

Bridgend County Borough Council
Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Pen-y-bont ar Ogwr

 www.bridgend.gov.uk



Annual Corporate Safeguarding Report

2023-2024

1. Introduction and Background

The purpose of this report is to provide information relating to Bridgend County Borough Council's (the Council) performance regarding safeguarding vulnerable individuals across the services provided by the Council's directorates. This report sets out how each area has been performing regarding the following areas:

- Adults Safeguarding
- Safeguarding children
- Education safeguarding
- Workforce
- Housing
- Partnership and Community Safety and Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV)
- Placement Sufficiency, Out of County Placements and Operating Without Registration (OWRs)
- Other areas of key focus
- Priority Areas for future focus and development

Safeguarding all remains a key priority of all services provided by the Council with the focus being put on ensuring and protecting people's health, wellbeing and human rights, whilst enabling them to live free from harm, abuse and neglect.

Following the implementation of Part 7 of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act (2014) (SSWBA), sets out responsibilities for Local Authorities and relevant partner agencies to work together to safeguard vulnerable individuals at risk. The Council forms a part of the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Regional Safeguarding Board (CTMRSB). For more details on the activity of CTMRSB, it's annual report can be found [here](#).

This report has been prepared through contributions from relevant members of the council's Corporate Safeguarding Board (CSB). The CSB meets on a monthly basis, is chaired by the Corporate Director for Social Services and Wellbeing, and consists of officers representing service areas from the following areas:

- Adults Services
- Children and Family Services
- Education, Early Years and Young People's Services
- Workforce and Human Resources
- Housing
- Partnership and Community Safety and Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV)
- Employability
- Social Care Workforce Development Programme (SCWDP) team

The Council's CSB is responsible for ensuring the compliance of all directorates with key safeguarding requirements in relation to vulnerable individuals, agreeing and implementing clear actions for the group within the annual action plan, ensuring effective cross directorate safeguarding practice, and monitoring corporate safeguarding measures. The board advises the Cabinet Corporate Management

Board (CCMB) and recommends relevant action in relation to corporate safeguarding standards and policy. At the monthly meeting, the CSB Dashboard is reviewed and discussed, which is then presented to CCMB at their following meeting by the Corporate Director for Social Services and Wellbeing.

2. Adults Safeguarding

Across this past year a significant piece of work has been completed regarding the future operating model of Adults Social Care which has resulted in a new three tier model of practice including the new Early Intervention and Prevention Hub (EIPH) front door. The function of this new front door team is as follows:

- Respond to unknown individuals from the 'ASC front door' or hospital setting
- Combines the functions of the Common Access Point (CAP) and the Short Term Social Work Team (STSWT), with the functions of the Community Support Workers and Social Work Assistants from EIPT
- The Intensive Support Service will be based within the Early Intervention and Prevention Hub
- The Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) will consist of Social Work Practitioners, Nurse, an Occupational Therapist response, links with Local Community Connectors and representation from Tu-veda and the Bridgend Association of Voluntary Organisations (BAVO).
- As per Adult Social Care Practice Model, all practitioners in the hub will deliver highly **strengths-based, outcome focused** practice
- There will be a focus on maximizing community assets and preventative approaches to avoid early entry in to the higher, specialist tiers, 2 and 3
- To ensure flow, individuals are assessed and supported within no longer than 12 weeks, after which individuals will be transferred to the next tier of the model or closed due to the ethos of the hub successfully managing any escalation in needs.

Within this new front door Early Intervention and Prevention Hub team, a new screening and consultation process has been identified in order to identify and appropriately support referrals into Adults Services in order to make the best and correct decision regarding any safeguarding concerns and reports of an adult at risk. Processes have been identified to support the team in dealing with email consultations, Adult at Risk reports, Professional Concerns, requests for checks to be completed, and telephone contacts for consultation appropriately.

The SSWBA places a duty on all to report an "adult at risk". Local Authorities must make enquiries where 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 126 safeguarding enquiries. These should 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.

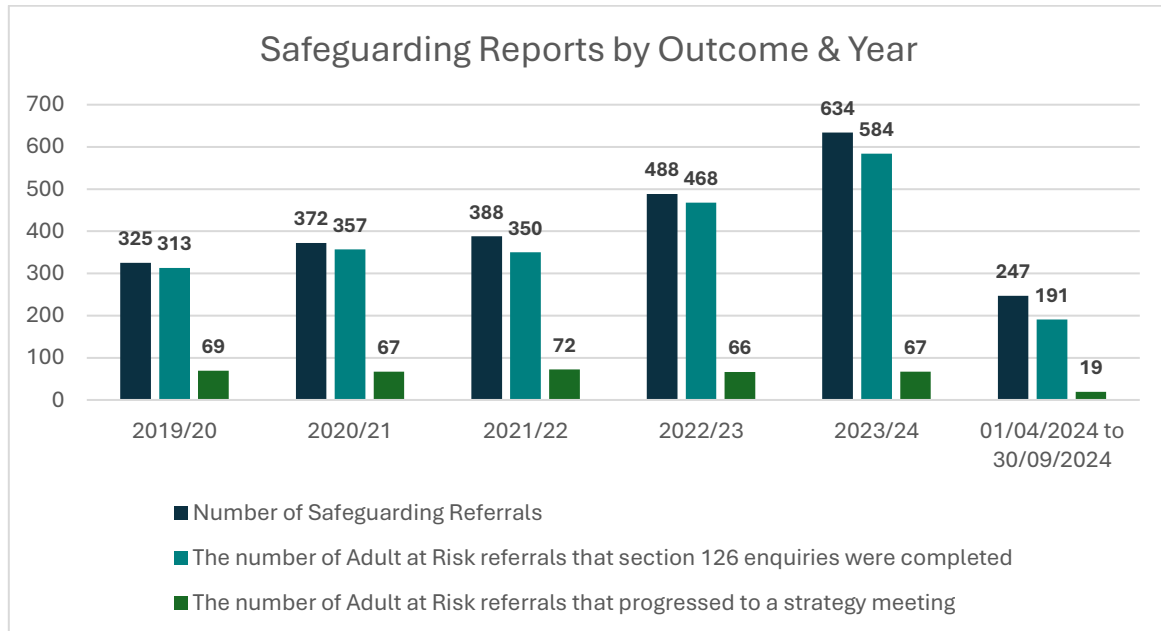
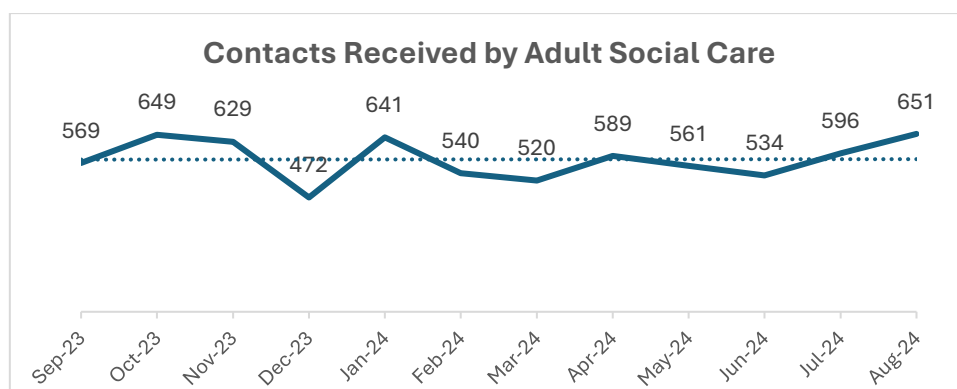
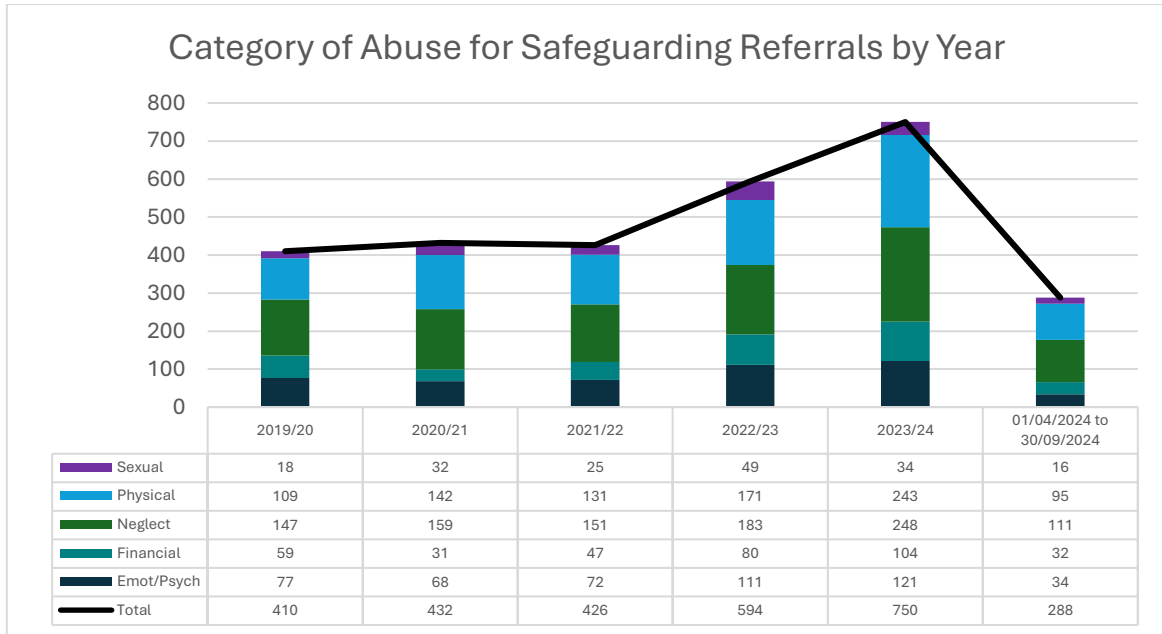


