

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

Minutes of the meeting held on 5 December, 2016

- PRESENT:** Dr Gwynne Jones (Chief Executive) (Chair)
- Councillor Kenneth Hughes (Portfolio Member for Education)
Councillor Ann Griffith (Corporate Scrutiny Committee)
Councillor Dylan Rees (Partnership and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee)
Mr Llyr Bryn Roberts (Interim Head of Children's Services)
Alex Kaitell (Interim Principal Operations Officer)
Mr Gareth Llwyd (Service Manager – Safeguarding & Quality Assurance) (on behalf of the IRO)
Dawn Owen (Child Placement Team Manager)
Huw Owen (LAC Team Manager)
Dr Eimir Thomas (Education Officer – ALN)
Heulwen Owen (LAC Education Liaison Officer)
Llinos Edwards (LAC Nurse – BCUHB)
Ann Holmes (Committee Officer)
- APOLOGIES:** Councillor Aled Morris Jones (Portfolio Member for Housing and Social Services), Dr Caroline Turner (Assistant Chief Executive & Designated Statutory Director of Social Services), Mrs Rona Jones (Independent Reviewing Officer - IRO)
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1 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

No declaration of interest was received.

2 MINUTES OF THE 5 SEPTEMBER, 2016 MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 5th September, 2016 were presented and confirmed as correct.

3 MATTERS ARISING

- **Health Matters**

The Panel noted that feedback from the meeting with the Clinical Psychologists to address the issues raised in the draft pathway action plan in relation to pregnancy and relationship issues in the looked after population was incorporated within the LAC Nurse's written report under item 8 on the agenda and would be considered at that point.

- **Children and Young People Missing from Care**

The Interim Head of Children's Services said that a discussion with the Data Collection Officer had confirmed that the service does not systematically collate data about children and young people missing from care because it is not a standard performance indicator. Should it be the Panel's wish that such data be provided then consideration will be given to creating a process for gathering the information.

The Panel noted that it wished to satisfy itself that every effort is made to track down children and young people who go missing from placements and that it would want to be informed as to if and when these children are found so as to be assured about their welfare and safety. The Panel was particularly concerned about children and young people who may have been trafficked who go missing from care as a particularly vulnerable group at risk of further exploitation.

The Service Manager (Safeguarding & Quality Assurance) said that Children's Services do work collaboratively with other agencies in relation to children and young people who go missing from care and are aware of such cases as they arise. These are tracked and monitored via the arrangements within the Duty Team and with North Wales Police. While the specific information may not be formally recorded via the data collection system, it is available through the individuals who deal with the cases at the time and who co-ordinate the monitoring work with North Wales Police. The risk status of children and young people who go missing from care for over 7 hours is escalated jointly with North Wales Police and a strategy meeting is held.

The Interim Principal Operations Officer said the service has an arrangement with Barnardo's as regards completing return home interviews and that information is supplied to the Police. Consideration could be given to how the Panel could be provided with the information on a regular basis. For children missing from care there is an escalation process, and the service follows the North Wales Child Protection Procedures which are clear in setting out the process and timescale for responding in cases where children and young people go missing from care. However more work needs to be done in terms of the local picture and on evidencing what the service is doing with the data.

The Panel noted that data about children and young people who go missing from care is therefore available and is monitored but that it needs to be further developed in order to produce a more local picture of vulnerability and risk, and a process needs to be put in place for reporting the information to the Panel systematically.

It was agreed to note the information.

ACTION ARISING: Interim Principal Operations Officer to provide a report for the Panel's next meeting in relation to children and young people who go missing from care.

4 ESTYN THEMATIC REVIEW – RAISING THE ATTAINMENT, ACHIEVEMENT AND ASPIRATION OF CHILDREN WHO ARE LOOKED AFTER

- Correspondence dated 2 November, 2016 from Welsh Government in relation to the above was presented for the Panel's attention. The correspondence sought clarification of the actions taken by the local authority to ensure that practice in its area is in line with the features of effective local authorities identified by Estyn with regard to raising the attainment, achievement and aspiration of children who are looked after along with practice examples of how the approach recommended by Estyn is being implemented. **The correspondence was noted by the Panel.**
- An Action Plan by the Education Service setting out the action steps to be taken by the service in response to recommendations contained within the Estyn Thematic Review above was presented for the Panel's consideration.

The Education ALN Officer reported that the Action Plan has been formulated in consultation with the Head of Learning and discussions have also been held with the Interim Head of Children's Services, the Interim Principal Operations Manager and the LAC Education Liaison Officer. The Plan shows the actions to be taken, the responsible officer, the timescale for completion, the arrangements for monitoring and the desired outcomes as regards providing a more composite picture of the educational progress of children in care. The Officer said that much of the work has been completed and that one of the most significant steps involves the establishment of a County Children in Care (CIC) Progress Tracking Group which will report to the Corporate Parenting Panel on progress, performance, interventions, provision and best practice which will help identify where improvements need to be made particularly in terms of specific aspects of education. The group will initially include 5 primary school representatives and 5 secondary school representatives and will have its inaugural meeting in January, 2017. It is anticipated that the Tracking Group will be in a position to provide a report to this Panel at its next meeting in March, 2017.

