

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

Minutes of the meeting held on 10 June, 2019

- PRESENT:** Dr Gwynne Jones (Chief Executive) (Chair)
- Councillor R. Meirion Jones (Portfolio Member for Education, Libraries, Culture and Youth)
Councillor Alun Mummery (Portfolio Member for Housing and Supporting Communities)
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)
Dawn Owen (Independent Reviewing Officer)
Llyr Bryn Roberts (Service Manager, Children's Services)
Keith Walters (Practice Leader – Child Placement Team)
Heulwen Owen (Looked After Children Education Liaison Officer)
Llinos Edwards (Looked After Children Nurse)
Sioned Owen (TGP Cymru) (for item 4)
Ann Holmes (Committee Officer)
- APOLOGIES:** Councillor Llinos Medi Huws (Leader & Portfolio Member for Social Services), Councillor Richard Griffiths (Corporate Scrutiny Committee)
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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 18th March, 2019 were presented and were confirmed as correct.

3 MATTERS ARISING

- **Voices From Care Cymru**

The Children's Services Manager confirmed that he had made enquiries with the Office of the North Wales Police and Crime Commissioner about the availability of proceeds of crime money to help fund the Voices from Care Cymru Project 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, but had received no reply to date.

It was agreed that the Children's Services Manager should follow up the initial enquiry with the Office of the North Wales Police and Crime Commissioner.

- **Children's Social Worker Workloads**

The Children's Services Manager gave a power point presentation on the workload of Children's Social Workers within the Children and Families' Service. The matter had arisen following an observation made by the Independent Reviewing Officers in a report to the Panel's previous meeting that they had the impression from practitioners that inconsistency in the quality of practice was due to workloads.

The presentation highlighted that as at 24 May, 2019 the caseload of each Social Worker within the Intensive Intervention Service which works with children who are looked after averaged 25 children with experienced Social Workers carrying higher caseloads than those with less experience. The Service's practice model provides that Practice Team Leaders have lower caseloads so that they are able to devote time to providing support and supervision to the small groups of staff which they lead. Caseloads are generic in nature meaning they are not confined to a particular expertise but span cases that involve a range of issues including care and support, child protection and children in care. Cases can be of varying complexity depending on the specific needs of the individual and/or family involved which also makes assessing caseloads more difficult. As of last week there were 87 children on the child protection register; 163 children in care and also 20 families who are the subject of court proceedings due to a variety of issues that can include neglect, substance misuse; allegations of abuse etc.; these are especially challenging because of the need to comply with the courts' expectations and timescales.

The following main issues were raised and noted by the Panel during the ensuing discussion –

- That the research undertaken is inconclusive as regards the ideal caseload size and that caseloads vary in number and complexity from authority to authority and between teams within services.
- That the data in the presentation does not reflect cases that may about to be closed, escalated or de-escalated.
- Whilst there are no published caseload benchmarking figures available to enable the Service to compare itself with other authorities in terms of what is manageable, informal enquiries with neighbouring authorities in Heads of Service meetings indicate that their numbers are similar and that higher caseloads do not necessarily mean poorer performance e.g. some authorities in England with 27+ average caseloads have received good Ofsted reports. The Service aspires to maintain caseloads at a level of between 18 and 25.
- That in assessing caseloads the experience of the staff holding the caseload is as important as the number of cases i.e. a newly qualified social worker would not be expected to hold a high caseload and that caseload weighting i.e. the volume of work a case is likely to generate is also taken into account.
- That there are no cases not allocated a Social Worker.
- That turnover of Children's Social Workers is a long-standing issue nationally within the profession because of the challenging nature of the work with caseloads being a factor. Workforce stability is recognised as key to providing continuity of care and to forming good relationships with looked after children and their families and is therefore a priority.

The Head of Children and Families' Services further clarified the process for closing and transferring cases between teams within the Service which require Care Plans and associated LAC documentation to be updated accordingly. Additionally, with regard to

workload pressures, Social Workers can talk through their workload with their Practice Leaders who are easily accessible and within reach; workload issues should in the first place be raised with Practice Leaders on a case by case basis.

It was AGREED to note the information presented about Children's Social Worker workloads and no further action was recommended.

4 TROS GYNNAL PLANT CYMRU (TGP CYMRU)

Sioned Owen, TCP Cymru presented the main points arising from the TCP Cymru documentation presented which comprised of the Quarter 4 2018/19 report in relation to Anglesey; the 2018/19 annual report for Anglesey as well as the 2018/19 North Wales Regional report which provided an analysis of take-up of advocacy services for those reporting periods and highlighted the following –

- An increase in the number of young people in Anglesey who accessed the service during 2018/19 which was also replicated on a regional level presenting a total of 109 issues up from the previous year's 63 issues which is a positive outcome.
- Referrals have come from three main sources with the majority being self-referrals with referrals also from Social Services and parents and carers. It would be good to see referrals from other sources as well especially from schools and foster carers which may indicate a need for further awareness raising in these areas about the availability of advocacy in order to improve the variation of referral sources. Notwithstanding, the issues presented showed a wide range of issues being dealt with.
- Support at meetings has again been the most common issue which young people in Anglesey present to TCP Cymru advocates this being a popular trend across North Wales.
- A total of 26 Active Offer referrals were made in Anglesey during the year with 16 moving on to issue based advocacy which can be taken to demonstrate the success of the NASA (National Approach to Statutory Advocacy) training provided to raise awareness of the Active Offer
- TCP Cymru has arranged to provide a presentation to all teams in Social Services on Anglesey on the advocacy service.

