

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

Minutes of the meeting held on 18 March, 2019

- PRESENT:** Dr Gwynne Jones (Chief Executive) (Chair)
- Councillor Llinos Medi Huws (Leader and Portfolio Member for Social Services)
- Councillor Alun Mummery (Portfolio Member for Housing and Supporting Communities)
- Councillor Richard Griffiths (Corporate Scrutiny Committee)
- Councillor Margaret M. Roberts (Partnership and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee)
- Barbara Jones (Anglesey Foster Carers' Association)
- Liz Fletcher (BCUHB)
- Fôn Roberts (Head of Children and Families' Services)
- Huw Owen (Independent Reviewing Officer)
- Llyr Bryn Roberts (Service Manager, Children's Services)
- Keith Walters (Practice Leader – Child Placement Team)
- Ann Holmes (Committee Officer)
- APOLOGIES:** Councillor R. Meirion Jones (Portfolio Member for Education, Libraries, Culture and Youth) Mr Alwyn Jones (Interim Director of Social Services), Rona Jones, Dawn Owen (Independent Reviewing Officers)
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1 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

No declaration of interest was received.

2 MINUTES OF THE 10 DECEMBER, 2018 MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 10th December, 2018, were presented and were confirmed as correct.

3 MATTERS ARISING

- **Voices From Care Cymru**

The Service Manager (Children's Services) said that he had reported to the Panel's previous meeting on a proposed joint initiative with Voices from Care Cymru – one of the leading voluntary agencies in Wales for working with looked after children – to set up a monthly participation group for care experienced children and young people to help co-produce an Ynys Môn Looked After Children and Care Leavers' Strategy. The project in which Voices from Care Cymru would offer advice and support on participation and corporate parenting, would run for a minimum of twelve months at a cost £16,500 per annum and would also have a legacy value in terms of establishing the means by which the Authority's looked after children and young people can continue to have a voice beyond the lifetime of the project, and also in ensuring that their participation is meaningful and has a tangible outcome in the form of a Looked After Children and Care Leavers Strategy for Ynys Môn which they would help produce. The Officer said that he had approached the Service's partners both internally and externally to find out whether

they would be able to contribute to the cost of the project and that hitherto the Council's Education and Housing Services had confirmed their readiness to make such a contribution. The Office of the North Wales Police and Crime Commissioner had confirmed by letter that it was unable to contribute citing that to do so would set a precedent for contributing to projects by other North Wales authorities and also because it was developing its own process for engaging with children and young people across North Wales. Similarly, the project does not meet the criteria for funding from the Isle of Anglesey Charitable Trust nor the Anglesey Further Education Trust (David Hughes Charitable Estate). The Service Manager said that discussions with Voices from Care Cymru have moved on and that an officer from the organisation will be in Anglesey in the next few weeks as part of a Laming Visit.

Liz Fletcher, BCUHB said that whilst she agreed with the project in principle, she would have to establish with the Board's Finance Department whether funding is available to enable a contribution to be made.

The Panel in noting the report back by the Service Manager noted also that under the proceeds of crime legislation, the Police receive a percentage of the monies confiscated which can be put to community use across the North Wales local authority areas. It was suggested that it might be beneficial to make further enquiries about proceeds of crime money as a potential avenue of funding for the Voices from Care project.

ACTION AGREED: Enquiries to be made with North Wales Police as to whether a contribution towards the Voices from Care project can be made from proceeds of crime monies.

- **CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE (CAMHS)**

Liz Fletcher, BCUHB confirmed that having responsibility for all of children's health across Gwynedd and Anglesey with a portfolio encompassing children and adolescent mental health service; hospital based acute service; health visiting and school nursing service and community service (with an emphasis on neuro-development and disability) she would be happy to ask any one of the four service managers to attend a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel to discuss specific elements relating to the four service areas.

4 VOICES FROM CARE CYMRU CONFERENCE

A report from the Voices from Care Cymru Conference held in Llanrwst on 26 February, 2019 was presented for the Panel's consideration.

