

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

Minutes of the meeting held on 8 December, 2014

PRESENT: Mr R.P. Jones (Chief Executive) (Chair)

Councillor Ieuan Williams (Council Leader & Portfolio Member for Education)
Councillor Kenneth Hughes (Portfolio Member for Housing & Social Services)
Councillor Ann Griffith (Corporate Scrutiny Committee)
Councillor Dylan Rees (Partnership & Regeneration Scrutiny Committee)
Sue Willis (Continuing Care Service Manager)
Mr Douglas Watson (Chair Anglesey Foster Carers' Association)
Mrs Gwen Carrington (Director of Community)
Dr Gwynne Jones (Director of Learning)
Anwen Huws (Head of Children's Services)
Mrs Delyth Molyneux (Head of Learning)
Deborah Stammers (Child Placement – Team Leader)
Gwenan Evans (LAC Learning Mentor)
Nia Mullings-Jones (LAC Personal Advisor)
Sean McClearn (Leaving Care Co-ordinator)
Ann Holmes (Committee Officer)

APOLOGIES: Alison Jones (NYAS), Mr Llyr Bryn Roberts (Principal Officer, Corporate Parenting & Partnerships) Heulwen Owen (LAC Education Liaison Officer), Natalie Woodworth (Principal Officer, Operations), Mrs Rona Jones (Independent Reviewing Officer)

ALSO PRESENT: Mandy Humphries (North Wales Adoption Service) (for item 3)

1 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

No declaration of interest was received.

2 MINUTES 8TH SEPTEMBER, 2014 MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 8th September, 2014 were submitted and confirmed as correct.

3 NORTH WALES ADOPTION SERVICE (NWAS)

The Annual Report and Quality of Care Review of the North Wales Adoption Service for 2013/14 was presented for the Panel's information.

Mandy Humphries, NWAS Team Manager referred to the review of the quality of service as forming the substantive part of the report and she said that there had been two significant changes namely, the disbanding of the monthly OMG meetings and new governance by way of the Partnership board meeting on a quarterly basis with a view to improving and facilitating decision making.

The following issues were raised in the ensuing discussion:

- Although the response rate to the staff survey was relatively low, the Panel noted that the feedback had been very positive generally in terms of how staff feel they have been supported by Management, are valued and are provided with development opportunities. However, clarification was sought in relation to comments made to the effect that the service is succeeding in spite of rather than because of management input due partly to the way adoption is seen by local authorities and because of the dire financial climate and the uncertainty nationally and regionally about the future of adoption and Social Workers' role

within it. The Team Manager said that some staff have felt isolated in not having a team around them. There is also some anxiety around the establishment of a national service. The Head of Children's Services said that there are risks which the NWAS Partnership Board will be seeking to mitigate in terms of top slicing finance to fund the national adoption service; that level is not known as yet nor how it will impact on the regional collaborative. The Welsh National Adoption Register and the impact of that register will need to be monitored as it does not allow for placements in England which for some children may be the best solution. The Welsh adoption landscape is changing but the Partnership is well placed to face the national challenge.

- The input as regards support and training for the three joint adoption panels and the investment made in developing panel members. It was asked whether in the Management's view and experience they are effective and are improving. The Team Manager said that as regards the Gwynedd and Ynys Môn Joint Adoption Panel the transition and merger was felt to be seamless as attested to by the reflections of the Panel's Chair. Some issues around attendance have arisen very recently but those have been addressed by drawing on the central list of panel members which has been introduced following regulatory changes and which has ensured that adoption matches are not delayed.
- The level of support available for adopters on Anglesey. The Team Manager said that the service is able to offer a range of support options but that more work is required as regards therapeutic support and provision for children who are experiencing difficulties. The National Service will help in developing adoption support. The Head of Children's Services confirmed that one of the advantages of the regional collaborative is in providing Anglesey with access to a wider range of services than it would be able to provide by itself and also in providing assurance that its provision is consistent with legal requirements. The CSSIW inspection report on the safeguarding provision for LAC indicates however that too great a burden is put on the local authority for ensuring therapeutic input; CAHMS has withdrawn representation from the panel due to pressures on the service. They have indicated that they could only provide representation if this was funded to allow backfill.

