

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

10 JUNE 2014

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

CORPORATE PARENTING CABINET- COMMITTEE CHAMPION UPDATE

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide the Members with an update from the Committee's Corporate Parenting Champion on the work being undertaken by the Corporate Parenting Cabinet-Committee.

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 19 February 2014 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 Corporate Parenting is the term used to describe the responsibility of a local authority towards looked after children and young people. This is a legal responsibility given to local authorities by the Children Act 1989 and the Children Act 2004. The role of the Corporate Parent is to seek for children in public care the outcomes every good parent would want for their own children. The Council as a whole is the 'corporate parent' therefore all Members have a level of responsibility for the children and young people looked after by Bridgend.¹
- 3.2 In order to further develop and enhance the Council's corporate parenting role with its partners, a Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee comprising all Members of Cabinet was established by Cabinet on 4 November 2008.

¹ Welsh Assembly Government and Welsh Local Government Association 'If this were my child... A councillor's guide to being a good corporate parent to children in care and care leavers', June 2009

- 3.3 The inaugural meeting of the Cabinet Committee was held on 27 November 2008. It has been agreed that the Cabinet Committee will meet bi-monthly. The terms of reference for the Cabinet Committee are:
- to ensure that looked after children are seen as a priority by the whole of the Authority and by the Children and Young People's Partnership;
 - to seek the views of children and young people in shaping and influencing the parenting they receive;
 - to ensure that appropriate policies, opportunities and procedures are in place;
 - to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the Authority in its role as corporate parent against Welsh Government guidance.
- 3.4 At its inaugural meeting, the Cabinet Committee requested that a Corporate Parenting "Champion" be nominated from each of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees to become permanent invitees to the Cabinet Committee.

4. Current Situation

- 4.1 The role of the Scrutiny Champion is to represent their relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee, partaking in discussions with Cabinet over items relating to children in care and care leavers.
- 4.2 In this role, it is also suggested that Champions provide regular updates to their Committees to ensure that Members are informed of the ongoing work of the Cabinet-Committee and particularly any decisions or changes which they should be aware of as Corporate Parents.
- 4.3 It is also proposed that Members consider how the services within the remit of their Committee affects children in care and care leavers, and in what way can the Committee can therefore assist in these areas.
- 4.4 Provided below from paragraph 4.5 to paragraph 4.34, is a brief update from Cllr David White who is the nominated Corporate Parenting Champion for the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Adoption Service

- 4.5 Although it is disappointing that Bridgend Local Authority has missed out in the appointment of the host authority within Western Bay in regards to adoption. It is this reports understanding that plans to create a new Western Bay Regional Adoption Service are well established and are on track to be in place by this autumn.
- 4.6 The regional arrangements will form part of a brand new National Adoption Service for Wales, which aims to improve services for both adopters and children who are seeking adoption. The adoption collaboration also is in line with the Welsh Government's aim to see more partnership working within local government
- 4.7 The three councils that form the Western Bay Regional Adoption Service all have relatively high numbers of looked after children and each face similar significant challenges in recruiting suitable adopters to meet demand.

- 4.8 Those challenges will continue in the new collaboration, but the three authorities are going into the new arrangement from a strong position as their current services are highly regarded. With Bridgend County Borough Council's adoption service recently achieving a positive inspection from the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW). It should be no surprise that Bridgend employee, Val Jones has been seconded to oversee the transition stage of the Western Bay Regional Adoption Service
- 4.9 The intention is to make the adoption process more consistent across Wales, build on best practice that Bridgend and other local authorities in Wales currently have in place, reduce bureaucracy, costs and more importantly address any weaknesses in practices that have may have been identified in the current provision.
- 4.10 It is the writer's view in this report, based on personal experiences and on Swansea's latest inspection in 2014. There should be no concern with Swansea being the host and as with Bridgend Local Authority, the adoption team in Swansea have strong leadership from the senior management in place and members of staff are enthusiastic, motivated, experienced in their role and are committed to achieving good outcomes for children and potential adopters.
- 4.11 This said, there should be firm mechanism in place that ensures that Bridgend Members and other Co Opted Members of the CYP Committee can continue to hold the decision-makers to account, to examine services provided and to ask questions on how decisions have been made. This will then enable the members of committee to consider whether service improvements can be put in place and then to make recommendations to Officers, Cabinet or Council to consider.

