

# CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

## Minutes of the meeting held on 9 March, 2015

- 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, BCUHB)  
Mr Douglas Watson (Chair, Anglesey Foster Carers' Association)  
Alison Jones (NYAS)  
Dr Gwynne Jones (Director of Lifelong Learning)  
Mrs Delyth Molyneux (Head of Learning)  
Llyr Bryn Roberts (Principal Officer – Corporate Parenting & Partnerships)  
Natalie Woodworth (Principal Officer – Operations)  
Dawn Owen (Child Placement Team Manager)  
Heulwen Owen (LAC Education Liaison Officer)  
Llinos Edwards (LAC Nurse)  
Llio Johnson (Delivery Manager – Children & Young People)  
Ann Holmes (Committee Officer)
- APOLOGIES:** Mrs Gwen Carrington, Anwen Huws, Mrs Rona Jones, Debbie Reid, Sean McClearn
- ALSO PRESENT:** Eleri Thomas (Chief Executive, Office of the Children's Commissioner for Wales), Elizabeth Hall (Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service – CAMHS)
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The Chair welcomed all those present to the meeting and he extended a particular welcome to Eleri Thomas, Chief Executive of the Office of the Children's Commissioner for Wales and to Elizabeth Hall, from CAMHS who were present for items 2 and 4 on the agenda respectively.

The Chair expressed disappointment at the absence of a number of key service officers from this meeting of the Panel in light of the business to be conducted and the presence of external speakers. He commented that it was his expectation that the panel should be amongst Social Services Officers' highest priorities and that he as Chief Executive had always accorded the panel that priority based on the Authority's vital responsibilities as a corporate parent.

Councillor Kenneth Hughes, Portfolio Member for Housing and Social Services said that he shared the Chair's disappointment.

### **1 DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

No declaration of interest was received.

### **2 PRESENTATION BY ELERI THOMAS, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF THE OFFICE OF THE CHILDREN'S COMMISSIONER FOR WALES**

The Chair formally introduced Eleri Thomas, Chief Executive of the Office of the Children's Commissioner for Wales to the Panel. He said that he understood that Mr Keith Towler who had addressed this Panel early in his tenure as Children's Commissioner for Wales had now completed his term in the post, and that the Panel subsequently wished to thank him for his very valuable work in his role as Children's Commissioner for Wales.

Eleri Thomas said that she would be providing an overview of the work undertaken during Mr Keith Towler's term of office as Children's Commissioner for Wales which came to a close at the end of

February, 2015 with particular reference to the importance of holding a strong vision for children in keeping children's rights and the voices of children and young people at the centre of everything that is done. The new Children's Commissioner, Sally Holland will be commencing in post on 20<sup>th</sup> April, 2015 and in the interim period, she as the Deputy Commissioner would be acting as Commissioner and utilising the powers under that post. She said that she would wish to return the Panel's recognition of Mr Keith Towler's work by acknowledging the challenges and great progress which Anglesey has made for its children through the dedication and commitment both of the Chief Executive in his stewardship of the Panel, and his fellow officers within the Council.

