

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

Minutes of the meeting held on 11 December, 2017

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

Councillor Llinos Medi Huws (Leader and Portfolio Member for Social Services)
Councillor Richard Griffiths (Corporate Scrutiny Committee)
Councillor Margaret M. Roberts (Partnership and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee)
Dr Caroline Turner (Assistant Chief Executive and Statutory Director of Social Services)
Fôn Roberts (Head of Children's Services)
Llyr Bryn Roberts (Head of Service – Corporate and Partnerships)
Gwyneth M. Hughes (Senior Manager School Standards and Inclusion)
Rona Jones (Independent Reviewing Officer)
Huw Owen (Independent Reviewing Officer)
Dawn Owen (Practice Leader Child Placement Team)
Dawn Hutchinson (Practice Leader Resilient Families Team)
Heulwen Owen (LAC Education Liaison Officer)
Llinos Edwards (LAC Nurse – BCUHB)
Llinos Parry (Fostering Recruitment and Marketing Officer (for item 3)
Ann Holmes (Committee Officer)

APOLOGIES: Councillor R. Meirion Jones (Portfolio Member for Education), Councillor Alun Mummery (Portfolio Member for Housing and Supporting Communities) Liz Fletcher (BCUHB), Douglas Watson (Anglesey Foster Carers' Association)

The Chair welcomed all those present to this meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel; he extended a particular welcome to Dawn Hutchinson to her first meeting of the Panel as Practice Leader for the Resilient Families Team and to Mr Fôn Roberts in his new role as Head of Children's Services.

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 11th September, 2017 were presented and confirmed as correct.

3 MATTERS ARISING

- **Recruitment and Retention of Foster Carers**

Llinos Parry, Fostering Recruitment and Marketing Officer gave the Panel a presentation which provided an overview of the Anglesey Fostering Service. The presentation focused on methods of recruitment along with strategies for retaining existing and established foster carers within the service.

The Officer highlighted the following considerations –

- That enquiries regarding becoming foster carers peaked in 2016/17 which saw a 154% increase in the number of enquiries on the previous year (129 as opposed to 50 in 2015/16). This was largely due to investment in online advertising for the first time which saw the service's two busiest quarters.
- That there are historically peaks and troughs as regards foster care enquiries - early summer during the Foster Care Fortnight is a busy period for enquiries as is early autumn with the beginning of the new school year, and also the New Year.
- That the decrease in enquiries thus far in 2017/18 was anticipated; the service has not invested to the same degree in online advertising and the focus of work in Children's Services has moved to other areas.
- That the quality of enquiries is as important as the quantity. The service has been undertaking more visits per enquiry during 2017/18 with the conversion rates being 1 visit to 3.4 enquiries (compared to 1 visit per 5.4 enquiries in 2016/17) and 1 application to 15.5 enquiries (compared to 1 application to 16.1 enquiries in 2016/17).
- The service has found that trends are shifting away from the more traditional enquiry routes e.g. face to face at events such as the Anglesey Show to online enquiries e.g. Facebook. In 2014/15, 36% of enquiries were made face to face with the online route accounting for only 6% of enquiries. In 2016/17 however, 5% of enquiries were made face to face with 57% being made online. This expansion of online methods of enquiry provides the service with the scope to develop in different ways by for example establishing a standalone website (as opposed to being embedded within the corporate website) subject to the availability of resources. As with the local authority fostering service, independent fostering agencies are also increasingly moving online and are dispensing with the more traditional physical sources of information e.g. information stands.
- That the local authorities in North Wales have created a fostering recruitment campaign involving a "front door" website; Facebook page and advertisements; Google advertisements; radio advertisements and regional press releases in an attempt to generate local interest in fostering. Last year, this regional endeavour resulted in 114 enquiries with 5 progressing to assessment and/or approval (4% conversion rate) whilst this year there have been 75 enquiries leading to 1 assessment (1% conversion rate). For Anglesey specifically, there have been 3 visits with 1 assessment taking place. Whilst there have been no approvals as yet, contact is being maintained with several others who may be interested. In terms of feedback from the enquiries made, about 1/3 of those expressing an interest did not qualify for various reasons - they were not ready to become foster carers or they had not the sufficient room at home or were already occupied with young children. Others were information seekers only and were at the very earliest stage of enquiry. The service does however seek to nurture leads and to follow up on enquiries periodically.
- That Anglesey is one of 4 local authority fostering teams in Wales chosen to take part in a national foster carer recruitment and retention pilot scheme – the TFN Pilot Project. The project action plan involves undertaking an audit; adopting a Values Modes approach (an approach wherein the population is divided by values and 3 core groups are identified each with their own distinct characteristics, values and attitudes - pioneers, prospectors and settlers); establishing a Foster Carer recruitment group and a buddying scheme.
- The challenges for the Fostering Service are manifold –
 - Foster carers need the appropriate skills and experience to be able to meet the needs of the children and young people they will be looking after;

