

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

Minutes of the virtual meeting held on 16 March, 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 Richard Griffiths (Corporate Scrutiny Committee)
Barbara Jones (Anglesey Foster Carers' Association)
Liz Fletcher (Assistant Area Director West – Children, BCUHB)
Fôn Roberts (Director of Social Services)
Rhys Hughes (Director of Education, Skills and Young People)
Huw Owen (Independent Reviewing & Safeguarding Officer)
Dawn Owen (Independent Reviewing & Safeguarding Officer)
Nia Hardaker (Independent Reviewing & Safeguarding 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)
Llinos Edwards (Looked After Children's Nurse)
Ann Holmes (Committee Officer)

APOLOGIES: Llinos Williams (Housing Services Manager)

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and she congratulated Mr Fôn Roberts on his recent appointment as Director of Social Services.

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 8th December, 2020 were presented and were confirmed as correct.

3 MATTERS ARISING

3.1 Looked After Children's Assessment Policy and Guidance

An update was provided by the Interim Service Manager (Safeguarding) who confirmed that a draft assessment policy document had been prepared and had been circulated to the Independent Reviewing Officers and Practice Leaders for comment. Local Authorities have a duty to assess all children referred to the Service whether they are in need of care and support; whether they are subject to Child Protection registration or whether they become looked after. For those children and young people who remain looked after for a long period whose situation and needs are likely to change as they grow older, the Service is seeking to ensure that assessment is not a one-off event. It has been agreed therefore, that every looked after child/young person will have an updated assessment a

minimum of once every twelve months. Additionally, should there be a significant change in the circumstances of a looked after child/young person e.g. a return to live with birth parents, discharge from care or leaving care, release from custody, a new adult joining the family group or the birth of a new sibling, then an updated assessment will be required the aim being to ensure that a child or young person that is looked after by the Authority has an assessment that is reflective of their current circumstances.

The Director of Social Services said that the objective is to implement the policy from 1 April, 2021 onwards; internal practice standards will be updated accordingly and Children's social care staff made aware of the changes and provided with training.

The Senior Education Well-being Manager asked that she be provided with the finalised Assessment policy to ensure co-ordination between the Children Services' policy and the Looked After Children's Policy for schools.

It was agreed to accept and to note the update.

3.2 Internal Audit Review – Function of the Corporate Parenting Panel

With regard to the Internal Audit Review Action Plan that followed Internal Audit's review of the Corporate Parenting Panel's function to assess whether it had in place appropriate arrangements to support and facilitate the Council in meeting its corporate parenting responsibilities, the Director of Social Services confirmed that a draft report is to be presented to the Senior Leadership Team on aligning the Panel more closely with the Social Services Improvement Panel and bringing it under the same governance structure thereby addressing a number of the recommendations highlighted by the Internal Audit review. Should there be any implications to the changes for the Council's Constitution then those will be addressed via the appropriate democratic processes under the direction of the Director of Function (Council/ Business)/Monitoring Officer.

It was agreed to accept and to note the update.

4 REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICERS

The report of the Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) as part of their duty to monitor the activity of the local authority acting as a good corporate parent under Part 6 of Welsh Government's Code of Practice was presented for the Panel's consideration. The report provided an overview of the period since the IROs last reported to the Panel in September, 2019 (three of the Panel's four meetings in 2020 having been suspended because of the pandemic) and included data collected at different times during the period.

Mr Huw Owen, Independent Reviewing Officer presented the report and highlighted the following points –

- That the case sampling undertaken by the IROs show that the situation with regard to the quality of assessments has improved but further work needs to be done to ensure that looked after children's assessments are current. The IROs welcome the Service's policy commitment to providing an up to date assessment for every looked after child.
- The IROs note the very significant improvements with regard to the provision of a Part 6 Care and Support Plan in preparation for reviews. Between 1 October, 2019 and 22 January 2020, 119 Reviews were undertaken and a Part 6 report was provided for 108 of those reviews (90.7%). Likewise during the period between 14 December, 2020 and 8 January, 2021 summary reports were received in 29 reviews out of 30 (96.6%); this progress is very much welcomed by the IROs as it means that more thorough preparations can be made in advance of review meetings.
- Although the IROs welcome the instruction given to Social Workers that they should share the Part 6 Care and Support Plan with the children and Foster Carers, the IROs still consider that the document used as a template for Part 6 Care and

Support Plan is not accessible for children, families or foster carers being lengthy and repetitive. The IROs note that the Service has started to reconsider the content of the document and although they recognise that this task has not been prioritised during the pandemic, they feel it should be resumed whenever possible.

