

## **Annual Corporate Safeguarding Report**

**2024-2025**

## **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 part of the Council has been performing in relation to corporate safeguarding:

- Adult Social Care
- Children and Family Services
- Education, Early Years and Young People
- Human resources and workforce
- Housing
- Partnership and Community Safety and Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV)
- Placement Sufficiency
- Shared Regulatory Services

Safeguarding is 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.

Part 7 of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 (SSWBA), set 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 Safeguarding Board (CTMSB). For more details on the activity of CTMSB, its annual report can be found [here](#).

## **2. Adult Social Care:**

The last 12 months has seen the strengths- based outcome focused practice model being further embedded into everyday practice within Adult Social Care.

Adult Social Care has a 3 tier operating model. Tier 1 includes an Early Intervention and Prevention Hub (EIPH) front door has been fully implemented and builds on the strengths of those we support, identifying the right support from the right person at an early stage.

Within the Adult Safeguarding team, a new consultation process has been implemented in order to identify and appropriately support Adult at Risk referrals into the team, and to provide advice and guidance in order to referrers to make the best and correct decision. 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 Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 (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

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 centered 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. These additional duties placed on the Local Authority 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 the department.

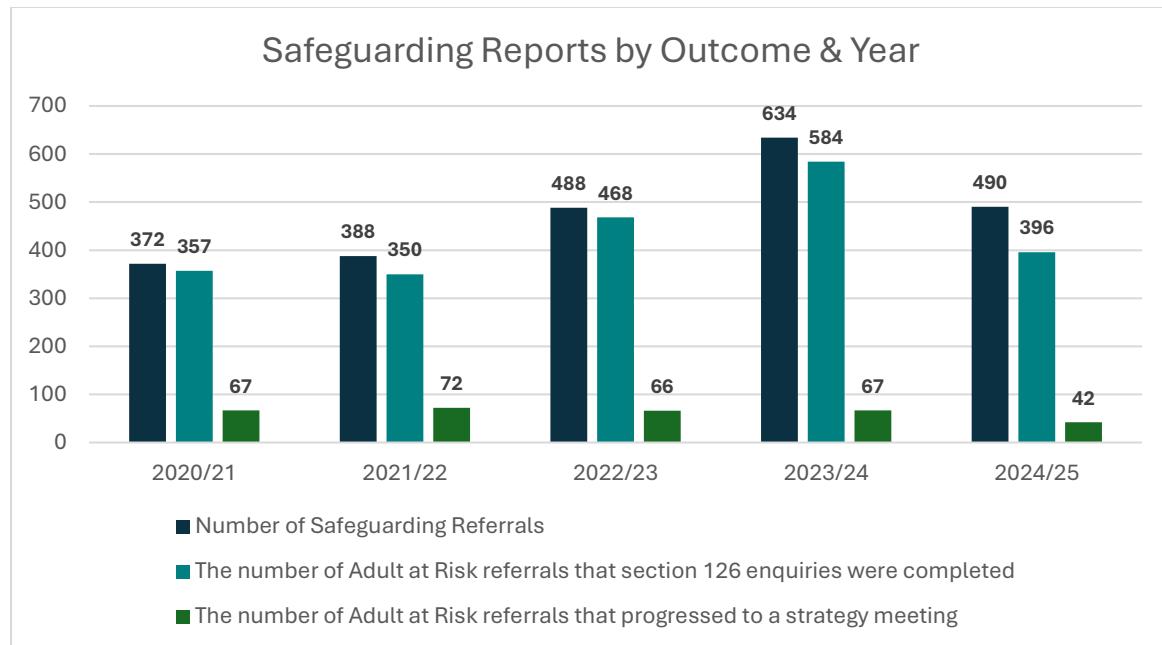
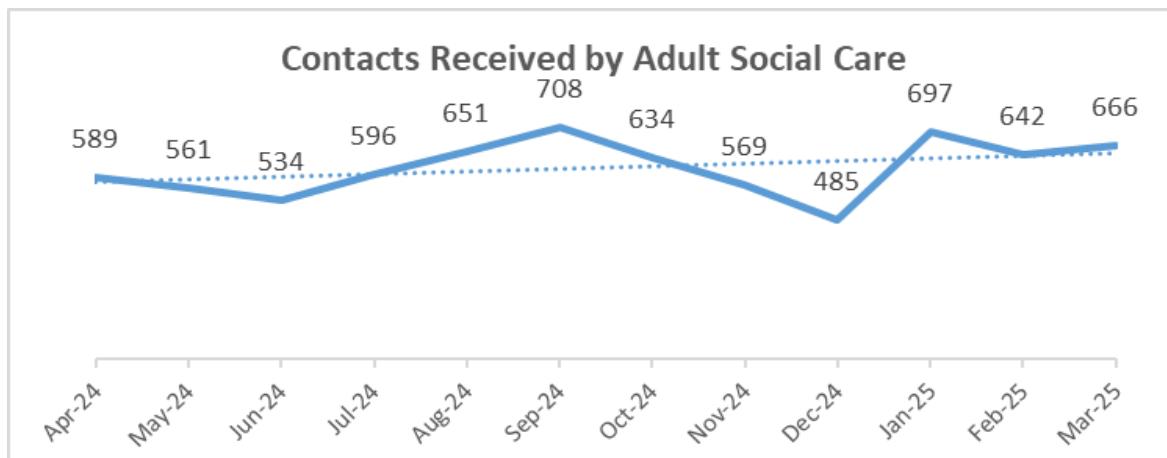


Table 1, above, shows comparative data from the previous 5 years of the number of safeguarding referrals received, as well as the number of referrals that have progressed through the relevant stages, demonstrating the reduction in numbers of contacts and subsequent enquiries that have been completed.

The total number of safeguarding referrals for adults shows that for the previous 4 years there was a consecutive increase in the number of referrals received, the past year saw a measurable decline. This follows the implementation of a new practice model and a focus on outcomes by the safeguarding team whilst addressing the safeguarding concerns. As noted above we have implemented a consultation process. Any consultation requests are considered, and the team aim to provide a response within the same day. Not only does this reduce inappropriate demand on our service, but it is more time efficient for service providers and prevents lengthy forms being completed/submitted when they are not needed. This also provides the opportunity for early advice and guidance.

With regards the contacts received into adult social care the services have 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 adult safeguarding referrals by year, showing that neglect and physical abuse are consistently the highest categories for referral.

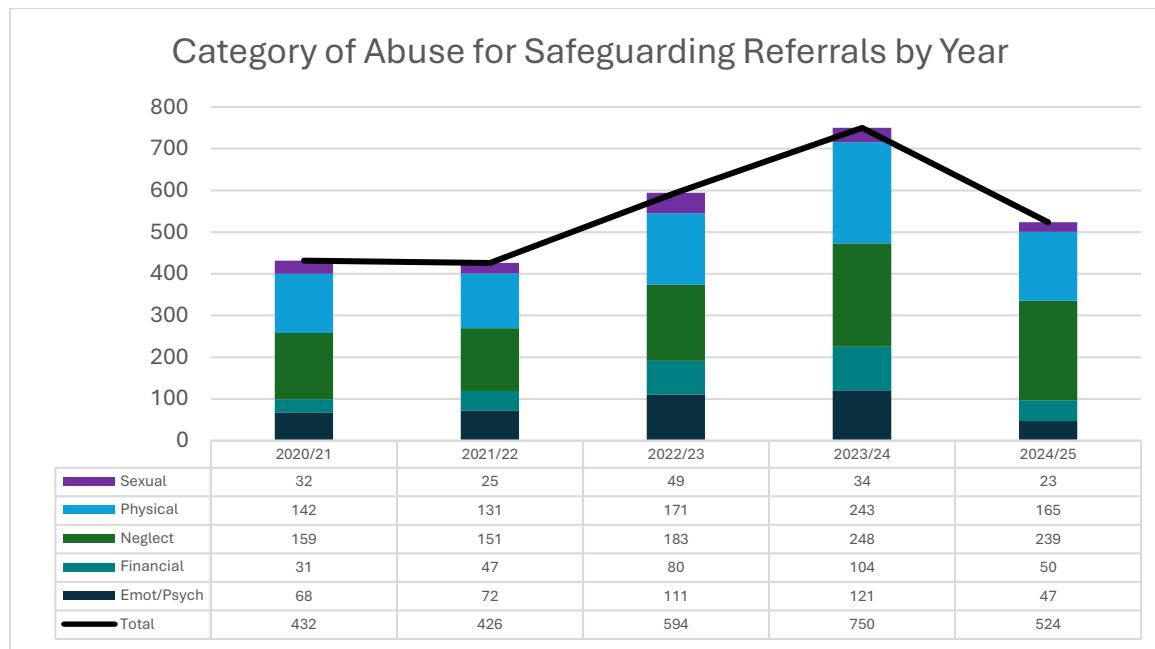
## Advocacy

Advocacy Support for Adult Safeguarding is provided by the Advocacy Support Cymru (ASC) Service.

