

# BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

## REPORT TO CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE

### REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR, SOCIAL SERVICES AND WELLBEING

20 JULY 2016

#### SAFEGUARDING OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

##### 1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To inform the Committee of the work undertaken to safeguard children and young people in our communities.

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

- 2.1 The report links to the following priority in the Corporate Plan:

- Helping people to be more self-reliant.

##### 3. Background

- 3.1 Safeguarding is the action that is taken to promote the welfare of children and protect them from harm. Safeguarding means: protecting children from abuse and maltreatment, preventing harm to children's health or development ensuring children grow up with the provision of safe and effective care.

- 3.2 Bridgend County Borough Council is committed to safeguarding the children and young people within our community from harm and as such all practitioners have access to a number of key documents which provide guidance and structure to their practice. For example;

- **The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989)** stipulates that the state shall protect children from sexual exploitation and abuse including 'prostitution', trafficking for sexual purposes and involvement in the production of child sexual abuse images.
- **The Welsh Assembly Government's 7 Core Aims** include the right to '*enjoy the best possible physical and mental, social and emotional health, including freedom from abuse, victimisation and exploitation*'. This Core Aim is central to protecting children and young people from sexual exploitation.
- **The Children Acts 1989 and 2004** set out the arrangements for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people.
- **Social Services and Wellbeing (wales) Act 2014** – including its protocols and supplementary guidance documents setting out the assessments and support plans to provide family in need.

- **The All Wales Child Protection Procedures 2008** sets out the arrangements for safeguarding, protecting and promoting the welfare of children and young people.
- **The All Wales Protocol Missing Children 2011** sets out guidance to compliment good practice for all relevant agencies in dealing with situations where children go missing.
- **The All Wales Protocol Safeguarding and Promoting the Welfare of Children who are at risk of abuse through sexual exploitation 2013** sets out guidance for practitioners on what to do if they encounter a child who is being sexually exploited or is at risk of being sexually exploited.

3.3 In **'Safeguarding Children: Working together under the Children Act 2004'** the Welsh Assembly Government emphasises that children involved in sexual exploitation should be treated primarily as victims of abuse, and their needs require careful assessment. They are likely to be in need of welfare services and, in many cases, protection under the Children Act 1989.

#### **4. Current situation/Proposal**

4.1 The Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service provides overarching support, specialist input and monitoring of a range of services, for example, by chairing meetings and tracking issues in relation to complex cases including those on the child protection register and looked after children; leading on child practice reviews and facilitating/undertaking case file audit activity. This is achieved through collaboration with partner agencies, Education, Health, South Wales Police, Community Resource Groups and neighboring agencies under the umbrella arrangements with the Western Bay Safeguarding Children's Board.

4.1.1 The Board recognises its functions under Section 139 of the Safeguarding Board Regulations within the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 as core business. Core Business/core functions underpin the effectiveness of a Safeguarding Children Board and are therefore written into the Terms of Reference for the Board and its management groups. Membership and structures are regularly reviewed and updated within the Safeguarding Board arrangements and work plans are aligned with this business plan and include core business functions to monitor effectiveness. These plans are regularly reviewed and amended throughout the year.

4.1.2 Core Business is undertaken through its established Management Groups: Child Practice Review, Policy Procedure & Practice, Quality & performance, Strategic Training and Communication and Engagement. It is therefore expected that the management groups continue to review, establish, monitor and report to the Board against individual work plans in place to undertake Core Business whilst also addressing individual actions set out within the Board's strategic priorities in order to achieve the overarching outcomes of the plan. We have representatives from our service on the Board and all of the management groups.

4.2 The Independent Reviewing Service which consists of one Service Manager and 6.5 Independent Reviewing Officers has an important Quality Assurance function and works towards ensuring all children within the care of Bridgend County Borough

Council have a robust, effective care and support plan. This plan is aimed towards improving outcomes for children and young people in providing a stable and secure childhood where their health, education and emotional wellbeing is promoted through effective care planning and support . It is the function of the Independent Reviewing service to ensure the care and support plan is appropriate and progressive in Safeguarding whilst meeting all identified needs.