The Panel noted the importance of the availability of early intervention services in preventing and/or alleviating problems later and registered its concern regarding the level and extent of Health input in this respect.

- The need in terms of recruitment of adopters to address the mismatch between where the adoption demand lies which is for children under 2 years old and the placement need which is for older children.
- The nature of pre and post adoption support and whether Anglesey is clear regarding its support responsibilities within the regional partnership as regards both the children for whom it arranges placements but also for those children who have been placed for adoption on Anglesey by other counties in terms of being aware of and meeting their needs.
- Linguistic and cultural needs and their importance from the perspective both of the experiences of children being placed and in terms of professional work procedures.
- The risks in maintaining local arrangements whilst moving towards a regional and national agenda.

It was agreed to note the Annual Report and Quality of Care Review of the North Wales Adoption Service for 2013/14 and the issues identified in discussion.

NO FURTHER ACTION ARISING.

4 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING

4.1 Barnardo's Cymru Joint-Initiative

The Head of Children's Services informed the Panel that Rebecca Wide from Barnardo's who had planned to be present at this meeting was now unable to attend because of work commitments. She had requested that the matter be deferred to the next meeting.

It was agreed to defer the item to the Panel's next meeting to allow the Barnardo's Officer to address the Panel.

4.2 Data on Absconding from Care

In the absence of the Principal Officer Operations, it was agreed that information with regard to absconding from care be circulated in writing to the Panel's members and for any concerns that Members may have subsequently to be made known to the Chair.

ACTION ARISING: Principal Officer Operations to circulate data on absconding from care in writing to the Panel's Members.

4.3 Rotherham Inquiry

A briefing paper by the Head of Children's Services in respect of the independent inquiry into child sexual exploitation in Rotherham was presented for the Panel's consideration.

The Head of Children's Services drew the Panel's attention to the implications of the review for the Isle of Anglesey and specifically for Elected Members in their capacity as corporate parents. She reported that the Authority with its partners has undertaken a great deal of work in the area of child sexual exploitation/trafficking and is well placed to respond to the issues arising. The CSSIW inspection report on safeguarding arrangements for Looked After Children comments on matters in relation to child exploitation to the effect that the local developments in this service area are regarded as positives. The Officer said that many of the practice issues identified in Rotherham around supervision, quality assurance and assessment, and recruitment etc. are integral to Children's Services in all authorities and are ones which the Children's Services in Anglesey have been addressing as documented in section 4.2 of the report. The CCSIW report also highlights that the Authority has introduced a Risk Model to provide staff with a clear risk assessment framework.

The Panel considered the report and sought assurance with regard to the following points:

- That the Authority has adequate oversight with regard to the safety and protection of children who are placed out of county.

The Head of Children's Services said that the SERAF risk assessment tool regarding which Barnardo's is leading is also utilised by the Police Service. As the tool has been adopted by Anglesey's Children Services, the same practice and models are therefore applied to all looked after children be they placed out of county or locally. It is important that a pattern of reporting on CSE is established both to the LSCB and to the Corporate Parenting Panel as well. With reference to Elected Members, the focus of activity in the next quarter will be a review of this Panel's remit and the provision of training on the guidance document - *If this were my child..... A Councillor's Guide to being a good Corporate Parent*. The Authority also needs to be assured that multi-agency practitioners including Education and the Youth Service are versed in CSE matters and have been trained therein.

- Whether in view of the pressures of austerity and financial cutbacks, the Authority's position is sound in terms of capacity, experience and expertise. The Head of Children's Services said that the challenge lies in developing the necessary skills set within a children's services workforce that is still relatively inexperienced. In terms of performance the service has improved and is meeting its targets but it is difficult to plan beyond 2015/16. Discussions about the risks have been held with the Portfolio Member and whilst it is recognised that certain aspects of the service will have to be done differently the challenge is to balance the risks inherent in a reducing budget with the expectations as regards national Social Services targets and outcomes.
- The Authority's approach to the ethnicity element of children and individuals who are on the social margins. The Head of Children's Services said that evidence from cases of sexual exploitation that come to the attention of the Child Sexual Exploitation Group do not present any pattern as regards specific groups, areas or geography. There are instances of individuals coming through Holyhead Port and to a lesser extent, from Eastern Europe and beyond, but there is no evidence to suggest organised arrangements on a significant scale by any particular community, area or group on the Island.