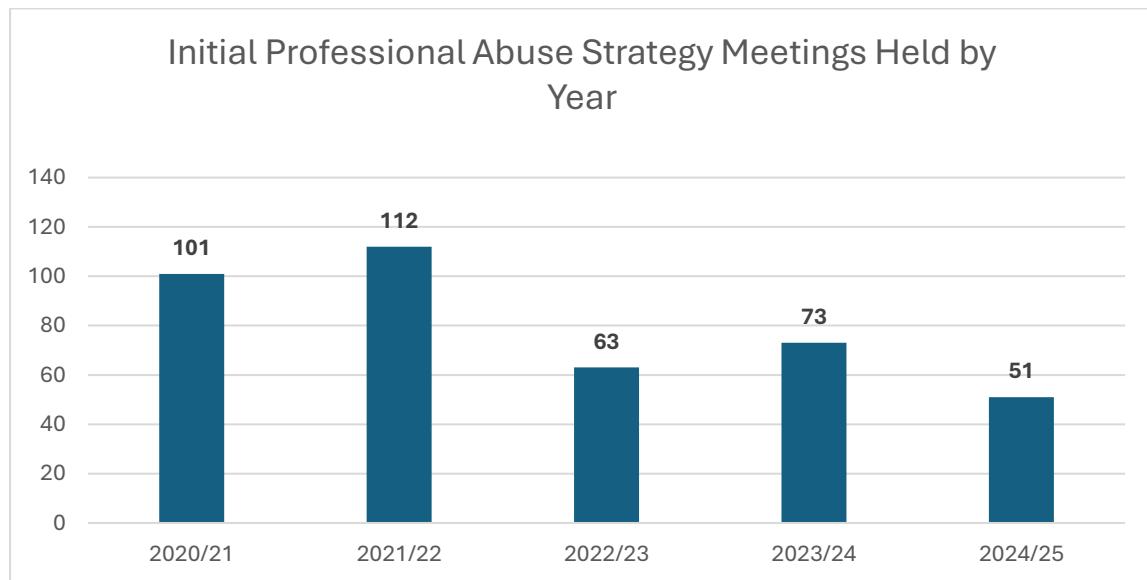
Advocacy Support Cymru (ASC) is a registered charity based in Wales, and is a charitable organisation that prides itself on its independence and effective delivery of advocacy to people who find themselves experiencing mental health issues. Advocacy referrals are offered as part of the safeguarding process.

Advocacy gives a voice to people to make themselves heard. It is an essential process of supporting and enabling people to:

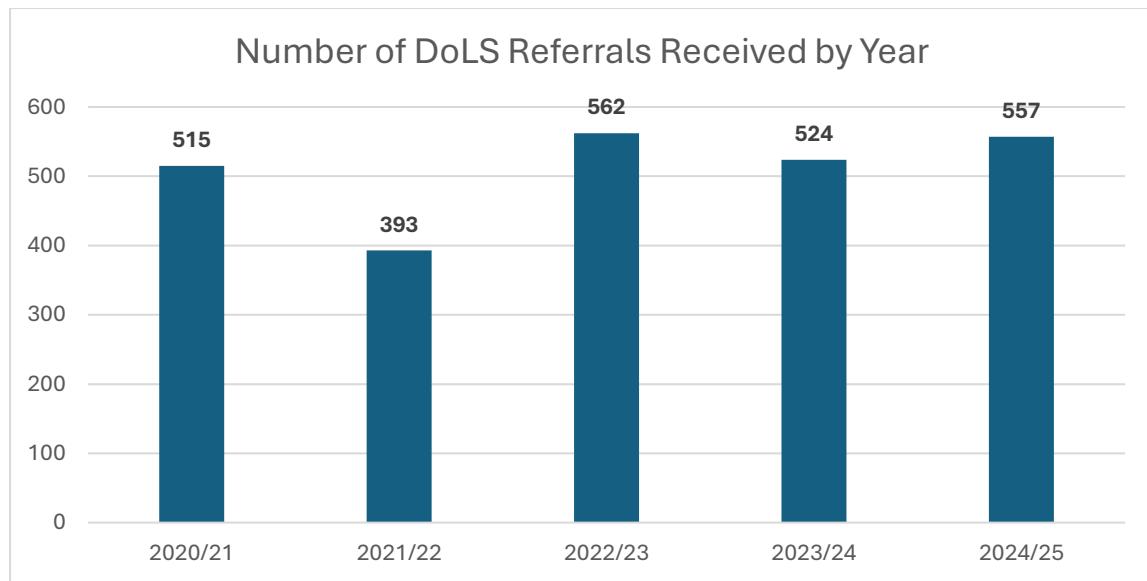
- Express their views and concerns.
- Access information and services.
- Understand and promote their rights and responsibilities.
- Explore choices and options



The number of initial professional abuse strategy meetings held in adult's services generally show a downward trend and reduction in numbers over the past 5 years as can be seen from the following graph. This is despite a slight increase in strategy meetings from 23/24. The highest referrer remains health. Over the last year 40% of allegations were substantiated, 13.3% were unsubstantiated and 26.7% are ongoing investigations.



Court of Protection Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) referrals across Adults Services have remained at a relatively consistent level.



### **Adult Safeguarding case study**

**Situation:** A referral was raised by the sister of a 36-year-old woman with a diagnosis of down syndrome, reporting poor home conditions, limited food, and neglect. The mother was the main carer and prevented professionals from accessing the home to consider the concerns. Further concerns were that the individual appeared withdrawn and unclean and was prevented from seeing her. The mother subsequently withdrew her daughter from day services, following the social worker meeting the women there without the mother's consent, increasing concerns of isolation and neglect.

**Task:** The Lead Coordinator's responsibility was to assess risk, ensure the individual's safety, and promote her rights and wellbeing in line with the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, while managing significant barriers to engagement from the mother.

**Action:** Safeguarding enquiries were completed and multi-agency professionals' meetings with police, day services, and legal services convened, which included formal strategy meetings as it was determined the adult was at risk as we could not obtain her views and wishes. We attempted to encourage engagement through announced and unannounced visits utilising the lead practitioner, joint visits with partner agencies, and maintained clear communication across professionals. When access was repeatedly denied, legal advice was sought regarding an Adult Protection and Support Order (APSO) to ensure all options to establish safety were considered. Alternative approaches were also explored, including a change of Lead Practitioner and a referral to the Local Community Connector (LCC), on the recommendation of the Authorised Officer for the APSO, recognising that relationship-based practice was key to engagement as mother had noted a mistrust of professionals.

**Result:** Through sustained multi-agency collaboration and persistence, a further social worker and the LCC achieved some positive engagement. The engagement was not however sustained, interrupted through unexpected leave of the LCC. Whilst further consideration for an APSO was discussed at Strategy, using this tool

prematurely would further isolate the adult at risk and erode any possibility of developing a working relationship in the future. After initial attempts to re-engage failed, a final attempt with the Lead Coordinator making an unannounced visit was made. Whilst there was initial resistance from mum, the adult at risk was seen safe and well, expressed her wishes to remain at home but also to increase social contact and future opportunities. Advocacy and community supports were put in place to promote her voice and autonomy. The case was appropriately closed to safeguarding, with continued oversight from the Peoples First Advocacy Service and LCC teams to ensure ongoing wellbeing and engagement. The services were advised to contact safeguarding should disengagement from mother resurface as the adult's views and wishes had been obtained. This illustrates how the person has remained the centre of all decision making and the efforts that workers have gone to ensure her voice is heard and to enable a positive outcome.

