

APPENDIX A – CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & TRANSITION COMMISSIONING STRATEGY

Introduction

Bridgend County Borough Council has developed 3 Commissioning Strategies looking at how current services will need to change and develop over the next 5 years, in order to continue to meet the needs of people in Bridgend County. This strategy describes how we will contribute to the wider health and wellbeing agenda by promoting independence and choice for individuals living in the County Borough. These strategies reflect the 7 wellbeing objectives laid out in the Council's Corporate Plan 2023-2028, which aim to have, a county borough:

- Where we protect our most vulnerable
- With fair work, skilled, high-quality jobs and thriving.
- With thriving valleys and communities
- Where we help people meet their potential
- That is responding to the climate and nature emergency.
- Where people feel valued, heard and part of their community.
- Where we support people to live healthy and happy lives

Our approach to commissioning recognises the importance of modern public services in meeting the needs of vulnerable people in our communities and of managing growing demands and expectations. There are increasing numbers of vulnerable people with complex needs who require support and care that will be delivered by a range of statutory agencies such as health, leisure housing and social services, and by the voluntary and independent sectors. There are benefits to be gained by actively coordinating and co-producing our responses with others in a cost effective and efficient manner.

It is our aim to make our approach citizen-centred, accessible, flexible and responsive for those in greatest need and to enable people to attain and/or maintain their independence for as long as possible in their own homes and local communities. We are committed to providing quality responses for our existing customers whilst also ensuring that support will be both sustainable and flexible to meet the needs of our future customers. As such, this Commissioning Strategy is both ambitious and far reaching.

Overall, we want to ensure we are investing in the right things, that will make the biggest difference and be of the most value to the people of Bridgend. We will always ensure that we commission services in a way that involves us working with other organisations, and most importantly local people. We all need to work together to get the best outcomes, and this way of working is at the core of this Commissioning Strategy.

Financial context

The SSWB directorate is projecting a considerable overspend position in 2023/24 – which is estimated to be more than £12M at quarter 3 (12.5% of the annual budget) – a large proportion of which (£7.5M) relates to Children's Services. The overspend position is mainly due to the pressures of work to meet statutory duties against a backdrop of an exponential increase in demand. The directorate is also expected to make cost reductions/savings from 2024/25 as part of BCBC's MTFS plans. This will mean that any of the priority areas and commissioning intentions proposed within this strategy must be subject to a rigorous business justification and decision-making process, where there will be a clear intention of reducing costs and making efficiencies, as well as providing creative and innovative services which will deliver the best possible outcomes for the citizens of Bridgend.

Children, Young People and Transition – Commissioning Priorities 2023-2028

Bridgend CBC has faced significant challenges in providing effective children's social care services in recent years. Many of these challenges are shared with other local authorities in Wales, and indeed, other parts of the UK. These include demand pressures, difficulty in recruiting and retaining a suitably skilled workforce, insufficient access to good quality local placements for care experienced children, the impact of the pandemic and financial pressures. Furthermore, Welsh Government's national agenda for eliminating private profit in care for children and its aim to rebalance the public sector away from reliance on commissioning external providers to a stronger public sector offer will provide additional challenges.

Our purpose as a Council is to exercise our legal and professional duties to help those who need care and support in Bridgend to have the best possible outcomes and experiences in life. Our children's plan identifies the following key challenges we will address in the next 3-5 years:

- Reducing the number and proportion of children and young people who need to experience care and support and require safeguarding in Bridgend.
- Helping more families in Bridgend live well together and bring their children up to be resilient and live the lives that they want to live as adults.
- Working with our partners to make sure families get the right help at the right time.
- Re-focusing our resources on more cost-effective support for families with complex needs rather than expensive substitute care experiences.

