

# CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

## Minutes of the virtual meeting held on 7 September, 2021

- PRESENT:** Mrs Annwen Morgan (Chief Executive) (Chair)
- Councillor Llinos Medi (Leader & Portfolio Member for Social Services)  
Councillor R. Meirion Jones (Portfolio Member for Education, Libraries, Culture and Youth)  
Barbara Jones (Anglesey Foster Carers' Association)  
Liz Fletcher (Assistant Area Director West – Children, BCUHB)  
Rhys Hughes (Director of Education, Skills and Young People)  
Ned Michael (Head of Housing Services)  
Llyr Bryn Roberts (Service Manager – Intensive Intervention)  
Huw Owen (Independent Reviewing & Safeguarding Officer)  
Dawn Owen (Independent Reviewing & Safeguarding Officer)  
Nia Hardaker (Independent Reviewing & Safeguarding Officer)  
Gwyneth Hughes (Senior Well-Being Manager)  
Heulwen Owen (LAC Education Liaison Officer)  
Saul Ainsworth (Interim Service Manager – Safeguarding)  
Sioned Warren (Voices from Care Cymru)  
Ann Holmes (Committee Officer)
- APOLOGIES:** Councillors Richard Griffiths, Margaret M. Roberts, Mr Fôn Roberts (Director of Social Services), Ffion Roberts (LAC Nurse), Melanie Jones (Integrated Manager – Children's Services)
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The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting after which introductions were made.

### 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 June, 2021 were presented and were confirmed as correct subject to noting that Nia Hardaker, Independent Reviewing Officer was present at the meeting.

Arising thereon –

The Chair highlighted the matters for action agreed at the 8<sup>th</sup> June, 2021 meeting some of which entailed the submission of supplemental information to the Panel's December, 2021 meeting with regard to activities for looked after children and out of county placements. She specifically referred to the proposed actions with regard to reviewing the form and contents of the Care Leavers' Pathway Plan in line with recommendations made by the Independent Reviewing Officers and sought confirmation that the review would be completed by December, 2021. The Interim Service Manager (Safeguarding) confirmed that that is the timescale which the Service is working towards.

### 3 VOICES FROM CARE CYMRU

Sioned Warren, Voices from Care Cymru's Wellbeing Officer for the North updated the Panel on the VFC's participation project with the Isle of Anglesey County Council which

involved establishing 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.

Ms Warren informed the Panel that much work had been going on to try to encourage children and young people being looked after by the Authority to join the participation group to better enable them to have their say on the plans and policies that directly affect them. Although the work has been challenging especially with the emergence of the Coronavirus pandemic, Voices from Care Cymru organised a virtual event to generate interest and subsequently the monthly meetings are now held consistently. The current focus is on expanding the participation group's numbers and to this end the group's members have come up with the idea of a poster competition that would both publicise the group and provide information about its aims and objectives. Whilst the brief for this task has been completed, the next step is to agree a mechanism for getting the message to young people and getting them interested in joining the group. It has also emerged that the group would like to learn more about the Corporate Parenting Panel and perhaps to stage an event that would bring the group and the Panel together in an informal way. Voices from Care is also looking at the possibility of staging fun days to persuade children and young people in care to become involved with the group and thereby with the services that affect them, and the organisation is open to suggestions as to how this can be achieved. Although the monthly meetings are still being conducted virtually at present the aim is to hold the meetings in person when possible while also providing the facility for those finding it difficult to travel to be able to participate remotely.

