

# CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

## Minutes of the meeting held on 11 September, 2017

**PRESENT:** Dr Gwynne Jones (Chief Executive) (Chair)

Councillor Llinos Medi Huws (Leader and Portfolio Member for Social Services)

Councillor R. Meirion Jones (Portfolio Member for Education)

Councillor Alun Mummery (Portfolio Member for Housing)

Councillor Richard Griffiths (Corporate Scrutiny Committee)

Councillor Margaret M. Roberts (Partnership and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee)

Liz Fletcher (BCUHB Area West Assistant Director)

Douglas Watson (Chair Anglesey Foster Care Association)

Dr Caroline Turner (Assistant Chief Executive and Designated Statutory Director of Social Services)

Llyr Bryn Roberts (Interim Head of Children's Services)

Delyth Molyneux (Head of Learning)

Fôn Roberts (Interim Children's Services Manager)

Rona Jones (Independent Reviewing Officer)

Huw Owen (Independent Reviewing Officer)

Dawn Owen (Child Placement Team Manager)

Heulwen Owen (LAC Education Liaison Officer)

Llinos Edwards (LAC Nurse – BCUHB)

Margaret Peters (Integration and Engagement Manager)

Helen Bilsborrow (Interim LAC Team Manager)

Kevin Thomas (Practice Lead)

Ann Holmes (Committee Officer)

**APOLOGIES:** None

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### 1 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

No declaration of interest was received.

### 2 MINUTES OF THE 10 JULY, 2017 MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 10th July, 2017 were presented and confirmed as correct.

### 3 MATTERS ARISING

- **The Role of the Corporate Parenting Panel**

The Interim Children's Services Manager presented a report which set out proposals for reviewing the structure and purpose of the Corporate Parenting Panel with a view to enhancing and broadening the Panel's role so that it –

- encompasses the wider children and young people at risk population including those who are subject to care and support, child protection and who are on the edge of care;

- promotes the delivery of corporate parenting objectives as a whole Council responsibility involving services other than Children's Services as well as the Council's external partners.
- Moves away from focusing exclusively on quantitative performance information thereby allowing time and opportunity to consider how well the children and young people who are looked after by the Authority are doing and how qualitative factors influence the outcomes for those children and young people.

The Interim Children's Services Manager reported that the review of the Panel's role arose out of the discussions at the previous meeting in which Members were of the opinion that the Panel was overly engaged in data sharing which did not always help them obtain a clear appreciation of the progress being made by children and young people who are looked after or what those children and young people think about the care they receive, and how those views could contribute towards planning provision for looked after children in future. The Officer said that the Corporate Parenting Panel aims to ensure that the Isle of Anglesey County Council discharges its duties as corporate parent for all the children looked after and care leavers it is responsible for so that they are able to achieve their potential and make a successful transition into adulthood. The Panel does this by ensuring the services provided for children and young people looked after are of good quality and meet their needs. The key elements of the Panel's role are listed in the report.

In order for the Panel is able to be able to achieve the key elements of its role fully, the following steps are proposed –

- To develop a Children Looked After and Care Leavers Strategy for a three year period from 2018 to 2020. This would provide a framework to ensure that the Authority's duties and responsibilities as corporate parent are fulfilled.
- To develop a strategy which reflects a whole system integrated approach to supporting children and families. The intention is to bring together the range of activity across the Council and externally and children's partnership arrangements at all stages of the care journey, including a clear focus on supporting families to stay together wherever it is safe to do so, and to minimise the need for children to become looked after.
- To review and reorganise agenda business so that the Panel receives statistical information and data reports in alternate quarters thereby freeing up time to discuss each area in more detail supported by more qualitative information.
- To introduce new areas to the Panel's agenda such as input by children in care; reports by the Resilient Families Team, case studies demonstrating positive outcomes and missing children data to help the Panel's members gain a more inclusive and rounded understanding of the range of issues affecting children and young people who are looked after so they are better able to challenge and support services to deliver improved results. Other specific areas such as participation, work and employment opportunities could also feature periodically on the agenda.
- To expand the Panel's membership to include representation from other partner agencies and sectors e.g. Police and local business.
- To implement an action plan to realise the new vision of the Corporate Parenting Panel to include the following tasks –
  - Develop a Children and Looked After and Care Leavers Strategy by the end of 2017
  - Develop a Children in Care Council by the end of 2017
  - Develop a Children in Care Pledge by the end of 2017

- Engage with children and young people who have been or are in care; all the Council's Elected Members; all Council departments; local business and partner agencies by March, 2018.
- Reorganise the Panel's agenda by the next meeting in December, 2017.
- Re-launch the Isle of Anglesey County Council's vision for Corporate Parenting by March, 2018.