- Fewer referrals but for increasingly challenging placements;
- Stretched resources;
- No set marketing budget for fostering recruitment;
- Need “buy in” from relevant partners across the service – social workers, managers, other departments.
- A period of transition and competing priorities in Children’s Services could impact on the team’s ability to implement the action plan.
- Developing a local focus in terms of recruiting the right kinds of foster carers for local needs. The key is for the Fostering Service to find the right people to become foster carers.
- Ensuring the service does all it can to retain its existing foster carers by treating them as co-professionals; offering appropriate training and support and providing sufficient remuneration. A motivated foster carer cohort can also act as the best recruitment method.
- Need to ensure that the service is offering foster carers the best possible package of support to improve both recruitment and retention.

The Panel considered the information presented and made the following points:

- The Panel noted that in an area such as Anglesey where in many households both adults/parents work because they have to, it is very difficult to recruit in sufficient numbers to be able to provide local placement choice, individuals who are able to foster on a full-time basis. The Fostering Recruitment and Marketing Officer said that the changing dynamics of the family situation is one of the challenges the Fostering Service has recognised and is facing. There needs to be discussion about ways of supporting foster families in a way that allows them to meet the needs of the children in their care whilst ensuring the service remains cost-effective. The Head of Children’s Services said that the service is looking to investigate the option of salaried foster carers which is a route already taken by two local authorities. Before that, there will be a renewed recruitment drive at next year’s Fostering Fortnight in May, 2018 where all available staff resources will be put into raising awareness of what fostering is and what it entails in an effort to generate interest and to encourage potential foster carers to come forward.
- The Panel noted that new and innovative ways have to be found to address the shortage of foster carers and to incentivise prospective foster carers to take their interest further. It was suggested that better use needs to be made of existing foster families to aid recruitment e. g by establishing a circle of friends. The Fostering Recruitment and Marketing Officer said that one of the schemes under the pilot project referred to above is based on rewards for “referring a friend.”
- The Panel sought clarification of the turnover rate for the service’s in house foster carers and whether this is contributing to the shortage of suitable foster carers. The Fostering Recruitment and Marketing Officer said that the number of foster carers leaving the service in Anglesey has not been high and is below the national average. This year that number has been slightly higher due to a variety of reasons including natural turnover due to age/retirement.
- The Panel sought clarification of the foster carer approval process in terms of the length of time required to convert initial interest into firm approval. The Fostering Recruitment and Marketing Officer said the aim is that the journey to approval should take no longer than six months but that analysis has shown that the process can take just under a year. Whilst there is room for improvement, the process does also have regard for court timescales etc.
- The Panel noted that in order to extend the message about the importance of fostering and what foster carers do it would be helpful if a similar presentation were to be given to

one of the monthly Elected Member Briefing sessions as well as the Town and Community Council Forum. This would help improve the understanding of fostering as well as helping to disseminate the message about fostering and the difference foster carers can make to the lives of children in their care.

