

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CABINET

11 APRIL 2023

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR SOCIAL SERVICES AND WELLBEING CARE INSPECTORATE WALES (CIW) IMPROVEMENT CHECK VISIT TO CHILDRENS SOCIAL CARE SERVICES 21 - 24 NOVEMBER 2022

1. Purpose of report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to present to Cabinet the Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) report of their improvement check visit to Bridgend County Borough Council Children's Services during November 2022, and to recommend that Cabinet considers the report and comments on the associated updated Action Plan.

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 CIW carried out a first improvement check of Children's Services in Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) in November 2022, this visit followed a Performance Evaluation Inspection (PEI) during May 2022. The improvement check focused on the progress made in the following areas identified for improvement during the Performance Evaluation Inspection in May 2022:

- **People – voice and control**

| Areas of improvement identified from PEI - May 2022 | Progress identified from improvement check - November 2022 |
|--|--|
| Seeking, hearing (including the use of direct work) and recording the voice of the child | Significant improvements made and must be sustained |

| | |
|---|---|
| People consistently feel listened to and treated with dignity and respect | Some improvements made; further action is required |
| Workforce recruitment and retention | Some improvements made; further action is required |
| Management oversight | Significant improvements made and must be sustained |
| Staff support, supervision, and training | Some improvements made; further action is required |

- **Prevention**

| Areas of improvement identified from PEI - May 2022 | Progress identified from improvement check - November 2022 |
|--|---|
| Provision of information, advice, and assistance (IAA). People receive the right support at the right time | Some improvements made; further action is required |

- **Well-being**

| Areas of improvement identified from PEI - May 2022 | Progress identified from improvement check - November 2022 |
|---|---|
| Compliance with statutory responsibilities | Some improvements made; further action is required |
| Arrangements for supervised contact between children and their families | Some improvements made further action is needed |
| Identification and response to child exploitation | Some improvements made further action is required |

- **Partnership and Integration**

| Areas of improvement identified from PEI - May 2022 | Progress identified from improvement check - November 2022 |
|--|---|
| Thresholds for early help and statutory services | Some improvements made further action is required |
| Learning from reviews and audits | Some improvements made further action is required |

3.2 The scope of the inspection included:

- Evaluation of the experience of people following the PEI undertaken in May 2022.
- Evaluation of the experience and outcomes people achieve through their contact with social services.
- Consideration of evidence of improvement made following the PEI undertaken in May 2022, and plans for service development and improvement.

- 3.3 The date of the improvement check was 21-24 November 2022, and the inspection team consisted of a lead inspector and four inspectors.
- 3.4 The inspection team reviewed the experiences of people's journey through care and support through review and tracking of their social care record. The team reviewed 25 cases, with more detailed case tracking of 6 of these cases. This included interviewing the allocated case worker and their manager, other professionals involved, and where possible having conversations with the person in receipt of social care services, their family or carers.
- 3.5 The Inspection team :
- Spoke with 46 Authority employees (including some agency staff) from across various departments
 - Spoke with 3 people using services
 - Spoke with a partner organisation and a care provider
 - Spoke with the Chief Executive of BCBC
 - Spoke with the BCBC Cabinet Member for Social Services and Early Help
 - Spoke with the Chair of the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Safeguarding Board
 - Requested and reviewed supporting documentation provided by the Authority
 - Observed the Improving Outcomes for Children Board
 - Observed two BCBC Overview and Scrutiny Committees
 - Listened to a presentation delivered by the Authority's Senior Management Team, which focused on the Authority's improvement journey following the PEI and the current position of the Authority's Children's Services.
- 3.6 CIW confirmed that a report of their findings would be published on their website and provided to the Minister for Health and Social Services.

4. Current situation/proposal

- 4.1 The CIW Improvement check letter/report is attached at **Appendix 1**.
- 4.2 CIW recognise that recruitment and retention has been and continues to be a significant issue in Bridgend Childrens Social Care, with a loss in experienced staff and reliance on high levels of agency and newly qualified social workers. CIW recognise that the workforce position remains fragile, and this remains a significant risk to the Authority achieving and sustaining improvements.

The Authority continues to experience high level of contacts and demand for children's social care services with increased complexity in needs, which the service is responding to within the context of increasing financial pressures.

CIW confirmed that the Authority must continue to assure itself of the priority status, pace, quality, delivery, and impact of its improvement activity.

4.3 Summary of findings

A summary of the main findings of the improvement check in the four main areas including strengths and areas for improvement can be found below:

People – Strengths

- Action has been taken to ensure the voice of the child is consistently sought and listened to
- Some assessments clearly articulated the complex family circumstances of some children, whilst maintaining the uniqueness of individual children
- The Authority continues to regard the rights of children with evidence of the active offer of independent advocacy
- There is improved engagement and involvement of care experienced children
- The offer of a carers assessment at the point of contact is made and recorded
- A review of direct payments has taken place with further engagement with individuals
- Workforce continues to be a priority for the Authority
- A leadership and management programme has been commissioned
- Staff continue to manage increasing volumes of work and increased complexity of need
- Staff feel supported by managers
- There has been some reduction in caseloads
- Staff have received 'Back to Basics' Training
- There are increased opportunities for staff to reflect and embed learning
- The 'Newly Qualified Social Worker - Supporting your First Three Year's in Practice' programme has been re-launched

4.4 People – Areas for Improvement

- The Authority must continue to work towards ensuring a sufficient and sustainable workforce, to consistently meet statutory responsibilities
- The Authority should continue to monitor the quality of social care records ensuring recording is strengthened, and a consistent approach taken.
- The Authority must ensure people consistently feel listened to and are treated with dignity and respect

