

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

Minutes of the meeting held on 1 June, 2015

- PRESENT:** Dr Gwynne Jones (Chief Executive) (Chair)
- Councillor Kenneth Hughes (Portfolio Member for Education)
Councillor Aled M. Jones (Portfolio Member for Housing and Social Services)
Councillor Dylan Rees (Partnership & Regeneration Scrutiny Committee)
Mr Douglas Watson (Chair Anglesey Foster Carers' Association)
Mrs Rona Jones (Independent Reviewing Officer)
Mrs Gwen Carrington (Director of Community)
Anwen Huws (Head of Children's Services)
Mrs Delyth Molyneux (Head of Learning)
Llyr Bryn Roberts (Principal Officer – Corporate Parenting & Partnerships)
Dawn Owen (Child Placement Team Manager)
Heulwen Owen (LAC Education Liaison Officer)
Llinos Edwards (LAC Nurse)
Karen Roberts (Principal Housing Officer)
Ann Holmes (Committee Officer)
- APOLOGIES:** Mrs Sue Willis (BCUHB), Natalie Woodworth (Principal Officer – Operations), Sean McClearn (Leaving Care Co-Ordinator), Llio Johnson (Delivery Manager – Children and Young People)
- ALSO PRESENT:** Jane Marr (Secondary Education Officer) (for items 4 and 6)

The Chair welcomed all those present to the meeting and extended a particular welcome to Councillor Aled Morris Jones as the new Portfolio Member for Housing and Social Services and to Councillor Kenneth Hughes as the new Portfolio Member for Education.

1 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

No declaration of interest was received.

2 MINUTES OF THE 9TH MARCH, 2015 MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 9th March, 2015 were presented and confirmed as correct.

3 MATTERS ARISING

3.1 With reference to the key issues in relation to CAMHS which the Panel deemed as requiring further discussion and clarification around access criteria and thresholds both from the perspective of Children's Social Care and the Education Service, the Head of Children's Services informed the Panel that a professional from the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service will be joining with the Children's Services Team meetings to try to resolve any stumbling blocks beyond routinely responding to individual cases. She suggested that the Education Officer be invited to attend the next Children's Services team meeting at which a CAMHS professional practitioner will be in attendance so that that forum can then become the vehicle for progressing matters with respect to CAMHS and the Corporate Parenting Panel can be updated accordingly.

It was agreed to proceed in accordance with the Officer's proposal.

3.2 With reference to the prospective awards ceremony to be held on 16 October, 2015 to recognise the achievements of children and young people looked after by the Authority, the Principal Officer - Corporate Parenting and Partnerships confirmed that the event will be staged at the Carreg Bran Hotel, Llanfairpwll and that a meeting had been held at the venue the previous week with the children and young people involved to co-ordinate the arrangements.

3.3 With reference to the provision of 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 to the previous meeting on children missing from Local Authority care, the Head of Children's Services said that she would follow the matter up with the Principal Officer (Operations) to ensure the Panel's members receive the information.

3.4 Care Placements and Changes in Placements

With reference to the Panel's request at the previous meeting for clarification of the process for determining care placements and changes in placements along with the considerations involved, the Principal Officer - Corporate Parenting and Partnerships presented a report setting out each stage of the placement process, the pivotal role of the Resource Panel as the provider of a scrutinising, gatekeeping and authorisation function for placement resources and family support services, and the factors taken into account as part of the placement process. The Officer also drew the Panel's attention to the following as key aspects of the process –

- Placement Strategy and the principles on which it is based
- The Children's Service's Delivery Plan for 2014/15 and the targets therein to reduce the number and costs of placements procured through independent fostering agencies.
- The Fostering Invest to Save Strategy.
- Other circumstances and reasons that lead to placement moves for children and young people.

