

# BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

## REPORT TO CABINET

15 SEPTEMBER 2020

### REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL SERVICES AND WELLBEING

#### CABINET COMMITTEE - CORPORATE PARENTING TERMS OF REFERENCE AND MEMBERSHIP REVIEW

##### 1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 This report sets out the work being taken forward across Welsh Government to strengthen and extend corporate parenting for care experienced children.
- 1.2 Cabinet is recommended to note the local implications of this work programme and what a new approach to corporate parenting can achieve to enable delivery of an improved Wales public sector response to the needs of care experienced children.
- 1.3 To seek approval from Cabinet to proceed with a review of the current Terms of Reference and membership for the Cabinet Committee - Corporate Parenting and approve the establishment of a Working Group to undertake the review.

##### 2. Connection to well-being objectives/other corporate priorities

- 2.1 This report assists in the achievement of the following corporate well-being 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 The Programme for Government, Taking Wales Forward, commits to “examine ways of ensuring looked after children enjoy the same life chances as other children and if necessary reform the way they are looked after”. This is reinforced by the national strategy Prosperity for All, with social care as 1 of the 5 priority areas, with actions to:
  - raise the educational attainment and improve the life chances of children in care, adopting a child centered approach, through the collaboration of education, social services and others;

- strengthen edge of care services to provide families with timely support to reduce the numbers needing care provision and provide assistance in the key transitional phase post 16 to access further education, jobs and housing for all those leaving care.
- 3.2 Improving outcomes for looked after children requires all public services to take ownership of their respective corporate parenting responsibilities – working collectively to safeguard and promote the life chances of looked after children.
- 3.3 As part of the conversations Welsh Government have been holding with local authorities to discuss the First Minister’s priorities to reduce the numbers of children in care, corporate parenting and the responsiveness of key agencies including Health and the justice system has been highlighted as a priority.
- 3.4 The concept of corporate parenting - the collective responsibility of all those within local authorities to safeguard and promote the life chances of looked after children is well established. Section 78 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 imposes a duty upon a local authority to safeguard and promote the well-being of each child it looks after. Under sections 104 – 118 of the Act, a local authority has similar duties to promote the well-being of care leavers.
- 3.5 The role of a corporate parent is to seek for children in public care the outcomes every good parent would want for their own children. Local authorities in Wales have a legal and moral duty to provide such support to the children it looks after. Elected Members have a responsibility to ensure that children looked after by a local authority are able to thrive, are nurtured, supported, educated and prepared for adult life in the way any parent would want for their own children.
- 3.6 It has been observed across Wales that whilst local authorities take the responsibility of corporate parenting seriously, it is often seen as a function for children’s social services and Elected Members, rather than a responsibility spanning the functions of the whole authority. Welsh Government policy intent is to strengthen corporate parenting across all departments within the local authority, to enable better partnership working and improved transitions between services provided for care experienced children, in education or housing for example.
- 3.7 Care experienced children also engage with and require the support of a wide range of public services outside of local authorities, in both the devolved and non-devolved sphere – i.e the NHS, the Police and the justice system. Welsh Government want to widen the concept of corporate parenting across all key agencies that provide services to looked after children, to instill accountability and ensure they are provided with the best response and support from these services.
- 3.8 By extending corporate parenting responsibilities across the public sector, it is anticipated outcomes will include greater accountability and delivery of:
- the provision of safe and stable accommodation for looked after children and care leavers;
  - secure, positive educational outcomes for care-experienced children;

- an increase in the number of care leavers in education, training and employment;
- ensuring physical, mental health and substance misuse concerns are identified early and addressed quickly; and
- a reduced number of looked after children and care leavers who enter the youth and criminal justice systems.