## **HMP Parc**

In April and May 2024 there was a cluster of deaths within the Secure Estate. A multi-agency response was provided to the escalating concerns which saw the implementation of the working group. Its purpose was to have timely and effective involvement from agencies around any concerns within Parc Prison, to ensure robust support and monitoring through a safeguarding lens and within a multi-agency approach. More recently the group has expanded to consider the needs of the young offender's wing within Parc and whilst no concerns were identified it was felt that when considering safeguarding in parc, this should be approached holistically. The working group meeting will continue a quarterly basis and in addition to identifying any areas of concern it is also tracking the progress being made. It is noted that there have been no deaths from suicide or a result of substances since May 2024 highlighting the significant improvements that have been made. Safeguarding leads from all agencies in the prison form part of the working group and are committed to attendance. The working group chair and prison safeguarding manager provide regular updates are being received by the Regional Safeguarding board.

Within HMP PARC a Significant Attempts of Suicide and Self-Harm Prevention Rapid Response meeting has been developed and implemented. This considers the needs of those who have engaged in a significant attempt and had it not been for an intervention there would be the risk of death. The response to this has been positive and is again shown the good practice within the prison highlighting the quick responses from prison staff in ensuring the prisoners are safeguarded and risk management plans agreed. Appropriate referrals are being made, and this is ensuring a bespoke response is being provided to those considered within the forum. The meeting is led by the service manager with a focus on prisoner wellbeing. Whilst this is still in its early days, patterns and themes have already highlighted which has enabled a targeted response.

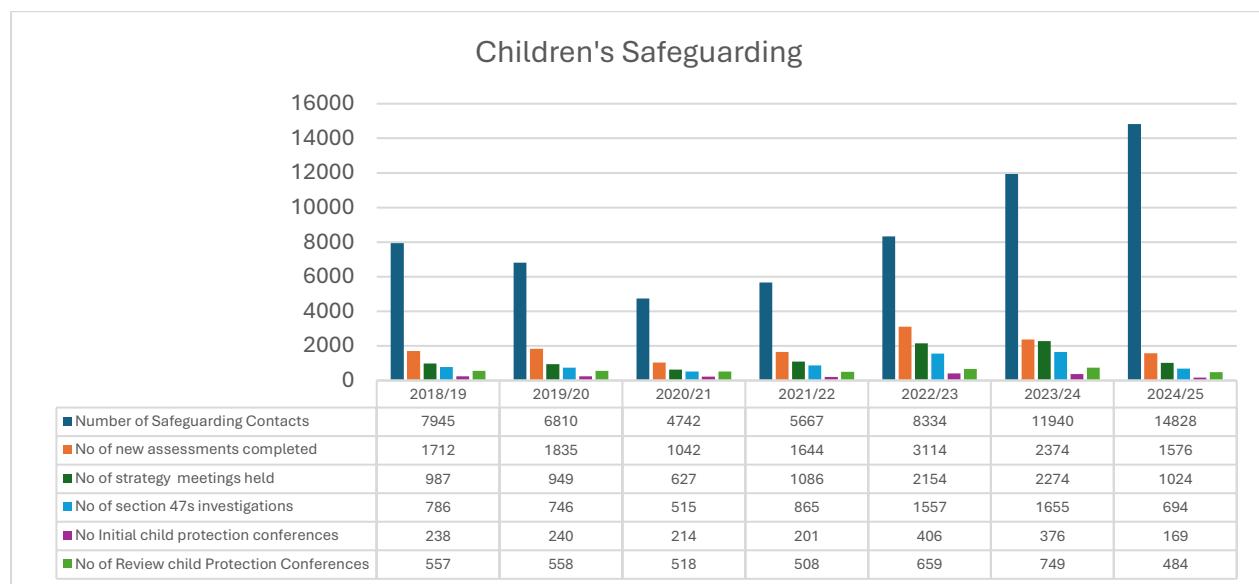
Adult Services continue to chair the community Significant Attempts of Suicide and Self-Harm Prevention Rapid Response meeting, this considers all incomplete suicides

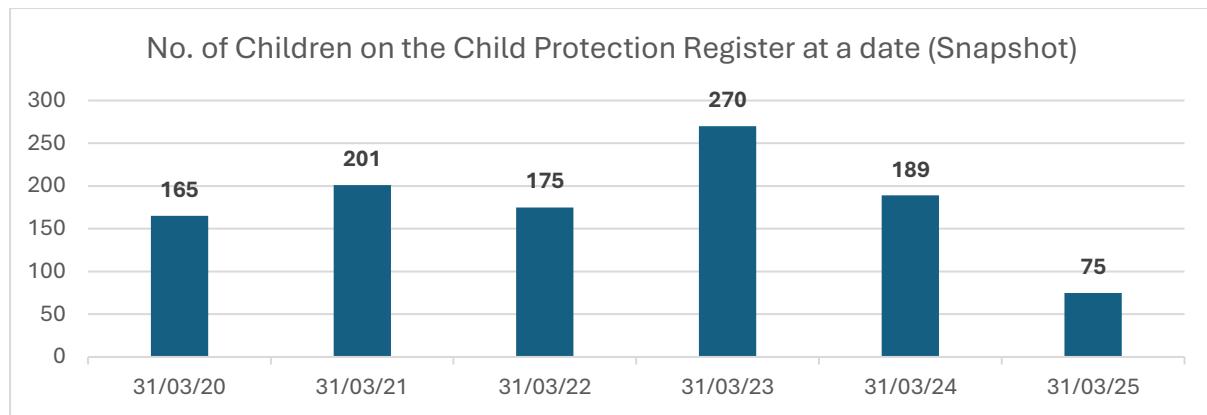
and seeks to share learning and prevent similar attempts in our community. Oth the community and prison forums will remain and key priority and focus going forward.

### 3. Children and Family Services

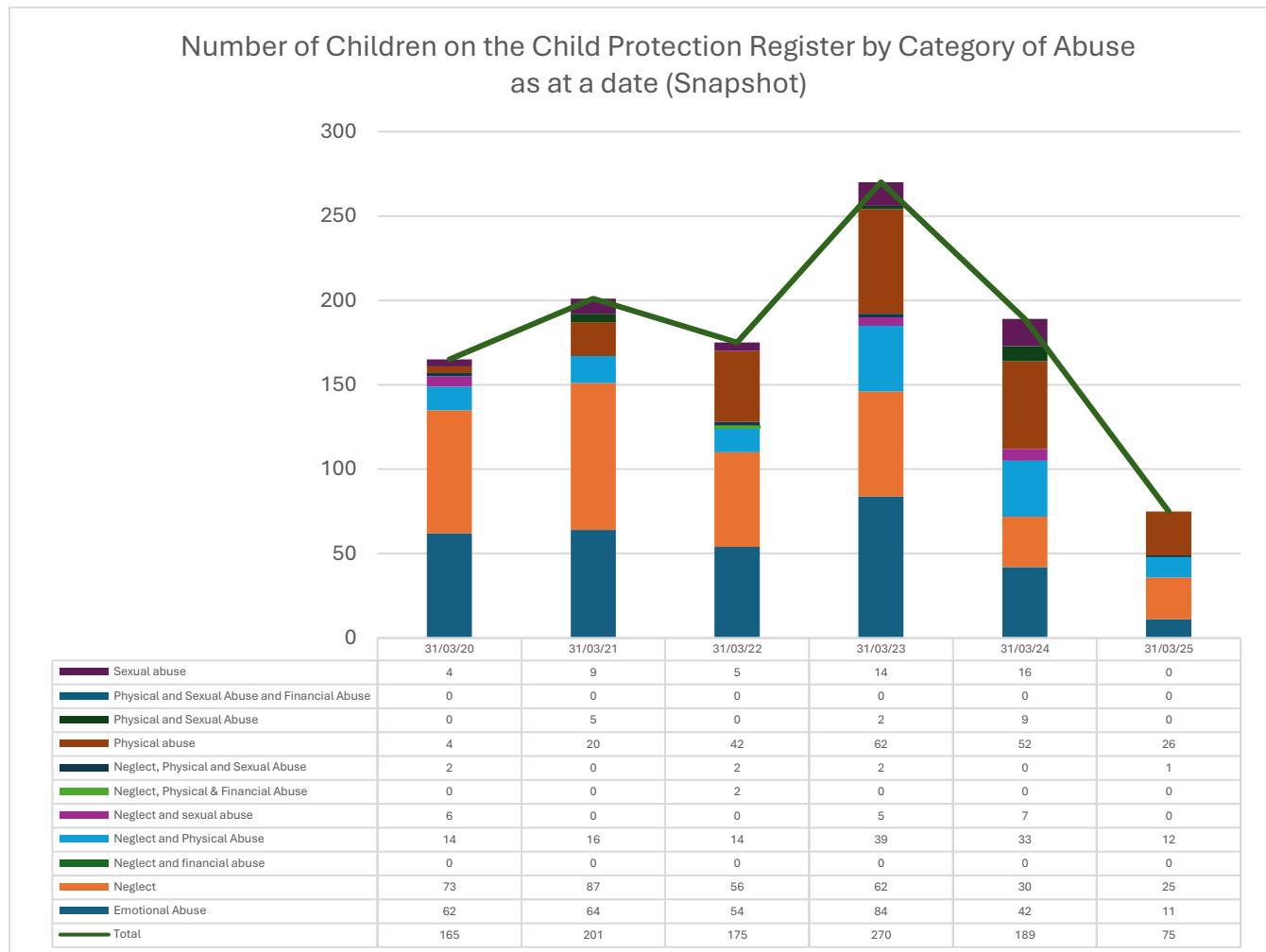
There has been an increase of 2888 referrals (24%) over the last 12 months, A proportion of these referrals are Early Help referrals which are now being included in the data. There has been a decrease in assessments which is largely as a result of our Signs of Safety screening tool and Signs of Safety mapping which is assisting in clearer decision making and also providing strengthened direction when further enquiries are being undertaken alongside our drive for early intervention via non statutory support for children and families.