Table 1, above, shows comparative data from the previous 5 years involving the number of safeguarding referrals received, as well as the number of referrals that progressed through the relevant stages, demonstrating the continued increase in numbers of contacts and subsequent enquiries that have been completed.

Although the total number of safeguarding referrals across adults' services has been on the increase since the implementation of the act, across this past year, the total number of referrals received by adults services has remained at a consistent level across the year as can be seen from the below graph.



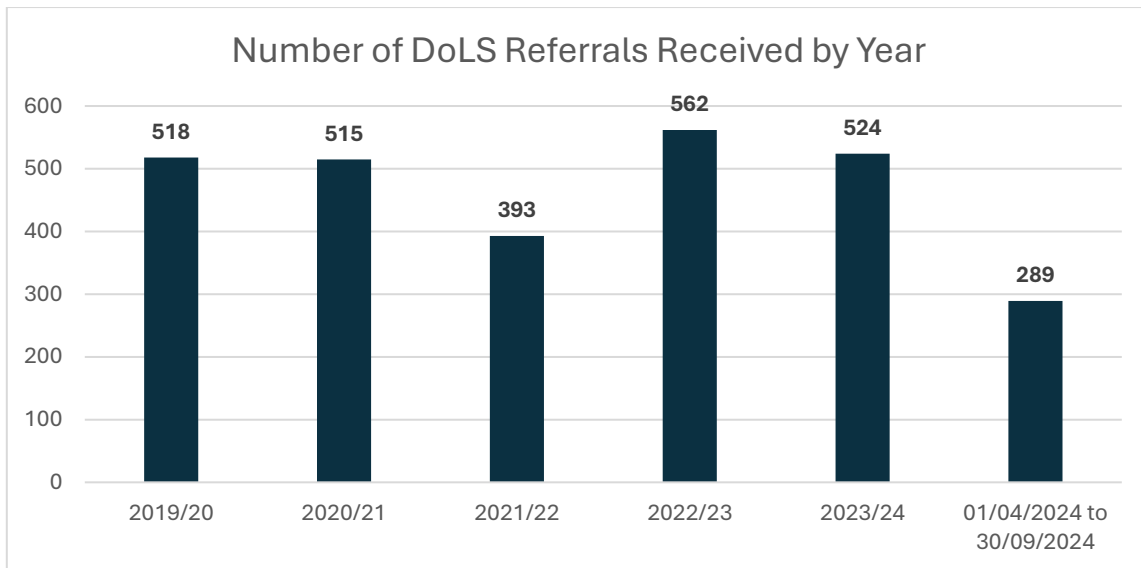
The following chart provides a breakdown of the category of abuse for Adults Safeguarding Referrals by year, showing that Neglect and Physical Abuse are consistently the highest categories for referral.



The number of Initial Professional Abuse strategy meetings held in Adult's Services continues to show a downward trend and reduction in numbers over the past 5 years as can be seen from the following graph. This is in spite of a slight increase in strategy meetings from the previous year. To date, there have been 20 strategy meetings held for professionals this year.



Court of Protection Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) referrals across Adults Services have remained at a relatively consistent level in comparison to the previous 5 years.



3. Safeguarding children

A significant piece of work has been undertaken within this area of the Social Services and Wellbeing directorate which has incorporated the integration of Edge of Care and Early Help services into Children’s Social Care as part of the future operating model for Children’s services and leading to the creation of the Children and Family Services division. The Council initiated an improvement programme for Children’s Services in February 2022 following the declaration of a critical incident in which the Council was highly challenged in meeting statutory duties to safeguard and protect children at risk of harm. To develop the sustainable operating model, the Corporate Management Board (CMB) commissioned a detailed review of the evidence base for effectively supporting children and families who, if there is not effective preventative intervention, will require statutory children’s services involvement; best practice across Wales; and analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data on the current arrangements in Bridgend. The review reported to CMB and the Council’s Improvement Board. Cabinet and Corporate Management Board (CCMB), CMB, and the Improvement Board, accepted the findings of the review and the evidence base and analysis has been used to support the development of a three-year strategic plan ‘Think Family, Sustainably Improving Outcomes for Children and Families’, which received Cabinet and Council approval in September 2023. The strategic plan is now the policy of the Council and commits the Council to introducing new proposed arrangements for an integrated IAA, early help, locality social work, locality early intervention and edge of care teams’ service. Consultation was conducted on Early Help and Edge of Care and concluded in April 2024 with operational restructures taking place on 1 July 2024 with both service areas moving from Education, Early Years and Young People directorate to the newly formed Children and Family Services. It is anticipated and expected that by bringing the Edge of Care and Early Help services into the directorate, this will create a more streamlined, smoother and improved experience for those families supported by services who are required to be stepped up or stepped down to and from early help support. The continued implementation of this operating model between preventative

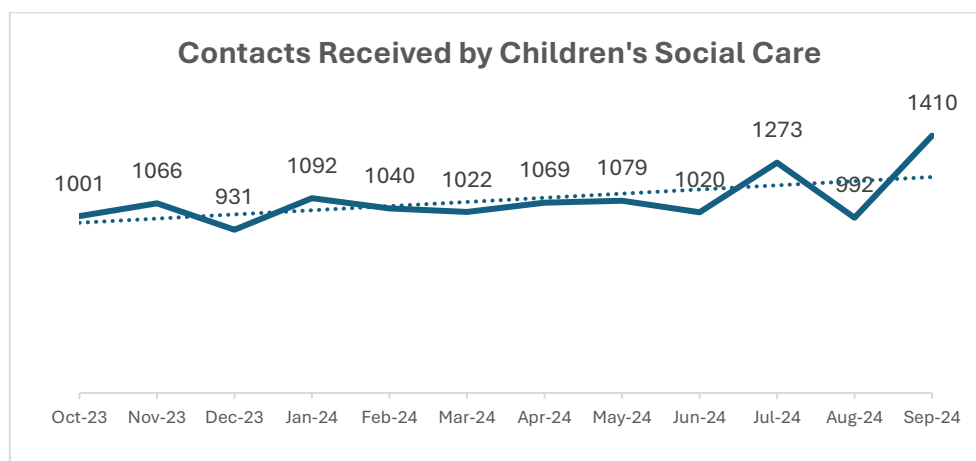
and statutory services to provide an integrated service, where more children and families with complexity of need are supported preventatively, and where families are motivated and consent to change, remains a priority area for action.