The Panel considered the proposals and made the following points –

- There was consensus among the Officer representation on the Panel that changing the way the Panel works in the manner proposed was to be welcomed in principle based on the view that the Panel should be paying more attention to how the services provided for children and young people looked after by the Authority help deliver better results for them and enable them to achieve success in their lives after leaving care. The Panel noted that currently it does not have a mechanism by which it can sufficiently evaluate this dimension of corporate parenting. Elected Members new to the Panel confirmed that they did not see any reasons why changes to the Panel should not be implemented in the way proposed especially as they were aimed at improving the ability of the Corporate Parenting Panel to maintain oversight of the progress of looked after children and young people and the effectiveness of the services provided for them.
  - The Panel sought clarification of whether implementing the review of corporate parenting would detract from the focus on the Children's Services Improvement Plan. The Panel was informed that reviewing how the Council discharges its corporate parenting role is work that needs to be done and it is not envisaged that it will impact the ongoing work on the Children's Services Improvement Plan; conversely it can contribute to it in providing a reminder and evidence to the Regulator that the focus of Children's Social Services is improving the lives of children and young people who are looked after and securing the best outcomes for them.
  - The Panel noted that in order to achieve the vision for corporate parenting, all the Council's services as well as partner agencies need to actively contribute to its development and to putting it into effect. Engaging the wider Council in this endeavour was recognised by the Panel as likely to prove a challenge that would take time to address. The Panel was informed that a group with representation from all services would be helpful in developing and taking the strategy forward so that it becomes a co-production and is not seen as the responsibility of Children's Services alone. The Penaethiaid Group was suggested as the forum wherein the matter could be brought to the attention of Heads of Service and their buy-in to the strategy secured.
  - The Panel noted that likewise the participation of looked after children and young people needs to be secured but was mindful that this should be done sensitively in a way that does not discourage or put off individuals from saying what they think and expect from the authority as a corporate parent. The Panel noted that hitherto it had had too few opportunities to meet and to listen to the views of looked after children and young people. The Panel was informed by the Leader that there is a participation group for children and young people which has been formed via the Llais Ni Youth Council which encompasses all the Council's services – so children and young people on the Island are not without an outlet for their views.

**Having given careful consideration to the information presented, the Panel agreed to support the changes proposed in principle along with the Action Plan, whilst recognising that the implementation timetable might slip due to the need to conduct discussions widely in order to enlist the agreement of services across the Council as well as partner agencies.**

**ADDITIONAL ACTION PROPOSED: The matter to be included on the agenda of the next meeting of The Penaethiaid Group.**

- **Statutory Visits to Looked After Children and Young People**

The Interim Children's Services Manager informed the Panel that a statutory visit by a Children's Social Worker has to be made within one week of a child becoming looked after; every 6 weeks during the first year of the placement and thereafter at intervals of not more than 3 months. The Children's Services' performance with regard to conducting statutory visits has historically been below target; however following more detailed analysis of the data in August it was found that the information had been collected incorrectly leading to a miscalculation of the figures. The Officer said that he could confirm that following revision, 86% of children received a statutory visit within timescale and 90% received a visit that was between 1 and 11 days out of time. One young person did not want to see a social worker and there was another whose foster carer was unavailable. It is intended that the previous quarter's figures should also be reviewed for accuracy.

The Panel noted and welcomed the information. The Panel sought clarification of whether the regulations with regard to statutory visits are too prescriptive and whether in the interests of efficiency and best use of resources, it would be better if they were conducted according to an individual child's circumstances e.g. a child in a safe and stable placement might reasonably require less frequent visits. The Panel was informed that the regulations with regard to timescales apply to statutory visits only; Social Workers can visit children any time, but a statutory visit carries with it certain requirements in relation to assessing the ongoing stability and suitability of the placement; the child's relationship with the carer and the child's sleeping arrangements and quality of life. It is regarded as good practice that the Social Worker meets with the child outside of the statutory time frame in what are termed quality visits in order to develop and build a relationship with the looked after child/young person.

**NO ADDITIONAL ACTION PROPOSED**

- **Independent Visitor Service**

The Independent Reviewing Officer informed that Panel that following review, it was found that only 7 children/young persons partially met the qualifying criteria for the Independent Visitor Service run by Tros Gynnal and whilst one of the group did not have regular contact with his/her parent, the parent attended when his/her agreement was required. The IRO said that she had raised the matter at reviews and she added that Social Workers could also benefit from a better understanding of the differing roles of advocate and independent visitor.

The Panel noted the information and was agreed in recommending that Tros Gynnal should be informed of the reasons for Anglesey Children's Services not making use of the Independent Visitor Service i.e. the Authority's looked after children do not fully meet the criteria for the service, given that it had been raised by the Tros Gynnal Team Manager at the previous meeting in presenting the Tros Gynnal Annual Report.

