

# CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

## Minutes of the meeting held on 9 September, 2019

- PRESENT:** Dr Gwynne Jones (Chief Executive) (Chair)
- Councillor Llinos Medi (Leader & Portfolio Member for Social Services)  
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)  
Huw Owen (Independent Reviewing Officer)  
Dawn Owen (Independent Reviewing Officer)  
Llyr Bryn Roberts (Service Manager, Children's Services)  
Dawn Hutchinson (Practice Leader – Resilient Families Team)  
Ann Holmes (Committee Officer)
- APOLOGIES:** Councillor R. Meirion Jones (Portfolio Member for Education, Libraries, Culture and Youth), 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 10th June, 2019 were presented and were confirmed as correct.

### 3 MATTER ARISING

The Children's Services Manager reported that the Panel at its previous meeting in June had asked him to follow-up on an enquiry to the Office of the North Wales Police and Crime Commissioner regarding 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. This followed an initial request to the Office of the North Wales Police and Crime Commissioner which the Children's Services had made as part of a general approach for funding for the project to partners both within and outside the Council. The North Wales Police and Crime Commissioner had declined the request on the basis that to make a contribution 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. A subsequent enquiry was made about the possibility of accessing proceeds of crime money instead. The Officer said that no response had been forthcoming at the time of the Panel's June meeting and he confirmed **that no reply had been received to the follow-up enquiry either.**

The Panel noted the position and although disappointed, agreed that it was important that the Service should in any case continue with the work of taking the project forwards. The Head of Children and Families' Services advised that work on the project had started and that representatives from Voices from Care Cymru would be attending the Corporate Parenting Panel's December meeting to provide an update on progress.

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

The report of the Independent Reviewing Officers (Safeguarding and Quality Unit) on the progress made on issues raised since the Safeguarding and Quality Unit report in this format was first presented to the Panel in March, 2018 was presented for the Panel's consideration. The Service's response to those issues was also incorporated within the report.

The Independent Reviewing Officers highlighted the main points from the report as follows –

- That inconsistency in the quality of the assessments for Looked after Children remains an issue – from an audit of 15 cases the assessments were current in the case of 9 children (60%) although examples of excellent assessments were also found with clear action steps to improve the outcomes for the child.
- From 70 of the statutory reviews held during June and July, 2019, a Section 6 document was included in 31 reviews (44.2%). The document had been updated in 30 reviews (42.8%). The Independent Review Officers are aware of the great efforts made to prepare the necessary documentation for reviews and acknowledge the Service's response that it has been a challenging period with regard to staff absences which is likely to have impacted on performance.
- The IROs consider that the Section 6 Care and Support document is ineffective in facilitating the review process and are pleased that Children and Families' Services have given detailed consideration to making changes to the document.
- For both of the previous reports to the Panel, an audit of cases was conducted in order to measure to what extent the case notes are current. The two audits highlighted that there were current case notes for each case scrutinised. The IROs are of the opinion that excellent progress has been maintained with regard to the quality and consistency of keeping case notes with notes often being added several times each day. As a result no specific audit was made for this report.
- The IROs are invited to permanent care planning meetings thereby enabling them to express an opinion orally or by e-mail beforehand. This development is to be warmly welcomed. Quarterly meetings are also held between the IROs and the Service Managers to discuss specific matters – the report provides a summary of the issues and concerns raised in the second of those meetings since this new process was established in relation to staff absences and changes in social workers, workloads and expectations and practice matters (Paragraph 5 (a) to (f) of the report refers).
- A sample of 6 cases where there was a need for a Post-16 Learning Plan showed that the plans had not been updated to reflect the current needs of the child.
- The IROs continue to respond to the challenge in terms of ensuring efficiency within the review process and to use different approaches to include and engage children and young people in meetings. The IROs review their current work in the context of Standards and the Practice Guidelines of Wales Review Officers. The Service Manager has prepared a report which considers the implications of the standards which increase the expectations at a time when the number of children in care has also increased. The Panel may wish to ask for this report to be discussed.
- In the opinion of the IROs the key issues arising from this their latest report are the need to ensure that Part 6 documents are presented consistently for all cases for Reviews of Looked After Children and that similarly, all Pathway Plans need to reflect the current needs of the child.