The Head of Children and Families' Services reported that the occasion above was the first ever VFCC Conference to be held in the North and that Anglesey was well represented at the conference with four girls between the ages of 6 and 14 along with three foster parents and three corporate parents attending the event. Highlights included a talk by a young man who had been a child in care who recounted his experiences of care and of moving from one foster placement to another. Morning and afternoon workshops were staged on themes ranging from corporate parenting and young people's experiences of being a child in care within communities in Wales to literature's role in turning negative experiences into positive ones. An interactive animal show was also held which proved popular. The Officer said that the conference provided an opportunity for children and young people who are looked after to meet and share experiences. The Authority will endeavour to ensure that a member(s) of the Corporate Parenting Panel can attend next year's event.

The Panel noted the information presented and although it welcomed the opportunity which the conference and other similar events can provide for members of the Panel to meet with children and young people who are looked after, it noted that attending organised events such as this should not be the only way in which Members engage with them. The Panel emphasised that it would like to receive feedback from the children and young people themselves about what does and doesn't work well for them including at events like this and for the children/young people to be able to express their views using the medium of their choice.

The Head of Children and Families' Services said that part of the project brief for Voices From Care Cymru is to improve participation by looked after children and young people and to strengthen the link between the Authority and Elected Members and the children and young people they look after.

NO ADDITIONAL ACTION WAS PROPOSED.

5 FOSTERING RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION STRATEGY

Keith Walters, Child Placement Team Practice Leader provided the Panel with a Powerpoint presentation on recruiting and retaining Foster Carers with specific reference to how the Foster Carers Recruitment and Retention Strategy would be implemented.

The Child Placement Team Leader reported that a SWOT analysis of the Authority's Fostering Service has shown that the Service is currently well placed being fully up to strength and having a mix of experienced and new Social Workers. As a Local Authority Fostering Agency, the Service is fortunate in having strong links with its own Children's Team Social Workers. The Officer said that the Service must make the opportunities available to it specifically, the support provided by the Council to fund a New Offer to attract Foster Carers which provides an enhanced package of benefits for the Authority's Foster Carers - a 50% discount on Council Tax; free parking at Council car parks, free Council leisure centre membership and a 10% increase in fostering allowances. However, the Service will need to ensure that it is able to meet the demand of assessments.

The Service has developed a Fostering Recruitment and Retention Strategy the objectives of which are to recruit more foster carers, to provide better support for foster carers and to also get better at preventative work. To achieve these aims the Strategy will

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- Make sure that Fostering is in the news. Events such as the Fostering Fortnight, the wider distribution of the IoACC Fostering Newsletter to doctors surgeries and dentists as well as to all Foster Carers and ensuring that Foster Carers attend high profile events will raise people's awareness of fostering and get them talking about it.
- Tell everyone about the Authority's New Offer. Assuming that people will know about it is not good enough. Whilst social media are an increasingly effective way of gaining publicity and disseminating information, word of mouth remains the most powerful mode of marketing.
- Improve the support provided for Foster Carers by -
 - increasing the frequency of supervision and support visits;
 - continuing to facilitate regular formal and informal gatherings of Foster Carers through the Fostering Forum (formal) and tea and cake sessions (informal);
 - greater involvement of Foster Carers in the Star Awards;
 - a mentoring scheme also known as the "Buddy-Buddy system;"
 - developing a clearer Training Programme;
 - developing a Men who Foster Group
 - developing a Connected Persons Support Group

- Strengthen preventative work through intensive intervention training and team meetings; early participation at Family Group meetings and considering alternatives to Fostering e. g. Special Guardianship Orders.

The Head of Children and Families' Services said that the Service has a better understanding of where it is at and based on that understanding, it is getting better at planning ahead instead of making plans on the hoof, e.g. anticipating the placement needs of children and seeing how those can be met by future fostering provision.

