

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

13 OCTOBER 2014

REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE – LEGAL & REGULATORY SERVICES

EARLY INTERVENTION AND PREVENTION STRATEGY

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide the Committee with the new overarching strategy for all early intervention and prevention work within the Directorate, as well as details of the impact this work is having on reducing the number of children becoming looked after.

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 the Committee's meetings in April and May 2013, Members received reports from the Children's Directorate on Preventative Services and Strategies. The purpose of these reports was to receive information in relation to the various preventative services and strategies that were being provided by the Children's Directorate and also determine the extent to which this preventative work was having a positive impact on children and young people. Obviously, Members were also keen to determine how these services and strategies were having an impact on reducing the numbers of LAC.
- 3.2 Some of the conclusions from these meetings have been highlighted below:

Whilst understanding that some of the services identified within the report have only recently been implemented, the Committee was concerned that there was still no indication of expected outcomes. Other Services had been in place for over 12-18 months and therefore Members proposed that some form of analysis and evaluation of outcomes should be available and therefore form part of the report to the Committee.

Members expressed concern over the slow progress of Integrated Working in relation to the establishment of the multi-agency hubs and some of the delays associated with the Health Boards IT arrangements. The Committee expressed the importance of the hubs in dealing with children, young people and families in Tier 1 and 2 to prevent them from moving into Tiers 3 and 4. Members asked that some indication be provided as to when Officers will be able to report to Scrutiny that all the hubs have been completed.

The Committee expressed concern over the grant funding that is due to cease for many of the preventative services and that nothing has yet been identified to replace them in the medium term financial plan. Members requested that this be raised with the Standing Budget Research and Evaluation for consideration.

The Committee expressed concerns over the sustainability of the Connecting Families Project given the uncertainty over its funding for the future. Welsh Government has focused funding towards the Integrated Family Support Service, which is a statutory requirement, whilst the Connecting Families Project is not. Given the fact that the IFSS has already had its budget reduced before it has even had a chance to produce any outcomes, the future of both services seemed very uncertain. The Committee agreed that the sustainability of the Connecting Families Project was particularly important as it is a much broader and flexible project covering a much wider range of services. The evidence provided in the report indicates that the project has also led to numerous positive outcomes for families, as well as a significant amount of cost avoidance for public sector agencies since its introduction. Such preventative services are essential for the future to ensure both financial savings and sustainability and better support for families. The Committee therefore recommend that this be considered and incorporated into the medium term financial plan.

The Committee expressed positive comments over the engagement with the voluntary sector over the new TAF and JAFF frameworks, however, did express some concern over too much reliance on the voluntary sector to take forward actions under these preventative services due to the uncertainty over future funding for the voluntary sector.

3.3 In addition to this Members also expressed concerns over the sustainability of the Connecting Families Project given the uncertainty over its funding for the future. The evidence provided in the report indicated that the project had led to numerous positive outcomes for families, as well as a significant amount of cost avoidance for public sector agencies since its introduction. Such preventative services were felt essential for the future to ensure both financial savings and sustainability and better support for families.

3.4 This led to the Committee's request for the independent researcher's formal evaluation report on the Connecting Families Project, which they received in November 2013. Their conclusions from this meeting are set out below:

The Committee expressed concerns regarding future funding of the Connecting Families project and welcomed the Corporate Director's assurances that funding would continue, either from an invest to save proposal or from the reallocation of core budget. The Committee noted that it looked forward to seeing evidence of reducing numbers of Looked After Children.

The Committee expressed disappointment that the full report had not yet been completed, and noted the importance of robust statistical evaluation and evidence in ensuring that projects such as these continued to have the support of the Local Authority and partner organisations.

- 3.5 Since November last year, the Committee has been advised of the development of a strategy to link all the various preventative strategies and services.
- 3.6 The Committee then received the finalised Placements and Permanency Strategy at its last meeting in August 2014, under which they were informed that the Permanency Strategy and the Early Intervention Strategy would work in parallel to 'form a multi-agency response to driving improved outcomes.' The Permanency and Placement Strategy stated that:

Children's Services are driving a 'whole system' approach to supporting Looked After Children and keeping families together.

The aim will be to drive improvements to family support, its design and delivery, and in doing so, reduce the numbers of families developing more complex needs and thus requiring more intensive and costly interventions, including the need for children to become looked after.

The Local Authority and partner agencies must prioritise the delivery of targeted prevention and early intervention services to stop needs escalating. The early intervention strategy will aim to ensure that prevention and early intervention forms part of a coherent continuum of support and interventions for families. It will be important that our prevention and early intervention services have systems in place to measure their impact, specifically on outcomes for children.

4. Current Situation / proposal.

- 4.1 Attached at Appendix A is a report from the Children's Directorate detailing the progress made to develop a Strategy to define the activity around early intervention and prevention services in Bridgend, now known as the 'Early help in Bridgend'.
- 4.2 When examining the report, Members may wish to consider the following points when formulating their questions to the invitees:
- a) *What impact have the preventative services that have been in place over 12 months had on reducing the number of LAC?*
 - b) *The report makes reference to achieving financial savings in relation to streamlining management, but does not make reference to any savings realised directly as a result of preventative work with families. What savings does the Directorate anticipate it will make as a result of increased and better coordinated early intervention and prevention activities?*
 - c) *What timescales are associated with the outcomes identified within the strategy?*

d) *What reassurance can be given as to the success of the Strategy and sustainability of the services within it, in light of the current climate, future budget cuts and the reliance on grant funding?*

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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Background Documents:
None