Achieving these will involve significant changes in the following areas:

- The voice of children and families
- Our workforce
- Our practice
- The impact of our services and interventions
- Our response to families with complex needs
- Our work with partners
- Our intelligence and information systems

As part of delivering these changes we need to focus on the following commissioning priorities:

1. Develop a placement support service to ensure the right multi-agency therapeutic input for children, young people and their carers.
2. Develop our local fostering services in order to increase our numbers of internal foster carers to secure greater placement sufficiency.
3. Develop additional residential provision in Bridgend to enable flexibility especially for children and young people with complex needs.
4. Strengthen our accommodation pathways for young people leaving care, consistent with Shelter Cymru's "Care Leavers' Accommodation and Support Framework for Wales".
5. Strengthen our offer of support to children with disabilities and their families, including those on the neurodevelopmental pathway.
6. Strengthen our support for children who are at risk, or likely to be at risk, of child exploitation, and those that go missing.

This document describes the rationale, current situation and commissioning tasks needed for each of these priorities, as well as some of the potential resource implications.

NB: In addition to these priorities linked to our statutory services, there is also a key priority to strengthen our early help services for families to prevent and reduce the need for children to experience safeguarding or care, for which a separate specific strategy is being developed.

Priority 1: Develop a placement support service to ensure the right multi-agency therapeutic input for children, young people and their carers.

Rationale:

To meet our sufficiency duty and improve outcomes for our children and young people we need to strengthen our support for foster carers and care experienced children. Having the right placement in the right place, at the right time, with the optimal level of support is a vital factor in improving placement stability, which in turn is a critical success factor in achieving better outcomes for care experienced children. This view is supported by the Welsh Government in its current Transformation Programme for Children's Services.

Placement stability, particularly for teenagers is challenging. Young people who need care and support tend to have complex needs including mental health, emotional and behavioural problems, and be dealing with the impact of childhood trauma. Carers often have to manage a range of significant emotional and behavioural difficulties in the young people they support, particularly disruptive and hyperactive behaviours which can lead to placement breakdown. Analysis of placement breakdowns for care experienced children in fostering and residential care in Bridgend in 2022/23 shows 68% of those breakdowns involved children aged 10 to 17 years and 22% of children had more than one placement breakdown during the 12 month period. Over half of the placement breakdowns were due to challenging behaviour.

Current Position:

Bridgend CBC is part of the Cwm Taf Morgannwg region of Wales which commissions some regional resources in this area including the Multi-Agency Permanence Support Services (MAPSS) which delivers therapeutic intervention services for care experienced children, those with historic placement breakdowns and those with plans for, and post, adoption. MAPSS is available for children with complex emotional and behavioural needs requiring intensive therapeutic support. Current demand for this service is exceeding capacity.

Bridgend CBC also commissions a Behaviour Analytic Support Service (BASS) to embed a trauma informed behaviour analytical service within our children's residential homes by working directly with the behaviour analysts, the wider staffing team and occasionally directly with children and young people. The Council is clear that more capacity and expertise is needed in this area. It recently appointed Oxford Brookes University to provide independent advice about a therapeutic service model to underpin both our residential and fostering services. We are committed to complement the MAPSS and build on our current behaviour analytical model within residential and fostering services to develop a highly skilled staff team who are able to work intensively with young people in both residential care and foster care to help them in their placements and in preparation for adulthood.

Our work in this area will meet the relevant legislative and policy priorities of the Welsh Government which currently include:

- All placements to be inhouse or not for profit.
- Appropriate models of care in place.
- Parity between foster care, kinship and SGOs.

- Sufficient workforce with right capabilities.
- Providing support to Local Authorities and other not-for-profit providers to boost provision, particularly for children and young people with the most complex needs.

Our Commissioning Intentions:

Our intention is to have a placement support service incorporating existing services which will provide sufficient multi-agency therapeutic input for children, young people and their carers available and effective across Bridgend by September 2024. To achieve this, we will:

- Complete a detailed needs analysis and complete work on a new service model.
- Plan the service in detail and the resources required.
- Confirm how it will be delivered – whether in-house, in partnership or through contracting with a provider.
- Re-organise existing services alongside this service to ensure they all complement each other and create an effective approach to ensuring all families have access to high-quality support.

The new service will require additional resources to develop and deliver, some of which will be recovered in reduced costs of placement breakdown and less support being needed from elsewhere. We estimate at this point that the combined existing and new services will require £500,000 per annum to resource.