ACTION PROPOSED: Head of Children's Services to arrange for the presentation on the Recruitment and Retention of Foster Carers to be made to an Elected Member Briefing Session and a meeting of the Town and Community Councils Forum.

4 RESILIENT FAMILIES TEAM

Dawn Hutchinson, Practice Leader, Resilient Families Team gave the Panel a presentation on the role and work of the Resilient Families Team.

The Officer referred to the following key considerations:

- The Resilient Families Team is composed of a Practice Leader, 2 Social Workers and 2 Support Workers.
- The team's mission is to prevent children becoming looked after when it is unnecessary (i.e. at the edge of care); to return children home during the first 8 weeks of care (reunification); to review the safe return of children in long term care (additional support following reunification), and in future, to reduce the nature of Looked After accommodation/care provided (e.g. from residential to foster care to family to revocation).
- That the team seeks to achieve its mission in the following ways –
 - By supporting families 7 days a week between the hours of 07:00 and 22:00 extending current office hours and reflecting the fact that needs don't stop outside of office hours
 - By intensive intervention (not case-holding but working alongside case-holding Social Workers)
 - By intervening in a family crisis
 - By consultation to determine whether a situation is appropriate for intervention and the nature of the intervention required
 - By holding an initial 3 day assessment to evaluate parental motivation and capacity to change etc. followed by
 - Stage 1 – 8-10 weeks of intensive intervention
 - Stage 2 – up to a year from the point of initial involvement
- That the team's working practices according to which children on the edge of care and the likelihood of the risk are assessed include the development of eligibility criteria with a view to ensuring that the right families receive the right support at the right time; consultations; agreed performance indicators; data collection which indicate how well the team is doing its job, as well as policies, procedures and protocols.
- The Resilient Families Team is newly established and its staff are on a process to embed the Authority's management practices and procedures within their own working practices. They are evolving an identity and are developing positive ownership of the work.
- Thus far the team has conducted a Resilient Families consultation with 5 families and 8 children all of whom were assessed as being appropriate for intervention because they were deemed to be at risk of becoming looked after. Three families and 5 children have been in receipt of Therapeutic consultations. In terms of interventions, there has been 1 planned reunification from foster care; 1 planned reunification from residential care; 1 case of preventing escalation to secure accommodation; 5 edge of care cases (remain at home) and 1 adoption.

- That as regards the ongoing development of the Team, future activity will involve identifying and consolidating the use of models; identifying and consolidating practice; commissioning training packages and undertaking a training plan; improving the quality of requests for Resilient Families interventions, and improving the quality of case-holder assessment and analysis leading to a decision to request Resilient Families consultation.
- That as regards the ongoing development of the service, future activity in the context of the Team will include developing marketing and communication processes and informing the wider workforce and partner agencies of the role of the Resilient Families Team whilst in the context of the wider service and practice development, the Team will seek to develop and with the approval of the Head of Children's Service, to implement a Training Programme Proposal initially focused on Children's Service but thereafter on other departments and external partner agencies.
- Future aims of the Resilient Families Team are focused on cost avoidance, cost reduction and the timely delivery of a high-quality specialist service to children and their families.

The Resilient Families Team Practice Leader said that the Team's approach is based on treating individuals as "children" rather than "cases" and of seeking to build a family around children on the edge of care so that they are able to have the same experiences as their contemporaries.

The Head of Children's Services said that it is the intention to use some of Welsh Government grant monies to fund additional staff for the Resilient Families Team for as well as providing families with early and timely help to prevent their entering the care system, the Team also undertakes work to reunify families.

The Panel noted the information presented and as with the previous presentation, recommended that the presentation given by the Resilient Families Team Practice Leader be made also to an Elected Member Briefing Session to build awareness and understanding of the Resilient Families Team and its role within the Children's Services. The Panel further noted that it would be useful to develop a link between the Team and schools.

