

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
REPORT TO CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE
2 MARCH 2022

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR SOCIAL SERVICES AND WELLBEING
UPDATE ON THE REMODELLING OF CHILDREN'S RESIDENTIAL SERVICES AND
THE BRIDGEND FOSTERING SERVICE

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Corporate Parenting Committee with an update regarding the remodelling of Children's Residential Services and to provide updated information about Bridgend Foster Care service provision and developments that are underway.

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:-**

- **Supporting a successful sustainable economy** – taking steps to make the county borough a great place to do business, for people to live, work, study and visit, and to ensure that our schools are focussed on raising the skills, qualifications and ambitions for all people in the county borough.
- **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 In February 2018 Children's Social Care reported to Cabinet on the work that had been undertaken as part of the Remodelling of Children's Residential Services in Bridgend.
- 3.2 Feedback from staff engagement sessions undertaken at that time identified a number of issues with the service model and the way the homes were structured, including:

- A lack of control over resident 'mix' due to age restrictions of each home and lack of placement options.
- No alternatives to residential placements for those with complex needs.
- Insufficient move-on facilities resulting in longer residential placements than is necessary.
- Young people who are not ready for transition being placed in Newbridge House, as there are no other options available.
- No emergency beds – existing homes cannot be used for emergency placements as this is not included in their Statement of Purpose.
- Layout of the homes not encouraging a positive, psychologically informed environment.
- Staff only able to provide minimal outreach support.
- Reservations regarding services' ability to achieve certain outcomes meaning a high level of Out of County and Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) placements.
- Children being sent far away from their home area.

3.3 Other issues identified at that time included:

- The need for a model which maximised the number of stable and safe accommodation options for young people leaving care.
- The numbers and cost of children who were being placed in high cost Out of County accommodation.

3.4 The Key elements of the new model included:

- **The Hub (Maple Tree House)** which consisted of two emergency beds and four assessment beds. Based at Newbridge House this service would allow for support to be provided in a timely way and facilitate move-on to another placement option that best meets the young person's need. There would be therapeutic staff on-site and outreach support workers who could provide additional support to young people, families and carers.
- **Medium/Long Term Unit (Sunny Bank)** that would provide a four bed home to young people who need a higher level of intensive support before they were able to move on to one of the other placement options available.
- **Supported Lodgings** providing a placement for young people who are not yet ready for independent living, that does not have the same level of regulation as a foster placement, but provides the individual with a more structured family type environment.
- **Supported Living** to provide increased move-on accommodation for young people in placements prior to their 18th birthday. This would reduce delay in young people moving out from residential care and prevent young people presenting as homeless on their 18th birthday.
- **Therapeutic Services** that were readily available to support young people, including the recruitment of a Clinical Psychologist and Senior Practitioner Social Worker. The vision was for this service to expand to include Placement Support Workers and potentially a therapist with a play therapy background.
- **Transitional Foster Carers (4-6)** recruited who could act as a step down for young people who were leaving residential care, before they were placed in a long-term family placement.

3.5 In addition to the remodelling work undertaken, Children's Social Care also have two Residential Homes to support disabled children.

- **Harwood House** which can support three young children/young people (mixed gender) within the age range of 8-19 years with complex needs, which include a learning disability or a disability diagnosis such as Autism.
- **Bakers Way** providing support to children with a disability and their families to enjoy appropriate and safe short breaks supporting them to remain living together. The service can offer a short break placement for children with complex medical needs who are cared for by appropriately trained staff.

3.6 In January 2019 Children's Social Care reported to Corporate Parenting Committee on the Remodelling of Fostering Services.

3.7 It was anticipated that the work would benefit the population of Care Experienced children, by providing improved placement choice, improved placement matching and more local placements. In addition it was identified that it would achieve cost savings contributing to the Directorate's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).

