

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

Minutes of the meeting held on 2 June, 2014

PRESENT: Mr Richard Parry Jones (Chief Executive) (Chair)

Councillor Ieuan Williams (Council Leader & Portfolio Member for Education)
Councillor Ann Griffith (Corporate Scrutiny Committee)
Councillor Dylan Rees (Partnership & Regeneration Scrutiny Committee)
Mr Douglas Watson (Chair, Anglesey Foster Carers' Association)
Mrs Gwen Carrington (Director of Community)
Mrs Delyth Molyneux (Head of Learning)
Glyn Hughes (Interim Principal Corporate Parenting Officer)
Deiniol Williams (LAC Team Manager)
Deborah Stammers (Child Placement Team Leader)
Heulwen Owen (LAC Education Liaison Officer)
Llinos Edwards (LAC Nurse)
Alison Jones (NYAS)
Ann Holmes (Committee Officer)

APOLOGIES: Councillor Kenneth Hughes (Portfolio Member for Housing & Social Services), Sue Willis (BCUHB), Anwen Huws (Head of Children's Services), Mrs Rona Jones (IRO), Natalie Woodworth (Principal Operations Officer), Mr Mair Read (SEN Officer), Sean McClearn (Leaving Care Co-ordinator), Llio Johnson (CYPP)

ALSO PRESENT: Llinos Parry (Fostering Recruitment & Marketing Officer) (for item 4)

1 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

No declaration of interest was received.

2 MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 10th February 2014 were presented and confirmed as correct.

3 MATTERS ARISING

The following matters were raised –

- A Member said that she had requested information at the previous meeting regarding children and young people lost in care who may be the victims of, or who are at risk from trafficking and/or sexual exploitation specifically in relation to the processes which determine when should the relevant local authority cease to pursue such cases. The Director of Community said that there is currently a workstream on a regional basis aimed at harmonising arrangements with those of the North Wales Police Service with regard to dealing with children and young people who go missing from care so the subject matter is being addressed and it is a question of reporting back on developments.

It was agreed to note the position.

ACTION ARISING: Director of Community to provide the Panel at its next meeting with information regarding the process and protocol for dealing with children and young people lost in care including collaborative links with other agencies.

A Member sought clarification of the position with regard to providing free gym membership for the looked after population. The Director of Community confirmed that discussions with the Leisure Service are ongoing on this matter and that these are focused on seeking a way forward that will accommodate competing priorities, for example the Leisure Service's need to meet income targets and the general pressures of diminishing resources. Members emphasised the Authority's corporate parenting duties towards the children and young people in its care meaning a collective responsibility across services to safeguard and promote the interests, wellbeing and life chances of Looked After Children and Young People. The Director of Community said that although the wish is to achieve a resolution of this matter, the details remain to be worked through with the services concerned.

It was agreed to note the position.

ACTION ARISING: Director of Community to provide the Panel at its next meeting with an update on the progress of the discussions.

4 FOSTERING RECRUITMENT STRATEGY

Ms Llinos Parry, the Fostering Recruitment and Marketing Officer provided the Panel with a visual presentation on the aims and objectives of the Fostering Recruitment Strategy along with background information about the local looked after population on Anglesey, the current pool of local authority foster carers and the extent of the interest in fostering over the previous three years. The Fostering Recruitment and Marketing Officer highlighted the key considerations in relation to the Strategy which is divided into two thematic parts - Recruitment and Retention and the specific challenges relating to those two dimensions.

In the discussion that ensued the Panel debated the reasons why foster carers leave the Authority's service; the loss of experience which that might entail and the sustainability of the recruitment strategy. Questions were also asked about the Authority's performance as regards the number of children in its care who have to be looked after away from their communities because there is no appropriate placement for them close to home as well as the extent of the bilingual provision. In terms of sustainability, the Interim Principal Corporate Parenting Officer said that as the Authority reduces its use of independent fostering placements, the resulting savings will be used to provide additional support for the Authority's foster carers.