The Panel thanked Ms Warren for the update which it appreciated. Points made during the ensuing discussion were as follows –

- The challenges involved in getting looked after children and young people to participate and whether these are commonplace. Reference was made to an event which was staged pre-pandemic in the summer of 2019 which was attended by foster carers and children and young people in the Authority's care and which gave Voices from Care direct access to the children and young people the organisation is looking to engage. Having experienced both in person and virtual events, the Panel sought clarification whether the challenges now faced are down to the circumstances created by the pandemic or whether they signify a lack of interest or a preoccupation with other activities on the part of young people. Ms Warren clarified that once they have joined, the young people appear to enjoy the involvement but it is getting them to that point that is proving difficult in Anglesey and elsewhere where VfC runs participation groups for example in Merthyr and Carmarthen which is why VfC is looking at different ways of engagement.
- Whether age is an influencing factor with regards to participation. Barbara Jones, Foster Carers' Association suggested that young children are unlikely to engage with what VfC is trying to do whilst older children's interest tends to be stimulated if there is an element of fun involved or if it means learning new skills. Ms Warren clarified that VfC works with groups with an age range of 13 to 22 and that an older child who is a member of the Anglesey participation group provides practical help with arranging meetings thereby learning new skills. VfC does run groups other than participation groups, for example an independent living skills group.
- That it would be helpful for VfC to establish a link with the Learning Service. The Director of Education, Skills and Young People confirmed that the Learning Service would be happy to promote the work of VfC with schools and in the education strategic forums.
- Whilst the Panel indicated that it would like to meet with the participation group once it has embedded and gained confidence, there was acknowledgement of the

challenge in establishing a workable and meaningful link between the Panel and the group. To this end, the Interim Service Manager (Safeguarding) suggested that Sioned Warren be made a standing member of the Corporate Parenting Panel as a conduit between the Panel and the participation group providing feedback to and therefrom, and that consideration be also given to producing a child friendly news sheet from each meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel to provide the participation group with a flavour of the type of topics the Panel considers. After further discussion it was agreed that a twice yearly newsheet would better meet the objective of securing the interest of the participation group as well as ensuring sufficient content and avoiding loading the group with information about matters it may not be interested in.

**It was agreed –**

- **To request an update for the Panel’s December meeting on the progress made by the participation group, specifically with reference to expanding its membership.**
- **To confirm the Corporate Parenting Panel’s willingness to meet with the participation group at an appropriate time and under terms with which the group is comfortable.**
- **To recommend that Voices from Care via Sioned Warren liaise with the Director of Education, Skills and Young People and/or the Senior Well-being Manager to establish a link with Anglesey’s schools.**
- **To confirm Sioned Warren, Voices from Care Cymru as a standing member of the Corporate Parenting Panel.**
- **That a twice yearly newsheet be produced to document matters of interest from the Panel’s meetings for the benefit of the participation group. Sioned Warren, Voices from Care Cymru and Saul Ainsworth (Interim Service Manager – Safeguarding) to collaborate on drafting the newsheet.**

#### **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 documented progress against the recommendations made by the IROs to the Corporate Parenting Panel in March, 2018.

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

- **Quality of assessments of looked after children - case sampling undertaken by the IROs showed that from 20 cases, 11 of the children did not have a current assessment (i. e. conducted in 2020 or 2021). Some of the assessments were not up to date in terms of reflecting the considerable changes some of the children have experienced since the completion of their assessment. Although the IROs have welcomed the Service’s policy commitment to provide an up to date assessment for every looked after child, further work needs to be done in this area in order to fully deliver on this commitment.**
- **Care and Support Plans in Place - The IROs note the considerable progress made in this area in comparison to what has been previously reported to the Panel. In the period between 1 June, 2020 and 23 July 2021, summary reports were received in 47 LAC Reviews (91%) The corresponding percentage in the IROs previous report was 91% and 97% for two respective periods for which data was collected. The IROs believe that support from a designated Business Support Officer has been invaluable in achieving this improvement.**