The Officer said that in order to meet the targets in the Service Delivery Plan, consideration has been given to strategies that allow for the safe reduction of external LAC placements. To be successful, the complex and specialist nature of this work needs to be understood and resources allocated to ensure the potential risks to the child associated with placement disruption are minimised. In January, 2015 all external placements were reviewed and evaluated against the factors outlined in paragraph 8 of the report which led to the identification of a small number of looked after children and young people whose care arrangements have since changed due to the placement not meeting their needs with the resultant outcomes described in paragraph 9. The Officer emphasised that although there are good reasons to want to reduce the number of children placed with external carers, the primary consideration underpinning any such decision will always be to meet the needs of the child.

The Head of Children's Services said that the Welsh Government's Minister for Health has set a challenge to Welsh local authorities to reduce the number of care placements in Wales as it is high in comparison with England and because the rate at which children enter the care system in Wales is more rapid than that in England. There is also a view that the life outcomes for looked after children tend to be poorer than those of their contemporaries in the mainstream, and that there is limited research to corroborate the optimism shared by agencies and local authorities that accommodating children is always a positive step. Locally, the Authority is commissioning a piece of work to analyse the looked after population. The Principal Officer - Corporate Parenting and Partnerships and the Children's Services Transformation Programme Manager are jointly undertaking work to analyse the looked after population's needs pattern in entering the care system and to seek to establish whether there are ways of working to change behaviours that lead to children coming into care particularly in relation to unplanned placements. A great deal of work is already being undertaken in the form of the evolving Placement and Foster Carers Recruitment and Retention Strategies. There is also evidence to suggest that the Invest to Save Initiative is helping to avert costs and that less resources and less overnight care was commissioned from the independent sector in 2014/15. The Principal Officer - Corporate Parenting and Partnership has been asked to formulate a Business Case 2 to increase the investment in this initiative in order to maximise savings. When the savings proposals for Children's Services were presented for scrutiny as part of the

2015/16 Budget setting process there was a clear consensus at scrutiny level that savings targets were not to be achieved at the expense of looked after children and there is now an understanding between Scrutiny, the Executive and Officers that their interests should not be compromised in order to secure financial savings.

In the ensuing discussion on the report, the following points were raised –

- The panel sought clarification of some of the data relating to the LAC population as at paragraph 5 of the report and whether it signified any particular trend or pattern in terms of increased pressures, capacity or insufficient placement options.
- That the Authority needs to ask whether it is meeting the needs of children and young people it looks after in the best way possible while they remain in its care in terms of enabling them to reach their potential. It also needs via another work stream to establish whether children and young people come into care for the right reasons and that it is satisfied that those reasons are sufficiently robust to warrant the placement or whether effective and timely intervention might have prevented the need for a child to become looked after in the first place.
- The need to examine each and every unplanned placement, and to better understand why these happen so that resources can be targeted at strategies that avoid escalation and support family resilience. The Panel was informed that consideration is being given to incorporating such models as part of the service transformation.
- The need for up to date assessments to be clear regarding the looked after child's situation and what can best meet their needs.
- Whether the Authority's performance with regard to the looked after population compares favourably with that of other authorities in Wales. The Panel was informed that the Authority performs well against the benchmark set by Welsh Government that a looked after child should not have more than 3 placement moves in one year, and it has also seen an overall reduction in the number of placement breakdowns. For 2014/15 there were only three children in care who experienced 3 or more placement moves (3.41%) which represents a significant improvement on the previous three years' performance and, based on last year's Welsh average figures it would place the Authority in the highest quartile. In view of the challenges and limited placement options, this performance shows a commitment and co-operation across Children, Education and Health services to maintain children's care placements.
- Concerns around the disruption to a looked after child's education because of a change in the LAC placement. The Panel was informed that although much effort is sometimes expended in ensuring that the child's education remains constant whatever the change in placement, it is not always in the interests of the child to have to travel long distances to school for the sake of stability. However the Authority is confident that the changes that have occurred have been planned rather than reactive.
- The need to set still more challenging targets with regard to recruiting foster carers and to invest accordingly, hence the current work on a Business Case 2.