Priority 2: Develop our local fostering services in order to increase our numbers of internal foster carers to secure greater placement sufficiency

Rationale:

Bridgend has one of the highest care experienced populations in Wales at approximately 135 per 10,000 population, with children aged 10 to 15 making up the largest proportion of this. Under Section 79 of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 the Local Authority must ensure that there is sufficient accommodation for all children who are care experienced. The Local Authority must also ensure that placements are made within the local authority's own area, unless it is not reasonably practical to do so, or there are overriding reasons for placing a child out of authority.

There is concern across the UK that the number of foster carers is reducing and that sufficient range and quality of placements across the spectrum is impacted. Placement sufficiency for care experienced children has a national focus currently in the Welsh Government Transformation Programme for Children's services. One of its stated aims is to ensure that public money invested in the care of children looked after does not profit individuals or corporate entities, but instead is spent on public or not-for profit children's services to deliver better experiences and outcomes for children and young people. It is also committed to developing a national strategy and approach through Foster Wales, which will complement local activity with national campaigns and resources for potential foster carers.

Current Position:

Bridgend CBC currently has a mixed market of fostering placements:

Placement	31st March 2020	31st March 2021	31st March 2022	31st March 2023
In-house Fostering	130	119	111	113
Agency Fostering (For-profit)	62	60	43	41
Agency Fostering (Not-for-profit)	7	5	6	4
Total number in fostering placements	199	184	160	158
Total number of Care Experienced Children	394	390	374	397

At 31st March 2023 the majority of children (113 or 72%) who live in a foster home are living with in-house foster carers, with 45 children (28%) living with Agency Foster Carers. There has been a 35% reduction in the number of agency fostering placements (from 69 in 2020 to 45 in 2023), however, of the 45 children placed with external carers only 4 (about 9%) are with a not-for-profit provider. Of the in-house placements at 31st March 2023, 86% of them are located within Bridgend Council boundaries, whilst only 49% of the agency foster placements are located within Bridgend. In terms of total capacity, at 30th June 2023, Bridgend CBC had 79 approved in-house foster carers compared to 92 in 2020, this is a 14% reduction.

In terms of demand and capacity the number of children who are care experienced has been growing in recent years in Bridgend (like other local authorities in Wales) and recent analysis of demand into the service suggests this is likely to continue into the future. This additional demand has been met through the for-profit sector in the past, but due to national policy changes we will need to focus much more on building local not-for-profit and public provision going forward.

For agency foster placements Bridgend CBC is a Signatory Authority to the All Wales Local Authority Framework for the Provision of Foster Care Services for Children & Young People. This framework delivers strategic level commissioning partnerships with independent sector providers in fostering services. The All Wales Frameworks are managed by the Children's Commissioning Consortium Cymru (4C's) which is a strategic commissioning alliance between Welsh Local Authorities to support placement-commissioning needs.

Commissioning intentions:

Our intention is to increase the number of foster carers available to support children and young people in Bridgend via public and not-for-profit agencies by at least 40. We will also enhance the skills and capacity of our foster carers to support children and young people with complex problems. To achieve this, we will:

- Review current recruitment and retention arrangements for in-house foster carers to ensure they have parity of conditions and then implement a recruitment plan to secure an additional 20 placements to meet sufficiency needs including:
 - Placements for siblings
 - Children aged 10 -17 years.
 - Children who are vulnerable to exploitation and go missing.
 - Children in need of emergency placements.
- Commission a review of the skills and capacity needed from foster carers in the future and implement a programme of training for foster carers to enable them to develop them.
- Identify mechanisms to ensure the training programme for foster carers is continually updated to reflect the current needs of care experienced children.

- Work with existing not-for-profit foster agencies and for-profit providers who have committed to converting their business model, to make at least 20 placements available to Bridgend children.

This priority will require a transfer of resources from those previously used to pay for not-for-profit provision to in-house and not-for-profit partners. We do not envisage additional resources being required in the long-term unless there are significant changes in demand.

Priority 3: Develop additional residential provision in Bridgend to enable flexibility especially for children and young people with complex needs.

Rationale:

As noted in the rationale to priority 2, Bridgend has one of the highest care experienced populations in Wales at approximately 135 per 10,000 population, with children aged 10 to 15 making up the largest proportion of this. Under Section 79 of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 the Local Authority must ensure that there is sufficient accommodation for all children who are care experienced. The Local Authority must also ensure that placements are made within the local authority's own area, unless it is not reasonably practical to do so, or there are overriding reasons for placing a child out of authority.

