

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE

26 NOVEMBER 2020

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR, SOCIAL SERVICES AND WELLBEING

SUPPORT FOR VULNERABLE CHILDREN DURING COVID 19

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an overview of the support and continuity planning for our most vulnerable children during Covid-19.

2. Connection to corporate 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**:-
1. **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.
 2. **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 In late February/early March 2020, as part of the preparation for supporting children and young people in the global pandemic, all directorate business continuity plans were reviewed. It was essential to ensure that Bridgend Children's Services continued to safeguard children and support their wellbeing in a time of great challenge. As far as possible the workforce was enabled to work from home and there has been a greater use of technology. There was a focus on dynamic assessment of risk in which the risks to the workforce and risks to children and young people needed to be understood, balanced and mitigated. Face to face home visits only took place when the risks of not doing so were greater than the risks to the workforce of potential exposure to the virus. The Council's short-break service was initially closed and the staff were re-deployed to work within our other residential settings which all remained open.
- 3.2 In line with Welsh Government guidance the service re-designed the way services were delivered and prioritised. A service plan was put in place in March 2020 and this has been subject to regular review as restrictions have been varied and/or national guidance has been revised.

3.3 The table below provides data on Children’s Social Care activity during the period April 2020 to September 2020:-

	Assessments	S47 Enquiries	Statutory Visits (Children Looked After)	Statutory Visits (Child Protection)	Child Protection Conferences	Core Group Meetings
Apr-20	98	32	225	324	50	120
May-20	57	48	224	442	59	142
Jun-20	65	49	230	369	57	135
Jul-20	104	40	255	392	67	136
Aug-20	76	40	240	526	43	169
Sep-20	80	55	260	426	52	132
Total	480	264	1434	2479	328	834

- 96.67% of new assessments for children were completed within statutory timescales
- 89% of visits to children looked after were completed within statutory timescales
- 92% of visits to children placed on the child protection register were completed within approved timescales
- 93% of Initial Child Protection Conferences were held within statutory timescales

3.4 The table below identifies the mode of contact made for statutory functions:-

	Statutory Visits (Children Looked After)	Statutory Visits (Child Protection)
Face to Face	37%	74%
Telephone	48%	20%
Video calls	15%	6%

3.5 From the outset of the pandemic the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) has remained fully operational at Ravens Court but with a reduced number of staff working from the office base on a daily basis. A small central team has also been based at Ravens Court to receive calls and enquiries from professionals and members of the public on open cases. These have then been passed to relevant personnel (based at home) if further action /advice is required.

3.6 The following support was established for vulnerable learners via Education and Family Support Teams and Children’s Social Care:

- A multi-agency approach to supporting vulnerable children and prioritising the most vulnerable to offer some of them access to emergency childcare hubs (pre-school and school) and special schools was established in April 2020 in response to the pandemic. This approach was agreed between the Education and Family Support Directorate and Social Services and Wellbeing Directorate and was effective from Monday 20 April 2020 until the end of July 2020.

- During the current COVID-19 crisis, vulnerable learners were also provided with a variety of contact and support from a range of services to ensure their needs continue to be met. Those children who were on the child protection register and are also eligible for free school meals were having their meals delivered to them directly by staff from the Edge of Care Team and the Bridgend Youth Justice Service. Information gathered on those visits was shared with allocated social workers and schools.
- A Central Hub and an Early Help COVID Helpline based in Ravens Court was established which assisted in the join up of support for children and families. This multi-agency hub supported the identification of services involved with children and families and signposting families and professionals to those allocated workers in the first instance. Where children and families are not known to services, the hub assisted in providing information, advice and assistance to ensure those needs are met and prevent issues escalating. This hub also acted as the conduit for referrals from schools and social workers of vulnerable learners who benefited from a place at one of the emergency childcare hubs.

4. Current situation/proposal

- 4.1 The most recent version of the full service plan can be found at **Appendix 1**.
- 4.2 In light of the Welsh Government Announcement that a “Circuit Breaker Lockdown” or “Fire Break” would come into force between 6pm, Friday 23rd October 2020 until Monday 9th November 2020 the decision was made to review and update the Children’s Services Service Plan in line with the Guidance that had been issued. An addendum outlining temporary changes in approaches was implemented for this specific period and can be found at **Appendix 2**.
- 4.3 In addition to the statutory services/functions covered in the service plan, the Council also responded to the need to provide support to our most vulnerable children and young people during the school holidays and established bespoke provision to achieve this.
- 4.4 The Social Services and Wellbeing Directorate was able to make good use of Welsh Government funding to provide activities and support during the summer period. 20 days of activities were provided supporting 39 young people, who were registered or classed as vulnerable, and with 259 sessions provided to young people over the four week period.
- 4.5 Additionally a programme was supported for young people with additional needs who would normally have accessed the Discovery Days respite programme during the summer period. This year the programme supported households including siblings with 21 young people being supported.
- 4.6 There has also been a growth in digital work with young people with disabilities with weekly on line activities progressed.

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 impacts 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 (Wales) Act 2014 (SSWBA) 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 Well-being 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 remodelling and transformation of services continues to be a priority.
- Prevention – the report is about the approaches adopted by the Directorate in line with the SSWBA, for example, the continued provision of information, advice and assistance to enable people to remain independent and safe.
- 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 statutory partners and the Third Sector.
- Collaboration – The collaborative approaches described in the report, are managed and monitored through various strategic and collaborative boards across Directorates and with partners.
- 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 The Council has claimed the following support from the Welsh Government COVID Hardship fund to support the provision of services for the county borough's most vulnerable children and young people covering spend from March to September 2020:-

	£
Direct Payments	14,430.93
PPE Related	165.98
Misc	5,363.52

Placement retainers	64,370.34
Supplies to Support Social Distancing Activities	868.29
Staffing	114,317.73
Summer Provision	47,032.04
	<u>246,548.83</u>

9. Recommendation

9.1 It is recommended that members note the content of the report.

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Background documents:

None