In addition to this, over the past year, work has been undertaken that has resulted in a fourth Locality Safeguarding Hub being created in Children and Family Services. Initially the team formed part of the East Locality Hub taking on work related to Public Law Outline, and child exploitation cases, where its remit was then expanded to match the case allocation across the East Locality Hub. This team has since been renamed the Central Hub and will focus on the Bridgend Town area and thus creating more capacity across the East Locality team.

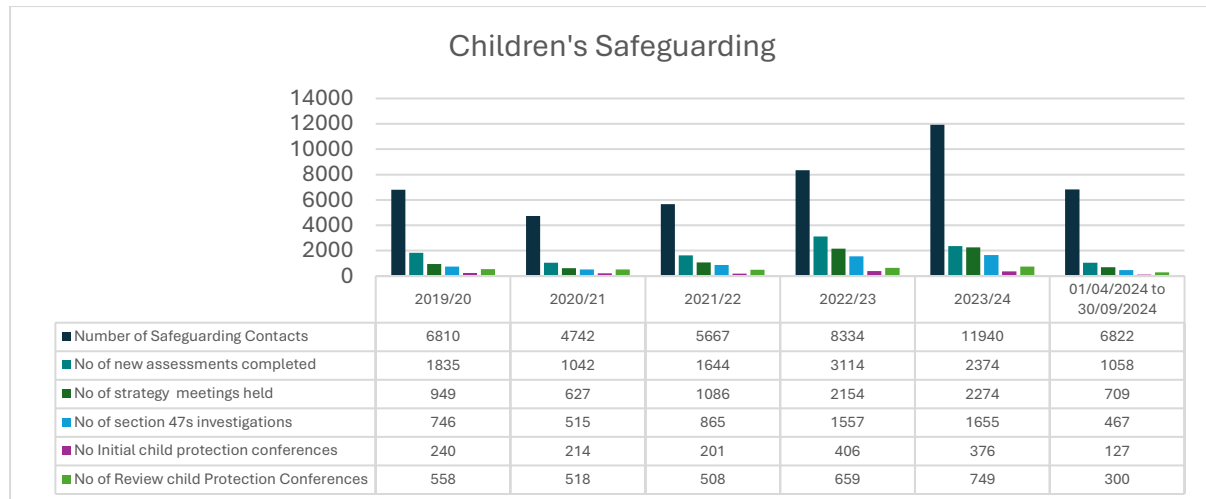
The continued implementation of the Signs of Safety practice model has had a significant impact on how partners work with families and assess risk. The strength-based model places greater emphasis on identifying areas of risks, strengths and protective factors but also seeks to identify what resources there are within the family to resolve their difficulties.

Implementing this model at the front door enables us to ask the right questions following a referral and this has supported the reduction of cases progressing to strategy meetings and potential subsequent child protection registration. It slows down thinking and enables further information gathering to mitigate risks. However, where risks cannot be mitigated, the model utilises the existing strengths within the family, and hones in on what needs to change, enabling better evidence of sustained change. This results in families receiving the right intervention, at the right time and for the appropriate length of time. As a result of this our numbers of children subject to the Child Protection Registration has reduced as have our numbers of Care Experienced children.

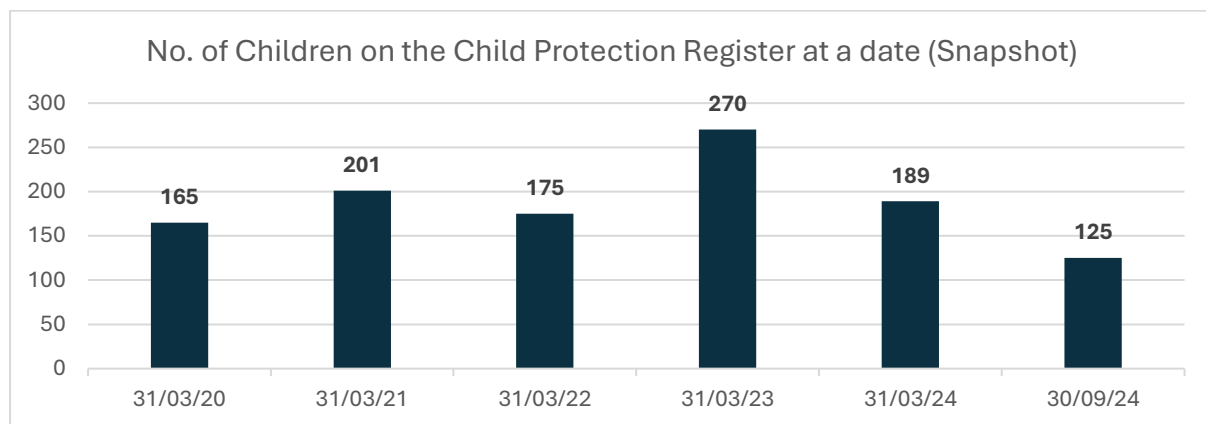
Contacts received to Children and Family Services over the past 12 months have fluctuated in line with school holidays. August 2024 shows a 6.7% decrease in the level of contacts when compared to July 2023. Contacts in July 2024 are the highest over the 12 month period, with the highest referrer being Police. However as can be seen from the below graph, the average number of contacts across the past year has remained fairly stable and consistent.



A breakdown of the total contacts received by Children and Family Services can be seen in the table and graph below showing the comparative data from the past 5 years for the number of contacts received, assessments completed, strategy meetings held, section 47 enquiries undertaken, number of initial child protection conferences and number of child protection review conferences held.



