

# BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

## REPORT TO CABINET

8 FEBRUARY 2022

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

#### 3 YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN FOR CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE IN BRIDGEND

#### 1. Purpose of report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to:

- Present for Cabinet consideration and approval a 3 year strategic plan for Children's Social Care in Bridgend.

#### 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

3.1 Children's social care services in Bridgend are fundamental in delivering the Council's statutory duties under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 to safeguard, protect and improve outcomes for the most vulnerable children in the County Borough.

3.2 The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Children's social care services is starting to become evident in respect of the need and complexity of children and families in Bridgend. In December 2021 there was a 40% increase in contacts into children's social care (476) compared to January 2021 (339) when the country was in lockdown. The number of children on the child protection register (185) have remained relatively stable and the number of care experienced children (380) have remained relatively stable over the last year. Quality assurance work has highlighted an increased complexity of case work and the issues which children and families are presenting to Children's social care.

- 3.3 Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) undertook a quality assurance check of social services in Bridgend in April 2021. They found some strengths and some areas for further development in their analysis of Children's social care. Overall, practitioners and Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) presented as having an understanding of the circumstances and experiences of the children and families they were working with. They found more varied practice in relation to co-production and seeking and /or recording the voice of the child. Confirmation regarding the active offer of advocacy was contained in the files viewed. Co-production, particularly in the context of engagement, identification of personal outcomes, risks, and provision of services to achieve positive change required some improvement. The assurance letter noted "the local authority is aware of the need to further embed practice, which is strength based and outcome focused and work is currently underway to address this".
- 3.4 Children's social care in Bridgend, in common with many other local authorities in Wales and across the UK, has experienced challenges in the retention and recruitment of children's social workers. There are vacancy rates across Children's services of around 30%. Corporate as well as service level attention is needed to deliver a strategic plan and the underpinning culture and values required to ensure that Bridgend is able to attract and retain social workers and this strategic plan.

#### 4. Current Situation

- 4.1 The 3 year strategic plan for Bridgend Children's social care is attached as **Appendix 1** to this report. The plan sets out the purpose of children's social care in Bridgend and emphasises the importance of culture, behaviour and values in delivering that purpose as well as the strategic actions which are detailed in the plan.
- 4.2 The strategic plan sets out strategic actions for the next 3 years which are themed in the following areas:
- A stable, well-supported, motivated permanent workforce
  - Strength based, social work practice which supports children and families to stay together (wherever possible) and safeguards children from harm
  - Evidence based services and interventions
  - Seamless partnership working at an operational and strategic level
  - Listening to and acting on the voice of children and families.

As well as detailing the actions required, the plan indicates the measures that will be used to understand progress.

- 4.3 The 3 year timescale for the strategic plan is based on evidence of independent evaluations of transformation programmes in Children's services conducted in other local authorities which demonstrate this is the timescale needed to sustain and embed change, particularly the implementation of strength based models of practice which is a central element of this plan.
- 4.4 The governance of the plan will be through an 'Improving Outcomes for Children Board' which will be chaired by the Chief Executive of the Council. The Board will provide regular reports on progress to the Cabinet Corporate Management Board, the Cabinet Corporate Parenting Committee and the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Board will provide regular oversight, challenge and direction and ensure that resources are recommended to enable delivery of this plan. The

Board will benefit from independent expert advice provided by a specialist in Children's social care who will advise on the priorities set out, measures and progress.

## **5. Effect upon policy framework and procedure rules**

5.1 There is no effect upon the Policy Framework and Procedure Rules as a result of this strategic plan.

## **6. Equality Act 2010 implications**

6.1 An initial EIA screening has identified that there would be no negative impact on those with one or more of the protected characteristics, on socio-economic disadvantage or the use of the Welsh language. It was therefore not necessary to carry out a full EIA on this policy or proposal.

## **7. Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 implications**

7.1 By taking steps to shift the focus of approach to strength based and solution focussed practice we are supporting the delivery of the Government's wellbeing objectives in "*Prosperity for all: the National strategy*". It is evident that a disproportionate number of children and families who Children's social care services work with and for experience multiple disadvantages including risk of poverty and economic disadvantage.

7.2 The links to the Welsh Government "*A Healthier Wales, our Plan for Health and Social Care*" can be evidenced in the emphasis in this plan of the need for enhanced partnership working arrangements between Health, Social Care and other agencies to provide seamless assessment and care and support for children and families.

## **8. Financial implications**

8.1 There are no direct resource implications arising from this report. The Council will be asked to consider recurring pressures in Children's social care workforce and service provision in setting its budget for 2022/23 onwards. Priorities for capital investments in Children's social care services will be considered by the Council in consideration of the capital programme. Short term resource requirements as a consequence of the quality assurance work, training and development and strategic capacity requirements to effectively deliver this plan, may require consideration of short term earmarked reserves in line with the Council's Reserves and Balances protocol.

## **9. Recommendation**

9.1 It is recommended that Cabinet consider and approve the 3 year strategic plan for Children's social care in Bridgend attached as Appendix 1.

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**Background documents:**

None