

# CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

## Minutes of the meeting held on 7 September, 2015

- PRESENT:** Dr Gwynne Jones (Chief Executive) (Chair)
- Councillor Kenneth Hughes (Portfolio Member for Education)  
Councillor Dylan Rees (Partnerships & Regeneration Scrutiny Committee)  
Mr Douglas Watson (Chair – Anglesey Foster Carers' Association)  
Mrs Sue Willis (BCUHB)  
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)  
Sean McClearn (Leaving Care Co-ordinator)  
Ann Holmes (Committee Officer)
- APOLOGIES:** Councillor Aled Morris Jones (Portfolio Member for Housing & Social Services),  
Natalie Woodworth (Principal Officer – Operations)
- ALSO PRESENT:** Mrs Mandy Humphries (Manager North Wales Adoption Service (for item 4))
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### 1 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

No declaration of interest was received.

### 2 MINUTES 1 JUNE, 2015 MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 1<sup>st</sup> June, 2015 were submitted and confirmed as correct.

### 3 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

- With reference to taking a more holistic approach to the educational experiences of looked after children and young people, the Principal Officer (Corporate Parenting and Partnerships) informed the Panel that a meeting between the Children's Services, Education Services and Health had been held to explore the issue; a further meeting is planned and the aim is to make it an integral part of the Corporate Parenting Strategy which is currently in development.
- With reference to implementing the When I am Ready statutory responsibilities which allow young people to remain with their foster families once they have reached 18 years of age, the Head of Children's Services said that a great deal of work has been undertaken in preparation for putting the arrangements into effect for April, 2016 and three funding models have been developed which are subject to an options appraisal. The Officer highlighted the fact however that there are significant cost implications to implementing the When I am Ready arrangements whichever funding model is adopted. The Principal Officer - Corporate Parenting and Partnerships emphasised that there has to be an element of consistency in the financial provision made to foster carers across North Wales under the When I am Ready scheme and that further discussions are needed with regard to this aspect. **The Panel noted that a further report would be forthcoming in due course on progress on this issue.**
- With reference to the Action Plan put in place to respond to issues arising from the CSSIW inspection of Fostering Services, the Principal Officer – Corporate Parenting and Partnerships

confirmed that the work is ongoing and there were no slippages to report on the Action Plan timescales.

- With reference to the number of children placed in care on Anglesey by other local authorities and the consequent pressures this places on resources and services, the Principal Officer – Corporate Parenting and Partnerships said that a meeting between the Education, Children’s and Health Services had taken place to discuss the issue and that it could be confirmed that according to initial data, there are currently 52 children in placements on Anglesey from other local authority areas. As regards the pressure which these placements put on resources, the status of children placed on the Island and where they receive their schooling needs to be confirmed and a further meeting of the services convened to establish the implications as regards education and health provision.
- With regard to looked after children missing from local authority care, the Head of Children’s Services referred the Panel to the report prepared by the Principal Officer (Operations) which provided the general context to responding to children missing from care; information relating to the particular circumstances of the one young adult missing from this authority’s care and the continuing efforts being made to trace the individual as well as ongoing work and areas of development in conjunction with other relevant agencies including Barnardo’s to develop knowledge of child sexual exploitation and the link between children missing from care and child sexual exploitation. The Director of Community informed the Panel that there is also an ongoing dialogue on a North Wales basis and involving the Police Service regarding what the provision should be and how best that can be met in the long-term in relation to child sexual exploitation which is at the root of many concerns about children missing from care. Additionally the Police has secured funding to extend the agreement with Barnardo’s which will provide a foundation for a regional framework for addressing this matter so that there is a consistency of approach across North Wales. **The Panel noted the position and took assurance from the account of the work that is being carried out to raise awareness of child sexual exploitation and child trafficking and to thus improve safeguarding.**

#### **NO FURTHER ACTIONS ARISING**

#### **4 NORTH WALES ADOPTION SERVICE – ANNUAL REPORT AND QUALITY OF CARE REVIEW 2014/15**

The Annual Report and Quality of Care Review of the North Wales Adoption Service for 2014/15 was presented for the Panel’s consideration.

