

REMOTE CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

Minutes of meeting held on 09th November, 2020

Present: Councillor B.T. Gray (Chairman), P. Drake, Dr. I.J. Johnson, K.F. McCaffer, R. Nugent-Finn, N. Thomas and, E. Williams; 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), Mr. M. Dacey (Lead Officer for Social Inclusion and Wellbeing), Mrs. R. Evans (Head of Children and Young People Services), M. Hudson (Head of Standards and Provision), Mr. M. Ingram (Head of Housing and Building Services), Miss CL (Care Leavers Forum Representative), C. O'Dare (Team Manager) and Mr. M. Swindell (Cabinet & Committee Services Officer).

(1)	Apologies for Absence –
	These were no apologies for absence received.
(2)	Minutes and Matters Arising –
	<p>The minutes of the meeting held on the 28th September, 2020 were agreed as an accurate record and would go on in Part I and Part II form to a future Cabinet meeting.</p> <p>There were no matters arising.</p> <p>It was noted that the figures Councillor Dr. I.J. Johnson (IJ) requested concerning the final figures for the current projected budget overspend from last year had been circulated to Members.</p>
(3)	Children Looked After –
	<p>Breakdown</p> <p>Mrs. R. Evans (Head of Children and Young People Services) (RE) took the Committee through the circulated papers beginning with the Quarter 2 submission of data to Welsh Government (as shown in Appendix 1 to the papers).</p> <p>Partners working together had made strong strides in reducing the number of Children Looked After (CLA) by the end of March 2020. Since that time, there had been significantly more challenges to overcome as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic .</p> <p>RE reported there had been an increase from Quarter 1 to Quarter 2 from 262 to 273 CLA which represented a high increase for the Vale of Glamorgan. There was continuing pressure in relation to admissions with more children being received into care. No child was received into care without a robust decision. There was a flow through the system of children exiting care as well as being received.</p>

Some of the ways that children become non-looked after can be through the discharge of Orders through the Courts where placements are with kinship foster carers or children are placed at home with their parents. There had been a significant impact on being able to proceed in this manner with the Courts as a result of COVID-19 as the Court's ability to hear discharge applications has been compromised, as had the Authority's ability to progress assessments to take a decision to go to Court to seek discharge of an Order

Children also exit care if they have a plan for adoption which has also experienced some delays in the context of COVID-19 where the Courts weren't able to prioritise applications for Adoption Orders. Applications for Adoption Orders have now resumed, with 5 achieved to date in this year and 7 more pending for Quarters 3 and 4.

Some children also turned 18 in the year.

Welsh Government asked where activity had been impacted with children placed out of area, outside of Wales or indeed brought back to the Vale. There is an assumption that a child being placed out of the area or Wales is a negative but this is too simplistic a statement. Often if placed with kin or parents, or for adoption out of area, that was a positive outcome for the child.

There had been high demand for placements with less availability in-house which had increased reliance on externally purchased care. Decisions also had to be taken into account concerning siblings remaining together or matching children's needs to suitable provision.

Placements outside of the Vale or Wales only occurred where required to do so or if a suitable match was found, and all decisions were weighed carefully before being made. Considerations regarding impacts in children such as loss of family connections, peer and friendship groups, etc. are discussed as part of any consideration of provision outside of the Vale or Wales, but it cannot be naturally assumed that a placement elsewhere is always a negative as each case is individual.

There were now some signs of a return to more normal practice but still a long way from what was considered 'normal business'. The priority to keep children safe, to consider their welfare and maintain safeguarding practices remain central to everything.

RE then referred to Appendix 2 which Welsh Government had asked to be completed in Quarter 1. There had been increased numbers of admissions, some as emergencies and a few as planned cases. Some exits for the system were documented also but were not counteracting the admission numbers. The increase to 273 CLA in Quarter 2 showed the impact the pandemic had had on the numbers entering and exiting care over the difficult 3-month period.

Cllr Thomas (NT) asked if getting Care Orders was not happening due to pressure on the Courts. RE replied that it wasn't that the Authority were not able to apply to the Court for an Interim Care Order, but the Court has had to prioritise

its activities so the ability to make an application to discharge a Care Order or Adoption Order had been compromised. Courts were not currently meeting face-to-face and are working virtually and hybrid hearings had also been established. Safeguarding activity had not been compromised, but activity that changed the plan of events concerning individual children had been.

