

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING

12 OCTOBER 2015

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR, SOCIAL SERVICES AND WELLBEING

INDEPENDENT REVIEWING SERVICE

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1** To provide a report to the Committee that is in line with the statutory duties under the Independent Reviewing Officers Guidance (Wales) 2004. This report will provide an overview of the role and function of the Independent Reviewing Service.

2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Plan / Other Corporate Priority.

- 2.1** This report is connected to all the corporate objectives relating to Looked After Children (LAC). The central one being to achieve best outcomes for Looked After Children through high quality Care Planning. It is linked to the current Looked After Children's Placement and Permanency Strategy and reflects information about the Local Authority's investment in the provision of appropriate placements for Looked After Children and Young People.
- 2.2** The work of the Independent Reviewing Service is carried out under the Children Act 1989, the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the Independent Reviewing Officers Guidance (Wales) 2004.

3. Background.

- 3.1** The Independent Reviewing Service has an important Quality Assurance function and has a duty to oversee and ensure that all children and young people within the care of Bridgend County Borough Council have a robust effective care plan in place that is meeting their needs and helping them to be safe in some cases.
- 3.2** This care plan is responsible for improving outcomes for children and young people by ensuring they are provided with a stable and secure childhood where their health, education and emotional wellbeing is promoted through effective care planning. It is the function of the Independent Reviewing service to ensure the care plan is appropriate and that children and young people are being assisted to make progress in all their identified needs.
- 3.3** Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) are required to independently review the Care Plans of all Looked After children and in Bridgend they also independently oversee those children with a Child Protection Plan subject to the Child Protection Register (CPR) through child protection conferences.
- 3.4** The Looked After Children Statutory review process requires the IROs to undertake bi annual and annual reviews of children and young people's circumstances and

they must consult with and ensure the attendance of relevant agencies including health, education and Police in some instances.

- 3.5** In addition the child or young person should attend in addition to their Social Worker, carers and family members if appropriate.
- 3.6** Time scales for Reviews are set out in the Children Act 1989, and monitored by Welsh Government. The initial review is to be carried out within 28 days of placement and then at 3 months, 6 months and annually.
- 3.7** Within Bridgend County Borough Council, the IRO Service is responsible for the following:
 - To Review and oversee the effectiveness and the appropriateness of Care Plans for those Children and Young People the Council has responsibility for. This includes the Chairing of all Child Protection Conferences with Bridgend County Borough Council area on behalf of Western Bay Safeguarding Children Board, Looked After Children Reviews, which includes children who are Looked After and placed in foster care, residential care, secure units, placed with parents, placed for Adoption and young people subject to Pathway Plans (for young people moving towards independent living and for those living Independently up to age of 21 years old or 25 if in full time education).

4. Current situation / proposal.

4.1 Composition of the IRO Service

There has been some change in the composition of the Team since the last Annual Report dated April 2014. There are currently 6 full-time posts and one ½ time post.

- 4.2** The current IRO cohort have a wealth of experience and all have been qualified Social Workers for a substantial period of time. The IRO Manager has been in her current post since June 2013.

4.3 IRO Caseloads

In line with Local Authorities across Wales, Bridgend County Borough Council has seen an increase in the number of Looked After Children and the number of children subject to a Child Protection plan over recent years. However, over the last year, Bridgend County Borough Council is beginning to see a reduction in both its LAC population and the number of children on the Child Protection Register. Consequently, the IRO caseloads are beginning to reduce with full-time caseloads currently around 100 cases.

- 4.4** However this caseload average to secure effective and robust management oversight should usually be an average of between 50 and 80 children and young people only. A review of volume capacity and demand will be required going into the new financial year alongside the reducing Looked After Children's population to ensure IRO have enough capacity to securely deliver their quality assurance function.

4.4 Reviewing Activity

Between April 2014 and March 2015, the IRO Service carried out 1187 reviews on Looked After Children and 1139 of these were within compliance. Between April 2014 and March 2015, 801 Child Protection conferences were held and 780 of these were held within compliance (further details in the IRO Annual Report 2014/15).

4.5 Qualitative Information

The IRO service continue to work to improve standards and ensure robust Care Planning is taking place for children, young people and families within Bridgend County Borough Council.

Information received from IRO's during Team Meetings, Supervision and the analysis of the IRO monitoring form have highlighted some general themes which are recorded below along with the concerns raised by the IRO's. However, it is important to note the information received is only a snapshot sample of the number of cases we have reviewed this year.

The capturing of the qualitative data will be improved during 2015/16 with the introduction of the IRO Audit/Monitoring Tool along with the introduction of the Electronic Consultation Document to obtain the wishes and feelings of the children and young people.

4.6 Case Dispute Resolution and Complaints

There have been 8 cases taken through the formal stage of the IRO Resolution protocol between April 2014 and March 2015. IRO Concern was raised on 22 cases at the informal stage of the Resolution protocol and all issues were resolved within five working days before reaching the formal stage.

The IRO Service has received 2 complaints between April 2014 and March 2015.

4.7 Challenges 2014-15

The IRO Service faced a number of challenges and achievements between April 2014 and March 2015 (documented within the IRO Annual Report **Appendix One**)

4.8 Service Priorities

- To continue to work to improve performance of the IRO service;
- To continue to work to improve Care Planning for children and young people;
- Improved monitoring/auditing of children's cases through the Quality Assurance role of the IRO service;
- Improved emphasis upon the transition to Pathway Planning for young people Looked After by the Local Authority;
- To improve consultation and participation of children and young people in the care planning process by continuing to develop ways to capture the voice of the child;
- To continue to work to improve standards of Looked After Children Reviews, Child Protection Conferences and Pathway Reviews.

5. Effect upon Policy Framework and Procedure Rules.

5.1 None.

6. Equality Impact Assessments.

6.1 There are no equality implications arising from this report.

7. Financial Implications.

7.1 All work will be carried out within existing budget. There were no cost pressures within this service for 2014/15.

8. Recommendation.

8.1 It is recommended that the Committee note the contents of this report and the accompanying Annual Report of the Manager of the Independent Reviewing Service.

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10. Background documents

None