The Panel considered the information presented and made points as follows –

- The Panel sought assurance that the structural arrangements are in place to support the ongoing implementation of the strategy and to facilitate considered rather than reactive planning i.e. the absence or departure of a particular officer will not affect the continuity of the work and that the requirements are made clear in successor arrangements.

The Child Placement Team Leader said that an element of continuity was lost as a result of the deployment and turnover of agency staff. However, that is now being addressed with a stable workforce and with the Strategy aiming to provide clarity to staff within the teams about their roles and what is expected of them, and how their responsibilities interlink with those of the teams that work alongside them.

The Service Manager (Children's Services) said that in terms of permanency planning for children in the Authority's care, permanency planning meetings ensure that everyone is clear about permanency plans for the child who is looked after. The Officer said that research suggests that children should not remain in care for the long-term due partly to the stigma which this creates. One option is for Foster Carers to apply for a Special Guardianship Order which gives the foster carers parental responsibility for the child until he/she is 18 years old. The child would continue to receive support but not as a looked after child. The Service is reviewing all the children whom it looks after to ensure that there are definite plans for them in the long-term and, since the end of last year it has applied to the Courts to revoke the care orders for six looked after children, the reviewing process having identified these as cases where the children no longer need to remain in care.

- The Panel sought assurance that the Placement Team has the capacity to deliver the Fostering Recruitment and Retention Strategy.

The Child Placement Team Leader said that the Team is managing successfully at present as regards support work but that the situation might have to be reviewed if there is an increase in the work and especially if that coincides with an increase in the number of assessments that have to be undertaken.

The Head of Children and Families' Services said that support needs to be understood differently, and that it can be provided in ways other than by Social Workers e.g. there is a range of support staff that are able to respond to queries by Foster Carers and often the best support comes from talking to other Foster Carers.

The Portfolio Member for Social Services said that the restructuring which has taken place in Children and Families' Services including within the Child Placement Team needs time to embed and that the impact of the changes including the introduction of the New Offer, on capacity as well on as the quality and effectiveness of practice will be better assessed in 6 to 12 months' time.

- The Panel noted that the Service is getting better at expediting assessments the perception having been previously that things take too long to come to fruition.

The Panel in noting the information presented, welcomed the aims and objectives of the Fostering Recruitment and Retention Strategy and made no further proposals for action.

6 REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICERS (IRO)

The report of the Independent Reviewing Officers (Safeguarding and Quality Unit) was presented for the Panel's consideration. The report provided an update on the progress against the five improvement objectives which were identified following the IRO's appraisal in March, 2018 of the Authority as a corporate parent.

The Independent Reviewing Officer reported that based on the evidence examined including monthly audits of cases, sampling specifically for the purpose of the report; the Reviewing Officers' experience of current practice; practitioners' and children's feedback and the thematic audit of 60 care and support plans for looked after children it can be concluded that further work is needed to improve the arrangements for planning for care and support of looked after children. The Officer highlighted the main points as follows –

- With regard to the quality of assessments for looked after children and the need to keep them up to date, whilst there are examples of assessments being updated and examples of good care and support plans, this needs to be applied consistently across practice.
- With regard to the provision of care and support plans for every child which focus on desired outcomes, interventions to meet those outcomes, clear responsibilities and timescales, there is a variety between the quality of different plans. There is a need to review whether the Part 6 Care and Support document is fit for purpose. The Part 6 document does not convey what has happened to the child since the last review.
- With regard to reviewing implementation and the difference made, a significant improvement is noted in the number of reports presented in advance of LAC Review Meetings; from a sample of 26 reviews, reports were presented for 24 (92.3%). However an issue was identified with updating documents with one IRO being of the view that many of the Part 6 documents had not been updated although the sample used for the report did not reflect this.
- There has been a deterioration in reports received from private fostering agencies for reviews; likewise the schools' reports for reviews are also inconsistent with some schools contributing reports regularly and others infrequently. A meeting with the Education Service has been scheduled to discuss this issue.
- With regard to the quality and consistency of case recording, as in the previous report to the Panel all the 10 cases that were sampled for this report had up to date case recordings. It is positive that this improvement has been sustained.
- With regard to acute focus on permanency planning for LAC to reduce the number of children being looked after, the IROs now attend permanency planning meeting and are able to express their views on the plans submitted. IROs also attend monthly meetings with the Service Manager to scrutinise foster placements.
- The Unit has reported to the Service the need to protect consistency in social workers for Looked After Children. Some children report numerous changes.
- The IROs believe that Pathway Plans (post-16) are not regularly updated; this will be monitored in more detail and included in the Unit's next report to the Panel. In one case however, it was noted that the young person had refused to complete the Pathway Plan with the Social Worker.
- The IROs are currently reviewing the effectiveness of the reviewing process in the context of Standards and Guidance Practice for Independent Reviewing Officers Wales; a programme of work has commenced relating to the aspects noted in the report.