**ADDITIONAL ACTION PROPOSED: Interim Children's Services Manager to inform Tros Gynnal of the reasons for Anglesey Children's Services not making referrals to the Independent Visitor Service.**

The Assistant Chief Executive and Statutory Director of Social Services said that she had updated the Panel at its last meeting on the announcement by Welsh Government of a

£1m St David's Day fund to address the needs of care leavers in Wales under three specific themes which were aligned with the Children's Commissioner for Wales' priorities for care leavers in her "Hidden Ambitions" report. The Officer said that correspondence dated 31 July, 2017 had been received from the Commissioner as a follow-up to her visit to Anglesey to discuss the implementation of the messages in the aforementioned report in which she asked that the Authority creates a response to the report that speaks directly to young people looked after by the Authority, and that the Authority also shares with the Commissioner's Team examples of good practice and positive stories.

**ADDITIONAL ACTION PROPOSED: Committee Office to circulate a copy of the Children's Commissioner for Wales' letter to members of the Panel.**

#### **4 THE REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER**

The report of the Independent Reviewing Officers for Quarter 1 2016/17 was presented for the Panel's consideration. The report provided statistical information in the form of graphs about the looked after population on Anglesey as well as highlighting practice issues identified by the IROs.

The Panel noted the following points –

- That the number of looked after children had decreased from 141 in Quarter 4 2016/17 to 140 in Quarter 1 2016/17 (although it had since the drafting of the report, increased to 143). The Panel was informed that although there has been a steady increase in the looked after population over the course of recent years, the number has stabilised over the past year.
- That placements for children have recently been under immense pressure due to the lack of foster carers – both local authority and independent. This is a problem that exists throughout Wales and is linked to the increasing numbers of children being accommodated. The Panel discussed the recruitment and retention of foster carers and the various factors impacting thereon at length as well as the knock on effects in terms of having to accommodate children in out of county placements. It was agreed that the Fostering Service's Recruitment and Marketing Officer be invited to attend a meeting of the Panel to brief Members on the key issues and the steps being taken both locally and nationally to try to address the shortage of foster carers. The Panel was informed that work is ongoing via the Fostering Network and that the Fostering Recruitment and Marketing Officer is a member of the Network's regional group.
- That changes in social workers is an issue within the care system with this leading to a lack of consistency and continuity which impacts on the quality of the relationship between a Social Worker and the looked after child/young person.
- That there have been a small number of incidents whereby children who are subjects of a Care Order have been admitted to the Ysbyty Gwynedd A & E department without the knowledge of the Local Authority. The Panel discussed the reporting and communication lines between Children's Social Services and the Health Service and the systems in place to keep all agencies informed in such cases.
- The Panel sought clarification of how it could obtain assurance that the challenges and practice issues identified by the Independent Reviewing Officer are being addressed fully by Management. It was suggested that it might be helpful if the IRO's report could be reformatted as an audit type report wherein the key practice issues for improvement and the specific actions taken by Management to respond to them are set out. The IROs confirmed that they had begun to review the format of the quarterly report to the Panel.

**It was agreed to accept the report of the Independent Reviewing Officer for Quarter 12017/18 and to note the issues arising.**

**ADDITIONAL ACTIONS PROPOSED:**

- **The Fostering Recruitment and Marketing Officer be invited to a meeting of the Panel to provide an overview of the issues arising in relation to the recruitment and retention of foster carers.**
- **The IROs to review the format of the quarterly report to the Panel in time for the next meeting so that it provides assurance that issues identified are responded to by Management.**

**5 SERVICE REPORT – LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN**

The report of the Interim LAC Team Manager setting out the risks and challenges facing the service as well as how these are being met was presented for the Panel's consideration.

The Panel noted that the LAC Team had seen a period of instability due to sickness absence and changes in line management which has affected caseload numbers and management oversight of cases. The Panel sought clarification of Management as to the prospects for stability within the service in future. The Panel was informed that there has been a raft of social worker appointments recently but that it will take time for the Authority to phase out its use of agency social workers and develop its own "home grown" children's social care workforce. Additionally the Authority is making the service a safer place to practice professionally through enhanced supervision, training and induction arrangements with the aim that having recruited successfully, new staff will want to remain with the Authority for the long-term.

**It was agreed to accept and to note the report of the LAC Team Manager.**

**NO ADDITIONAL ACTION WAS PROPOSED**

**6 NEXT MEETING**

The Panel noted that the next meeting was scheduled for 2:00 p.m. on Monday, 11<sup>th</sup> December, 2017.

**Dr Gwynne Jones  
Chair**