Mrs Mandy Humphries, Manager of the North Wales Adoption Service provided the Panel with an overview of the Service’s activities during 2014 and she referred to the following as key points –

- That as of 31 March, 2015 there was a total of 34 adopter assessments across the North Wales region. There were 7 available adopters and 18 on hold for potential matches.
- That at the same time there were 14 children on the waiting list for families with no identified match at present which is considerably lower than in previous years and which is attributable to the increase in the number of children placed during the year and a decrease in the number of referrals. An analysis of children waiting by county is given on page 8 of the report.
- A total of 196 enquiries were made across the six North Wales local authority areas during the period from April, 2014 to March, 2015 resulting in the completion of 84 response forms. This represents the highest number of enquiries since the service’s inception and despite the slight decrease in the response forms the resultant number of application forms (61) is also significantly higher than in previous years.
- In terms of marketing, 55% of enquiries are received via the NWAS website which continues to be the main source of enquiries. A further 20% are received via the Local Authority websites.
- A total of 55 children were placed for adoption and 48 children were adopted.
- The 2014/15 years saw a significant decrease (34%) in the total number of children referred to the service although the number placed has remained stable and the number of children adopted has risen slightly and is the highest recorded compared to previous years.
- There has been a significant rise in the number of babies being placed for adoption and a decrease in the number of sibling groups. Analysis of placements by gender and age is provided at pages 27 to 28 of the report.

- There has been a 32% increase in the number of adopters approved in the 2014/15 financial year compared to the previous year's figure. Although the number of adopters of children up to the age of 3 has risen there has been a decline in the number of adopters approved for children above this age group.
- The service consists of staff members directly employed by the host authority and staff seconded from the remaining five local authorities and is supplemented by additional sessional workers. The service is almost fully staffed.
- NWAS continues to work in partnership with After Adoption to provide a Safe Base Programme for approved adopters with children in placement. Feedback to After Adoption following the courses has been positive and shows an increase in the number of adopters who felt more able to manage their children's needs which will hopefully sustain placements and prevent disruptions in future.

The Head of Children's Services said that being part of the North Wales adoption consortium has enabled Anglesey to fulfil its statutory duties with regard to adoption and that this is a partnership that pre-dates the formation at the Welsh Government's behest, of the 5 regional collaboratives under the umbrella of the National Adoption Service.

The Panel considered the report and the following matters were raised in the ensuing discussion thereon –

- The Panel sought to establish whether there were any specific reasons for the rise in the number of babies placed for adoption. The NWAS's Manager said that there are advantages to children in being placed at the earliest possible stage and that it is a trend that is being replicated nationally. The Head of Children's Services said that although it was difficult to come to any definite conclusions regarding changes in pattern locally because of the limited numbers involved it had come to her attention as part of her role in evaluating whether an adoption placement is the right option for an individual child prior to the submission of a Care Plan to the Courts and the issuing of a placement order, that the children being placed for adoption during the past year have been younger.
- The importance of local support to ensure the success and permanency of the placement and the adoption process. The Panel noted that there are issues around the availability of therapeutic support services for adopted children and emphasised the need to ensure that there are adequate support services in place to prevent placement breakdowns.
- The pattern as regards bilingual requirements and the ability of the service to meet those requirements as a core part of the provision.
- Whilst acknowledging that it was not necessarily a like for like comparison, the Panel noted that the comparative data on a national basis indicates that the North Wales service takes longer to process applications and for assessments to be made which suggests there is a process issue that partners need to be mindful of. The Panel felt that it would be helpful if the figures were investigated at a more detailed level to be able to understand why that is the case and to try to learn from it. The NWAS's Manager said that the service is looking at where in the process delays are occurring and where are the obstructions.
- The Panel noted that there are differences in practice across local authority areas in the context of placements made and that consistency of approach is required with regard to adoption services.

**It was agreed to note the North Wales Adoption Service's Annual Report and Quality of Care Review for 2014/15.**

**NO FURTHER ACTION ARISING**

## **5 NATIONAL ADOPTION SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT 2014/15**

The first Annual Report of the National Adoption Service for 2014/15 was presented for the Panel's information.

