

**Bridgend County Borough Council
Annual Corporate Safeguarding Report – 2022/23**

The purpose of this Annual Report is to provide information on Bridgend County Borough Council’s (the Council) performance in respect of safeguarding adults and children at risk. The report covers the following areas:

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Safeguarding:

Safeguarding means protecting people's health, wellbeing, and human rights, and enabling them to live free from harm, abuse, and neglect.

Safeguarding Legislation and Wales Safeguarding Procedures:

The key legislation relating to safeguarding children and adults at risk are the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 (SSWBA) and the Children Act 1989.

Part 7 of the SSWBA relates to Safeguarding. Part 7 includes:

- Definitions of an ‘adult and child at risk’.
- A duty on relevant partners to report adults and children at risk.
- A requirement on a local authority to investigate where they suspect that an adult with care and support needs is at risk of abuse or neglect.
- The introduction of an Adult Protection and Support Order (APSO).
- The requirement on the local authority to consider undertaking an investigation when there has been a report that a child is at risk and then carry this out in line with Section 47 of the Children Act 1989.
- The establishment of a National Safeguarding Board.
- The functions and procedures of Safeguarding Adults and Safeguarding Children Boards.

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Safeguarding duties under the SSWBA apply to adult protection, as safeguarding is preventative as well as protective. Safeguarding is wider than the essential focus on those most at risk or needing protection from abuse, neglect, and harm. Safeguarding includes ensuring the provision of safe and effective care; protecting from abuse, neglect, and harm; optimising well-being, voice, choice and control, and preventing impairment of health and development.

Safeguarding is everyone's business. However, the SSWBA sets out duties for Local Authorities and relevant partner agencies to work together to safeguard and protect children and adults at risk.

Section 47 of the Children Act 1989 sets out the duty on a local authority, with the help of other organisations as appropriate, to make enquires if they have reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering harm, to enable them to decide whether they should take any action to safeguard and promote the child's welfare.

The Wales Safeguarding Procedures (WSP) were launched in November 2019 and provide a detailed framework for safeguarding adults and children at risk.

Safeguarding Adults at Risk

The SSWBA placed a new duty to report an "adult at risk". There was also a new duty for a Local Authority to make enquiries if it has reasonable cause to suspect that a person within its area (whether or not ordinarily resident there) is an adult at risk. Where there is reasonable cause to suspect that an adult is at risk of abuse or neglect the Local Authority has a duty to undertake section safeguarding enquiries which are known as section 126 enquiries. These enquiries should normally be completed within seven days and enquiries should be made to determine what actions may be required to support the adult at risk and any ongoing protection planning that may be required.

These enquiries should be person centred and ensure that the adult is consulted and spoken with to determine their understanding of the situation and any support needs they may have as well as considering potential risks. The duties placed on the Local Authority by the SSWBA, have resulted in a significant increase in the number of safeguarding enquiries being undertaken. This has resulted in increased numbers of citizens coming to the attention of Social Services.

Table 1 below shows the number of adults at risk referrals received from 01/10/2022 until 30/9/2023, and shows the number that met the threshold for Adult Safeguarding procedures to commence:

	01/10/2022 to 30/09/2023
Number of Safeguarding Referrals	593
Met threshold for Adult Protection Procedure	74
The number of Adult at Risk referrals that section 126 enquiries were completed	555
The number of Adult at Risk referrals that progressed to a strategy meeting	75

Table 1

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36 cases did not progress as an adult at risk. This can be for a variety of reasons, but one example is as follows:

Mr A declined consent to progress this safeguarding referral and has been deemed to have capacity to do so. There is no wider public interest in overriding his consent. Additional advice has been provided to him and this will continue.

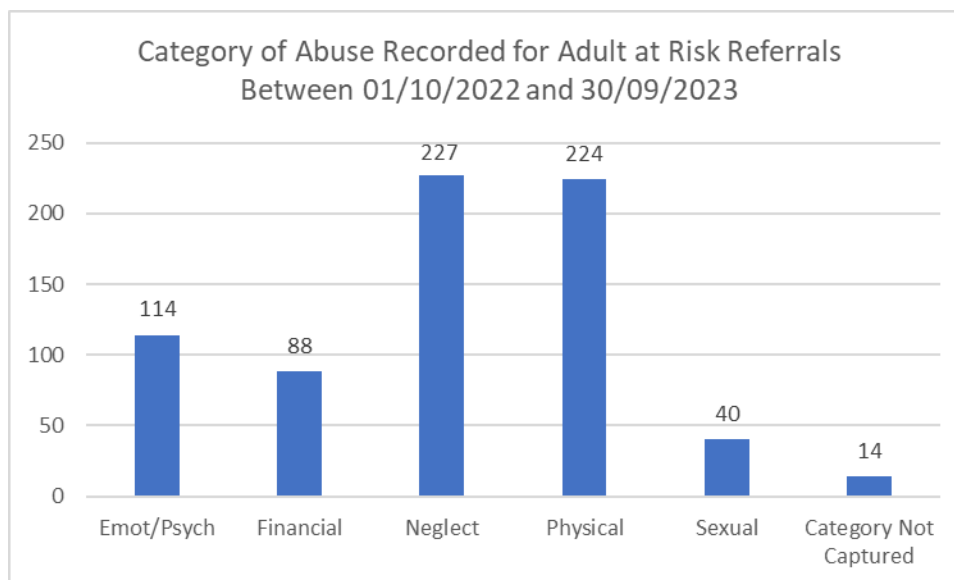
	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	01/04/2023 to 30/09/2023
Number of Safeguarding Referrals	275	325	372	388	488	360
The number of Adult at Risk referrals that section 126 enquiries were completed	261	313	357	350	468	338
The number of Adult at Risk referrals that progressed to a strategy meeting	55	69	67	72	66	34

Table 2

Table 2, above, shows comparative data from the previous 5 years involving the number of safeguarding referrals received, as well as the number of referrals that progressed through the relevant stages.

