

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

Minutes of the meeting held on 22 July 2013

- PRESENT:** Ms Anwen Huws (Head of Children's Services) (Chair)
- Councillor Kenneth Hughes (Portfolio Member for Social Services and Housing)
Councillor Dylan Rees (Partnership and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee)
Mr David Lydford (Fostering Care Association)
Natalie Woodworth (Principal Officer – Operations)
Deiniol Williams (LAC Team Manager)
Deborah Stammers (Child Placement Team Manager)
Sean McLearn (LAC Co-ordinator)
Ann Holmes (Committee Officer)
- APOLOGIES:** Councillor Ieuan Williams, Gwen Carrington, Mr Richard Parry Jones, Alison Jones (NYAS) Mair Read, Rona Jones, Heulwen Owen, Llinos Edwards, Dr Janet Horn and Sue Willis
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INTRODUCTION

Ms Anwen Huws, Head of Children's Services welcomed all those present to this meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel and she informed the Members that in the absence of Mr R.P.Jones, the regular Chair of the Panel and Mrs Gwen Carrington, Director of Community, she would be chairing this meeting. As this was the first meeting of the Panel of the new Council she asked those present to introduce themselves.

1 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

No declaration of interest was received.

2 MINUTES 22 APRIL, 2013 MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 22 April, 2013 were presented and noted.

The Chair confirmed that from her perspective the minutes were a correct record of the deliberations at the previous meeting but as there was no one present at this meeting who was able to second that viewpoint it was agreed that those present at the 22 April meeting be asked to give notice within two weeks of any objections to the minutes.

3 MATTERS ARISING - LETTER BY THE PANEL'S CHAIR REGARDING DENTAL PROVISION FOR CHILDREN LEAVING CARE

- The Chair informed the Panel that she had met with the Head of Service (Housing) and that they were assessing the resource implications of the action plan in respect of the young people support and accommodation strategy. She also confirmed that the Coedlys Project was now operational and would be officially opened shortly.
- The Chair updated the Panel on the arrangements with regard to setting aside a day for Education and Children's Service Officers to analyse the findings of national research in relation to the educational attainment of children in care in order to then jointly develop a plan to maximise the opportunities and life chances for looked after children by saying that the designated day had been deferred from June to October.

- The Chair confirmed that she had forwarded to the standing Chair of the Panel information in respect of the success of the young person in care who had had his artwork accepted for exhibition at the Foundling Museum with a view to that achievement being recognised formally by the County Council.

Action Arising: The Head of Children's Services to follow the matter up with the Chair of the Panel.

- Correspondence between the Chair of the Panel and the Chief Executive of the BCUHB regarding the issue that had arisen in discussion at the Panel's 22 April meeting that all looked after children on Anglesey do not have access to a core dentist service to which they are fundamentally entitled was presented for the Panel's information. In her response to the Chair, the Chief Executive of the BCUHB explains how access to primary care dental services for children in care in North Wales is provided via two alternative routes – the Community Dental Service and General Dental Services and she outlines the remit of these services, as well as providing contact details for CDS clinics and general dental practices.

The Chair observed that the LAC Nurse in her report to the Panel at agenda item 4 confirms that following discussions within BCUHB it has been determined that care leavers can continue to access the community dental health service until the age of 21 and that the PI performance in Anglesey with regard to Dental Appointments for LAC children and young people is within acceptable thresholds.

It was agreed to note the correspondence as presented and to not also that the report of the LAC Nurse confirms that the PI performance for Dental Appointments for LAC and young people is within acceptable thresholds.

No further action arising.

4 SERVICE REPORTS - REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER

- The report of the Independent Reviewing Officer for the period from April to June, 2013 was presented for the Panel's consideration. The report provided information about the looked after population in Anglesey during the first quarter of 2013/14 including numbers and placements; the number of reviews held within statutory timescales; good practice issues in terms of placement and care planning and any issues arising along with risks and concerns and how those are being addressed. Also incorporated within the report was information about the LAC Review Service user feedback.