ACTION PROPOSED: Head of Children's Services to arrange for the presentation on the work of the Resilient Families Team to be made to an Elected Member Briefing Session.

5 SERVICE REPORTS

The following service reports were presented –

5.1 The report of the LAC Education Officer on performance over the course of the previous 6 months from April to September, 2017 was presented for the Panel's consideration. Data in relation to the end of key stage results for individual children in the Authority's care was presented separately.

The Officer reported that for the six months reporting period to which the paper refers the Performance Indicator for change of schools is very high with 23 children having changed schools in September, 2017 for a variety of reasons. An emerging issue also has been the delay in securing the right education provision for children in the Authority's care who are in placements within one or more other North Wales local authority areas.

Among the positive points to note are the STAR Awards which were held on 3 November, 2017 which celebrated the successes of the children and young people whom the Authority looks after.

The Panel considered the information presented and made the following points:

- The Panel noted that the Authority has been chosen to pilot the Purple Letterbox Scheme for to 5 year olds (the Letterbox scheme being a jointly delivered scheme between the Welsh Government and the Booktrust which over the years has involved the distribution of colour coded book packs to children aged 7 to 11). The Panel sought clarification of whether there were arrangements in place to monitor the outcomes of the scheme. The Panel was informed that with regard to children who are looked after, a “before” and “after” questionnaire will be sent to foster carers. It was also suggested that it might be useful to identify this cohort of children within the scheme and to do a piece of work on their attitude to learning.
- With regard to the number of children who have changed schools during the period the Panel noted that after discounting the 6 individuals who have transitioned from primary to secondary education and the 3 individuals who have changed schools due to school closure which are experiences common to all school children and are not unique to looked after children, the total comes down to 14 meaning that the percentage performance against the indicator is improved.
- The Panel noted the information pertaining to the education performance of the Looked After population with regard to qualification points and it sought clarification of the expectations for looked after children in points terms compared with those for mainstream pupils. The Panel was informed that the abilities of individual children within the looked after cohort vary and consideration has also to be given to where each child is starting from; however, in purely educational terms the general attainment target is 5 GCSEs. It is fair to note that evidence shows that looked after children have poorer educational outcomes compared to their peers because their life experiences have affected their ability to make the most of education. The Panel noted further that it would be helpful to ascertain to what extent the findings of the LAC Education Liaison Officer’s report correlates with the school’s expectations for this group of children.
- The Panel noted that part of the Deprivation Grant for Looked After Children has been used to purchase 15 laptops to provide educational support. The Panel sought clarification of the procedures in place to ensure that the laptops are used safely; it also sought assurance that they are equipped with appropriate security software and that foster carers are given support to ensure that the children in their care remain safe online. The Panel was informed that the 15 laptops were purchased through the Gwynedd and Anglesey Additional Learning Needs and Inclusion Service. There is an agreement between the service, foster carers and the children in their care in relation to usage. Additionally, Foster Carers are provided with training on technology through the Child Placement Service; the most recent session looked at Child Sexual Exploitation as well as online apps – a PCSO provided guidance on the apps most popular with children and young people and helped to identify the related risks. There is ongoing dialogue between the service and its Foster Carers about the use of technology and respective responsibilities.
- The Panel noted the information with regard to the educational attainments of individual children within the Authority’s care through Key Stages 2, 3, and 4 which was provided separately. The Panel was gratified by the outcomes especially as it is known that there is an attainment gap between looked after children and their peers and that many young people who have experienced being in care end up as NEETs (not in education, employment or training). The Panel emphasised the importance of the Authority, as corporate parent, continuing to provide support and opportunities for all the individuals referred to in the report to enable them to continue with their

education or in the case of those in KS4, to progress in their chosen further education and/or career fields.

It was agreed to accept the report of the LAC Education Liaison Officer for Quarter 2 2017/18.

ADDITIONAL ACTION PROPOSED: The Chair on behalf of the Corporate Parenting Panel to acknowledge the success of those individuals in KS4 who have completed their GCSEs and to wish them well in their future paths.

