

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

Minutes of meeting held on 23rd September, 2019

Present: Councillor B.T. Gray (Chairman), Dr. I.J. Johnson, K.F. McCaffer and E. Williams; Ms. J. Ballantine (Principal HR Business Partner), L. Carver (Director of Social Services), Mrs. M. Coles (LAC Education Co-ordinator and Lead Professional EAL), Ms. A. Condy (Operational Manager CYPS), Ms. K. Conway (Operational Manager CYPS), M. Dacey (Lead Officer Social Inclusion and Wellbeing), D. Davies (Head of Achievement for All), Mrs. R. Evans (Head of Children and Young People Services), Ms. C. Light (Care Leavers Forum Representative), Mr. M.E. Thomas (Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer) and Ms. G. Toon (Complex Needs Manager and Principal Educational Psychologist).

Also Present: Amanda Gardner (TM, CLA Team - for Fostering Well-being Programme item), Ceri O'Dare, (TM, 15 Plus Team – supporting Chair of Care Leavers Forum), Abbey Durrans (PM, Placements Team – for Fostering Well-being Programme item), Amy McArdle (Marketing and Recruitment Officer, Placements Team – for Fostering Well-being Programme item).

(1)	Apologies for Absence –
	These were received from Councillors Mrs. P. Drake, O. Griffiths, Mrs. R. Nugent-Finn and Ms. M. Hudson (Head of Standards and Provision Learning and Skills).
(2)	Minutes and Matters Arising -
	The minutes of the meeting held on 8 th July, 2019 were agreed as an accurate record. There were no matters arising.
(3)	Presentation: Fostering Wellbeing Programme -
	Colin Turner (CT), from the Fostering Wellbeing Programme, introduced the presentation by saying that the Fostering Wellbeing Programme was an innovative solution funded by Welsh Government and delivered by the Fostering Network. The Programme was run in the Cwm Taf region from 2017 to 2019. It had been formally evaluated by Cardiff University with an overall positive outcome. He went on to say the Programme recognised that in order to improve outcomes, multi-agency working through a partnership framework across Social Services, Health and Education was essential. The Programme had therefore been designed specifically for professionals working with Children Looked After and young people. This Programme would encourage professionals to work together with the focus being on improving wellbeing outcomes and it would create a shared language for multi-agency professionals as well as a shared framework from which to operate and would contribute to workforce development. He then cited the expected outcomes of this Programme, which included for example:

- Greater recognition that foster carers were a key part of the team alongside teachers and social workers and played an important role as 'first educators';
- Increased engagement with foster carers and social workers through integrated activities and the development of a shared approach;
- Greater knowledge and confidence displayed by foster carers in advocating for the child and accessing education support services;
- Increased access of foster carers to peer support, training and information;
- A tested as a sustainable model, ready for further roll out across all regions at the end of the funding period.

He then added that the Programme would operate at regional level and deliver learning as well as bringing people together and sharing best practice across service boundaries in order to embed a shared approach across the region. He emphasised the fact that the Welsh Assembly Government had agreed to fund this project and to implement it within Wales, initially in Cwm Taf as part of the pilot, but then rolled out across the country.

CT then ran a short You Tube video about the implementation of the programme in Cwm Taf, which detailed the various stages of the Programme as well as the positive feedback of professionals involved in this Programme so far. After this he went on to say that the Programme would require support and 'buy-in' by the Corporate Parenting Panel in order to get this implemented within Cardiff and the Vale with funding provided by the Welsh Assembly Government in order to set up the project board. However, it was crucial that this get off the ground as soon as possible as the money needed to be spent before the next local elections. Elizabeth Bryan (EB), also from the Fostering Wellbeing Programme stated that educational professionals in the Cardiff and Vale area were keen to get this Programme off the ground and have the training initiated, particularly within the Vale.

CT continued with the presentation and focused around the key aims of the Programme which centred around equipping children and young people who were looked after to fulfil their potential, to provide a shared and consistent approach to meeting the needs of children and young people looked after and to help increase their ambition and help them to find success, also for professionals to become active advocates for the children and young people for whom they have a responsibility for, whether that was in an individual or corporate sense. CT went on to describe the key deliverables of the Programme, which included the delivery of themed masterclasses, recruitment and training of fostering and wellbeing 'pioneers' as well as service support.

CT finally mentioned the master classes which were a key component of the Fostering Wellbeing Programme. This Programme would enable foster carers co-professionals to:

- gain the skills, contents and confidence to help inspire children and young people to fulfil their potential

- build upon knowledge, understanding and skills, confidence and strategies to use in working with each other and the children in their care
- equip participants with theories, practical tools and additional materials that could be used straight away in order to enhance practice.

