

Bridgend County Borough Council
Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Pen-y-bont ar Ogwr



Bridgend Children’s Social Care Strategic Plan 2022-2025

Improving Outcomes for Children and Families in our County Borough

‘Working together to enable better outcomes for children, young people and their families via strong relationships, effective practice and timely and responsive services, which support children and families to live together (wherever possible) work on difficulties and safeguard children from harm’

Introduction

This plan has been developed to set out a clear set of strategic actions that will be taken to support a culture and practice of strength based, continuous improvement in children's social care in Bridgend which places safety, wellbeing and improving outcomes for children and their families at the heart of everything we do.

The plan is located within a wider programme of organisational and service development being undertaken by Bridgend County Borough Council (the Council) in partnership with the people and communities of Bridgend, statutory and non-statutory partners which include:

- Progressing the priorities in the Council's Corporate Plan 2018-23 and developing a new plan for 2023-34 onwards.
- The Cwm Taf Morgannwg Regional Partnership Board Population Needs Assessment which sets out an assessment of the needs of the populations of Bridgend, Rhondda Cynon Taff and Merthyr Tydfil and is also an assessment of the range of health, social care and wellbeing services needed to meet those needs
- The priorities of the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Regional Safeguarding Board (RSB) which provides strategic leadership for safeguarding children and adults at risk across the region and supports learning through the undertaking and publication of Child Practice Reviews (CPRs)
- Contributing to the Council's medium term financial strategy (MTFS)
- Legislation set out in the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act (2014), the Regulation and Inspection of Care Act (2016), the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (2015) and other statute and guidance.
- The Bridgend Social Services and Well-being Recovery Plan developed to support people, workforce and providers of service to recover from the short, medium and long-term impact of the Covid-19 global pandemic.

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The Plan forms part of a wider transformation programme to improve outcomes for people in Bridgend 'Improving Outcomes for the Joneses' which has the following purpose:

Doing what matters for all the Joneses

Through:

- *Keeping people well, connected and addressing health inequalities*
- *Relationship based practice and services*
- *Seamless well-being, primary and community health and social care co-located in localities and communities delivered by multi-professional teams with the person at the centre*
- *Understanding and mitigating risks and safeguarding people from harm and supporting their safety and wellbeing and enabling people to achieve what matters to them.*

Whilst this wider context is important, this plan is specific to the purpose and strategic priorities for children's social care. It is clear these strategic priorities can only be delivered through strong and effective partnerships, most importantly with the children and families who children's social care work with and for but also key partners within and out with the Council. The effectiveness of multi-agency safeguarding and early help arrangements that support the protection and wellbeing of children who may need intervention from children's social care is also fundamental to the successful delivery of the priorities within this plan.

The purpose of Bridgend Children's Social Care:

'Working together to enable better outcomes for children, young people and their families via strong relationships, effective practice and timely and responsive services, which support children and families to live together (wherever possible) work on difficulties and safeguard children from harm'

What will this plan achieve to support delivery of this purpose?

- Children's social care will have a clear purpose. This purpose will be achieved through culture and values which are inclusive and support everyone within the service and we the people we work with to feel part of the 'family firm'. Our culture will be open and transparent, celebrate our strengths and commit to learning and development and continuous improvement;
- The voice of children and young people will drive the delivery of this strategic plan and their voices will be evident in all work and decisions;
- Meaningful involvement and engagement of families in the work of children's social care reflecting a commitment to the long-term relationships needed to work together for our children and young people;
- Effective workforce planning which supports a stable, well- motivated workforce , good retention and recruitment, an optimal mix of skills and capabilities. Our workforce feel well supported, professionally supervised and have access to high standards of professional development;
- Highly effective management and leadership which provides clarity, structure, excellent supervision and provides high support and appropriate challenge;
- Children's social care teams which are resourced to fulfil their purpose and responsibilities and are good places to work and develop professional practice;
- A strength-based model of effective social work practice which will be implemented systematically. This model will have at its heart protecting children from harm, enabling positive outcomes through strong relationships with families and partners who work together as the 'village' which it takes to raise a child in Bridgend;
- High standards of safeguarding and child protection practice, recognizing that whilst safeguarding children is an inherently multi-agency endeavor children's social care play a leading role in ensuring Bridgend children are protected from harm;
- Robust quality assurance and performance systems which ensure that the effectiveness and consistency of excellent practice and interventions are understood within a culture and practice of transparency, learning and continuous improvement;
- Creating a way of working which is 'proactive' rather than 'reactive', with interventions focused on preventing escalation of needs because needs are met effectively at the earliest opportunity, preventing the need for children and young people to become care experienced unless