- The need to extend monitoring arrangements to taxis and to be vigilant with regard to unregistered taxis. The Head of Children's Services said that there will be consultation with the Licensing Service to ensure that taxi drivers are alerted to CSE and receive training therein.

The Portfolio Member for Housing and Social Services said that whilst the concerns regarding budgetary pressures are acknowledged and understood, the issue of resources was not the primary factor in Rotherham. The Authority in Anglesey will be keeping a close watch on services that deal with vulnerable individuals and every effort will be made to protect them and to ensure they remain effective.

It was agreed to note the report and to accept and support the summary of recommendations for the Local Authority in Anglesey.

5 NATIONAL INSPECTION: SAFEGUARDING AND CARE PLANNING OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AND CARE LEAVERS WHO EXHIBIT VULNERABLE AND RISKY BEHAVIOURS

The report of the Head of Children's Services on the outcome of the CSSIW's inspection of safeguarding and care planning of looked after children and care leavers who exhibit vulnerable and risky behaviours was presented for the Panel's consideration along with an action plan to address areas for improvement.

The Panel considered the report and made the following points –

- Concern was expressed regarding the feedback from young people that they felt they had little ability to exert influence or choice around where they were placed. The Head of Children's Services said that the pressure to meet targets in terms of the number of reviews undertaken within the statutory timescale does lessen the IRO's capacity to come to know the children involved. The Independent Reviewing Officer has been invited to discuss ways in which the Authority jointly with NYAS can engage more effectively with looked after children and young people so that their reviews become more meaningful to them.
- The need for the Action Plan to be more precise particularly as regards timescales and priorities. The Panel noted that it was difficult for it to exercise its challenge function effectively in terms of ensuring that the best outcomes are achieved for the LAC population without being provided with more specific information about cases. Whilst it was noted that the intention is to provide further training on corporate parenting and safeguarding, the point was made that training alone should not be seen as a panacea and that the Panel requires the appropriate information to be able to do its work properly. The Head of Children's Services said that that could be added to the Action Plan.
- Concern was expressed regarding access to the child and adult mental health service (CAMHS) and the implications not only for assessment and care planning but also for the Schools Counselling Service which it was noted is experiencing increasing pressure to take over the deficit brought about by the unavailability of CAMHS which due to diminishing resources, is escalating its thresholds. The Head of Children's Services said that the inspection report identifies two specific issues namely an over reliance by the Health Service on children's social services to provide funding and resources to assess and meet the therapeutic needs of looked after children and care leavers and difficulties for young people placed out of county to access support for their mental health needs. Sue Willis, BCUHB said that she could ask the Health Board to formulate a response to the matters identified and arrange for an officer from CAMHS to address the Panel to clarify the issues arising.

It was agreed to accept the report and to note the contexts.

ACTION ARISING:

- **Head of Children's Services to liaise with Sue Willis, BCUHB -**
 - **to provide a Health response to the issues identified in the CSSIW report regarding the relationship with CAMHS and the accessibility and availability of the service and,**
 - **to arrange for an officer from CAMHS to meet with the Panel to clarify the issues arising in relation to the availability of the service.**

- **Head of Children's Services to incorporate within the Action Plan, provision for making available to the Panel information about the LAC population to enable it to exercise its challenge function more effectively.**

6 REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER

The report of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) incorporating data in respect of the LAC population on Anglesey during Quarter 2 2014/15 was presented for the Panel's consideration.

The Panel noted the steady decline in the number of looked after children and young people since 2012. The Panel also noted the risks and concerns raised by the Independent Reviewing Officer in section 4 of the report to which the Head of Children's Services responded in clarification as follows –