Some referrals are received where there is no abuse/neglect, but care needs are identified – these are then passed on to the Common Access Point which is the ‘front door’ of adult social care, providing information, advice and assistance and proportionate assessment of needs.

Graph 1 below shows the categories of abuse recorded on adult at risk referrals between 1/10/2022 and 30/9/2023:



Graph 1

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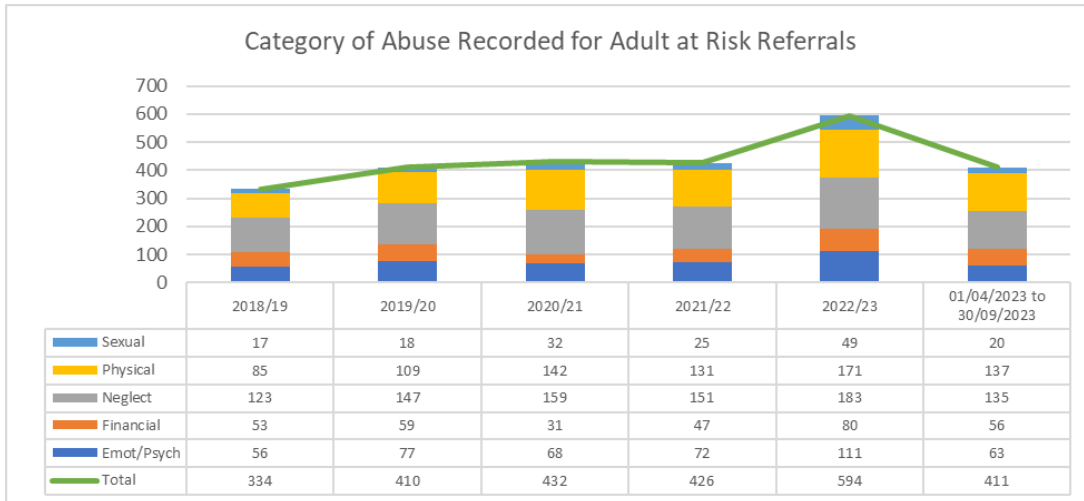


Table 3

Table 3 above shows the trend analysis for the categories of abuse recorded for adults at risk referrals over the previous 5-year period.

The Adult Safeguarding team joined Bridgend's Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) in July 2018. The MASH remained operational throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. The co-location of all teams in the MASH has allowed for instant information sharing between agencies which in turn results in a timelier, focused, response to safeguarding concerns. The Adult Safeguarding & Secure Estate Service Manager is also a representative on the joint MASH Quality Assurance Group, which is attended by colleagues from Bridgend MASH and Pontypridd MASH.

Graph 2 shows the number of Initial Professional Concern strategy meetings held for those in positions of trust working with adults. The number of referrals between 1/10/2022 – 30/09/23 amount to 153 referrals where a total of 68 Initial Strategy meetings have been held.



Graph 2

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Graph 3

Graph 3 shows the total number of initial professional abuse strategy meetings held over the previous five-year period, by year.

Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS)

The Mental Capacity Act 2005 provides a statutory framework for making decisions on behalf of individuals who lack mental capacity to do so for themselves. People can be deprived of their liberty wherever they live, but in broad terms this is divided between a Care Home/Hospital setting and a community setting.

On 6 April 2023 Local Authorities in Wales received a letter from Welsh Government stating, following the announcement by the UK Government that Liberty Protection Safeguards (LPS) would not be introduced in this parliament, and the Welsh Government cannot bring forward its own regulations to implement the LPS in Wales. The letter stated that there is a need to consider how to strengthen the current Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) system in Wales, and to continue to protect and promote the human rights of those people who lack mental capacity. Welsh Government remains committed to providing funding to protect the rights of those who lack mental capacity under the current DoLS system. Welsh Government will therefore continue to provide funding at a comparable level to 2022/23 levels, to ensure that these rights are protected ahead of any future implementation of the LPS.

In 2023-24, the Council received £133,392 grant funding from Welsh Government. The Council used part of the grant funding to employ an agency for a two-month period to assist to clear a small backlog of 150 cases leaving a total of 34 cases to allocate.

The data in **Table 4** below shows the numbers of DoLS referrals received into Bridgend adult services from 1/10/2022 to 30/09/2023:

	01/10/2022 to 30/09/2023
Number of DoLS Referrals Received	563

Table 4

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	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	01/04/2023 to 30/09/2023
DoLS Referrals Received	545	518	515	393	562	262

Table 5

Table 5 indicates the number of Adult's DoLS referrals received over the previous 5 year period, by year.

Children Deprived of their Liberty.

The data in **Table 6** below shows the numbers of DoLS referrals received into Bridgend children services from 1/03/23 to 30/09/2023. Data is not currently available for a 5-year comparison.