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this is evidently the right outcome in which case plans for permanence and stability will be timely and support children to achieve their potential;

- A range of effective services and interventions, from prevention through to services for care experienced children which are evidence based, are of the highest standards, and are able to support children and young people to achieve positive outcomes;
- An integrated, seamless 'whole system' practice with across the whole system to meeting the needs of the vulnerable children and families in Bridgend – across the whole Council, with statutory partners, the third sector and commissioned providers.

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From purpose into action – our culture and behaviours

We recognise that ‘purpose’ and ‘strategy’ can feel like ‘empty words’ without the underpinning culture and behaviours which support effective delivery. As a Council, we therefore, commit to the following:

- A ‘One -Council’ and ‘One Bridgend’ approach in which we commit to working together to working with others to support the delivery of the priorities within this plan, recognizing corporate, political and partnership ownership are as critical to effective children’s social care as the behaviours and actions within children’s social care

In Children’s Social Care:

- Our leadership, management and practice will be strongly focused on delivering our purpose;
- We will be respectful of each other’s contributions to the lives of children and families and those of our partners;
- We will work as a team, and as part of other Council and partnership teams, working to each other’s strengths and to improve outcomes for children and family;
- We will listen and have open and honest styles of communication;
- We commit to reflection, understanding and acting on our individual and collective learning and development needs;
- We will appropriately challenge and work with others to improve systems, practice and process where this will improve outcomes for children and families;
- We are passionate and motivated about the work we do and the difference we can make;
- We will take care of, and be mindful of, our own and our colleagues wellbeing;
- We will work equitably and fairly, creatively, and innovatively within all resources available.

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Values

Work in children' social care is rooted in the values of the social work and social care and the United Nations convention on the rights of a child:

- To hear, listen and act upon the voice of the child or young person in everything that we do
- Respect for the inherent worth and dignity of all people
- Promoting social justice
- Acting with integrity
- Ensuring our children are safe from harm
- Treating all people with respect, compassion, empathy and care

The Governance Structure for this Strategic Plan

Governance

Improving outcomes for children's social care is a high priority for the Council. To ensure that the strategic plan is effectively led and has the right level of resources assigned to support delivery, a Strengthening Outcomes for Children Board (the Board) will be established, 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.

This Board is in addition to safeguarding as a standard agenda item at each Cabinet/Corporate Management Board meeting in accordance with the Council's Corporate Safeguarding Policy (2021).

Strengthening outcomes for children and families is also a partnership priority and it is critical that senior partners from the NHS, police, housing, education and third sector are fully involved in the delivery of this plan. It is proposed that the Board involves partners as appropriate and reports through the Bridgend Local Operational Group for Community Safety and Safeguarding to the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Regional Safeguarding Board and the Bridgend Public Services Board as appropriate as well as reporting to individual governance arrangements within partner organisations.

The Board will benefit from independent professional advice from an experienced expert in children's social care. The independent expert will provide appropriate support and challenge to ensure that priorities set are the right ones, that measures and progress are understood.

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Improving Outcomes Strategic Plan – 2022-2025

The following Strategic Plan (see Appendix 1) looks to support a ‘whole Council’ approach to achieving the purpose set for children’s social care. As such, the plan is the bridge between strategic actions, effective operational practice and improving outcomes for children and families. The 3-year timescale of the plan recognises that practice led continuous improvement requires sustained leadership, focus and actions over a prolonged period of time.

