

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

13th OCTOBER 2016

JOINT REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR, SOCIAL SERVICES AND WELLBEING and THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR, EDUCATION AND FAMILY SUPPORT

EARLY HELP AND PERMANENCE STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To share the draft Early Help and Permanence Strategy and Action Plan with the Committee;
- 1.2 To provide information about the numbers and associated costs of the current Looked After Children cohort in Bridgend;
- 1.3 To provide information about the costs of providing the associated placements;
- 1.4 To provide information about the strategies and work being undertaken to manage the Looked After Children population in Bridgend.

2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Plan / Other Corporate Priority

- 2.1 The report links to the following priorities in the Corporate Plan:
 - Helping people to be more self-reliant;
 - Smarter use of resources.

3. Background

- 3.1 "Looked After" Children are those children and young people aged between 0 to 18 years who cannot safely remain with their family and are cared for by the Local Authority.
- 3.2 Research indicates that outcomes for children who have been "Looked After", are not as good as those for other children. Children and young people who have been exposed to very poor parenting, neglect and/or abuse require not just care but also support in coming to terms with their experiences. We also know that the difficulties and negative behaviours experienced by "Looked After" children and young people may be repeated when they become parents themselves.
- 3.3 Early help, support and intervention at the earliest opportunity is essential to ensure children, young people and their families receive the correct level and type of service intervention. Such intervention will 'turn around' children's lives to reduce the likely repetition of harmful behaviour amongst future generations.

- 3.4 Research suggests that some variation in the numbers and rates of “Looked After” children across Local Authorities can be explained by differences in the demographic and socio-economic profile of each Local Authority.
- 3.5 This is especially the case in relation to population size, deprivation and the proportion of households that are lone parent families. Other aspects affecting the numbers and rates of “Looked After” children relate to factors more within the control of the Local Authority and their partners – especially the way that local areas lead, organise and deploy their services for vulnerable children and families.
- 3.6 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee last considered this item in October 2014 at a time when the Permanency and Early Strategies were separate but were within the same Directorate.
- 3.7 In January 2015 the Director of Wellbeing assumed line management responsibility for Children’s Social Services and assumed the new title of Director of Social Services and Wellbeing. The Early Help and Prevention Services remained under the Director of Education and Family Support. Both Directors ensure there remains close working relationships between both sides and have recognised the necessity for a single overarching strategy.

4. Current situation

Overview of the Current Looked After Children Population and Monitoring of Expenditure

- 4.1 As at the 30th June 2016, Bridgend CBC had 385 “Looked After” children. The breakdown of placement type is listed below:
 - 1. Care Order (CO) S.31 Children Act 1989 – The Local Authority has parental responsibility (PR) for children and has placed them in a regulated placement. A regulated placement is with approved foster carers which can include family members who have been approved as foster carers as they require the ongoing support of the Local Authority to manage the placement.
 - 2. Interim Care Orders (ICO) – The Local Authority has PR for children and has placed them in a regulated placement for the duration of care proceedings, the final care plan for the child has not yet been agreed by the Court.
 - 3. Voluntary accommodation S76 SSWBA – children have been voluntarily accommodated with the consent of their parents into the care of the Local Authority often whilst assessments are undertaken or via the Public Law Outline (PLO) process where parents retain PR. There is often a clause that should the parents seek to remove the children from S.76 care then the Local Authority will seek immediate legal action as the child would be at risk of significant harm.
 - 4. Regulation 26 of the Care Planning Placement and Case Review Regulations (Wales 2015) – immediate or emergency placement of children with relatives or family friends under a temporary approval agreement. These placements are overseen and managed within the Local Authority often whilst a full unified assessment is undertaken of those family members/friends as part of care proceedings.

5. Placement with Parents (PWP) S16 Social Services and Wellbeing Act (SSWBA) – Children who are accommodated under a full care order but placed with their parents upon the conclusion of care proceedings.
6. S.38(6) placements, Children Act 1989 – The Court makes an interim care or supervision order and directs, as it considers appropriate, that the child be assessed. This can include the child being assessed whilst placed 1) with parent/s in a residential placement; 2) with family members and 3) in a residential placement alone for a period of assessment.
7. Remanded into custody - All children and young people who are remanded into custody become “Looked After” children as they are placed into the care of the Local Authority.
8. Placed for adoption – Placed with prospective adoptive parents prior to the application and granting of an Adoption Order. Once an Adoption Order is granted children cease to be “Looked After” children.