Eleri Thomas addressed the Panel as follows –

- The office of the Children's Commissioner for Wales was established in 2000 following the production and conclusion of the Waterhouse Inquiry with the aim that it should be a strong, human rights institution for young people, and it was the first of its kind in the United Kingdom. Its principal objective is to safeguard and promote the rights and welfare of children and young people. It is based on a vision that seeks to see Wales as a country where children and young people are respected, valued, listened to and supported to lead happy and safe lives.
- Under the powers vested in the Office of the Children's Commissioner, the person appointed to act as Commissioner can review the effects of policies and practices and the delivery of services; examine cases and provide advice to individual children and young people; provide assistance to children and young people and make representations to the Welsh Government and local authorities.
- The important role of the Children's Commissioner should be in being the first and the last place that individuals can come – the first place to find out where locally people can provide support, guidance and assistance and to ensure that families who require support can connect with the right professionals, and the last place in terms of taking on individual cases to try to work with agencies to achieve resolution. Working in partnership with agencies to achieve resolution at the earliest possible point for children and young people has been a key theme of Keith Towler's term of office. That has been the approach in working with Social Services departments and local councils, namely to identify where there are difficulties and to seek to unlock those as easily as possible.
- The essential theme for Keith Towler's term of office has been to set a clear and co-ordinated vision for children and young people. The conclusion of that period is that there has never been a more important time than the present to listen to children and young people and to be a champion for them. It needs to be recognised that whilst much has been achieved, there remains a significant amount of work to do especially given the reality of the climate in which those challenges are being addressed - the clear resource implications facing local authorities are significant and cannot be underestimated. These are very challenging times when the need has perhaps never been greater but where the resource implications are significant for example, in the context of the Corporate Parenting Panel's role, the increasing number of children and young people coming into the care system and the significant challenges that brings - these are self-evident but real.
- The key messages around rights and voice have endured since the publication of the findings of the Waterhouse tribunal. Keith Towler sought to ensure that his priority was to consider the role of his office in relation to looked after children, and he started that journey in reviewing services for the transition for young people when they approach independent living resulting in the publication of the Lost After Care report which looked at the experiences of young people as they moved to independence. This report recognised that sometimes, actions in terms of planning and preparation are taken too late – the recent CSSIW inspection report on safeguarding reinforces the message that key practical issues need to be considered for children and young children in relation to early preparation and planning, engaging young people and helping them to build a trusting relationship with their social workers. There has also been a transformation of services for young people as they reach 15 years of age in terms of services working more coherently together which is critical.
- Lost After Care also focussed attention on the number of children who still said they did not know how to access advocacy or had not experienced having the opportunity of an advocate. Since 2011, Keith Towler has published a series of reports – Missing Voices – which have concentrated on the experiences of children and young people in relation to their access to independent advocacy and particularly, statutory access to advocacy encompassing looked after children and young people, children in need and children leaving care. The first report in the series in 2011

found that there were significant inconsistencies across Wales as regards children and young people's access to advocacy and this in the context of the second recommendation of the Waterhouse Report – ensuring that children and young people when not living with their families can have the support of an independent champion to help them be heard. The Children's Commissioner's Office has been working very strongly with the Welsh Government and local authorities to try to achieve a way forward in relation to advocacy provision across Wales. A strategic leadership group has been established at national level and this in turn has set up a task group led by ADSS to look at strengthening the experience of children and young people's access to advocacy across Wales. There are challenges in ensuring that advocacy as a safeguarding service is critically provided for all children and young people in the looked after system. The work of the Corporate Parenting Panel is of critical importance in terms of making sure that the accountability to ensure children's voices are heard, is absolute.

- Keith Towler also called for the re-emergence of the investigation into historic abuse in North Wales which has led to Operation Pallial. Keith Towler has served on the Co-ordinating Group for Operation Pallial and has been pleased with the work which the agencies have done in respect of re-examining historic abuse cases. Of critical importance is making sure that it is never too late in investigating concerns but the challenge this poses is in achieving a balance between managing resources and capacity in investigating historic allegations with the delivery of safeguarding services for children and young people who are in care today. Keith Towler published a report on Learning the Lessons from Operation Pallial shortly before he left office and the report pays testament to the multi-agency work which has led to multiple convictions.
- An emerging area of significant concern is in relation to child sexual exploitation. The recent Alexis Jay report into failings in Rotherham in relation to making sure that children are protected, safeguarded and listened to has provided a salutary reminder of how important this work is. Keith Towler held an all Wales meeting of relevant stakeholders in November, 2014 to try to pose the question how can assurance be obtained that a situation like Rotherham will not happen in Wales. The initial conclusion is that existing all Wales child protection procedures and guidance on safeguarding and child sexual exploitation are strong, but work needs to be done in achieving assurance as regards the picture across the whole of Wales. Subsequent to a further meeting in February, Welsh Government has undertaken to develop an Action Plan for Wales alongside local authorities, ADSS and the Police that fits with the recommendations of the Alexis Jay report and is framed within the UK Government context but recognises the made in Wales work that is happening. Of critical importance is tracking and thinking about missing children along with good strategic collaborative working with the police in relation to safeguarding.
- Much progress has been made in relation to promoting and safeguarding children's rights and much can be achieved if children are listened to and their voices heard and responded to. Critical to this endeavour is building trusting relationships with children and young people in care; building cultures that listen to children, recognising the many pressures and challenges of delivering services in the current climate but at all times aspiring to do the best collectively for children and young people.