- 4.3 Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) are required to independently review the Care and Support Plans of all Looked After Children and those children whose names are on the child protection register (CPR). The Looked After Children Review will include consultation with and attendance of relevant agencies (health, education and Police etc) and will usually include the child/young person, their Social Worker, carers and family members. Time scales for Reviews are set out in the Children Act 1989, with the first Review taking place within 28 days, the second within three months following the initial and subsequent Reviews within six monthly intervals thereafter. This service has consistently met high standards of compliance.

### **Child Protection Activity**

- 4.4 At the time of writing this report the number of children's names placed on Bridgend's Child Protection Register is 181. In line with other Local Authorities these numbers increase and decrease reflecting the rates of registration against that of deregistration. There has been a gradual increase in the number of registrations against a smaller number of deregistration's. For example in June and December 2015 there were 30 additions to the Register compared to only 7 deregistration's of children and young people. Such activity has resulted in an overall increase in the number of children's names being placed on the Child Protection Register.
- 4.5 In response to this rise in numbers and to better understand the origins of the increase in registrations, the actions identified below are to fundamentally improve practice and to safely reduce the number of children's names being placed on the register.
- To assist the IROs in the effectiveness of monitoring and tracking of cases the Principal Officer for Permanence now attends the Permanence and Accommodation Panel in addition to the Legal Gateway meeting to ensure that the areas are linked and drift is minimised especially around cases of neglect where timescales for registration should be shorter to prevent children from experiencing persistent neglect.
  - The IROs will carry out shadowing of each other's reviews to ensure that we have consistency in thresholds and practice.
  - The IRO Service Manager will also have greater scrutiny over the requests for Initial Conferences and provide a monthly breakdown of the quality and appropriateness of these requests.
  - Case file audits are being carried out in respect of the children and young people whose names have been placed on the CPR for longer than 12 months. Findings from these Audits will be analysed to consider whether the analysis of risk is proportionate and whether the children's names should remain on the

CPR with the added protection of the Public Law Outline process or whether these cases should be managed under the auspices of a Care and Support Plan.

- The Group Manager for Safeguarding will arrange to observe and report on the effectiveness of strategy meetings and provide training if required.

#### Public Law Outline (PLO) and Care Proceedings

- 4.6 When children's names have been on the child protection register for nine months and, due to the parents failing to adhere to the Child Protection Plan despite being provided support, it is proposed that consideration be given to continued registration, then the matter will be presented to the Legal Gateway Meeting for advice as to whether the case had met the necessary legal threshold to enter the pre proceedings process as set out by the Public Law Outline.
- 4.7 The pre proceedings process is set for a realistic period of time for families to engage in the necessary services to ensure that the child/ren needs are met and they are kept safe from harm. The family will receive a 'pre proceedings letter' which sets out:
- the Local Authority's concerns,
  - what the Local Authority has done to try to address those concerns,
  - what the family need to in order to address those concerns,
  - the likely outcome if they fail to do so which involves the Local Authority considering whether the children are able to remain in the family home and whether care proceedings should be issued;
  - informing them of a meeting that they must attend with legal representation.
- 4.7.1 The family then take that letter to a family law solicitor and will obtain legal aid to fund the attendance of that lawyer. During the meeting the concerns are set out clearly by the social worker (with legal representative for the local authority present) and an agreement signed setting out what the parents need to do whilst an assessment is undertaken by the Local Authority. The conclusion of this assessment will ascertain whether there have been improvements made by the parents for the case to return to Child Protection Matter or if there have been no improvements – legal advice will be obtained as to whether the threshold for care proceedings has been met.

#### Care Proceedings

- 4.8 This is a last resort situation for the local authority and will only be issued when the local authority has attempted to do all it can to work with and support the family but there has been no change and the child/ren are at risk of suffering significant harm should they remain in the care of parents.