The Panel considered the information presented and was satisfied that the Authority reviews placements to ensure they remain appropriate and continue to meet the needs of the looked after child, that it seeks where possible to maintain permanency in placements and that the best interests of the child is the guiding factor in decisions taken.

It was agreed to accept the report and to note the process, and considerations involved, in determining placements and placement moves.

NO FURTHER ACTION ARISING

3.5 Post of LAC Learning Mentor

This item was considered as a confidential item under the provisions of Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that it involved the disclosure of exempt information as defined in Schedule 12A of the said Act and in the Public Interest Test presented.

With reference to the Panel's request at its previous meeting for evidence of the impact of the post of LAC Learning Mentor on the looked after school population in light of the prospective loss

of the post because of a change in grant arrangements, the Head of Learning presented a report which set out the following –

- The number of children in care which the post holder had worked with over the previous four academic years totalling 33.
- The kinds of support offered by the LAC Learning Mentor during her period in post.
- Examples of feedback from schools testifying to the valuable input provided by the LAC Learning Mentor in supporting individual looked after children to develop their skills and educational attainment and the disappointment expressed at the demise of the post.

The Head of Learning informed the Panel that notwithstanding the positive comments from schools as documented in the report, there is no quantitative evidence that the LAC Learning Mentor's assistance has had a direct impact in improving the educational outcomes for the looked after population. She informed the Panel that a change in the terms of the Pupil Deprivation Grant through which the post was financed means that the funding will now be implemented through the GwE North Wales Consortium rather than through the Local Authority with the intention that educational support for looked after children will be provided on a whole school basis rather than via a specific post.

In response to the Panel's expression of regret at the loss of the support which the LAC Learning Mentor delivered on a one to one basis, the Head of Learning said that LAC Co-Ordinators for the region are meeting across the network to put together a package for schools to enable them to deliver support to looked after children as a matter of day to day provision.

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

NO FURTHER ACTION ARISING

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

The Secondary Education Officer reported verbally on the Authority's response to the consultation by the Welsh Government's on raising the ambitions and educational attainment of children who are looked after in Wales. The draft strategy proposed potential actions for all key partners involved with looked after children to support them to achieve better educational outcomes and was issued on the basis that looked after children as a group are deemed to have unsatisfactory experiences resulting in educational attainment rates significantly below that for other mainstream children.

The Officer summarised the Authority's response to the questions asked by the consultation document and referred to the following as of particular interest to the Panel:

- That local authorities should designate an elected member to have lead responsibility for the education of children who are looked after. The Authority is in agreement that such a designation would help strengthen the voice of looked after children especially in terms of informing strategy and operational decision making.
- That likewise a lead governor should be designated in each maintained school with lead responsibility for the education of children who are looked after.
- The adoption of a Virtual School Head approach which assigns responsibility for delivering co-ordinated support for children who are looked after and for improving their educational attainment to a senior local authority officer. The approach has been trialled in areas of Wales and is established in England. The Authority will look at how such a role works in areas where the approach has been implemented.
- The need for effective partnerships and collaboration between agencies involved with children who are looked after. The Authority agrees that it is essential that Social Services and Education Services work together to build success.
- The need for local authorities and schools to collaborate to develop materials to help carers and foster parents understand the importance of engagement with schools and post-16 education providers and in promoting their educational needs.
- That while the Authority is of the view that the document is clear in its intent, more information is required about looked after children prior to their entering the care system to be able to

subsequently evidence the extent of their progress as a result of local authority support and intervention.

The Head of Children's Services said that the strategy provides an opportunity for the Authority to take stock and to evaluate how it intends to track the educational journey of looked after children from the perspective not only of examination results and basic targets, but also from the perspective of their attendance, their emotional health and well-being and in order to ensure that they leave school with some form of recognition be it in the form of a GCSE or otherwise.