The Director of Community informed the Panel that Suzanne Griffiths, the National Adoption Service's Director of Operations is keen to visit North Wales within the next six months and she suggested that the Panel might wish to issue an invitation to her to attend one of its meetings at that time.

The Panel noted from the report that the rate for looked after children is higher in Wales than in England and that according to the report, no satisfactory explanation for that situation can be given.

The Head of Children's Services said that the Welsh Government's Minister for Health and Social Services stated that the number of children in care in Wales is too high and that the rate at which children in Wales enter the care system is more rapid than that in England. The Heads of Children's Service in Wales did commission a piece of work by Cordis Bright which sought to analyse the reasons for the differentiation in numbers of children receiving care in counties in the context of factors such as deprivation, expenditure etc. and that work showed that certain factors are common to those counties where the percentage of children receiving care is relatively low e.g. they have a clear strategy that aims to prevent the need for children to enter the care system arising in the first place, and to reduce the number of children in care in a safe way. However, it can be difficult in practice to bring down the number of children in care – the majority of children who are currently under the care of the Children's Services on Anglesey have come into the system under Care Orders made by the Courts i.e. a significant threshold of harm is judged to have been reached in those cases. Understanding the reasons why children locally come into the care system in the first place will form an essential element of the transformation work within Children's Services in the next two to three years. Children's Services in Anglesey currently spend a third of their budget on meeting the costs of children in care.

The Director of Community said that the Minister of Health and Social Services has also issued an invitation to form a working group on fostering services nationally and to look at how fostering services are shaped. Whilst working to reduce the number of children within the care system locally poses a challenge in terms of the implications of moving towards fewer children in care and is a corporate undertaking as regards processes and procedures, there is also a substantial body of work ongoing at national level.

**It was agreed to note the Annual Report of the National Adoption Service for 2014/15.**

**ACTION ARISING: Chair of the Panel to issue an invitation to Suzanne Griffiths, Director of Operations for the National Adoption Service to attend one of its meetings at a time to coincide with her proposed visit to North Wales.**

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

The report of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) for Quarter 1 2015/16 was presented for the Panel's consideration. The report provided an overview of the children currently being looked after by the Authority in terms of their age, gender and ethnic profile; their legal status and reasons for accommodation; the type of placements made and the conduct of LAC reviews. The report also highlighted practice issues arising and how these might be addressed.

Among the key messages from the IRO's report were the following –

- From 1 April, 2015 to 30 June, 2015 the Authority looked after a total of 95 children and young people which represents an increase on the previous quarter's total and is reflective of an upward trend generally.
- The high percentage of children and young people being placed in care under Child Protection is a concern and may be indicative of a lack of appropriate resource to prevent children and young people from being accommodated in the first instance.
- The largest group accommodated continue to be with independent agencies out of county (24)
- Whilst the number of reviews completed within timescale decreased slightly during Quarter 1, the overall trend remains good and the PIs for LAC reviews continue to be high. There is still room for improvement including more consistent use of the relevant Notification Form by social workers to alert the administrator to a child becoming "looked after."
- Parental participation in LAC reviews remains variable. Many do attend review meetings but do not complete the relevant consultation papers.
- Secondary schools are poor in attending or providing a report for the child/young person's LAC review.
- The number of children experiencing a breakdown in their placement continues to be too high,
- There is a clear lack of CAMHS intervention at an early stage in the placement when it is deemed to be fragile. CAMHS continues to provide advice and support to the foster carers but does not provide any service directly to the child unless the child is in a stable placement.

However, in many cases early input by CAMHS is a pre-requisite in terms of facilitating a stable placement.

