

**BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**  
**REPORT TO CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE**

**17 OCTOBER 2018**

**REPORT OF THE CORPORATE  
DIRECTOR EDUCATION AND FAMILY SUPPORT**

**REVIEW OF THE MODEL FOR EARLY INTERVENTION SERVICES**

**1. Purpose of report**

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Corporate Parenting Committee with an update on the work completed to date in response to one of the recommendations made by the Institute of Public Care (IPC) specifically around the impact of early help services.

**2. Connection to corporate improvement objectives/other corporate priorities**

2.1 This area of work supports the achievement of the following corporate priority/priorities:

- **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.
- **Supporting a successful economy** – supporting young people into education, employment and training.
- **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 IPC was commissioned by Bridgend's Children's Social Care Management Team to undertake a learning review of selected cases where children have become looked after. The purpose of the review was to consider whether there were areas for improvements in practice, guidance and protocols that could be achieved. IPC reviewed 35 cases across the following age ranges

- pre-birth;
- 0 to 11 years-old; and
- 13 to 17 year-old.

3.2 The recommendations which came from that review were:

- Strengthen earlier assessments of pre-birth families.
- Review services that are available to parents following the removal of their children with a view of preventing future removals.
- Parenting and psychological assessments completed at Child Protection or Public Law Outline stage.

- Utilise Family Group Conferences.
- Ensure completion of chronologies.
- Improve consistency in social work assessment.
- Work with partner agencies to improve information sharing.
- Ensure good quality supervision of cases is administered.
- Review the impact early intervention services have to ensure that they are making a difference for children and families.

#### **4. Current situation/proposal**

- 4.1 In response to the final recommendation (ie to review the impact early intervention services have to ensure that they are making a difference for children and families), the Family Support Services Manager reviewed existing services available within the Central Hub that support children and young people open to Children's Social Care. These services include:

##### **Connecting Families**

- 4.2 This is a multi-agency team offering a 12-week intensive intervention to families whose children are at risk of becoming looked after or are already looked after but require additional intervention to return home to family. The support consists of intensive support (2 to 3 visits a week). The service has been operational since 2011.
- 4.3 During 2017-2018, the service worked with 204 children who were deemed to be at risk of coming into the care system. Following support, 91% (186/204) were prevented from becoming looked after and remain out of care.

##### **Western Bay Integrated Family Support Services (IFSS)**

- 4.4 The statutory Integrated Family Support Service (IFSS) works with parents with substance misuse issues to prevent children becoming looked after or who are in care, with a plan to return home. The service is a Western Bay collaboration which is led by Bridgend and delivers intensive (3 to 4 visits a week) evidenced-based interventions to whole families for 4 to 6 weeks.
- 4.5 The service is relatively small and worked with 33 children during 2017-2018. Positive outcomes include 6 children being deemed no further action and closed to Children's Social Care following intensive support.

##### **Rapid Response**

- 4.6 A rapid response service was introduced in August 2017. This service was introduced in recognition that there are occasions when children and families require support in an immediate fashion in order to prevent issues escalating. The workers offer intensive support (3 to 4 visits a week) for a 4 to 6-week period including early mornings, evenings and weekends.
- 4.7 The service worked with 121 children who were deemed to be at risk of entering the care system from August 2017 to March 2018. Following support, 92.6% (112 / 121) remain out of care.

## **New Services**

- 4.8 It is important to note that the Central Hub has developed new services to assist in the prevention of children becoming looked after. These include the Baby in Mind and Reflect services.

### ***Baby in Mind Service***

- 4.9 The Baby in Mind service provides intensive multi-agency support at a crucial time for parents of pre-birth and post birth babies. It ensures that risks can be managed, and would prevent the baby from becoming either separated from its parent(s) or being placed in a mother/parent and baby placement. In 2016-2017, the local authority utilised 23 parent and baby placements. These are high cost and raise questions as to whether these families could have been supported in the community. There was a clear need for a local service to assist pregnant mothers and their partners to develop the necessary skills to keep their children safe. This new service assists social workers in assessing and care planning for these children and families where there is a risk of care proceedings and the care system possibly being required. This had been highlighted as an issue within the IPC review. The service was fully recruited to in July 2018 and at this stage it is too early to demonstrate the anticipated positive impact of the service.