The Chair thanked Eleri Thomas for her overview of some of the key themes of Mr Keith Towler's term as Children's Commissioner for Wales. There followed a question and answer session in which the Panel's Members were given the opportunity to seek the views of Eleri Thomas on matters of interest to them in relation to their responsibilities as corporate parents.

The Panel acknowledged the presentation made by the Chief Executive of the Office of the Children's Commissioner for Wales and noted the messages arising therefrom.

#### **NO FURTHER ACTION ARISING**

### **3 MINUTES 8 DECEMBER, 2014 MEETING**

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 8<sup>th</sup> December, 2014 were presented and confirmed as correct.

## 4 MATTERS ARISING

### 4.1 Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS)

The Chair welcomed Elizabeth Hall to the meeting and said that she was present to respond to the Panel's concerns regarding the accessibility and availability of the CAMHS service.

Elizabeth Hall reported as follows –

- That one of the issues that makes it difficult sometimes for services to work together is the existence of different criteria, different standards and different drivers. CAMHS has criteria which determine whether a young person is accepted for a mental health assessment or whether he/she is directed to the early intervention/prevention part of the service.
- That this is not a locally or arbitrarily set decision but falls within national service frameworks, the Mental Health Measure and Government drivers. CAMHS is there for children with significant mental health disorders and difficulties and for those where there is an overlap e.g. attachment disorders where those involve a co-morbid mental health condition alongside.
- That behavioural difficulties are not routinely part of the service which CAMHS is commissioned to provide unless they are so severe as to impact on a young person's mental health. This is a grey area which does give rise to some issues.
- That any professional practitioner can make a referral to CAMHS which is directed to the Service's single point of access. There is a team available to speak to directly between 1 and 3 in the afternoon and the administrative process including managerial scrutiny of every referral happens after that time. An urgent referral is dealt with there and then.
- That the Service's referral and acceptance criteria have been agreed across BCUHB and are compliant with Welsh Government standards and directives.
- That there may be under use of the early intervention and prevention service. Whilst that provides access to specialist consultation it does not take the onus about managing the young person's emotional needs away from the social worker or the teacher. It means that the early intervention/prevention practitioner will provide consultation, advice and support thus enabling the professional to do some of the work, or school based counselling or education welfare.
- The CAMHS is not set up to say that every child who is struggling needs a mental health service but is set up to provide mental health assessment and therapy for those that are ill or have significant co-morbid needs, and to provide consultation to the community and to help build capacity therein.
- Social Services might take the view that a child going into care needs a mental health assessment as a vulnerable child. However the other part of the equation is what the child/young person wants. CAMHS seeks to engage them in services where appropriate but is aware that it needs to be mindful that it can be negative for a child already experiencing difficulties through no fault of his own to be told that he/she needs a mental health assessment.

There ensued a detailed discussion about issues around the service's diagnostic parameters and what is and is not covered. It was noted from a Social Services' perspective that every looked after child has a therapeutic need be that low level or otherwise which Social Services do not have the strategic framework to address. If those children do not qualify for CAMHS then their needs must be met in other ways. From an Education Service's perspective the concerns were in relation to the heavy and therefore potentially more risky caseload which the School Counselling Service is having to carry and the need therefore to better understand the access criteria to CAMHS.

The Chair suggested that it would be informative for the Panel to receive a presentation on the CAMHS that would assist it in better understanding the issues arising around the criteria for accessing the service. He further suggested that Service Managers from both Social Services and Education consult on what are the key issues that need to be brought back to the Panel to be discussed at a future meeting.

**It was agreed to note the information and to thank Elizabeth Hall for her time in attending the meeting.**

**ACTION ARISING: Principal Corporate Parenting and Partnerships Officer to facilitate consultation between Social Services and Education Service Managers on the key issues in relation to CAMHS that need to be brought back to the Panel at a future meeting for a substantive discussion.**

#### **4.2 Awards for Looked After Children**

The Principal Corporate Parenting and Partnerships Officer informed the Panel that a task group has been established to develop and take forward ideas about formally recognising the diverse achievements of looked after children and young people and that Elected Members' input to the Group would be especially welcome. The intention is to hold an awards ceremony on 16 October, 2015 at a venue to be confirmed and it the group's view that the success of all looked after children from the age of five upwards should be recognised and that that should be done across a broad range of categories not confined to academic attainment alone but celebrating attendance, sports, creativeness, compassion, contribution to community etc. Officers and Members' will be invited to attend the event.

