

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING HELD
HYBRID IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER - CIVIC OFFICES, ANGEL STREET, BRIDGEND,
CF31 4WB ON THURSDAY, 20 JULY 2023 AT 10:00**

Present

Councillor J Gebbie – Chairperson

F D Bletsoe
W R Goode
HM Williams

JPD Blundell
M Lewis

HJ David
J E Pratt

N Farr
T Thomas

Officers:

Steve Berry	Corporate Parenting and Participation Officer
Raeanna Grainger	Independent Reviewing Service Manager
Claire Marchant	Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing

27. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

R J Collins and JC Spanswick

28. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

29. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting dated 19 April 2023, be approved as a true and accurate record.

30. INDEPENDENT REVIEWING SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT 2022-2023

The Group Manager IAA Service and Safeguarding submitted a report, that detailed the work undertaken by the Independent Reviewing Service between April 2022-March 2023, in line with The Independent Reviewing Officers Guidance (Wales) 2004.

The report set out the legislative framework that governs the work undertaken by the Independent Reviewing Service.

She explained that primarily, the Independent Reviewing Officer's (IRO) role is to ensure the child's care plan is appropriate and meeting their developing needs and, that they challenge any issues of delay in achieving the objectives of the care plan and/or any issues of delay. The role has a strong emphasis on quality assurance and challenging the local authority when they are not satisfied in areas of decision making.

The IRO's in Bridgend also undertake the chairing of Child Protection Conferences, where their role is to ensure professionals make important decisions based on evidence and safeguarding procedures. Most importantly explained the Group Manager IAA Service and Safeguarding, the IRO Service must ensure the child's voice is central to decision making and that they are informed of their rights and their circumstances.

There is a strong focus on qualitative data in the annual report and compliance rates, but also, strengthened processes and how the service has met the annual plan objectives.

The report further considers how the service has responded to increased demand and rising numbers of children subject to the Child Protection registration and what is being done to reduce this figure.

The report also sets out the improvements made in relation to the child's voice being central to decision making and how the significant increase in referrals to advocacy are supporting this.

The Group Manager IAA Service and Safeguarding stated that the updated Annual Plan could be read at the final section of the report in Appendix 1 to the covering report, and this highlighted the aims for the next reporting period.

Appendix 1 therefore covered the work of the IRO service from April 2022 to March 2023. The report contained performance information in respect of the statutory reviewing of children who are Care Experienced, including children with plans for Adoption and Young People with Leaving Care LAC/Pathway Plans (under 18) by Bridgend County Borough Council. It also included information on children subject of a child protection plan and reviews of these plans at Child Protection Case Conferences.

This report further included information that related 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 2023-2024.

The Group Manager IAA Service and Safeguarding outlined, that as described in the report the IRO's chaired/reviewed 406 (51% increase) Initial Child Protection Case Conferences between April 2022 and March 2023 compared to 200 the previous year. A total of 659 Review Child Protection Case Conferences (RCPC) between April 2022 and March 2023 were convened compared to 508 (23% increase) in the previous reporting period. All RCPCs were held within the statutory timescales. In this reporting period, 1,125 Care Experienced review meetings were held between April 2022 and March 2023 compared with 1,159 the previous year. This reduction is mainly as a result of greater placement stability.

She explained that 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.

Previous work had been undertaken to improve the consultation document for children and young people. However, very low response rates were still experienced. The introduction of Microsoft Teams has enabled a greater number of young people to attend their meetings, particularly their Care Experienced Review meetings. The introduction of Signs of Safety will place much greater emphasis on participation and it is expected that this will be reflected in the data.

The report did highlight a significant increase in referrals for advocacy which supports and captures the voice, wishes and feelings of the children and young people worked with.

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 partner agencies are included in the roll out of the Signs of Safety practice model and the training for this.

The Group Manager IAA Service and Safeguarding, assured that 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.

She also gave a power point presentation on the Independent Reviewing Service Annual Report for the above period, giving a resume for the benefit of Members, of the key points that came out of this, some of which are highlighted above.

The Chairperson thanked the Group Manager IAA Service and Safeguarding for the report, which she felt made for excellent reading. She then opened up the meeting for questions and these together with the responses of Officers can be located via the following [link](#)

RESOLVED: That the Corporate Parenting Committee noted the report and the IRO Service Action Plan.

31. **CORPORATE PARENTING DEVELOPMENT UPDATE**

The Corporate Parenting and Participation Officer presented an update report, to inform the Cabinet Committee of progress in relation to the corporate parenting activity. He stated that particular points to note, were that the Corporate Parenting Strategy had been launched and a professionals' engagement event had also taken place to undertake action planning for future work.

By way of some background, he informed Members that since he had been in post updates to the Committee had provided at meetings on the following key areas:-

- Establishing a shared vision for Corporate Parenting Responsibilities.
- Establishing a governance structure that supports the strategic and operational approach to Corporate Parenting.
- Establishing a Corporate Parenting Performance Framework.
- Establishing care experienced forums to provide our children and young people with a collective voice

The Corporate Parenting and Participation Officer then gave a resume of the work undertaken in respect of these areas as referenced in the report.