The detailed plan is Appendix 1 to this paper. There are 5 themes contained within the plan which details the strategic actions required to deliver effectively:

- 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

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APPENDIX 1 – CHILDREN’S SERVICES 3 YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

Theme 1 -Stable, well-supported, motivated, permanent workforce (W)

Action	Strategic Action	Measure of Success
Priority action W1	Implement new structures for grade 3 social workers in children’s social care and consider application for market supplement to address vacancies for children’s social workers	<p>High level of permanent social workers in children’s social work teams</p> <p>Low vacancy rates in children’s social work teams</p> <p>Low levels of turnover in children’s social work teams.</p>
Priority action W2	Review of skill mix in children’s social care to develop a workforce plan which includes consideration of optimal numbers of: social workers, social work support officers, social work assistants, social services practitioners, support officers, business support, other professionals such as mental health specialist workers, behaviour analysts.	<p>Quality of practice and outcomes for children and families evidenced by achievement of care plan outcomes which are better achieved by multi-professional input.</p> <p>Improved retention and recruitment of children’s social workers who are able to delegate non social work tasks to skilled workers who can work effectively within their competencies.</p>

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Priority action W3	Develop a revised business case for the Bridgend ‘Grow our own Social Work Programme’ which sets out the resource requirements for Bridgend to achieve sustainable permanent recruitment by supporting workforce to develop their careers to become qualified social workers through secondment and traineeship arrangements.	Effective social work workforce planning evidenced by sufficient numbers of social workers to meet requirements. Improved retention and recruitment/ low vacancy levels as it is evidenced that social workers who are supported to professionally qualify in an LA area are committed to the culture and practice in the area and more likely to develop their careers there.
Priority action W5	Implement a training programme for all workforce in children’s social care to ensure there is a consistent understanding of quality of practice	Consistency and quality of practice evidenced through quality assurance, inspection and the outcomes for children and families.
Priority action W6	Deliver a comprehensive ongoing training and development programme to ensure effective and consistent implementation of the preferred strength-based model of social work practice	Consistent strength-based practice which achieves the purpose of this strategy to improve outcomes for children, young people and their families supporting children and families to live together (wherever possible) and work on difficulties and safeguard children from harm. This will be evidenced by quality assurance, inspection and the outcomes for children and families
Priority action W7	Review and strengthen supervision policy and practice to ensure all workforce benefit from strength based reflective supervision, management oversight support and focus on quality.	Timely and high-quality supervision evidenced through regular quality assurance audits.

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<p>Priority action W8</p>	<p>Commission a bespoke management and leadership development programme to support all managers in children’s social care to support current and future managers to develop their skills in leading the development of team culture and practice.</p>	<p>Improved retention of managers and leaders of children’s social care in Bridgend</p> <p>Improved retention and recruitment of children’s social care staff</p> <p>Consistently high quality and performance from well-managed and led social work teams</p>
<p>Priority action W9</p>	<p>Implement evidence-based mechanisms to ensure that reflective practice is embedded including communities of practice and action learning sets.</p>	<p>High quality strength practice and outcomes for children and families which benefit from peer led practice reflection</p> <p>A well-supported, motivated workforce who feel well supported in the time required for reflective practice.</p>
<p>Priority action W10</p>	<p>Focus on well-being through implementing a tiered approach to ensure timely and effective trauma informed support to workforce including through effective line management support, peer support and timely access to specialist support where needed.</p>	<p>Low levels of sickness absence for reasons related to workforce stress</p> <p>Low turnover rates/ high levels of retention as staff feel supported in their work.</p>
<p>Priority action W11</p>	<p>Work to implement the most effective recruitment process including drawing on marketing expertise to enhance campaigns and ensure the most efficient selection processes.</p>	<p>Increased number of applicants for children’s social care roles.</p> <p>Efficient processes for recruitment which lower levels of attrition.</p>

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Theme 2 -Strength based practice which supports children and families to stay together (where possible) and safeguards children form harm (P).