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 safeguarding enquiries undertaken, number of initial child protection conferences and number of child protection review conferences held.





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.



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.

Row Labels	Age Group					Total
	Under 1	1-4	5-9	10-15	16-18	
Emotional Abuse	2	1	3	5	0	11
Neglect	1	6	6	12	0	25
Neglect and Physical Abuse	2	4	4	2	0	12
Neglect, Physical and Sexual Abuse	0	0	0	1	0	1
Physical abuse	3	7	4	10	2	26
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>75</b>

## Child Protection Registration – Progress and Impact

Historically, the Local Authority has recorded disproportionately high numbers of children subject to Child Protection Registration (CPR) when compared with other local authorities. Over the past period, we have achieved a targeted and sustained reduction in these numbers through strengthened processes, improved practice, stable workforce, better integration with early help and prevention and a more proportionate approach to safeguarding intervention.

Significant progress has been made with partners to ensure that only those children who require statutory intervention become subject to the CPR. Updated forms, enhanced training, stable workforce and strengthened decision-making processes within the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) have been instrumental in achieving this improvement. These measures have enabled more robust screening of referrals, ensuring that only cases requiring statutory intervention progress to a Care and Support Assessment or Strategy Discussion.

As a result, decision-making is now more informed and proportionate, reducing unnecessary Section 47 safeguarding enquiries and ensuring that resources are focused on children at highest risk. This approach prevents families from being escalated unnecessarily, thereby avoiding the emotional distress and practical disruption associated with child protection processes.

Further progress has been achieved through ‘What Matters’ conversations within MASH. These conversations explore families’ lived experiences and consider what support exists within their own networks and communities and preventative services to help them address challenges. By prioritising early help and community-based support, practitioners are able to provide proportionate responses rather than defaulting to statutory child protection pathways.

Where a Care and Support Assessment is required, practitioners are increasingly using tools such as mapping and family network meetings to ensure families and their wider support systems are actively involved in planning solutions. This inclusive approach promotes family ownership of change and reduces dependency on statutory services.

Strong and effective multi-agency partnership working continues to be a cornerstone of our approach. Improved coordination between partners ensures that support is holistic, reduces duplication, and allows children's needs to be met earlier. This has had a direct impact on CPR figures by preventing case drift and deterioration, reducing the need for children to become subject to child protection processes.

The Signs of Safety (SoS) practice framework underpins this transformation. It provides a strengths-based, solution-focused approach that helps practitioners and partners balance strengths, risks, and worries with clarity. This has enabled targeted and timely interventions, ensuring that safeguarding activity remains focused on what will make the most significant difference to child safety and wellbeing, while avoiding unnecessary registration.

There has also been a strong focus on workforce stability and professional development. Efforts to secure a permanent, experienced, and stable workforce have enhanced the quality and consistency of practice. Stable relationships between practitioners, children, and families foster greater trust and more sustainable progress. Experienced practitioners bring professional confidence to risk assessment and decision-making, while strengthened management oversight ensures consistency in thresholds, planning, and review activity.

Collectively, these improvements have created a more proportionate, family-focused, and strengths-based safeguarding system. The implementation of the Signs of Safety model has contributed significantly to the reduction in CPR figures by enabling children to be safeguarded effectively without over-reliance on registration.

Quality assurance and audit activity, including dip sampling, continue to monitor decision-making, identify learning themes, and promote good practice. These checks ensure that decisions remain safe, consistent, and reflective of best practice.

As a result of these combined efforts, the number of children subject to the CPR is now aligned with both regional and national (Welsh) averages. Ongoing audit and learning activity will continue to ensure that progress is sustained and that our safeguarding practice remains both effective and proportionate.

### **Advocacy:**

We continue to work with Tros Gynnal who provide our advocacy service. In this period they have worked with 199 children/young people. This has included 66 children via the Active Offer of advocacy and 133 for Issue Based Advocacy.

There has been an increase in Active Offer referrals from 27% to 50% this year which highlights an increased awareness of the Advocacy service.

133 children and young people accessed the Issue based advocacy, presenting with 172 issues. The number has decreased slightly by 8% compared to the previous year, whereby 145 accessed the service.

81 supported children/young people were care experienced, 29 were subject to child protection procedures, 13 were open to the LA on a care and support basis and 10

were care leavers over the age of 18. The most prevalent issue the child/young person wanted support with was 'family time, previously referred to as 'contact' and issues relating to their foster placement.

An advocate attended 59 meetings in the period to support the voice of the child/young person.

TGP continues to visit our Residential Homes to reach out to children and young people and ensure the children are aware of their service, their rights and how to refer themselves.

### **Young Carers:**

We continue to discharge our statutory responsibilities in regards to young carers. We are currently working with education partners and the Education and Engagement Team to promote our offer and to ensure partners are aware that even without the co-ordinator post we still assess and provide a service for young carers.

	<b>2022/23</b>	<b>2023/24</b>	<b>2024/25</b>
No. of Young Carers Assessments Completed	111	94	96

This year 693 Young Carers in Bridgend have received a young carers ID card, the card offers recognition and wellbeing support opportunities to young carers. Many of these Young Carers have also received a Halo membership.

The Prevention and Well-Being Service continues to have a positive relationship with both primary and secondary schools, Bridgend College, Young Adult carers, 3<sup>rd</sup> sector organisations and also a partnership with Bridgend Young Carer Network.

There is a growing group of Young Carers ambassadors within each comprehensive school, who are the voice of other young carers. Ambassadors have monthly meetings, and their role is enabling them to create a platform for Young Carers in Bridgend.

Further support provided this year has included Young Carers days at Margam Park and Bridgend Young Carer Network Days.

### **Exploitation:**

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 in place since June 2023. The impact of the exploitation screening tools and multi-agency collaboration is already evident. The

safeguarding exploitation senior social worker has continued to raise awareness of exploitation and supports teams and agencies to complete 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.

The Regional Exploitation Pathway has now been implemented, and this will be reported on in next year's report.