It was agreed to accept and to note the Education Service Action Plan.

ACTION ARISING: An initial report from the County CIC Progress Tracking Group to be presented to the Panel's next meeting in March, 2017.

5 SUPPORT FOR CARE LEAVERS – CORRESPONDENCE BY THE CHILDREN'S COMMISSIONER FOR WALES

Correspondence dated 14 November, 2016 from the Office of the Children's Commissioner for Wales with regard to support for care leavers was presented for the Panel's information. The correspondence set out the Children's Commissioner's intention of reinvigorating the discussion about what every local authority can offer to ensure consistent support for care leavers across Wales with the aim that by 2019, a measured increase will have been made in offering care experienced young people access to safe and secure housing options and an active offer of a job, education or training place.

The Interim Head of Children's Services said that the Children's Commissioner in her letter draws particular attention to three elements of support for care leavers in relation to housing, education, and employment and training opportunities which she proposes are discussed in meetings with key personnel and Elected Members in local authorities in Wales and which she sees as essential aspects in helping care leavers get the best start to independent living. Children's Services in Anglesey do have a plan in place for reviewing after care arrangements which is being implemented. The Commissioner specifically highlights the expectation that local authorities, as corporate parents for the children in their care, should offer work and training to care leavers as any other parent would do within their own family firm.

The Interim Principal Operations Officer confirmed that there is within Children's Services a Transformation Project in relation to care leavers which was established originally to address the recommendations of the Lost After Care report. The project is looking at provision for care leavers, what care leavers themselves think of the services provided for them and what is required going forward. It is intended to bring a report to this panel on how the service assesses its position, where it wants to be and the challenges it is facing in the key areas identified by the Children's Commissioner. One of the main challenges is successfully engaging wider service areas within the Council in contributing to corporate parenting objectives. Corporate parenting by definition is a responsibility that involves the whole authority but is often focussed on Children's Social Services. Progress has been made e.g. in updating the Housing Policy and in creating a Financial Policy which sets out the expectations in terms of financial support for care leavers.

The Panel considered the correspondence presented and the information provided by officers and made the following points:

- The Panel noted, and was agreed in supporting the Children's Commissioner's ambitions for care experienced young people.
- The Panel noted that as well as actively supporting care leavers to gain employment or training opportunities, the Children's Commissioner expects local authorities to proactively offer work and training places for care leavers within their own organisation.
- The Panel noted that without access to good employment, young people leaving care are unlikely to be able to meet their housing costs especially in light of the impact of the Welfare Reform Bill and it sought clarification of how the Authority proposes to help them sustain accommodation out in the real world. The Panel was informed that the local authority does provide accommodation for care leavers with the response being on an individual basis. A joint protocol with the Housing Service has been developed and is in the process of being updated in line with the new legislation. The Housing Service provides starter packs for care leavers and a rent deposit scheme is also offered. However, work needs to be done in developing a more collective corporate approach rather than issues being addressed on a case by case basis by an individual officer.
- The Panel sought clarification whether the engagement of partner agencies had been sought. The Panel was informed that further work needs to be done in the first instance in securing the buy-in of other departments within the council to corporate parenting and in raising awareness that corporate parenting encompasses the wider authority and is not just the responsibility of Children's Services. The Children's Commissioner's letter provides an opportunity to highlight

the issue. **It was agreed that Officers would consult with other services within the council about their contribution to achieving corporate parenting objectives.**

- The Panel sought clarification of its authority in driving this agenda forward. The Panel was informed that it has the status of a permanent working group which reports directly to the Council's Executive and to which recommendations can be made.

It was agreed to note the correspondence of the Children's Commissioner for Wales.

ACTION ARISING: Children's Service's self-assessment of leaving care arrangements along with a Corporate Action Plan to be presented to the Panel's next meeting.

6 REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER (IRO)

The report of the Independent Reviewing Officer for Quarter 2 2016/17 was presented for the Panel's consideration. The report provided quantitative data in relation to the number of looked after children; their legal status; the number and nature of the placements made; the statutory visits undertaken, the performance of the IRO against key indicators and the caseload of the IRO.

