

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CABINET

30 JUNE 2020

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR, SOCIAL SERVICES AND WELLBEING

CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE – REGIONAL ADOPTION ARRANGEMENTS: APPRAISAL OF OPTIONS

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To inform Cabinet of the outcome of the independent evaluation of the existing regional adoption arrangements and their appropriateness with the creation of the new Cwm Taf Morgannwg Regional Partnership.
- 1.2 To seek approval from Cabinet to proceed with the recommendations contained in the report.

2. Connection to Corporate Wellbeing Objectives/Other Corporate Priorities

- 2.1 This report assists in the achievement of the following corporate well-being objective/objectives under the **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015**:-
 - **Helping people and communities to be more healthy and resilient** - taking steps to reduce or prevent people from becoming vulnerable or dependent on the Council and its services. Supporting individuals and communities to build resilience, and enable them to develop solutions to have active, healthy and independent lives.
 - **Smarter use of resources** – ensure that all resources (financial, physical, ecological, human and technological) are used as effectively and efficiently as possible and support the creation of resources throughout the community that can help to deliver the Council's well-being objectives.

3. Background

- 3.1 As from 1st April 2019 healthcare services for people in the area of Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) have been provided by Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board instead of Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University (ABMU) Health Board to align decision-making across health and local government.
- 3.2 From a Local Authority perspective, whilst the disruption to general services may not have been as significant as that to be experienced by the Health Boards, the boundary changes impacted on a number of BCBC services. To ensure that BCBC have not been disadvantaged by the transfer of regions, there were a small number of essential services that BCBC continued to receive under the auspices of the West Glamorgan (previously Western Bay) footprint. A number of these services were developed under Regional decision making

and have been maintained under Transitional arrangements. One of the services that BCBC continue to be an equal partner to is the Western Bay Adoption Service, which was nationally defined as a result of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (Joint Adoption Arrangements) (Wales).

3.3 The creation of a National Adoption Service is one of the key policy strands of the Welsh Government, as enacted in the Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Act 2014. This Act provides powers, under Section 9, for Ministers to direct Local Authorities to collaborate in relation to adoption services and to prevent any Local Authority from withdrawing from these collaborations in the future. Consequently five Adoption Regional “Collaboratives” and the National Adoption Service were created in Wales and the Regions became fully operational in 2015.

3.4 The Adoption and Children Act 2002 (Joint Adoption Arrangements) (Wales) Directions 2015 came into force on 13th March 2015. The primary purpose of these Directions is to ensure effective joint arrangements are in place between Local Authorities in Wales for the delivery of adoption services.

Schedule 1 of the Directions sets out which Local Authorities must collaborate with each other. For the former Western Bay region the Local Authorities are Swansea, Bridgend and Neath Port Talbot. Swansea host and manage the regional service on behalf of the partner agencies. However the Cwm Taf Local Authorities of Merthyr and Rhondda Cynon Taf were joined to Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan to create the Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Regional collaborative.

The regional adoption service provides a range of services and interventions across the five key domains to those affected by adoption. Those being:

- Assessing and supporting prospective adopters;
- Assessing non-agency (parent/carer, formerly step parent adoptions);
- Birth Record Counselling and Intermediary Services (BRC & IS);
- Adoption support (assessments and support services to anyone affected by adoption);
- Twin tracking and Family Finding (TT&FF), which involves working with birth families of children in or following care proceedings and, once a Placement Order has been granted by Court, in searching for an adoptive placement.

3.5 Due to the transfer of BCBC from the former Western Bay Region to Cwm Taf Morgannwg, BCBC required a thorough evaluation of the current regional adoption collaborative arrangements against alternative options. This piece of work was commissioned in July 2019 and undertaken by an independent consultant who has worked for 40 years in local authority Children’s Services and for the last few years has been the project manager for collaborative fostering projects and the National Adoption Service in Wales. The scope of the project was as follows:

To undertake an evaluation of the existing Regional Collaborative Adoption arrangements that the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Local Authorities are part of, and assess their suitability in line with the creation of the new Cwm Taf Morgannwg Region. The evaluation must be limited to 3 related options as follows:

Option 1: *Continue with existing Regional collaborative arrangements i.e. Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council remain part of the*

Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Adoption Region and Bridgend County Borough Council remain part of the former Western Bay Region (now West Glamorgan).

Option 2: *Bridgend County Borough Council leave West Glamorgan Regional collaborative and join the Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Regional collaborative.*

Option 3: *Bridgend County Borough Council, Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil create a new Cwm Taf Morgannwg Regional (Adoption) Collaborative.*

The evaluation will consider existing arrangements, taking into account performance, issues and costs (including staffing). In addition, the evaluation will also identify potential issues and benefits with each of the options above and should also include potential structures costs (including financial) and specific benefits.

The evaluation will be concluded in a report that will fully consider the information gathered and provide balanced and objective conclusions that lead to a recommendation as to which of the three options provides the best arrangement and how this could be implemented.