- The IROs are of the opinion that maintaining case records has been consistently good for some time and note that systems are in place to monitor the recording.
- The IROs remain of the opinion that there are still cases where a Special Guardianship Order would be appropriate. The IROs note a willingness on the part of the Service to discuss this further with Foster Carers but a number are anxious about shouldering the responsibility. It is difficult to imagine that the Service could do more in this direction and the IROs recognise that it is important to respect the views of the carers who do not consider SGO as being suitable for them and accept that children should not be moved for the sake of an SGO. The IROs further note that a thorough review of the permanency Policy is being undertaken.
- The IROs feel that greater focus on Post-16 Pathway plans in terms of their being co-produced with the young person could lead to improved practice in this area.
- The IROs have adapted their working methods in response to the coronavirus pandemic and have succeeded in undertaking reviews throughout the lockdown period with 357 out of 366 (97.5%) conducted within the statutory timescale. The Safeguarding Unit is looking at ways of strengthening the review process including by continuing to look at different models to make it more child-centred and by improving the timeliness of review records.
- That the quarterly meetings between the IROs and Service Managers are constructive and a means of collaborating to improve practice. Recent discussions have focused on the suitability of the Post-16 Pathways Plan template; ensuring that instructions and commitments at the conclusion of care proceedings transfer into the day to day plans for children and providing a Life Story book for each looked after child.
- The consistency of Social Workers has improved significantly with data collected for the period from 1 October and 31 January 2020 showing continuity of Social Worker in 41 out of 51 reviews and for the period between 4 December, 2020 and 8 January, 2021 there was continuity of Social Worker in 23 out of 30 reviews.
- That during Quarter 3, 2019/20, the percentage of statutory visits was 81% against a target of 90% and performance in this area will continue to be monitored by the IROs. Evidence was also found of Social Workers going above and beyond what is required to provide support for children and their families.
- The IROs welcome the formation of a specific team for Looked After Children and Young People aged 15+. It is also encouraging to be able to report about the ongoing progress of looked after children and young people who have left care and embarked on the next phase of their lives examples of which are provided in the report.

In acknowledging the hard work and progress taking place in often challenging circumstances the Panel raised the following issues as areas to be followed up –

- Accepting that not every young person wants support or a Pathway Plan, the Panel sought assurance that the Service does have the means and capacity to prepare and complete the plan for every eligible young person in the Authority's care so that each young person's needs are agreed and clearly mapped out.

The Director of Social Services confirmed that the post -16 cohort of looked after young people has been recognised for some time as a group needing additional input with the Service having anticipated that the numbers in this group would increase this year and next commensurate with the number of children that have

come into care over the past few years and who would therefore require a Pathway Plan. The Service has therefore formed a specific team for looked after children and young people aged 15 years and over. The team sits within the normal Practice Group and has been formed using existing resources with a Practice Lead who has long-standing experience with post 16 looked after young people and two Personal Advisors. ICF funding has also been used to provide two support workers to provide assistance. The Service also intends to work with Voices from Care Cymru to explore different ways of working capitalising on the more frequent contact with young people which working digitally in the pandemic has facilitated. Additional funding from Welsh Government to provide Covid-19 related support for this group of young people has also been fully utilised with a request having been submitted for this funding to continue into the coming financial year.

- With reference to reviews, the Panel in expressing its appreciation that reviews continued to be undertaken throughout the lockdown period albeit by virtual/digital means with 97% having been carried out within the statutory timescale noted that an explanation of why the remaining 3% of reviews were not within timescale would have been helpful. The Panel noted further that the report makes little mention of how effective the child/young person has found engaging with reviews during the pandemic and whether virtual contact has been more or less intrusive for them. The Panel felt that the feedback could be used to inform new ways of working post pandemic by incorporating new technologies into the review process and taking what has worked from virtual reviews and combining that with face to face meetings to offer a more flexible approach to engaging with children and young people.

The Director of Social Services confirmed that feedback from young persons in care show that the levels of contact increased during the first lockdown period with Social Workers maintaining weekly contact with young care leavers to ensure their practical needs were being met. Coming out of the initial lockdown, each young person agreed a plan setting the frequency of contact subsequently and some of the additional Covid-19 funding was used to facilitate contact. The Service also draws on survey reports of looked after children and young people's experiences of Covid-19 by the Office of the Children's Commissioner for Wales in tandem with other partners including Voices from Care Cymru and Young Carers as well as the experience and input of the Service's own post-16 Personal Advisors. However, the Service would be happy for Voices from Care Cymru to undertake a specific piece of work on how the pandemic experience of looked after children and young people on Anglesey can be used to further improve future engagement.

