

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

Minutes of the meeting held on 10 February, 2014

- PRESENT:** Mr Richard Parry Jones (Chief Executive)
- Councillor Kenneth Hughes (Portfolio Member for Social Services & Housing)
Councillor Ann Griffith (Corporate Scrutiny Committee)
Councillor Dylan Rees (Partnerships and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee)
Sue Willis (BCUHB)
Mrs Gwen Carrington (Director of Community)
Anwen Huws (Head of Children's Services)
Glyn Hughes (Interim Principal Corporate Parenting Officer)
Mrs Rona Jones (Independent Reviewing Officer)
Natalie Woodworth (Principal Officer – Operations)
Deborah Stammers (Child Placement Team Manager)
Heulwen Owen (LAC Education Liaison Officer)
Llinos Edwards (LAC Nurse)
Mrs Mair Read (SEN Education Officer)
Ann Holmes (Committee Officer)
- APOLOGIES:** Mr David Lydford, Alison Jones, Llio Johnson, Sean McClearn,
Deiniol Williams
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1 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

No declaration of interest was received.

2 IMPROVEMENT STUDY – SAFEGUARDING

At the request of the Chair, the Director of Community informed the Panel of the arrangements regarding an imminent inspection of the Authority's safeguarding arrangements as part of an All Wales Improvement Study with regard to safeguarding to be conducted by the Welsh Audit Office across all 22 Welsh councils. The Officer explained that the focus of the inspection will be the robustness of the Authority's internal governance and management arrangements for satisfying itself that its safeguarding practices are working effectively rather than the operational aspects of safeguarding. She went on to outline the form the inspection would take and the fieldwork requirements as regards the examination of documentation and the interview of relevant personnel. The inspection will result in feedback to each individual council as well as in a national report bringing together the findings from the work undertaken locally. The Director of Community also referred to an inspection of the Authority's fostering arrangements which was deferred from late last year and will also take place shortly. The Department will be formulating a Work Programme and making preparations for the fieldwork.

The issue of training on safeguarding for the Elected Member representatives was raised and it was suggested that a previously arranged session which was postponed due to insufficient elected member subscribers might be re-scheduled. The Director of Community said that the matter is currently under discussion notwithstanding the timescales are extremely challenging. Following consideration of the matter, it was agreed that training should be provided for Elected Members on the matter of safeguarding and should be tailored to enable them to respond to the requirements of the inspection.

It was agreed to note the information.

ACTION ARISING: Director of Community/Head of Children's Services to instigate arrangements for providing training on safeguarding for Elected Members as appropriate.

3 MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 11 November, 2013 were submitted and confirmed as correct.

Matters arising –

- It was confirmed that the success of the young person in care in having his art work accepted by the Foundling Museum had been acknowledged by letter.
- The Principal Officer (Operations) informed the Panel that it was premature at this time to try to gauge the impact which the revised Public Law Outline is having on the care planning for Looked After Children and how it is assisting Children's Services' staff given the limited number of care cases in the process at this time. Training in the revised PLO procedures has been provided for the Service's front line staff who are directly involved in care proceedings and will be extended to all the Service's other staff as well by the end of the year. The Officer said that she hoped to be in better position to brief the Panel at its next meeting on the effects which the revised PLO is having on LAC care proceedings and planning.

ACTION ARISING: Principal Officer (Operations) to brief the Panel at its next meeting on the impact of the PLO on LAC care planning.

- The Principal Officer (Operations) confirmed that feedback from the Corporate Parenting Panel and other relevant forums is shared with Children's Service's staff including social workers, and administrative and support staff in bi-monthly departmental meetings in which any matters arising are discussed.
- Councillor Ann Griffith said that she had been seeking to bring the Council's attention to the matter of free gym membership for the looked after population and she sought clarification of the channels available to her in order to take the matter forward. The Director of Community said that she would investigate what steps could be taken to progress the matter.

ACTION ARISING: Director of Community to investigate possible avenues for raising the matter of free gym membership for the Looked After population.

- In response to question about the outcome of a meeting with the Chair and Acting Chief Executive of the BCUHB, the Chair said that the meeting had served to introduce the new Chair of the Health Board. Further regular meetings are planned which will focus on specific issues of mutual interest to the Health Board and the Local Authority.