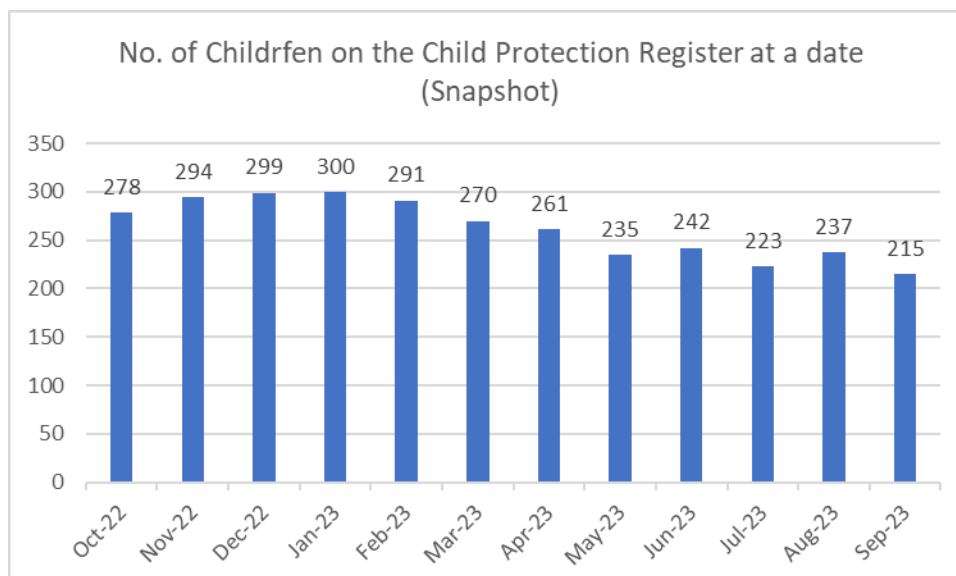
	01/03/23 to 30/09/23
Number of DoLS Referrals Received	8

Table 6

During the reporting period we have identified 8 cases where the Local Authority has applied for DoLS for looked after children in the 2 years up to 1st March 2023. Colleagues in Legal Services deal with DoLS applications as well and they also deal with any applications from the Childrens Disability and Transition Team for looked after children who are 16/17.

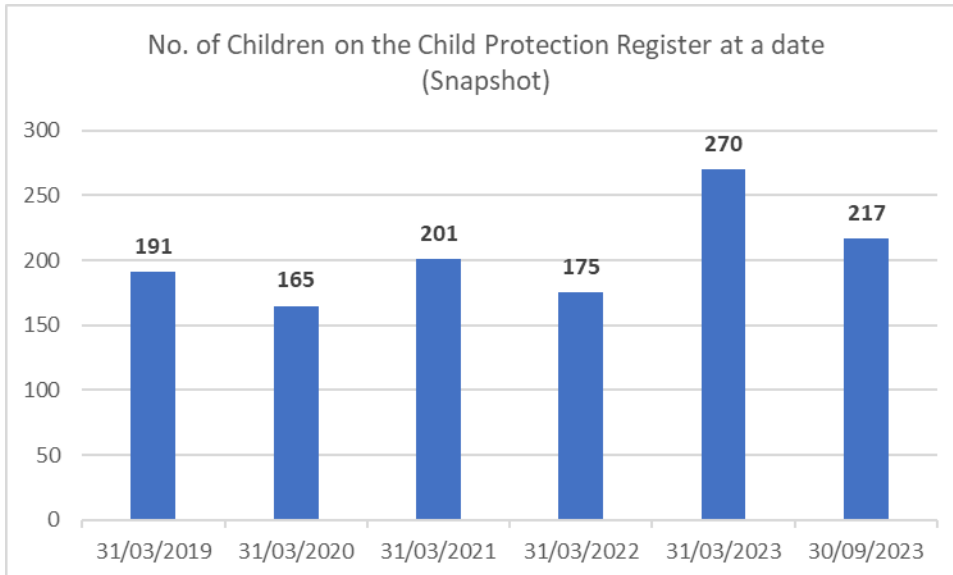
Safeguarding children

The Child Protection Register (CPR) figures for this period are set out below in **Graph 4**:



Graph 4

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Graph 5

Graph 5 shows a snapshot comparison of the number of children on the Child Protection Register over the previous 5-year period by year.

Table 7 below shows the categories and ages of the children open to the Child Protection Register as of the 30/09/23.

Category of Abuse	Age Group					Total
	Under 1	1-4	5-9	10-15	16-18	
Emotional Abuse	3	10	24	17	0	54
Neglect	6	9	14	16	4	49
Neglect and Physical Abuse	2	8	12	13	0	35
Neglect and sexual abuse	0	2	0	4	1	7
Neglect, Physical and Sexual Abuse	0	0	0	1	0	1
Physical abuse	3	21	13	18	2	57
Physical and Sexual Abuse	0	0	0	3	0	3
Physical and Sexual Abuse and Financial Abuse	0	0	0	2	0	2
Sexual abuse	0	3	1	5	0	9
Total	14	53	64	79	7	217

Table 7

Category of Abuse	31/03/2019	31/03/2020	31/03/2021	31/03/2022	31/03/2023	30/09/2023
Emotional Abuse	82	62	64	54	84	54
Neglect	66	73	87	56	62	49
Neglect and financial abuse	3	0	0	0	0	0
Neglect and Physical Abuse	15	14	16	14	39	35
Neglect and sexual abuse	8	6	0	0	5	7
Neglect, Physical & Financial Abuse	0	0	0	2	0	0
Neglect, Physical and Sexual Abuse	0	2	0	2	2	1
Physical abuse	5	4	20	42	62	57
Physical and Sexual Abuse	1	0	5	0	2	3
Physical and Sexual Abuse and Financial Abuse	0	0	0	0	0	2
Sexual abuse	11	4	9	5	14	9
Total	191	165	200	175	270	217

Table 8

Table 8 above shows the categories of abuse recorded at registration, compared to the age recorded for children open to the Child Protection Register over the previous 5-year period.

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The numbers of children subject to the Child Protection Register is steadily declining during the reporting period. Targeted work has been undertaken to progress cases, including case consultation and improved management oversight to ensure drift does not occur. The category trends above follow the same trends as the previous year. Contributory factors for this are the rise of awareness of child protection factors in the media, the MASH strengthening processes which leads to greater numbers of assessments being undertaken, improved training and recognition of child abuse, covid-19 related social challenges and professional awareness of the importance of the duty to report following the tragic deaths of children in Bridgend. The current figures show a steady reduction in CPR figures.