- Thorough review and monitoring of implementation and difference made - the IROs welcome the commitment by the Children and Families' Service to review the template of the Part 6 Care and Support Plan hoping that it will result in a less repetitive form that is more child centred. The high number of summary reports presented prior to LAC reviews is helpful to both Social Workers and IROs in the preparation work.
- Quality and consistency of record keeping - the IROs remain of the opinion that maintaining case records has been consistently good for some time.
- Acute focus on Permanency Planning for Looked After Children to reduce the number of children being looked after - the IROs welcome the commitment by the Children and Families' Service to review its policy on Special Guardianship Orders and are of the view that the Service has been proactive in all relevant cases where Special Guardianship Orders could be considered. The IROs continue to attend Permanent Care Planning meetings which it is felt leads to timely information sharing and the avoidance of drift.
- The LAC Review process has continued using a variety of virtual media and whilst this has enabled the continuation of contact with children and key adults, there is also a huge disadvantage in not having face to face conversation with children. A total of 120 LAC Reviews were held between 1 April and 23 July, 2021 of which 118 (98%) were within statutory timescales.
- The IROs are committed to developing their approach to ensure that the focus is on the child and the child's review process. The report expands on what developing a child centred approach entails and the progress made thus far. The Service Manager would be happy to attend a meeting of the Panel to share and be challenged on the work undertaken to strengthen the IRO service.
- The IROs continue to be invited to quarterly meetings which are constructive and a means of collaborating to improve practice. The report provides an overview of the matters discussed at the most recent meeting in April, 2021 including the requirement for all Looked After Children to have Life Journey Work; considerations around contact and the need for contact to be based on the outcome of a risk assessment in each case; the provision of documentation, and the Public Law Reform.
- Consistency of Social Workers and staff turnover. The report sets out the issues arising following scrutiny of cases where there has been a change of Social Worker since the previous statutory review. The IROs welcome the commitment made by the Children and Families Service, that where there is a change of Social Worker for the child, the case remains allocated to the same practice group; accordingly, the same Practice Leader should continue to have oversight of the work.
- That it is very positive to note that from a random sample of 30 cases, Looked After Children statutory visits were conducted within timescales in all 30 (100%).
- The IROs are of the view that the key matters arising from the report relate to the improvement in terms of the number of reports submitted in advance of LAC Reviews; the continuation of efforts to ensure that every looked after child has an up to date assessment and that the Service Manager be invited to attend a meeting of the Panel to present the IRO Development Plan.

In responding to the report by the IROs on behalf of the Children and Families Service , the Interim Service Manager – Safeguarding welcomed the report as a positive evaluation of the work overall. He confirmed that a draft policy based on a no detriment approach to supporting applications for special guardianship orders for looked after children has been produced and will be considered by the Children's Management Team later this month. Further, there will be a renewed focus on ensuring that each looked after child has an up to date assessment of their needs. The North Wales Adoption Service has appointed a Life Journey social worker to assist the authorities across North Wales with timeliness and quality of the Life Journey work. The Service Manager acknowledged that arrangements for contact for children in care was a particular challenge for the

Service during the two lockdown periods of the pandemic. Although the Service put the needs of the child at the heart of decision making, it was often faced with competing tensions in the context of its duty of care to the health of parents, foster carers and staff. Lessons were learnt along the way and staff worked diligently and stoically to achieve the best arrangements for children's contact with important people, balancing the needs of all in a period of uncertainty. Notably, Care Inspectorate Wales during its recent assurance visit fully recognised how well the Service responded to the pandemic generally. The Service will also implement the necessary changes to practice over the coming months to respond to the public law reform agenda. With regards to consistency of social worker, this is recognised as a major factor in children and young people's journey through care as it is key to building relationships with trust at their core. The Service will undoubtedly face challenges as social workers and IROs move on or are absent for periods through illness or maternity leave. In that context, the Service endeavours to keep transfers between social workers to a minimum; the Service has recently made two new permanent social worker appointments and 2 temporary appointments.

The Panel noted the assessment of progress provided by the IROs as well as the Service's response to the challenges raised. In discussing the report the following points were made by the Panel –

- The Panel welcomed the report of the IROs which it felt had evolved over the past few years to provide a comprehensive but succinct overview of practice including challenge and support as appropriate thereby fulfilling an important assurance function.
- The Panel had some concern over staff turnover especially as children and young people state that social worker continuity is a key factor for them and that changes in social worker mean they have to tell their stories over and over again. Reference was made to national statistics which indicate that social worker turnover has reduced; this being so the Panel queried whether the reduction had been replicated locally, whether the introduction of more efficient working practices as a result of the pandemic e.g. virtual hearings meaning less time is spent waiting in courts is a factor, and also whether lessons are being taken from the new ways of working to be applied long-term in order to help retain experienced social workers.