Securing sufficiency of provision across the placement spectrum is challenging in all nations of the UK and current policy direction in Wales aims to rebalance the public sector away from reliance on commissioning for-profit providers to a stronger public sector offer. Furthermore, the Welsh Government's policy intention to eliminate profit from children's social care, means that as well as strengthening foster care provision there is a need to increase the number of inhouse residential placements and those commissioned via not for profit residential providers.

Although nationally the number of registered beds in residential care homes in Wales exceeds the number of children placed in residential care, many places are taken up by English authorities and there is significant regional variation. Locally for example Cwm Taf Morgannwg has a larger population of care experienced children and young people needing residential care than the number of places available in children's homes in the region.

Analysis shows us that residential placements are primarily needed for children and young people between the ages of 13 - 17 and that the needs of these children are particularly complex resulting in challenges in securing places. Bridgend is a member of the Children's Commissioning Consortium Cymru (4C's) which is a strategic commissioning alliance between Welsh Local Authorities to support placement-commissioning needs, but they are having similar challenges in securing places across the country. We are also seeing increasing demand for placing children with complexity of need who are not able to be placed alongside other children which is leading to an increased use of out-of-country placements.

The costs of these placements can be extremely high, certainly many thousands of pounds per week. While they can be valuable places for helping children and young people with previous breakdowns in care for many, they are a poor substitute for a loving family environment.

Current Position:

Bridgend CBC has a mixed market for residential placements:

Placement	31st March 2020	31st March 2021	31st March 2022	31st March 2023
In-house Residential	10	9	9	6
Independent Residential	6	6	9	20
Total number of children in residential placements	16	15	18	26
Total number of Care Experienced Children	394	390	374	397

The number of children requiring residential placements has increased from 18 to 26 since March 2022 with 77% of these placed with independent providers. This increase has played a significant part in budget challenges for children's services in the last few years. We recognise that demand has increased significantly in recent months and that this is likely to continue increasing over the next year.

We currently have four internal Children's Residential Homes, plus another new home due to open in September 2023. The new children's residential home is purpose-built and will provide care and support for up to seven children and young people within the age range 8 – 17 years at any one time. This consists of four placements within the assessment facility and three within the emergency facility.

Of the four existing homes, one provides medium to long term placements for up to four children and young people aged 8-17 years. Another is a bespoke residential provision that provides short term accommodation for one child/young person between the ages of 8-25yrs who due to their complex needs cannot be placed alongside others.

The other two homes provide care and support for children with disabilities. One is a long term residential provision for up to three children/young people with complex learning disabilities and the other provides a residential short break service for disabled children and young people aged 0-18 years and has five beds. The long term provision is currently located in the grounds of Heronsbridge Special School. However, the school is in the process of re-locating to a new site. Options are being considered to co-locate both our residential long term and short break services alongside the new school to help maintain strong links with the school and to benefit from a purpose built home with wheelchair access that our current long term provision does not have.

For independent residential placements Bridgend CBC is a Signatory Authority to the All Wales Local Authority Frameworks for the Provision of Residential Care Services for Children & Young People. This framework delivers strategic level commissioning partnerships with independent sector providers in residential services. The All Wales Frameworks are managed by the Children's Commissioning Consortium Cymru (4C's).

Commissioning intentions:

Our intention is to reduce our reliance on independent for-profit residential providers in line with Government policy, and to continue to improve the quality and capacity of public and not-for-profit provision in the Bridgend area. We aim to reduce the proportion of residential placements which are with the for-profit sector from 77% currently to 25% by March 2026. To achieve this we will:

- Develop 4 bespoke residential placements for children with complex needs. The ongoing costs of this service will be met from the resources previously spent with the for-profit independent sector.
- Review BCBC's residential provision for children/young people with complex learning disabilities and our residential short break service for disabled children
- Review the age range of our current supported accommodation/behaviour analytical service for young people aged 18-21 with complex needs (Ty Mor).
- Explore the potential for working in partnership with not-for-profit residential care providers and existing local for-profit providers who commit to converting business model to increase available block or call-off arrangements for local residential provision by about 8 places. The costs of these contracts would be met from reductions in the contracts with for-profit providers and be sufficient unless there are significant changes in demand.