The highest figure we have seen in BCBC of children subject to the CPR was in January 2023 with a figure of 306. Since this time we have seen improvements in our recruitment and retention rates which has created greater stability in our safeguarding locality hubs. As such targeted work has been undertaken with children and their families to reduce our CPR numbers. We have also strengthened management oversight processes which has assisted in less drift in cases. It is pleasing to see this steady reduction and we envisage this will continue.

The level of work has increased in the MASH and Information Advice and Assistance Service. **Table 9** below shows the distribution of this work for the past year to date.

Mash and IAA continue to work diligently to meet their statutory functions. The demands on this service have increased significantly in the last year, however the service is meeting its compliance targets.

1st Oct 2022- to 30th Sept 2023	Total
Number of Safeguarding Contacts	10539
No of new assessments completed	2495
No of strategy meetings held	2248
No of section 47s investigations	1678
No Initial child protection conferences	363
No of Review child Protection Conferences	792

Table 9

The number of referrals received in this period has increased by 4024, however our level of assessments has decreased by 179 as a result of improved screening and decision making. This figure also evidences an increase in referrals that do not meet the threshold for statutory services. As such we are undertaking workshops with safeguarding partners to agree a common threshold policy. This is currently in draft and consultation is taking place with Police and Health partners. Our rate of Section 47 Child Protection Investigations has increased by 457.

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	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	01/04/2023 to 30/09/2023
Number of Safeguarding Contacts	7945	6810	4742	5667	8334	5788
No of new assessments completed	1712	1835	1042	1644	3114	1183
No of strategy meetings held	987	949	627	1086	2154	1166
No of section 47s investigations	786	746	515	865	1557	843
No Initial child protection conferences	238	240	214	201	406	181
No of Review child Protection Conferences	557	558	518	508	659	408

Table 10

Table 10 shows a breakdown of safeguarding referrals and subsequent required actions over the previous 5-year period.

The core business of the Council's Children's social care department is safeguarding and protection of children from harm. The Council approved a 3-year strategic plan in September 2023 to deliver sustainable improvements in outcomes for children and families. An excerpt from [Bridgend Children's Social Care Strategic Plan 2022-2025 Improving Outcomes for Children and Families in our County Borough](#) relating to safeguarding is as follows:

This plan sets out Children's social care's purpose will have a clear purpose. This purpose will be achieved through culture and values which are inclusive and support everyone within the service and we the people we work with to feel part of the 'family firm'. Our culture will be open and transparent, celebrate our strengths and commit to learning and development and continuous improvement; High standards of safeguarding and child protection practice, recognizing that whilst safeguarding children is an inherently multi-agency endeavor children's social care play a leading role in ensuring Bridgend children are protected from harm.

Bridgend ensures to create a way of working which is 'proactive' rather than 'reactive', with interventions focused on preventing escalation of needs because needs are met effectively at the earliest opportunity, preventing the need for children and young people to become care experienced unless this is evidently the right outcome in which case plans for permanence and stability will be timely and support children to achieve their potential.

Public Law Outline (PLO)

The PLO is a legal process which was introduced in April 2014. The PLO sets out streamlined case management procedures for dealing with public law children's cases. The aim is to avoid care proceedings if possible and for those cases where proceedings are necessary, identify and focus on the key issues for the child, with the aim of making the best decisions for the child within the timetable set by the Court (26 weeks), and avoiding the need for unnecessary evidence or hearings. Under the PLO, the 'pre-proceedings process' is considered when the above has not been effective with a family and the legal threshold is met i.e., when the child/ren is suffering or is at risk of suffering significant harm.

This process is followed when the Local Authority has assessed that the risks are able to be managed safely whilst the children remain in the care of their parents/primary carers. The process allows the parents to obtain legal advice and a legal meeting takes place with the parents and lawyers. In this meeting the Authority sets out clearly its concerns, its plan to help the family, and the consequences if no progress is made. The process is set for a

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realistic period of time for families to engage in the necessary services to ensure that the child/ren's needs are met and they are kept safe from harm.

In this reporting period 71 cases entered the PLO process.

Care Proceedings

Issuing Care Proceedings is the last resort situation for the Local Authority and will only be issued when the Local Authority has attempted to do all it can to work with and support the family but there has been no change and the child/ren are suffering or are at risk of suffering significant harm should they remain in the care of parents or primary carers. In Bridgend there are currently 24 cases subject to proceedings.

Cwm Taf Morgannwg Regional Safeguarding Board

The Cwm Taf Morgannwg Safeguarding Board (CTMRSB) is a statutory partnership comprising the agencies that are responsible for safeguarding children and adults at risk in the Cwm Taf Morgannwg area. The Board ensures that agencies in the region have effective arrangements in place to ensure that people of all ages, living in the region, are protected from abuse, neglect, or other kinds of harm. This also involves preventing abuse, neglect or other kinds of harm from happening.

The CTMRSB operates within the statutory guidance set out under Part 7 of the SSWBA. Membership of Safeguarding Boards is prescribed within the Act. The RSB is a multi-agency, statutory partnership whose main objective is to ensure that local safeguarding arrangements and partners act to help and protect vulnerable people at risk of abuse and neglect across the region.