4.5 Prevention - Strengths

- Quality assurance arrangements have been strengthened
- Additional resources into the IAA service have impacted positively
- The Authority and its partners respond promptly to meet the needs of children particularly where acute need and risk is identified
- A good range of early help and edge of care services are available
- An independent review of Childrens Services has been commissioned

4.6 Prevention – Areas for Improvement

- The Authority must continue to closely monitor the position of Children's Social Services and early help services and identify and take action to mitigate risks to achieving and sustaining improvement and compliance with statutory responsibilities
- The Authority should ensure systems are in place to provide all staff, with up to date information regarding availability and accessibility of early help services

- The Authority must ensure children are not placed in unregistered services and must continue to identify suitable, registered placements

4.7 Partnerships and Integration - Strengths

- Collaborative partnership working at operational and strategic levels
- Agencies working effectively together through child protection processes

4.8 Partnerships and Integration – Areas for Improvement

- The Authority must prioritise work to ensure children and families access the right support at the right time, with smooth access and transition between early help and statutory services

4.9 Wellbeing – Strengths

- The IAA service is more stable, contacts/referrals are screened within 24 hours, with improved management oversight
- Child protection conferences, and reviews of care experienced children, are held in statutory compliance
- Practitioner assessments show wider understanding of family context and focus on risk
- The Authority and partner agencies identify immediate learning from critical events and child practice reviews
- Evidence of young people, parents and carers being involved in safeguarding processes

4.10 Wellbeing - Areas for Improvement

- The Authority must maintain focus on ensuring compliance with all its statutory responsibilities
- The Authority must progress work as a matter of urgency to implement and embed consistent practice regarding responses to child exploitation
- The Authority must continue to closely monitor contact arrangements

Recommendations and Next Steps

- 4.11 During the PEI in May 2022 CIW identified a number of areas requiring improvement where they had significant concerns. At the improvement check in November 2022, CIW found that improvements had been made but further actions are needed, so it remains that the Authority's Childrens Services require improvement.
- 4.12 The Action Plan has been updated to reflect the areas where improvement has been made, and where the additional recommendations made by CIW in the Improvement check can be found. The updated Action Plan can be found at **Appendix 2**. The progress to implement the outstanding and additional areas for improvement and corresponding actions will continue to be overseen by the Improving Outcomes for Children Board and reported to the Member Advisory Panel and the Overview and

Scrutiny Committee. CIW have indicated they will continue to closely monitor the Authority's performance and progress in achieving the improvements required.

- 4.13 To ensure timely action to sustainably improve the areas for improvement, Cabinet approved a 3-year strategic plan for Children's Services in February 2022. The implementation of the priorities in the plan continues to be overseen by an Improving Outcomes for Children Board chaired by the Chief Executive and advised by an Independent Advisor. There is also a Member's Advisory Panel as part of the governance comprising of Group Leaders.
- 4.14 Evidence from local authorities who have been in similar positions in respect of children's social care is clear. When a local authority is on an improvement journey 3 years is a realistic timescale to progress from being a service where there are serious concerns to one that requires improvement (at the end of year 1) to adequate and then good performance. It is important that this is understood by the whole Council and that the impact on the whole Council is understood by all officers and Members of being a Local Authority that requires improvement in such a critical service area.
- 4.15 A stocktake of progress against the 3-year strategic plan will take place over the spring and summer of 2023 and a refreshed plan will be brought to Cabinet in September 2023. The refreshed plan will be informed by analytical work being progressed by the Institute of Public Care with the Council to develop a sustainability plan for children and families in Bridgend in which a service and financial strategy for how the Council works with children and families at risk in Bridgend is set out for consideration. This sustainability plan will be based on robust evidence of the most effective operating model and interventions in supporting children and families through focussed preventative services at the edge of statutory provision. It will be accompanied by a workforce plan and a financial strategy and revised action plan all of which will need to be delivered to achieve sustainably good outcomes for children and families.

5. Effect upon policy framework and procedure rules

- 5.1 There is no effect upon the policy framework and procedure rules.

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. The inspection team included a Welsh speaking inspector, enabling CIW to make the active offer of conducting parts of the inspection process in Welsh. 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. 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 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 Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 (SSWBA) focusses on sustainable prevention and well-being 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 – one of the four themes within the CIW inspection is Prevention. CIW have identified areas of strength for Prevention in their report. The areas for improvement are also included, and actions for improvement have been addressed within the updated Action Plan at **Appendix 2**.
- Integration – one of the four themes within the CIW inspection is Partnerships and Integration. CIW have identified areas of strength for Integration and Partnerships in their report. The areas for improvement are also included, and actions for improvement have been addressed within the updated Action Plan at **Appendix 2**. 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 refers to work with statutory partners.
- Collaboration – The collaborative approaches described in the report, are managed and monitored through various strategic and collaborative boards across Directorates and with partners, including the Childrens' Social Care Improving the Outcomes for Children Strategic Board.
- 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 Whilst there are no direct financial implications arising from this inspection report, there are a number of significant pressures that the Directorate has identified, particularly in the areas of workforce and service provision (placements) in children's social care which will need to continue to be considered as part of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy. The development of a sustainability plan as set out in paragraph 4.15 of this report will require dedicated short-term capacity, which may be funded through the repurposing of existing grant funding or may need to be considered as part of future Medium Term Financial Strategy and specific grant investment discussions.

9. Recommendations

- 9.1 It is recommended that Cabinet considers the CIW report on the improvement check of Bridgend's Children's Social Care Services and comments on the associated updated Action Plan.
- 9.2 It is recommended that Cabinet note the development of a sustainability plan to most effectively meet the needs of children and families in Bridgend as set out in paragraph 4.15 of this report.

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Background documents: None