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

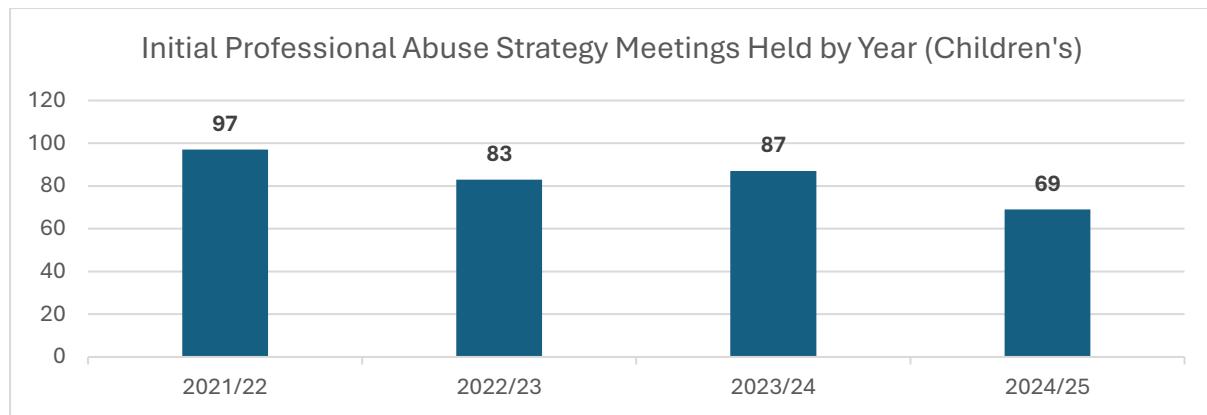
The multi-agency response panel consists of partnership agency attendees from:

- 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

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

### **Professional Concerns:**

Across the past year, there were 69 Professional Abuse Strategy meetings held as shown by the below graph, which is a slight reduction on the previous two years. However there remains no current identifiable pattern due to monthly referral fluctuations. Professionals across education remain the dominant profession to see referrals from.



### Children's Case Study:

Rise is an Edge of Care service in Bridgend, Rise provides practical and emotional support, to women and their partners who have experienced the compulsory removal of a child from their care. Parents are supported for up to eighteen months and are given tailor-made help ranging from counselling to debt management.

Rise will give parents the chance to take control over their lives and break a destructive cycle that causes both them and their children deep trauma.

Below is written by two parents who were supported by Rise:

*There are no bad changes all positive, like the well-being walks just nice to get out and go for a walk, especially with our Rise support worker. You can also clear your head, if you're having a bad day, you can just go for a walk somewhere and even the sessions where we just sit and do a little bit of colouring, have a chat, have a cuppa. She's (Rise practitioner) helped us understand the judgement that we were given so it helped us work through all of our problems and issues that were raised. If we have any problems she will sit there and listen to us rant she's wicked, she's brilliant.*

*We are more confident to talk about certain situations especially with the social, yeah it's easier to open up and we have a better understanding of what's happened and what's going on.*

*I don't feel as anxious going out now because before I refused to leave the flat now what don't mind it as much. Yeah, most definitely giving you that little boost. For me, it is just getting out being with other people socialising, I'm a people person.*

*It's helped us understand it a bit more it was easier to talk about yeah specially with people who understand. Cause you never know who's going for the exact same thing. It's nice to have someone who can relate and knows what you are going through, you don't have to explain your feelings. Rise listens and she doesn't judge, she's just there to support and not tell us what we're doing wrong. I mean even if it is something that we're not doing 100% (Rise Practitioner) has a nice way of putting it without making you feel bad, It's like you realise and you recognise oh yeah I could have done it that way, that would have been a bit better. In a less judgemental way. Thanks to Rise it's*

*helped us loads, it's helped with my mental health, it's helped us understand what's happened, why it's happened and obviously helped us with what we needed to do.*

*Having Rise with us, because with everything we've been through it's just nice to be able to laugh with some people. After so long with like everything that's gone on, there's been a lot of heartache, tears and sadness so it's just nice to have a change and have a bit of a laugh.*

#### **4. Education, Early Years and Youth Services:**

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

	<b>2018-2019</b>	<b>2021-2022</b>	<b>2022-2023</b>	<b>2023-2024</b>	<b>2024-2025</b>	<b>01/09/2025 to 22/10/2025</b>
<b>Primary</b>	1	0	1	7	6	0
<b>Secondary</b>	7	9	13	23	26	7
<b>Special</b>	0	0	1	0	1	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>9</b>

This trend has continued into 2025-2026 school year, with nine permanent exclusions recorded to date. A review of permanent exclusions from the previous school year has been undertaken. Schools are increasingly managing complex situations both in number and severity. The Directorate's focus remains on supporting schools to address issues early, before they escalate.

The Directorate continues to undertake targeted work to understand the complexities of the situation, as well as to review and consider the systems implemented by other local authorities. The Directorate has implemented a Managed Move Panel held every fortnight. This process allows secondary schools to discuss and agree managed moves as well as consider 12-week revolving door provision at The Bridge. To date there have been a total of eight managed moves agreed. One has succeeded, two have failed and the remaining have not yet hit the six-week review to conclude. It is an aim for a directory of local authority approved providers to be created that schools can utilise as alternative provisions to assist.

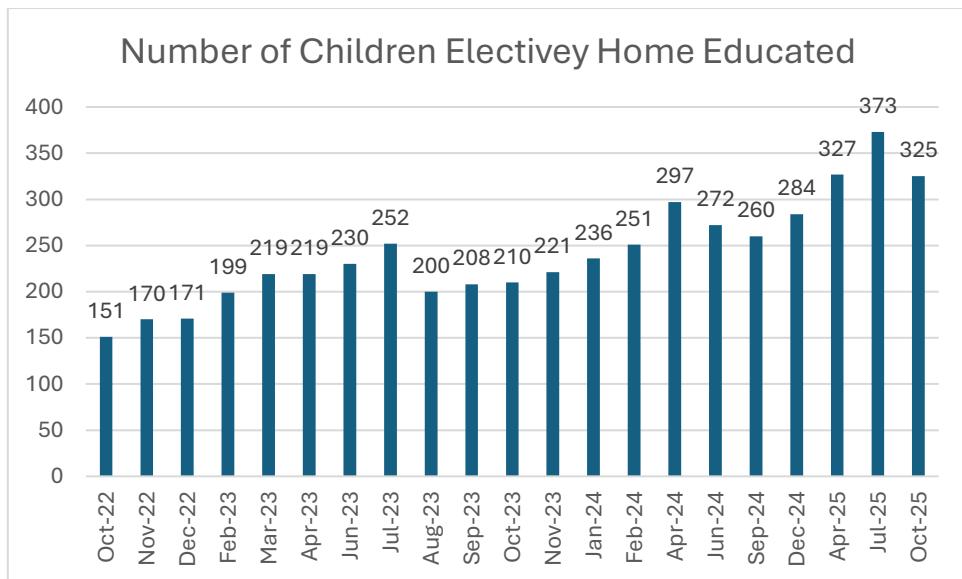
Moving forward, Cabinet have agreed a £1m non-recurring budget to support schools in reducing permanent exclusions. A proposal has been developed in partnership with schools and is due to be approved in November 2025.

Following a similar trend, the number of fixed-term exclusions has consistently continued to rise over the past few years as shown in the table below. However, the total number of days lost has decreased compared to 2022/23.