### ***Reflect Service***

- 4.10 The Reflect Service is a Welsh Government initiative developed to work with mothers who have had children removed from their care following care proceedings. There is a wealth of evidence that highlights the vulnerabilities for these individuals in respect of repeat pregnancies. Across Bridgend (as at 1 October 2018) there were 74 children in care whose mothers had previously had children removed suggesting that there were some missed opportunities in preventing repeat pregnancy leading to children social care involvement. The Reflect project has been developed in response to this. This project is being delivered as part of a regional arrangement with Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council and Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council. The service became operational in May 2018 and the service has engaged with 11 parents from Bridgend to date.

## **Summary of local authority visits and workshop**

- 4.11 Following the IPC recommendations, the Family Support Services Manager in Early Help and Principal Officer within Children Social Care undertook joint visits to three other local authorities, who were deemed to have good early help services. These were Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council, Newport City Council and Carmarthenshire County Borough Council. In addition, a workshop with managers across early help and children social care was held in May 2018. The purpose of which was to review existing services, share good practice from the three local authorities visited, and identify any perceived gaps in service provision.
- 4.12 The rationale for visiting these three local authorities can be seen at Appendix 1. Each of these local authorities has been able to demonstrate a consistent reduction in looked after children (LAC) (per 10,000 population) over the past four years (2014-2017) and exploration as to how this has been achieved was required.

- 4.13 Following the visits and the workshop, it is apparent that there is no significant difference in the way in which Bridgend delivers its edge of care services compared to the local authorities visited. There was no substantial evidence from other local authorities or via the workshop that there needs to be significant changes or re-direction of services at this time. It is important to note that there are a number of new services that have come into effect around the prevention of LAC in 2018 and it will be important to evaluate the impact of these services in due course. If it is evident that these services are not supporting the reduction of LAC following evaluation, then a re-direction of resources will be considered.
- 4.14 What was, however, apparent during this work was the significant similarities between the delivery models within family support services across comparator local authorities. In particular, the focus on intensive support for children and families along with evidenced based interventions.
- 4.15 What was also evident in relation to support services were the concerns that all local authorities visited had in respect of the impact of IFSS on children and families. All commented that they were considering alternative ways in delivering the IFSS work to ensure value for money. This is an area that is already being explored in Bridgend with a restructure of the service currently being implemented.
- 4.16 It is important to note, that all the three local authorities have developed social work models of practice that have been embedded for a number of years. All these models appear to focus on outcomes for children and families alongside managing risk. The three local authorities were clear in their delivery of such models and its benefit for staff for example improved retention of social work staff with a focus on service users and an ability to manage increased risk.
- 4.17 All local authorities commented on the positive joint-working relationship between Early Help and Children's Social Care in Bridgend. It was evident that Bridgend is more advanced in relation to step up/step down work between Children's Social Care and Early Help and seamless transitions for children and families. All local authorities appeared to be facing similar challenges. There are clearly pressures for Early Help in relation to increased service demand and Safeguarding thresholds. It must be noted that each local authority visited as part of this review expressed that they were under pressure to reduce its spending which has led to increased focus on their LAC population. Careful consideration needs to be given as to how Early Help and Children's Social Care can continue to provide positive support to children and families given the risks associated with predominately annual grant monies to fund Early help services and associated service demand.
- 4.18 The workshop that was held between staff within Early Help and Children's Social Care reflected a significant amount of what was identified through visits to the other local authorities, in that no significant changes were felt to be necessary. The group acknowledged the benefit of having a social work model of intervention and how this would assist in recruitment and retention of social workers but also provide some consistency in the approach to engaging with children and families. It was noted that edge of care services offer good quality interventions and assist social workers in undertaking assessments of families around whether children are at risk of coming into care. This assertion is supported by performance data. However, it was also noted that at times services could be more responsive. Alongside this, the

need for specialist support for children with disabilities where behaviors are leading to the child being at risk at coming into care was raised within the workshop.

