

# BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

## CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING

11<sup>th</sup> JULY 2018

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

#### REVIEW OF DECISION MAKING ON THE LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN (LAC) PATHWAY

#### 1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To present to the committee the Institute of Public Care (IPC) review report and associated action plan.

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

- 2.1 This report assists in the achievement of the following corporate priority/priorities:-

1. **Helping people to be more self-reliant** – taking early steps to reduce or prevent people from becoming vulnerable or dependent on the Council and its services.
2. **Smarter use of resources** – ensuring that all its resources (financial, physical, human and technological) are used as effectively and efficiently as possible and support the development of resources throughout the community that can help deliver the Council's priorities.

#### 3. Background

- 3.1 The number of looked after children across Wales is rising year on year. For 2016-17 overall numbers across Wales had increased by 5.5%; however, Bridgend were below this average with an increase of only 2.2%.
- 3.2 Effective oversight and management of the looked after children population is a key priority for the Council and there is a commitment to further improve both early intervention and statutory services for children, young people and their families. It is recognised that this is significantly dependent upon the ability of all directorates to work together and specifically the Social Services and Wellbeing and Education and Family Support Directorates.
- 3.3 A joint Early Help and Permanence Strategy is in place which 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 that are provided and commissioned for looked after children to improve their outcomes by affording them the opportunities available to all children.

- 3.4 Both directorates within the local authority 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, young people and their families.
- 3.5 In November 2017, IPC undertook a review of the pathways experienced by children and young people who had become looked after in the last year, to review decision-making and analyse practice across their care pathway and explore with teams how interventions and decision-making might have been more effective. They looked at 35 children who became looked after during the period October 2016 to September 2017. The cases were randomly selected by Bridgend County Borough Council from all the children who became looked after in that period. The cases were in the following categories:
- Unborn – where the family were referred during the pregnancy of the child who became looked after.
  - Early intervention for children aged 0 to 11 years. Where the child referred was aged 0 to 11 years and there may have been opportunities for early intervention prior to the start of the child becoming looked after.
  - Early intervention for children who were teenagers. Where the child referred was aged 13 to 17 years and there may have been opportunities for early intervention prior to the start of the child becoming looked after.

3.6 The project involved four stages:



- 3.7 IPC was asked to look specifically at:
- The quality of decision making, timeliness, and threshold management at the front door including any relevant Information Advice and Assistance (IAA) arrangements;
  - How risk was identified, assessed, mitigated and managed;
  - Whether there is a coherent model of early intervention and preventative services, and the relationship between children’s social care and these services;
  - Whether there is evidence of strength based, outcome focussed assessments and care plans;
  - Whether there is evidence of strong partnership working underpinned by a common value base and clear roles and responsibilities;
  - Whether there are dynamic quality assurance and quality improvement systems driving continuous improvement within and between teams;
  - Whether there is evidence of the involvement of children, young people and families at a service level and in practice.

## 4 Current Situation/Proposal

- 4.1 The Summary report is attached at **Appendix 1**. The complete report has not been attached in order to maintain confidentiality as it is possible to identify specific individual children.
- 4.2 The general conclusions reported that at the point where the children became looked after this was the correct decision and the best way to safeguard their welfare and well-being in all the cases reviewed. However, the quality of interventions and casework was mixed. There were missed opportunities in some cases and areas for improvement in respect of practice and management oversight.
- 4.3 The recommendations of the review were:
- Strengthen progression of work in pre-birth cases so that where it is clear, following initial assessment, that a substantial intervention will be required, (as it was in all these cases), work starts on parenting assessments and other assessments of the adults as early as possible and should be completed well before the birth due date.
  - Review what services could be available for parents who have had children removed at or shortly after birth so that the likelihood of the removal of future children is reduced. The development of the Reflect service helps meet this recommendation.
  - Ensure that parenting assessments and psychological assessments are considered as part of the Child Protection Register (CPR) or Public Law Outline (PLO) stage of the case or earlier to enable better judgments to be made about the plan for the child and for the local authority to be more fully prepared at the point care proceedings are initiated.
  - Make better use of Family Group Conferences in public law proceedings and at the PLO stage so that what the wider family and support system can or cannot provide is understood earlier in the child's journey.
  - Chronologies should be present on all cases and developed further when cases enter PLO which will enable social workers to complete a better analysis of the parents and the child including future risks and the capacity for change.
  - Review the impact of early interventions to understand whether and where they are making a positive difference, especially with the children and families with the highest needs, and where there are gaps in services or where existing services are not having an impact.
  - Work with social workers on improving the consistency of assessments so that they are all 'good'.
  - Identify at an early intervention stage and with partners, children not living with birth parents or who are adopted and where there are early signs of difficulty in relationships, and ensure that these children at higher risk of becoming looked after are given priority for services.
  - Review how management oversight is undertaken so that there is a clear record of oversight on the cases and that the reflective as well as the directional elements of supervision are recorded.
- 4.4 An action plan, attached at **Appendix 2**, has been developed to progress the recommendations and is monitored by the Early Help and Safeguarding Board which is chaired jointly by the Corporate Directors for Social Services and Wellbeing and Education and Family Support

## **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 implications in this report.

## **7. Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 Implications**

7.1 The implementation of the duties and responsibilities under the Social Services and Wellbeing Act (Wales) (SSWBA) 2014, in turn, supports the promotion of two of the seven goals of the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 within the County Borough of Bridgend. By promoting an environment that maximises people's physical and mental well-being and by supporting children, young people, adults and their carers and families to fulfil their potential no matter what their circumstances, the wellbeing goals of a Healthier and more equal Bridgend and Wales are supported.

7.2 The Wellbeing 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 – Social Services is demand led and the SSWBA focusses on sustainable prevention and wellbeing outcomes for the future. There is a requirement to meet the needs of people in the longer term and, because of rising demographics and increasing complexity, the remodeling and transformation of services continues to be a priority.
- Prevention – the report reflects the new approaches adopted by the Directorate in line with the SSWBA, for example, the provision of information, advice and assistance to enable people to remain independent for as long as possible. This will ensure that need is anticipated and resources can be more effectively directed to better manage demand.
- Integration – the implementation of the SSWBA requires local authorities to work with partners, particularly the NHS and the Police, to ensure care and support for people and support for carers is provided. The report evidences work with partners to enable people to remain living within their communities, and where necessary, responding to safeguarding concerns in a timely, efficient manner.
- Collaboration – The collaborative approaches described in the report, are managed and monitored through various remodeling and collaborative boards, for example, the Early Help and Safeguarding Board where there is cross Directorate and sector stakeholder representation.
- Involvement – the key stakeholders are the people who use social care. There is considerable engagement including surveys, stakeholder meetings, feedback forms and the complaints process. The provision of accessible information and advice helps to ensure that the voice of adults, children and young people is heard.

## **8.0 Financial Implications**

- 8.1 The Social Services and Wellbeing Directorate financial plan incorporates the work underway to reduce both the overall number of looked after children and high cost out of authority placements. Spend in this area is decreasing and the strategy (paragraph 3.3) and action plan (paragraph 4.4) should strengthen the ability to reduce expenditure further in these areas.

## **9.0 Recommendation**

- 9.1 It is recommended that the Committee notes the IPC report and comments on the associated Action Plan.

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11. **Background Documents**  
None.