3.8 The Recommendations were:

- The Fostering Service was to be separated into two distinct areas; one with responsibility for connected persons foster carers and one with responsibility for general foster carers.
- The existing five liaison carer roles were to be maintained, with one being dedicated to connected persons carers and the other four to general foster carers.
- In the short term, the Skills to Foster Course would be re-shaped to align with the directorate wide training programme.
- In the longer term, it was proposed that consideration was given to strengthening Bridgend County Borough Council's (BCBC) in-house training for foster carers, through the development and delivery of in-house courses.
- To be competitive with IFA's it was proposed that BCBC needs to pay fees to general foster carers at an earlier stage in their fostering career. The recommendation was for them to receive a fee post approval, with the expectation they complete a core training programme within their first year.
- Introduction of a £250 bonus for a foster carers who refer a friend to Bridgend and who goes on to be approved and receive a placement.
- Implement a new process to review all IFA placements that have been in place less than 16 weeks.
- The Permanence Social Workers to be transferred to work within the Fostering Team where it was identified their role had a "better fit".
- To support the recruitment of Foster Carers, a Development Officer post and an additional Social Worker to undertake Foster Carer Assessments. Targets were set for additional carers to be recruited (2019/20 – 7, 2020/21 – 8 and 2021/22 – 9).

4. Current situation/proposal

Residential Services

- 4.1 In line with the paper presented to Cabinet in 2018 Residential Services have been remodelled, with Sunny Bank now offering Medium to Long Term Placements to children and young people aged 8-17 years. The Service has provided a safe and stable home to a number of young people, two of whom have lived there for over five years, one for four years and one for three years. Of these young people one is transitioning to supported accommodation in March 2022, one is transitioning to Ty Mor in March 2022, and placement searches are currently being undertaken to identify a Foster Carer for one child to step down from Residential Care.
- 4.2 Maple Tree House (MTH) has been open since 2018 offering a two bed emergency unit and a four bed assessment unit. It offers a therapeutic environment for children and young people, using a trauma informed approach to provide the most effective support possible, enabling them to understand their individual circumstances, develop resilience and self-care skills. The initial proposals were for there to be an on-site psychologist who would be able to be readily available to support young people and a Social Worker to undertake the Assessment. Following unsuccessful attempts to recruit to the psychologist post, a review was undertaken and a decision made to implement a model which utilised the services of an on-site Behaviour Analyst. The Behaviour Analyst undertakes a complex assessment for each young person in the Assessment Unit that will consider their Functional Living Skills, identifying areas for development, a young persons therapeutic needs and will also set out recommendations in terms of placement options. In addition to this the Behaviour Analyst will analyse the young people's behaviours and develop bespoke protocols to support staff intervention and undertake direct therapy work with young people. The aim, during a young persons time at Maple Tree House is to provide them with consistency and routines and to enable them to develop trusting relationships that will support their recovery from trauma allowing them to gain the maximum benefit of any therapy that they receive. The Service are currently working with Dr Jennifer Austin from the University of South Wales who is looking to undertake research on the impact of behaviour analysis on young people who have experienced trauma.
- 4.3 In April 2020 The Behaviour Clinic commenced in their role to support the implementation of this model until the Service was able to recruit a Behaviour Analyst. Since this time the service has faced a number of challenges linked with Non-Compliance with Regulatory Requirements and the Covid Pandemic, with its impact on staffing and the young people who were living at MTH. Despite these challenges the service achieved a positive inspection outcome in October 2020 and the understanding and confidence of the staff team has continued to improve.
- 4.4 The next step is for the new Residential Hub to be built in Brynmenyn (re-locating Maple Tree House) and I am pleased to be able to report that the old Brynmenyn Primary School has been demolished and the site cleared in readiness for construction work to commence during spring 2022 with an anticipated completion date in January/February 2023. Consultation with young people played a significant role in the initial development of the building and we continue to engage with young people regarding the opportunity to develop the outside space (which will be quite considerable at the new build). The new building will allow for even greater

opportunities to engage with young people to support them in a positive environment. Within this building there will also be office accommodation where the fostering and placements team will be co-located to support with identifying the right placement options for a young person following their time in the residential home.