- 4.19 Bridgend's financial policy in respect of Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) was also discussed during visits to the three local authorities and within the workshop. This policy has been recognised as being equitable and robust by other local authorities. However, it may be that an improved financial offer to potential Special Guardians who are existing foster carers could lead to an increased number of applications being made. The cost implications of any new financial policy would need to be closely examined. However, it is likely that an improved financial policy would support the local authority to decrease its LAC population.

## **5. Effect upon policy framework and procedure rules**

- 5.1 There is no effect upon the policy framework and procedure rules

## **6. Equalities Impact Assessment**

- 6.1 There are no equality issues arising from this report.

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

- 7.1 No assessment has been undertaken to date. However, the emphasis of this report is around intervening at the earliest stage with children and families with the aim of preventing issues from escalating. The work between both services can achieve this aim in terms of improving the well-being of future generations and improving outcomes for children and families.

## **8. Financial implications**

- 8.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report at present. However, for any of the considerations below to be developed further they will first need to be assessed individually for any financial implications. These will continue to be part of the monitoring process going forward and will be reported as part of the forward work programme.

## **9. Considerations**

- 9.1 The following matters for consideration and discussion were presented to the local authority's Corporate Management Board (CMB) on 27 September 2018:
- 9.2 There is a need to reconfigure IFSS to work across a Cwm Taf footprint in future as well as expanding the criteria to include work with families affected by mental health and domestic abuse in line with guidance from Welsh Government. Further to this, the service will also begin to work with more cases than the previous guidance has issued with the hope of demonstrating an improved impact in relation to prevention of LAC. This work has commenced.
- 9.3 Re-brand the Central Hub to ensure clarity on edge of care services.
- 9.4 Additional capacity to meet the increased demand at the front door of Early

Help services. (This has recently been actioned).

- 9.5 A model of social work intervention for the local authority should be agreed and implemented by March 2019 in order to align social work practice with other local authorities who have demonstrated a decrease in LAC numbers.
- 9.6 Review the re-unification work undertaken within Children's Social Care and Central Hub to determine ways to increase the number of children returned home to family following a period in care by December 2018. This review will need to include recommendations relating to the Care Crisis review and specifically the use of the NSPCC toolkit.
- 9.7 Evaluate the new service provisions of Baby in Mind, Rapid Response Team and Reflect service in April 2019.
- 9.8 Secure a resource to introduce three practice support worker roles within the family placement teams to assist with direct work, crisis intervention, placement support for LAC including weekend and evening working.
- 9.9 Review Bridgend County Borough Council's SGO policy to consider alternative packages of financial support which may contribute to a reduction in LAC by April 2019.
- 9.10 To explore options linked to the Facing the Challenge service within Western Bay to support children with a disability who are at risk of coming into care. Further exploration into the need, cost and demand for the service will need to be undertaken to ensure any decision to commission support is evidenced based.