- 4.2 Table 1 sets out the numbers of children and their legal status;
Table 2 sets out the numbers of children and their placement type.

Table 1

Legal status	Number
CO	245
ICO	46
S.76	43
Remand	2
Placement order (for adoption)	49

Table 2

In house foster care including reg.26	205
Independent foster care	91
In house residential setting	11
External residential setting	8
PWP	43
Placed for adoption	19
S38(6)	6
Remanded (Young Offenders institute)	1
Secure (remanded)	1

- 4.3 It is evident that there are different types of provision. Wherever possible, children are placed with in house foster carers within the Bridgend area.
- 4.4 All independent foster and residential agency placements are tendered via the Childrens Commissioning Support Resource (CCSR) framework; if, no expressions of interest are forthcoming then off the framework placements will be sought. The Framework is pan-Wales and gives the Local Authority assurance that the agency is reputable and has met stringent and robust standards in order to be entered into the framework.

Routes into accommodation

- 4.5 Children can be accommodated in an emergency by the Police using Police Powers of Protection (PPO).
- 4.6 Children’s services aim to have placements for children made in a planned manner but this is not always possible due to the nature of the reasons for accommodation and placement breakdowns.
- 4.7 Social Workers are expected to attend a multi-disciplinary Accommodation and Permanence Panel, which is held on a weekly basis, for all planned and emergency placements. This process supports the principle that requests for accommodation should be made only where all other care planning arrangements have been explored and considered inappropriate or not viable.
- 4.8 In order for families to enter the PLO process, Social Workers and their Managers attend Legal Gateway meetings. These are chaired by the relevant Safeguarding Group Manager and also in attendance is a senior childcare legal representative. If the decision to issue care proceedings is initiated and there is a plan for a placement to be provided, the Social Worker must book into the Accommodation and Permanence Panel for agreement to a placement and for consideration to be given to the most appropriate type of placement.
- 4.9 We undertook a snapshot of the numbers of children and the reason for admission into the “Looked After” system between March and May 2016; see Table 3.

Table 3

Route in	court	A and P	Legal gateway	emergency	total
ICO	10				
PPO	6				
S.76	5				
S.26				6	
S38.(6)				4	
Total	21			10	31

- 4.10 Within this overall cohort were one sibling group of 5, three sibling groups of 3 and one sibling group of 4. This goes to demonstrate that overall numbers increased exponentially due to only 6 family groups of children. 4 were planned through Court processes and 1 via PPO.
- 4.11 It is of note that out of all the entrants into care, 20 were through the Courts (ICO and S38(6)) and PPOs that were exercised by police.
- 4.12 Should it be necessary to safeguard a child or sibling group outside of the agreement of the Accommodation and Permanence panel, then Group Managers (GM) must have agreed any placement after exhausting all other available options. The Senior Management Team have agreed that any GM agreeing to the accommodation of a child will let the other GM’s, the Permanence Team and the Placements Team know of their decision and the reasons for this behind this decision along with any actions to be carried out i.e., timescales, type of provision.

Monitoring of placements and care planning

- 4.13 The Local Authority is required to carry out a first review of a child's care planning within 20 working days of the date on which the child becomes "Looked After". The second review **must** be carried out no more than three months from the first review. Subsequent reviews **must** be carried out no more than six months after the previous review. The responsibility to change/amend the child's care plan is the responsibility of the Safeguarding Social Worker and Manager and it is this plan which is reviewed at the Looked After Children's Review. The review is chaired by an Independent Reviewing Officer
- 4.14 Looked After Children's Reviews are a performance measure reported to Welsh Government.
- 4.15 The Accommodation and Permanence Panel, in addition to the primary function of considering placement requests, will also undertake a range of functions in relation to the management of the LAC placement arrangements. These will include monitoring of assessment placements, considering children where drift has been identified, making permanent placement decisions and considering requests for therapeutic intervention. At the end of every panel the number of children who became "Looked After" as of Monday that week are recorded as is all children and young people who cease to be "Looked After". Reasons why are recorded to ensure all agencies have been notified under the brighter lives stable futures guidance.
- 4.16 Legal Gateway meetings plan and monitor the Public Law Outline process for entrance to accommodation but also the legal change of care plan for exiting the "Looked After" children system via revocation or discharge of orders. There is a legal tracker managed jointly by the childcare legal representative and Safeguarding Group Manager (chair) and this is reviewed at each Legal Gateway meeting for accuracy and to prevent drift.
- 4.17 Within Bridgend Foster Care there is a weekly meeting which monitors every 'live' referral for all children requiring or moving placements and update on the progress of any searches approaches or move on dates. Within the team brief all new referrals whether they come to fruition or not are recorded and where appropriate reference to needing and a request being made to attend Accommodation and Permanence Panel are noted.
- 4.18 Monthly meetings are held between the GM for Regulated Services, GM for Disability Case Management and Transition, the Commissioning and Placement Officer and the Team Manager for the Just Ask Plus (JAP) team. This reviews every 17 year old open to the JAP and their current Pathway plan, given the age and independent nature of these young people we carefully track and monitor their evolving plans as they are liable to short notice change.
- 4.19 Out of Authority Panel is a multidisciplinary senior management panel held monthly. The purpose of the panel is to:
- determine that there is no placements in the area capable of meeting the child's needs, or that an out of area placement is more consistent with the child's well-being;