In considering the report, the Panel welcomed the increased use of advocacy by young people on Anglesey noting from the two case examples provided in the reports how advocacy can give voice to the wishes and feelings of looked after children and help bring about an appropriate outcome for the children involved. In order to increase foster carers' awareness of the availability of the advocacy service it was proposed that they be also included in the planned presentation by TCP Cymru to the Social Services' teams.

It was agreed that the documentation presented by Tros Gynnal Plant Cymru be noted and no additional action was recommended.

5 SERVICE REPORTS

Updates were provided by the Services as shown below –

- The **Looked After Children Education Liaison Officer's report** which highlighted the much improved performance against PIs over Quarters 2, 3 and 4 2018/19 particularly with regard to the preparation and submission of Personal Education Plans within timescale by schools and minimising change of schools for looked after children. It was noted that the Officer's current workload involved 118 children between 3 and 18 years old and 43 different educational establishments.

In response to questions by the Panel the Officer further clarified -

- That consideration has been given to school transport including sharing transport as well as paying for transport to school in cases where the placement is known to be short-term and that this had been a factor in enabling children who are looked after to stay in their schools.
- That a programme run by Canine Assisted Learning whereby a therapy dog visits schools had had an impact on a visit to Pencarnisiog School where interacting with the therapy dog (Teal) had an immediate positive effect on the attitude of some of the children.
- That a one day conference on the subject of Trauma Informed Schools would be held in July in collaboration with GwE with an invitation to attend extended to all schools. This follows difficulty in implementing a transfer by arrangement because of the time taken to identify a suitable school that was able to meet the needs of one child whose behaviour had become challenging. Additionally, it is intended to extend Boxall (resource for assessing children and young people's emotional, behavioural and social development) to all the Island's schools with 20 schools becoming "nurture" schools equipped to deal with the emotional needs of looked after children, the aim being to provide schools with a toolbox to be able to receive and accommodate looked after children.
- That a new booklet for schools – Cared for Children: Friendly Schools – had been launched by Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr County Councils in April and had been shared with Anglesey schools. The booklet provides an excellent introduction for schools who might be accommodating children in care for the first time or which are unfamiliar with the children in care process.
- It was noted that staff changes are inevitable, and that the Service endeavours where possible to ensure that looked after children are allocated permanent rather than agency Social Workers.

It was agreed to note the information provided by the Looked After Children Education Liaison Officer's report and no further action was recommended.

- The **Looked After Children Health report** which highlighted a shortfall in terms of looked after children's health assessments conducted within timescale although it was emphasised that all health assessments are undertaken, and a significant improvement in the timeliness of notifications of placements made in relation both to children placed on Anglesey by other authorities and children placed out of county by Anglesey.

In response to questions by the Panel the LAC Nurse and Officers further clarified -

- That health assessments are essential because they provide a full picture of the cared for child's health on which a Health Plan is based which is then made available for the first LAC review of the child's care plan.
- That there had been some delays and a consequent knock on effect on completion within timescales due to the unavailability of community paediatricians who undertake the health assessments. Some authorities operate a different model whereby Nurse Practitioners carry out the health assessments forwarding only the relevant assessments for the paediatrician's attention but this model is dependent on nurse capacity.
- That there had been some practice issues about the transition of looked after young people to Adult Services falling between services because of their learning abilities. Initial discussions with the relevant teams/officers have been held. Additionally, a protocol is being developed jointly with Adults' Services both for looked after children and for children and young people with mental health issues

who are approaching the transition to Adults' Services but who do not yet meet the threshold for Adults' Services so that these cases can be progressed.

It was agreed to note the information provided by the Looked After Children's Nurse's report and no further action was recommended.

- **The Child Placement Team's report** (Qtrs. 1 and 2 2018/19) which highlighted a decrease in the use of private foster carers and an increase in the use of internal foster carers in the period which was very encouraging, with the Service also having been able to keep more children within their families. The report also provided an update on the Child Placement Team staff position, training courses provided and achievements and good practice identified.

In response to questions by the Panel the Child Placement Team Practice Leader and Officers further clarified -

- That the Fostering New Offer which is based on an enhanced package of benefit for Foster Carers was introduced as part of the Authority's fostering carers' recruitment and retention programme both in acknowledgement of the essential work which existing Foster Carers' undertake all day, every day and also as a recruitment aid for potential new Foster Carers. The data as at section 2 of the reports shows an increase in the number of applications and in the assessments that have subsequently begun following the launch of the New Offer which it is anticipated will generate a number of additional beds for fostering placements.
- That other forms of support – Friends and Family Support Group, Coffee and Cake sessions as well as the more formal Fostering Forum are all key to creating and maintaining a good supportive working relationship with the Authority's Foster Carers.
- That planned actions going forward include becoming "inspection ready"; ongoing development of policy and strategy and continuing to publicise the New Fostering Offer and increasing the number of Foster Carers registered to the Authority.

In considering the report, the Panel was pleased to note that the message from Foster Carers is that they appreciate the Fostering New Offer and that it is making a difference for them and it was keen to emphasise that the relationship between the Authority and its Foster Carers is one of partnership.

It was agreed to note the information provided by the Child Placement Team report and no further action was recommended.

6 FUN DAY: LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AWARDS CEREMONY 21 SEPTEMBER, 2019

The Children's Services Manager reported that the 2019 Looked After Children Awards Ceremony (held biennially) would take on the form of a Fun Day with the awards being made at the end of the day, and would be held on 21 September at Bodedern Secondary School. An initial session with looked after children to generate ideas for the event had been held. Corporate Parenting Panel Members would be warmly welcomed.

7 NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel was scheduled for Monday, 9 September, 2019 at 2:00 p.m. **It was requested and agreed that the Panel's**

meetings be re-scheduled to earlier in the day to accommodate those of the Panel's members with afternoon commitments.

Dr Gwynne Jones
Chair

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