The Interim Service Manager – Safeguarding confirmed that the Service's staff turnover rate is within the corporate target. The retention of experienced social workers in front-line child protection practice has always been a challenge for local authorities because of the complexities and pressures of this area of social work; it is also the area where the Service has a high proportion of less experienced staff, the pattern being that having built experience in child protection social workers then move on to management roles or become IROs. In terms of learning from the pandemic one of the main advantages has been court related work. Court hearings have been conducted virtually throughout the pandemic, thereby saving on time spent waiting and travelling to and from the court building. However, there have been questions around virtual hearings with the President of the Family Division stating that for families and especially parents, not being physically present in court does not serve justice well. Whilst final court hearings will therefore revert to in person attendance discussions about whether other hearings such as direction hearings which serve administrative purposes can continue to be conducted virtually are ongoing; this would be welcome from the Service's perspective and representation to that effect will be made to the Local Family Justice Board. *The Panel indicated that it was willing to support making such representations agreeing that virtual court proceedings for administrative ends bring efficiency benefits.*

The Service Manager – Intensive Intervention referred to the Service restructure following the CIW inspection report of 2017 which introduced the practice team model with each team headed by a Practice Leader. Those Practice Leaders who work in intensive intervention have remained in post and in the intervening years have gained experience and a wide range of skills. The professional development of staff does inevitably lead to gaps on the front line; however recent social worker appointments have been made and appropriate support will be provided where the appointees are less experienced.

- The Panel had some concern about the production of reports noting that the timely presentation of reports appeared to be a challenge for some social workers in the context of other work pressures with the impression being of social workers “chasing their tails” in the sense of working very hard just to keep on top of things. It was suggested that increased support and supervision might be appropriate especially in the case of less experienced social workers so that the compilation of reports does not become burdensome.

The Interim Service Manager – Safeguarding emphasised that the provision of pastoral care and support for children’s social workers is critical given the challenging nature of the work and is an aspect that will be the subject of further work as part of the workforce retention strategy.

- With reference to looked after children assessments, the Panel sought clarification of when it was hoped the additional input and support for this element of the work would yield results in improved timeliness and quality of assessments.

The Interim Service Manager – Safeguarding likened the task of keeping assessments up to date to painting the Forth Bridge in that when they are completed it is time to start again as they become outdated very quickly. The key is to create a mechanism whereby assessments are regularly reviewed by Practice Leaders; to this end he was keen to establish a benchmark of where the Service has reached with assessments across the board for all the children in the Authority’s care and thereafter to set a target for them to be updated to be reviewed by the Practice Leaders. The quality assurance role of the IROs is critical in this respect in terms of cases individually and collectively.

**It was agreed to endorse the following key matters arising from the report as identified by the IROs –**

- **That the increase in the number of reports submitted in advance of LAC Reviews is very much welcomed;**
- **That efforts to ensure that every looked after child has an up to date assessment need to continue and the quality of the assessment overseen by the Practice Lead, and**
- **The Service Manager (Safeguarding and Quality Unit) be invited to the Panel’s next meeting in December, 2021 to present the IRO Development Plan.**

## **5 IOACC FOSTERING SERVICE – STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

The report of the Service Manager – Intensive Intervention incorporating the Isle of Anglesey Fostering Service’s Statement of Purpose was presented for the Panel’s consideration.

The Service Manager – Intensive Intervention reported that in line with requirement of the Local Authority Fostering Services (Wales) Regulations 2018, the Statement of Purpose provides information about the Isle of Anglesey County Council’s Fostering Service with

regard to the Service's management and staffing structure; the range of needs of the children for whom the service is provided, and how the service is delivered to meet the needs of children and to support them to achieve their personal outcomes. The Statement of Purpose will be available to Welsh Ministers, CIW, approved and prospective foster carers, any child placed by the fostering service, the parents of any such child, persons working for the purpose of the local authority fostering service and any other person on request. In addition to the Statement of Purpose, there is a range of specific and procedural documents that support the aims, objectives, service principles and standards set out for the Fostering Service. The Statement of Purpose will be updated on an annual basis or earlier in the event of any changes made to the services provided.