#### **Child practice Reviews**

- 4.9 In 2013, Child Practice Reviews replaced what were known as Serious Case Reviews (SCRs). This new process stems from the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales report published in October 2009 - *Improving Practice to Protect Children in Wales: An Examination of the Role of Serious Case Reviews*. This work

was pivotal to where we are today, and concluded that action was required to replace the SCR process which had become ineffective in improving practice and inter-agency working.

- 4.10 A key element of the new framework is different types of review – known as ‘concise’ and ‘extended’ – depending on the circumstances of the child involved. Child Practice Reviews will be effective learning tools where it is more important to consider how agencies worked together. The formal review processes are underpinned by multi-agency professional forums that are critical to improving practice, and will allow practitioners to reflect on cases – and not only where things have gone wrong – in an informed and supported environment.
- 4.11 The guidance sets out arrangements for multi-agency Child Practice Reviews in circumstances of a significant incident where abuse or neglect of a child is known or suspected.
- 4.12 The overall purpose of reform of the review system is to promote a positive culture of multi-agency child protection learning and reviewing in local areas, for which the Western Bay Safeguarding Children’s Board and partner agencies hold responsibility.
- 4.13 A Multi-Agency Professional Forum is a multi-professional event facilitated for practitioners and managers, primarily to examine case practice and provide opportunity for consultation, supervision and reflection, and to disseminate findings from child protection audits, inspections and reviews, in order to improve local knowledge and practice and to inform the Board’s future audit and training priorities.
- 4.14 Concise Reviews: a concise Child Practice Review is carried out in cases where abuse or neglect of a child is known or suspected and the child has –
  - died; or
  - sustained potentially life threatening injury; or
  - sustained serious and permanent impairment of health or development; *and* the child was *neither* on the child protection register *nor* a looked after child on any date during the 6 months preceding the date of the event referred to above.
- 4.15 Extended Reviews: an extended Child Practice Review is carried out in cases where abuse or neglect of a child is known or suspected and the child has –
  - died; or
  - sustained potentially life threatening injury; or
  - sustained serious and permanent impairment of health or development; *and* the child was *on* the child protection register *and/or* was a looked after child (including a care leaver under the age of 18) on any date during the 6 months preceding the date of the event referred to.
- 4.16 Bridgend is currently undertaking three Child Practice Reviews following the identification of concerns where the above criteria have been met. One of the reviews is an historical review relating to a young person who, now that she is in a safe care arrangement, has disclosed she was sexually abused by her biological father.
- 4.17 The two other reviews being undertaken are Concise Reviews one of which involves a child who sustained serious head injuries and another where a child died

of natural causes but siblings were open cases to the department and are currently subject to care proceedings via the Public Law Outline.

- 4.18 The purpose of the reviews is to identify learning for future practice and involve practitioners, managers and senior officers in exploring the detail and context of agencies' work with the child(ren) and family. The review is intended to generate professional and organisational learning and promote improvement in future practice.
- 4.19 Recommendations from Child Practice Reviews are considered and actions agreed are reported to and monitored by the Western Bay Safeguarding Children's Board. The lessons to be learnt are shared with senior managers and disseminated through learning events and training to Safeguarding practitioners.