4 MATTER DEFERRED FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING – PROPOSAL TO PROVIDE IT SUPPORT FOR ELIGIBLE LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

The Panel considered progress to date in moving to provide IT support for eligible Looked After Children. Mention was made by the Officers of an options appraisal exercise to establish the costs involved and to the formulation of eligibility criteria and attention was drawn to the LAC Team Manager's report wherein reference was made to an agreement in principle for funding for the provision of 10 laptop computers for LAC children. The Chair said that the issue of providing IT equipment for Looked After Children has been a long standing aspiration of the Corporate Parenting Panel in seeking to ensure that Looked After Children are given the same learning support and opportunities as their contemporaries. The Head of Children's Services said that some concern has been expressed previously by Foster Carers who felt that it would be difficult for them to monitor the use of the laptops by the children in their care. The Chair said that the Education Service does have systems to ensure appropriate use of laptops and that the Panel was of the view that it would be possible to provide security to Looked After children in their use of the devices. The Head of Children's Service said that she would investigate further in order to clarify the stage reached in terms of the work undertaken.

It was agreed to note the position.

ACTION ARISING: Head of Children's Services to address the issue of providing laptops for eligible Looked After Children as a matter of priority.

5 SERVICE REPORTS

5.1 The report of the Independent Reviewing Officer providing an oversight of issues arising in relation to Looked After Children in the care of the Authority and their management by the Authority was presented for the Panel's consideration.

The following matters were raised in the ensuing discussion on the contents of the report:

- Placement breakdown. Reference was made to the case of young child who had experienced 6 different placements within a five month period and it was suggested that a management review of the circumstances and the way the case has been dealt with be undertaken. The Officers explained the steps taken at each stage in terms of ensuring the welfare and wellbeing of the child in question and in seeking to meet her needs. The Panel was satisfied that all possible action had been taken to try to meet the needs of this individual child.
- The issue of the lack of placement options due to a shortage of local foster carers was raised as a factor in the case above. The Officers said that the matter is being addressed via a foster carers' recruitment strategy and by developing training for current foster carers to ensure they are equipped to deal with children with challenging behaviour. The Head of Children's Services said that because of the shortage of local foster carers the Authority has been placing children with additional needs with private agency foster carers at greater cost. She explained that the Recruitment Officer and the Child Placement Team during the next quarterly period have been tasked with completing the foster carers' recruitment strategy; completing and costing the recruitment plan for the year along with the placement strategy. She said there are several strands that need to be brought together in an encompassing strategy including the issue of remuneration for foster carers including the option of salaried carers; the quality and breadth of the support package around the looked after child and consideration to establishing a multi-agency team to be able to provide comprehensive 24 hour support for foster carers.
- The challenge which lies in trying to put together a support package for foster carers that will facilitate recruitment of new carers and help retain current carers and that addresses aspects other than remuneration e.g. a support package that has built into it respite provision for carers of children with acute needs and/or difficult behaviour.
- Whether a specific strategy needs to be developed for supporting children who experience placement breakdown and instability in trying to make sense of their circumstances and in dealing with the emotional impact thereof.
- The need to consider alternative methods for obtaining the views of looked after children in reviews other than through monitoring forms. The Interim Principal Corporate Parenting Officer said that a broader view of advocacy needs to be taken and that advocacy needs to extend beyond conveying a viewpoint to identifying and developing different means of engaging and contributing.
- The need for clarification around respite care and regulations in relation to looked after children. Whilst the Principal Corporate Parenting Officer said that a Looked After Child is formally defined as such when his/her accommodation period is for a continuous period over 24 hours, the LAC Nurse pointed out that the six North Wales local authorities' approach this matter differently. It was agreed that the Director of Community would take this matter up with the North Wales local authorities' Directors of Social Services' network.

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

ACTIONS ARISING:

- **Quality and Assurance Officer to undertake an audit of the case management of the child who experienced several placement breakdowns.**
- **Director of Community to raise on a regional level with Directors of Social Services the need to clarify and regularise respite care and regulations within the looked after status across North Wales authorities.**

5.2 The report of the LAC Team Manager containing information about the LAC population for Quarter 3 2013/14 was presented for the Panel's consideration.

The following issues were noted:

- The increase in the LAC population from the Quarter 2 reporting period.

- The numbers subject to care orders have increased slightly. However there continues to be purposeful planning to move children on from the care system through special guardianship order; discharge of orders, and adoption orders as appropriate and where these are in the best interests of the child.
- A decline in the recording of statutory visits within timescales. The service is committed to addressing the issues behind this downturn.
- The lack of local Foster Carers continues to be a risk area.

NO FURTHER ACTION ARISING

5.3 The report of the LAC Education Liaison Officer providing an overview of matters relating to providing for the educational needs of the Looked After population in Quarter 3 2013/14 was presented for the Panel's consideration.

The following issues were noted:

- School attendance rates for Looked After Children for the 2012/13 school year. It was suggested that it would be helpful for the Panel to be able to draw a comparison with the attendance rates of the mainstream school population.
- From the information obtained for the summer 2013, that 43 of the 59 children of school age within scope of the LAC Education Liaison Officer have additional needs which are being met with different levels of support plans.
- A concern exists that due to a shortage of local foster carers, a number of Anglesey's looked after children are in out of county placements meaning they must travel some distance to receive their education.