The Panel considered the report and raised the following issues thereon –

- The Panel noted a continuing issue with access to the CAMHS service as and when looked after children and young people require it, and noted also that early intervention by CAHMS in addressing any mental and emotional needs which the individual child /young person may have is often an important factor in averting placement breakdown. The Head of Children's Services said that both the national CSSIW inspection report on the safeguarding and care planning of looked after children and care leavers and the Anglesey specific report identified shortcomings in the availability of the CAMHS service resulting in the burden of responsibility being placed instead on local authority social services. The deficit in provision was recognised as a national issue which needs to be addressed on an all Wales basis. The Officer said that she was not aware that BCUHB had provided a strategic response to those reports and that it would be helpful for it to take ownership of the messages emanating from the inspection with regard to the CAMHS provision. Whilst accepting that the reports may not have been brought to the attention of the CAMHS service, the Panel noted that meeting the needs of the LAC population is a collective responsibility and a way needs to be found to work together to address regional and national concerns.
- The Panel noted that the number of out of county placements is high compared to other forms of accommodation for looked after children and young people and whilst recognising that these placements are required to meet specific and often complex needs that cannot be fulfilled locally, it was concerned that the placements are costly and do impose an additional burden on children's social workers who may have to travel considerable distances to visit the children concerned. The Principal Corporate Parenting and Partnerships Officer said that the Service's Invest to Save initiative seeks to recruit 10 new foster carers each year for the next three years. However there are not enough carers on Anglesey to meet the increase in the number of children and young people in the 10 to 13 age range who are coming into the care system, hence the need to have recourse to out of county placements. An additional investment has been made in Phase 2 of the Invest to Save Initiative to try to further maximise the savings but the task of providing a sufficient range of placements to meet the diverse needs of the LAC population remains a challenge.
- The Panel noted that it would be helpful for it to be provided with information to clarify and to differentiate between the number of placements made within county on Anglesey; placements out of county in neighbouring authority areas and specialised out of county placements which typically account for the highest level of expenditure.
- The Panel noted that the Independent Reviewing Officer highlights a number of practice issues within her report and it sought clarification of how these would be addressed. The Head of Children's Services said that the IRO will be invited to attend a meeting of the Children's Services team to ensure accountability with regard to the practice matters to which she has drawn attention. Additionally, the Manager of the Business Support Unit and the Principal Officer - Operations have been asked to devise a protocol to be used in circumstances where there is a professional disagreement between the IRO and the service to ensure that any differences of opinion are resolved constructively.
- With regard to the responsiveness of Secondary schools in relation to LAC reviews, it was agreed that schools be given a specific timescale within which to respond and in the event that the timescale is missed, then the matter be brought to the attention of the ALN Education Officer. The Principal Corporate Parenting and Partnerships Officer said that it would be included as a target within the Corporate Parenting Panel Strategy.

**It was agreed to accept the report of the Independent Reviewing Officer and to note its contents.**

**ACTION ARISING: Principal Officer - Corporate Parenting and Partnerships Officer to provide the Panel with a breakdown of placements within county; out of county and specialised out of county.**

## 7 SERVICE REPORTS

The following service reports addressing specific aspects of the provision for the LAC population were presented for the Panel's consideration and were noted –

- The report of the LAC Education Liaison Officer

The Head of Learning informed that Panel that it the intention to move to a situation whereby schools themselves will assume responsibility for the completion of personal education plans which it is hoped will ensure they are completed within timescales and will allow the service greater latitude to focus on qualitative aspects. The LAC Education Liaison Officer confirmed that data with regard to the educational attainments of the LAC population will be reported to the Panel's December meeting.

- The report of the Child Placement Team Manager

The Panel noted that requests for emergency placements remain high and was assured that further work would be undertaken to better understand why this is so and to better manage the situation.

- The report of the LAC Team Manager
- The report of the Leaving Care Co-ordinator

As at at-risk group, the Panel noted the increase instances of pregnancy in young care leavers with concern and sought to establish whether these pregnancies were intentional or accidental and if the former, what is the Authority able to offer the young women in its care who are often emotionally vulnerable and have little support so that they do not view pregnancy as the desired outcome. The Head of Children's Services said that the Corporate Parenting Strategy is key in providing a foundation to enable the Authority to better prepare care leavers for adult life through better education and work opportunities. Although the numbers in this context are small, there remains a concern regarding being able to ensure the best life outcomes for this cohort of young people.

