

Meeting of:	CABINET
Date of Meeting:	19 DECEMBER 2023
Report Title:	JOINT INSPECTION OF CHILD PROTECTION ARRANGEMENTS (JICPA) IN BRIDGEND 12-16 JUNE 2023
Report Owner / Corporate Director:	CORPORATE DIRECTOR – SOCIAL SERVICES AND WELLBEING
Responsible Officer:	ANNETTE PARKES BUSINESS CHANGE PROGRAMME MANAGER
Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:	There is no effect upon the policy framework and procedure rules
Executive Summary:	Between 12 and 16 June 2023, Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW), Healthcare Inspectorate Wales (HIW), Estyn and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) carried out a joint inspection of the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements for children aged 11 and under who are at risk of abuse and neglect in Bridgend County. A copy of the inspection report is attached, along with the associated Joint Action Plan.

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to present to Cabinet the inspection report of the Joint Inspection of Child Protection Arrangements (JICPA) in Bridgend. This took place during June 2023. Cabinet is requested to note the report and the local authority improvement actions identified in the associated Joint Action Plan.

2. Background

- 2.1 Between 12 and 16 June 2023, Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW), His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS), Healthcare Inspectorate Wales (HIW), and Estyn carried out a joint inspection of the multi-agency response to abuse and neglect of children in Bridgend.

- 2.2 The JICPA reviewed:

- the response to allegations of abuse and neglect at the point of identification

- the quality and impact of assessment, planning and decision-making in response to notifications and referrals
- protecting children aged 11 and under at risk of abuse and neglect
- the leadership and management of this work
- the effectiveness of the multi-agency safeguarding partner arrangements in relation to this work

2.3 The date of the improvement check was 12-16 June 2023, and the inspection team consisted of 15 inspectors from the 4 inspectorates.

2.4 The inspection team reviewed the experiences of people's journey through sampling agency records and file tracking children's care and support arrangements. The inspection team case sampled ten files and tracked six. Tracking a child's record included conversations with the child where appropriate, their family or carers, key worker, the key worker's manager, and other professionals involved.

2.5 The Joint Inspection team :

- held focus groups with staff and two professional groups focused on the working arrangements and outcomes for two of the tracked files
- visited a small sample of primary schools and a special school, where they conducted meetings with the headteacher, the designated safeguarding lead and small groups of children
- interviewed a range of employees across different agencies
- interviewed a range of partner organisations, representing both statutory and third sector
- reviewed supporting documentation sent to the inspectorates for the purpose of the inspection
- administered surveys to children's services staff, third sector organisations and children and family members
- observed child protection conferences and practice as part of the inspection activity
- conducted a pre-inspection headteacher survey and visited a small sample of primary schools during the inspection week
- evaluated samples of health and well-being schemes of work and looked at samples of pupils' work. This included holding a 'listening to learner' sessions in all schools visited

2.6 The report of the findings would be published on the CIW website and provided to the Minister for Health and Social Services.

3. Current situation / proposal

3.1 The JICPA Inspection report is attached at **Appendix 1**.

3.2 The JICPA found that in common with many areas across Wales, recruitment and retention of key staff is impacting on children's safeguarding arrangements. This is exacerbated by high levels of demand and increasing complexity of children's and

families' needs. The workforce position within social services remains fragile. Deficits in the number of social workers and a competitive market has resulted in an increased reliance on agency social workers. Despite these workforce issues, inspectors found that significant actions have been taken and improvements have been made by Bridgend County Borough Council's children's services and partners since Care Inspectorate Wales' previous full inspection which took place in May 2022 and the follow-up visit in November 2022.

3.3 **Positive practice includes:**

- Professionals identify children in need of help and protection and report their concerns accordingly enabling accurate, early decision-making.
- Actual and potential risks are identified well with proportionate actions taken to protect children.
- There are examples of the local authority and partners responding promptly and effectively to meet the needs of children, especially where acute need and risk is identified.
- Schools across Bridgend county work well with a wide range of services to support children and families.
- There is good multi-agency attendance and participation in child protection meetings arranged under the Wales Safeguarding Procedures.

3.4 Overall, systems and relationships are in place to facilitate effective partnership working where a child is at risk of abuse and neglect. There are, however, **areas of child protection which are inconsistent and require attention. These include:**

- Challenges in sharing information between agencies in the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub.
- Immediate actions are taken to promote children's safety but there can be gaps following an initial enquiry. This may represent a missed opportunity to share essential information and discuss the outcome of the enquiry with all relevant agencies.
- The quality of care and support protection plans is too variable.
- There are gaps in recording and in supervision which need to be addressed by managerial oversight and a focus on the quality of practice.

Summary of findings

3.5 In common with many areas across Wales, recruitment and retention of key staff is impacting on children's safeguarding arrangements. This is exacerbated by high levels of demand and increasing complexity of children's and families' needs. The workforce position within social services remains fragile. Deficits in the number of social workers and a competitive market has resulted in an increased reliance on agency social workers.