### **Child Sexual Exploitation**

- 4.20 Child Sexual exploitation (CSE) is the coercion or manipulation of children and young people into taking part in sexual activities. It is a form of sexual abuse involving an exchange of some form of payment which can include money, mobile phones and other items, drugs, alcohol, a place to stay, "protection" or affection. The vulnerability of the young person and grooming process employed by perpetrators renders them powerless to recognise the exploitative nature of relationships and unable to give informed consent.  
(All Wales Protocol CSE 2008)
- 4.21 Child Sexual Exploitation Strategy meetings in Bridgend are chaired by the Group Manager for Safeguarding and the frequency of these meetings is considered on a case by case basis with the primary consideration being the risk to the child or young person. A constant chairperson ensures continuity and oversight of the actions identified within the care and support plans, continuous evaluation of the level of risk posed to the child or young person and identification and monitoring of those persons who pose the risk to the child(ren). Information about these individuals is closely monitored by the Police and attending agencies to assist in the disruption of their activities to better protect children and young people.
- 4.22 The ages of children and young people who are subject to CSE strategy meetings range from 10 years to 17 years. Each meeting takes into account the specific vulnerabilities of these young people to ensure their care and support plan targets all aspects of their needs and their need to be protected and educated around the facets of grooming and sexual exploitation.
- 4.23 Currently Bridgend has 37 children who are subject to monitoring under the CSE protocol. This number has increased over the last three years but this does not necessarily indicate that CSE is becoming more of a concern in Bridgend. It does however evidence that professionals and agencies are now more aware of CSE and are better in identifying behaviours associated with such to protect those identified as being at risk of exploitation.
- 4.24 The Western Bay Safeguarding Children's Board have ensured that across the region there are a number of practitioners who are trained to deliver CSE awareness raising training and further work is underway to increase available trainers and training opportunities. Bridgend SCDWP are developing a

comprehensive training program to ensure that all aspects of our community are involved in raising awareness of CSE across Bridgend and the Police force has also worked closely with us to develop and deliver training. South Wales Police has already delivered two members' training sessions to raise the awareness of CSE and are also working with us to facilitate training to Licensees, taxi drivers and door staff to identify offenders and protect children.

- 4.25 Good communication and collaborative working with the Police is essential in all cases and particularly so in CSE cases and cases where children are frequently reporting missing. The priority for all agencies is to protect children and young people but for the Police there is also the duty to investigate and prosecute offenders. In response to this South Wales Police now has a dedicated CSE team of investigators supported by a Police analyst who regularly completes a problem profile for the Bridgend area regarding children who are at risk of being sexually exploited and the perpetrators of exploitation. The Safeguarding team holds a data base of all young people subject to CSE meetings and also has substantial performance reporting arrangements with the Western Bay Safeguarding Children's Board.
- 4.26 Focusing on a strategic multi-agency approach to CSE, Safeguarding services, South Wales Police, ABMU Health and BCBC Education department have formed a "CSE Task Force". The Task Force addresses issues such as identifying gaps in training, highlighting and tracking high risk cases, new CSE concerns identified outside of the strategy meetings, monitoring and mapping children and young people who are reported as missing with CSE concerns. When appropriate, forums will be convened with practitioners to share the group's findings thus ensuring vital information is shared and robust safeguarding measures are implemented.
- 4.27 As a result of the work carried out by the agencies and professionals involved in the CSE process more Child Abduction notices are being actioned. Notices are used in situations where a young person is visiting the home of an adult where it is suspected he/she may be at risk of being groomed for exploitation. They assist in the disruption of offenders' behaviours by outlining powers of arrest and prosecution if their contact with the child concerned persists. .
- 4.28 With regard to Child Sexual Exploitation and Education, the Child Protection Manager for Education delivers an annual programme of Child Sexual Exploitation training to year 8 pupils with their teachers present. This training is delivered jointly with South Wales Police Officers and evaluated on an annual basis. This ensures children and young people within the education establishments in Bridgend receive appropriate early education around the risks and behaviours associated with CSE.
- 4.29 The Sexual Offences Act 2003 has supported this work by introducing new offences to protect all children aged less than 18 years. The Act now provides specific offences in respect of Child Sexual Exploitation

### **Professional Abuse**

- 4.30 The Safeguarding Service is responsible for dealing with and managing allegations of abuse about or against a professional staff member or volunteer in contact with children and vulnerable adults (or who manage, influence or supervise services).