Action	Strategic Action	Measure of Success
<p>Priority action P1</p>	<p>Undertake an option appraisal of strength- based models of social work practice and develop a business case for the implementation of the practice model which will best deliver the purpose to support children and families to stay together (where possible) and safeguard children from harm. The model of practice will build on strengths within the Bridgend operating model of locality hubs. The preferred model will enable:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationship-based, systemic and solutions-focused practice • Higher proportion of social worker time invested in direct work with family members. • Strengthened relationships with specialist services such as mental health, domestic abuse and substance misuse services, exploring how these can be integrated into teams around the family • Consistency of social worker, promoting longer term relationships and reduced likelihood of children and families having to repeat their story. 	<p>A model of practice is agreed with a clear evidence base which is understood by the workforce and is clearly evident in practice as evidenced by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality assurance • Outcomes for children and families • Independent evaluation

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<p>Priority action P2</p>	<p>Systematically implement preferred model of practice ensuring that all mechanisms are in place to support this including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership by senior managers at every level • Policies and procedures • Decision making processes • Supervision and case direction • Practice leadership positions, coaching and mentoring • Systems of quality assurance • Operating model • Training and development programme • Case management system and business support processes • Celebration and show-casing good practice and progress 	<p>Measures as above with progressed mapped through in-depth independent diagnostics on an annual basis.</p>
<p>Priority action P3</p>	<p>Implement an evidenced based framework to enable practitioners the potential for safe reunifications with families for children who become care experienced.</p>	<p>The numbers of children who are reunified with their families Qualitative review on outcomes for children following evaluation</p>
<p>Priority action P4</p>	<p>Commission a programme of independent detailed quality assurance to provide a thorough assessment of the strengths and areas for development in Bridgend children’s social care services to inform the practice development programme and the Council, and partnership quality assurance programmes.</p>	<p>Quality assurance reports</p>

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<p>Priority action P5</p>	<p>Following completion of action P4, develop a series of practice development plans, where appropriate with partners, for key service areas including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MASH and IAA • The threshold between early help and safeguarding • Children with Disabilities • Transition • Care Experienced Children <p>The practice development plans will include priorities for policy development, decision making processes, training and development.</p>	<p>Development plans for key areas which are able to demonstrate progress through follow up quality assurance work at agreed timescales.</p>
<p>Priority action P6</p>	<p>Ensure that learning from Child Practice Reviews and other in-depth analysis is systematically embedded through learning, training and development and follow up quality assurance and review.</p>	<p>Outcomes for children and families Quality assurance reports</p>
<p>Priority action P7</p>	<p>Undertake a review of integrated family support service and family group conferencing, arrangements within Bridgend with a view to determining if this whole family approach can be expanded for working with more families.</p>	<p>Increased number of children and families benefitting from these interventions Outcomes for children and families</p>

Theme 3 - Evidence based services and interventions (S)

Action	Strategic Action	Measure of Success
Priority action S1	Develop an updated commissioning strategy for family support services and interventions to ensure the optimal range of commissioned and Council provided services to meet the needs and interventions set out in care and support and child protection plans	Commissioning strategy approved by Cabinet which demonstrates an analysis of need, clear evidence based and commissioning intention
Priority action S2	Complete the establishment of the children’s assessment hub at Brynmenyn, reviewing the service model as part of the ambition to ensure the right multi-agency therapeutic input including access to psychological assessments where required.	Outcomes for children who are assessed through the hub through effective long-term care plans which meet their needs and reduce unplanned changes of placement
Priority action S3	Working with regional partners in Cwm Taf Morgannwg ensure there is sufficient quantity and quality of flexible provision for children who’s needs can not be met in standard residential or fostering provision. This planning will be informed by the regional market stability plan which will analyse need and set out requirements for service development.	Sufficiency of supply of accommodation care and support – children are supported in regulated settings (no un-regulated placements) and reduction in the need for children to move out of the region to have their needs met for reasons of sufficiency.
Priority action S4	Develop a commissioning strategy for the provision of accommodation, care and support services for children with disabilities, working closely with education	Commissioning strategy with analysis of need and clear plans to meet the accommodation, care and support needs of children with disabilities.