The Safeguarding Board has published an Annual Report into its activities. The Annual Report for 2022-23 is accessible via the following link: [Annual report 2022/23](#)

The Board also publishes an outcome focused Annual Plan. The Annual Plan for 2023-2024 is in **Appendix 2** to this report. The Annual Plan for 2023/2024 is accessible via the following link: [Annual Plan 2023/2024](#)

There is a committee and sub-group structure sitting under the Board to support the delivery of the Annual Plan on behalf of the Board. Each Sub-group uses performance measures to report on a quarterly basis to the Board, via the Joint Operational Committee, and to escalate any risks and issues against the delivery of the plan and for decision and action from the Board. This enables the Board to take ownership of its work at strategic level and to provide leadership to subgroups.

The sub-groups of the Safeguarding Board are:

- Children's Quality Assurance Sub-group
- Adults Quality Assurance Sub-group

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- Joint Adult child Review Group
- Protocols and Procedures Group
- Training and Learning Group
- Engagement, Communications and Participation Group

The RSB is required to raise awareness with the public of the need to protect and prevent children, young people and adults from becoming at risk of abuse, neglect and other forms of harm, and provide information about how this can be achieved. As part of developing a positive culture of learning the Board also needs to ensure that information is widely disseminated within the workforce to inform them about best practice and learning arising from reviews, audits and other Board activities. The Board has an established group whose aim is to ensure that there are clear processes in place for the identification of engagement and participation needs and to capture the activities of partner agencies in meeting these needs.

Child and Adult Practice Reviews

In 2013, Child Practice Reviews replaced what were known as Serious Case Reviews (SCRs). This process stems from the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales report published in October 2009 - *Improving Practice to Protect Children in Wales: An Examination of the Role of Serious Case Reviews*. This work was pivotal to where we are today and concluded that action was required to replace the SCR process which had become ineffective in improving practice and inter-agency working.

The overall purpose of reform of the review system is to promote a positive culture of multi-agency child protection learning and reviewing in local areas, for which the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Safeguarding Board and partner agencies hold responsibility.

The purpose of the review is to identify learning for future practice and involve practitioners, managers and senior officers in exploring the detail and context of agencies' work with the child(ren) and family. The review is intended to generate professional and organisational learning and promote improvement in future practice.

The following Child Practice Reviews were published between October 2022 and September 2023 relating to Bridgend children.

There are 4 Child Practice Reviews being undertaken in relation to Bridgend children that will be published during the next reporting period.

The themes from the Learning Events that have taken place have identified the need for strengthened processes for sharing information, the importance of embedding a quality assurance framework, further development of multiagency training and the need for the Local Authority to adopt a clear model of practice.

As a result, processes have been strengthened, including improved multiagency working practises, the involvement of fathers and extended family in child protection processes. A mandatory training program has been implemented with a focus on the importance of professional curiosity and recognising coercive controlling behaviours. Bridgend Children's Social Care has implemented the Signs of Safety Practice Model. A Supervision Policy has been embedded throughout the service and this is providing greater management oversight.

Signs of Safety implementation

Following the agreement of the Organisational and Practice Goals aimed to be achieved through the implementation of Signs of Safety, by the Senior Management Team alongside the Signs of Safety Consultant, two Signs of Safety Launch days were held in March 2023. The aim of the launch days were to introduce Signs of Safety to the Children's Social Care Workforce and share the implementation plan alongside the Leadership Promise.

Following this, as part of the implementation plan, four workstreams were developed, these included System Alignment, Meaningful Measures, Leadership and Learning and Development.

Between April and July, initial two-day Signs of Safety training was provided to the frontline Social Care Workforce, which introduced them to the Risk Assessment structure and process along with the Next Steps. Following this, the Signs of Safety Consultant spent time with Childrens Social Care Teams, as part of practice intensive sessions focused on their individual team areas. Partner Agency briefings were also facilitated by the Signs of Safety Consultant. The consultant facilitated a session with the Joint Operational Group, which included partners from MASH, Education and Health. Quarterly partner agencies briefings have continued to be facilitated by the Principal Officer for Signs of Safety, who has also facilitated introduction briefings with the Designated Safeguarding Leads within Schools, Early Help services and Foster Carers.

As part of the System Alignment workstream, significant work is underway to embed Signs of Safety within all forms used by Children's Social Care on the Welsh Community Care Information System (WCCIS). This has required a whole system review and process mapping to ensure all forms are captured. Interim arrangements have been applied to support Childrens Social Care to able to begin using the skills and knowledge learnt on training while they await for WCCIS to be aligned. This will ensure consistent practice across teams and framework being embedded.

Enhanced five day training is now underway for those that have completed the initial two-day training to learn and understand how to use Signs of Safety to work with parents/carers and create family safety plans. Due to ongoing staff turnover and changes, the two-day and five-day training programs are continuing to be provided to ensure that all staff access this training.

The aim of the Meaningful Measures Workstream is to understand in a timely way, the progress being made with the implementation, to evidence our improvement and the good difference it makes for children and families so we can ensure improved service consistency, quality, and impact.

Adult Practice Reviews

The RSB has completed one adult practice review for a Bridgend resident during the reporting period. Adult R (pseudonym) of this review had complex needs arising from past trauma, mental illness and poor physical health. The death was unexpected, and the review considered the multi-agency response to the circumstance and made recommendations for learning which will be monitored via the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Joint Practice Review subgroup.

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There is currently one new adult practice reviews for a Bridgend resident being undertaken by Cwm Taf Morgannwg Safeguarding Board.

Following a child or adult practice review, the learning is disseminated in several ways, including specific briefings for workforce. 7-minute briefings which summarise the learning are widely disseminated. The learning informs individual, team, service and organisational learning and development plans. Where necessary, policies, procedures and practice guidance are developed. Detailed action plans are developed which are robustly monitored through the RSB practice review sub-group.