Supported Accommodation

- 4.5 The role of Transitional Foster Carers was developed which identified that six foster carers were required, due to the demands of the role and the need to have an opportunity post placement for a short period of recovery and to have two carers available at any time to support other Transitional Carers who had a young person in placement. However, the service was only able to recruit three transitional foster carers. Two of these later made a decision to step away from that role as they wished to provide on-going care to a young person who they were looking after and one choosing to leave the role of foster carer altogether. At the present time BCBC do not have any Transitional Foster Carers. However, work has been undertaken to review the role and develop a policy which sets out in detail the expectations and also the support available. The service are currently working with Golley Slater on a targeted recruitment campaign for Transitional Foster Carers that began in February 2022.
- 4.6 Development of the therapeutic support for young people was at the heart of the remodelling work. As noted above, following unsuccessful recruitment for the psychologist, the service has now employed a Behaviour Analyst. To further support the development of this model, nine members of staff and one liaison foster carer have been offered places on the “Practical Skills in Applied Behaviour Analysis” course at University of South Wales providing them with the opportunity, once they successfully complete the course, to undertake a competency based assessment and become a Registered Behaviour Technician with the Behaviour Analyst Certification Board. This course will provide attendees with knowledge and skills for implementing basic behavioural analytic strategies, and strategies to help young people acquire important communication, social and academic skills, how to determine some reasons why challenging behaviours occur, and how to replace problem behaviours with more appropriate skills.
- 4.7 Since 2018 the Service has identified the need to develop a new residential “pop up” service that can be made operational at short notice to provide accommodation to a young person/young adult who, due to their complex needs, cannot be placed alongside others. This provision could provide, for example, an alternative to secure accommodation. Whenever the young person moves on from this accommodation the service will be “popped down” with staff being re-deployed across the other residential homes to provide cover for staff absences. This service will be registered as a children’s home but will also be able to support young people up to the age of 25 years. BCBC have worked closely with Valleys to Coast (V2C) who identified a property where this service could be based. In 2021 V2C, supported by BCBC, successfully applied for Discretionary Integrated Care Funding (ICF) Grant, in order to renovate the property with all works being completed in January 2022. BCBC also secured Safe Accommodation revenue funding for 2021/22 and has re-aligned budget to allow for the recruitment of permanent staff for the service. We are currently in the process of recruiting staff and preparing all required documentation in order to apply to Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) for registration.