- A process is in place for challenging/escalating concerns where Reviewing Officers are of the opinion that the Local Authority is not fulfilling its duties in specific cases thereby depriving the child of their rights. This process has been reviewed and a report will be made in future on the number and level of challenges and whether or not they were resolved.
- The IROs have expressed concern that schools are inconsistent in inviting the parents of Looked After Children to parents' evenings. The Panel is asked to request the Learning Service to respond to this by providing clear guidance to schools on this matter and on the right of parents to be informed of their children's educational progress.

The Service Manager (Children's Services) in responding to the report said that it would be helpful to the Service in addressing the matters raised if the IROs were more precise in their commentary and able to give examples e.g. for which reviews were there no reports provided in advance; in which cases have there been changes in social workers. Issues with practice need also to be challenged directly with Team Leaders so that they are aware of their professional accountability.

The Panel in considering the report made the following points –

- The Panel noted the inconsistency across schools in providing reports for review meetings and that this will be raised in a meeting arranged with the Learning Service. It was noted that Elected Members in their role as school governors can highlight with their schools the importance of providing a report for review meetings on the educational progress of children who are looked after and that this is a minimum expectation, and provides a basis for determining whether any changes in provision are required.

The Portfolio Member for Social Services said that the named/designated Looked After Children Governor on the school governing body would be an appropriate link between the school and the Children and Families' Services.

- The Panel noted that issues with the Part 6 Care and Support document have been identified. The Panel sought clarification of whether the Part 6 document is fit for purpose and whether it can be made more user friendly.

The Independent Reviewing Officer said that from the perspective of the IROs the document's usefulness for reviewing purposes is limited because although it contains historical information about the child it does not track the progress of the child since the last review meeting.

The Head of Children and Families' Services said that the Part 6 document is ambitious in combining 5 previous documents into one report and as such it is complicated and contains a great deal of information, some of which is repetitive. The document has been in use for less than a year and its effectiveness has not yet been reviewed. The Service could look at adapting the document particularly in terms of paring down the information to eliminate duplication whilst still ensuring that information that is statutorily required is included.

- The Panel noted that some of the observations made by the IROs are not detailed enough to enable the Panel to be clear about what needs to be done e. g the IROs have the "*impression*"; one IRO was of the opinion that "*many*" documents had not been updated.

The Panel suggested that adopting the following descriptions would be useful in evaluating any shortfall or inconsistencies in practice that may be identified – nearly

all = 90%; significant majority =75%; majority = 55%; significant minority = 25% and very rare = 10%.

- That it would also be helpful were the report to include a section covering the main issues arising from the Independent Reviewing Officers' work and that this be shared with the Service in advance so that it is able to prepare a response to the issues raised and to report on measures taken.

The Panel agreed to note the report and the issues raised by the Independent Reviewing Officers and made the following proposals for further action –

- **The Service Manager (Children's Services) to follow-up on the practice issues raised and to provide an update to the Panel on Children's Social Worker workloads.**
- **The Independent Reviewing Officers –**
 - **to amend the report template to provide a section on the principal issues arising;**
 - **to quantify inconsistencies in practice by reference to the percentage of cases.**

**Dr Gwynne Jones
Chair**