

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2

21 APRIL 2021

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR, SOCIAL SERVICES AND WELLBEING

SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN AND ADULTS DURING COVID-19

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with an overview of the safeguarding arrangements for adults and children during the Covid-19 pandemic.

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**:-

- **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

March – September 2020

- 3.1 On 26th November 2020 Corporate Parenting Committee received a report entitled 'Support For Vulnerable Children During Covid-19'. The report noted that in late February/early March 2020, as part of the preparation for supporting children and young people in the global pandemic, business continuity plans were reviewed. The report noted it was essential to ensure Bridgend partners continued to safeguard children and support their wellbeing in a time of great challenge. It was reported that the workforce was enabled to work from home through the greater use of technology with 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.
- 3.2 In line with Welsh Government guidance social services 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 between 1 April 2020 and 30 September 2020:-

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

3.5 The table below provides data on Adult Safeguarding activity during the period April 2020 to September 2020:-

	Number of Safeguarding Referrals	Met threshold for Adult Protection Procedures
Mar-20	21	4
Apr-20	14	2
May-20	28	7
Jun-20	41	10
Jul-20	32	3
Aug-20	21	4
Sep-20	20	1

3.6 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 had been based at Ravens Court to receive calls and enquiries from professionals and members of the public on open cases. These would then have been passed to relevant personnel (based at home) if further action /advice is required.

3.7 The following support had been 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 20 April 2020 until the end of July 2020.
- In the first 2 weeks of September there was a gradual return into education, with all pupils officially back in school from 14 September until all schools closed again on 11 December. The schools remained closed, other than for foundation phase pupils who returned to school on 22 February. Key Stage 2 and secondary pupils started returning to schools on 15 March 2021 with the expectation that schools will be opened fully on 12 April.
- Virtual/blended learning was offered as well as on-site provision for vulnerable learners during all school closure periods.
- 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.

- 3.8 In addition to the statutory services/functions covered in the service plan, the Council also responded to the need to provide support to its most vulnerable children and young people during the school holidays and established bespoke provision to achieve this at the time.
- 3.9 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.
- 3.10 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. Last year the programme supported households including siblings with 21 young people being supported.
- 3.11 There had also been a growth in digital work with young people with disabilities with weekly on line activities progressed.

4. Current situation/proposal

September 2020 – January 2021

- 4.1 Over the pandemic period of the past year, children's social care has developed and adapted a number of service plans to support the working arrangements for staff whilst ensuring the most vulnerable children and young people continue to be contacted and visited on a face to face basis. The service plans have responded to the differing Tiers of Welsh Government guidance including the "Circuit Breaker Lockdown" or "Firebreak" which came into force between 23 October 2020 until 9 November 2020. The service plan for tier four restrictions can be found in **Appendix 1**
- 4.2 The Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) has remained fully operational at Ravens Court with a reduced number of staff working from the office base on a daily basis. A comprehensive MASH risk assessment has been completed to ensure the working arrangements for the Information, Advice and Assistance Team, The Adult

Safeguarding Team and all of its partner agencies withing MASH work in an environment which is safe and compliant with Welsh Government Guidance. At the start of the pandemic, a small central safeguarding children’s social care team was also working from Ravens Court offices to receive calls and enquiries from professionals and members of the public on open cases. As the options in the use of technology has progressed the work of the central team has now returned to the individual teams by means of virtual engagement.

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

	Assessments	S47 Enquiries	Statutory Visits (Children Looked After)	Statutory Visits (Child Protection)	Child Protection Conferences	Core Group Meetings
Apr-20	98	33	225	324	34	124
May-20	57	48	224	442	63	148
Jun-20	65	49	230	369	57	139
Jul-20	104	41	255	394	73	138
Aug-20	76	40	238	540	39	183
Sep-20	80	55	263	412	57	140
Oct-20	93	46	221	394	82	132
Nov-20	82	62	266	496	83	149
Dec-20	129	49	274	399	36	132
Total	784	423	2196	3770	524	1285

- 95% of new assessments for children were completed within statutory timescales
- 85% of visits to children looked after were completed within statutory timescales
- 90% of visits to children placed on the child protection register were completed within approved timescales
- 95% of Initial Child Protection Conferences were held within statutory timescales on a virtual basis. Plans are underway to gradually introduce a blend of virtual and face to face conferences with family and partner professionals but this will be dependent on Welsh Government guidance.