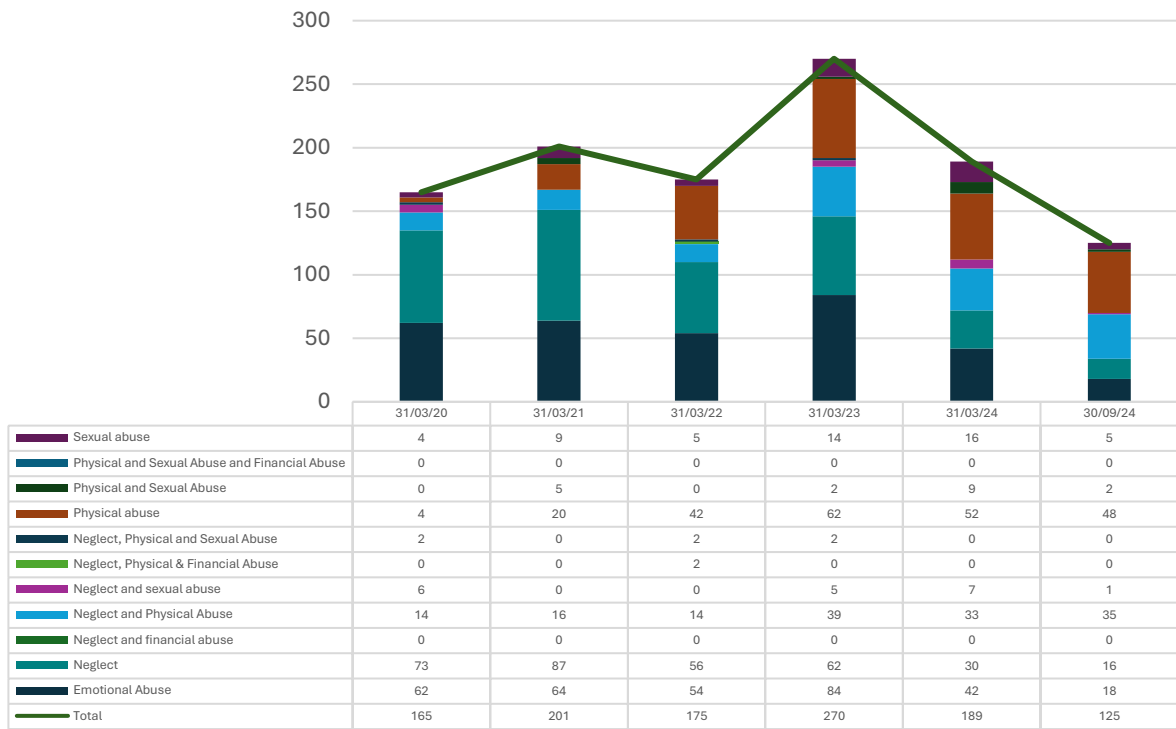
At the start of 2023, Children and Family Services were experiencing a significant increase in children being made subject to the Child Protection Register (CPR), however, following targeted work and a more stable workforce in the Safeguarding Hubs, a steady reduction in these numbers can be evidenced from the following graph.



An Independent audit has been commissioned to look at numbers of children becoming looked after with future findings and actions to be identified and acted upon.

The following chart provides a breakdown of the reasons for registration on the Child Protection register by category, where across the past year physical abuse has been the primary reason for the registration with neglect and physical abuse the second most prevalent category.

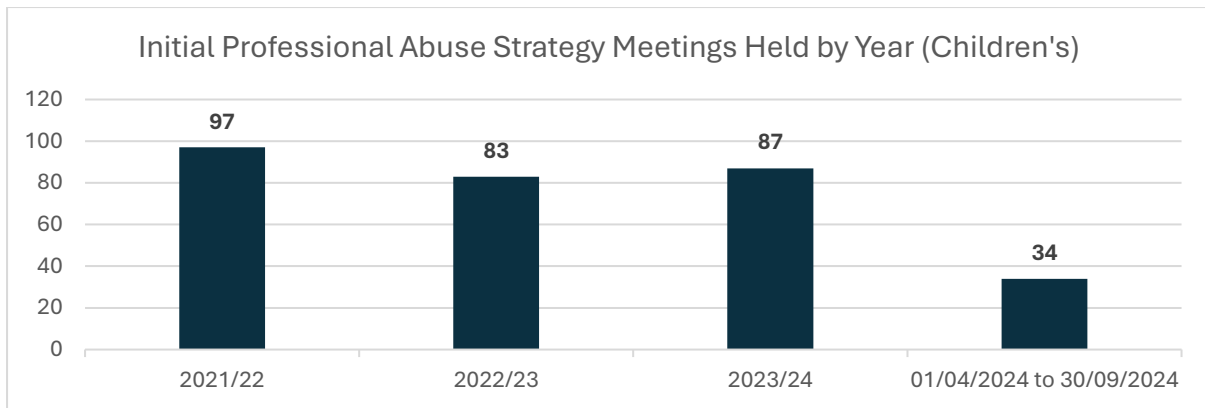
Number of Children on the Child Protection Register by Category of Abuse as at a date (Snapshot)



The following table provides a breakdown of the numbers of children and young people registered on the Child Protection Register by age and by category of abuse.

Category of Abuse	Age Group					Total
	Under 1	1-4	5-9	10-15	16-18	
Emotional Abuse	0	3	7	8	0	18
Neglect	0	2	2	9	3	16
Neglect and Physical Abuse	5	7	10	12	1	35
Neglect and Sexual Abuse	0	0	0	1	0	1
Physical abuse	4	11	11	20	2	48
Physical and Sexual Abuse	0	0	0	2	0	2
Sexual Abuse	0	1	3	1	0	5
Total	9	24	33	53	6	125

Across the past year, there were 87 Professional Abuse Strategy meetings held as shown by the below graph, which is consistent with previous years, however there remains no current identifiable pattern due to monthly referral fluctuations. To date there have been 34 Professional Abuse Strategy meetings conducted for this financial year. Professionals across education remain the dominant profession to see referrals from.



The table below sets out the current position for this year's number of Children's Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) referrals that have been made. As can be seen from the comparative data from this time last year, this is a significant reduction in number of applications made. Data is not currently available for a 5-year trend analysis.

	01/03/23 to 30/09/23	01/04/2024 to 30/09/2024
Number of DoLS Referrals Received	8	2

The Council remains committed to providing 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.

To progress the multi-agency management of exploitation a panel has been established. The panels have been ongoing since May 2023 with the first full panel taking place in June 2023. The impact of the exploitation screening tools and multi-agency collaboration is already evident. Two senior social workers have been appointed to lead on exploitation within the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)/Information Advice and Assistance (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.

Since June 2023, there have been 85 people discussed at the Exploitation Prevention Panels and the panels have taken place monthly, apart from January 2024, June 2024 and September 2024.

The multi-agency response panel consists of partnership agency attendees from:

- Police
- Youth Justice Service
- CAMHS
- Education Engagement Team
- Schools

- School Health Nurse
- Choices Programme
- Independent Child Trafficking Service
- BAROD
- Community Partnership Team
- Adult Services
- Health and Wellbeing Team
- Housing

A Senior Social Work Practitioner for Exploitation has been in post since July 2023 and who chairs the majority of strategy meetings regarding cases of exploitation in order to promote consistency of approach. Termly meetings are held with the heads/safeguarding leads of the local comprehensive schools in relation to exploitation and mapping of young people, these meetings allow comprehensive schools to raise concerns around children they feel are vulnerable to exploitation and it aids in linking peer groups/associations across the Bridgend area. It also allows schools to be aware of the ongoing issues in the area, any persons of concerns, emerging themes of locations of concern. Weekly meetings are held with Police colleagues focussing on missing persons so that any shared intelligence/concerns can be discussed. Representatives from Children and Family services were involved in a British Transport Police (BTP) operation that took place across South Wales in April 2024 targeting County Lines operations. Bridgend Children's Services were present with BTP at relevant train stations across South Wales. A further Police Operation is being undertaken in December which Children and Family Services will also be supporting. The Senior Social Work Practitioner has currently attended 2 Primary Federation of Headteachers meetings to provide education around Exploitation and County Lines, been part of the steering group for Cwm Taf Safeguarding Board to assist in creating regional policy/assessments in relation to Child Exploitation, and is currently part of a Steering Group for Children and Young People who are reported missing from home or care. This Steering Group is part of the Welsh Government approach to tackle concerns around missing children.

Work continues to be completed to ensure and monitor the safety of vulnerable individuals to exploitation.

4. Education, Early Years and Youth Services

This year, the Education, Early Years and Young People Directorate has experienced similar patterns of challenges as in the previous year.