- 4.31 This applies to all professionals, employees and volunteers working for or accredited to a public, voluntary, private agency, place of worship or faith organization or independent contractor whose work brings them into contact with children and young people. This includes all professionals across the Borough including prisons, secure training facilities and staff who transport children.
- 4.32 The Safeguarding Group Manager is responsible for chairing the Professional Strategy Meetings and ensuring that Safeguards and actions are appropriately considered and implemented. Based on the seriousness of the allegation or concern this process can result in recommendations that professionals' working practices are changed whilst investigations are ongoing or in some cases recommendations are made to suspend a member of staff.
- 4.33 Upon the conclusion of either child protection or criminal investigations a further meeting is convened to consider the findings and reach a conclusion based on the balance of probability whether the original concern raised has been founded, unfounded, unsubstantiated or substantiated. The need for any internal investigation or disciplinary action will also be considered upon the conclusion of this process.

### **Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements**

- 4.34 Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) are a set of arrangements to manage the risk posed by the most serious sexual and violent offenders. These arrangements within Bridgend bring together lead professionals from the Probation Service, Mental Health Service, Housing, Public Protection and Children's Services on a fortnightly basis. These professionals are experienced in this arena and are effective in the sharing of information between agencies which is key in protecting the most vulnerable in our society.
- 4.35 The Group Manager for Safeguarding attends MAPPA to ensure continuity in information and process, and individuals who pose a risk to children and young people are identified and brought to the attention of Safeguarding practitioners at the earliest stage. The Group Manager also ensures agencies and professionals outside of Safeguarding make the necessary referrals to the department and they are then tracked to ensure assessments are carried out in a timely manner to ensure the protection of children, young people and their families.

### **General**

- 4.36 To ensure governance of the safeguarding of children, young people and adults a Strategic Safeguarding Operational Group is chaired by the Corporate Director of Social Services and Wellbeing. This multi-agency group meets on a quarterly basis and includes representatives from children and adult services. This group considers information on all aspects of Safeguarding across both children and adults services with updates from the Western Bay Safeguarding Childrens and Adult Boards.
- 4.37 The Safeguarding Group Manager is the link to HMP Parc Prison and is a member of the Safeguarding Committee. The Committee meets on a quarterly basis to consider Safeguarding arrangements and information of the Young Offenders Unit at the Prison. These arrangements and effective communication between the Young People, the Prison Service and Safeguarding services are assisted by the



presence of a Safeguarding Practitioner located within the unit. Any allegations made against staff members are considered under the professional abuse arrangements and investigated by Safeguarding Practitioners.

### **Corporate Parenting**

- 4.38 Safeguarding is the responsibility of all and not the responsibility of Safeguarding services alone. It is of paramount importance that all Members prioritise Safeguarding when fulfilling their role as corporate parents and receive regular updates about Safeguarding activities across the Council. With a view to promoting awareness of this and raising the profile of Safeguarding across the whole of the Council, a Corporate Safeguarding Policy has been developed and implemented. Each directorate across the Council has identified an individual who is known as a Safeguarding representative to provide assistance and advice to staff should a safeguarding concern be raised. The representatives and Safeguarding leads from both Adult and Childrens services will meet on a quarterly basis to share information and consider practice and training of staff around Safeguarding. The Safeguarding leads will be available to these representatives to ensure that concerns are dealt with promptly and proportionately.
- 4.39 The Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 was implemented in April 2016. Further guidance will be provided to Local Authorities specifically around enhanced statutory responsibilities and the Code of Practice is still being developed. There will be a large number of staff that will require training and Bridgend training department (SCDWP) is working closely with Welsh Government to achieve this.

### **5. Effect upon Policy Framework and Procedure Rules**

- 5.1 There will be an implication on Policy and practice once the new codes of practice come into force.

### **6. Equality Impact Assessment**

- 6.1 This is an information report. There are no equality matters relevant to this report.

### **7. Financial Implications**

- 7.1 There are no financial implications arising directly from this report. However, any budget pressures identified as a result of action taken to safeguard children and young people will be considered as part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

### **8. Recommendation.**

- 8.1 The Committee is requested to note the developments in the safeguarding of children and young people across the County Borough of Bridgend.

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**June 2016**

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**10. Background documents:**

None