Priority 4: Strengthen our accommodation pathways for young people leaving care, consistent with Shelter Cymru's "Care Leavers' Accommodation and Support Framework for Wales"

Rationale:

All Welsh Councils have been tasked by Welsh Government to examine their corporate parenting response in relation to care experienced children and young people and their future accommodation needs. A new "Care Leavers' Accommodation and Support Framework for Wales" was launched by Welsh Government and developed by Shelter Cymru in May 2023. It aims to guide local authorities in helping young people to transition from care to settled housing by helping local authority commissioners, team managers of leaving care/housing and providers that support young people to plan for transition.

Across Bridgend children aged 10 to 15 make up the largest proportion of care experienced children (39%). This has a potential impact on accommodation sufficiency in the next few years as these young people move through the care system and avail of care leaving services. In addition, all local authorities in Wales are experiencing the pressure of the recent growth in unaccompanied asylum seeking children locating to the area under the Home Office's mandated National Transfer Scheme. To date, the majority of young people referred to Bridgend have been aged 16+ and their needs have been primarily met in Supported Accommodation. Due to their immigration status and no recourse to public funds, accommodation and move on options for these young people are extremely limited, which results in lengthy stays in supported environments, impacting on availability.

Factors such as the current lack of social housing, long waiting lists on the Common Housing Register, affordability, and low landlord confidence in young people as tenants, are impacting on longer-term move-on options for our care leavers post 18. Time spent in supported accommodation services within Children's Services are therefore much longer than their identified need, due to the lack of move-on. This is not optimal as it means that care leavers are delayed in living independently and from a financial perspective it is not good use of scarce resource as more support is being provided than is required.

Despite having a range of accommodation options available for care leavers aged 16+, the predicted high numbers of children leaving care over the next few years, including unaccompanied asylum seeking children, means there is need for additional capacity to build on the young person's gateway to ensure we have sufficient accommodation with support for those who cannot live with family and friends, or live independently.

Current Position:

Bridgend has a number of accommodation pathways available for care experienced young people and care leavers aged 16-21:

- When I'm Ready (WIR) arrangements allows young people to stay with their former foster carer from the age of 18 to 21. The number of WIR arrangements in Bridgend have increased from 10 in 2019 to 18 in 2023.
- We run a supported lodgings scheme which are placements within a family home in the local community. There are challenges in the recruitment and retention of suitable supported lodgings hosts and the number of arrangements we have has fallen from 6 in 2019 to 1 in 2023.
- We have also developed a service for young people aged 18-21 who have complex needs (Ty Mor). This service accommodates up to four individuals and provides additional support and therapeutic interventions to assist individuals on their transitional pathway.
- We commission a range of supported accommodation and semi-independent options to offer young people aged 16 to 21 the opportunity to develop independent life and living skills to assist them in moving into adulthood. Currently we commission seven units of 24 hour supported accommodation, three units of intermediate supported accommodation and three units of step-down accommodation, all are located within the local authority boundaries.
- In addition, Bridgend CBC are part of a Cwm Taf Morgannwg regional commissioning agreement where we are allocated two units of supported accommodation specifically for unaccompanied asylum seeking children. This provision is located within RCT boundaries.

Whilst there are a range of accommodation pathways in place for young people leaving care at age 18, the major challenge is the longer term move on from these provisions. Analysis shows that some young people are residing in supported and semi-independent accommodation services for longer than required as they have nowhere to move on to. This position is causing pressure and "throughput" issues in our supported accommodation.

These challenges have been recognised and work with partners in Housing has commenced whereby consideration to the priority given to care experienced children in line with the Council's corporate parenting responsibilities when reviewing the Social Housing Allocation Policy will be explored.

Commissioning intentions:

Our commissioning intention is to increase the capacity and quality of accommodation-based support for young people leaving care in Bridgend. This will include securing the following by March 2028:

- 7 additional step-down units/training flats offering medium-term support for young people leaving the care system.
- Recruiting an additional 5-10 placements with hosts of supported lodgings offering longer-term placements for young people.