In considering the Statement of Purpose the Panel made the following points –

- Whether the range of key legislation and policies governing the work of the Fostering Service facilitate or hinder the delivery of the service and whether they need to be simplified.

The Service Manager – Intensive Intervention said that the key pieces of legislation and policies collectively contribute to the standards and expectations on local authorities as Fostering agencies. Fostering is a statutory responsibility and it is an important responsibility for local authorities to fulfil in terms of ensuring the best possible care for the children whom it looks after and in ensuring also that the right people are engaged to provide the care on the Authority's behalf. The Service has developed over the last two years and two social workers along with a support worker have been appointed over the summer the latter to provide support for friends and family foster carers.

- Whether the Statement of Purpose sufficiently captures the aims and objectives of the Fostering Services and how it proposes to achieve them.

The Service Manager – Intensive Intervention said that the Isle of Anglesey County Council's is a leading authority in terms of the provision made for the Authority's Foster Carers specifically the unique package of benefits that was developed for foster carers in April, 2019 in recognition of the challenging role they undertake and which has provided an exemplar model for other authorities many of which have since introduced similar benefits. The Statement of Purpose is not a static document and will evolve as new forms of provision, support and opportunities for foster carers are developed. The Statement as presented meets the regulatory requirements and provides a starting point for that conversation. There is a risk that the purpose of the Statement which is to provide a clear description of the service for service users and other stakeholders might be lost in an overly detailed document.

- Whether in order to ensure sufficient opportunities for young care leavers to move forward with their lives the single designated unit In Llawr y Dref to help young people acquire the skills to live independently is enough to meet the need.

The Service Manager – Intensive Intervention explained that many of the Authority's Looked After young people are happy to remain with their foster carers beyond the age of 18 under the Welsh Government's "When I am Ready" scheme which enables a young person in foster care to remain with their foster carer until they are 21 years old. The arrangement allows the young person to remain in a stable environment up to the age of 21 and to prepare for independent living. The Authority encourages foster carers to maintain contact with the young people they have fostered in a long-term supportive role. However, the Authority needs to look at ways in which it can support a growing number of care leavers to transition to living independently which is as a direct result of the high number of children who have entered care over the course of the past few years. Accordingly the role of the post 15 team has been strengthened and a social

worker has been appointed to work specifically with care leavers as well as a personal advisor to help draft pathway plans. There is further work that needs to be done and the relationship with the Housing Service is key to progress with the housing unit in Llawr y Dref exemplifying effective inter-service collaboration to develop a model that is working successfully in terms of providing young people leaving care with the opportunity and resource to develop essential skills.

- Whether other authorities have replicated the developments made by Anglesey in recent years in Children and Families' Service e.g. the special offer to foster carers in the form of a package of benefits and whether the Authority has had recognition for the enterprise it has shown and for pioneering what has proved to be a successful initiative.

The Service Manager – Intensive Intervention said that at the time the special offer was introduced, Anglesey was viewed with admiration for its vision and for having the political will to implement the vision; the Welsh government is now keen for the Council Tax discount to be adopted as a national model for care leavers and it would be gratifying to believe that Anglesey may have had some influence on Welsh Government's thinking. The Service Manager said that he was not aware of the Authority's having received any formal recognition for the work.

Councillor Llinos Medi, Leader and Portfolio Member for Social Services confirmed that she was able by virtue of her role as a member of the Welsh Local Government Association to highlight the Authority's work within the local government sector and with the Deputy Minister and that further, a presentation on Anglesey's plans including those for its foster carers as well as others within the Children and Families' Service e.g. Catrefi Clyd (small family homes), has been made to all the Welsh authorities' Social Services Portfolio Holders.