The Chair said that in being a corporate parent, the Authority should be seeking to make sure that the children in its care are attending school and/or are receiving a schooling; that it is aware of their potential and that they are making progress to fulfil that potential and that furthermore, they receive the best possible experiences from their education. He suggested that the Panel might wish to satisfy itself via a report that the Authority if it does not already have in place a system to ensure that those fundamental principles are established and are effective, is taking steps to that end.

It was resolved to note and accept the information as part of Authority's response to the Welsh Government's consultation.

ACTION ARISING: Principal Corporate Parenting and Partnerships Officer in collaboration with the Secondary Education Officer to draft a report for the Panel on how well the Authority is implementing the three basic principles referred to and what it needs to do to take a more holistic approach to the educational achievement of looked after children in terms of ensuring they have rounded and positive experiences of school.

5 WHEN I AM READY – PLANNING TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD FOR CARE LEAVERS

The report of the Principal Corporate Parenting and Partnerships Officer outlining the preparatory steps which the Authority is taking ahead of implementing the When I am Ready arrangements before April, 2016 in line with the Welsh Government's intentions was presented for the Panel's consideration. The Officer reported that as part of the implementation programme, a Task and Finish group is to be set up to agree on policy and procedures as documented in the report.

The Head of Children's Services drew the Panel's attention to the fact that there are financial concerns around the implementation of the When I am Ready arrangements which seek to extend foster placements post 18 in order to extend a young people's transition to adulthood within a family and household environment. Although the Welsh Government has introduced the scheme as a cost neutral initiative those counties which piloted the arrangements have shown that there are cost implications to it. The Officer said that she was concerned about its affordability and she highlighted the possibility that a report may have to be brought to the Council to draw its attention to the scheme as an additional unfunded need by the Welsh Government and that Children's Services are unlikely to be able to meet the need from current resources.

The Chair of the Anglesey Foster Carers' Association said that whilst the child's interests must be paramount and that it must not be a financial decision, the scheme does have financial implications for foster carers and the Authority has to be prepared to cost the arrangements.

The Panel noted the position, and acknowledged that this matter may have to be revisited post implementation if resource issues do arise.

It was agreed to accept the report and to note the local arrangements being made to implement the When I am Ready statutory responsibilities.

ACTION ARISING: Panel to be updated on any financial issues arising as a result of implementation.

6 EDUCATION SAFEGUARDING REPORT APRIL 2013 TO MARCH 2014

The Education Safeguarding Report for 2013/14 was presented for the Panel's consideration.

The Panel noted the report for information purposes and noted also that it would be considered by the Corporate Safeguarding Panel.

NO FURTHER ACTION ARISING

7 CSSIW INSPECTION OF FOSTERING SERVICE

The report of CSSIW on its inspection of Fostering Services at Anglesey undertaken in January, 2015 and an Action Plan in response to issues raised were presented for the Panel's consideration. The inspection carried out was an announced baseline inspection which assessed the four quality themes – quality of life; quality of staffing, quality of foster carers and the quality of leadership and management.

The Panel was informed that the inspection was generally positive and recognised areas of good practice as well as improvements made since the last inspection. One area of non-compliance with the requirements of the Fostering Services (Wales) Regulations 2003 was identified but was found not have had an adverse impact on the quality of life of children and a non-compliance notice was not issued. Actions to address areas where further improvements can be made are in progress as indicated by the Action Plan.

It was agreed to accept the report along with the accompanying Action Plan.

ACTION ARISING: Foster Services Manager to provide the Panel with an exception report in the event of any slippages on the Action Plan timescales.

8 CSSIW NATIONAL INSPECTION OF SAFEGUARDING AND CARE PLANNING FOR LAC AND CARE LEAVERS WHO EXHIBIT VULNERABLE OR RISKY BEHAVIOURS

The report of the Principal Officer - Corporate Parenting and Partnerships summarising the key findings from the CSSIW national inspection was presented for the Panel's consideration.

The Head of Children's Services said that the findings from the Anglesey specific report has already been presented to the Panel and the actions arising therefrom have been incorporated within the Service Provision/Business Plan.