The Chair thanked the Task Group for its work and said that it is appropriate that the Panel and the Council corporately celebrates the achievements of those children and young people in its care and that it is hoped they in turn will derive inspiration from the acclaim received.

It was suggested that the Task Group might consider seeking sponsorship for the event from local businesses. The Chair said that any suggestions for the Task Group regarding the support and staging of the event should be channelled through the Principal Corporate Parenting and Partnerships Officer.

**It was agreed to note the information.**

**ACTION ARISING: Principal Corporate Parenting and Partnerships Officer to provide the Panel's Elected Members with information about the Task Group's meetings and to forward to the Task Group any suggestions received regarding the awards event.**

#### **4.3 Children Missing from Local Authority Care**

A report by the Principal Officer – Operations setting out the current situation with regard to children/young people missing from the Authority's care along with ongoing work and areas of development was presented for the Panel's information in line with a request made at a previous meeting.

The Principal Officer – Operations highlighted the extent of the work that has been undertaken by the Authority in relation to better understanding child sexual exploitation and developing an awareness of the risks around this issue which has resulted in a level of knowledge and expertise which has drawn positive feedback from the UK Border Agency and the Home Office.

The Panel noted the information and acknowledged the work being carried out.

**It was agreed to accept the report for information purposes.**

**ACTION ARISING: Principal Officer – Operations to circulate to the Panel's Members the data relating to children/young people placed out of county in residential care and/or foster care which had been inadvertently omitted from the report.**

### **5 REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER**

The report of the Independent Reviewing Officer incorporating data in respect of the Looked After population on Anglesey during Quarter 3 2014/15 was presented for the Panel's consideration.

The Panel noted that the number of children/young people looked after by the Authority had increased slightly from 79 in the previous quarter to 84 in Quarter 3. The Panel paid particular attention to the risks and concerns raised by the Independent Reviewing Officer in her report and was especially keen to obtain clarification of point (v) under section 4 of the report in which the IRO urged caution in considering or making a decision to return out of county children to the Island on the basis of financial savings. The Panel sought assurance that care placements and/or any decisions to return out of county children to the Island are determined by what best meets the child or young person's individual needs, and that financial considerations are not an influencing factor

in such decisions. The Panel requested that an explanatory report be brought back to the next meeting to address the issue raised by the Independent Reviewing Officer.

The Panel also noted that the risks and concerns set out might be better defined in terms of priority by according them RAG status as is the practice with corporate risks.

The Principal Officer – Operations in response to the comment under paragraph (u) of the report confirmed that there is an established protocol for implementing recommendations made within LAC reviews which she described. In relation to the point made by the IRO under paragraph (y) of her report regarding the rationale for Care Plans making provision for very young children to be transported onto the Island for contact with their parents and whether these decisions meet the needs of the child, the Officer said that whilst Care Plans are always made in the best interests of the child, court proceedings can sometimes direct that the Authority address parental needs as well.

**It was resolved to accept the report and to note its contents.**

**ACTION ARISING: Head of Children’s Services to provide the Panel at its next meeting with a report in clarification of the process for determining care placements and/or changes in placements and the considerations involved.**

## **6 NYAS ADVOCACY SERVICE**

The report of the NYAS Senior Advocate for Quarter 3 2014/15 was presented for the Panel’s consideration. The report provided a statistical breakdown of the referrals made during the quarter and any trend/pattern emerging therefrom.

The Panel noted that this would be the final report by NYAS as the provider of advocacy services for Anglesey’s looked after population.

The Principal Officer – Operations said that the decrease in referrals might be due to the fact that NYAS provides an issue based advocacy service meaning that children/young people must first have a specific issue in order to warrant a referral. It could thus be interpreted that not so many children within the Authority’s care have issues which they want to discuss with an advocate. The level of referrals is affected by the way the advocacy service operates and is not indicative of a lack of support for children to have an advocate.