Overall, this would help to engender greater wellbeing for children looked after, which was defined as a person's basic needs being met and used the acronym SPECL (S standing for Social, P standing for Physical, E standing for Emotional, C for Cultural and L for Learning) in order to illustrate this. CT mentioned the fostering wellbeing pioneers who would be experienced foster carers that had received specialist training developed by the fostering network such as in peer monitoring and support, counselling skills, recording and reporting as well as emotional coaching.

After the presentation, Councillor Dr. Johnson questioned how the Programme and related Project Board would work, for example how this would operate, how has it worked in Cwm Taf and how would it work in the Vale of Glamorgan.

EB replied that in the early stages they would need to speak to the Vale of Glamorgan how best to do the master classes. Colleagues from Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan would need to be drawn in, such as in the fields of education, health, social services, CAMHS, etc.

RE replied that this was all in the early stages at present but it was necessary to work quickly on this in conjunction with Children's Services in the Vale. She went on to say there was huge potential in this Programme and it was necessary to speak to key people/stakeholders as well as asking colleagues in the fostering network to look at the practicalities and look to get corporate buy-in as soon as possible. As part of this there would need to be a tie-in with Cardiff Authority in order to get this project up and running.

CT also added this all needed to be done under a regional footprint due to the nature of the Welsh Assembly Government funding. He went on to say that spreading the master classes across the Vale of Glamorgan and Cardiff, for example, would mean if professionals missed a master class in the Vale they could re-attend another master class in Cardiff. The joint work would be positive in the sense that it would avoid complacency and bring in new ideas.

A Member of the CLA team asked if the programme would also be looking at kinship or other non-foster carers to which CT replied that yes, this could be looked at going forward.

The Chairman concluded that the Parenting Panel needed to be proactive in this regard and the importance of endorsing this Programme. The Chairman asked the Democratic Services Officer that the relevant links to the Fostering Wellbeing You Tube video be forwarded to Members for their review and understanding of the Fostering Wellbeing Programme.

(4) The National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) –

This was presented by Francesca Bell (FB) as the Project Co-ordinator for NYAS in the Vale of Glamorgan. The presentation provided an overview of the services currently provided by the organisation and where they were currently at in terms of provision. FB went on to explain the mission statement with their rationale being the support of children, vulnerable adults, parents and carers and to ensure these are heard through the provision of confidential advice, information and representation.

FB went on to say that this service was now embedded in the Vale of Glamorgan and that children could opt in or out of the NYAS service at any time. The services included:

- active offer of advocacy;
- issue based advocacy service;
- systems advocacy; and
- additional NYAS services for children and young persons within the Vale.

NYAS acted as an advocate for children specific issues as per Article 12 of the UNCRC. Contact services provided by NYAS are bespoke and less formal than other agencies that children and young persons may engage with. FB stated that predominantly the services provided by NYAS related to supporting children at meetings with another agency - this formed approximately 40% of the overall services or issues that NYAS dealt with regarding children and young persons. An example of young person's advocacy would be in situations where a child or young person wanted to move from formal social worker support to alternative, less formal arrangements. Using NYAS in that manner meant that sometimes children felt more able to speak and offer their thoughts and feelings about issues as the NYAS advocate would speak on behalf of the child. Such services from NYAS could also be accessed in other counties. FB also mentioned a wider range of other services that NYAS could provide such as mental health and wellbeing, the Unity Project which involved young mothers to be – for example, providing them with support such as receiving baby boxes and parent advocacy where parents with additional learning needs could also be supported.

The Chairman stated that it was important to have such an advocacy service for children that were looked after.

RE added that sometimes it took a third party to help children resolve issues between them and Social Services and other agencies.

Councillor Dr. Johnson also added that it was important to have an agency that offered children a 'voice' and a say with regard to their care and support. He referred to the figure in the presentation around referrals where there were 91 referrals and asked for clarification whether this was just the Vale of Glamorgan or the wider region. FB went on to say that within the Vale of Glamorgan these figures related to children who had an advocate and also stressed that all children who required advocacy from their service did receive it.