- With regard to the issue of developing a safeguarding unit, that there is a HR process to be followed in relation to restructuring the children's services and ideally that would have been completed sooner. There are staff issues to be addressed before a Manager to the unit can be appointed and that process is ongoing.
- That no directive has been issued with regard to modifying or changing placements in the interests of identifying savings i.e. reducing out of county placements. The Authority will have to determine whether that is a viable option but the situation at present remains that if a placement is stable then the Authority is committed to supporting the child/young person in that placement. The Authority does challenge placement decisions to ensure they are the most appropriate but there is no scheme to move children from independent fostering agencies to local authority foster carers unless that is judged to be in the interests of the individual child/young person.
- With regard to the after-care population being lost to the Panel, the Director of Community said that the need for authorities to refocus attention on the after-care population is national theme and there is a view that some authorities do relinquish active responsibility for this group too soon even though legislation now extends that responsibility to individuals beyond 18 years of age. The Authority's arrangements for monitoring and tracking the after-care population were deemed to be insufficient and that is being addressed.
- With regard to celebrating the achievements of the looked after population, the Chair said that ways of making a corporate contribution to recognising the achievements of looked after children and young people would be discussed with the Fostering Recruitment and Marketing Officer.

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

ACTIONS ARISING:

- **Head of Children's Services to follow up the risks and concerns noted in the IRO's report for validation and clarification.**
- **Fostering Recruitment and Marketing Officer to consult with the Chair regarding a corporate input to arrangements to recognise the achievements of the looked after population.**

7 SERVICE REPORTS

7.1 The report of the Interim LAC Team Manager was presented and noted.

NO FURTHER ACTION ARISING

7.2 The report of the LAC Education Liaison Officer for Quarter 2 2014/15 was presented and its contents noted.

The Panel restated its wish to see comparative attendance data for mainstream pupils and the looked after population.

NO FURTHER ACTION ARISING

7.3 The report of the LAC Nurse was presented and noted.

Sue Willis, Continuing Care Manager said that she would follow up on performance information to ensure that the indicators remain on track. The Panel noted the risks and concerns which the LAC Nurse had commented on and indicated that it would like to see further explanatory detail around those for future reports.

ACTION ARISING: LAC Nurse in future reports to expand on risks and concerns identified.

7.4 The report of the Child Placement Team Manager was presented and noted.

NO FURTHER ACTION ARISING

7.5 The report of the Leaving Care Co-Ordinator was presented and noted.

The following issues were raised on the report –

- Concern was expressed regarding the number of young women leaving care who become pregnant and the question this raises about whether their care placement equips them with the skills to be able to form healthy relationships, and to be capable parents thereafter once their child is born. The Panel questioned whether the Authority helps young care leavers to develop the necessary life skills and noted the need for a comprehensive personal education programme for this group of individuals.
- The Panel also noted that in considering the care leavers group on the basis of statistics it was at risk of losing sight of them as individuals, and that it had insufficient appreciation of how they felt about their situation. The Head of Children's Services said that the Principal Officer for Corporate Parenting and Partnerships will be looking to set up a task group from amongst the Panel's Members to consider how it can enhance and extend its role. There is also a part to be played by NYAS in promoting participation by looked after children and young people.
- The need for looked after children and young people to receive adequate preparation for life after care to be able to cope with the freedom, responsibilities and obligations that life outside the care system brings. Sue Willis, Continuing Care Manager said that CAMHS has made a commitment elsewhere in North Wales to become involved in training with teachers, foster carers and social workers on how to support young people.

NO FURTHER ACTION ARISING

8 PALLIAL RELATED MATTERS

The Director of Community confirmed that there were no significant matters to report since the previous meeting from the perspective of Anglesey apart from the Authority's continuing participation in the regional partnership in support of the Statutory Director in Conwy in her capacity as nominated safeguarding lead to provide support for those who have come forward under Operation Pallial. It is anticipated that those numbers could increase as the operation garners media attention and publicity.

NO FURTHER ACTION ARISING

9 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

9.1 The report of NYAS regarding the provision and take-up of advocacy services in Quarter 2 2014/15 was presented and noted.

9.2 The Director of Community informed the Panel that there is a requirement on the Authority as part of a regional response to undertake a self-assessment of the readiness to implement the duties and responsibilities under each part of the Social Services and Wellbeing Wales Act 2014. Part 6 of the Act relates specifically to looked after and accommodated children. She circulated a copy of the self-assessment pro forma for the Panel Members' information and explained that completion of the pro-forma is intended to involve other people across a range of organisations. She suggested that the Principal Officer for Corporate Parenting and Partnerships looks at the role of the panel in light of the legislation.

10 NEXT MEETING

Noted as Monday, 9th March, 2015 at 2:00 p.m.

**Mr R. P. Jones
Chair**

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