- Noting that the report focuses upon the timeliness of assessment rather than quality, the Panel wanted to know how the Service intends to address the quality of assessments.

The Director of Social Services clarified that although practice standards set out the expectations with regards to assessments, there remain issues with the Part 6 Care and Support Plan assessment template in terms of its length, complexity and accessibility. The Service is planning to review the contents of the document to ensure that in meeting the requirements of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 it is also fit for purpose and user friendly. Notwithstanding this work will take time and care and requires focus within the WCCIS Board meetings, the aim would be to develop a draft of a new template by the end of Quarter 1 or beginning of Quarter 2 2021/22. An officer within the Quality Assurance team also audits the quality of social work.

The Interim Service Manager (Safeguarding) advised that a tracking spreadsheet has been developed to provide day to day overview of work that is outstanding. As regards improving quality, the Service is working with the Quality Assurance team to utilise case audits to better effect and to improve practice with a view to identifying themes from audits and to develop quality assurance workshops where social work practitioners can have their own conversations about developing best practice.

- The Panel in noting that the Service states that a review of the Authority's Special Guardianship Orders policy may be required sought clarity on whether the Service considers a review necessary.

The Interim Service Manager (Safeguarding) advised that the Service would want children in the Authority's long-term care to become the subject of a private order such as a Special Guardianship Order that would provide them with a family life and the certainty of a long term placement. Barriers to applications by the Authority's foster carers are the financial and practical support available. The legislation requires the financial support to be reviewed annually meaning there is less security from a legislative perspective than with foster care. Some authorities have chosen to adopt a no detriment approach so despite the legal requirement for an annual review, they have a standard policy that there would be no difference to the financial and practical support offered to foster carers as special guardians than they would have received as foster carers. The matter needs further discussion within the Service before a decision is made but can be a cost effective approach in that children are encouraged out of public care which is beneficial to them and the Authority's existing costs are reduced as its statutory involvement decreases.

In accepting the report, the Panel thanked the Service and its staff for the work undertaken and the progress made and was agreed regarding the following actions

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- **The Panel to be provided with a progress report on pathway planning to the next meeting including the provision and content of post-16 Pathway Plans.**
- **The Director of Social Services to report back to the Panel with any recommendations as regards amending the SGO policy with reference to a no detriment approach.**
- **The Director of Social Services to consider how the Service can demonstrate that it is improving the quality of assessments.**

5 LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN'S HEALTH REPORT

The report of the Looked After Children's Nurse providing an update on looked after children's health related matters was presented for the Panel's consideration.

The Looked After Children's Nurse highlighted the following –

- That as at 29 January, 2021 BCUHB had 161 looked after children under the remit of the Isle of Anglesey County Council – 118 were placed within Anglesey and 43 were placed in other BCU counties and outside North Wales.
- That there are 57 looked after children placed in Anglesey from other BCU areas and from outside North Wales.
- That 17 initial health assessments were conducted in the period from April to September, 2020. Where those were not conducted within timescale, the reasons for lateness are given.
- That a total of 143 Review Health Assessments have been carried out in the period from 1 April, 2021 to date.
- Most of the health assessments have been completed virtually or by telephone contact with follow up home visits being made where there are any health concerns.

- Working virtually has meant that more meetings have been attended and virtual training has worked well and has been conducted on a multi-agency basis. What has not gone so well is the loss of face to face contact with the looked after children and young people with some of the young persons in care lacking in confidence when meeting virtually and also feeling isolated because of the Covid related restrictions.
- The majority of referrals to additional health services involve the Speech and Language Therapy Service. Training indicates that the effects of trauma on the brain can be significant leading to difficulty in processing information; in those circumstances a referral to the Speech and Language Therapy Service can be more appropriate than to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAHMS). Schools have developed a good understanding of the impact of trauma on a child's development and are delivering a training programme to staff on the subject.
- That regionally within BCUHB, workforce planning within the LAC nursing and administrative team is being reviewed partly as a result of the steady increase in the number of children and young people becoming looked after which has had a significant impact upon workload.
- That a LAC Nurse/CAHMS meeting has taken place to look at mapping services provided within BCUHB with a view to assisting when looked after children and young people move from one BCUHB area to another.

The Director of Social Services said that the Authority is grateful to BCUHB that the LAC nurses were not redeployed to work in any other areas of the Health Board during the pandemic and that communication with all agencies has been maintained.