- satisfy themselves that the child's health and educational needs will be met in the proposed placement;
- agree arrangements for meeting the child's health and educational needs, and who will be responsible for what;
- agree funding for the placement;
- review existing out of county placements on a no less than 3 monthly basis.

Placement Support and Stability

- 4.20 In order to support Foster Carers and residential staff to safely care and maintain placements, multi-agency partnership working is critical. In particular for those children/young people with the most complex needs who have a history of absconding, challenging behaviour and placement breakdown.
- 4.21 There are now established regular meetings held at the two residential children's homes (Sunnybank and Newbridge House) which involve representatives from Children's Social Services, Police, YOS, Early Help (e.g. Youth Engagement Officers). These meetings are to ensure that the day to day care planning of each young person within the unit does not contradict or potentially negatively influence the management of the young people on a day to day basis, i.e. curfews.
- 4.22 Multi-agency collaboration meetings are now held on a quarterly basis at Ysgol Bryn Castell. These meetings are chaired by the Headteacher and Group Managers from Children's Safeguarding, YOS, Police, LACE coordinator and Early Help Managers also attend. The purpose of these meetings is to share information regarding the 'high end' pupils, and to agree plans to address concerns which will also include placement issues. Therefore, all agencies are working together effectively in a coordinated and informed manner to give consistent messages to the children and young people.
- 4.23 Additionally when a foster placement is at risk of breakdown, a Placement Stability meeting will be convened. These MUST be held before any agreement is given to cease a placement. This is chaired by the Senior Practitioner or above within Bridgend foster Care for in-house placements. In the case of Independent Fostering Agencies the agency will host and wherever possible, a member of the Placements Commissioning Team will attend along with the case managing Safeguarding Social Worker. The purpose of the these meetings is to establish what is leading to the placement breaking down, and what additional support/resources can complement the placement in order to maintain and sustain it. If no additional services can be identified then the meeting can agree that notice can be served. Notice is 28 days from the date of the meeting, providing the child has been in placement for 28 days. We are mirroring this practice in terms of a notice placement with our in-house foster placements.

Preventing Children becoming Looked After

- 4.24 In April 2015, a significant restructure of Integrated Working and Family Support Services was implemented. Drivers included the need to support children, young people and families in a more joined-up way with a greater focus on preventative services to avoid escalation into statutory services. There were significant barriers for families to access services due to imposed threshold constraints and lack of consistency with the assessment of needs.

- 4.25 A change programme ran alongside the re-structure which resulted in:
- one front door\one referral form for Early Help Services;
 - a common assessment;
 - co-located multi-disciplinary locality teams (co-located with safeguarding);
 - a greater emphasis on staff development and evidence based interventions;
 - improved multi-agency working.
- 4.26 The benefits of this re-structure are already evident including:
- a 200% increase in the number of completed family assessments in 2015/16 compared with 2014/15 (681 completed assessments in 2015/16 compared to 228 in 2014/15);
 - one referral pathway to early help services which has resulted in reduced duplication and confusion for referrers;
 - co-location of a range of family intervention workers who support the team around the family and team around the school approach of working;
 - an agreed step up and step down process for cases between Safeguarding and Early Help Services;
 - mentoring and support for Early Help and Safeguarding staff from consultant social workers within the Integrated Family Support Service.
- 4.27 Other work is underway including the creation of a joint 'front door' for Early Help and Safeguarding services before the end of this calendar year.
- 4.28 The Early Help and Permanence Strategy describes the services available to children, young people and their families within Bridgend. Such services support and enable where possible children and young people to safely remain in the care of their family and/or safely return to their family or an alternative carer. Where this is not possible the Strategy describes the alternative care arrangements we provide and commission for our "Looked After" Children to improve their outcomes by affording them opportunity's available to all children.
- 4.29 Children's Services across both Directorates within BCBC are driving a 'whole system' approach to supporting Looked After Children and keeping families together. Together with the Early Help and Permanence Strategy, they form a multi-agency approach to improving outcomes for children, you people and their families.
- 4.30 Early Help refers to a way of working which will ensure that children, young people and families who are at risk or vulnerable to poor outcomes are identified early and that their needs are effectively assessed and met by agencies working together. The aim being to prevent their escalation rather than to respond only when the difficulty has become so acute as to demand attention.
- 4.31 Permanence is the long term plan for the child's upbringing and provides an underpinning framework for all social work with children and their families from Early Help through to adoption. It ensures a framework of emotional, physical and legal conditions that gives a child a sense of security, continuity, commitment, identity and belonging.