Mr Douglas Watson, Chair of the Anglesey Foster Carers' Association spoke from the perspective of foster carers and highlighted the following as matters that are causing them concern:

- Insufficient support leading to feelings of isolation, vulnerability and low morale.
- Lack of corporate recognition for Foster Carers reflected by the fact that the Payment of Skills scheme has not been revised since 1998 making foster carers feel undervalued and unappreciated particularly in comparison with independent foster carers leading to the perception of a two tier system.
- The need for a Foster Carers' Charter to confirm and enshrine the Authority's commitment to its Foster Carers.

The Interim Principal Corporate Parenting Officer said that the issues raised by Foster Carers are being addressed via the Foster Carers' Forum which was launched in February as a channel whereby Foster Carers can have more direct input into decision making within the service. Specific concerns are being dealt with via three working groups which have been established under the Forum to look at a Foster Carers' Charter, a Foster Carers' Handbook and a review of the payment structure for Foster Carers. The Director of Community emphasised that the service is sensitive to the sentiments of Foster Carers and is keen to enhance the Authority's engagement with them in the interests also of placement stability on Anglesey. A strategy is emerging that will form a platform for resolving the issues that have been raised.

It was agreed to note the information along with the points raised.

NO FURTHER ACTION ARISING

5 REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER

The report of the Independent Reviewing Officer for Quarter 4 of 2013/14 was presented for the Panel's consideration. The report provided a statistical overview of the looked after population on Anglesey during the fourth quarter along with the issues affecting this population and the service response to them.

The Interim Principal Corporate Parenting Officer highlighted the main considerations from the report in relation to performance management; the number of children and young people currently being looked after which although subject to fluctuations has shown a pattern of steady decline over the past year; the nature of the placements made and the reasons why the children and young people are currently looked after by the Authority. The Officer referred to the key messages garnered from young people from their reviews. The general message is that the young people concerned seem to be unenthused by their reviews and many find them boring. In addition identifying suitable venues for conducting reviews continues to be problematic.

The Panel considered the information presented and highlighted the following matters –

- Members sought clarification and reassurance regarding the case of one young person whose behaviour had proved to be challenging and whose care plans had been subject to constant change. The Officers explained that as a result of discussions the continuation of the young person's current placement has been secured thus avoiding an out of county placement and there is cross agency input to the case. The LAC Team Manager confirmed that the best outcome has been achieved in the circumstances.
- Looked After Children and Young People's participation in review meetings. It was emphasised that there must be a continuation of efforts to ensure Looked After children's involvement in their review meetings bearing in mind that they are individuals with distinct needs and not a homogenous group and that these meetings need to be held in an environment in which the children and young people feel comfortable and confident enough to participate.

The NYAS Senior Advocate said that the report does not provide sufficient detail regarding the number of children and young people who have attended reviews and whether they have been offered an advocacy service. She pointed out that the child should always be the focus of these meetings. The Interim Principal Corporate Parenting Officer emphasised that a review is essentially a process and not a meeting. The Director of Community said that the service has a dual responsibility in terms of review and participation and that it needs to reflect on ways of facilitating the discharge of that responsibility and how current arrangements might be hindering that process.

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

NO FURTHER ACTION ARISING

6 SERVICE REPORTS

6.1 The report of the LAC Team Manager for Quarter 4 2013/14 was presented for the Panel's consideration.

The LAC Team Manager highlighted the fact that statutory visits continue to average over 90% for the quarter. The service is however committed to further improving the process. He confirmed that he had been in contact with two North Wales authorities in relation to their policies for funding care leavers as had been requested at the previous meeting and that the Leaving Care Co-ordinator would now broaden that inquiry to include the remaining authorities prior to reviewing Anglesey's policy. It was also intended that the Leaving Care Co-ordinator should report fully on the implementation of the Lost in Care Action Plan to the next meeting. The Officer also drew attention to a thematic inspection by CSSIW at the beginning of May which was a nationwide inspection of a specific age group that has displayed a defined set of at risk behaviours or specific vulnerabilities. Overall the feedback for Anglesey has been positive with the Authority deemed to have shown improvements since the previous inspection.

The Director of Community said that the service has made significant progress in terms of improving its processes and procedures and that the next challenge is for it to be more ambitious

for its Looked After children and young people; to raise the expectations for them and to focus on qualitative aspects of the service.