The Chair highlighted the salient points from the report as follows –

- The position with regard to the two young persons who continue to be missing from their placements.

The Principal Officer (Operations) updated the Panel by saying that these two cases remain open with the department as regards the continued allocation of a social worker to them and there is also continuing liaison with North Wales Police regarding the matter. A process has been put in place to risk assess with the aim of reducing or eliminating such occurrences in future. The IRO also reviews the situation regularly. In addition, a Missing Children and Child Sexual Exploitation of Children Task Group has been established and as part of the work of that group a meeting has been set up between the Principal Officer (Operations) and an official from Barnardos who has particular expertise in this area to develop local arrangements.

- Continuing concerns with regard to maintaining the stability of placements.

The Child Placement Team Leader updated the Panel on an invest to save proposal which was approved by the Council's Executive on 15th July. The Officer explained

that the proposal bid is for an investment of £50k to be used to employ a Recruitment and Marketing Officer and to promote fostering on the Island. The Recruitment and Marketing Officer will take a lead role in implementing the recruitment strategy in order to enhance the Child Placement team's interface with the public of Anglesey. The improvement in attracting prospective foster carers will raise the service's profile, increase placement choice for children on the Island thus improving the fit between the placement and the child's needs and will also reduce placement costs by reducing the use of private agency placements.

The Portfolio Member for Social Services said he had been seeking to prioritise this issue and that he strongly endorsed the invest to save strategy and its aim of bolstering the Council's own foster care service thereby providing improved placement choice and better serving the needs of children requiring care.

The Foster Carers Association's representative commented that the fact that the Foster Care Support team which supports existing foster carers has also been engaged in recruitment and assessment activity has posed a problem for a long time in so far as this dual responsibility has diluted the time they are able to give to support activities. He said that he believed that the number of foster carers has reduced over time for a number of reasons including a natural process of moving on; some are lost as a result of the investigative process and there is also the economic situation which has led to a situation where both adults in many two adult households are now working meaning they are not able to dedicate so much time to other activities such as fostering. He believed that foster carers are now more generally satisfied with the position as regards remuneration but that there is room for improvement with support matters especially with regard to investigations.

The Chair said that she wished to see foster carers as an integral part of the planning and delivery of a new strategy. The intention is to have in place clear targets in terms of response and follow up visits; more training courses so that a standard is set e.g. a time limit of 6 months for completing the assessment of foster carers from the initial contact.

- Children in the LAC system for over 12 months.

The Principal Officer (Operations) confirmed that a small number of children have been in the LAC System for significant length of time due partly to the inability to find a suitable placement for their needs. The Officer said that there is a shortage of families for children with specific development needs and that age is also a factor with older children proving more difficult to place.

The Chair commented that the Panel requires assurance that this matter is being addressed and that the service has not overlooked any consideration and she suggested that an audit be undertaken to this end with a report back to the Panel's next meeting.

The Chair proceeded to refer to prospective changes with regard to the Public Law Outline and she said that the Service's preparatory work plans to ensure that the Council conforms to the new processes which set out the expectations on all parties in taking care cases to court will be shared with the Panel at its next meeting.

It was agreed to accept the report and to note its contents.

Actions Arising:

- **The Principal Officer (Operations) to undertake an audit of the Service's approach and management of children in the LAC system for 12 months or over and to report back to the Panel at its next meeting.**

- **Head of Children's Services to provide the Panel at its next meeting with information regarding the service's preparatory work plans for conforming to changes in relation to the Public Law Outline processes.**
- The report of the LAC Education Liaison Officer for the first quarter of 2013/14 was presented for the Panel's consideration. The report provided information regarding the educational profile and status of the children/young persons with whom the Officer is working currently.

The Chair referred to the two group activity sessions which had been held during the period in which children and young people had participated in practical, creative and team activity work aimed at enabling the children to get to know each other, to improve self-esteem and to develop trust in others.