Statutory Independent Professional Advocacy And Independent Visiting Services.

- 4.12 In April 2011 the Children's Commissioner for Wales announced his intention to review independent and professional advocacy services for looked after children and young people, care leavers and children in need. The review aimed to ascertain whether, and to what extent, arrangements for independent professional advocacy services made by Welsh Ministers and all local authorities in Wales, are safeguarding and promoting the rights and welfare of these children and young people.
- 4.13 In accordance with various statutory requirements included in the Children Act 1989 (Sec 26A); Children Leaving Care Act 2002 and the Adoption and Children Act 2002. It places a statutory duty for Local Authorities to commission and make available independent professional advocacy for children in our care, Children In Need and Care Leavers.
- 4.14 As a result of The Children's Commissioner's published review, in 22 March 2012 (Missing Voices) The report set out 29 key recommendations of which 11 were directed to the Welsh Government. The remaining 18 were directed to local authorities, which was heavily critical of Local Authorities in Wales and

Welsh Government in concluding that authorities were failing in their duties in relation to independent professional advocacy for the vulnerable groups.

- 4.15 Following an audit by Bridgend Local Authority it identified a number of gaps in current service at the time of the audit, demonstrated that the Council was not meeting all of its statutory duties to children and young people in relation to independent professional advocacy.
- 4.16 In light of the above a procurement exercise for a new contract commenced in December 2013, where one tender was received and evaluated on price and quality by a panel of three officers from the Council.
- 4.17 Following a successful evaluation of the tender, the contract has been awarded to Tros Gynnai Plant. The independent Professional Advocacy and independent Visiting contract will be in place for two years with an option to extend for up to 12 months following successful evaluation during year 2. With the contract service commencement, date was the 1st April 2014.
- 4.18 The new service has been widened to include all children and young people aged 0-25, who is engaged with children's social services in Bridgend. This includes all Looked After Children (including those placed for adoption), Care Leavers and Children in Need as per the Children Act 1989 definition.
- 4.19 These are the children who require the support from local authority children's social care teams, including those on, or being considered for entry onto the child protection register and disabled children and young people
- 4.20 The Bridgend Borough Council is arranging for processes to be put in place to ensure that children and young people in our care are aware of their rights to access advocacy, should they ever need it. This includes developing and implementing protocols that ensure that an automatic offer of advocacy is made to all children and young people at the point at which they become involved with Children's Social Services teams and that this offer is repeated at regular intervals.
- 4.21 Good advocacy can have a profound effect on the lives of children and young people and the CYP Committee should continue to do all we can to ensure that the provision. I have no cause for concern that Tros Gynnal Plant will not meet the Bridgend Local Authorities statutory obligations and the expectations of the Children's Commissioners of Wales in relation to independent professional advocacy and visiting service.
- 4.22 Tros Gynnal Plant was founded in 2002 and has vast experiences in advocacy and children's rights. Tros Gynnal is Wales leading based Children's Rights Charity, which supports and represents vulnerable children and young people through a range of projects, training and campaigning. Already they are commissioned by a number of other local authorities in Wales to carry out advocacy service.