The Principal Officer - Corporate Parenting and Partnerships referred to the good practice examples which the national report had identified in relation to services and their partners who have an input into the care of looked after children, and said that these need to inform the review and development of Anglesey's own Corporate Parenting Panel Strategy.

It was agreed to accept the report and to endorse the good practice examples for incorporation within the Corporate Parenting Panel Strategy.

NO FURTHER ACTION ARISING

9 THE REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER

The report of the Independent Reviewing Officer was presented for the Panel's consideration. The report provided an analysis of the looked after population in terms of trends, age and ethnic profile, placement arrangements, issues to be addressed and key messages from LAC reviews. The report noted that there had been a gradual increase in the looked after population over the previous 12 months with the total standing at 91 for Quarter 4 compared with 78 for the previous quarter.

The following issues were noted and discussed –

- That many of the children/young people accommodated are placed in care in a situation of crisis with little or no foregoing information about their needs. Seventy eight are being looked after because of child protection concerns (78). It was noted that a further breakdown of the 78 children/young people thus accommodated would be helpful in trying to establish the reasons why they come into care and to plan services accordingly. It was emphasised that there needs to be an attempt to understand the underlying messages from the data rather than accepting them as bald figures.
- The number of out of county placements remains high.
- The number of children accommodated under Regulation 38 whereby children are placed with family without a clear assessment of need. In the event that the assessment when made is

negative it is all the more difficult to remove the child from the family placement to a foster care placement.

- The need to refresh LAC documentation and in particular review reports so that they are more personal to the individual child.
- That a meeting is to be arranged with Tros Gynnal to seek ways of improving children and young people's participation in LAC reviews especially with regard to articulating their wishes and feelings.
- Clarity around the Authority's decision making with regard to adoption in terms of setting out the reasons for the decision in court and other reports. The Head of Children's Services said that the new PLO procedures have been in effect for over a year and the feeling is that it is a very tight schedule in terms of providing sufficient time to assess all the options and the work that goes with that task. Consequently consideration has been given to whether the structure of the service is appropriate to meet the requirements.
- The process for dealing with concerns raised by the IRO. The Head of Children's Services said that there is a process within Children's Services for resolving professional disputes. The IRO does have recourse to CAF/CASS if she deems the Authority is failing in its duty to a looked after child/young person. The Head of Service seeks to develop a culture whereby disputes are discussed and resolved openly and transparently and in a way that is constructive rather than defensive.
- That there is a concern around contact and the supervision of contact. The Head of Children's Services said that the acceptance of supervised contact has almost become a default position and consideration needs to be given to whether there is sufficient assessment of the need for supervision. There has been discussion around commissioning a tool to assist with contact decisions.
- That it would be helpful to have a mechanism (not necessarily within the Corporate Parenting Panel unless the issue is of corporate significance) to ensure that issues raised by the IRO are followed up in the Service's Work Programme.

It was agreed to accept the report of the Independent Reviewing Officer and to note the issues raised.

NO FURTHER ACTION ARISING

10 ADVOCACY SERVICE

The Principal Officer - Corporate Parenting and Partnerships informed that Panel that Tros Gynnal has commenced on a three year contract for the provision of an advocacy service across North Wales and that while the organisation proposes to provide the Panel with quarterly update reports, it will only provide representation on an annual basis for the presentation of an annual report unless specific concerns are raised in the interim.

The Panel sought clarification of how under the proposed arrangements, it will be able to obtain qualitative information about the service provided in terms of the views of the looked after population about the usefulness of advocacy and not simply information about the number accessing the service.

The Head of Children's Services informed the Panel that the information which Tros Gynnal is able to provide is statistical and that that information can be provided through contract monitoring arrangements. Children's Services are about to go through an appointment process for a Participation and Family Conference Officer and it is this post that will take the lead on Children's Services participation matters and on developing different means of communication with looked after children which will help build a more informative picture of their views and feelings. The Officer said that the formal advocacy service represents one dimension only of advocacy for looked after children and young people and that participation should be viewed as an integral part of the service and not a provision that is delivered externally.