Foster Wales Bridgend

- 4.8 In December 2021 the re-structure of the Fostering Service in Bridgend was completed. Bridgend Fostering is now divided into:
- General Fostering and Placements – Recruitment, assessing and supporting all general foster carers (including transitional foster carers) and placement services.
 - Kinship and Permanence – Assessing and supporting Connected Persons Foster Carers, Permanence, “When I am Ready” carers, Supported Lodgings and Re-unification workers.
- 4.9 The service currently have 5 Liaison Carers, one of whom is a Connected Person Foster Carer. This service is currently being reviewed and further consideration being given to their role and its development including issues such as Out of Hours support for foster carers. As part of this work the liaison carers developed a questionnaire for the service to send to all foster carers as part of a programme of engagement to ensure that we provide a high quality service to them and ensure that their voice is heard in any service improvements made.
- 4.10 Bridgend Foster Care have re-developed the pre-approval training for prospective foster carers to meet the challenges of the pandemic that have prevented face to face learning. With the permission of the Fostering Network, the training, known as Skills to Foster, has been adapted into a workbook that can be delivered remotely. In addition to this the workbooks have been tailored to the needs of the prospective carers, with one workbook to meet the needs of general foster carers and the other to meet the needs kinship carers. The Kinship Carer workbook incorporates the recommendations of the ‘Guide for the offer of Special Guardianship Support in Wales’ (published by Association for Fostering and Adoption Cymru (AFA Cymru) in 2020) to ensure that connected persons who care for children are aware of all the options available to them. We have also drafted a training workbook for those connected persons who care for children and make private law applications to court for Special Guardianship Orders and who do not want to be considered as foster carers, to ensure that they have access to the same vital information to aid them in caring for another’s child and making informed choices.
- 4.11 Post-Approval Learning and Development Framework For Foster Carers - The purpose of the Framework is to provide a basis for a national approach that can underpin a more consistent approach to learning and development for foster carers across Wales. It is hoped that the development of a more consistent approach to post-approval training for foster carers will provide a platform for fostering services to exploit the potential benefits of regional working, should they choose. The Framework recognises the importance of providing an individualised approach to learning and development for foster carers, driven by circumstances, strengths, vulnerabilities and the needs of the children they foster. Learning opportunities can be provided through formal training courses, but also through online learning, peer mentoring, self-learning or through practice learning (eg through one to one work with a therapist in relation to a specific child). The key issue is: “How did the learning/development activity contribute to your capacity as a foster carer to meet the needs and improve outcomes for the child in your care?” A national launch took place in November 2019 with over 70 stakeholders from across the Cwm Taf Morgannwg (CTM) region, including each Local Authority in attendance. Briefing sessions have been rolled out across local authority fostering teams, members of foster panel and

to the foster carers themselves regarding the framework being implemented. The framework is being phased in gradually across the CTM region in line with Annual reviews due over the year.

- 4.12 The proposal regarding the fee payment to all general foster carers was successfully implemented. A draft eligibility and Fostering Allowances Policy has now been developed which would allow Connected Persons Carers to be assessed against the criteria and also being entitled to an “Additional Allowance” (formerly Fee).
- 4.13 The Service did introduce the £250 reward scheme for carers who “refer a friend” however, this has had very limited impact on the number of referrals received.
- 4.14 All new IFA placements are reviewed by the placement team within 16 weeks of the placement being made. However, it has been identified that a more formal multi-agency process is needed. The Terms of Reference for the Accommodation and Permanence Panel are currently being reviewed and consideration being given to reviewing these placements within this meeting. At the present time the number of children and young people who are placed with IFA foster carers is 45 which represents a significant reduction from 70 on the 31st March 2020.
- 4.15 Permanence is now an integrated part of the Fostering Service. The Special Guardianship Policy was reviewed and updated in November 2020 and a new separate Special Guardianship Order Financial Policy was introduced in June 2021.
- 4.16 The Development Officer post was initially introduced to the Service, but following a review of options a decision was made for Bridgend County Borough to join its regional partners offering a Regional Front door offering one point of contact for foster care enquiries. As part of this service there is a regional marketing officer who, along with BCBC Communications Team lead on foster carer recruitment.

In September 2021 Maethau Cymru/Foster Wales was launched with BCBC fostering service being named Maethau Pen y Bont/Bridgend Fostering and the Fostering Website updated.

In January 2022 Bridgend Fostering launched its Social Media pages on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

Bridgend Foster Care/ Foster Bridgend

- 4.17 Bridgend Fostering Service continues to offer a wide range of fostering services for children who need to be Looked After and this includes carers who are able to offer care to children and young people who do not have a pre-existing relationship with and carers who are considered to be “connected persons”.
- 4.18 As at 23rd March 2021 within Bridgend Foster Care there were:
 - 99 approved Fostering households for general foster placements
 - 129 children placed with in-house general foster carers
 - 56 approved Connected Persons fostering households
 - 88 children placed with Connected Persons Foster Carers
 - 65 children placed with independent fostering agencies

- 4.19 Bridgend Fostering has faced significant challenges during 2020 due to the Covid 19 pandemic but during this time has sought to provide on-going support to carers.
- 4.20 In November 2019 funding was secured to recruit 4 re-unification workers whose main aims were to:
- support foster placements at risk of placement breakdown,
 - support children to transition into step down provision (from residential and out of county placements) and
 - support children to be reunified into the care of their birth family