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

ACTION ARISING: Leaving Care Co-ordinator to report to the next meeting on the implementation of the Lost in Care Action Plan.

6.2 The report of the LAC Education Liaison Officer for Quarter 4 2013/14 was presented for the Panel's consideration. The report covered matters in relation to school attendance and the provision of personal education plans along with matters of concern and examples of good practice.

The Panel considered the report and highlighted the following matters –

- The length of time taken to provide an educational psychologist's report in an adoption case which in turn led to a delay in the Court process which it was felt posed an unacceptable risk. It was emphasised that cases involving vulnerable children need to be prioritised by the Educational Psychology Service. It was questioned whether the case in point was an exception or whether it reflected a systemic weakness that required attention.
- The need on a corporate level to minimise disruption to Looked After children's lives and their education through having to move schools because of a change of placement.

The LAC Education Liaison Officer said that the adoption case above and the considerations around the late report had been discussed with the Head of Learning in her previous role.

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

NO FURTHER ACTION ARISING

6.3 The report of the LAC Nurse for Quarter 4 2013/14 was presented for the Panel's consideration. The report documented performance against a number of Health PIs which it was noted continue to be stable, and provided information on the health of the Looked After population and related matters.

The Panel considered the information presented and discussed possible avenues of funding for the proposed group venture aimed at training and informing children, care leavers, foster carers and parents about nutrition and cooking. The Director of Community suggested the Community Directorate as the first point of contact to establish whether the initiative qualifies for core funding.

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

NO FURTHER ACTION ARISING

6.4 The report of the Child Placement Team for Quarter 4 2013/14 was presented for the Panel's consideration.

The Child Placement Team Leader drew attention to the following points –

- The position with regard to enquiries from prospective foster carers, the sources from which the expressions of interest arose and the recruitment activity undertaken.
- The position with regard to the number of assessments of new mainstream foster carers and Friend and Family carers.
- Training provided.
- The CSSIW Inspection of the Fostering Service conducted in mid-February which was a focussed inspection on the quality of Care, as well as Leadership and Management aspects of the service. The definitive report is awaited and will be made available to the Panel.
- Team Restructure which was undertaken to better address the challenges facing the service.
- The establishment of the Foster Carer Forum aimed at enhancing foster carers' involvement in the development of the service.

The Panel deemed it important that it should receive feedback from the Foster Carers' Forum in order to monitor the steps taken to address any issues arising and it was agreed that this should be provided via an annual report by the Chair of the Forum.

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

ACTION ARISING: Child Placement Team Leader to arrange for the Chair of the Foster Carers' Forum to provide the Panel with an annual report on the Forum's activities.

7 NYAS INDEPENDENT ADVOCACY OFFICER

A report by the NYAS Senior Advocate for Quarter 4 2013/14 was presented for the Panel's consideration.

The Senior Advocate reported on the referrals made to NYAS during the quarter and she highlighted the following points:

- An increase in the number of referrals including those made by Social Workers which is a positive trend.
- The predominance of referrals relating to child protection meetings. The Officer suggested that there needs to be more referrals from the LAC Social Work Team; the After Care Social Work Team and the Children with Disabilities Social Work Team. Work to improve this situation and to raise awareness of advocacy amongst professionals and to ensure that advocacy is being promoted is ongoing.
- That progress has been made in planning participation sessions with children and young people on Anglesey with a view to delivering 6 sessions over the next financial year. The Officer said that the lack of interest shown by the LAC population in participation stems in part from a feeling of being overburdened by meetings and in part from a wish to be regarded as normal rather than feeling they are defined by the fact they are in care.

The Officer provided a detailed analysis of the 18 cases that had been closed from the perspective of the nature of the advocacy support given.

The Panel acknowledged the challenges involved in improving participation whilst at the same time being receptive to the feelings of looked after children and young people who want to be treated in the same way as their contemporaries outside the care system. It was recognised that alternative ways of enhancing engagement with the LAC population which are more discreet need to be explored and discussed.

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

NO FURTHER ACTION ARISING

8 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

No other business was considered.

9 NEXT MEETING

Noted as 3:00 p.m. on Monday, 8th September, 2014.

**Mr R.P.Jones, Chief Executive
Chair**