

# **CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL**

## **Minutes of the virtual meeting held on 8 December, 2020**

**PRESENT:** Mrs Annwen Morgan (Chief Executive) (Chair)

Councillor Llinos Medi (Leader & Portfolio Member for Social Services)  
Councillor Alun Mummery (Portfolio Member for Housing and Supporting Communities)  
Councillor R. Meirion Jones (Portfolio Member for Education, Libraries, Culture and Youth)  
Councillor Margaret M. Roberts (Partnership and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee)  
Councillor Richard Griffiths (Corporate Scrutiny Committee)  
Barbara Jones (Anglesey Foster Carers' Association)  
Janw Hughes Evans (Head of Nursing - Children's Services) (BCUHB)  
Fôn Roberts (Interim Director of Social Services)  
Rhys Hughes (Director of Education, Skills and Young People)  
Huw Owen (Independent Reviewing Officer)  
Gwyneth Hughes (Senior Education Well-being Manager)  
Keith Walters (Child Placement Team Manager)  
Saul Ainsworth (Interim Service Manager – Safeguarding)  
Melanie Jones (Integrated Manager – Children's Services)  
Heulwen Owen (Looked After Children Education Liaison Officer)  
Llinos Edwards (Looked After Children's Nurse)  
Llinos Williams (Housing Services Manager)  
Marion Pryor (Head of Audit and Risk (For Item 5))  
Nanette Williams (Principal Internal Auditor) (for item 5)  
Ann Holmes (Committee Officer)

**APOLOGIES:** Dawn Owen (Independent Reviewing Officer) Liz Fletcher (BCUHB)

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The Chair welcomed all those present to this first virtual meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel and everyone introduced themselves. Meetings of the Panel had been paused during the Covid-19 emergency but the intention was now to re-continue with the Panel's meetings in line with the Council's meetings schedule.

### **1 DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

No declaration of interest was received.

### **2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 9th December, 2019 were presented and were confirmed as correct.

Updates on matters arising from the Panel's last meeting were provided as follows -

- The Interim Director of Social Services confirmed that significant progress had been made on updating assessments since the previous meeting of the Panel and that of the 99 children whose assessments were reported as not current only 11 are now

outstanding and work on these is planned over the Christmas period. The Service is also aiming to update policy and guidance with regard to the frequency of assessments with a view to bringing a draft policy to the Panel's March 2021 meeting.

**The Panel welcomed the information and the progress made and noted that it would be provided with an updated draft policy and guidance at the next meeting.**

- That with regard to the Learning and Children and Families' Services taking a joint approach to presenting information about the educational attainments of children who are looked after, it was confirmed and **was noted by the Panel** that the report under item 7 on the agenda represents the first collaborative report in relation to the educational achievements of looked after pupils in Anglesey based on data drawn from the 2019/20 academic year.
- That with regard to how information is shared between Health and Children and Families' Services and whether it is supported by a formal process, Janw Hughes Evans, BCUHB who was standing in for Liz Fletcher BCUHB at this meeting of the Panel confirmed that she would take the matter back to Liz Fletcher to update the Panel at the next meeting.
- That with regard to inviting the Adoption Service to a meeting of the Panel, the Interim Director of Social Services confirmed that he would schedule an invitation within the Panel's programme of meetings for the year.

### **3 SERVICE OPERATIONS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

The Interim Director of Social Services provided the Panel with a verbal report supported by a power point presentation on how Children and Families' Services had functioned during the pandemic and he highlighted the following –

- That with the onset of Covid-19, practice standards were reviewed and adapted to reflect social distancing requirements and related restrictions which meant that face to face social work was not possible
- All the children looked after by the Authority (totalling 154 at the time since increased to 161) come into care for a number of reasons including as subjects of a court order; they may be living with foster parents, with family and friends, with their parents or they may be cared for in a residential setting. They each have a Social Worker assigned to them and an Independent Reviewing Officer.
- Where appropriate, Social Worker contact was maintained during the period by digital means – Microsoft Teams, Skype, or text were utilised. Looked After Children statutory visits have continued to be held albeit differently because of social distancing requirements with some taking place in the garden. The changed circumstances have of necessity led to more creative practice.
- The Service has where appropriate, kept in contact with schools and also with colleagues in the Learning Service to ensure that all the Authority's looked after children were able to access laptops and the co-operation with Learning as well as with the Youth Service has been excellent. A register of vulnerable children was drawn up jointly with the Learning Service and this included looked after children placed at home with their parents.
- Age appropriate activity packs were prepared for the children in foster placements as a means of support for foster parents during this period. The Service has also made increased use of the St. David's Fund for care leavers to provide assistance for care leavers facing employment challenges for example and to purchase computer hardware.