During Quarters 1-3 of 2021/22 there were some notable outcomes achieved:

- 56 Referrals received
 - 26 placement Stability
 - 23 re-unification
 - 2 transition between placements
 - 4 inappropriate referrals
 - 11 cases where re-unification home has been achieved
 - 3 cases where support and intervention has contributed to a plan for Special Guardianship Order
 - 1 case which supported a grandmother to obtain a Child Arrangement Order
 - 1 case which supported a young person to transition to a Connected Person Foster Carer
 - 6 cases where placement stability was achieved
 - The number of children having 3 + placement moves as at 31st December 2020 was 7.12% (6.72% 31st December 2019).
- 4.21 As part of Children's Services re-modelling of Residential Care in 2018 it was proposed that 6 Transitional Foster Carers would be recruited who would act as a step-down for young people coming out of the residential units before being placed in a long-term family or independent placement. They would be therapeutically trained and therefore able to address issues that occurred as a result of a transition into a different environment, increasing the chances that the long-term placement will be successful and reducing multiple placement breakdowns and reliance on out-of-county placements.

The scheme was only successful in recruiting 3 Transitional Foster Carers who were approved at the beginning of 2019 and this did have an impact upon the overall success. Since this time one of the Transitional Carers resigned and another made the decision to step down from her role as a transitional carer in order to continue to provide a long term placement to a child who was in her care.

In January 2021 a review of this scheme was undertaken, with one of the previous transitional foster carers central to and informing our discussions/decisions and we are currently seeking to recruit an additional 5 carers. It is recognised that the Transitional Foster Care Scheme plays a key role within the wider Placements Service to reduce the number of children who need to be placed outside of BCBC and to prevent children and young people experiencing numerous placement breakdowns.

- 4.22 Bridgend's Fostering Team is also going through a re-structure at the present time with a view to continue to provide timely and high quality support to our general foster

carers, whilst promoting a focus on permanence options for children and young people within their own extended family.

5. Effect upon policy framework and procedure rules

5.1 There are no effects on the policy framework or procedure rules arising from this report.

6. Equality Act 2010 implications

6.1 The protected characteristics identified within the Equality Act, Socio-economic Duty and the impact on the use of the Welsh language have been considered in the preparation of this report. As a public body in Wales, the Council must consider the impact of strategic decisions, such as the development or the review of policies, strategies, services and functions. This is an information report, therefore it is not necessary to carry out an Equality Impact assessment in the production of this report. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable equality impacts as a result of this report.

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

7.1 As stated above stakeholders have advocated for greater collaboration across all sectors, to address strategically the growing concerns about the overall effectiveness and sustainability of fostering services in Wales. The creation of a National Framework was seen as a means of ensuring that known concerns were addressed and of introduced greater consistency without sacrificing the acknowledged strengths and diversity of local accountability within the existing system.

7.2 Both the regional and local work programmes seek to support BCBC Children's Services` aim that where children and young people are looked after this is done in placements that are within the local authority boundary enabling them maintain links with and access their school, GP, dentist, friends and family. These work programmes also recognise the impact on Health and Education when children and young people are placed outside of BCBC.

7.3 From the outset one of the key drivers in the development of a National Fostering Framework has been the recognition that Local Authorities across Wales did not have sufficient numbers of foster carers, with sufficient support and skills to meet the increasing demand for placements for children and young people with increasingly complex needs. The work that has and continues to be undertaken is focussed on this to prevent any further deterioration in the ability of Local Authorities to meet this demand.

8. Financial implications

8.1 There are no specific financial implications arising directly out of this report.

9. Recommendation

9.1 That the Corporate Parenting Committee notes the updated information contained within the report and supports the further development of the Bridgend Foster Care service as set out above.

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March 2021

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Background documents: None