5.2 The report of the LAC Nurse for Quarter 2 2017/18 was presented for the Panel's consideration. The report provided information on the Quarter 2 position in relation to the conduct of both initial and review looked after health assessments.

The LAC Nurse updated the Panel on the situation with regard to health staffing arrangements, particularly school nursing and progress with implementing the emotional health pathway. The Officer confirmed that uptake of the CAMHS consultation appointments with Dr Trish Girling (Clinical Psychologist, CAMHS) continues to be good. She proposed that CAMHS be invited to attend the Corporate Parenting Panel on an annual basis to provide an update on the services available locally to the Authority's looked after children, young people, carers and staff.

The Panel noted the information and noted also that it would be advantageous to establish a link between CAMHS and the new Resilient Families Team.

It was agreed to accept the report of the LAC Nurse for Quarter 2 2017/18.

ADDITIONAL ACTION PROPOSED:

- **CAMHS to be invited to the Corporate Parenting Panel on a once a year basis.**
- **The attachment to the LAC Nurse's report: *Getting more Involved - A Young Person's Guide to Health and Well-being* to be shared for information purposes with the Elected Members serving on the Children's Services Improvement Panel**

5.3 The report of the Child Placement Team Practice Leader for Quarters 1 and 2 2017/18 was presented for the Panel's consideration. The report provided information on the position with regard to placement numbers, types and referrals during the period, progress with regard to assessments, foster care recruitment and retention and regional working and also the pressure points within the service particularly in relation to the capacity to assess.

The Panel considered the information presented and gave particular attention to the situation with regard to Foster Carers making the following points –

- The Panel noted that a misunderstanding had arisen in relation to foster carers' allowances. The Panel emphasised the importance of ensuring good communication between the Authority and its foster carers and also of publicising the fact that the Authority is seeking to increase its pool of foster carers and is exploring ways of doing so. Enlisting the support of Elected Members in this endeavour would be helpful hence the need to ensure that Elected Members are well informed about foster caring and foster care arrangements.
- The Panel noted that it might also be useful to try to ascertain whether there is a geographical pattern to foster carer recruitment i.e. whether foster carers are more likely to come from certain areas of the Island than others. The Panel was informed that there is a general shortage of people willing to take on a foster carer role; the TFN pilot project work will involve looking at details to help the Authority better target recruitment and to ensure the right people for the right children.

- The Panel noted the need to ensure that foster carers are properly remunerated for the work they do and that they are regarded as co-professionals.
- The Panel noted the increased use of friends and family provision. The Panel was informed that children provided for in this way are now included as part of the statistical reporting as the Authority has legal responsibility for them; these add to the numbers even though they may be cared for within their communities – if the children in these placements as well as those in respite care are discounted (53 in total in Quarter 1 2017/18) the number of children otherwise looked after comes down to 87 in this period. Additionally, Anglesey has traditionally had a high number of friends and family placements. The National Fostering Framework is looking at according friends and family carers alternative status to that of foster carers because their circumstances and their reasons for fostering are different to those who choose to foster professionally.
- The Panel noted that the data suggests that only a relatively small number of the referrals for family viability assessment end up being viable meaning that considerable resources are expended to achieve limited results. The Panel was informed that the Courts require authorities to assess a number of family members from both parents' families which can lead to a number of assessments having to be made. Ideally, there should be a screening mechanism of potential carers so that those who obviously do not meet with the criteria from the outset can be removed from the process, thereby saving time and resources.

It was agreed to accept the report of the Child Placement Team Practice Leader for Quarters 1 and 2 2017/18.

NO ADDITIONAL ACTION WAS PROPOSED

6 NEXT MEETING OF THE PANEL

It was noted that the Panel's next meeting was scheduled for 2:00 p.m. on Monday, 19th March, 2018.

**Dr Gwynne Jones
Chair**