The past school year has seen the highest number of permanent exclusions the Directorate has ever experienced. The following table shows the trend of permanent exclusions across the past five years. Please note data is not available for 2019-2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

	2018/19	2021/22	2022/23	2023-24	2024 up until 30/9/2024
Primary Schools	1	0	1	7	0
Secondary Schools	7	9	13	23	3
Special Schools	0	0	1	0	1

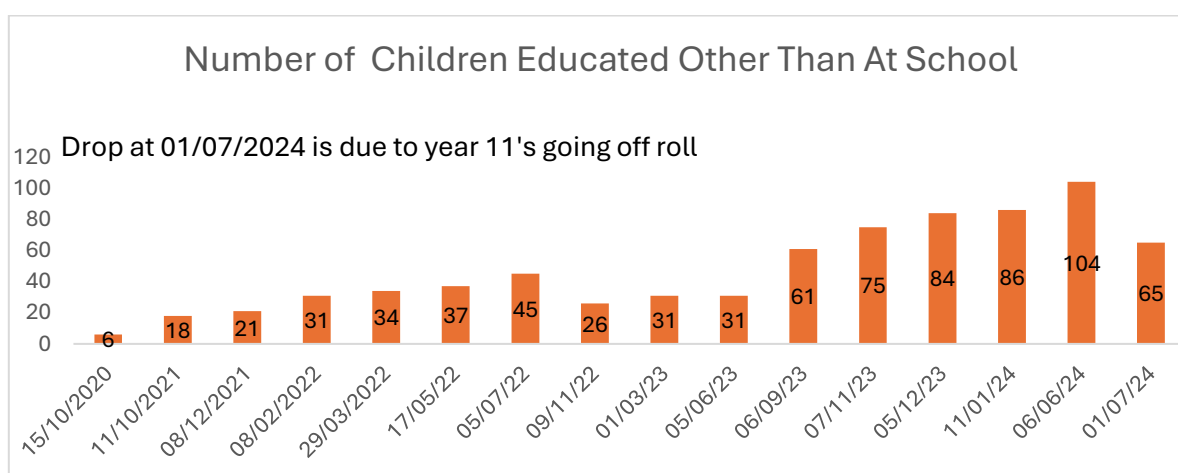
This trend that has continued into the beginning of the 2024-2025 school year, where there have already been four permanent exclusions. An examination of permanent exclusions from the last school year has concluded that they are all justified and reasonable. However, schools are dealing with complex situations in ever-increasing numbers and severity. The Directorate's focus is on what is happening in schools to manage situations before they become so complex.

The Directorate has undertaken a focussed piece of work to understand the complexities of the situation and has considered systems implemented in other local authorities in Wales. The Directorate is hoping to implement a new system to manage moves between schools. It is hoped that this will have a positive impact. However, it must also be recognised that financial cuts mean that there will be less support staff available in schools and also less Directorate services available to assist schools with complex pupils.

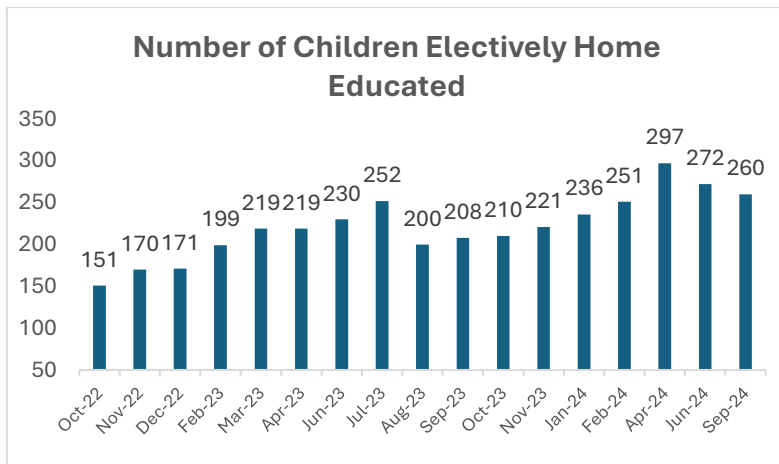
In a similar trend, the number of fixed-term exclusions has continued to increase over the past few years as can be seen from the table below.

	Number of fixed term exclusions			Number of lost days		
	Primary	Secondary	Special	Primary	Secondary	Special
2021-2022	166	1224	74	351.5	2395	124.5
2022-2023	248	1355	67	441	2574.5	152.5
2023-2024	269	1309	97	537.5	2400.5	204.5
1/9/2024 to 30/9/24	15	84	2	20	138	1.5

The numbers of children that are being educated other than at school (EOTAS) has increased considerably over the past school year with a significant proportion of these students being from last year's Year 11 cohort as there was a significant drop in EOTAS numbers following this year group going off roll.

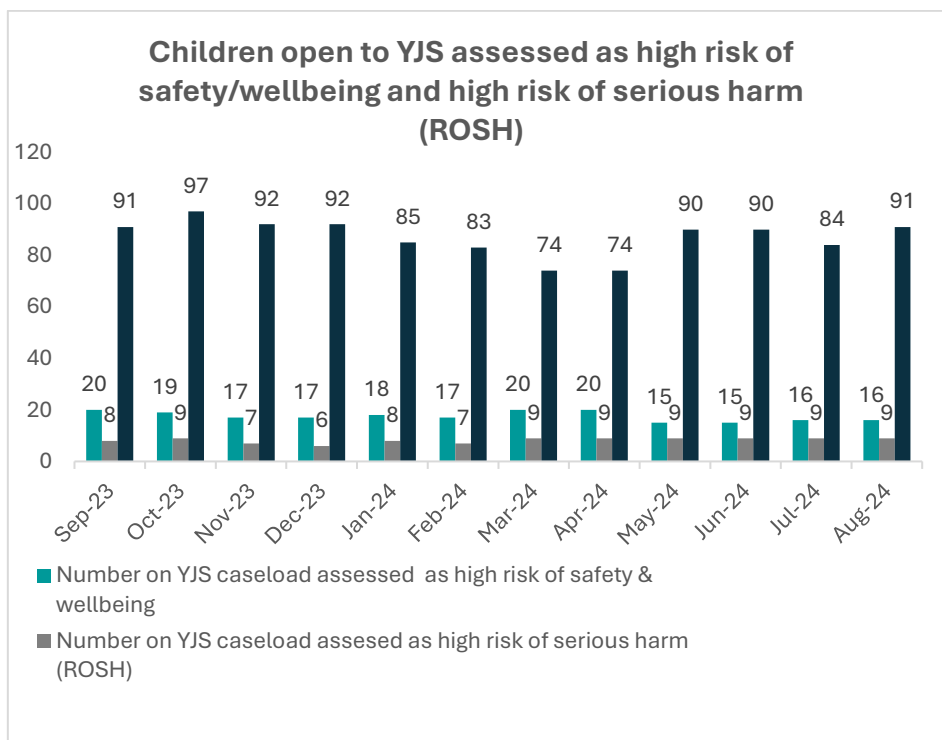


The number of children who are electively home educated has continued to follow similar patterns over this past school year as can be seen from the graph below.



Findings from school safeguarding audits for the 2023-2024 school year highlight that 54 education settings have rated themselves as green and 6 education settings have rated themselves as amber. No school has rated itself as 'red' during the 2023-2024 school year. This represents an increase of two schools who are now rated as green, and a reduction of 1 school that was rated 'red' across the previous school year. The school safeguarding audits are due to be completed by December 2024 for the 2024-2025 school year.

Across the year, the number of children and young people that have been open to the Bridgend Youth Justice Service (BYJS) has reduced. However, the numbers of children and young people on the BYJS caseload that are assessed as having a high risk to their safety and wellbeing, along with those assessed as being at a high risk of serious harm (ROSH) has increased.