Bridgend Safeguarding Partners Joint Operational Group

In the last 2 years local safeguarding partnerships have been developed through the establishment of a Bridgend Safeguarding Partners Joint Operational Group (JOG) which is chaired by the Deputy Head of Children's Social Care and reports through the RSB.

The JOG was established at a time of increased demand and has continued to enable Bridgend safeguarding partners to exercise real time situational awareness of operational safeguarding performance across partner agencies to ensure children and adults are effectively safeguarded from risk and harm. The JOG also considers and agree actions to address, at a thematic level of operational escalations via the RSBs process to resolve professional differences (the CRISP process).

Bridgend Corporate Safeguarding Policy

Safeguarding is the responsibility of all Council Directorates. With a view to promoting awareness of this and raising the profile of Safeguarding across the whole of the Council, the Corporate Safeguarding Policy has been reviewed, developed and reimplemented. This sets out the Council's duty and commitment to safeguard and promote the health, well-being and human rights of adults and children at risk and to ensure that effective practices are in place throughout the Council and its commissioned services such that individuals can live their life free from harm, abuse, and neglect. This policy has been updated to strengthen the approach to self-evaluation, management of risk and governance arrangements.

The Corporate Director of Social Services and Well-being chairs a monthly Corporate Safeguarding Group which includes representatives from across the Council. The group oversees a corporate safeguarding dashboard which includes information on safeguarding performance from all parts of the Council and which is reported to the Cabinet Corporate Management Board (CCMB).

Exploitation

The Council is committed to provide a coordinated, multi-agency response to children, young people and vulnerable adults who are currently at risk, or likely to be at risk of, Child Sexual Exploitation, Child Criminal Exploitation, County Lines activity and gang affiliation. We aim to provide a range of services and forums whereby violence, vulnerabilities and exploitation is discussed and addressed from a multi-agency perspective.

To progress the multi-agency management of exploitation a panel has been established. The first full panel took place in June 2023. The impact of the exploitation screening tools,

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and multi-agency collaboration is already evident. Two senior social workers have been appointed to lead on exploitation within Mash/IAA and the Locality Teams. The safeguarding exploitation senior social workers undertake a range of safety mapping tasks as well as developing the relationships between the multi-agency partners and in particular the development of the missing protocol and continues to support frontline practitioners in completing the exploitation screening tools.

Nearly all secondary schools have participated in the Exploitation Panel. As part of this a mapping exercise is being developed to identify potential links between and across young people schools in the county.

The number of young people presented to EPP Panel since June 2023 is 42. That includes 18 females and 24 males from the range 8-17. The nature of exploitation in these cases has included sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation, trafficking and periods of missing. Between 1 October 2022 and 30 September 2023 there were 121 criminal and sexual exploitation concerns for 82 children/young people.

Safeguarding in Education

Within the Education and Family Support Directorate the Education Engagement Team (EET) was established in 2018 and its remit includes the 'safeguarding in education' role.

EET support children from groups identified by Estyn as being vulnerable or potentially vulnerable such as: excluded pupils, care-experienced children, those known to Youth Justice Services, those with English as an Additional Language and Home Educated Learners. This "joined up" approach means that the team are able to offer schools ongoing advice and guidance around a range of areas and have knowledge and skills in safeguarding, child protection as well as education. The EET team are co-located within the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).

EET deliver Designated Safeguarding Lead training to schools. They facilitate whole school safeguarding training to individual schools and Flying Start provisions. Within the remit of EET they also facilitate and coordinate twice yearly Designated Lead Forums. These meetings are for both Designated Safeguarding Leads and Designated Leads for Looked After Children. The meetings cover regular safeguarding information and training sessions and speakers from partner agencies and internal teams. This year the forum has included speakers from Children's Services, Signs of Safety information, Fostering Wales and Police colleagues covering topics such as Care Experienced Children placements, updates on services in Bridgend, Child Practice Review 7-minute briefings and County Lines.

Schools in Bridgend continue to undertake audits of their safeguarding approaches. Utilising an audit tool developed by Estyn schools are able to satisfy themselves that their approaches to safeguarding are robust. All school audits are reviewed, and quality assured by EET annually. Findings from these audits have highlighted good practices and demonstrate schools have a good understanding of their safeguarding responsibilities. Areas for development have included the role of the school governing body in safeguarding and their understanding of their responsibilities for safeguarding issues within their school. Additional opportunities for governors to access safeguarding training have been offered this year to respond to this need.

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To date for this academic Year 23-24, the Education Engagement Team have delivered 16 whole school Child Protection Training sessions as well as 1 Designated Lead Training session with 65 staff in attendance and 1 Designated Lead Forum with 45 school and Early Years staff in attendance.

The Current number of electively home educated learners is 214.

School safeguarding audits

Welsh Government statutory guidance “Keeping Learners Safe” states clearly that the responsibilities of schools, governing bodies and local authorities, voluntary-aided and foundation schools, and further education institutions, under section 175 of the Education Act 2002 and independent schools under section 157 of the 2002 Act. The guidance states that all staff in those education settings must have an understanding of their responsibilities linked to safeguarding. Education settings must ensure that there are systems in place to support staff to understand and discharge these responsibilities effectively. The guidance also provides schools with an audit tool that can be used to evaluate their safeguarding approach and to assure themselves of their compliance in this key area.

In the Summer and Autumn term of 2022, schools were asked to complete this initial audit tool to consider how they are discharging their responsibilities linked to safeguarding. The local authority, specifically the education engagement team acted as a “critical friend” as part of this process and in subsequent years have supported schools via annual quality assurance visits during the Autumn Term.

VAWDASV

Table 11 sets out the referrals received by the Assia Domestic abuse service between September 2022 and October 2023. Due to changes in service provision, 5-year comparative data is unavailable.

