

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING

29th MAY 2019

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR, SOCIAL SERVICES AND WELLBEING

LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN – NATIONAL TECHNICAL GROUP

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To inform the Cabinet Committee of the work being undertaken by Welsh Government to develop reduction expectation plans with each local authority across Wales.
- 1.2 To describe the process in place to take this forward and the local activity underway to progress this.
- 1.3 A presentation on the local headline data/key findings contained in the preparatory framework documents.

2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Plan/Other Corporate Priority

- 2.1 This report assists in the achievement of the following corporate 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.
 - **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 First Minister's manifesto includes a firm commitment to support looked after children. This is focussed upon reducing the need for children to enter care and improving outcomes for children in care.
- 3.2 As at March 2018, there were 6,407 looked after children in Wales. This was an 8% increase on the previous year. Over the past 15 years, the number of looked after children has increased by 34%; this increase cannot be attributed to austerity alone.

In 2018, the number of children starting to become looked after decreased by 2%, however the number of children leaving the care system also decreased by 10%.

- 3.3 National data also highlights some other noteworthy patterns. For example, 24.6% of looked after children are placed out of county (1,575) and 5% are placed outside Wales (320). There will be good reasons why some of these children are placed out of area (e.g. placement with family or friends or the development of regional approaches to specialist provision), but it is recognised that others are placed further afield because there is no suitable provision locally. Some of the underlying

issues have begun to be addressed through the National Fostering Framework, the Children's Residential Care Task and Finish Group and other work strands within the Improving Outcomes for Children programme. However, Welsh Government also wants to take this opportunity to explore with local authorities the factors that influence decision making around out of county and cross-border placements, to ensure that more children can be placed closer to home where this is in their best interests.

- 3.4 To take this work forward Welsh Government has established a technical group to inform and advise on the approach to this activity involving representatives from ADSS Cymru, WLGA, local authorities, third sector and Welsh Government officials. The Corporate Director, Social Services and Wellbeing represents ADSS on this group.
- 3.5 Welsh Government would like to work in partnership with local authorities across Wales to better understand the context in which organisations are working and to co-produce realistic and bespoke reduction expectation plans which focus on safely reducing the numbers of children in care whilst continuing to improve outcomes for those already in or leaving care. This will require close analysis of existing data at a local, regional and national level to help better understand the pressures within the system and how these can be best relieved. Welsh Government is committed to work in a co productive manner with individual authorities so that reduction plans are bespoke and tailored to their populations and demography. Individual visits will be made to each local authority during April and May of this year.
- 3.6 The technical group have developed a conversation framework to use during their visits to cover all areas of interest in a focussed way.

4. Current situation / proposal.

- 4.1 The visit to Bridgend County Borough Council took place on 10th May 2019 and officials from Welsh Government met with the Chief Executive, Corporate Director of Social Services and Wellbeing, Cabinet Member for Social Services and Wellbeing, Corporate Director of Education and Family Support, Head of Children's Social Care, Head of Education and Family Support, and colleagues from legal.
- 4.2 The conversation framework covered the following themes with sub headings as described below:

Reducing the need for, and number of, children entering care

Discussions will commence with an analysis of each local authority's data for:

- Looked after children population
- Rate per 10,000 population
- Number of children starting to be looked after
- Parental factors recorded for children looked after including, Abuse, Neglect, CSE (child sexual exploitation), Disability (physical, learning or mental), Domestic abuse, Substance Misuse, Behavioural.
- Rate of emergency admissions

Key questions:

- What is the biggest local driver behind the numbers of children in care?

- What early help and preventative services are in place?
- What evidence is there of their effectiveness?
- What should be scaled up – what should be stopped?
- What procedures do you have in place to assess and manage risks?
- What is the organisation's approach to positive risk management?
- Describe the role of Legal Services in decision making?
- Can you demonstrate a pathway of de-escalation?

Positive, stable placements

Discussions will focus on the following key data:

- Number of out of county placements
- Number of out of Wales placements
- Average spend per looked after child
- Proportion of LA spend on children's services
- Proportion of spend on placements and factors driving costs

Key questions:

- What steps are being taken by the LA to fulfil its sufficiency duty, and how do these feed into local and regional placement commissioning strategies?
- What commissioning arrangements are in place and how might these be improved?
- What efforts are being made to promote kinship care and find more family-based solutions (e.g. use of SGOs)?
- What efforts are being made to increase the number of LA foster carers?
- What efforts are being made to develop in-house residential provision and emergency / crisis provision (including regional approaches)?
- What local information is there about the cost of out of county and out of country placements?
- How are decisions made about out of area and cross-border placements, and which partners are involved?
- How effective are local out of county placement panels?
- What factors are driving any increase in out of county and cross-border placements?
- What factors are driving the cost of placements, especially expensive specialist placements?
- How can placement costs be reduced whilst maintaining quality and value for money, and ensuring positive outcomes for children?
- What approaches are you developing towards efficiency of placing children with adoption orders with their new families?

Enhancing exit strategies that better enable exit from care

Key data to inform this discussion will be:

- Episodes finished for looked after children, including numbers of:
 - Adoptions
 - Kinships/SGOs
 - Care at Home Orders/Placement with Parents
 - Care Leavers (inc those who return to birth family)
- Age profile of children looked after

Key questions:

- What support systems are in place to help promote independence?
- What support is provided to parents to enable them to be reunited with their children?
- How frequently do you review existing looked after children cases to see if circumstances have changed?

Managing the business

- What Practice Framework/Model is in place? What is your assessment of its effectiveness?
- Do you have a corporate LA strategy for reducing the need for children to enter care?
- What Quality Assurance procedures are in place?
- Describe the criteria for decision making for proceedings being met?
- Managing budget and financial affairs. How can the voice of children's services be strengthened?

Co-production of Bespoke Targets

- Consider stretching targets for the 4 priority areas identified by the First Minister
- Achieve mutually acceptable agreement about targets over 12, 24 & 36 months
- As a result of the conversation, any additional areas identified that we want to see specific action.

4.3 A presentation of our local data and profile which was shared with Welsh Government at the visit is attached at **appendix 1**.

4.4 When all the visits have been completed an overarching report will be collated and shared with the technical group before it goes to the First Minister. The overarching report will highlight the key messages and also identify some actions to be taken forward nationally. The technical group will also be considering monitoring and review.

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 Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 (SSWBA), 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 wellbeing 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 safe reduction of looked after children numbers continues to be a priority.
- Prevention – the report reflects the ongoing commitment to 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 and Collaboration – 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 the work with partners that will be required to enable people to remain living within their communities, and where necessary, responding to safeguarding concerns in a timely, efficient manner.
- 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. Financial Implications

8.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report.

9. Recommendation

9.1.1 It is recommended that the Cabinet Committee notes the information provided in this report.

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May 2019

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Background Documents

None