5. Workforce

Human Resources & Organisational Development (HR/OD) continue to provide workforce information to the Council's Safeguarding Board which meets monthly. The information includes a monthly update on the status of DBS checks and renewals as well as quarterly data relating to completion rates for safeguarding training.

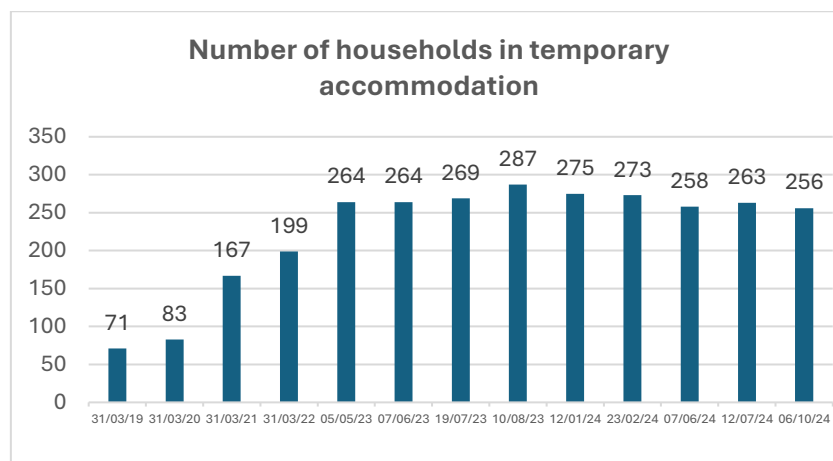
The Council's DBS policy has been reviewed and updated to include checks on those posts covered by regulated services. An escalation process has been agreed by the Corporate Safeguarding Board to deal with non-completions and renewal applications. The process includes monthly reports to be sent to Heads of Service and Group Managers for actioning.

In relation to Safeguarding e-learning, this is monitored by the Learning & Development team and escalation reports are issued to managers for actioning on a quarterly basis.

The Council also has a Recruitment and Selection Protocol to support managers when undertaking recruitment. It is expected that all managers who participate in recruitment complete the mandatory e-learning programme.

6. Housing

Across the year, as demonstrated by the following graph, the number of individuals in temporary accommodation is stabilising, following a period of significant increase in recent years. Temporary Accommodation numbers are a corporate concern with numbers and costs having gone up a lot in recent years. Whilst we have had a slight decrease in numbers, the overall picture is still very high compared to previous years.



Analysis of these individuals in temporary accommodation has been undertaken and will continue to be undertaken at quarterly intervals in order to understand the numbers of individuals that are open and known to Adults and Children's Services. Since the initial set of analysis has been completed, the number has halved. More work is needed to understand this further. The sharp increase in temporary accommodation placements in 2020/21 was largely due to emergency legislative guidance, from Welsh Government, leading to increased statutory duties to provide temporary

accommodation. This legislative change is now permanent and as such still impacting on the number of placements, however wider issues such as the cost of living crisis and the particularly challenging private rent market are significant factors, causing both increase in demand and making it harder for households to move on from temporary accommodation.

The following table shows the percentage of care leavers experiencing homelessness during the year and its reduction from the previous year. This is an accumulative total across the year and so the current position shown is only anticipated to rise across the year.

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	Qtr 1 2024/25	Qtr 2 2024/25
The Percentage of care leavers who experience homelessness during the year	8.23%	10.27%	7.17%	1.81%	4.00%

7. Partnership and Community Safety and Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV)

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.

There has been new guidance produced by Welsh Government relating to the unification of practice reviews into a new Single Unified Safeguarding Review (SUSR) process. Guidance on this can be found [here](#). This year, there have been three SUSRs (formerly Adult/Child Practice reviews) published regarding Child F, Child Q, and Child C from Bridgend County Borough which can be found on the CTM Safeguarding Board website [here](#).

As updated previously, the partnership landscape for Cwm Taf Morgannwg (incorporating Bridgend, Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda Cynon Taf) has changed over the last few years. There is one regional Public Services Board (PSB), and now one strategic Community Safety Partnership which is aligned to the PSB. Both Boards work on the basis of a regional strategy, but a local delivery model based on our communities. Recent reviews of the governance structures have also taken place.

Local community safety structures remain in place, including town centre anti-social behaviour (ASB) management meetings for Bridgend and Maesteg. These groups are well attended from a diverse range of agencies and meet to resolve problems. Successes over the last twelve months have seen drug dealing tackled on our buses, setting up joint patrols between Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) and Barod substance misuse workers and utilising our youth outreach team to attend hot spots for youth ASB and engage in diversionary activities, such as the successful 'Tackle After Dark' and 'Caerau Kicks' with the Ospreys and Cardiff City football club respectively.

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 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.

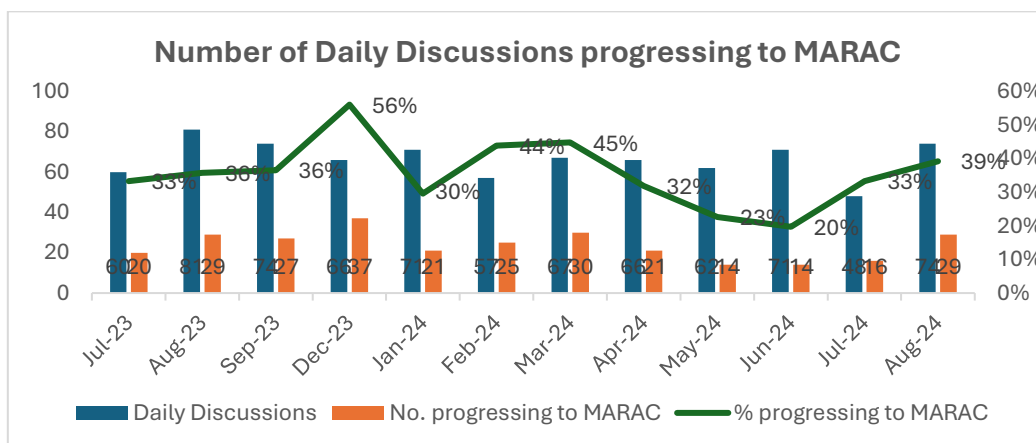
Initiatives such as ‘Trecco Watch’ have been created in response to concerns in Porthcawl, with the model looking to be replicated at Park Dean sites elsewhere in the county. Wildmill has been the focus of partnership working, including holding a community day in August as part of International Youth Day, developing a Crimestoppers Zone there to encourage anonymous reporting and targeted police operations. This is part of a ‘Clear, Hold, Build’ initiative taken forward by the community safety partnership for the area,

Acquisitive crime continues to be a challenge, and likely linked to the cost-of-living crisis and there is active engagement in the partnership with Bridgend Business Against Crime and Bridgend Traders Forum, as well as targeted operations throughout the year.

Bridgend’s Community Cohesion officer post is vacant following the previous job holder taking up a regional position in Western Bay. Bridgend still benefits from support from the Western Bay Community Cohesion team and have supported a lot of work in the borough resulting in visual improvements, such as the popular street art work, and the ‘Bridgend Celebrates Diversity’ project with Bridgend College which is showcased in a vacant property in Bridgend town centre. The team have also been involved in administering small grants to community groups undertaking relevant work and supported Bridgend with tension monitoring, equality support and learning and training opportunities.