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	and health partners to ensure integrated models for short and long term care provision.	Outcomes for children and young people
Priority action S5	Develop a commissioning strategy with key partners to meet the accommodation, care and support needs of care experienced children and young people and care leavers	Commissioning strategy with analysis of need and clear plans to meet the accommodation, care and support needs of care experienced children and young people and care leavers. Outcomes for children and young people.
Priority action S6	Work with national and regional partners through the National Fostering Framework to increase the numbers of Bridgend foster families, including carers who have additional skills and experience in caring for children who would otherwise require residential care, or are transitioning from such provision. The work to increase the numbers of Bridgend foster carers should consider the most effective recruitment and retention strategies as well as the range of support for foster carers from the Council.	Bridgend children with fostering in their care plan are able to have their needs met by Bridgend foster carers unless there is a specific need identified for an independent foster carer, or a foster carer who lives out of the Bridgend area.
Priority action S7	Explore innovative and creative solutions including the use of direct payments and family help services as part of care and support arrangements in children's services teams.	Increased uptake of direct payments across children's services. Review of models for family help and support and commissioned service in place if the review demonstrates a need. Improved outcomes for children and families.

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Priority action S8	Enhance pathways between children’s social care and substance misuse services, domestic abuse services, mental health services (for adults and children) and third sector organisations. Explore opportunities for integrated teams and provision.	Improved outcomes for children and families where substance misuse, mental health and domestic abuse is evident.
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Theme 4 - Seamless partnership and working and business systems at an operational and strategic level (B)

Action	Strategic Action	Measure of Success
Priority action B1	Ensure that senior health, education, housing, NHS and partners work with children’s social care services strategically and operationally to deliver the priorities in this plan. In delivering this action, existing Bridgend children’s partnerships will be reviewed to ensure the most effective set of arrangements for joint and integrated working.	Effective multi-agency strategic partnerships for children and families in Bridgend in which key partners at a senior level are meaningfully involved in developing practice, services and improving outcomes.
Priority action B2	Building on the MASH partnership model, develop business cases for integrated multi-professional locality teams to meet the needs of children and families with care and support needs, children with disabilities and child protection needs. Models that will explored will include integration of mental health professionals, substance misuse workers and specialist therapists.	Improved outcomes for children and families achieved through seamless teams around the child and family. Less ‘hand offs’, waiting times for services referred to and children and families tell their stories once.
Priority action B3	Working with partners regionally and nationally ensure that children’s social care teams have an effective case management IT system which enables integrated working and supports strength based practice and the safeguarding and protection of children.	‘Fit for purpose’ IT system which: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improves the quality of working experience for staff • enables information sharing between professionals • Supports improved outcomes for children and families

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Priority action B4	Enhance the use of business intelligence within children’s social care teams, through live performance dashboards which support safe and effective practice and management oversight and decision making.	Demonstrable use of dashboards Improved performance against key measures Improved outcomes for children
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Theme 5 – Listening to and Acting on the Voice of Children and Families (V)

Action	Strategic Action	Measure of Success
Priority action V1	Develop an engagement and involvement framework so children and young people have an opportunity to become meaningfully involved in all aspects of the work of children’s social care in Bridgend. This will build on existing good practice such as involvement in interview panels and tender evaluations.	The involvement of children and young people is clearly evident in all strategies and service development proposals.
Priority action V2	Ensure that the quality and effectiveness of practice is understood through the lens of the experience of the children and families who we work with and for.	Quality assurance processes meaningful embed the experience of children and families using a range of mechanisms to capture their voice and using the outcomes of quality assurance to drive improvements.
Priority action V3	Develop a Corporate Parenting Strategy which is led by the children and young people for whom the Council is their corporate parent, ensuring all parts of the Council and partner agencies understand what matters to care experienced children and young people.	Cabinet approve a corporate parenting strategy which clearly demonstrates what matters to care experienced children and young people in all aspects of their lives. The outcomes in the strategy are measurable and key partners are held to account by care experienced children and the Cabinet Corporate Parenting Committee for their achievement.

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Priority action V4	Develop a parent's participation charter setting so the experience of the families who work with children's social care is understood and used enhanced practices and interventions.	Experience of parents who children's social care work with is understood and any findings acted upon.
Priority action V5	Celebrate the achievements of our children and families with an annual celebration event.	The achievements of children and families are clearly valued and can inspire others to achieve their potential.