4.4 The table below identified the mode of contact made for statutory functions between 1 April 2020 to 31 December 2020:-

	Statutory Visits (Children Looked After)	Statutory Visits (Child Protection)
Face to Face	44%	76%
Telephone	42%	17%
Video calls	14%	7%

4.5 Multi Agency Safeguarding

Despite the extreme challenges over the past year, multi-agency information sharing and safeguarding practices have continued to ensure adults, children and young people are safe within the community.

An example of this is the convening of multi-agency Professional Strategy meetings. These meetings respond to safeguarding concerns about those whose work, either in a paid or voluntary capacity, which brings them into contact with children or adults at risk. It also includes individuals who have caring responsibilities for children or adults in need of care and support and their employment or voluntary work brings them into contact with children or adults at risk.

A total of 58 Professional Abuse Strategy Meetings have been convened between 01/04/2020 to 31/01/2021 in respect of professionals working within services to children and young people. A total of 75 meetings have been convened in relation to professionals working within services to adults.

The service continue to work closely on a virtual basis at other multi-agency forums such as Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA). This forum assess and manages the risks posed by sexual and violent offenders.

In addition, the work of the Regional Safeguarding Board has continued and the subgroups regularly meet to prioritise its safeguarding responsibilities.

Daily discussions are a core function within the MASH where high risk domestic abuse cases are considered. Multi-agency working and information sharing is essential to facilitate this function which has continued virtually throughout the pandemic.

Between July 2020 to September 2020, 42 high risk domestic abuse cases were discussed in this forum and between October 2020 to December 2020, 61 cases were discussed. This function of MASH allows information to be shared at the earliest opportunity, reducing risk and targeting support and protection for adults and children without the delay of waiting for a Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) which is convened every two weeks.

Although restrictions on people’s movements, social events and the closing of pubs and restaurants saw a reduction in Public Protection Notices (PPNs) generally throughout the pandemic, the domestic abuse related PPNs remained at a similar level throughout these months.

4.6 Adult Safeguarding

In early March 2020, as part of the preparation for supporting adults in the global pandemic, all directorate business continuity plans were reviewed in the same way as Children’s Social Care. It was essential to ensure that Bridgend Adult Social Care Services continued to safeguard adults 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 aided by risk assessments to ensure practitioners and vulnerable adults are protected. 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 Table below shows comparative figures for Adults at Risk referrals received between April 2020 to December 2020 and the number that progressed to a Strategy Meeting.

Years 1 April – 31 December	Number of Safeguarding Referrals	Met threshold for Adult Protection Procedures
Apr-20	14	2
May-20	28	6
Jun-20	41	10
Jul-20	32	4
Aug-20	21	5
Sep-20	20	1
Oct-20	31	12
Nov-20	43	6
Dec-20	30	4
Total	260	50

The table below shows a breakdown in the categories of abuse for April 2020 until December 2020. Please note as a person can have more than one category of abuse:-

Category of Abuse	Total
Emotional or Psychological	49
Financial	22
Neglect	120
Physical	98
Sexual	16
Total	305

For all safeguarding referrals received that do not meet the threshold for adult protection procedures an enquiry report is completed and recommendations made e.g. no further action the adult is not at risk or they may have needs for care and support and a referral made for social work support. It may also be appropriate for people to be signposted to alternative services. An enquiry report is also sent to the referrer where appropriate.

4.7 Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS)

The Mental Capacity Act 2005 (MCA) provides a statutory framework for acting and making decisions on behalf of individuals who lack mental capacity to do so for themselves. In 2007, the Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) were introduced to provide a legal framework to prevent breaches of the European Convention on Human Rights following the 'Bournewood' judgement.

DoLS is appropriate if people lack the capacity to consent to a particular treatment or care that is recognised by others as being in their best interest or which will protect them from harm. Welsh Government issued guidance which confirmed that during the pandemic, the principles of the MCA and the safeguards provided by DoLS still apply.

Bridgend as the Supervisory Body needed to take a proportionate approach to all applications, including those made before and during the pandemic. Any decisions must be taken specifically for each person.

Due to Welsh Government restrictions, for much of 2020/21, it has not been possible for Best Interest Assessors to undertake face to face visits in care homes. During periods of lockdown decisions around professional visiting are risk based decisions. Therefore to undertake DoLS assessments and reviews, remote techniques have been used, such as telephone or video calls where appropriate to do so, and the person's communication needs have been taken into consideration. Views have also be sought from family, friends and professionals who are concerned for the person's welfare.