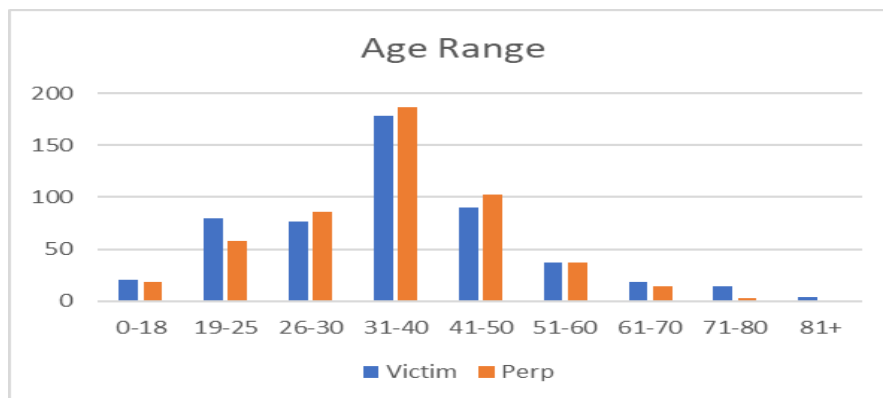
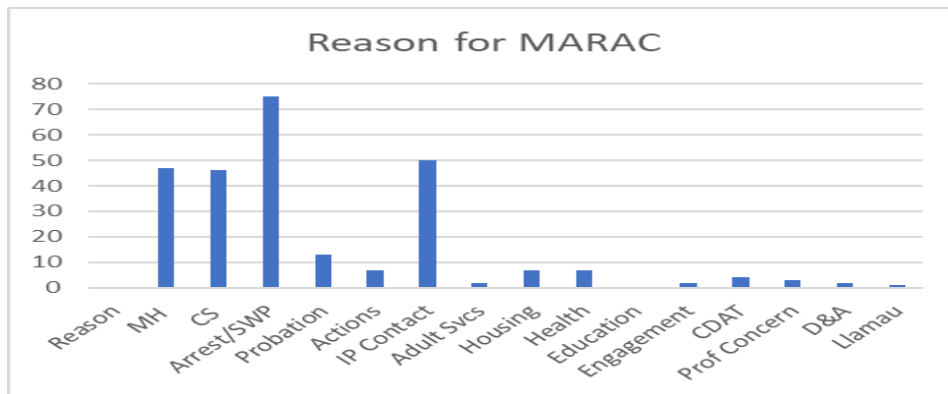
Assia domestic abuse service has seen further expansion and offers a diverse range of bespoke support to meet the wide range of service users. This includes a dedicated older persons independent domestic violence adviser (IDVA), a young person’s IDVA and a male victim IDVA. The high quality of service provided has been recognised by Assia achieving ‘Leading Lights’ accreditation, making it the only council-led provision in Wales to hold the standard.

The following graph shows the number of daily discussions that have progressed to a Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC), which is a meeting specifically set out to discuss how to help victims of domestic violence.



At present, 39% of daily discussions are progressing to a full MARAC, and included in this data above are a number of cases which are listed as information only, this is due to the victim having been listed previously but there have since been further incidents.

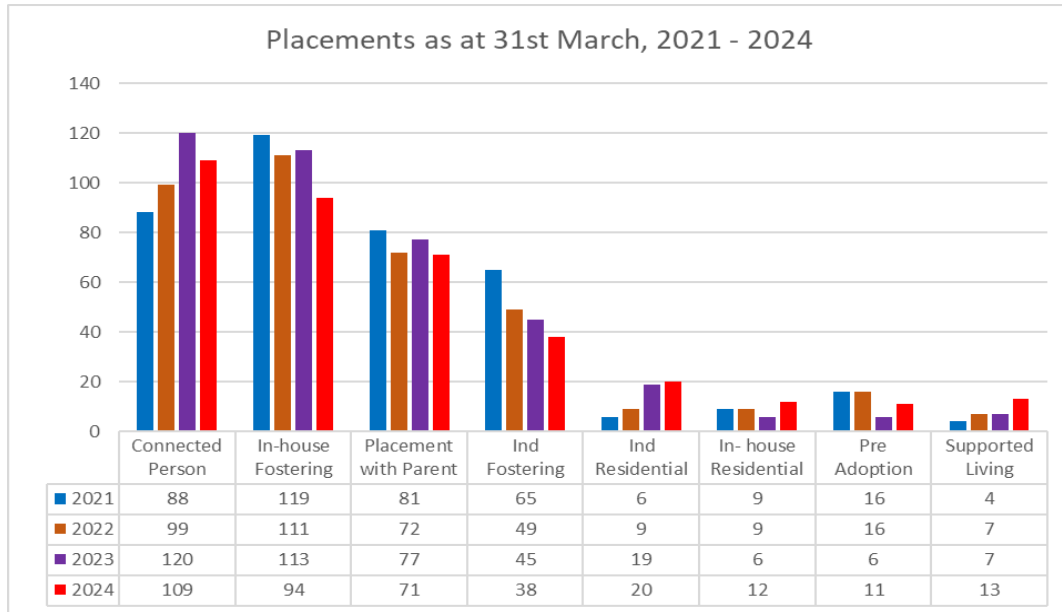
The following two graphs provide a current breakdown of the reasons for MARAC's being convened along with a breakdown of the age ranges of individuals involved, both victims and perpetrators.



8. Placement Sufficiency, Out of County Placements and Operating Without Registration (OWRs)

In 2022, Cwm Taf Morgannwg Regional Partnership Board undertook a Population Needs Assessment, and a Market Stability Report produced, to assess current and future needs which contributed to informing local and regional strategies. A Children, Young Person and Transition Commissioning Strategy 2023-2028 has been developed by the Council which outlines the plan on how Bridgend will address these challenges, with a key priority being placement sufficiency across fostering, residential and supported accommodation. In addition to this, the Council is required by Welsh Government to have a Placement Commissioning Strategy (PCS) which is also being developed. The PCS will specifically focus on placements and placement sufficiency across the county borough.

The following graph shows the position and trend of different types of placements utilised across Children and Family services in Bridgend.



29% of care experienced children are living with connected persons, which is the majority of placements, closely followed by those living with in-house foster carers at 25%. 10% are placed with Independent Foster Agency (IFA) and 3% are placed in a pre-adoption placement. 19% were subject to Placement with Parents regulations, at the 31st of March 2024. These children’s plans are scrutinised at the Local Authority’s bi-monthly Permanency Monitoring Group Meetings, with clear plans in place regarding timescales for revocation applications where that care plan is deemed to be appropriate. Of those children who require a residential placement, 3% of the total care experienced population are looked after in Bridgend children’s homes and 5% of the total care experienced population are looked after with independent providers.

A degree of placement movement can be healthy for some children, indicating a progression in care and support plans in a timely manner which is in the best interests of a child as their placement needs change. This planned movement is most likely in the first 6 to 12 months of a child becoming care experienced as their permanence plans are determined. Where a child’s plan for permanence is to remain care experienced, long term stability is evidenced to deliver best outcomes. Lack of sufficiency and placement choice can have dual impact on stability; a reduction in planned moves due to lack of appropriate match to move a child onto in their best interests, or an increase in unplanned and emergency moves where a child has been placed in an inappropriate match unable to meet their needs, resulting in disruption.

BCBC remain above the Wales Average for children with 3 or more placements moves per year, and is generally higher than the comparator local authorities for the period 2019 to 2023 (latest published data on Stats Wales). However, it is positive to note that recent local data indicates that BCBC’s three or more placement moves figure has decreased from 10.8% at 31st March 2023 to 6.2% at 31st March 2024.

Placement sufficiency across the county borough remains an area of concern and will continue to be monitored and actioned. Further information relating to the ongoing

work and plans to improve placement sufficiency can be found in the commissioning strategy.