		2021-2022 School Year	2022-2023 School Year	2023-2024 School Year	2024-2025 School Year	01/09/2025 until 17/10/2025
Primary	<b>Number of exclusions</b>	166	248	280	262	53
	<b>Number of days lost</b>	351.5	441	553	427	76
Secondary	<b>Number of exclusions</b>	1224	1355	1309	1440	255
	<b>Number of days lost</b>	2395	2574.5	2400.5	2252.5	346.5
Special	<b>Number of exclusions</b>	74	67	97	141	18
	<b>Number of days lost</b>	124.5	152.5	204.5	191.5	44.5
Total	<b>Number of exclusions</b>	1464	1670	1686	1843	326
	<b>Number of days lost</b>	2871	3168	3158	2871	467

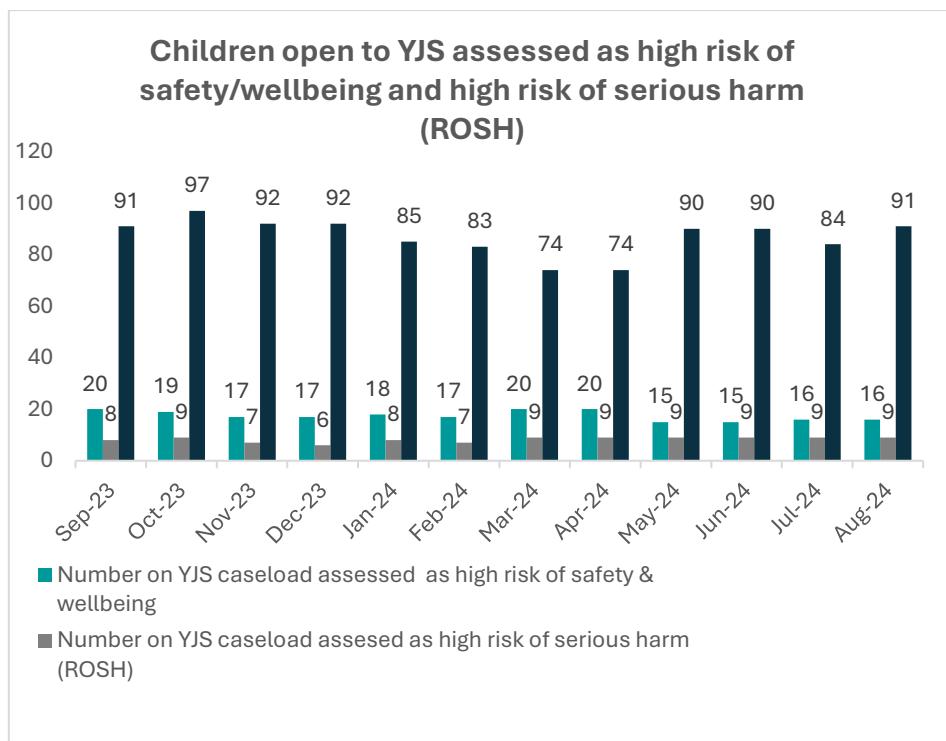
Having reviewed the last academic year this current academic year, emphasis will be placed on reviewing pastoral support plans and reduced timetables. This aims to ensure that reviews are conducted regularly, decisions are made in the best interests of the child, and safeguarding implications are appropriately considered when children are not in school. Attendance will remain a priority with specific initiatives and continual monitoring to improve persistent absenteeism figures across the Local Authority.

The number of children who are electively home educated has continued to increase with the current total standing as 325 as at 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2025. A seasonal decline is typically observed each June, corresponding to a number of learners reaching non statutory school age (on the last Friday in June). Allocated co-ordinators maintain ongoing efforts to meet with families annually to review the education provided, supplemented by coffee mornings and information sessions and attending workshops and events that our electively home educated learners are accessing. Nonetheless many families opt for online only engagement.

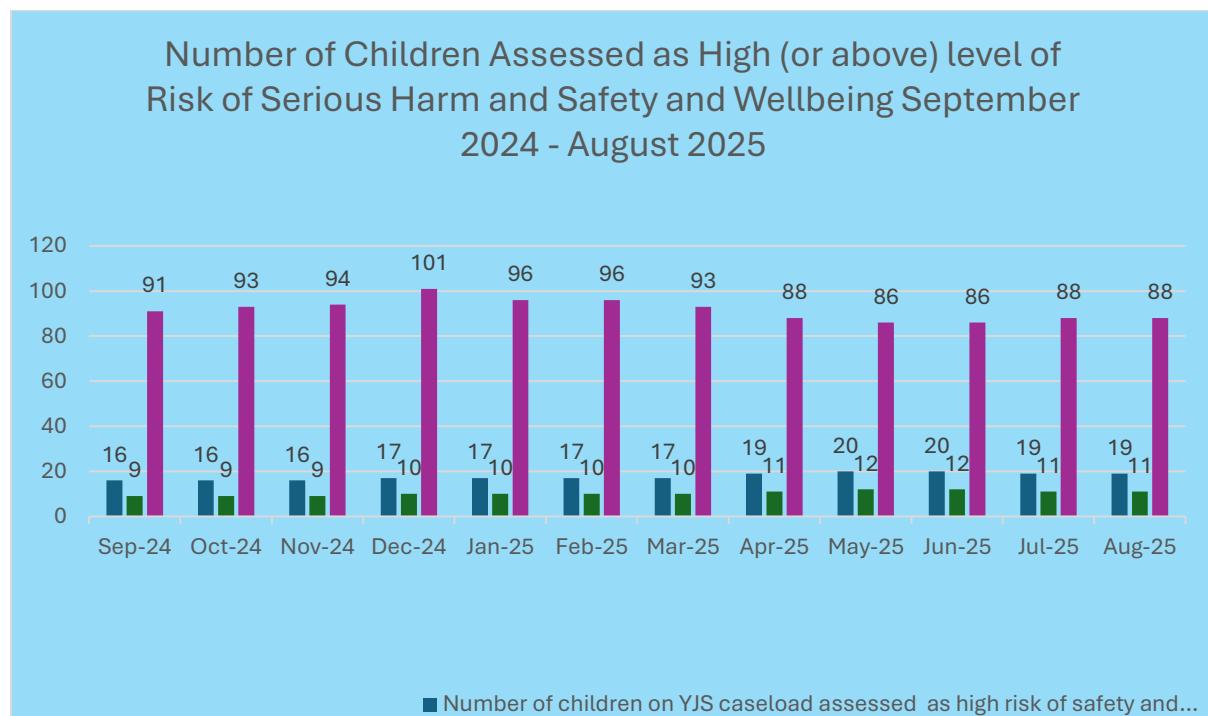


Findings from school safeguarding audits for the 2024-2025 school year highlight that 56 education settings have rated themselves as green and 4 education settings have rated themselves as amber. No school has rated itself as 'red' during the 2024-2025 school year. This represents an increase of two schools who are now rated as green having moved from amber. The school safeguarding audits have been completed in December 2025 for the 2025-2026 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.



Across the year, 2024 to 2025 the number of children and young people that have been open to the Bridgend Youth Justice Service (BYJS) has remained consistent to the previous year. 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 also remained consistent. With the highest percentage of children being high risk of serious harm as 23% of the caseload (20 children) and high risk of their safety and wellbeing being 14% of the caseload (12 children).



## 5. Workforce:

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

An appropriate escalation process has been agreed by the Corporate Safeguarding Board to deal with non-completions and non-renewal of DBS applications. Escalation reports are provided to Heads of Service and Group Managers for action. In May 2024, the DBS Policy was updated to reflect the statutory requirement to undertake checks every three years for employees covered by the Care Standards Act 2000. Previously, the Council had adopted best practice and rechecked for all employees on a three yearly basis.

The below table shows the number of outstanding or overdue DBS applications at each quarter:

Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4
4	8	4	1

In relation to Safeguarding e-learning (including workbooks), this is monitored by the Learning & Development team and escalation reports are issued to managers for action on a quarterly basis, the completions are set out in the table below:

Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4
81.83%	81.51%	84.72%	85.77%

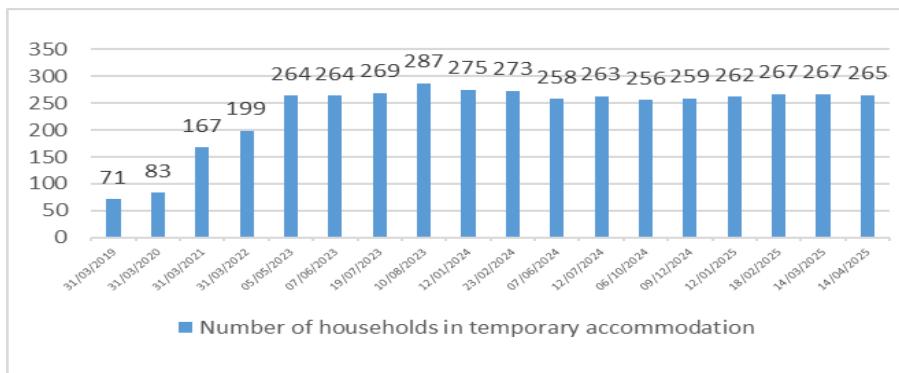
The Council also has a Recruitment and Selection Protocol and Guidelines to support managers when undertaking recruitment. It is expected that all managers who participate in recruitment complete the mandatory e-learning programme. Recruiting managers must also follow safe recruitment practices, such as obtaining professional references, ensuring the recruitment process is robust and checking previous employment history including gaps in employment, as well as a DBS check for new starters.