The Service Manager – Safeguarding & Quality Assurance reported on the following main considerations –

- That by September, 2016 the number of children and young people accommodated by the Council had increased to 135 compared to 126 at the end of June, 2016.
- That there has been a steady increase in the looked after population in Anglesey since the first quarter of 2014/15 as illustrated by the graph in paragraph A (iii).
- In terms of legal status, there has been a slight increase in the number of children and young people on Full Care Orders to the Authority and similarly, there is a slight increase in the number of children and young people who are accommodated with parental consent under Section 76 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. This is a group which the Authority may need to target in terms of support and intervention so that the children can return to their parents and family setting.
- Safeguarding remains the main reason why children and young people are accommodated by the Council.
- That there has been an increase in the number of LAC reviews held within timescale from 81.48% to 85.96%. 113 LAC reviews were held in Quarter 2 of which 27 were within county (previously 57) and 41 out of county (previously 24); the latter in particular place pressure on the officer conducting the reviews. Consideration needs to be given to the children in care in light of the new initiatives being developed around early intervention and preventative services to establish whether some can safely return to the family setting. Others may need more intensive intervention before more permanent plans can be made for them in the form of adoption.
- In terms of issues arising, the IRO caseload continues to be very high at 135. Steps to engage a second IRO to reduce the workload are being taken currently.
- Issues identified by the IRO as areas for continuous improvement are set out under paragraph (vi) of the report. These include improving the qualitative aspects of documentation and reviews; undertaking statutory visits within timescale and better involving young people in reviews and in the review of LAC consultation documents.

The Interim Principal Operations Manager reported that improvements have been made with regard to safeguarding and quality assurance; communication has also improved significantly in the past six to twelve months. New procedures in relation to work around Section 76 – voluntary accommodation have been developed and are awaiting sign-off; new templates with regard to obtaining consent are now being put to use; work is ongoing around resilient families which involves targeting the most vulnerable groups of young people and engaging with them in a timely manner and offering more intense intervention. As regards the LAC service there is work being done to prevent escalation and children coming into the care system as well as work to develop the information and advice hub and to promote the early intervention agenda. Therefore a great deal of work is ongoing in the areas highlighted by the IRO's report.

The Panel considered the information presented and it raised the following issues –

- The Panel noted the high caseload of the IRO and noted also that action is being taken to address the situation.
- The Panel sought clarification whether capacity within the Legal Service is sufficient to support the work in relation to rescinding care orders. The Panel was informed that a joint protocol with the Legal Service has been established and where necessary external legal provision is commissioned. Cases to be presented to the courts are tracked closely. Social Services have access to an Adults' Legal Advisor as well as a Children's Legal Advisor so currently capacity is not an issue with regard to court work.
- The Panel sought clarification of the reasons for the continuing increase in the number of children being looked after by the Authority in Anglesey. The Panel was informed that a rising LAC population is a feature across local authorities in Wales and that the number of children going through the Public Law Outline process which seeks to move cases to a resolution within 26 weeks, is also increasing. In Anglesey, there has been an increase in the number of larger sibling groups coming into the care system which is a factor in the upward trend in numbers as is the need to review the thresholds in light of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.
- The Panel noted that the number of children in out of county placements (27 with private out of county Foster Carers and 6 in residential out of county placements) remains high. The Panel was informed that in the absence of children's residential provision on the Island, the service has to access residential accommodation out of county to meet the sometimes specialised needs of children requiring care provision.
- The Panel noted and emphasised the importance of the Authority being able to drill down to the reasons behind the ongoing rise in the number of looked after children and young people so it can identify what the needs are and plan how these can best be met in the future. The Panel was informed that some of the Edge of Care funding will be used to develop processes to better capture the profile of the Authority's looked after children and young people leading to an improved understanding of their needs and how those might be fulfilled.
- The Panel noted that for the future it would like to see within the report of the IRO an increased focus on the work being done to improve the quality of decision making and consequently the effects of that as regards better outcomes for the children in the Authority's care. The Panel was informed that the Quality Assurance process has highlighted areas requiring attention as documented in the report and that that task is the responsibility of the whole service; this is being addressed in a number of ways including by issuing clear staff guidelines, improved supervision and setting up small practice groups to look at specific areas.
- The Panel noted that LAC reviews need to be held in a more child-friendly environment.

It was agreed to accept the report of the IRO and to note its contents.

ACTIONS ARISING:

- **IRO to give consideration to how the report can in future evidence how quality issues are being addressed and how this is leading to better outcomes.**
- **IRO to provide further information regarding the requirements in identifying appropriate venues for conducting LAC reviews.**

7 FOSTERING SERVICE PROGRESS REPORT

The Interim Head of Children's Services reported that the Fostering Service was the subject of a positive CSSIW inspection in January 2016 which was reported to the Panel. Recommendations made by CSSIW with regard to improving practice in some areas were subsequently incorporated in an Action Plan. Children's services were also the subject of a Child Practice Review which resulted in a number of ECPR 2 recommendations which are interlinked to the Fostering Service. The two action plans (CSSIW inspection action plan and ECPR 2 action plan) have been combined; the recommendations relate primarily to improving processes and related documentation with regard to risk assessing children in care placements and ensuring that the care provision is suitable for the child's needs. The documentation relating to the areas highlighted by both the CSSIW inspection and the Child Practice Review are being reviewed to ensure they meet the purpose.