In responding to the report, the Service Manager provided the following clarifications and assurances –

- **Statutory reviews /Part 6 Care and Support Plan** - social workers are expected to complete and update the plan on children in care for each child's care review and, if this is not in place, it is felt that the IRO should postpone and re-arrange the review in order to ensure that the information is up to date and discuss the matter with the Practice Leader in order to remind them of this expectation.

The Service Manager will discuss the audit of statutory reviews held in June and July with the Children in Care Review Officers to ensure that an implementation plan is in place to respond appropriately to the findings.

- **Other Practice matters** – the Officer outlined the Service's arrangements to ensure continuity of care for children who are looked after when staff are absent due to illness or extended leave. Whilst changes in staffing are inevitable, the Service strives to ensure that children in care are provided with stability and continue to live with the same foster carer. Where Pathway Plans do not reflect the current needs of the child, it is felt the IRO should postpone and rearrange the review to ensure that the information is up to date and discuss the matter with the Social Worker and Practice Leader to remind them of the expectation that plans are updated. The Service Manager will discuss the Pathway Plan with the Review Officers to ensure that processes for escalating matters to the Service are clear. With regard to Life Story work which helps children in care gain a perspective on their lives, staff have been trained in this work and further discussions will take place with staff to try to understand and overcome the barriers to the work being completed consistently and in a timely way.

In discussing the report the Panel noted the issues raised by the IROs in relation to inconsistency in some areas of practice, social worker workloads, and changes of social workers be that due to temporary absences or staff turnover and the potential effect this has on the welfare of looked after children, and it sought assurance on these matters. In response, the Officers further clarified –

- That Social Workers' workloads are overseen and supervised regularly by managers with less experienced social workers assigned a lighter caseload than those with greater experience. Workload pressures are sometimes inevitable because of the nature of the work. However, the Service seeks to manage workloads and is satisfied with the caseloads of its less experienced cohort of social workers.
- That changes in staff can potentially be more challenging to manage in terms of getting the right people with the right experience and skills to fill the gap. When staff are absent interim arrangements are put in place to ensure the same level of service continues for children in care. The Practice Leader is responsible for ensuring that these arrangements are in place in order to support the children and placements.

In a further discussion of the issues arising, the Panel acknowledged the pressures on children's social workers and accepted that court timescales can also add to these pressures. The Panel noted that the Service makes use of temporary staff to resolve short-term pressures and vacancy issues and that changes of staff can contribute to variable quality of practice. **The Panel in accepting and noting the report of the IROs recommended that –**

- **When staff leave or are absent the Service has arrangements in place to ensure that where possible, an effective and seamless handover takes place between social workers so that any disruption to or impact on the child is**

minimised. Ideally, the new social worker should be introduced to the child and family well in advance of the handover.

- That the Panel be provided with a report back on the 15 cases which were audited by the IROs for up to date assessment with an analysis of whether the cases were held by temporary or by permanent staff.
- That the Service Manager discusses the practice issues arising with the IROs and updates the Panel on any changes/developments in practice as a result.
- That the section of the IRO's report headed "Success of our Children" be re-designated as it could make children/young people who do not have the same achievements as those referred to feel that they are not a success.

## 5 RESILIENT FAMILIES TEAM

Dawn Hutchinson, Practice Leader provided the Panel with a progress report on the work of the Resilient Families Team since its establishment in 2017. The team was created in response to the requirements placed on local authorities by the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 that they provide preventative approaches to the delivery of well-being. The team works on the basis of Prevent, Return, Reduce and Review principles i.e. –

- *Prevent* children from becoming looked after when it is unnecessary;
- *Return* children home during the first 8 weeks of care and work with identified families for the reunification of their children from care;
- *Reduce* the nature of looked after accommodation/care required (e.g. from residential care to foster care to family revocation), and
- *Review* the safe return of children in long-term care.