## **10. Recommendations**

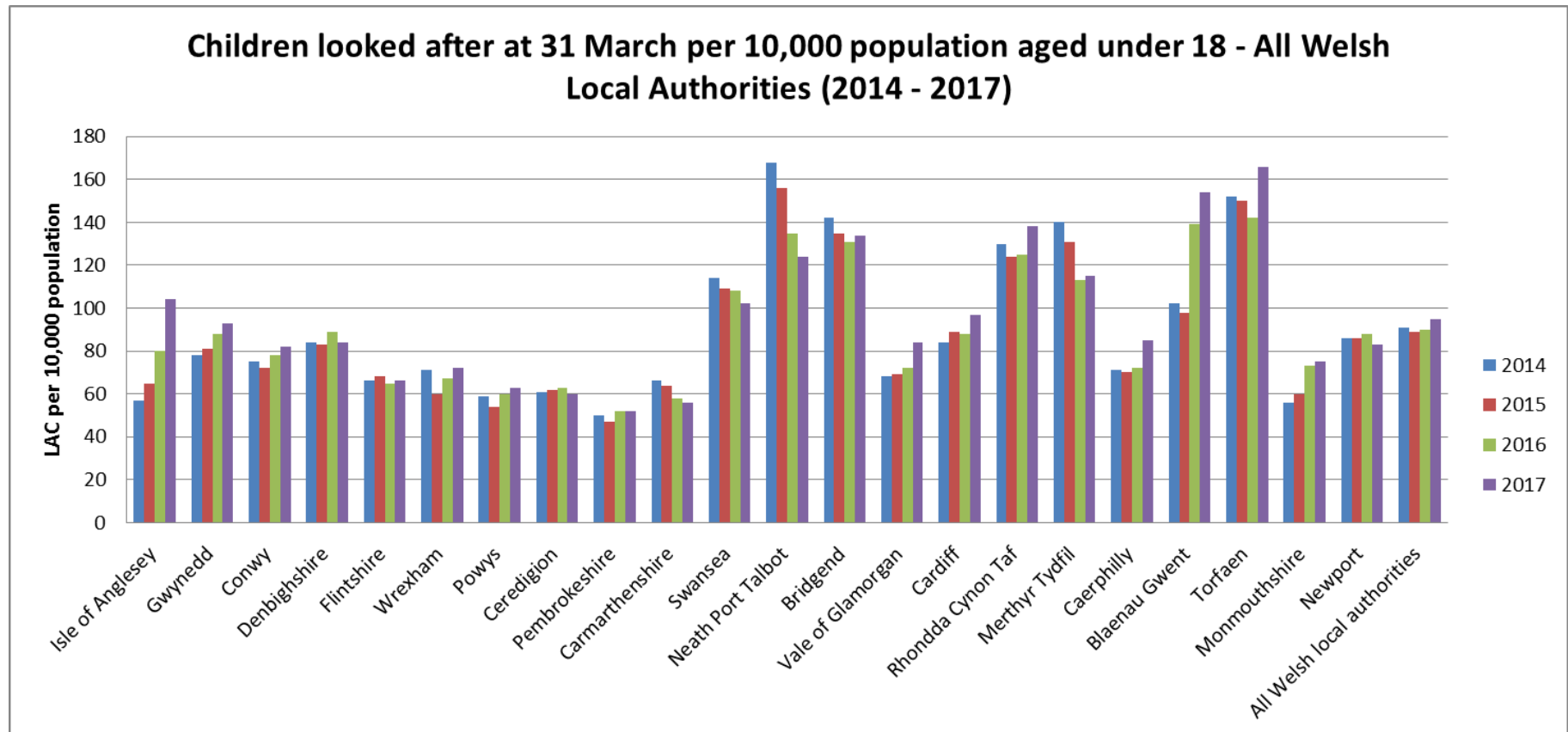
- 10.1 It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Committee notes the considerations above and monitors progress towards the implementation of these as part of its forward work programme.

**Contact Officer:** Mark Lewis  
Group Manager Integrated Working and Family Support  
**Telephone:** (01656) 642679  
**E-mail:** [Mark.lewis@bridgend.gov.uk](mailto:Mark.lewis@bridgend.gov.uk)  
**Postal Address** Level 2, Civic Offices, Angel Street, Bridgend, CF31 4AR

## **Background documents**

None

## Appendix 1 Looked After Children Data



- The number of Looked After children in Bridgend per 10,000 of population aged under 18 decreased from 142 in 2014, to 131 in 2016.
- This figure increased slightly in 2017 to 134 per 10,000, however this is in line with the average across all Welsh local authorities, with 68% of local authorities reporting an increase in the LAC figures from 2016 to 2017.
- The reduction in the LAC figures could in part be attributed to the restructure of Early Help services in April 2015