September 2022 – October 2023	
Referrals received	2820
Referrals where support was accepted	2103
Referrals received for female victims	1325
Referrals received for male victims	310
Referrals received for non-binary victims	2

Table 11

During the period between September 2022 and October 2023, Assia Domestic Abuse Services received 2820 referrals, of these referrals 2103 accepted support. This means 561 referrals didn't accept support, some of these would have been repeat referrals and would have already been active within the service. All referrals would have been contacted directly, where contact was made, full safety planning would have been discussed but ongoing support would have been declined. Where contact was not directly made with the victim, a letter and safety plan would have been sent out where safe to do so. We would also let the referrer know of any outcome. 286 referrals were male, we are currently receiving higher numbers of male victims since having our dedicated male victim IDVA (Independent domestic violence advisors) which is a positive.

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The VAWDASV Manager participates in child and adult practise reviews as well as DHRs (Domestic homicide reviews) as required. All of which ensure learning can be sought and shared. In the last year we have delivered training across the region on Coercive Control, Domestic abuse awareness and Exploitation. In addition to this we are continuing to raise awareness in the community with the Police, PCSOS, the Community Safety Partnership Team and Midwives.

As indicated above, we have recruited a dedicated older persons IDVA, we also have a dedicated Male Victim IDVA. In addition to this we also have a secondees from New Pathways who a role that offers SV (Sexual Violence) support work / stabilisation work to identified victims that need ongoing trauma work around the SV whilst the IDVA stays in situ to continue with the specialised DV work. The trauma from SV can often derail a victim from engagement with an IDVA so this stabilisation work should prove effective. We have a dedicated Substance use worker from BAROD working with High-risk victims of Domestic Abuse and perpetrators.

We have also developed a Male victim focus group to ascertain what is working well and where we can improve the service going forward, this is proving very popular with the victims and will hopefully develop more as the year progresses. We are currently going through a Leading Lights accreditation which is due to be assessed fully by the end of the financial year.

There are six objectives within the National Strategy that Bridgend also follows:

- Objective 1: Increase awareness and challenge attitudes of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence across the Welsh Population
- Objective 2: Increased awareness in children and young people of the importance of safe, equal and healthy relationships and that abusive behaviour is always wrong
- Objective 3: Increased focus on holding perpetrators to account and provide opportunities to change their behaviour based around victim safety
- Objective 4: Make early intervention and prevention a priority
- Objective 5: Relevant professionals are trained to provide effective, timely and appropriate responses to victims and survivors
- Objective 6: Provide victims with equal access to appropriately resourced, high quality, needs led, strength based, gender responsive services across Wales

Partnership and community safety

Bridgend Community Safety Partnership (CSP) involves various agencies from the public, private and voluntary sector that work together to reduce crime, disorder and fear of crime locally, in order to improve the quality of life and to create a safer living and working environment.

Following the implementation of the Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015, the decision was taken by Bridgend Public Services Board (PSB) to embed the activities of the Bridgend CSP into its own, and this practice continues now that the PSB has merged with Cwm Taf PSB to create one public services board for Cwm Taf Morgannwg. The two current CSPs operating in the region have also stated their intention to merge and have gone through an external review to scope the required work. The remainder of this financial year will see a task and finish group take forward the recommendations from this review with a view to being one merged CSP in spring 2024.

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Statutory membership for the CSP includes Bridgend County Borough Council, South Wales Police, South Wales Fire and Rescue Service, Cwm Taf Morgannwg Health Board and National Probation Service. Other partners have chosen to be involved, including the Police and Crime Commissioner, Cwm Taf Morgannwg Safeguarding Board, registered social landlords, Department of Work and Pensions and Bridgend Association of Voluntary Organisations (BAVO).

This has been a busy year for the CSP. Key areas of work have been around delivering the Safer Streets Home Office grant which was secured in partnership with South Wales Police. The focus for cycle four of the grant was on improving feelings of community safety and reducing violence against women and girls, and the Council utilised the 'Safer Streets' fund to carry out a broad scope of activity employ health and well-being co-ordinators, undertake youth diversionary activities, work with Welsh Women's Aid to deliver 'Don't be a bystander' training and work with Valleys to Coast to undertake visual improvements.

The biggest area of spend was providing improved CCTV coverage across the county borough. New cameras were installed in key locations as a measure of improving feelings of community safety particularly for women and girls, reducing the risk of crime and addressing ASB concerns.

One of the most successful areas of spend for this grant was in the 'Street Art' project which saw areas across the County Borough be transformed from unwelcoming spaces often featuring hateful or discriminatory messages into bright, vibrant areas for communities and improve feelings of safety. The street artists worked with local groups to transform underpasses, subways and walls and drew on local inspiration to give each project a distinct identity, such as the Mari Lwyd design near Maesteg Bus Station and the aquarium in Porthcawl. The community response to these has been very positive, both in person and social media. South Wales Police delivered elements of the Safer Streets grant, with activities that complemented those being delivered by the Council, such as target hardening, developing new Neighbourhood Watch schemes and also very popular self-defence classes specifically for women and girls aged over 16 living in Bridgend County Borough. These were held at a variety of locations to ensure more women were able to attend.

The funding for 'Safer Streets' came to an end in September 2023. Round five of the grant is awarded on a regional basis, i.e. to Cwm Taf Morgannwg, and the Community Safety Manager for South Wales Police has led on the application. The amount available is significantly lower than received in round four but remains focused on improving feelings of safety, particularly for women and girls.

Anti-Social Behaviour town centre management groups for Maesteg and Bridgend have resumed to act as a multi-agency problem solving fora for these areas. Attendance is from a broad range of partners and there is a good level of engagement. Reports of ASB are generally reducing which is positive, but we continue to encourage communities and residents to report their concerns to the Police through online reporting, email and 101. Our activities are undertaken using ASB as an evidence base, so this reporting is vital for us understanding and addressing the challenges seen in our communities and supporting these communities to feel safe and inclusive.