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

- 4.1 Welsh Government are now embarking on an extensive programme of work and engagement activity to take forward a new 'refreshed' approach to corporate parenting. The new approach is about doing things differently and to organisations' best abilities including a new Voluntary Charter referred to in paragraph 4.2 below. Whilst other elements will be about strengthening what is already in place by raising awareness and increasing knowledge about organisations' roles and responsibilities.
- 4.2 The programme of work includes engagement with a wide cohort of care experienced children to identify what corporate parenting means to them and their expectations from the services they routinely engage with. Working with this cohort, Welsh Government will look to co-produce a Voluntary Charter that organisations can sign up to setting out their commitment and unique offer to care experienced children. This Voluntary Charter will enable all stakeholders, across the public and private sector and the devolved and non-devolved spheres, to sign up to a common statement of improved support and action when working with care experienced children. It is anticipated the Charter will allow signatories to describe how they engage with care experienced children and what they propose to do differently or offer in addition to care experienced children in the future.
- 4.3 To build on the agreements as set out in the Voluntary Charter, they will also look to use existing legislative powers to strengthen statutory guidance, clarifying roles and responsibilities and extending duties across the public sector. This will be achieved by:
- Developing a new 'corporate parenting' chapter within the Part 6 Code of Practice under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014, providing clear statutory guidance to all departments within local authorities about their responsibilities and duties towards care experienced children.
  - Updating the Part 9 Code of Practice under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, providing statutory guidance to Regional Partnership Boards on the issue of corporate parenting and enabling improved partnership working between local authorities and Local Health Boards.
  - Seeking to embed the concept of corporate parenting beyond that of local authorities. Existing powers are available to Welsh Government under the Children Act 2004 and Education Act 2002 to develop statutory guidance to embed corporate parenting beyond local authorities.
- 4.4 The membership of the Council's existing Cabinet Committee - Corporate Parenting comprises of 15 Elected Members (6 of whom are Cabinet Members and have voting rights), Corporate Management Board (CMB) and relevant Heads of Service. The current Terms of Reference outline its key functions as follows:

- To ensure that Looked After Children are seen as a priority by the whole of the Authority and by the Children and Young People's Partnership;
- To seek the views of Children and Young People in shaping and influencing the parenting they receive;
- To determine appropriate policies, opportunities and procedures;
- To monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the Authority in its role as corporate parent against Welsh Assembly guidance;
- To approve the Permanence Policy in relation to Looked After Children;
- To approve individual Statements of Purpose for the service areas of Fostering, Adoption and Children's Homes;
- To receive information specifically relating to Looked After Children and the Authority's Corporate Parenting Role;
- To approve the Placement Strategy.

4.5 At its most recent meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> March 2020 the Cabinet Committee – Corporate Parenting discussed how it could be strengthened and the value of extending membership to key partner agencies. Importantly the Committee were also keen to ensure that the voice of the looked after child (or care experienced child) was heard.

## **5. Effect upon Policy Framework and Procedure Rules**

5.1 There is no effect upon 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) 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 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/ Collaboration** – Improving outcomes for looked after children requires all public services to take ownership of their respective corporate parenting responsibilities – working collectively to safeguard and promote the life chances of looked after children.
- **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 arising from this report.

## **9.0 Recommendation**

- 9.1 Cabinet is recommended to note the local implications of the Welsh Government work programme and approve the commencement of a review of the existing Cabinet Committee - Corporate Parenting Terms of Reference and membership.
- 9.2 Approve the establishment of a Working Group to conduct the review to be led by the Head of Children's Social Care and to include corporate colleagues and representation from key external partners and young people who are or have been looked after by the Authority.
- 9.3 Note that the findings of the Working Group and any proposed amendments to the Terms of Reference and membership of the Cabinet Committee – Corporate Parenting will be reported back to Cabinet.

**Laura Kinsey**  
**Head of Childrens Social Care**  
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**Contact officer:** Laura Kinsey, Head of Children's Social Care  
**Telephone:** (01656) 642314  
**Email:** [laura.kinsey@bridgend.gov.uk](mailto:laura.kinsey@bridgend.gov.uk)  
**Postal address:** Bridgend County Borough Council, Civic Offices,  
Angel Street, Bridgend CF31 4WB

## **Background Documents**

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