To achieve this, we will:

- With partners analyse, and review accommodation pathways for children leaving care in line with the "Care Leavers' Accommodation and Support Framework for Wales".

- Agree a programme of development for training flats and step-down units.
- Commence a recruitment campaign for supporting lodgings hosts
- Explore whether there are additional services which might meet needs including for example a 'Shared Lives' programme.

These new or additional services will need to be funded. The Council will explore arrangements and contributions with partners and the extent to which capital and ongoing costs can be off-set by national grants, partner contributions and welfare benefits.

Priority 5: Strengthen our offer of support to children with disabilities and their families, including those on the neurodevelopmental pathway.

Rationale:

The numbers of children and young people seeking a diagnosis of ASD have been increasing since the millennium. In Cwm Taf Morgannwg there are more than 1,600 children and young people on the current waiting list for diagnosis, and newly accepted patients can expect to wait longer than two years.

As highlighted in the regional Population Needs Assessment 2022-2027, many of these families are living with the long-term impact of Covid restrictions upon their health and wellbeing. Health and Wellbeing is being further impacted by families having to face long periods of uncertainty whilst they await diagnosis. Although support is available from various organisations, there can be long waiting lists for this support because of high demand.

Based on 'what matters' conversations family's feedback is that they are looking for support to secure a 'normal' and 'calmer' homelife. For instance, they want to be able to take their child on family days out or be able to get to get them to school on time or support them with toileting or sleeping. They have asked for practical 'in the moment' support – they need a service to provide practical support which shows them how to manage their child's behaviour.

Current Position:

Children with a disability and/or diagnosis of ASD who have eligible needs for Care and Support can receive services from the Children with Disability and Transition Team. The assessment and care planning processes undertaken by the team enable the identification of appropriate support services to meet the identified needs. These services include Direct Payments and short breaks (e.g. Bakers Way residential short breaks children's home; Family Link, short break fostering service) and access to specialist play/sport activities.

For those children who do not have eligible needs for Care and Support, including those on the ND pathway, support is offered through the Early Help Hubs. However, this is time limited and still leaves some families waiting for a diagnosis in the hope that this will unlock additional support to manage their needs. Bridgend CBC currently commissions a parenting programme from Action for Children, although this service is not aimed specifically at families who have children with disabilities. We also commission an 'Atebion' service from Barnardo's that offers:

- Provision of professional advice and guidance on managing the effects of disability on the family.
- Support for siblings of disabled children and young people to enable them to thrive.

- Appropriate parenting support that meets the needs of and supports those parents/carers with coping strategies for challenging behaviour.
- Promoting independence and resilience in the community.

However, this is a very wide ranging service, and the provider is under a lot of pressure to meet demand. There is currently a 53-week waiting list for families to receive an assessment. In December 2021 a pilot service was commissioned to provide intensive support to families around managing behaviour. In a very short space of time families and professionals could see the impact of providing such an invaluable service and feedback is that more services around positive behaviour support is required.

We are also working with colleagues in the region to scope, analyse and identify the current gaps to redesign a future model of support. To date a multi-disciplinary workstream has been set up to progress the initial mapping and gapping work in relation to services available for children on the ND diagnosis pathway, and a hackathon is due to take place in October to seek the views of families.

Commissioning intentions:

Our commissioning intention is to work with public and not-for profit partners to develop a multi-disciplinary service responding to children and young people with ASD and Neurodiversity which is able to meet the current and projected demand over the next five years. By March 2028 we will have designed, agreed and introduced the new service with partners. To achieve this, we will:

- Develop data capture mechanisms to produce clear projections of demand for these services in Bridgend for the next 10 years.
- Map the services available and produce a directory of these to improve awareness for children, their families, and professionals.
- Draw on evidence from elsewhere to specify an optimal range of universal and early intervention services and positive behaviour support for parents.
- Develop creative respite/short break options.
- Work with providers and other partners to provide care, particularly personal care, for children in an outcome focussed way.
- Review the Atebion service to explore how it might be further developed within the overall model.
- Work with the region to agree a final service specification, exploring funding streams and governance arrangements, to enable a tender and procurement of services where needed.

