

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING

12 OCTOBER 2015

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR – SOCIAL SERVICES AND WELLBEING

OVERVIEW OF WESTERN BAY REGIONAL ADOPTION SERVICES

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide Members with an overview of the current position regarding the Western Bay Regional Adoption Service.

2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Plan / Other Corporate Priority

- 2.1 The report links to the following Corporate Priorities:

- Working together to raise ambitions and to drive up educational achievements
- 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 The creation of a National Adoption Service is one of the key policy strands of the Welsh Government, as enacted in the Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Act 2014. A new model for delivering Adoption Services was introduced by Welsh Government, which dictated that all Councils are expected to deliver Adoption Services collaboratively. In the case of City and County of Swansea, Bridgend County Borough Council and Neath Port Talbot County this is the Western Bay footprint.

- 3.2 A Regional Adoption Project was initiated under the Western Bay Programme and was funded via the regional collaboration grant in 13/14 and 14/15. The aims of the project were:

- To carry out the functions of the national service and deliver a comprehensive adoption service regionally
- To ensure compliance with legislation, regulations, minimum standards, local procedures and the performance management framework set by the National Board
- To develop a recruitment strategy which ensures a range of adoptive placements are available regionally
- To provide a child focussed placement service to ensure that children are appropriately matched with adopters who can meet their needs throughout their childhood.

- 3.3 Western Bay Adoption Service aims to increase the recruitment of local adopters by 100% given the high number of looked after children across the Western Bay Region. This can then significantly reduce the time that children spend waiting for an adoptive placement.
- 3.4 The Host Authority was approved at Cabinets in Swansea, Neath Port Talbot and Bridgend, with the City and County of Swansea taking on this role in April 2014.
- 3.5 A detailed Cabinet report was presented to all three local authority Cabinets in December 2014 which approved the financial model, service structure, joint panels and co-location of staff.
- 3.6 The Regional Adoption Service became operational in February 2015, being co-located in Port Talbot.

4. Current situation / Proposal

- 4.1 Membership of the Regional Management Board/Committee which has replaced the Steering Group has been agreed and complies with the requirements set out in The Adoption and Children Act 2002 (Joint Adoption Arrangements) (Wales) Directions 2015.
- 4.2 The flexible/remote working arrangements as part of the functional model are working well. At the initial set up of the Western Bay Adoption Service, differences to staff terms and conditions caused some difficulties. These issues have now been resolved.
- 4.3 Performance in the first quarter of the year and to date has been good in relation to a number of PI's:
- Enquiries 76
 - Adopters approved 25
 - Adopter Assessments underway 39
 - Children matched 44
 - Children placed 35
 - Adoption Orders granted 40
 - Children placed within the region 20
 - Children placed outside the region 15
- 4.4 The figures above are demonstrating a positive trend for the service. There is also a positive impact in reducing the time it takes to place children from the Placement Order being granted to placement date, with Western Bay achieving the shortest average time across Wales at five months in Quarter 1. The Wales average in Q1 is 9 months.
- 4.5 Western Bay achieved 50% of the children matched within six months although doing well compared to performance across Wales, it is an area that needs improvement.
- 4.6 The conversion rate of enquiries to approvals is the highest in Wales.

- 4.7 As with other regions in Wales there are some PI's where improvement is required, however, Western Bay have done well given the amount of changes the staff have had to deal with in a short space of time and the challenges that this brings.
- 4.8 **Appendix one** and **Appendix two** show the qualitative performance to date across the region with the specific cumulative Bridgend numbers of children being reflected at August 2015.
- 4.9 These numbers reflect an increase in adoption activity locally and through appropriate timeliness the Authority is able to interrogate data produced to reflect care proceedings and securing of adoption status for those children and young people requiring permanence arrangements to be secured.
- 4.10 The Region held its official launch of the new service on 25th September 2015.
- 4.11 Facebook and Twitter accounts are now live and making use of social media to attract adopters to Western Bay.
- 4.12 Health representative from ABMU has been nominated on the regional management board/committee and will be attending the next meeting in November 2015.

Key Issues

- 4.13 There are currently a number of social work and business support vacancies which have placed some pressures on the service since it became operational. There is a strategy in place to address this with a combination of both permanent and temporary arrangements being progressed, including collaboration with one of the partner Voluntary Adoption Agencies. The risk in not being able to fill these positions in a timely way could impact adversely on the regions performance in the coming months and affect staff morale.
- 4.14 The Service is still awaiting a named person from Education to fulfil the role of the representative on the regional management board.

Priorities

- 4.15 The key milestones/priorities for the coming year continue to be:
- Increasing the number of enquiries and converting these into an increased number of approved adopters
 - Increasing the number of children matched and placed within the region particularly those harder to place children
 - Reducing the length of time children wait for a placement
 - Developing and improving the range of adoption support provision through commissioning and up skilling staff
 - Improving service user engagement/involvement
 - To meet NAS targets in relation to key PI's

5. Effect upon Policy Framework and Procedure Rules

- 5.1 None.

6. Equality Impact Assessment

6.1 There are no equality implications arising from this report.

7. Financial Implications

7.1 The regional service should make a significant contribution to the financial sustainability plans for Children's Services across the region as there is considerable scope for reducing the future spend on independently commissioned adoptive placements. The regional adoption service will also contribute to the looked after children permanency and placement strategy, and linked savings within the MTFS.

8. Recommendation

8.1 It is recommended that the Committee note this report.

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5th October 2015

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Background documents

None