It was agreed to accept and to note the information.

NO FURTHER ACTION ENSUING

8 SERVICE REPORTS

8.1 The report of the LAC Nurse for Quarter 2 2016/17 was presented for the Panel's consideration.

The Panel considered the information in the report and made the following points:

- The Panel noted that only 1 from 14 initial looked after health assessments were completed within the 28 day timescale which it deemed unsatisfactory. The Panel sought assurance that this was an isolated event and did not represent a trend. The Panel was informed that late assessments have been an issue previously; the Health Service maintains a register of reasons for delays in health assessments which can be due to the late receipt of information by partners. This makes scheduling appointments with the paediatrician who undertakes the assessment more difficult within the 28 day timescale. Improved co-operation should make it easier to meet the timescale in all cases. Additionally, a task group has been set up in all six areas across the region to facilitate co-operation and practices between the local authorities and the Health Service with a view to improving the timeliness of health assessments.
- The Panel noted the developments with regard to the revised pathway for better access to mental health services for looked after children and young people as well as the carer's report which is designed to give a more comprehensive picture of the needs of the child. The Panel sought assurance that the pathway (appended as a flow chart to the report) will facilitate access to CAMHS for looked after children and is not an additional hurdle to be overcome in order for them to receive a mental health service. The Panel was informed that while progress has been made from an Education Service perspective, less inroads have been made from a Children's Services perspective and that accessing CAMHS and ensuring that looked after children receive a timely therapeutic service that is responsive to their needs remain an issue.
- The Panel noted that there were two professional viewpoints in relation to the provision of mental health services for looked after the children the one being that an assessment of mental health needs should take place at the point of entry and should form part of the LAC initial health assessment; the other proposed that the mental health needs of looked after children should be assessed only when they are settled within their placements to allow any mental health issues to emerge. The Panel was informed that the pathway chart is meant to facilitate access to a CAMHS consultation when a mental health concern about a looked after child is raised and does not cover access to a therapy service for which there is a waiting list. **It was suggested and agreed that the matter be discussed at a North Wales regional level and feedback reported to this Panel.**
- The Panel noted that a task group has been established to look at pregnancy issues in the looked after population. While the Panel supported the task group as undertaking an essential piece of work in the context of improving after care support and guidance, it also recognised that the issue of care leavers becoming parents extends beyond Children's Services and involves Health, Education and Schools in helping looked after children and young people to develop healthy relationships and to make positive decisions about their future.

It was agreed to accept the report and to note the contents.

ACTION ENSUING: Officers to seek a regional view on the effectiveness of the Looked After Children Mental Health Pathway as well as on the timing of mental health assessments for looked after children entering the care system, and to report back to the Panel thereon.

8.2 The report of the Child Placement Team Manager was presented for the Panel's consideration.

The Panel considered the report and noted the following:

- The Panel noted that the number of placement breakdowns continues to rise and stands at 6.63% for Quarter 2.
- The Panel noted that the child placement team managers have been managing a high volume of assessments during the quarter due to the high number of viability and full assessment for friends and family cares.

- The Panel noted that the retention of foster carers remains high on the agenda for the fostering service and that the work of the Recruitment and Marketing Officer is key to this objective. The Panel supported the emphasis placed on retention of foster carers given the importance of having in place a stable pool of in house foster carers in being able to provide better placement choice.

It was agreed to accept and to note the report

NO FURTHER ACTION ENSUING

8.3 The report of the LAC Education Liaison Officer was presented for the Panel's consideration. Information in relation to the educational attainment of individual looked after children was tabled at the meeting.

The Panel considered the report and noted the following:

- The Panel noted that it would be useful for it know what were the targets set for the educational attainment of the looked after children whose results are documented. The Panel was informed that those are monitored via tracking reports.
- The Panel noted the position with regard to a case where the outcomes could have been better. The Panel noted that it was disappointed in this instance and believed that lessons in improving practice could be learnt. The Panel considered how review and escalation processes within the authority were applied in the case and it discussed how communication and collaboration with other authorities might be improved to ensure a better outcome in the circumstances in future. It noted that a joint approach for monitoring the quality of provision in out of county placements is needed. The Panel also noted that in circumstances where securing a placement is a matter of priority there is sometimes less opportunity to give attention to other considerations.

It was agreed to accept and to note the report.

ACTION ENSUING: Officers to consider formulating a protocol to be applied in future in circumstances as described in the report of the LAC Education Officer.

9 NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the Panel's next meeting would be held at 2:00 p.m. on Monday, 6th March, 2017.

**Dr Gwynne Jones
Chair**