Acquisitive crime continues to be a challenge, and likely linked to the cost-of-living crisis. Bridgend's Community Cohesion officer is currently seconded to Swansea and acting as the Regional Community Cohesion Coordinator. Whilst the post is currently vacant, we are

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still actively working to create and improve feelings of cohesion. One of the ways we are working innovatively is through our SMART partnership with Welsh Government and Swansea University to develop an app that can capture and report hateful images and graffiti. 'StreetSnap' is being developed and piloted in Bridgend and has already generated significant interest and is identified in the Crime and Justice element of the Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan as good practice. We will soon be establishing focus groups and carrying out training with staff to refine and test the app.

Workforce

Human Resources provide workforce information to the Council's Safeguarding Board which meets monthly. The information includes a monthly update on the status of DBS checks (in particular renewals) and quarterly updates on numbers of completed safeguarding training. If any follow up action is deemed necessary, then this is agreed at the meeting and the relevant managers will be asked to take this forward. Reports on DBS end dates and outstanding safeguarding training are sent to managers periodically to enable them to take relevant action. There is a current DBS Policy and Recruitment & Selection Protocol in place to advise managers on the steps to follow when undertaking a recruitment exercise. All managers are expected to complete the recruitment & selection e-learning module prior to participating in this process.

Housing

From October 2022 to October 2023 there were over 1800 homelessness applications with 989 individuals, including 280 children placed into temporary accommodation. Housing and homelessness services are under unprecedented demand. A draft Housing Support Programme Strategy for 2022-2026 has set the Council's priorities for tackling these demands. The draft strategy has been subject to public consultation and the final version of the strategy will be submitted to Cabinet for approval prior to submission to Welsh Government. Joint working through BCBC's Corporate Safeguarding Board and Corporate Parenting Board ensures a link between housing and social services. Actions from these groups are looking to further analyse the circumstances in which individuals, including care leavers have found themselves homeless, with the aim that further preventative measures can be put in place in the future.

Out of country placements and Operating Without Registration (OWRs)

Out of County Placements are placements for care experienced children that are outside of the Bridgend area. There are times where Children's needs require that they are placed out of the local area, these can be related to managing risks for the young person or can be related to the need for specialist support that can only be provided out of area. In other cases, children can be placed out of county where there is no local provision available to meet the child's needs at that time. In these cases, efforts are made to support a child to return to the local area via ongoing searches by the placements team. Decisions to move children between placements are carefully made, balancing the current and anticipated future needs of children together with the requirement to provide local placements where possible.

In accordance with The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (Wales) Regulations 2015, a local authority may only place a child out of county where they are satisfied there is no placement capable of meeting the child's needs within the county. A regular Out of

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Authority Panel takes place to review cases where children are placed out of area in residential and high-cost placements. Panel is made up of representatives who can assist with meeting Childrens' needs in out of county arrangements, such as Health and Education.

01/10/22 – 30/09/23	
Placements out of Bridgend but in Wales	88
Placements outside of Wales	15

Table 12

41 children placed out of county currently are residing in Foster Wales Bridgend placements with General and Connected Persons carers. 17 of these children are placed with their parents. 21 are placed with independent fostering providers. The remaining children are placed with residential providers including parent and child assessment units.

OWR's

OWR as an acronym for Operating Without Registration. This specifically refers to placements that are made where the provider is not registered with Care Inspectorate Wales in accordance with legislation. There have been 16 OWR's between 01/09/2022 and 31/10/2023.

Local authorities place children within such arrangements when there is an overriding need for a placement and where there are no other options available. Such considerations are subject to the highest levels of scrutiny and can only be agreed by the Director of Social Services and Wellbeing or the Head of Childrens Services in their absence. In all cases the Care Inspectorate is notified of the placement and regular updates provided evidencing the additional oversight in place to support the child and continued search activity of the Placement Team to secure a registered provision. These arrangements can vary:

- In some cases, the local authority places children with a provider who is in the process of setting up a new residential home but has not secured registration at the point this is needed.
- In others, a child can be placed with a Supported Living provider, a home for children aged 16+ who have support needs but with an additional package to meet any identified care needs of the child/ren.
- A child may also be placed in a home that is rented by the local authority with the support of a staff team recruited from an agency and/or supported by local authority staff.

The reasons for OWR's are related to overall placement sufficiency, the children's social care market study final report Wales summary (10 March 2022) found there are significant problems in how the placements market is functioning, particularly in England and Wales. The study outlined that there is a lack of placements of the right kind, in the right places, means that children are not consistently getting access to care and accommodation that meets their needs.

Within BCBC we have sought to address these issues via:

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- Increases to Fostering Allowances above Welsh Government National Minimum levels
- Targeted foster carer recruitment activities Provision of paid respite for Foster Carers and the implementation of a Foster Friendly Policy within the Local Authority to enhance support to foster carers within BCBC.
- Developing and completing a new single occupancy provision within Bridgend that is registered with Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW).
- Developing and completing a new Residential Home that has 3 emergency beds and 4 assessment beds. The needs profiles of children within our existing medium term Residential Home have been reviewed to enable maximum occupancy.
- Securing funding to enable the commission of a specialist placement support service for children within both fostering and residential placements.

The local authority currently has 3 OWR placements.

	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Number of children	6	3	0	0	7
Number of placements	9	5	0	0	7

Table 13

Table 13 indicates the number of children and number of placements that utilised an OWR over the past 5-year period. It is possible for a child to have been placed in multiple OWR placements.