The Panel thanked the LAC Nurse for the report and raised the following issues –

- That apart from providing data relating to the number of looked after children and young people being assessed or open to CAMHS, the report is not clear on whether intervention by CAMHS is sufficient or the impact it has in terms of addressing the emotional and mental health needs of the looked after children and young people referred to the service.

The Panel was advised that due to system incompatibility and despite much efforts, providing specific intelligence on looked after children and young people is problematic. The Health Board operates a number of data collection systems across services and because of technical issues, is not currently operating the WCCIS system which was introduced to better integrate health and social care information. Identifying children who are looked after within the data sets that are held by BCUHB in a way that provides timely and up to date information is therefore a challenge.

Following further discussion about the ability of the Health Board to identify and provide systematic information on children who are looked after, the Panel recognised that the pandemic has highlighted and emphasised existing systemic/IT issues which need a long-term solution.

Referring to speech and language difficulties and the impact they can have on a child's behaviour, the Senior Education Wellbeing Manager advised that the Education Service has been working with Sure Start for a number of years. A scheme named Welcome has been in effect for some time and delivered by the Health visitors for children aged 0 to 6 years and has now been adopted not only in nursery groups but also in schools. The scheme works through a programme that helps identify whether a child has actual speech deficiencies or is just slower in making progress and it provides the evidence for a more diagnostic assessment through speech therapy intervention. The scheme sits alongside the work with trauma informed schools. A further programme for children aged

6 to 11 years has now been piloted with five schools. Speech and communication difficulties inevitably have an impact on a child's behaviour.

- The Panel noted that capacity within the CAMHS Service has been a recurring theme in discussions and it sought an update on the position.

The Panel was advised that although there has been a shortage of CAMHS practitioners in the West area over the past two years, the Health Service has recently been successful in recruiting from outside the Health Board meaning there are no internal gaps to fill and the Service's vacancy levels are reducing as a result. New staff are expected to undergo induction and training but the Service is retaining its experienced practitioners who are moving into new work e. g. early intervention. A new Service Manager has been appointed who is an experienced CAMHS practitioner with a social work background. It was suggested to the Panel that it might wish to consider inviting the CAMHS Service Manager to one of its future meetings to explain some of the changes being introduced by the new team.

- The Panel in considering a suggestion that Officers be asked to map out the services which looked after children are currently receiving, was informed by the Director of Social Services that a significant piece of work is being commissioned at regional level to review local authority and other service arrangements which will among other things look at lessons to be learnt, doing things differently and resource implications which will address some of the matters arising. It might be helpful to await the output from the regional exercise before then taking the review down to a local level.

It was therefore proposed by the Chair and agreed by the Panel, that being mindful of the regional work, the relevant Officers from the Social Services, Health and Education should meet to examine current capacity and resources to deliver the services/ interventions that looked after children and young people need and to consider how the quality of provision is evaluated and measured with a view to providing a high-level overview to the Panel's next meeting.

In closing the discussion, the Panel was keen to know whether there were any standout areas which had created particular issues for the Authority's looked after children and young people during the pandemic period.

The Director of Social Services said that although it has been an intensive time for the Authority's Foster Carers, many have appreciated the opportunity which being free from schedules has created to spend time with the children in their care. A number of foster carers have indicated that they would like to routinely be allowed such time at the beginning of a new placement to better get to know the child they are fostering. Dealing with the pandemic has opened up a conversation about doing things differently in future.

The Director of Education, Skills and Young People agreed that the emergency period had been challenging for all children and that as schools have re-opened the impact of the pandemic on children and young people has become more apparent. Education is working with schools to provide a support package and is also working closely with Children and Families' Services.

The Chair suggested that it would be useful for the Panel to receive an overview of what has gone well and not so well in delivering services to looked after children and young people during the pandemic including aspects of pre-pandemic practices which if they were not to return would not be missed or would be done differently.

In accepting the update report provided by the LAC nurse, the Panel recognised the unique challenges which the period had created and the commitment of all staff in responding to them; the Panel was agreed on the following actions –

- **That mindful of the regional work, the relevant Officers from Children and Families' Services, Health and Education meet to discuss (a) capacity and resource issues and (b) how the quality of services for the looked after population is evaluated and measured with the aim of presenting a high level overview to the next meeting.**
- **The Director of Social Services in consultation with the relevant Officers to provide the Panel at its next meeting with a summary review of what has gone well and not so well during the pandemic to include aspects of pre-pandemic practices which if they were not to return would not be missed, or would be done differently.**

6 NEXT SCHEDULED MEETING

The arrangements for the next scheduled meeting of the Panel at 10:00 a.m. on Tuesday 8 June, 2021 were noted.

**Annwen Morgan
Chair**

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