The Principal Officer (Operations) explained what the additional tutoring sessions for Year 11 pupils which were very well received, entailed. She said that the Service has decided to utilise a Welsh Government grant which was given to all authorities to improve the educational attainment of children in these years to engage a Learning Mentor who liaises with schools and specifically year 11, provides tuition and support with revision, and works on a one to one basis with the children. With residual money from the grant four looked after children were offered, and two received additional tuition in subjects where they felt they needed support in preparation for their GCSE examinations.

A member of the Panel enquired whether LAC school attendance rates compared favourably with those of other children and commented that the report did not cover this consideration. It was agreed that the LAC Education Liaison Officer be asked to provide this information in her next quarterly update to the Panel

It was agreed to accept the report and to note its contents.

Action Arising: LAC Education Liaison Officer to include LAC school attendance data in her next quarterly update to the Panel.

- The report of the LAC Nurse for the first quarter of 2013/14 was presented for the Panel's consideration. The report provided information about the health of the looked after population during the period including the number of health assessments undertaken and any issues arising thereon as well as achievements including confirmation that all LAC children and Care Leavers are now able to gain easy access to dental care.

The Chair highlighted the second graph for LAC Children's Health Assessments during the period and the Officer's commentary regarding what she anticipated would be a slight downward trend in performance initially as a change in the time schedule for the completion of the assessments is introduced, and she suggested that the LAC Nurse be asked to attend the Panel's next meeting to clarify the situation and that a dialogue be held with her in the interim to provide assurance that there are no breaches in performance as a consequence.

It was agreed to accept the report and to note its contents.

Actions Arising:

- **LAC Team Manager to ask the LAC Nurse to attend the Panel's next meeting to clarify the position with regard to the introduction of a new time schedule for the completion of health assessments and any issues arising therefrom.**
- **LAC Team Manager to arrange a dialogue with the LAC Nurse in the interim to obtain assurance that no breaches in performance have occurred, or are occurring.**
- The report of the LAC Team Manager for the first quarter of 2013/14 was presented for the Panel's consideration. The report provided data regarding the LAC population since 31 March, 2012 covering changes in LAC numbers and reasons, the legal status of looked after

children and young people, the type of placements and why, along with issues of good practice and planned actions. The report also contained an update on the three authorities which would pioneer the When I am ready arrangements – a scheme to facilitate more care leavers remaining with their former foster carers beyond the age of 18.

The following were highlighted as discussion points –

- The decline in LAC Team Statutory visits during April and May. However, preliminary data sources suggest that this has been largely remedied in June, 2013. A remedial action that is being implemented is that of monthly rather than 6 weekly statutory visits which it is intended will improve the service's statutory visits performance considerably.

It was pointed out by a member of the Panel that the quality of visits is as important as the frequency with which they are held. It was emphasised that it is essential to have in place a schedule of regular visits of quality in order to identify any potential issues before they become problems.

- Free Gym Membership for LAC children and young people

The LAC Team Manager informed the Panel that following discussion the Leisure Department has confirmed that it is only able to offer subsidised and not free gym membership to LAC children and young people and that a proposal made is a charge of £20 per month for a group of five individuals and then multiples thereof meaning that the cost of gym membership for 19 looked after individuals who are likely to make use of this facility and service would amount to approximately £1,000.

The Chair said she would raise the matter further with the Director of Community and notwithstanding the Children's service could look at whether it could meet the suggested payment and terms for membership she believed it to be an important matter of principle in the sense that there should be a whole Council approach to being a corporate parent meaning that each service within the corporate body should be considering how it approaches that responsibility and contributes to it.

It was agreed to accept the report and to note its contents.

Actions Arising:

- **Head of Children's Service to further raise the issue of free gym membership for LAC and young people with the Director of Community specifically in the context of the Council's corporate approach to being a corporate parent.**
- **A written report by the Aftercare Service to be provided to the next meeting of the Panel.**
- A report by the Child Placement Team was presented for the Panel's consideration which incorporated analysis of the type of placements made and the current position with regard to the health of the Fostering Service including the impact which an upward trend in the LAC population is likely to have on the service and the consequent need to plan for additional placements.