Across the past year there has been work undertaken looking at the number of placements for children and young people who are placed outside the boundaries of Bridgend County Borough. It is an unfortunate position that most Local Authorities find themselves in regarding requiring placements outside their local authority borders but this can be related to a number of factors and not just solely availability of suitable placements. The needs of Children and Young People will dictate as to whether an Out of County Placement is required, this could be to manage and mitigate risks associated with the individual, or in order to access specialist support which is unavailable within the county borders. BCBC strives to provide and identify suitable placements for care experienced children and young people within its county borders, if individual children or young people do not meet the threshold for an out of county placement in order to mitigate risks or access specialist services, an out of county placement will only be used if there is no other possible placement available. As can be seen from the below graph, the number of Care Experienced Children and Young People placed outside of Bridgend but inside Wales, as well as those placed Outside Wales have reduced across the past year.

	01/10/22	As at
	-	at
	30/09/23	30/09/24
Placements out of Bridgend but in Wales	88	72
Placements outside of Wales	15	14

30 children placed out of county currently are residing in Foster Wales Bridgend placements with General and Connected Persons carers. 19 of these children are placed with their parents. 18 are placed with independent fostering providers. The remaining children are placed with residential providers including 1 that is Operating Without Registration.

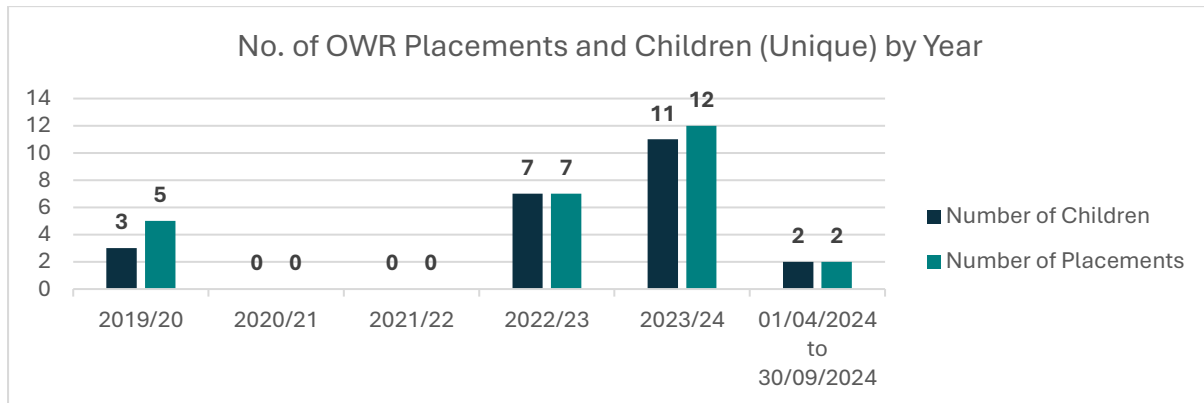
Operating Without Registration (OWR) placements are emergency placements made where the provider is not registered with Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) in accordance with legislation.

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 Children and Family Services in their absence. In all cases CIW are notified of the placement and regular updates provided evidencing the additional oversight in place to support and safeguard the child, and the 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 following graph shows the trend of OWR placements from across the past year.



9. Other Key Areas of Focus

The level of demand continuing to be received into Children's Social Care continues to exceptionally high. PPN's continue to be a main source of the high levels of demand. Meetings with South Wales Police have been held to look at how the demand can be best managed. A variety of workshops will be held with staff to develop an approach that ensures children and families access support from the right service at the right time.

There continues to be challenges related to children in out of county residential placements. The Health and Social Care Bill, which when on the statute books will provide the legislation for moving away from profit in children's social care in Wales, has been laid before the Senedd. Urgent consideration will need to be given in the coming years as to how the local authority can develop resources that can meet the needs of those children within Bridgend.

There have been a cluster of deaths by Suicide within the Secure Estate. There has been a multi-agency response. A working group, which mirrors the escalating concerns process for regulated care settings, has been established and regular updates are being received by the CTMRBSB. In addition to this, between January 2023 to February 2024, there were 18 referrals relating to deaths by Suicide to the CTM Immediate Response Group (IRG) panel, 36.8% were females, 63.2% were males. There were 15 suicides in Bridgend in 2021 and in 2022 up until September there were 20 deaths.

A new Corporate Volunteering policy, which was approved by Cabinet in November 2023, sets out and identifies any areas for consideration regarding the use of volunteers, especially in services that may support vulnerable individuals.

Staffing challenges have continued to be experienced across both Children and Family Services and Adult Social Care Social work teams. In Children and Family services, international recruitment of social workers has continued to take place to support with the vacancy position experienced across its Social Work teams and is now in a more stable position regarding permanently employed staff than when international recruitment processes were begun. The total number of agency social workers is also down across Children and Family social work teams, including the successful transition away from the managed team that was providing support to the front door IAA team since April 2022. Following the model that has been utilised when the managed team were in place, a second IAA team has been created to support with capacity in the front door. Through the implementation of a second permanent team, not only will there be a positive impact upon service budgets through the reduction of agency costs allowing for more money to be spent elsewhere supporting vulnerable children, young people and families, but greater consistency of process and support will be provided to children, young people and families who are referred for assessment, including supporting appropriate registrations and reducing inappropriate registrations onto the Child Protection Register. This will remain an area of focus and development for the coming year.

Across Adults Services Social Work teams, recent challenges relating to capacity and availability have begun to arise, particularly across the new Early Intervention and Prevention front door team. This is related to some long-term sickness absence as well as vacant positions. New processes have been identified working alongside colleagues from the Corporate Front Door Customer Services team which are supporting in ensuring the appropriate allocation and redirection of contacts into Adults Services, along with the new Consultation process that is underway as previously mentioned. This remains an area of concern and will continue to be monitored and acted upon into the coming year.

10. Priority areas for future focus

In line with the process undertaken within school and education settings regarding their safeguarding audits, a process is being identified and agreed through the Corporate Safeguarding Board to support service areas in assessing and improving their safeguarding performance. This process is being adapted from the School Safeguarding Audit process in order for continuity and familiarity of process to be undertaken. This will allow each service area to fully understand their performance regarding safeguarding in a meaningful way, and where they can improve upon their existing performance in safeguarding the vulnerable individuals they support.

Following a Regional Safeguarding Board meeting, where a presentation was shared regarding Cybercrime and the continued development of types and means of Cybercrime by criminals, the same presentation was organised to be shared with CSB. Discussions were held around the prevalence of Cybercrime and how this may become something more prevalent across safeguarding referrals in both Adults and Children's safeguarding services. Work is planned to increase and raise awareness of

Cybercrime and its prevalence in a team and service specific and targeted manner for the coming year.

Following the challenges that have been experienced across the county borough and the secure estate regarding suicide, a local multi-agency Suicide Prevention Group (SPG) has been organised and implemented across the County Borough in order to support individuals and services. Its purpose is:

- To improve awareness, knowledge and understanding of suicide and self-harm amongst the public, individuals who frequently come in to contact with people at risk of suicide and self-harm and professionals in Wales;
- To deliver appropriate responses to personal crises, early intervention and management of suicide and self-harm;
- To provide better information and support for those bereaved or affected by suicide and self-harm;
- To support the media in responsible reporting and portrayal of suicide and suicidal behaviour;
- To reduce access to the means of suicide;
- To continue to promote and support learning, information and monitoring systems and research to improve our understanding of suicide and self-harm in Wales and guide action.
- To be a focused multi-agency working group to work on preventative measures and strengthen our support from lessons learned
- to identify any gaps in services particularly at the primary prevention, groups at greater risk and crisis intervention levels in order to bring about change.

The SPG reports to the Bridgend Safeguarding Partners Joint operational group and has been in operation since July 2024. Work continues towards identifying an appropriate local preventative support group.