3.6 Despite this context, overall, systems and relationships are in place to facilitate effective partnership working where a child is at risk of abuse and neglect. Partners are working to a shared ethos of safeguarding children at different levels of vulnerability. Senior leaders in the local authority, police force and health board articulate a shared vision with a positive approach to regional safeguarding arrangements. Managers and leaders provide a positive working together culture. The local authority has taken action to instigate learning following recent critical

incidents. The subsequent improvement and joint action plans are overseen by the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Regional Safeguarding Board (CTMSB).

- 3.7 From the sample of records viewed as part of the inspection the inspectorates found no concerns for the safety of children. Actions generally happen within timescales with support and protection in place to meet needs. There are, however, areas of child protection which are inconsistent and require attention. Professionals make appropriate referrals but partner agencies, such as police and health, are struggling to resource the increase in child protection activity. Challenges remain in sharing information between agencies in the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). It is envisaged a new IT platform will address this.
- 3.8 Immediate actions are taken to promote children's safety but there can be gaps following a Section 47 enquiry (S47). Post enquiry feedback (including single agency enquiries often undertaken via children's services) generally involves social services and police, is routinely via email communication, and does not include relevant partners who were involved in the initial strategy discussion. This may represent a missed opportunity to share essential information and discuss the outcome of the enquiry. The quality of care and support protection plans (CASPP) is too variable. Plans are adult, rather than child focused, and without clear outcomes for the child identified. There are gaps in recording and in supervision which need to be addressed by managerial oversight and a focus on the quality of practice.
- 3.9 Schools across Bridgend work well with a wide range of services to support children and families. There is good multi-agency attendance and participation in child protection meetings arranged under the Wales Safeguarding Procedures (WSP). This includes initial and review child protection case conference and core groups. The MASH facilitates adherence to the WSP and encourages close partnership working. Multi-agency contribution is evident in addressing the child's safety through the care and support protection plan.
- 3.10 The JICPA report outlines more detailed findings in the four main areas of Wellbeing, People, Partnerships, and Integration and Prevention, outlining strengths and areas for improvement for each agency in each of the four areas.

Recommendations and Next Steps

- 3.11 On behalf of the partnership, the local authority prepared a written statement of proposed action responding to the findings outlined in the JICPA report. This was a multi-agency response which involved Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board and South Wales Police and outlined the set out the actions for the partnership and, where appropriate, individual agencies.
- 3.12 A JICPA Action Plan has been developed to reflect the recommendations for improvement outlined in the JICPA report. The JICPA Action Plan can be found at **Appendix 2**. The progress to implement areas for improvement and corresponding local authority actions will be overseen internally in the Council by the Social Services Improvement Board (SSIB). All inspection recommendations are included on the regulatory tracker which is reported through the Corporate Performance Assessment. The improvement actions identified for South Wales Police and Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board will be monitored by individual agencies own governance arrangements. The Cwm Taf Morgannwg Regional Safeguarding Board

(RSB) is the statutory body responsible for leading safeguarding in the Cwm Taf Morgannwg region and holding agencies to account. It will hold partners to account for achievements of the improvements identified. Progress will also be reported into Scrutiny Committee. A copy of the JICPA Action Plan will also be submitted to CIW and will form the basis of any future joint or single agency activity by the inspectorates.

3.13 On 23 November 2023 the Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2 considered the report and JICPA Action Plan and provided comments.

4. Equality implications (including Socio-economic Duty and Welsh Language)

4.1 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.

5. Well-being of Future Generations implications and connection to Corporate Well-being Objectives

5.1 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 JICPA inspection is Prevention. The Joint Inspectorates 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 Joint Action Plan at **Appendix 2**.
- **Integration** – one of the four themes within the JICPA inspection is Partnerships and Integration. The Joint Inspectorates 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 Joint 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 as this was the basis for the JICPA inspection and the development of the response to the inspection in the Joint Action Plan.

- **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 Social Services Improvement Board, and the Regional Safeguarding 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. As part of the JICPA inspection the views of stakeholders; children and young people, parents and carers and partners, were listened too and taken into account by the inspectorates of the four statutory agencies.

This report assists in the achievement of the following corporate well-being objectives under the **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015**:

- **A County Borough where we protect our most vulnerable:** Providing high quality services for children and families and early help services, and safeguarding people who are at risk of significant harm, 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.

6. Climate Change Implications

6.1 There are no climate change implications.

7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications

7.1 This JICPA Inspection report and associated Joint Action Plan outlines and proposes changes that will be required to improve performance and compliance with the statutory safeguarding accountabilities of partners in Bridgend for children and young people. Implementation of the plan will ensure effective safeguarding arrangements and support to the wellbeing of vulnerable children and young people for whom the Council is corporate parent, and will work towards improving the outcomes for children, young people, and families in Bridgend.

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 have been identified in the Action Plan, particularly in the areas of workforce and service provision (placements) in children's social care which will be considered during the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy planning process. However, delivery of any agreed actions may be impacted by the current challenging budget situation that the Council is facing.

9. Recommendation

9.1 It is recommended that Cabinet note the report on the Joint Inspection of Child Protection arrangements in Bridgend and the local authority improvement actions identified in the Joint Action Plan.

Background documents

None