

# BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

## REPORT TO CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE

2 MARCH 2022

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

#### INDEPENDENT REVIEWING SERVICE (IRO) REPORT

#### 1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide a report to Corporate Parenting Committee in line with The Independent Reviewing Officers Guidance (Wales) 2004.

#### 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.

- 2.2 This report is connected to all corporate well-being objectives relating to care experienced children, its central objective being to achieve best outcomes for those children and young people through high quality care planning, which in turn helps to ensure they live in stable placements with plans for permanence in place. The care planning for these children and young people is integral to Welsh Government's commitment to reduce the number of care experienced children and young people in Wales.

#### 3. Background

- 3.1 The appointment of Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO's) by Local Authorities is a legal requirement and their core functions are governed by legislation and guidance as follows:
- The Adoption and Children Act 2002.
  - The Independent Reviewing Officers Guidance (Wales) 2004.

3.2 The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) service has an authoritative role, in assuring the quality of care planning is achieved. The Independent Reviewing Officers Guidance (Wales) 2004 states that the Independent Reviewing Service report must identify good practice but must also identify issues for further development, including those where urgent action is required. The guidance urges the Local Authority to make effective use of the reports from its IRO service so that it can be satisfied that its services can achieve best outcomes for the children and young people concerned.

#### **4. Current situation/proposal**

4.1 The Independent Reviewing Service report, **Appendix 1**, covers the work of the IRO service from April 2020 to March 2021. The report contains performance information in respect of the statutory reviewing of children who are Looked After, including children with plans for Adoption and Young People with Leaving Care LAC/Pathway Plans (under 18) by Bridgend County Borough Council. It also includes information on children subject of a child protection plan and reviews of these plans at Child Protection Case Conferences.

4.2 The report also includes information that relates to regulatory requirements in respect of resolution of case disputes, IRO caseloads, participation and consultation of young people in their Reviews, challenges and achievements in the reporting period, and service priorities for 2020-2021.

4.3 In addition to the guidance referred to in paragraph 3.1 additional IRO guidance and practice standards were introduced at the beginning of 2019 by the Association for Fostering and Adoption (AFA) Cymru. IRO's have worked to improve tracking and monitoring as advised within the Practice Standards and Good Practice Guide.

4.4 As described in the report the IRO's chaired/reviewed 195 Initial Child Protection Case Conferences between April 2020 and March 2021 compared to 235 in the previous year. A total of 518 Review Child Protection Case Conferences between April 2020 and March 2021 were convened compared to 595 in the previous reporting period and 1,159 Looked After Child review meetings were held between April 2020 and March 2021 compared with 1,191 the previous reporting period.

4.5 Following each meeting the IRO completes a quality assurance audit. The Audit is available to the Social Worker and the Team Manager to notify them of outstanding work/actions. The audit supports the IRO in the tracking of the case and supports the identification of good practice and areas for improvement. The audit also supports the Team Manager when carrying out supervision with the Social Worker.

4.6 Whilst the IRO service has worked to improve the consultation document for children and young people, challenges remain in encouraging them to complete it. Similarly, children and young people's participation at both their Child Protection Review and Looked After Child Reviews is hugely important and should always be considered an area for improvement. In Bridgend, despite virtual platforms assisting in communication with children and young people, proportionately it is only a small number of children and young people who are attending their meetings.

- 4.7 Consequently this is a priority and the team are committed to developing more creative ways of engaging with and encouraging participation of all children and young people. However it must be recognised in many cases it is not appropriate for the child to attend the Child Protection Conference. The IRO Service Manager has requested the Training Department facilitate joint training between the IRO Service and the Safeguarding Locality Social Worker teams to look at creative ways we can include children.
- 4.8 The IRO service continues to work with the safeguarding teams, education, the Health Visiting services, School Nurses and Midwifery Services to improve practice around child protection conferences. The next stage is to work at improving the quality of Looked After Children reviews on a multi-agency basis. The IRO Service Manager in this period has facilitated training on the Wales Safeguarding Procedures and the Outcomes Model.
- 4.9 Continuous service improvement is always sought after and as such the IRO Service aims to continue to have a greater impact in terms of improving the quality of the lives of care experienced children and young people. The IRO Service Action Plan is incorporated towards the end of the report and reflects the areas of focus for improvement over the 12 months following the timescale of the reporting period for the service which will be under constant review. It is contained at the end of the annual report.

## **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 The implementation of the duties and responsibilities under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act (SSWBA) 2014, in turn, 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 well-being 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 well-being 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** – The IRO Service has a legal requirement to assure the quality of care planning is achieved for children and young people enabling them to reach their full potential in life.
- **Prevention** –the IRO service works closely with safeguarding practitioners and Early Help services in developing a comprehensive outcome focused plan for the child or young person, to maximise their opportunities and identify focused support at the earliest stage.
- **Integration** – the implementation of the SSWBA requires local authorities to work with partners, to ensure care, support and protection of all and more specifically its most vulnerable. The report evidences consultation between professionals and partner agencies with a specific focus to the safe care planning and protection for children and young people within the County Borough of Bridgend.
- **Collaboration** – This is currently managed in order to provide the best possible intervention for children and young people across Bridgend.
- **Involvement** – the key stakeholders are the care experienced children and young people of Bridgend. The IRO service’s engagement with these individuals is essential to ensure their voices are heard and included in their meetings. The IRO service speak to children and young people and utilise consultation documents, quality monitoring forms, complaints process and advocacy services to support this. The provision of accessible information and advice helps to ensure that the voice of children and young people is heard and responded to.

## **8. Financial implications**

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

## **9. Recommendation**

9.1 It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Committee notes this report and the IRO Service Action plan

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**Background documents:**

None