- Reports on any issues arising from the statutory visits were prepared and made available on a monthly basis to the Interim Director of Social Services/Head of Children and Families' Services.
- Likewise the Fostering Team adapted its working practices to the changed circumstances with supervising Social Workers initially maintaining weekly contact with foster carers until such time as the foster carers felt comfortable with the new arrangements and the frequency of contact by agreement, was reduced. Support was provided to all foster carers regardless of whether they had a child/children placed with them at that time. In some instances and where required, one to one support was given for example to allay anxieties about Covid-19. Arrangements were made whereby foster carers could contact the Fostering Team with any queries the view being that the Authority had at its disposal the information and resources to be able to provide the appropriate guidance and response. Editions of the Foster Carers' Newsletter were issued with increased frequency to ensure clear and consistent messaging.
- Similarly the Child Placement Team Leader provided the Interim Director of Social Services/Head of Children and Families Services with a monthly report on any issues, concerns or pressure points arising.
- During this period also and despite the challenges of responding to Covid-19, the Service continued with planned developments including Cartrefi Clyd, utilising the training flat for care leavers, and collaborative work with Voices from Care Cymru. Work has also carried on with regard to updating policies and in relation to ensuring the stability of placements and of looked after children's education plans.
- The increase in the number of children becoming looked after during the period has been limited and below expectations. Neither has the increase been due to Covid-19 – most of the children who have come into care during this time would have come into care in any case regardless of the pandemic. CIW has noted that the increase in the number of looked after children in Wales has been modest and that the anticipated surge has not materialised because of efforts made by Children's Social Care Teams to keep children safe and at home. In Anglesey for example, the Resilient Families Team and the Team around the Family has continued to work throughout the period.

The Panel in thanking the Interim Director of Social Services for the update sought further information about progress with taking the Cartrefi Clyd programme forward and whether plans in this respect had been affected by Covid-19. The Panel also wanted to know whether any aspects of the new ways of working had worked well and would likely be retained in the new normal phase.

The Interim Director of Social Services confirmed that the first Cartref Clyd has been opened and has its first resident who is doing well. Whilst the pandemic did cause some delay with regard to moving residents into the second Cartref Clyd, that has since happened and the two children who were to be accommodated in the property have now moved in and are settling into their new home. Plans are being made for the third Cartref Clyd and in addition the resource to provide respite care for children with disabilities is scheduled to open in the New Year.

In terms of working practices the Interim Director of Social Services advised that with regard to interacting with the people whom the Service supports, remote contact cannot take the place of direct contact and that when conditions allow, social work practice will resume on a face to face basis. However, responding to the pandemic has shown the advantages of flexible and home working and has also shown that even though the bulk of assessment work may continue to be undertaken face to face post-Covid, some assessments can be successfully carried out virtually. Collaboration with colleagues from

other services and with partners has been excellent during the pandemic period and the Service will be looking to continue with this and to strengthening those relationships outside of and beyond the emergency situation. The Integrated Manager (Children's Services) said that the shift to digital platforms has made contributing to regional and all-Wales meetings easier which in turn means that Anglesey's voice is heard more strongly at national level and is a practice that hopefully will continue after the pandemic.

**The Panel agreed to note the update provided with regard to the conduct of Service operations during the pandemic and to thank the Interim Director of Social Services for the information.**

## **NO PROPOSAL FOR ADDITIONAL ACTION WAS MADE**

### **4 FOSTER CARERS' RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION**

The report of the Child Placement Team Manager outlining the steps that have been taken to strengthen Foster Carer recruitment and retention together with the outcome of this work was presented for the Panel's consideration. The report was supplemented by a short power point presentation summarising the main points.

