

**BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**REPORT TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEE**

**2 SEPTEMBER 2014**

**REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE –  
LEGAL & REGULATORY SERVICES**

**PLACEMENTS AND PERMANENCY STRATEGY**

**1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 To present the Committee with the final version of the strategy to reduce the numbers of Looked After Children in Bridgend and to provide Members with an update of the work being carried out under this strategy, and the impact this will have on the budget for this service area.

**2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Objectives / Other Corporate Priorities.**

- 2.1 The key improvement objectives identified in the Corporate Plan 2013-2017 have been embodied in the Overview & Scrutiny Forward Work Programmes. The amended Corporate Improvement Objectives adopted by Council on 3 April 2013 formally set out the improvement objectives that the Council will seek to implement between 2013 and 2017. The Overview and Scrutiny Committees engage in review and development of plans, policy or strategies that support the Corporate Themes.

**3. Background.**

- 3.1 At its meeting in November 2013, the Committee received a report containing the draft strategy to reduce the number of Looked After Children in Bridgend.

- 3.2 The conclusions from this meeting are set out below:

- *The Committee welcomed the draft strategy and recognised that this represented a significant amount of work on the part of the Directorate. The Committee noted that it would be supportive of an increase in the number of Special Guardianship Orders and adoptions as a means of reducing the LAC population and improving outcomes for children.*
- *The Committee noted that the high number of teenage pregnancies, and therefore the number of babies of young mothers being taken into care, was a cause for concern. Whilst this was identified in the strategy, the Committee considered that the strategy needed to be more specific about what action the Directorate intended to take in order to address these issues.*

- *Similarly, the Committee considered that there was a need for the strategy to be more explicit regarding the role of other agencies in tackling issues identified in the strategy such as substance misuse, domestic abuse, mental health and teenage pregnancies. The Committee recommends that an action plan should be developed and agreed with partners, particularly the Community Safety Partnership.*
- *Further to this point, the Committee noted that the action plan as it stands lacks timescales and lacks the element of personal responsibility; i.e. no officers or agencies are identified as being responsible for specific actions. The strategy therefore would benefit from a more fully developed action plan.*
- *The Committee also queried what research was available regarding the number of people who have been in care who subsequently have their own children taken into care; the reasons behind this and possible methods of prevention. The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support agreed to investigate this further.*
- *The Committee agreed that it would look again at the strategy at the earliest opportunity. It was agreed that the Scrutiny Officer and the Chairperson would discuss this further with officers to establish a suitable timescale.*

3.3 Members may also recall receiving a report in September 2013 on Looked After Children – Impact of the Public Law Outline where the Committee were advised that under the new Public Law Outline care and adoption cases were now required to be completed in a much shorter period and any independent expert assessments would have to be completed before the case reached the court with the costs absorbed by the Local Authority. The Revised PLO has a new flowchart for case progression which is designed to speed up the process for bringing an application for a care order, such that each case must conclude within 26 weeks or less.

3.4 According to the Children’s Directorate, the impact upon local authorities in England and Wales is enormous and unprecedented and actions were being taken to try to mitigate these, particularly since there were financial implications associated with these changes including wasted costs orders from the courts if the deadline of 26 weeks was not adhered to. The Committee expressed concerns over this and agreed that the impact of the Public Law Outline needed to be strongly incorporated into the LAC Strategy.

#### **4. Current Situation / proposal.**

4.1 Attached at Appendix A is a report from the Directorate containing the final version of the strategy to reduce the numbers of LAC, now renamed the ‘Placement and Permanency Strategy’ and the associated Action Plan. This Strategy and its action plan were presented to Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee as well as Cabinet at their meetings on 7<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2014.

4.2 When examining the report, Members may wish to consider the following points when formulating their questions to the invitees:

- a) *Point 2 of the Committee's conclusions from its meeting in November states the need for the strategy to be more specific in what action is being taken to address the issue of high teenage pregnancies, and the number of babies of young mothers being taken into care. Where does this preventative work factor into the current action plan?*
- b) *What impact, including financial, has there been from changes arising out of the new Public Law Outline which now means that all care proceedings must be concluded within a 26 week timeframe with all assessments being completed by social workers before care proceedings are initiated?*
- c) *How has this impact been incorporated into the Strategy and Action Plan?*
- d) *How has the Authority ensured that other agencies are aware of strategy and essentially agree to buy into it? How is their work being monitored?*

**5. Effect upon Policy Framework and Procedure Rules.**

- 5.1 The work of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee relates to the review and development of plans, policy or strategy that form part of the Policy Framework and consideration of plans, policy or strategy relating to the power to promote or improve economic, social or environmental well being in the County Borough of Bridgend.

**6. Equality Impact Assessment**

- 6.1 The equality implications are outlined in the officer's report attached as Appendix A.

**7. Financial Implications**

- 7.1 The financial implications are outlined in the officer's report attached at Appendix A.

**8. Recommendation**

The Committee is asked to:

- i. Consider and discuss the information within the attached report;
- ii. Explore issues consistent with its challenge and support role;
- iii. Determine whether it wishes to make any comments or recommendations relating to these reports.

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2014**

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**Background Documents:**

None