The Chairperson confirmed that the work the Corporate Parenting and Participation Officer had been carrying out since he had been in post, had been recognised as good practise within Welsh Government and that he would be developing guidance that would sit alongside our Corporate Parenting Strategy that would be used by other local authorities in Wales.

The Leader added that he hoped that as the above had been recognised by Welsh Government, then the work developed as part of this guidance would be financially supported by them. He also sought assurance that children and young people within the County Borough had 'a voice' when BCBC and its partners were considering policy changes. He was sure this was the case, as that had come through loud and clear at a recent Launch he had attended.

The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing assured Members this was the case as was evidenced at the Bridgend Youth Voice Forum.

She added that in the summer period, the Corporate Parenting and Participation Officer would be ensuring that there would be meaningful engagement undertaken with Children and young people, on the draft Sustainability Plan for Children and Families in Bridgend, something that had been raised previously through the Council's Overview and Scrutiny process.

RESOLVED:

The Cabinet Committee – Corporate Parenting noted the progress made identified within the report and agreed to invest in the future development of Corporate Parenting activity to establish better outcomes for its children and young people.

32. REGIONAL ADVOCACY SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT 2022-2023

The Group Manager – IAA Service and Safeguarding presented a report, the purpose of which, was to highlight the key aspects of service delivery from BCBC's regional provider, Tros Gynnal Plant. She was accompanied at the meeting, by the Team Manager of Tros Gynnal Plant.

Detailed performance reports were included as attachments to the covering report as follows:

Appendix 1: Bridgend Annual Advocacy Report 2022-2023

Appendix 2: CTM Regional Annual Advocacy Report 2022-2023

Tros Gynnal Plant (TGP) provides a regional advocacy service in Cwm Taf Morgannwg (CTM). TGP has delivered advocacy services in Bridgend for many years and is a well-established provider locally, as well as being the largest provider of advocacy to children and young people in Wales.

The report's background information confirmed that Tros Gynnal Plant (TGP) provides a regional advocacy service in Cwm Taf Morgannwg (CTM). TGP has delivered advocacy services in Bridgend for many years and was a well-established provider locally, as well as being the largest provider of advocacy to children and young people in Wales.

The Group Manager – IAA Service and Safeguarding advised that detailed quarterly performance reports were provided by TGP, as well as this provider also providing an annual report for both Bridgend locality and the CTM region. They covered the key service aspects of Issue Based Advocacy, and the Active Offer of advocacy.

Appendix 1 to the report reflected that there had been an increase in the number of people who had accessed the IBA service this year when compared to last year, including some individuals who had used it for the first time. The most popular method of using the service was via the 'self referral' route, followed by Social Services referrals.

An 'Active Offer' (AO) of advocacy was a core element of the statutory service, while the majority of young people referred for AO in Bridgend last year, being aged between years 6 and 11.

The report confirmed that TGP continued to be responsible for facilitating young people's participation and consultation groups in Bridgend, now called Bridgend Youth Voice Forum, or 'BYV' Forum. The aim of the group was to allow care experienced

young people and care leavers to have a voice in wider Bridgend forums, including the Bridgend Corporate Parenting Board.

The Group Manager – IAA Service and Safeguarding emphasised that TGP continued to develop new and innovative ways for young people to provide feedback to help improve the advocacy service, for example, through the use of a QR code that they can scan from their mobile phones and which links to a short questionnaire.

TGP had noted that social workers are not always able to respond to some case communications, resulting in some young people's advocacy cases remaining open longer than they need to be. This is noted in both the local Bridgend report (Appendix 1 of the report) and the regional report (Appendix 2). The volume of work being managed in statutory children's services will have impacted and focused work to safely reduce caseloads, which will in turn, assist in improving responsiveness.

Following recent changes in BCBC Children's Services, including the appointment of a new Responsible Individual (whose role is to promote, monitor and improve service quality), TGP had met and engaged with BCBC on a number of levels to further develop working relationships and improve awareness and understanding of referral processes for advocacy.

The Chairperson sought clarification of the methods by which we were promoting ways to encourage volunteers for TGP support in relation to the Independent Visiting Service, particularly with regards to promoting/advertising such opportunities.

The Team Manager, TGP advised that an Independent Co-ordinator post had been created for the purpose of social media, etc recruitment promotion for the above. She added that the increased number of volunteers would be matched to young people subject of referrals, in order in turn, to decrease the amount of time these individuals remain on the waiting list. The Team Manager TGP added that essential training is given to volunteers, in order that they may successfully undertake the work that comprises their role.

The Leader advised that he was pleased to note the improvement in numbers of children taking up advocacy services. This was essential he felt in order for their voices to be heard. This was crucial to older children also he felt, particularly those who had other challenges to overcome.

The Team Manager TGP assured Members that there were experienced Advocates in place who managed the situations of younger children through a number of initiatives and this also applied with anyone with for example a disability who was accessing advocacy services. There was a multi-agency approach to such services she further added.

Finally, the Team manager TGP advised that there was also a non-instructed Advocacy service, in addition to the mainstream service.

RESOLVED: That the Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting noted the report.

33. **URGENT ITEMS**

None.

The meeting closed at 11:25