

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CORPORATE PARENTING CABINET COMMITTEE

7 JULY 2014

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR – CHILDREN

LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN - PLACEMENTS AND PERMANENCY STRATEGY

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Cabinet Committee on the progress made to develop a refreshed “Strategy to reduce the number of Looked After Children and Young People in Bridgend, now known as the “Looked After Children - Placements and Permanency Strategy”.

2 Connection to Corporate Improvement Objectives/Other Corporate Priorities

- 2.1 This report links to the following Community strategy priorities:
- Working together to raise ambitions and drive up educational achievement.
 - Working with children and families to tackle problems early.
 - Working together to help vulnerable people to stay independent.
 - Working together to tackle health issues and encourage healthy lifestyles.

3 Background

- 3.1 Members will be aware that throughout the last decade, there has been a significant increase in the overall number of Looked After Children in Bridgend. This has resulted in major pressures upon Safeguarding and Family Support Services and associated budgets. It also suggests that a significant number of children and young people in Bridgend are not experiencing childhoods conducive to wellbeing or achieving their full potential. Consequently, in order to direct a strategic response to the growing numbers of Looked After Children, the Council intends to publish its “Placements and Permanency Strategy” within which one of the primary aims is to reduce the number of Looked After Children (LAC) but also to take a whole systems approach to preventing the need for children to become LAC in the first place.

4 Current situation/proposal

- 4.1 Previously Committee has received comprehensive reports on statistical data and analysis of Looked After Children (LAC) in Bridgend, together with details of associated costs. Members were informed that the information contained within these reports would inform a refreshed strategy for reducing the numbers of LAC in Bridgend. Members requested that an update on the newly developed strategy be presented to Committee in order for Committee to comment and provide feedback.
- 4.2 Attached at Appendix 1, is the latest draft of the Council's "Looked After Children - Placements and Permanency Strategy". It recognises that in order to be effective in reducing numbers of looked after children, will require a strategy that is continually reviewed, has sound leadership, rigorous approaches to prevention and early intervention, targeted interventions to children and families with complex needs, (particularly where there are children on the edge of care), clearly defined approaches to social work practice, a strong collaborative working approach to working with children and families and a proactive use of relevant data, information and intelligence in respect of looked after children.
- 4.3 This Placement and Permanency Strategy describes the placements we want to provide and commission for our LAC, and focuses on how we will improve our current arrangements to improve outcomes for children in our care. However the scope of the strategy is not restricted to making good quality placements. Stages of the care journey, including a clear focus on supporting families to stay together wherever it is safe to do so, and minimising the need for children to become looked after are also key elements of this strategy. Children's Services are driving a 'whole system' approach to supporting LAC and keeping families together. Together with the Early Intervention and Prevention Strategy, these will form a multi-agency response to driving improved outcomes for children.
- 4.4 The focus in the strategy is on describing what will change in relation to our work with children in care or at risk of coming into care. The strategy contains an action plan for the future rather than an attempt to cover every detail of our current services and support.
- 4.5 In 2013 reports setting out our intention to launch a strategy aimed at reducing looked after children, was presented to the Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the People's Partnership Board. Whilst both meetings welcomed the strategy, the importance of it being managed as a bespoke project was highlighted with the appointment of a project manager being integral to its success. This feedback was welcomed and informed a business case being written for such a post and submitted to the Council's Change Management Programme fund. Funding was subsequently agreed for a 14 month period and recently a project manager has been appointed who will take up her post mid June 2014.

5 Effect upon Policy Frameworks and Procedure Rules

- 5.1 This has been considered but as there are no new or changed services policy / functions in this report, it is therefore not applicable at this time.

6 Equality Impact Assessment

- 6.1 This has been considered but as the report is for information purposes, an assessment is not deemed necessary at this stage.

7 Financial Implications

- 7.1 The Council has awarded additional funding of £66,169 from the Change Management Programme Fund to cover the associated costs for a project manager to lead the Permanency and Placement Strategy from the date the project manager takes up her post.

8 Recommendations

- 8.1 Cabinet Committee is recommended to note and consider the content of this report and associated appendices.

Deborah McMillan
Corporate Director - Children

Date:

Contact Officer: Colin Turner
Head of Safeguarding and Family Support

Telephone: (01656) 642073

E-mail: Colin.turner@bridgend.gov.uk

Background papers

Appendix One – Placements and Permanency Strategy.