The Senior Advocate for NYAS clarified that it is also a matter of making individuals aware of the service so they can make their own referrals.

**It was agreed to accept the report and to note its contents and to also thank NYAS for its work during its contract term.**

**NO FURTHER ACTION ARISING**

## **7 SERVICE REPORTS**

7.1 The report of the LAC Education Liaison Officer for Quarter 3 was presented for the Panel’s consideration.

The Panel noted and was concerned by the implications of the potential loss of the LAC Learning Coach post because of a change in the grants arrangements that support education as documented in the report, and requested that a report be brought back to the Panel in respect of the impact which the post has had on the learning attainments of the looked after population and the prospective arrangements after the post has ceased.

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

**ACTION ARISING: Head of Learning to provide the Panel at its next meeting with a report on the impact of the LAC Learning Coach on the looked after school population and the arrangements for when the post has ceased.**

7.2 The report of the LAC Nurse for Quarter 3, 2014/15 was presented and noted.

**NO FURTHER ACTION ARISING**

7.3 The report of the LAC Team Manager for Quarter 3 2014/15 was presented and noted.

**NO FURTHER ACTION ARISING**

7.4 The report of the Child Placement Team Manager for Quarter 3 was presented and noted.

**NO FURTHER ACTION ARISING**

7.5 The report of the Leaving Care Co-ordinator for Quarter 3 2014/15 was presented and noted.

**NO FURTHER ACTION ARISING**

**8 PALLIAL RELATED MATTERS**

The report of the Children's Commissioner for Wales on Learning the Lessons from Operation Pallial was presented and was noted by the Panel for information purposes.

The Chair confirmed that the report is being given consideration by Social Services.

**NO FURTHER ACTION ARISING**

**9 WELSH GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION – RAISING THE AMBITIONS AND EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF CHILDREN WHO ARE LOOKED AFTER IN WALES**

The Welsh Government's consultation document was presented for the Panel's consideration and comment.

The Panel noted that the consultation document identifies a number of issues and potential actions for all key stakeholders at a time of financial constraints for both schools and local authorities and made the point about whether they were realistic or achievable in that context.

The Director of Lifelong Learning confirmed that the Education Service as part of its response to the Welsh Government document will be highlighting actions which may involve significant investment. The LAC Education Liaison Officer said that a number of actions identified are undertaken already.

The Panel noted that what the Welsh Government document proposes in terms of raising the educational attainments of looked after children runs counter to its actions in changing the terms and conditions of grants that support education thus putting at risk the post of the LAC Learning Coach which promotes the educational attainment of looked after children (as discussed under item 7.1). The Panel proposed that its concerns regarding this contradiction and the potential effects of the changes in grant arrangements be incorporated within the response to the Consultation document.

**It was agreed to note the document and the information contained therein.**

**ACTION ARISING: Head of Learning to incorporate within the response to the Welsh Government consultation document the Panel's concern regarding the change in grant arrangements that support education and the potential effects in terms of the loss of the LAC Learning Coach post.**

**10 CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL ACTION GROUP**

The minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel Action Group held on 4 February, 2015 were presented and their contents noted by the Panel.

**11 FOSTER CARERS IDENTITY CARDS**

The report of the Fostering Recruitment and Marketing Officer regarding the proposed introduction of Foster Carer Identity Cards was presented for the Panel's consideration. The report set out the benefits of the proposal, the practicalities of implementation as well as considerations in relation to putting in place the necessary safeguards for the use of the cards.

The Panel supported the proposal with the proviso that the scheme and the way it is used does not stigmatise children who are looked after.

**It was agreed to support the introduction of Foster Carers Identity Cards on the lines described in the report.**

**NO FURTHER ACTION ARISING**

**12 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The Principal Corporate Parenting and Partnerships Officer confirmed that Rebecca Wilde from Barnardo's Cymru would be attending the Panel's next meeting.

**13 METINGS OF THE PANEL FOR THE FORTHCOMING YEAR**

The Panel's schedule of meetings for 2015/16 was presented and noted.

**Mr R.P.Jones  
Chair**

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