It has been a challenging time for Best Interest Assessors and each DoLS assessment has taken a longer period of time to complete. Therefore currently BCBC have a backlog of 152 DoLS assessments that need to be completed. A plan is in place to clear the backlog. Arrangements for lateral flow device (LFD) testing will be in place in all care homes so BIA can undertake these tests when appropriate.

The team is currently working on allocating on a care home basis to limit the footfall into each home so numbers allocated to each BIA will depend on the requirements per home and how many new referrals are received.

The service is working towards clearing the backlog by the end of the financial year. Although it should be noted that approximately 60 - 70 new referrals were received between mid-February and 31st March 2021.

In addition to funding received from Welsh Government of £11,803 for this financial year; 2021/22, following a successful further bid, BCBC were granted additional funding of £51,000, which became available in March 2021. Some of this funding will be used for training. The remainder of the funding will purchase additional Best Interest Assessors (BIA) capacity to reduce the current backlog.

DoLS Referrals including outcome status

Years	Number of DoLS referrals received	Status at 31/12/20
1 April – 31 December		
Granted Standard Authorisation	370	129
Criteria not met		0
Withdrawn		77
Allocated/Ongoing		48
Awaiting Allocation		116

4.8 Secure Estate – Parc Prison

In April 2016, in accordance with the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014, BCBC became responsible for assessing and meeting the care and support needs of adults in the secure estate (Parc Prison) in Wales.

A small team comprising of two social workers and an occupational therapist was developed. This team is usually based in Parc Prison however due to the global pandemic the Ministry of Justice made the decision to lock prison's down due to the risks of Covid 19 in the secure estate environment. The Safeguarding Prison Social Work team have remained fully operational but working from home, using remote techniques, such as telephone or video calls where appropriate to do so.

The social work team, also works as part of a wider multi-disciplinary prison team. The team assesses the needs of prisoners with care and support needs, with families of prisoners, plan for prisoner release and liaise with other local authorities to ensure

a safe discharge. If a prisoner requires a care package of support this is commissioned from G4S who provide domiciliary care service.

Prior to Covid-19 the service had seen a year on year increase in the numbers of referrals received. However from the figures below the referral rate has dropped this year:-

Years	Number of Secure Estate Referrals	Number of Assessments Completed for the Secure Estate
1 April – 31 December		
Apr-20	1	2
May-20	8	4
Jun-20	6	7
Jul-20	4	2
Aug-20	7	4
Sep-20	11	3
Oct-20	6	3
Nov-20	14	7
Dec-20	3	10
Total	60	42

The impact of Covid 19 in the prison environment was significant, in order to try and contain the spread of Covid 19 prisoners were spending long periods of time in their cells, exercise was limited to 1 hour per day. Social care staff were based in specific areas of the prison and only worked in that area to prevent cross contamination. During the first wave of Covid infection in March 2020 – May 2020 7 prisoners contracted Covid 19, however the outbreak of Covid was far worse in the second wave when over 150 prisoners and over 100 prison officers contracted Covid 19 and there were three prisoner deaths.

4.9 Residential & Nursing Homes

Adult Safeguarding and Contract Monitoring Teams work very closely together to support independent residential providers. Contract monitoring officers telephoned care homes on a weekly basis to offer support and to monitor the number of Covid cases in each home (residents and staff), this would form the basis of a RAG status report to the Head of Adult Social Care and the Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing. Over the New Year period three homes were managed via the Escalating Concerns Process following significant Covid outbreak with the majority of staff and residents testing positive. JIMP (Joint Interagency Monitoring Panel) meetings were convened initially on a daily and then weekly basis. This is a statutory process led by the Authority. The purpose of the multi-agency process is to ensure the residents receive the necessary care to safeguard their health and wellbeing. The group will support the Responsible Individual (RI) in their legal role. All three homes are now Covid free.

There was a significant impact on the care home population with a high number of deaths amongst residents who had been diagnosed with Covid-19. This impacted on the wellbeing of other residents and the staff. Through the JIMP process the

service worked with care homes providers and offered additional counselling services to residents, staff and the managers of the homes. The impact on the care home population in Bridgend was reported to Cwm Taf Morgannwg Safeguarding Board by the Director and Head of Service in a Board meeting.

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 Where applicable the Council has claimed support from the Welsh Government COVID Hardship fund to support the provision of services for the county borough's most vulnerable children, young people and adults and this will continue into 2021-22. Any additional pressures not met from Welsh Government funding will be highlighted in the quarterly revenue budget monitoring reports to Cabinet.

9. Recommendation

- 9.1 It is recommended that the Committee note the content of the report.

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Background documents:

None