**It was agreed –**

- **To endorse the Fostering Statement of Purpose as presented.**
- **That the Children and Family Service's achievements in developing creative plans for the delivery of services be included in the Authority Annual Performance Report.**
- **To ask Officers to consider further ways of publicising Children and Family Services' achievements.**

## **6 CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Interim Service Manager – Safeguarding presented the report incorporating proposed terms of reference for the Corporate Parenting Panel and he invited the Panel's views on whether it deemed the paper sufficiently captures the Panel's range of responsibilities.

In considering the terms of reference, the Panel suggested the following amendments –

- The opening statement under Purpose of the Corporate Parenting Panel rather than headlining the legal requirements, to refer to the Council's aim as defined in its Corporate Plan 2017-22 to create the conditions whereby individuals can thrive and realise their long-term potential.
- To expand on the Elected Member role under point 7 to reflect the spirit of what being a corporate parent means e.g. to want the best for children and young people whom the Authority looks after, for them to be healthy and to do well at school and for them to be safe and happy.
- To include a Voices from Care Cymru representative among the Panel's membership as a link between the Panel and looked after children.

- To specify the Elected Members Portfolio/Scrutiny responsibilities and Champion for Children in Care role under Membership of the Panel
- To refer to the Director of Education as Director of Learning, Skills and Young People and the Education Service as the Learning Service.
- To refer to the Health Authority representative as Local Health Board representative
- To include among the Panel's responsibilities the production of a twice yearly newsletter for looked after children and young people setting out matters of interest from panel meetings.

**It was agreed –**

- **To endorse the Panel's terms of reference subject to incorporating the amendments suggested.**
- **To ask the Interim Service Manager – Safeguarding to circulate the amended terms of reference for final confirmation.**

## **7 NEXT SCHEDULED MEETING**

The arrangements for the next scheduled meeting of the Panel at 10:00 a.m. on Tuesday 14 December, 2021 were noted.

## **8 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 Paragraphs 12 and 13 of Schedule 12A to the said Act.**

## **9 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENTS OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE LOOKED AFTER BY THE AUTHORITY**

The Senior Well-being Manager gave a verbal report on the educational attainments of the Authority's looked after children at Key Stage 4 and she informed the Panel that more comprehensive information would be provided to the Panel's December meeting once PEPs had been updated. The following main points were highlighted –

- Of the cohort of 10, 60% were successful in the examinations they had sat; 80% were proceeding to further education and/or apprenticeships whilst 20% had not sat any examinations and had not been able to identify a post-16 placement.
- That a few of the cohort had performed particularly well in their GCSE examinations.

The Senior Well-being Manager provided some background information about each child's placement, personal circumstances and mental wellbeing which are influencing factors in how well they achieve. She confirmed that two individuals had not been able to engage meaningfully with education nor with the Intervention Team.

The Panel noted the information and sought clarification as to whether the children/young people had performed according to expectations; the Panel also sought information about KS2, KS3 and post 16 outcomes.

The Senior Well-being Manager confirmed that the children/young people referred to had performed in accordance with targets and whilst there are other priorities in their lives, the Authority is satisfied with the outcomes overall. Whilst many people make up the support team which seeks to do the best by these children and young people and to help them achieve the best possible results, there are two cases where despite the intervention provided, the individuals have not done so well and have not identified a way forward. With regard to evidencing performance against targets the electronic PEP is able to generate data to this end.

The Panel commented that where the children and young people have succeeded, the Authority should be formally congratulating them either by card or letter. The LAC Education Liaison Officer confirmed that an acknowledgement card signed by herself and the Director of Social Services wishing them all the best is sent to look after children and young people in Years 6 and 11 after the publication of examination results.

**It was agreed –**

- **To note the information.**
- **That the Panel be provided with a more detailed educational outcomes report to its December, 2021 meeting to include KS2, KS3 and post 16 attainments along with an analysis of performance against targets.**

**Mrs Annwen Morgan  
Chair**

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