Cllr Johnson (IJ) advised that he found the table for CLA data useful, as well as the explanation for the flow in understanding the process of flow through the system and that the information was worth retaining even if Welsh Government were not currently asking for the information.

Ms. K. Conway (Operational Manager CYPS) (KC) took the Committee through Appendix 3, which had not been circulated but was available on-screen at the meeting, concerning a breakdown of Children Looked After in the Vale of Glamorgan as of the 05th November, 2020, for information.

KC advised that the number of CLA had increased to 281 as of Friday the 05th November, 2020. This compared to 259 at the end of March 2020, 262 at the end of June 2020 and 273 at the end of September 2020.

The presentation considered confidential information concerning children who potentially could be identified from the detail within the presentation. The discussion was therefore recorded under a confidential Part II report.

RE referred to the discussion that took place at the last Corporate Parenting Panel concerning there being more boys than girls who are looked after. Although gender has little to do with the cases specifically, the numbers of cases over the last week had involved more males than females. However, this was not a gender-specific issue and no trends in place that should warrant concern.

Mrs. M. Coles (LAC Education Co-ordinator and Lead Professional EAL) (MC) asked whether the profile had changed within age groups at all. KC confirmed that since the last figures were reported to Corporate Parenting Panel there had been increases in all the age groups and no concern within any particular age group as a result.

IJ referred to the costs of external placements and if there was any additional support from within Council or Welsh Government in terms of dealing with increased cases at present, particularly in recognition of the fact that Court services had not been able to function as normal during this period and additional challenges were being faced as a result of current circumstances. RE advised that during the early part of the pandemic there had been an opportunity to make submissions to the COVID hardship fund as the increased cost of placements had been noted, but the numbers were smaller at that time and access to that fund was now no longer available. There was a cost pressure award to Children's Services in relation to the costs of external placements that sat outside of residential provision. Officers are working hard to ensure that costs related to the budget are monitored and accurate due to the higher levels of activity and the budget is not currently overspent.

	The Chairman thanked RE and KC for the information provided and hoped the Courts were soon able to administer the requirements for the CLA in our care.
(4)	Housing – update concerning the effects of COVID-19
	<p>Mr. M. Ingram (Head of Housing and Building Services) (MI) took the Committee through a presentation onscreen concerning some of the issues faced by Housing Solutions since March 2020 as well as legislation around care leavers and priority status afforded to them through the Housing Service. MI also updated Panel Members concerning the gateway into supported accommodation and how people move through that element of the service.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Housing Solutions Service had been under enormous pressure since March 2020, with 116 units of B&B accommodation block booked with 3 local hotel providers, with the majority of business for two of those hotels via Cardiff Wales Airport. • There had been over 2,300 homeless enquiries since March 2020. • Previously, 40 units of accommodation had been used across those 3 providers; that provision had had to increase week on week since March 2020 which saw a huge increase on demand on the Service and the available accommodation. • The vast majority of those threatened with homelessness were under the age of 35. • There were no recorded care leavers over 18 years old in temporary accommodation managed by Housing Solutions currently; 16 and 17 year old would not be placed into B&B accommodation, rather supported accommodation or via Social Services. • There were a significant number of people with drug and alcohol issues, as well as mental health concerns and other vulnerabilities, that required support. • The Local Authority has statutory duties under legislation to assist those identified with vulnerabilities and in priority need. During the pandemic, Welsh Government amended the legislation and issued new guidance in relation to homelessness which meant that effectively anyone who was homeless or under threat of homelessness, regardless of whether they had a priority need or not, the Local Authority was required to provide them with accommodation and drove additional demand for additional units. • Funding was provided under Phase 1 from Welsh Government until the end of March to support the significant financial impact on the Authority, who had given authority to block book accommodation at 2 of the hotels until the end of March at a cost of £700k, some of which would be met by Housing Benefit and the rest from Welsh Government. • The issue for all Local Authorities was that after March 2021, what would happen regarding all those in temporary accommodation at that time, the challenge for the Vale being the limited availability of single person's accommodation. • Under the Phase 2 funding, the Authority had proposals to build some units of modular accommodation and were working with a private landlord

to convert an existing and empty residential; homes into a supported accommodation unit for single people with complex needs.

- Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee had asked for a Task & Finish group to be established to look at the medium and longer term planning arrangements and was due to begin in the new year.
- Relevant legislation for Care Leavers lay in the Housing Wales Act 2014, Section 70. The Council must have regard to Chapter 16 of the Housing Act Code of Guidance 2016 where the housing of young people falls on a number of different agencies and stakeholders with a requirement in the guidance to work in partnership to secure suitable accommodation .
- The Authority works in partnership with Llamau with the One Stop Shop as well as a range of supported accommodation and had set up a Gateway Panel Service for 16-21-year olds. Every young person who required some sort of supported accommodation was referred through that Young Persons Gateway Panel, which was made up of Supporting People staff, Housing Solutions staff, Social Services 15+ Team Manager and support providers such as Llamau and Pobl.
- From May 2019 to June 2020, 189 referrals had gone through the Panel and as of last week there were 13 young people on a waiting list for appropriate supported accommodation.
- There was provision for ‘floating’ support for people within the various accommodation schemes.
- In terms of pathway, people were assessed via the Gateway and a Panel decision taken for the most appropriate route for that young person. Once placed in suitable supported accommodation, a range of agencies work with individuals to help them get the best chance of moving on to a more permanent housing arrangement.
- Young people are supported through Move On with the Gold Plus card as the highest banding within the Council's Allocations Policy and backdate it to the date they moved into the supported accommodation, giving them a priority into a more permanent housing arrangement. The majority were accommodated through social housing or via the private sector if they feel they can be supported via that route.
- There can be issues with Housing Benefit for privately rented accommodation as well as issues with single room allowances.
- Care Leavers are not categorised as a separate group within the Housing Service and the Young Person's Gateway was for all young people. There had been 25 referrals classified as young and vulnerable between May 2019 and June 2020 but also 164 referrals where homelessness was the lead need but also included as a secondary or tertiary need, being young and vulnerable. As such, it was difficult to accurately say how many Care Leavers there were currently in the system as it relied on the Service being advised that they were a Care Leaver.

The Chairman thanked MI for the detailed information provided and opened up the matter to Panel Members for questions.

Councillor Neil Thomas (NT) referred to the difficulties surrounding a lack of accommodation for single people and welcomed the idea of modular housing

proposal where the appropriate support structures would also need to be in place. However, he felt that may be a shorter term solution but was interested in the pre-formed modules that were low energy, quick-build and sustainable solutions as used in Machynlleth. He also suggested that Planning Committee should be considering in terms of Planning Policy, planning applications and Section 106 possibilities.

The Chairman added that in the first instance this was something that the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee would be looking into.

MI added that the accommodation being looked at was factory built and could be on site by the end of March 2021. A report was going to Cabinet on the 16th November. It was possible to move at speed currently under the pandemic regulations, but a full planning process would need to be undertaken should the process go on for longer than the current guidelines were in place. Cabinet had also considered a report on the Local Housing Market Assessment which identified a disparity between the supply and demand for single persons accommodation. With support from Housing and Planning, the Authority would like to increase the numbers of single persons units being built either on private developments or with partner Housing Associations. Part of the discussion within the Homes and Safe Task & Finish Group would be how to utilise existing stock or change existing stock to deal with such issues, both on a temporary or permanent basis. Local Authority stock was traditionally family housing and there may be a need to invest in modifying existing larger accommodation to smaller units.

Councillor Dr. I.J. Johnson (IJ) advised as a member of Planning Committee that there was a number of smaller one and two bed social housing that had been given planning permission that had not as yet been built and were available. He referred to not knowing if young people were Care Leavers unless they had volunteered that information and looked to clarify where that information would come from, e.g. a question on application.

MI advised that the information on Care Leavers was not a requirement for collation from the Welsh Government and was not part of the statistical return; there was a requirement to collect information on young people but not specifically referencing care. The Authority however would be collating that information going forward, but there could be cases where a young person wouldn't want to inform us and wouldn't volunteer that information.