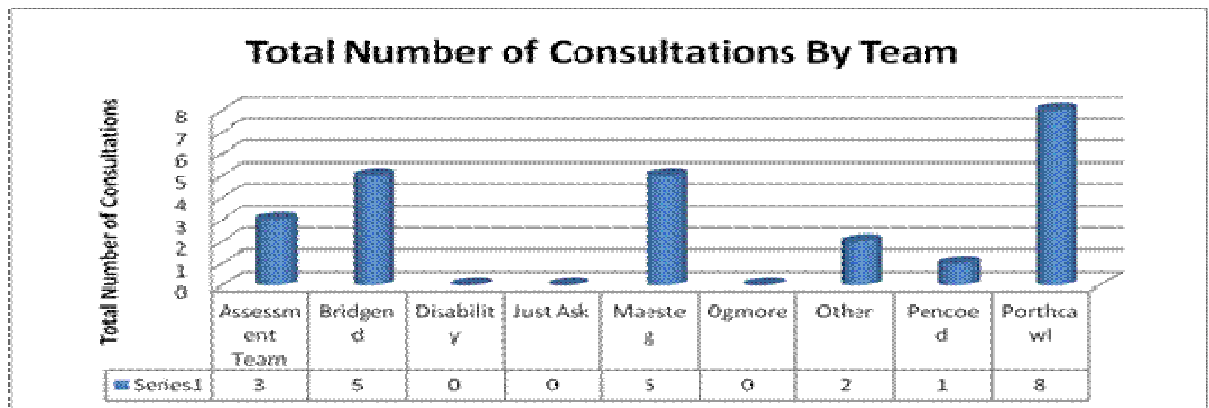
- 4.23 With appropriate values in place they believe that every child and young person has the right to have their views and wishes considered when decisions are being made that affect their lives.

Awards and Celebrations

- 4.24 In my role in the Corporate Parenting representative, I have recently attended The LAC Awards and One Year Celebration of IFSS.
- 4.25 It was a pleasure to be invited to the LAC awards which recognises the skills, talent and hard work of looked after children and young people. The awards afforded an opportunity for the young people to have their successes and achievements recognised. Various awards included Academic Improvement awards was given to youngsters for committing to school attendance, improving in certain subjects and for making progress in other areas.
- 4.26 It would be wrong if the LAC awards failed to recognise the work of our foster carers commitment to providing a solid and stable environment for a child or young person to grow and feel valued. With the child's well-being and best interest is always their top priority
- 4.27 Furthermore, acknowledgement was also offered to members of staff and without their enthusiasm commitment, hard work and skills which enable them to make a difference in the lives of young people and their carers. The achievements noted at the awards, could not have been achieved without these skills and dedication, demonstrated by the members of staff and foster carers.
- 4.28 In regards to the IFSS One Year Celebration, we read and hear many reports by the officers of the success achieved by the local authority and the members of staff who are involved with families.
- 4.29 The one year celebration offered the opportunity to meet with the families involved with IFSS and to hear first-hand about their experiences. The positive difference made when support is offered from a highly skilled team of multi-agency professionals who work intensively with children and families.
- 4.30 This process helps family members to understand and recognise the impact of their behaviour and to identify how it could be improved. Furthermore to take the practical steps needed to make and sustain those changes when overcoming the difficulties of parental substance and alcohol misuse.
- 4.31 It can be easily be observed from speaking to and hearing from the families, IFSS are making a positive difference to some of the most vulnerable families in our communities, who were drifting and making no improvement after extensive support from the local authority. This resulted in the children of these families having lengthy periods on the Child Protection Register or being looked after by the local authority, at a significant cost to the budget.
- 4.32 In 2013 the IFSS predicted to work with 100 families per year across the region which would equate to approximately 30 families within BCBC. To date

Western Bay IFSS have completed a total of 130 Consultations during the period 01.04.13 to 30.04.14 with Bridgend accounting for 24 of the consultations.

- 4.33 Below is a graph detailing the teams and areas within the Borough that have participated in Consultations with IFSS.



- 4.34 Rather than me make further comment it has been agreed that I can show a short DVD made by IFSS and the families who have been referred to the service. Who will be able to inform what the service as meant to them and how this service has reduced the lac population and children on the child protection register. Therefore saving costs to the budget and more importantly making positive changes to the families who are in extreme crisis as a result of or a factor involving parental substance misuse..
- 4.35 It is the role of the Committee to ask the Champion any questions or raise any queries with Cllr White to be fed back to the Cabinet-Committee.

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 attached report has been provided as an update and therefore does not relate to a specific decision or Equality Impact Assessment.

7. Financial Implications

- 7.1 There are no financial implications.

8. Recommendations

- 8.1 The Committee is asked to consider and note the Corporate Parenting Champion's update and to decide whether or not to raise any queries with Cllr David White in his capacity as Corporate Parenting Champion for the Children and Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee, in order they be communicated to the Corporate Parenting Cabinet-Committee.

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Background Documents

None