The Director of Community said that consideration also needs to be given to why many care leavers do not maintain contact with the Authority. There is currently a consultation being undertaken on Children and Advocacy Services as part of the Social Services and Well-being Act (Wales) 2014, and the Panel will need to consider how it wishes to deal with new requirements under this legislation.

It was agreed to note the information.

NO FURTHER ACTION ARISING

11 ANGLESEY FOSTER CARE ASSOCIATION

Mr Douglas Watson, Chair of the Anglesey Foster Care Association provided the Panel with an overview of the Association in relation to its membership and governance; its aims as an organisation and charity and its promotion of social activities for the Authority's family of foster carers and the children they look after.

Mr Watson highlighted the often stressful, isolating and often challenging nature of foster caring and referred to steps taken during the last 12 months to address concerns through the establishment of the Foster Carers' Forum which provided the Association with a valuable interface with Children's Services. He referred to social activities for both carers and children which the Association arranges and supports by fundraising and he said that it is unlikely that the Association will be able to sustain this level of fundraising in the long term and would appreciate if consideration was to be given to a more formal allocation of local authority funding. He stressed the importance in the interests of morale and the retention of foster carers of including them in service planning and consultation processes so they do not feel marginalised.

It was noted that funding and other issues raised would be considered by the Foster Carers Forum. It was further suggested that the Association might utilise central library resources to collate materials for projects and make them available for Foster Carers locally.

The Panel thanked Mr Watson for his presentation and expressed its appreciation of the contribution of the Authority's Foster Carers, and of the Association's work in representing and supporting them.

12 SERVICE REPORTS

The following service reports were presented and noted –

- The report of the LAC Education Liaison Officer
- The report of the LAC Nurse

The Panel considered issues arising from the placement of children from other local authority areas in care on Anglesey in terms of the responsibilities, the provision of services, and the resource pressures as distinct from the Corporate Parenting Panel's responsibilities towards the Authority's own looked after children. It was agreed that an initial report providing baseline information on the number of children placed in care on Anglesey by other authorities, the placement made, their schooling and the resource implications be presented to the Panel.

ACTION ARISING: Principal Officer - Corporate Parenting and Partnerships in collaboration with the Secondary Education Officer to report back to the Panel on the number, status, schooling and resource implications of children placed in care on Anglesey by other local authorities.

- The report of the Child Placement Team Manager
- The report of the Leaving Care Co-Ordinator

The Head of Children's Services referred to the reference made in the report to a 50% reduction in the Leaving Care Social Worker Service in 2012 and clarified that the two leaving care social worker posts in 2012 were adapted to meet the statutory requirement to provide a personal advisor. While there remained a social worker for the 20 or so care leavers significant work is done by the personal advisor so the change was not a service cut but a service adaptation to respond to a statutory need.

The Director of Community highlighted the Care Leavers Service as an area where more work is required in terms of improving performance and contact to the extent that a service review is required to examine practice and approach and to formulate a service plan based on meaningful principles and performance indicators. The Head of Service agreed to follow up

with the Principal Officer (Operations) the report on the service arrangement for care leavers and a progress report against the Missing After care report that the Panel had requested. The Head of Service said that she was of the view that this is a service that requires a fundamental review to ensure that a different approach is provided, based on the principles of the Social Services and Wellbeing Act 2014 and has engagement with the young people and direction by them at its heart.

ACTION ARISING: Head of Children's Services to follow up the reports as noted.

- The report of the LAC Team Manager

13 FOSTER CARE CHARTER

The Foster Care Charter was presented and noted subject to updating the information therein with regard to the Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel and Portfolio responsibilities.

14 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business to report.

15 NEXT MEETING

Noted as Monday, 7th September, 2015, at 2:00 p.m.

Dr Gwynne Jones
Chair