C. O'Dare (Team Manager of the 15+ Team) (CO) chaired the Gateway Panel and advised that at present there were only 3 young people as Care Leavers on the waiting list awaiting assessment but chosen not to engage with Children's Services as part of their care and support. Information was not collected on whether they are Care Leavers directly but could be gathered if required. Younger people require support and may be more likely to not identify in that was initially.

With no further questions, the Chairman thanked all parties for their contributions.

(5)	Apprenticeship Routes
	<p>CO shared an update on developments in securing apprenticeship routes for CLA and Care Leavers. CO advised the Panel that they had identified opportunities through targeted recruitment on social housing, opportunities for CLA or Care Leavers through the routes of pre-employment training, work experience, trainees / traineeships and on to apprenticeships. It was identified it was a 100% affordable scheme by the Local Authority.</p> <p>There was also a partnership with Organisational Development & Learning to assist any Care Leaver to apply for Council-wide apprenticeships, assisting young people to complete the application forms and would be guaranteed an interview. Links are also in place with Hafod, Wales and West and United Welsh who had all signed up to the apprenticeship housing scheme. Work also took place with Careers Wales via 'inspire to learn and into work'. There was also a link to JEHU, who had engaged four Care Leavers and were looking to offer site-management experience in January 2021 (COVID restrictions depending), which hopefully could lead on to apprenticeships in the future.</p> <p>The Chairman thanked CO and opened up the matter to Panel Members for questions.</p> <p>Councillor K.F. McCaffer (KM) stated it was reassuring to hear that the construction industry was continuing through the pandemic and able to potentially involve young people in learning new trades and skills.</p> <p>Miss CL (Care Leavers Forum Representative) agreed this represented an amazing opportunity for Care Leavers as she had experienced difficulties with employment after leaving care and with limited support. CL advised she had been offered an internship with the Department of Education with the support of CO and her team and applauded any opportunities made available to young people.</p> <p>CO advised of the internship advertised with Welsh Government for Care Leavers and CL would be interviewed again on the 12th November. The Chairman noted it was positive to hear that CL was being supported through that process.</p> <p>MI advised of a current bid for Department for Works and Pensions funding where a number of different schemes were being pulled together under one banner. Different pots of funding sat in different parts of the Council and it was being attempted to coordinate those funds to get more value for money for young people. He added there had been the first meeting last week of a Foundational Economy Working Group where there had been discussion around apprenticeships as well as reinforcing social value. Another matter being looked into concerning longevity was for apprentices to start with one RSL at a particular site and then in year 2 or 3 of that apprenticeship, move to another provider for additional experience where apprentices are needed.</p>

	<p>Councillor P. Drake (PD) asked if there were many females applying for apprenticeships with the construction industry.</p> <p>KM stated that generally there was a massive push within the construction industry to recruit more women on every level (planning, site-managing, health and safety, etc.).</p> <p>RE gave praise to CO who was exceptionally proactive in seeking out opportunities and outcomes for young people, working incredibly hard to engage with young people and Care Leavers. The Care Leavers Forum was her development and had helped CL and others, and CO has worked hard to progress opportunities for others. Panel echoed thanks to CO and her team.</p> <p>With no further questions, the Chairman thanked all parties for their contributions</p>
(6)	Work Programme Items – Discussion
	<p>The Chairman referred to the discussion at the last meeting and held a meeting to pull together all the aspects that Panel had mentioned. The strands from those discussions had been circulated and would now be worked through to form the future agenda items. The Chairman asked Panel Members if they felt anything else was missing or should also be included, going forward.</p> <p>IJ asked to prioritise the advocacy update, as well as an update on the issues and positives experienced in 2020 as a result of the pandemic. He also referred to a report from the National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) and would be interested in an update.</p> <p>The Chairman advised that the agenda items would be agreed following Agenda Conference meetings for the new year meeting or March at the latest.</p>
(7)	Any Other Business –
	There were no items of other business for consideration.
(8)	Date of Next Meeting –
	Monday, 18 th January, 2021 at 4.30 p.m.