## 6. Housing:

The number of households in temporary accommodation has remained relatively stable over the year. Whilst numbers are consistent with recent years the pressure on this service represents a significant increase compared to pre Covid 19 pandemic levels. A number of measures are in place to both improve the suitability of and reduce the use of temporary accommodation.

In 2024-25, we saw a slight increase in care leavers experiencing homelessness, although the figure is still lower than 2022/23. A corporate working group is set up to ensure close joint working between housing, youth support services and social services. The council, to support care leavers agreed a motion to ensure care leavers and care-experienced children as a protected characteristic and therefore an attempt to help with some of the challenges faced by our care-experienced children.

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. 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	2024/25
The Percentage of care leavers who experience homelessness during the year	8.23%	10.27%	7.17%	9.96%

## 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.

Over the last few years there has been an increased level of regional working at a Cwm Taf Morgannwg level, i.e. Bridgend, Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda Cynon Taf. There is one regional Public Services Board (PSB), and one strategic Community Safety Partnership which is aligned to the PSB. Both Boards have a regional strategy, but a local delivery model to meet the needs of 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 include working to address anti-social behaviour concerns in Caerau, bringing partners together to address 'lock outs' affecting waste and emergency vehicles and community clear up events in Pyle and Maesteg, the latter involving Parc Young Offenders Institute. We continue to utilise 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. Mobile CCTV cameras are deployed throughout Bridgend County Borough to address ASB concerns.

'Trecco Watch' continues to address concerns in Porthcawl, and associated family fun days are well attended. Work on the 'Clear, Hold, Build' initiative in Wildmill continues and the second Crimestoppers zone has been launched in Brynmenyn.

Assia domestic abuse service has undergone a restructure resulting in a second team leader post and opportunity for development from within the team. The service continues to offer diverse range of bespoke support to meet the wide range of service users. This includes a male victim IDVA (Independent domestic violence advisor), and there has been an increasing number of male victims coming forward to receive support. A male victim service user group is working well. There is also a dedicated older persons independent domestic violence adviser (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 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.

Reported Circumstances	
Verbal	1
Ongoing Physical	4
Emotional	0
Sexual Assault	2
Strangulation	5
Assault/ABH	14
Stalking	8
Breach of Order	1
Criminal Damage	5
Harassment	5
Financial Abuse	0
Coercive Control	0
Threats	5

Note: Some PPNs record more than one offence for charging.

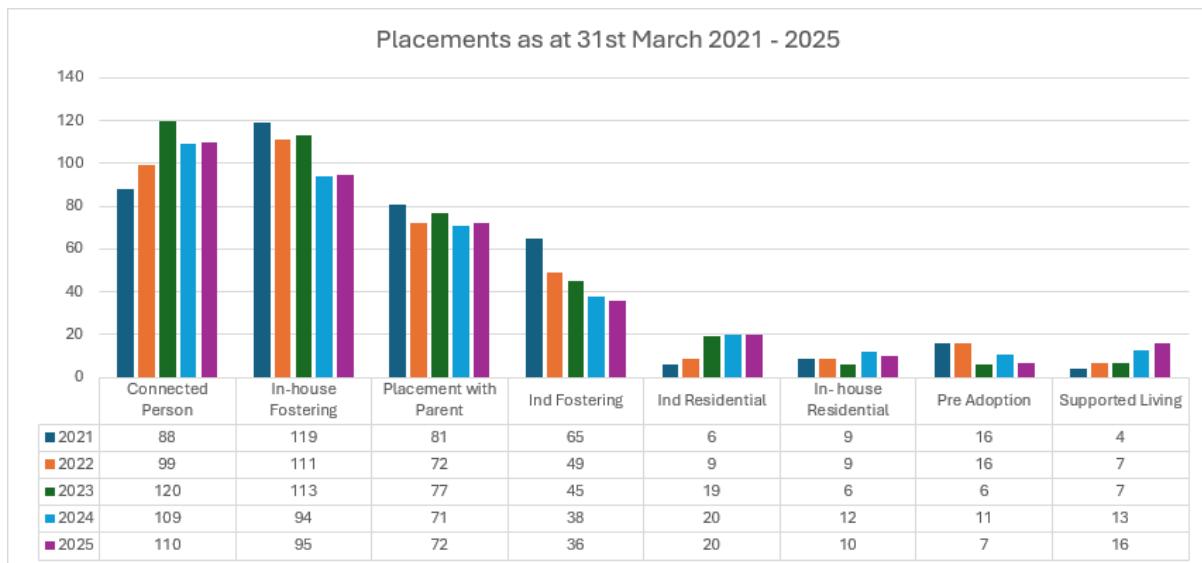
Age Range	Victim	Perp
0-18	4	4
19-25	8	8
26-30	9	9
31-40	11	10
41-50	3	4
51-60	3	4
61-70	4	2
71-80	2	0
81-90	1	1

## 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 been drafted and pending cabinet approval. The PCS sets out how the Council will meet our sufficiency duty. It focuses on assessing the needs of care experienced children and the demand and supply of placements for our children who are care experienced or leaving care to ensure there is a clear vision which underpins our approach to commissioning. It is intended to:

- Shape our internal services to maximise the benefits of public sector provision in terms of quality and value for money.
- To work in collaboration with public sector partners across the regional footprint where this offers identifiable benefits.
- To increase placement choice supplemental to our sufficiency duty to enable good matching.
- To co-produce outcomes focused services acknowledging that there are a range of different methods for strategic commissioning with multiple partners who may be co-operatives, charities, not for profit agencies.
- Identify and engage with commercial providers who will collaborate / convert to not-for-profit provision.

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



We have seen a reduction in children becoming care experienced and targeted work has been undertaken to return children to their families where safe and appropriate. However, for children that cannot remain in the care of their parent/s it is pleasing to see a continued increase in the number of children being placed within their own family network (connected person placements) as opposed to traditional fostering arrangements.

A degree of placement movement is healthy, 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.

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 both Placement commissioning strategy (2025-2030) and Children, Young Person and Transition Commissioning Strategy 2023-2028.

	As at 31/03/24	As at 31/03/25
Placements out of Bridgend but in Wales	77	73
Placements outside of Wales	12	12

35 of the children placed out of county currently, are residing in Foster Wales Bridgend placements with General and Connected Persons carers.

15 of these children are placed with their parents. 16 are placed with independent fostering providers.

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.

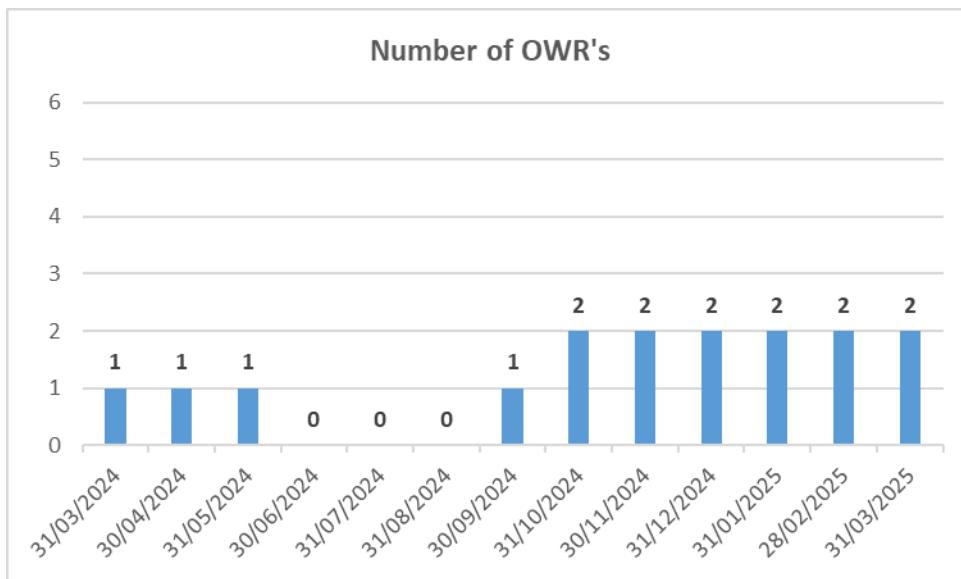
The needs of Children and Young People will dictate as to whether an Out of County Placement is required, this could be to manage and mitigate risks associated with the individual, or in order to access specialist support which is unavailable within the county borders. BCBC strives to provide and identify 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.