	<p>The Chairman referred to the area around active offer referrals and what this exactly meant. FB replied that these figures included children who, once aware they could receive advocacy, had actively used the service. The Chairman stated that going forward such reports would need to look at drilling down on these figures, for example in the quarterly reports.</p> <p>DD went on to say that FB’s referral to parenting advocacy was of particular interest and would be very useful in terms of offering support to parents with learning difficulties.</p> <p>Councillor Williams mentioned that part of the presentation seemed to suggest that Social Services were not meeting all the needs of children and young persons and wondered if this was a systemic issue. FB replied that children who came to use NYAS were typically those who were not happy with the services currently provided, for example by Social Services and in such cases NYAS would be a mediator between the child or young person and Social Services and would let Social Services know what issues the child or young person had with its provision.</p> <p>RE went on to say that it was important that her department received complaints in such circumstances in order that they could improve and provide greater support to children and in fact NYAS did not seem to be saying that it was a systemic problem as such.</p> <p>Councillor Williams went on to say that it was important that when talking about NYAS and any issues that arose from Social Services provision, there was a need to look at the support given to social workers in the tasks they undertook.</p> <p>The Chairman concluded that by getting regular figures through on these matters it would ensure that the Panel could assess these issues better as well as the wider Vale of Glamorgan Council.</p>
(5)	Children Looked After –
	<p>RE introduced the presentation by saying that the key aim would be to reduce the need for children to enter care but also to balance this by keeping children safe, which was a statutory responsibility and not to keep children out of care at any price. This entailed daily management of risk by Social Services. It was also important to recognise the opportunities as well as addressing the challenges within this area and also how the Vale of Glamorgan was aligned with the Welsh Assembly Government’s call for action in this area - although RE noted the Vale of Glamorgan would be carrying out these actions anyway and the alignment was purely coincidental. RE stated the Children Looked After rates per 10,000 population within the Vale were just above the Welsh average with older age ranges of children being prevalent. Part of this could be explained that where you had younger children i.e. within age range 4-6 years, the key aim was looking for permanency within this group for example via adoption rather than fostering. In terms of the breakdown of Children Looked After, RE pointed out that the majority were either in foster care or within</p>

kinship or parent care, also of those children placed outside the county or outside of Wales, the majority were placed within foster type placements or within kinship ones, with a smaller number being in residential type accommodation. RE went on to say that in relation to the numbers of those children starting to be looked after and those ending their care, within the last three years the difference between these groups had grown with a higher number being entrants rather than leavers. It was noted that last year this graph was the highest with 40 more children becoming looked after than ceasing to be looked after. RE pointed out that this was due in part to a rise in population and wanted to also say 60% of children who left foster care went back to their families.

RE went on to say that the current Corporate Strategy for Children who need Care and Support would be replaced by a new one in the near future and a draft of this new strategy would be going to Scrutiny in October and then on to Cabinet. Two of the key objectives here would be:

- support families to stay together; and
- to provide support at the 'edge of care'.

The Corporate priority to provide a range of services for preventing escalation would include:

- effective operation of our information, advice and assistance service;
- recommissioning of Family Support Services;
- Families First, FACT, Parenting and Wellbeing services;
- Flying Start;
- Early Action Together;
- ICF investment;
- flexible funding.

As part of the strategy there needed to be optimum cultural conditions in order to ensure the system worked, for example ensuring that caseloads were at manageable levels, investment in training and motivated staff who knew their children well. A key area would be the recruitment and retention of staff to ensure this could be done. As part of this there needed to be formal and informal supervision supported by management tiers as well as visibility of managers such as in the co-location of frontline teams with Operational Managers based alongside Head of Service within the same building. Finally, RE mentioned the creation of a Service Development Officer post which would have a positive impact on the strategy. This would ultimately help to ensure that proper assessments were in place when it came to children leaving care and going back to their family if suitable to do so. This would be a sustainable model in terms of Children Looked After moving away from care and living within a family unit. RE reiterated the need to upskill staff and the key resource for this was staff in place and also new staff which RE exemplified with the new position of Marketing Officer with the person involved bringing the new skillset to the team. In this way the Council could provide strong emphasis on Children's Services and help to ensure sustainable family arrangements,

	<p>including working with Courts who considered the Vale of Glamorgan to be a 'sensible' Authority with regard to this. RE also noted that as the Vale of Glamorgan was a small Authority it could also mobilise quite quickly with regard to Children Looked After. RE then asked the Panel if there were any questions on the back of the presentation.</p> <p>The Chairman stated that this was a useful presentation and was the backbone to the conversation that the Local Authority was having with the Welsh Assembly Government. The Welsh Assembly Government had sight of how each Council was dealing with Children Looked After and also had seen the performance of the Vale of Glamorgan Council in respect of this area resulting in them sending a thank you to the Authority for their work.</p> <p>These comments were echoed by Councillor Williams, who said it was an excellent presentation.</p> <p>CL stated that it had been an achievement that the Authority had seen only a limited rise in numbers for Children Looked After. The Chairman added that the presentation had been good in not simply being a review of numbers of children in care but also had offered a view on how children were looked after and their care needs assessed.</p> <p>LC went on to say that the drive to reduce numbers of Children Looked After would not result in a reduction in the cost or quality of the service provided, in fact what would happen would be an increase in support provided and that would lead to a proactive, 'smarter' approach.</p>
(6)	Any Other Business –
	No items were raised.
(7)	Date of Next Meeting –
	Monday, 18 th November, 2019 at 4.30 p.m. in the Council Chamber, Civic Offices, Barry.