Some resources for this service will be drawn from existing partnership arrangements. Depending on future demand projections and the capacity of the service to be agreed, additional resources to ensure sufficient capacity will be needed.

Priority 6: Strengthen our services to children who are at risk, or likely to be at risk, of child exploitation, and those that go missing.

Rationale:

It is important that children at risk of or involved in child exploitation should receive care, support, and protection in line with statutory guidance and the Wales Safeguarding Procedures. In May 2022, the Performance Evaluation Review Inspection (PEI) by Care Inspectorate Wales identified that areas

of practice such as child exploitation and children going missing had not been adequately developed in Bridgend.

Data shows that the number of child exploitation reports in Bridgend has more than doubled over the last three years, increasing from 23 in 2020/21 to 54 in 2022/23 with a further increase anticipated for 2023/24.

In addition, the number of episodes of children going missing in the same period has increased by 54%. Statutory guidance states that local authorities must offer an independent return interview to all children and young people who run away or go missing from their family home or care. This involves an in-depth conversation led by a representative or advocate who is independent of their placement or the local authority, to understand and address the reasons why a child has run away, to identify any harm that may have occurred and to address and prevent further risk.

Current Position:

A regional CTM Exploitation Steering group has been set up with the primary aim of developing an Exploitation Strategy that will support practitioners to respond effectively to issues of exploitation and provide a coordinated, multi-agency response.

In Bridgend, two senior social workers have been appointed to lead on exploitation within our Mash/IAA and Safeguarding Team, and an Exploitation Panel has been set up. Training on understanding and identifying exploitation and contextual safeguarding is being rolled out and a suite of documents created, including screening tools and direct work tools, to support practitioners to identify exploitation. Work is also ongoing to look at how we can strengthen the consistency and facilitation of the triangulation/mapping of child exploitation information.

Bridgend has a service level agreement (SLA) in place with a third sector provider for therapeutic intervention services for children and young people who have been the victims of sexual abuse; young people who display problematic or Harmful Sexual Behaviour; and young people who are at risk of or are abused through Child Sexual Exploitation. From the service usage data below, it is clear that the number of children and families receiving this service increased by 53% in 2021/22 and has remained consistent in 2022/23. Current demand for this service is outweighing capacity.

	2020/21	2021/2022	2022/2023
Number of children and families who received therapeutic intervention services	15	23	23

Return home interviews for children who go missing in Bridgend are currently undertaken by a child advocacy service that is commissioned by South Wales Police. Further exploration around these arrangements requires review.

Nevertheless, given the intensity of the direct work required with children at high risk of exploitation, and the increase in demand that we are seeing in this area, we need to explore if and how these services can be best delivered and ensure that we have sufficient capacity to meet need in the future.

Commissioning intentions:

Our commissioning intention is to establish a service for children who are at risk, go missing or are likely to be at risk of child exploitation which has sufficient capacity, skills and knowledge to meet their growing needs by March 2025. To achieve this, we will:

- Complete a detailed analysis of needs and review examples of best practice from elsewhere.
- Agree with partners the design of a service which will meet needs effectively, and how this will be funded. In doing so we will explore the need for four direct intervention workers to work with young people who are at risk of or are being exploited, review demand for therapeutic support services for young people who are at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation and review the current contract for the service that carries out return home interviews for children when they return from a missing episode.
- Work with partners to develop and implement the service.

Some of the resources that will be needed to resource the service will come from the relocation of existing services but depending on the analysis of need and future capacity required, it is likely that additional resources will be needed. This will need to be explored with partners and possibly central Government.

- Working alongside colleagues in corporate services and relevant service area(s), explore the potential for more flexible and effective use of national grants to address the needs of children and families with more complex needs
- Agree a single set of measures and a single monitoring framework to use as the basis of maintaining a close handle on demand, activity and performance.

The changes involved in this area are primarily to do with reallocation of resources. Primarily, it is intended that the resources currently spent on safeguarding, residential and fostering support will be reduced as a result of greater investment in intensive early help, resulting in no additional costs, although this of course will depend on ongoing patterns of demand. There may well be additional resources to facilitate the transition required planned and ensure existing services are maintained while others are built up.