The Child Placement Team Manager referred to the key considerations as follows –

- That in 2018/19 the Ynys Môn County Council Foster Carer recruitment and retention strategy was not effective in as much as it was not able to re-dress the imbalance of placements available and placements needed thereby creating a dependency on private sector foster carers. This is illustrated by the fact that only 3 mainstream fostering households were approved in 2018/19 even though 133 enquiries about fostering were received in that year.
- That although the number of enquiries reduced in the following two years (33 in 2019/20 and 20 in 2020/21 as of 26 October, 2020), the number of fostering approvals in both years was higher at 7 (now 8 for 2020/21 following the November meeting of the Fostering Panel). The main reason for this is that recruitment became much more targeted thereby producing better quality of enquiries leading to increased foster carer approvals.
- A key component of the positive change in foster carer recruitment has been the Core Offer which is a specific marketing incentive which was launched in January, 2019 to attract new foster carers. The scheme focuses on what the Local Authority is able to offer through the very nature of its business and makes available to the Authority's foster carer bespoke benefits consisting of a 50% Council Tax reduction; free Local Authority parking on the Island; free Local Authority leisure centre membership and 10% additional fostering allowance. The Core Offer has had an impact on the actual foster carers successfully recruited in the subsequent years.
- That the foster carer approval process from receipt of the application form through to ADM approval took on average 307 days or 10.1 months in 2019. The average range for an assessment was between 2.6 months and 17.1 months reflective of some anomalies which were due to very specific reasons. The timescale had reduced to 203 days for 2020 (January to October 2020) and there were no identified anomalies. The Service has already met and exceeded this financial year's target of completed assessments for 6 foster carer households having approved 8 as of November, 2020 with a further 6 active applications on the system. This success can be attributed to a number of reasons including the Core Offer.
- That additional assessment work is being carried out by both the internal Team and by private assessors with access to the latter making it possible to assess as soon as possible and as quickly as possible. The aim is to reduce the timescale for completing all future Form F assessments to within an average of 6 months.

- That in terms of the Fostering Panel's functionality, the Panel has adapted well to changed circumstances including meeting virtually and has also had to adjust to other changes - in its administrative support, the appointment of a new Chairperson and the retirement of two of its members.
- That in October, 2018, it was reported to the Corporate Parenting Panel that the Council had 23 foster carer households. This year the figure on the register has risen to 34 - an increase of 11 foster care households in two years. Considering that there have also been some retirements during this period, it is still a sharp increase in the two year period.
- The engagement of a Connected Persons Support Worker in June, 2020 has released qualified social workers from some of their supporting duties to focus on assessing and supervising the Authority's general foster carers. However the increase in the number of Connected Persons (from 19 in October 2018 to 24 today) as well as in the number of Foster Carers (from 42 in October 2018 to 58 in October, 2020) means that the workload continues to grow both in terms of the work around Connected Persons Fostering especially assessment, and in terms of the work around the retention (support, training and supervision) of General Foster Carers. It is considered that the solution to better managing the demands lies in splitting the Fostering Team into a Connected Persons Team and a General Fostering Team, a route already taken by two neighbouring authorities the rationale being that separating the Connected Persons work from the General Fostering work will reduce its impact on the recruitment and retention of General Foster Carers. The vision is to follow other examples of splitting the Fostering Team in order to be able to focus fully on recruiting and retaining the Authority's General Foster Carers in order to be able to meet future need which is predicted to be great.

The Panel thanked the Child Placement Team Manager for the information and in welcoming the progress made with recruiting foster carers queried what else could be done to further boost recruitment and whether new prospective foster carers were being drawn from across Anglesey bearing in mind the emphasis on caring for children within their communities.

The Child Placement Team Manager said that reallocating work within the Fostering Team has made a difference in terms of helping to focus on specific aspects and this will be looked at further in the coming year. He advised that the assessments carried out reflect applications from all parts of Anglesey. Four areas are noted in the table at Figure 2 of the report which provides a snapshot only and reflects the areas from which the six ongoing applications are derived and the stages these have reached at a specific point in time. The Interim Director of Social Services confirmed that the recruitment process is consistent across the Island and that further, word of mouth is one of the most effective means of recruitment.