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's 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.
- A child may also be placed in a home that is rented by the local authority with the care and support team recruited from an agency who has experience of delivering residential care.

The following graph shows the trend of OWR placements from across the past year.



## 9. Shared Regulatory Services (SRS)

In delivering the Environmental Health, Trading Standards and Licensing functions, Shared Regulatory Services (SRS) contributes to the Council's wider Safeguarding responsibilities in several ways. 2024-25 saw another busy year regarding the Safeguarding of older and vulnerable adults. This work included:

### Doorstep Crime and Scams

SRS responds to instances of doorstep crime and scams, supporting those affected and their families where possible. These crimes can have a devastating effect on the emotional as well as the financial wellbeing of residents, and the following gives an indication of the types of interventions undertaken over the course of the year. During 2024-25, the service dealt with some 175 scams and assisted 130 scams victims. The year also saw 168 doorstep crime cases being identified which represented an 11% increase on 2023-24. On 8 occasions, the SRS rapid response protocol was deployed, ensuring an immediate visit to the homes of residents affected by doorstep crime. There was a significant increase in the number of vulnerable civil cases dealt with by SRS, with 32 cases in 2024-25, compared with 20 in 2023-24 (an increase of 60%). Officers obtained a staggering £240,827 redress for residents during the year. This included £67,094 for one victim, £5,500 for another and £2,300 for a third, all through the efforts of officers making contact with the victim's banks, setting out the facts of the fraud under investigation in each case, and requesting reimbursement for the customer.

In another example, officers raised the case of an elderly lady pressured and misled into buying multiple lots of gold coins by instalments (rather than paying upfront as she had wished to). After an investigation by the business concerned, it was concluded that there had been a lack of clarity and professionalism from the account manager involved in this case, and as a result, changes to process

were made and staff were retrained. As a result of SRS taking up this resident's case, they received a £5,000 refund from the company.

Once again, Officers have investigated a number of significant rogue builder or doorstep crime cases. Sitting behind each of these cases is a story of residents, often vulnerable, being defrauded of large sums of money, sometimes their life savings. The cases show a pattern of little, or no, work being done, and where work has been carried out, it will have been to a very poor standard. During the year, four rogue builder / doorstep crime cases were prosecuted. The outcome of these cases was significant, with the four defendants receiving a total of 11 years and 9 months in immediate prison sentences, as well as in one case a 10-year Criminal Behaviour Order.

The following example illustrates the impact of this offending on residents of Bridgend County borough:

#### *Bridgend Rogue Builder sentenced to imprisonment*

The victims in this case suffered significant financial loss, amounting to over £200,000. The residents also endured months of distress as they fought to get their home improvement projects completed or to get their money refunded. The builder presented himself as a competent businessman, however the truth behind that image was quite different. The builder engaged in misleading and fraudulent trading practices in his dealings with customers, and using classic rogue trader practices, he 'robbed Peter to pay Paul' by continuing to take money from new clients in order to do at least some work for existing customers.

Using a string of trading names, he created a web of deceit, including starting a new company when one went into liquidation and later using a completely different trading name to distance himself from the growing number of poor Trustpilot reviews being left by customers. The witness statements in this case illustrate in detail the misery brought on the residents over many months, through for example jobs started and not finished, goods not ordered despite specific payments having been made for them, poor workmanship, and failure to obtain necessary Planning and Building Control consents. He relied on a façade of stock images and passed them off as examples of his previous work. The defendant finally pleaded guilty to 11 counts of fraud, 1 count of fraudulent trading and 1 count of unfair commercial practice. He was sentenced to 43 months in prison (3 years, 7 months).

#### Call blockers

These devices can put an end to nuisance or malicious calls. They can be installed at the homes of residents being repeatedly targeted by scams and once fitted, they prevent all calls coming through other than those from recognised friends and family numbers. Over the last 10 years, SRS has installed a total of 70 call blockers to protect older and vulnerable people and

each of these devices is estimated to block up to 5 nuisance or scam calls a day. By the end of 2024-25, 53,581 calls had been blocked and an estimated 86 scams prevented. The associated savings for residents as a result of these call blockers having been fitted now stands at an estimated £637,417.

The feedback received from residents using the call blockers, and their families, is particularly powerful, for example

- *“My mother no longer gets anxious and agitated. I cannot impress on you the positive impact this has made.”*
- *“This made a huge difference, and enables my mother to live in her own home for longer”, and*
- *“Thanks for making my phone my friend again”.*

Turning to the Safeguarding of young people, SRS contributed through its compliance and enforcement activities in 2024-25 as follows:

95 complaints or intelligence logs were received regarding the underage sale of alcohol, tobacco, vapes, fireworks and knives from across the three local authority areas. In response to these, and with the assistance of a young volunteers, Officers staged 73 attempts to purchase a range of age restricted products during the year. 9 of these attempts to purchase resulted in a sale (12%) of either alcohol, vapes or fireworks, and the circumstances of each of these sales were investigated and appropriate enforcement action taken.

While the Service will always recommend a stepped approach to enforcement, over the course of 2024-25, three cases concluding in court saw the successful prosecution of three businesses for underage sales of alcohol, vapes or fireworks.

Finally, Shared Regulatory Services has contributed to the wider Safeguarding of residents and visitors to the area through its licensing of taxi drivers in 2022-23. While the vast majority of drivers are reputable, and the journeys they provide take place without issue, there are occasions when the SRS and the Licensing Committee has to act to protect the public, particularly the vulnerable.

## **10. Priorities 2025/26**

The level of demand continuing to be received into Children's Social Care continues to be exceptionally high. PPN's (Public protection notices) 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. Representations have been made to South Wales Police from Heads of Children Services in regards to the level of demand being created. A series of

meeting are being held with South Wales Police to develop a consistent approach across the South Wales Police footprint.

Early Intervention and Prevention will continue to be key for the council in coming months and years. All Directorates working together to maximise the resources available to support local communities developing their own resilience has to be a key approach the Council takes forward to improve outcomes for the residents of Bridgend.

There continues to be challenges related to children in independent residential placements. The Health and Social Care (Wales) Act 2025 has come into effect and 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.

We continue to work with Tros Gynnal to further develop Parental Advocacy, we have seen increases in parental advocacy in the Child Protection arena, we will be extending this to parents/carers who work with us on a Care and Support basis.

Work has been undertaken this year to progress the Safeguarding Self-assessment toolkit, this will be utilised across the Council in the next financial year.

Our Digital system replacement remains a priority for next year. The Council is facing a number of challenges and risks in relation to a new system for its current safeguarding and case management IT System. A new system has been procured but there is a significant amount of work to be undertaken to move from the current WCCIS system to the new Mosaic system. This is an area of significant concern which will be closely monitored corporately through our corporate risk register throughout 2025-26. Implementing a new digital system which will modernise the way our workforce practice, whilst we support them to prepare for social care being at the fore of the Council's digital strategy. These are as follows:-

Supporting workforce wellbeing, retention and recruitment to continue to achieve a highly motivated, well supported skilled workforce.

Embedding our models of practice and using our quality assurance and learning and development programmes to address variation in quality.

Enhancing our prevention, early intervention and edge of care services to support more people to live independently and well and for children to live safely with their own families.

Embedding our operating models in adults, children and families and prevention and wellbeing which have early help and prevention at their core.

Hearing and acting upon the voice of the people we work with and alongside. Addressing deficits in the sufficiency of services, particularly children's not for

profit residential and fostering services and supported living, shared lives and extra care for adults.

Understanding better current and future needs and projections for social services and wellbeing services, including the impact of new legislation and demographics, to align service and financial plans which mean we are as best placed as possible to achieve sustainable social services at a cost affordable to the Council.

Investing in partnerships with other public services, the third sector and community groups to improve outcomes for individuals and families in the most effective and cost-effective way.