The Child Placement Team Manager elaborated on the "Invest to Save" initiative which had been approved by the Executive and which was intended to strengthen the Authority's own fostering service by placing renewed focus on recruiting new families to the service via a recruitment and Marketing Officer who will be employed to promote fostering on the Island. The proposal suggests net benefit of 20 new families over a post implementation period of 3 years, subject to further investment from savings. It is projected that this will produce significant net savings of approximately £300k over that period.

It was agreed to accept the report and to note its contents.

No further action arising.

5 INDEPENDENT ADVOCACY SERVICE

A first quarter report by the NYAS Advocacy Service was circulated to the Panel's Members at the meeting.

The Chair expressed disappointment regarding the commentary about lack of progression with regard to participation with Looked after children. She said that as the Head of Service she had requested that arrangements be put in place to this end and she informed the Panel that the report would be considered by the Service's Management Team later that week with a view to identifying officers to liaise with NYAS to arrange regular meetings between the Head of Service and children in receipt of care.

The Panel noted its concern that the report was not presented bilingually and was only available at the meeting.

The Panel acknowledged receipt of the report and it was agreed that it be given consideration at the next meeting.

No further action arising.

6 MATTERS FOR INFORMATION - CORPORATE PARENTING STRATEGY

A draft Corporate Parenting Strategy for 2013-16 was presented for the Panel's information and comment.

The Chair said that she believed that the Panel over time had become overly focussed on scrutinising Social Services activity with regard to Looked After Children and young people instead of developing a broader vision of corporate parenting and a strategy to fulfil that vision. Following a constructive discussion it had been agreed at a previous meeting of this Panel that work around a strategy would be undertaken following the completion of work on the Corporate Safeguarding Policy. That work has now been completed and an associated work programme is nearing completion thus allowing time to consider how the Panel can move forward with a corporate parenting strategy. An initial strategy as presented has been developed and pledges that every child in the Authority's care has access to the following –

- A home where they can feel safe valued and cared for
- Education to ensure that they achieve the best possible outcomes
- Health in the form of appropriate health care and advice
- Leisure so that they can enjoy a wide experience of leisure, cultural, sport and social activity to fulfil their potential
- Support when leaving care so that they can prepare for the future and make positive choices for independent living.

The Officer proceeded by saying that the intention is that the strategy should provide the Panel with specific themes around the pledges, and if it can be agreed with the Looked After population that this reflects their aspirations and desires and represents what is important to them and that it crystalizes what the Council as a corporate body wishes to achieve for the children in its care then an action plan can be developed with designated services leading on each theme as appropriate to their remit. Within those themes a programme of activity for the next three years can then be formulated which will enable those aspects to be fulfilled. In addition to being provided with the IRO report and the Children's Services report, the Panel would at each quarterly meeting invite 2 lead officers on the various themes to address the Panel on progress and achievements in relation to those themes. The intention is to instigate a shift in the Panel's focus so that it becomes more corporate in its outlook and places responsibility for meeting the pledges made to children and young people in the Authority's care on services across the Council.

The Panel considered the document and whilst they were agreed with the broad thrust of the strategy members did suggest that the expertise with regard to Looked After Children lies with Social Services.

The Chair acknowledged that Social Services have the expertise with regard to the statutory functions but the programme suggested by the Strategy presumes that the Council as a corporate body acts as a corporate parent thus taking responsibility for the other aspects of the care and welfare of looked after children encompassing physical wellbeing, leisure activities and employment opportunities. The Strategy seeks to provide a framework for the Council within which it can act as a corporate parent.

It was agreed to accept the Corporate Parenting Strategy for the purpose of further consultation.

7 THE PANEL'S MEETINGS SCHEDULE

Consideration was given to the Panel's current meetings schedule with a view to better enabling officers to report on full quarter outcomes whilst conforming to reporting timetables.

It was agreed to review the Panel's meetings schedule for the reasons given.

Action Arising: Committee Officer to formulate a new schedule of meetings for the remainder of the year with the consent of the Panel's regular Chair.

**Ms Anwen Huws (Head of Children's Services)
(In the Chair)**