- 4.32 The Strategy includes guidance on the Step up and Step down of cases between the Early Help and Safeguarding teams. As we know the needs of children, young people and their families are not static, these may escalate e.g. in the face of a crisis or unanticipated incident, equally they may diminish, e.g. as a result of a successful intervention, an increase in protective factors, reduction in risk and enhancement of resilience. The Step up and Step Down guidance is underpinned by the fundamental principle that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.
- 4.33 The Early Help Hubs (EHH), Children with eligible Care and Support Needs, Child Protection (CP), and Looked After Children (LAC) systems are all multi-agency and multi-disciplinary processes which differ only in terms of their threshold focus.
- 4.34 The co-location of the Early Help Hubs in the three localities, i.e. North, West and East in addition to the central hub based at the Civic Centre, enables timely discussions and information sharing which will inform decisions regarding the need to step up or step down intervention with families, including Connecting Families.
- 4.35 Since April 2014, Connecting Families approach has been to a) target families where the children and young people are at risk of becoming accommodated (*Edge of Care families*), b) rehabilitate children and young people home and c) provide Family Support services. Connecting Families also offers a rapid response service and group work with service users.
- 4.36 Integrated family support services (IFSS) is a programme unique to Wales. Its work is described in detail in the Child and Family (Wales) Measure 2010 and associated regulations. IFSS has been available across Wales since 2014.
- 4.37 A Local Authority may refer a family to an Integrated Family Support Team when there are concerns about the welfare of children, such as:
- substance misuse
 - domestic violence or abuse
 - history of violent or abusive behaviour
 - mental health issues.
- 4.38 Families who experience such difficulties might be at risk of having their children placed into care or having their names placed on the Child Protection Register. IFSS work with families to help them to make positive changes, so that any concerns are lessened and children can stay safely at home.
- 4.39 Connecting Families and IFSS are component parts of the range of Early Help services which includes individual and group work. Data collated from an overview of the impact some of the services in May 2016 is as follows:
- a) Between 01/04/14 and 31/03/16, 126 children out of the 144 of the children / young people prevented from becoming Looked After have remained out of the care system following the end of Connecting Families EOC involvement.
 - b) 18 children and young people have been rehabilitated home, 5 in 2014 / 2015 and 13 in 2015 / 2016.

- c) Between 01/04/15 and 31/03/16, Group Work - 79 individuals have benefited from participating in group work around Grobain (*13 participants*), Connecting Dad's (*15 attendees*), Non Violent Resistance (*NVR*) (*43 parents*) and the Chill Out Group (*COG*) (*8 teenagers*).
- d) Connecting Families received 80 referrals – between 01/04/15 and 31/03/16, which is more than in previous years. This included 13 more referrals for Edge of Care support and 10 more referrals for Rehabilitations Home. It is also important to note that the 3 streams of Connecting Families offer an intensive 12 week intervention to families so the support they receive is exactly the same regardless as to which part of the service they access.

4.40 The Early Help and Permanence Strategy Action plan for 2016/2017 (attached in **appendix A**) identifies a range of joint working activity between the Early Help and Safeguarding Service areas, and sets down actions/milestones. Some of these key actions/milestones which are particularly significant for managing the population of Looked After Children are as follows:

- a) Agree and promote a clear referral pathway for both Safeguarding and Early Help Services, in order for Children and Young People's needs to be identified and met in a more timely manner.
- b) Agree transfer points into Early Help Services from Safeguarding in order for Families to receive a consistent seamless service with clearly defined transfer points.
- c) Put mechanisms in place to alert Early Help services to any children\YP that become looked after in order to be proactive in increasing the number of children who cease to be Looked After.
- d) Review Early Help thresholds to determine the trigger for Team Around Family (TAF) work. This will ensure that help is provided to families early in the emergence of a problem, and is well coordinated and recorded through multi-agency arrangements.
- e) Review of Connecting Families service to assess it remains fit for purpose with regards to the focus on front door/preventative services i.e. to avoid step up to Safeguarding Team.
- f) Review the work of Bridgend IFSS (Integrated Family Support Service) to consider offering support to a broader range of families open to Safeguarding Teams.
- g) Utilise existing preventative resources to facilitate Early Help services at Primary School stage e.g. early indicators of neglect, poor school attendance, domestic violence, challenging behavior, aiming to ensure children's needs are met in a more timely manner.
- h) Identify services to work with mothers between pregnancies where their children have been removed from their care through SSD involvement. This will aim to address the issue of repeated pregnancies resulting in a cycle of children needing to be removed and placed into the care of the Local Authority.

- i) Recruit a practitioner to engage and develop programs of work with fathers. This practitioner has already been appointed and will work to enable fathers to become more involved in working with agencies to improve their parenting.
- j) The Personal Assistants within the Just Ask Plus Team are to lead and agree a work plan to engage young people who are/have been Looked After in educative work around child development and parenting. This would ensure that Looked After children and those leaving Care have the skills and support when they become parents themselves, again aiming to address the cycle of pregnancies leading to removal of children into the Care of the Local Authority.
- k) Continue to identify and assess potential carers for Special Guardianship Orders. This will ensure that Permanency is achieved for more children and young people and they will no longer be Looked After by the Local Authority.
- l) Continue to review Children and Young People accommodated subject to Section 76 SSWBA. This will ensure that children return home with the support they need and when it is safe for them. If this is not possible, they live in stable placements where they are helped to build positive relationships and maintain contact with their family and friends where this remains in their best interests.
- m) Continue to review Children and Young People subject to the Public Law Outline to prevent drift and ensure appropriate legal orders are considered.
- n) Continue to review Children and Young People subject to Placement Orders for over 2 years. This will ensure that an appropriate Care Plan is in place and a potential reduction in the “Looked After” children population.
- o) Staff in the early help hubs to have sufficient knowledge and understanding of disabled children and their families to enable preventative work to be undertaken with the families. This is critical to enable disabled children to remain living within their families with support if assessed as a need. It is acknowledged that family breakdown resulting in a disabled child needing to become Looked After, will likely require a placements which will be high cost and usually long term.
- p) Review of the Support Care service and whether it can be used to facilitate rehabilitation of children home as well as preventing children coming into care.

Exit routes from Local Authority Care/Accommodation

4.41 The table below provides a snapshot of the children who are projected to cease to be Looked After by the Local Authority between July and September, 2016.

Month	Rehab home	SGO	CAO	Cease LAC (18)	Other
July				5	
August	1	1		3	
September				2	
Total	1	1		10	
Overall Total					12

- 4.42 All children who are “Looked After” by the Local Authority must have a Care and Support Plan in line with the requirements of Part 6 of the SSWBA.
- 4.43 The review of a Part 6 Care and Support plan is a key component of the care planning process. The purpose of the review meeting is to consider the plan for the well-being of the child, monitor progress and consider recommendations to support the plan. In order to comply with the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (Wales) Regulations 2015, the Local Authority must appoint Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) who have the responsibility for chairing the reviews and a range of responsibilities to ensure decisions are made in the best interest of the child who the Local Authority is Looking After.
- 4.44 Possible exit routes out of Local Authority Care/Accommodation are as follows:
- a) The young person reaches the age of 18, at which point the Care Order expires.
 - b) The young person reaches the age of 16 and is not subject to a Care Order but is accommodated under S76 of the SSWBA. At this point the young person can sign themselves out of the “Looked After” system. This must be ratified via the LAC review meeting. Sometimes the decision for the young person to cease to being “Looked After” is in relation to a planned move on to another form of placement. Placement in other types of arrangements for Looked After Children who are over the age of 16 will be made because they are the best way to meet the assessed needs and intended outcomes set out in the young person’s Part 6 Care and Support Plan, and in the Pathway Plan (which subsumes the young person’s Care and Support Plan at the age of 16). Generally these will be outcomes connected to preparing the young person for leaving care and helping the young person make the transition to more independent adult living. The placement options are likely to include:
 - supported lodgings
 - supported living accommodation
 - independent accommodation with floating support from housing support workers.
 - c) A LAC Review of the Care and Support plan whereby the legal status is a Care Order and Placement with Parents Arrangements determines that sufficient progress has been made to enable the Local Authority to no longer need to share Parental Responsibility for the child with the parents, and a decision is then made to either go back to Court to seek a step down to a 12 month Supervision Order, or to discharge the Care Order. Plans for ongoing support are put in place to ensure the child and family remain sufficiently supported during this process. Following such a decision reviewed via a LAC Review, the case must be presented to the weekly Legal Gateway meeting whereby the responsible Group Manager in consultation with the Senior Lawyer, will if in agreement with the plan, endorse the decision. At the Legal Gateway meeting, timescales are agreed with the legal department for the completion of the necessary Court documentation, to enable an application to be made to the Court as soon as possible.
 - d) An Adoption Order is granted.