ACTION ARISING: LAC Education Liaison Officer to incorporate in her report school attendance data for the mainstream school population for comparison purposes.

5.4 The report of the LAC Nurse for Quarter 3 2013/14 was presented for the Panel's consideration.

The following issues were noted:

- Compliance with health assessment completion timescales and the reasons for any variation in compliance rates from Quarter 2.
- That whilst there is no prescribed timescale for the completion of adoption medicals, at least 6 weeks are required to collect the necessary information from various sources to be able to complete them. It was noted that there should be a review of adoption procedures to ensure they reflect this requirement.
- An improvement in the notification of adoption orders along with the developing of a protocol on changes to the health records of children being placed for adoption.
- The increased use of the new health assessment form which is more in-depth and designed to be of benefit to the individual child and placement.

NO FURTHER ACTION ARISING

5.5 The report of the Leaving Care Co-Ordinator for Quarter 3 of 2013/14 was presented for the Panel's consideration.

The following issues were noted:

- The impact of a move towards job seeking on line on those care leavers without computer/internet access. The Authority is the first to broker a partnership with the Department of Works and Pensions in relation to local Job Centre Plus Teams to engage in better working relations with Care Leavers to allow for a smoother transition for young people needing to claim benefits and in appealing decisions relating to job seeking online.
- The absence within the Authority of an up to date Financial Policy relating specifically to care leavers given that the Children Commissioner for Wales' report Lost After Care calls for an agreement between Children's Services and Corporate Heads of Service about accepted levels of support and financial commitment towards care leavers written into policy.
- The high number of young care leavers living out of county in sometimes distant locations making visiting by the Care Leavers Team difficult.

- The status and current situation of care leavers.

ACTIONS ARISING:

- **Leaving Care Co-ordinator to provide the Panel at its next meeting with an update on progress against the Lost After Care Action Plan and the status of any unfinished tasks.**
- **Leaving Care Co-ordinator to make inquiries regarding other authorities' financial policies relating specifically to Care Leavers in order to inform development of the Local Authority policy.**

5.6 The report of the Child Placement Team for Quarter 3 2013/14 was presented for the Panel's consideration.

The following issues were noted:

- A decline in the number of initial inquiries from prospective foster carers. With the commencement in post of the Recruitment Officer it is anticipated that that situation will improve by the next reporting period.
- That the service is currently on course to meet its target of 10 new fostering households within the first year of the Recruitment Officer's activity.
- A sharp increase in the number of friends and family placements and assessments being undertaken in the last quarter and the risk that this trend will continue due to the new Public Law Outline legislation; because of the urgency of court timescales this may impact on the team's ability to meet the targets for assessing mainstream foster carers.
- That the placement strategy will be reviewed in the near future and consideration will be given to retained carers and salaried carers as possible options particularly in relation to providing support for single foster carers.
- Launch of Foster Care Forum planned for February, 2014.

The Panel also noted the investment made in terms of time and capacity in the assessment of prospective foster carers. The Head of Children's Service said that she was committed to ensuring the success of the Recruitment Strategy including if necessary by identifying additional resources within the Children's Service's budget to support the strategy which will in the long term yield the savings which the Service needs to make. The Officer said that the service needs to be more robust in its approach to families in terms of not assessing each and every member of a family and asking each family to identify one or two of its members for assessment as carers.

Careful consideration also needs to be given to salaried and retained carers.

NO FURTHER ACTION ARISING

6 NYAS INDEPENDENT ADVOCACY SERVICE

In the absence of Ms Alison Jones, Senior Advocate for NYAS North West Wales, it was agreed to defer consideration of the Quarter 3 report of the NYAS Advocacy Service.

It was suggested that NYAS be requested to provide information on the consultation event held with children and young people who are Looked After on Anglesey and particularly the output from the work in terms of the children's views as a point of interest for the Panel.

ACTION ARISING: LAC Team Manager to liaise with Alison Jones regarding the provision of a report to the Panel's next meeting on the consultation event held by NYAS for LAC children and young people on Anglesey.

7 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

A Written Statement by the Welsh Government's Deputy Minister for Social Services regarding post 18 placements for care leavers and the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Bill was presented and noted.

8 NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next proposed meeting of the Panel was scheduled for 3:30pm on Wednesday, 30th April, 2014.

Councillor Ann Griffith suggested that the Panel might be provided with information about any children/young people lost in care and the reasons therefore. Councillor Dylan Rees asked for consideration to be given to an earlier start time for meetings of the Panel.

ACTIONS ARISING:

- **IRO to incorporate in her next report information about any children/young people lost in care with reference to asylum seekers and/or victims of trafficking.**
- **Committee Officer to bring forward the start time of meetings of the Panel.**

**Mr R.P.Jones
Chair**

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