**It was agreed to note the Panel's concern and that it will continue to monitor this trend.**

The Leaving Care Co-ordinator drew the Panel's attention to the opportunity that came the way of two of the young care leavers to meet with the Children's Commissioner for Wales at Plas Menai as a positive and also highlighted the unresolved issue of subsidised gym membership, apprenticeships and opportunities for work experiences within the Authority as ongoing points to note with regard to care leavers.

The Head of Children's Services referred to the update provided with regard to the local situation in relation to the Lost After Care publication by the Office of the Children's Commissioner for Wales in 2011 and said that a review of the After Care Service is required in order to draw out a planned and purposeful response to the Lost After Care agenda. She confirmed that she would be giving careful thought to this matter and would report back to the Panel with a specific schedule once she had assessed the staffing and resource position against the requirements.

**ACTION ARISING: Head of Children's Services to report back to the Panel on a schedule for responding to the Lost After Care publication.**

## 8 ADVOCACY – TROS GYNNAL QUARTERLY REPORT

The report of Tros Gynnal Advocacy Service providing an analysis of referrals by source, location, age and issues for the first quarter of 2015/16 was presented and was noted by the Panel.

## 9 FOSTERING RECRUTIMENT AND TECHNOLOGY

A report by the Fostering Recruitment and Marketing Officer outlining a proposal to establish a dedicated Isle of Anglesey Fostering Service micro-site, Facebook and Twitter in order to help fulfil

the Invest to Save initiative was presented for the Panel's consideration. The report set out in detail the main benefits of the proposal, the costs primarily in terms of staff time and the main challenges involved.

The Principal Officer – Corporate Parenting and Partnerships said that direct contact between the Council and Anglesey residents is increasing through the web and social networking. By developing a fostering micro-site, Facebook and Twitter for Anglesey, the Council will be able to offer an opportunity for those with a specific interest in fostering to engage with its service in a straightforward and meaningful way. As the ultimate recruitment tool combining the internet with word of mouth, social media is highly cost-effective and can be used alongside a micro-site and real life event to complement a comprehensive recruitment strategy.

The present social media strategy for Anglesey requires all communication to be disseminated through the Communications, Web and Tourism teams; however having an online voice for fostering on Anglesey makes sense in the context of the Invest to Save bid which seeks to significantly reduce costs by increasing fostering placements. By not implementing the proposal and developing an online presence, the Authority faces the risk of being left behind in the online fostering marketplace.

The Panel was supportive of the proposal and identified further potential opportunities that might be explored in due course to use Skype and Face time technology to support Foster Carers and also as a link between Foster Carers themselves.

**It was agreed to recommend to the Executive –**

- **That a fostering micro-site be developed for recruitment purposes with a specific area for sharing information with existing foster carers: timescale – as soon as possible**
- **That a social media presence on Facebook and Twitter be developed: timescale – early 2016**

**ACTION ARISING: Principal Officer – Corporate Parenting and Partnerships to initiate discussions with ICT Business Transformation, Communications and Graphic Design to explore the possibilities with a view to -**

- **Ensuring that relevant guidance and policies are in place for the management of accounts;**
- **Softening the brand by integrating the corporate image with the fostering service's imagery;**
- **Ensuring that accounts across all platforms are in keeping with the overall corporate brand and strategic aims.**

## **10 URGENT BUSINESS – SPECIFIC CASE**

This item was not included as part of the business of the meeting but the Chair agreed that it be raised as information of which the Panel needed to be aware because of its implications for Children's Services.

The Director of Community informed the Panel of a placement that had been made for an individual in secure accommodation due to the specialised requirements of the case. She confirmed that the case met all the criteria as regards secure accommodation but highlighted the fact that it posed significant challenges to the Authority in terms of being able to respond to the needs of the individual in a practical and sustainable way, and that the placement also had financial implications for the Authority.

The Panel noted the information.

## **11 NEXT MEETING**

Noted as scheduled for Monday, 7 December, 2015 at 2:00 p.m.

**Dr Gwynne Jones  
(Chair)**

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