- e) A person who has Parental Responsibility for a child who has previously consented to voluntary accommodation under S76 of the SSWB Act withdraws that consent and requests the child to return home. The Local Authority will need to determine if there are ongoing risks/eligible needs which can be safely met through the provision of services and support without the child remaining "Looked After", and if not, immediate legal advice is sought with a view to issuing Care Proceedings.
- f) A child who is accommodated under S76 of the SSWB Act is successfully rehabilitated to parents.
- g) A child is made subject to a Special Guardianship Order or Child Arrangement Order.

Financial oversight of placements

4.45 The looked after budget is mainly made up of:

- In-house and out of county residential budgets
- In-house fostering budgets
- Independent fostering budgets
- Special Guardianship Orders
- Supported Lodgings

The total net budget in 2016/17 is £10.6m. The net budget in 2014/15 was 11.1m. The net budget has been reduced by £557k over these two years as part of the MTFS as below:

- CH22 – Residential reductions £200k 2016/17
- CH25 – LAC placement related reductions £357k 2016/17

4.46 There are further reductions of £260k planned in 2017/18 and £260k in 2018/19. This was based on a reduction of 35 placements at a cost of £15k per placement. However, a review of LAC costs has identified that it is impossible to put an average cost £15k against LAC placements as costs can vary greatly between different placements.

4.47 Based on early projections in 2016/17 it has been estimated that average placement costs are as follows:

- Out of County Residential Costs – £160k
- Independent Fostering Placement - £48k
- In-house fostering placement - £19k
- Foster placement with friend / family - £9k

4.48 Over the last 18 months the numbers of looked after children has fluctuated and although children have ceased to be looked after, new children have come into care and therefore the position at the end of September 2016 of 378 shows that the total LAC numbers have actually reduced over a 18 month period from 390 to 378. However, the annual equivalent cost has actually increased; this is mainly due to a small increase in numbers for high cost out of county placements.

- 4.49 The Head of Service and the Group Manager for Regulated Services are the only people permitted to authorise funding for independent fostering placements. No placements are confirmed with providers until funding authorisation has been obtained by the Placements or Safeguarding Team. In their absence no one below Group Manager level can authorise such placements.
- 4.50 The Head of Service and Director of Social Services are the only people permitted to authorise funding for independent residential placements. In their absence no-one below Head of Service level can authorise those placements.
- 4.51 Every external placement is provided with its own individual contract which clearly states the price of the contract and any discounts which are to be applied. Discounts include sibling and long term placements. Any additional service being commissioned within a placement must be additionally agreed and the cost made clear so permission for funding can be sought.
- 4.52 Each independent fostering agency or residential placement has an individual invoice which is printed and verified weekly by the Placements Team, this is then authorised by the GM for Regulated Services. Placement dates are checked against known placement move dates and anticipated dates are noted on the invoices for finance.
- 4.53 Monthly meetings are diarised between Finance, Commissioning and Placements Officers and the GM for Regulated Services to forecast placement moves, ensure placements have ended on correct dates and invoices match known move on dates.
- 4.54 The Early Help and Safeguarding Board will continue to have oversight of the application of the Early Help and Permanence Strategy along with its 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 Impact Assessment

- 6.1 There are no equality matters relevant to this report.

7. Financial Implications

- 7.1 There are no financial implications arising directly from this report. However, current looked after children costs continue to be a significant budget pressure for the local authority. All potential costs identified as a result of action taken to safeguard children and young people will be considered as part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

8. Recommendation.

- 8.1 The Committee is requested to note the developments in the safeguarding of children and young people across the County Borough of Bridgend and provide comments on the draft strategy and action plan.

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September 2016**

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10. Background documents:

None