In order to work towards and meet the core aims of Prevent, Return, Reduce and Review, the Team is a group of highly skilled, multi-disciplinary workers who intervene with families which present a high level of need which places their children at risk of becoming looked after, or has recently caused their children to become Looked After or which prevents their children being restored to their care. The team consists of a Practice Leader, 2 Social Workers, 2 Intervention/Support Workers, a Reflect Project worker and 0.3 Business Support Officer. The team also provides consultation, training, advice and guidance to the wider workforce and conducts intensive interventions with families in crises.

The Practice Leader explained that the Team applies an evidence-based model of intervention which is structured into specific stages and levels of support to be best effective in enabling parents to change. The 2 stage model of intervention requires 15-20 hours per week of structured face to face intensive intervention during the first 8 weeks (Stage 1) followed by up to a year of maintaining any changes made (Stage 2). Based on this, a full-time Resilient Families Intervention Worker has the capacity to work with approximately 6 families per year.

In the two years it has been operational the Resilient Families Team **has worked with a total of 57 families and 123 children** who without the intensive intervention provided, may have become looked after children. In addition to providing intensive interventions with families, the team also arranges and holds Family Group Conferences (FGC); these are meetings between immediate and extended family members facilitated by a person independent from case management responsibilities which aim to mobilise a family's own support networks to safeguard the family's children to prevent them from becoming looked after. In the two years it has been operational, **the team has held 32 FGCs involving 79 children.**

The team's "Reflect" project post is funded through separate Welsh Government funding (being incorporated into the Revenue Support Grant for 2019/20) and is part of a national project aimed at increasing the well-being, resilience and stability of women who have one or more children permanently removed from their care through the adoption process, to reduce the amount of repeat pregnancies which result in further removal of children into to the care system. The Reflect Project Worker has been in post since mid-May 2019, and as well as developing the project's profile and establishing links with key statutory and voluntary agencies the post-holder has also begun working with 2 women.

The Practice Leader in giving examples of individual cases where the team's intervention has had positive outcomes for the children and families involved, emphasised that the intervention must be timely and that intervention has less impact the later it happens; families who would benefit from intervention need to be identified before their problems have escalated. However, in those cases where the team has had to intervene at a later stage when it is not able to prevent a child from becoming looked after, it can still provide support in ways that can prevent the child from entering costly residential care.

In thanking the Practice Leader for her report and presentation, the Panel noted the following -

- That the team has been instrumental in helping a number of families in crisis whose children might otherwise have entered the care system, but that the success of the model is dependent on early intervention – helping the right families with the right support at the right time. The local systems for the early identification of families who would benefit from the team's support therefore need to be robust.
- That the team is highly skilled and places emphasis on the development of skills having high expectations of its staff.
- That the Panel would welcome an update/progress report on the Reflect project when feasible.

**The Panel noted the report and thanked the Resilient Families Team for its work in providing a valuable preventative service for families and their children.**

## **6 NEXT MEETING**

It was noted that the next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel was scheduled for Monday, 9 December, 2019 at 10:00 a.m.

## **7 OTHER MATTERS**

The Children's Services Manager brought the following to the Panel's attention –

- The success of Sian Morgan, a Support/Intervention Officer with the Resilient Families Team in being recognised for her use of Welsh in the workplace by the presentation of the Social Care Wales' Care in Welsh award at the National Eisteddfod in Llanrwst in August, 2019 .
- The arrangements for the Star Awards which celebrate the achievements of all the Authority's looked after children and young people which this year will take on the format of a fun day to be held at Ysgol Bodedern on 21 September, 2019.

The Panel congratulated Sian Morgan on her award and noted that it was looking forward to the Star Awards.

*Since this was Dr Gwynne Jones's last meeting as Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel, the Panel thanked him for his chairmanship and guidance throughout his time in the role and wished him well in his retirement.*

**Dr Gwynne Jones (Chair)**