- 3.6 As indicated above, any potential changes to regional collaborative arrangements would have to be considered in the context of The Adoption and Children Act 2002 (Joint Adoption Arrangements) (Wales) Directions 2015 (“the 2015 Directions”).

4. Current Situation/Proposal

- 4.1 The project was carried out during October – December 2019 and involved a series of face to face interviews with individuals and small groups, a workshop with staff from the existing regional team, conference calls and the reading and analysing of a number of documents (details in Appendix A, Section 3).
- 4.2 The project concluded that “it is a question of balancing the strategic challenges this places on Bridgend and the inevitable disruption to service delivery and improvements for children and adopters that would be caused by any structural changes to the existing Regional Adoption Collaborative. All parties have been willing to take a positive, problem-solving approach to minimise some of these challenges. There is a clear consensus from all those colleagues directly involved in the delivery of services to children and their adoptive families that, in order to maintain the focus on service improvement, the existing arrangements should remain. For children and their adoptive families changing the existing arrangements at present would involve far more losses than gains”.
- 4.3 Both Western Bay and the Vale, Valleys Cardiff Regional collaboratives consider themselves to be in a similar overall position. Having come through enormous organisational change, the focus over the last twelve months has now shifted to service improvements. Both collaboratives are now very much engaged in plans to recruit more adopters and, where possible and in their best interests, place more children within their regions.
- 4.4 However, it was also noted that, whilst from a service delivery perspective it was deemed that the existing arrangements need to remain in place for the medium term at least, this had already and would continue to pose some challenges for Bridgend County Borough Council in its strategic planning and partnership arrangements. As all other partnership arrangements and other initiatives are currently being done with RCT and Merthyr County Borough Councils, retaining

the status quo means the Regional Adoption Service will be something of an 'outlier'. Regional Partnership Boards are being encouraged to become more involved in the strategic planning for Children's Services. Although this is not currently having an impact on service delivery, it was recognised that this may well do so in the future.

4.5 The recommendations contained in the report were as follows:

- Continue with existing regional collaborative arrangements: i.e. Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Councils remain part of the Vale, Valleys and Cardiff (VVC) Adoption Region and Bridgend County Borough Council remains part of the former Western Bay (WB) Region (now West Glamorgan).
- These Arrangements remain in place for a period of a minimum of 3 years. This will allow time for consultation with key stakeholders and early planning for the longer term.
- Begin work with key stakeholders to identify the specific challenges for Bridgend County Borough Council remaining as part of the Western Bay Regional Collaborative and to develop strategies for mitigating some of these issues.
- Inform the Chairperson of the Western Bay and Vale, Valleys Cardiff Management Boards, the Chairperson of the National Adoption Service Governance Board and the National Adoption Service Director of Operations about the outcome of the evaluation.

4.6 The report findings and recommendations have been shared and accepted by both Vale, Valleys Cardiff and Western Bay regional adoption service management boards. Meetings have also taken place with the National Adoption Service Director of Operations and it is proposed that the report is also shared with the National Board.

4.7 The Head of Childrens Social Care will continue to be a member of the Western Bay Service Management Board which will monitor the arrangements and address any adverse impact of continuing the existing arrangements. Work will also commence within the next 3 years to further review the suitability and sustainability of these arrangements.

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 arising from 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 relevant well-being goals have been considered in this report:

- **Long Term** – Social Services is demand led and the SSWBA focusses on sustainable 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 transformation of services continues to be a priority.
- **Integration** – the implementation of the SSWBA and the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (Joint Adoption Arrangements) (Wales) Directions 2015 requires Local Authorities to work with partners, particularly the NHS and Education, to ensure care and support for people and support for carers is provided. The report evidences work with partners to enable children to be placed in permanent arrangements.
- **Collaboration** – The collaborative approaches described in the report are managed and monitored through the Regional Collaborative Management Board and the National Adoption Service Advisory Group and Governance Board where there is Local Authority 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 There will be no change to the existing budget for the service.

9.0 Recommendation

9.1 Cabinet is asked to approve the recommendations contained in the report at Appendix 1:-

- Continue with existing regional collaborative arrangements: i.e. Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Councils remain part of the Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Adoption Region and Bridgend County Borough Council remains part of the former Western Bay Region (now West Glamorgan).
- These arrangements remain in place for a period of a minimum of 3 years. This will allow time for consultation with key stakeholders and early planning for the longer term
- Begin work with key stakeholders to identify the specific challenges for Bridgend County Borough Council remaining as part of the Western Bay Regional Collaborative and to develop strategies for mitigating some of these issues.

- Inform the Chairperson of the Western Bay and Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Management Boards, the Chairperson of the National Adoption Service Governance Board and the National Adoption Service Director of Operations about the outcome of the Project.

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June 2020

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11. Background Documents

None