hear updates from the team, meet with guest speakers and have an opportunity to access peer support.
- 3.19 The Team have been working to embed Signs of Safety (SofS) into their practice in accordance with the model being rolled out across the local authority, the lead consultant for BCBC recently gave the following feedback:

*I was so impressed with the managers efforts to lead and embed the SofS practice and how team members were responding to this. We had lots of examples in how they were practicing the model. It was such a delight to see how committed the teams were to learn, trying the model out and sharing how the model was helping them. I certainly felt that the team/s were the strongest in leading the signs of safety practice! I felt proud and inspired from the team.*

- 3.20 Our next Recruitment Campaign to look out for and promote is focused on combatting outdated and damaging perceptions of care experienced teens. We will provide more details in future and extend invitations to cabinet committee to participate.

#### **4. Equality implications (including Socio-economic Duty and Welsh Language)**

- 4.1 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.

#### **5. Well-being of Future Generations implications and connection to Corporate Well-being Objectives**

- 5.1 A summary of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 assessment is listed below:

<b>Long-term</b>	Children are supported by their carers to reach their full potential, and carers/staff have access to a highly skilled staff team for advice, support, and direction.
<b>Prevention</b>	The service will assist with a shared understanding of the child's needs and their carers difficulties, to determine how best to intervene and respond to achieve positive outcomes and avoid the needs of young people escalating further.
<b>Integration</b>	The service is a multi-agency partnership where integration is key to good service delivery arrangements.

**Collaboration** Collaboration is a key approach by placing young people at the centre of their support. Working with the network around the child working towards positive wellbeing outcomes.

**Involvement** Participation and engagement arrangements will be strengthened as part of this working arrangement.

## 6. Climate Change Implications

6.1 There are no climate change implications arising from this report.

## 7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications

7.1 This report provides updates regarding how Foster Wales Bridgend are meeting their duties to promote the wellbeing of children via undertaking activities to support recruitment of foster carers and supporting children to reside with connected persons where assessed as safe to do so.

## 8. Financial Implications

### Therapeutic Team Welsh Government Grant Funding

8.1 The grant funding is for purposes in accordance with the eliminating profit priorities, and to strengthen the therapeutic model and capacity to implement, BCBC submitted an application for, and secured funding, to strengthen residential staffing structures and develop and implement a dedicated support team in fostering and residential services from Welsh Government.

Confirmation of funding has been received from WG which is set out below:

- 2022/23      £129,304
- 2023/24      £1,228,268
- 2024/25      £1,538,785

8.2 Funding is available for 3 years (Financial years 2022/23–2024/25), and it is unknown at this stage if funding will continue beyond this initial term.

8.3 There is evidence from other local authorities who have implemented similar services that reductions in independent residential placements over a medium-term period could be made – which could be used to offset costs of the service beyond 2024/25 – if Welsh Government funding does not continue beyond then.

8.4 Additionally, if Welsh Government funding is reduced or ceased post-2025, we will ensure there are the necessary clauses within commissioned contracts to end any arrangements entered into, or to allow amendments to reduce provision/funding, leaving minimal financial risk to the local authority.

## 9. Recommendation

9.1 It is recommended that Cabinet Committee – Corporate Parenting notes the contents of this report.

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