The Leader and Portfolio Member for Social Services suggested that the Authority take advantage of the Christmas period to thank all its Foster Carers for the work they have done over what has been a difficult year for everyone. The Interim Director of Social Services assured the Panel that the Service does send a Christmas card annually to its Foster Carers with a competition being held for the children in the Authority's care to design the card. This year the card will be sent virtually. The Service also pays thanks to the Authority's Foster Carers in alternate editions of its Fostering Newsletter. The Interim Director of Social Services said that the Authority's Foster Carers have worked especially hard this year because as a result of Covid-19 restrictions and the limitations on social activities they have been providing care 24/7 for long periods. There are also plans in the offing with the support of grant funding to provide up to date technology for

the Authority's Foster Carers to help with communication and training with a view to shifting some of the support provision to a digital platform.

**The Panel agreed to accept the report and to note its contents.**

**ACTION: Annual Christmas card to the Authority's Foster Carers to be sent in the name of the Chair of the Council and the Head of Children and Families' Services.**

## **5 INTERNAL AUDIT – FUNCTION OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL**

The draft report of the Internal Audit Service on the outcome of an audit review of the Corporate Parenting Panel's function was presented for the Panel's consideration. The review sought to establish whether the Panel has in place adequate arrangements to support, oversee and facilitate the Council in fulfilling its corporate parenting responsibilities. The Panel was advised of the draft status of the audit report as presented to today's meeting which would need to be definitively agreed ahead of its finalisation.

The Principal Internal Auditor reported that the audit was undertaken at the request of the Chief Executive, Interim Director of Social Services and the Leader of the Council who is also the Portfolio Member for Social Services in order to look at the overall effectiveness of the Corporate Parenting Panel. The audit examined four key areas in relation to the Panel's governance arrangements, record-keeping, action tracking and risk management. Whilst the audit review resulted in a Reasonable assurance opinion and found that overall the Panel is operating effectively and has some good arrangements in place to help the Council discharge its corporate parenting responsibilities, it also identified improvements that could be made; these when implemented would take the Panel to the next level of effectiveness and are the kind of arrangements which when benchmarked against other corporate parenting panel models, are the arrangements which panels deemed excellent have in place. Five issues/risks have been raised, two of which due to the potential impact of the risk in this area, are classed as "Major." An action plan will be agreed with management (a draft action plan was appended to the report) to address the findings in the areas summarised below –

- Although the Panel is generally appropriately constituted, the Council has not formally revised the Panel's terms of reference document following changes to its remit in 2017. There is a risk that the Panel may lack clarity, focus attention incorrectly, or fail to fulfil a key element of its role if its terms of reference are not up to date.
- The Panel may also benefit from additional representation from senior leadership from the Learning and Housing services. There is a risk that their absence may inhibit the Panel's effectiveness in promoting and embedding a culture of inclusive responsibility for corporate parenting.
- The Panel does not currently have formal representation from the Authority's looked after children. As this is critical to its ongoing effectiveness, the Council has recognised this risk and is taking steps to address it.
- The Council needs to finalise and publish its Looked After Children and Care Leavers' Strategy including an articulated commitment or pledge to its looked after children and young people. It is understood that this is being addressed as part of the work of improving the participation of looked after children and young people referred to in the previous bullet point.
- The overall administrative and governance framework of the Corporate Parenting Panel could be improved by annual reporting to the Executive, forward work scheduling, cover reports and actions tracking. The Council may wish to consider the advantages of aligning the corporate parenting and the social services improvement panels more closely to take advantage of existing governance structures in this area.

The Interim Director of Social Services welcomed the report and confirmed that initial discussions to agree a response to and implement the action plan had taken place.

The Panel in considering the report and its findings which it also welcomed, recognised that the panel needs to be more directly engaged with the children and young people in the Authority's care whose interests and well-being it is tasked with promoting especially in terms of hearing their views and that the collaborative project with Voices from Care Cymru which it has supported, will help meet this need. Although constituted as a working party (no decision-making powers) of the Executive which receives its minutes for adoption, it was accepted that the reporting process could be improved to provide assurance, and that formally reporting to the Executive via an annual report would be effective in bringing key issues to the Executive's attention. The Panel in accepting the findings was confident that it has in place a basis from which to move forwards to successfully address the issues identified by the audit review and requested that it be provided with a report on progress in implementing the action plan for its next meeting in March, 2021.

**The Panel agreed to accept the audit review report findings and draft action plan.**

**ACTION: Interim Director of Social Services in consultation with Internal Audit to bring a progress update report on implementing the Audit Review Action Plan to the Panel's March, 2021 meeting.**

## **6 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

**It was resolved Under Section 100 (A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 to exclude the press and public from the meeting during the discussion on the following item on the grounds that it involved the disclosure of exempt information as defined in Schedule 12A of the said Act and in the Public Interest Test presented.**

## **7 LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN EDUCATION PROGRESS REPORT**

A joint report by the Senior Education Wellbeing Manager and the Looked After Children Education Liaison Officer charting the educational progress of looked after pupils on Anglesey for the 2019/20 educational year was presented for the Panel's consideration.

The Senior Education Wellbeing Manager guided the Panel through the report which provided data with regard to the following –

- The percentage of looked after pupils within the statutory education age (3-16 year old) in the 2019/20 educational year split in to primary and secondary cohorts.
- The attendance rate for looked after children which at primary level is good. A small percentage of looked after children in KS3 and KS4 have been identified as having difficulties engaging with education leading to a lower attendance rate.
- The type and nature of interventions used by schools to support pupils who find it hard to engage with education including the provision of individual support plans.
- The number of looked after children who receive their education in mainstream schools in other authorities because they are being cared for by private agency foster parents due to the unavailability of placements on the Island. A small percentage of children receive out of county care because of profound needs requiring specialist residential provision. A looked after children officer regularly communicates with the specialist out of county placement to ensure that the pupils are making appropriate educational progress in accordance with their age and ability. A termly report on the educational attainment of each out of county pupil in a

specialist placement is received and the views of the pupils are heard via the regular visits of the social worker.

- The percentage of looked after children who have an Additional Learning Needs and Inclusion Statement. A high proportion of looked after children have some form of additional learning needs which are in addition to the trauma of having been taken into care.
- The percentage of looked after children who achieved 5 GCSE qualifications or more in 2019/20 (which because of Covid-19 were based on institution assessment rather than examinations) and the number of looked after children who for the 2020/21 academic year have registered for KS5.

The Senior Education Wellbeing Manager referred to the progress tracking system introduced in 2019/20 to collect reports from schools with regard to all looked after children in order to monitor their educational progress. Although a step in the right direction in terms of identifying performance and progress, the system is an administrative burden and a more manageable system is required. The benefits of tracking progress are that the need for additional intervention can be identified, and therefore provided sooner, and the focus and use of the Looked After Children grant is directed to specific needs based on firm evidence.

The impact of Covid-19 has been felt in various ways with some looked after children thriving because the pressure of school life has been removed whilst older children have found the lockdown difficult and an obstruction to their freedom with consequent impact on their mental health and work experience opportunities. All looked after children now have access to a laptop to facilitate blended learning but for a substantial percentage of pupils, virtual learning is a challenge due to their additional learning needs.

The Panel thanked the Officer for the report and information and made points with regard to –

- The potential usefulness of the inclusion of Free School Meals data in the evaluation.
- The limitations of data reporting on its own and the need to use the information available to identify trends or gaps and to take additional steps where necessary to help looked after children achieve at school.

The Director of Education, Skills and Young People in confirming that collaboration between the Learning Service and Social Services is good, advised that drawing comparisons can be difficult especially as the circumstances have changed so much this year.

**The Panel agreed to accept the report and to note the information presented.**

**NO PROPOSAL FOR ADDITIONAL ACTION WAS MADE**

## **8 NEXT SCHEDULED MEETING**

The arrangements for the next scheduled meeting of the Panel at 10:00 a.m. on 21 March, 2021 were noted.

*In concluding the meeting, the Chair thanked all those involved in the care and support of the Authority's looked after children for their hard work during a very challenging year.*



**Annwen Morgan  
Chair**

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