

CORPORATE PARENTING CABINET COMMITTEE - 26 MAY 2009

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING CABINET COMMITTEE
HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOMS 1/2/3, CIVIC OFFICES, ANGEL STREET, BRIDGEND,
ON TUESDAY, 26 MAY 2009 AT 3:50PM

Present: -

Councillor A E Davies - Chairperson

Councillors

M E J Nott - Leader
D Sage - Deputy Leader
H J David - Cabinet Member - Resources
L C Morgan - Cabinet Member - Wellbeing

Invitees:

Councillors

M W Butcher
R D Jenkins
K J Watts

Officers

H Anthony - Corporate Director - Children
M Shepherd - Head of Healthy Living
S Hughes - Senior Solicitor
M A Galvin - Senior Cabinet and Committee Officer

19 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from the following Members and Officers:-

Councillor J C Spanswick - Holiday
Councillor S Smith - Town Council commitments
Councillor M Thomas - Other commitments
L Harper - Annual Leave

20 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

21 APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED: That the minutes of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting - Cabinet Committee held on 31 March 2009 be approved as a true and accurate record.

22 REVISED COMPREHENSIVE PLACEMENT STRATEGY FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN IN THE SAFEGUARDING AND FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICE - APRIL 2009 - MARCH 2012

The Corporate Director - Children submitted a report, which attached for approval at Appendix 1, a Draft Revised Comprehensive Placement Strategy April 2009 - March 2012.

The Corporate Director - Children outlined some background information in relation to the report and accompanying Strategy, which advised that looked after children (LAC) population in Bridgend had increased steadily from 31 March 2002 to 31 March 2008, from 175 children to 277 in 2008, with a peak of 299 experienced in June 2007.

This had reduced to 264 recently it was added, largely due to intensive focus being given to LAC, through the Supporting Vulnerable Children Programme.

Concern remained ongoing regarding the significant high costs association with looked after services, particularly out of Authority placements which in turn had denied the Safeguarding and Family Support Service an opportunity to commit as much interest in family support services as had been required.

The Corporate Director - Children advised that certain Strategies and Policies have or were in the process of being developed, so as to ensure that early interventions were in place, to prevent children coming into care and ensure that those under Council care, were supported into long-term secure family environments, where possible.

The Revised Placement Strategy set out the means by which the Safeguarding and Family Support Service would seek to provide both the range and quality of placements required to meet the anticipated needs of children and young people being looked after, over the next three year period and beyond.

The Strategy, the Corporate Director - Children confirmed, should be read in conjunction with the Permanence Policy (for LAC and Young People) attached at Appendix 2 to the report, which was a framework to support an exploration of options to enable children to develop secure attachments to committed carers, for the duration of their childhood and into adulthood.

The Strategy outlined the principal intended activities to develop and strengthen placement services, so that suitable provision was available at the right time, in a suitable place and at an appropriate cost, in an effort to provide increased choices to achieve best matches, so that each child's differing needs were met.

The key issues that the Revised Placement Strategy would endeavour to address were looked after children numbers, the use of Independent Foster Agency Placements and Multi-agency planning and commissioning of accommodation services.

The Corporate Director - Children advised that reports recently received from the CSSIW and the Creative Exchanges' report "Bridgend Children Deserve the Best", had confirmed that LAC in Bridgend was at a higher figure than it probably should be, for a number of reasons which were alluded to in the document.

There had also been a long-term trend of Independent Foster Agency (IFA) placements, which the Corporate Director - Children advised, were around double the cost of in-house Bridgend County Borough placements, and this was another issue that the Strategy would look to address and reduce via suitable plans and actions.

The residential provision managed by Bridgend County Borough Council (fifteen places in three Children's Homes) was above average for Welsh local authorities and was currently therefore under review.

CORPORATE PARENTING CABINET COMMITTEE - 26 MAY 2009

The Strategy then outlined a Plan of how to seek to reduce the overall LAC population by 31 March 2012 to 200, and set out points (i.e. A1 - A8 of the document) on steps for how to achieve this.

The Strategy also provided information on ways of providing placements to meet various needs, with targets identified to specifically:-

- (a) Reduce the number of children in IFA placements to 50 by 31 March 2012.
- (b) Reduce the number of children in out of Authority residential placements to 4 by the above date.
- (c) Increase the availability of Bridgend County Borough Council foster placements by 15 by the stated date.
- (d) Increase placement stability, and
- (e) Reduce in-house residential placements (the number to be determined by the Residential Review).

A major task for the Authority was to tackle in a more effective way, the task of meeting the needs of children with emotional and behavioural difficulties, who may otherwise be placed in high cost out of authority residential provision. Increased integration and a better co-ordinated and more multi-agency input could assist these young people added the Corporate Director - Children, as well as looking at intervention and prevention methods at an early stage to reduce these numbers.

She also stressed the need for enhanced adolescent fostering provision than that which currently existed, though it was difficult in itself to find carers to take on the challenges that were faced with vulnerable adolescents, who more often than not experienced emotional and/or behavioural difficulties, that Foster Carers sometimes found difficult to deal with.

It was hoped, added the Corporate Direction - Children, that the Care Plan, regular reviews and the assessment process would assist in providing stable homes for this category of young person. She also stressed the importance of continued care for children as they went through the transitional period of adolescence and beyond.

The remainder of the Strategy included statistical information and trend data including graphs and charts, which were broken down and appropriately categorised. The Corporate Director - Children gave a résumé on various areas of these.

Members asked a number of questions on the Strategy which were responded to by the Corporate Director - Children, for example stressing the need for an integrated multi-agency approach to resolve the problems currently in existence with regard to LAC. It was also agreed that sustained marketing campaigns continue to attract new Foster Carers, and to look to not only recruit more Foster Carers, but to explore avenues to look to retain them also.

It was acknowledged that Independent Foster Carer roles may be more attractive than Local Authority Foster Carers currently, due to market forces the amount of support and training needs available and the present economic climate.

CORPORATE PARENTING CABINET COMMITTEE - 26 MAY 2009

Prior to the Committee concluding debate upon the revised Placement Strategy, it was agreed, as suggested by the Chairperson, that the trend previously set of inviting young people in After Care placements to future meetings of the Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee for involvement in various issues of debate continues.

RESOLVED: For the Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee to approve the revised comprehensive placement strategy for 2009 - 2012.

23 PLANNING THE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2009/10

The Corporate Director - Children submitted a report, so as to allow the Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee the opportunity to consider and approve its Forward Work Programme 2009/10, attached as an Appendix to the report.

Members debated the Forward Work Programme, which detailed nine items for consideration at future meetings of the Committee up until March 2010.

It was noted that Item 8, Young People's Session and Item 9, Update on the Family Support Strategy would be considered at meetings of the Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee in January 2010 and March 2010, respectively.

Arising from consideration of the report and attached Appendix, it was

RESOLVED: That the Committee approves its Forward Work Programme shown as an Appendix to the report, subject to:-

- Item 2 of the Forward Work Programme, Articulation of the general role of officers, members and partners in relation to corporate parenting, being the subject of a Presentation being made at or immediately prior to the ordinary meeting of Council in September 2009
- A Presentation on Item 3 of the Forward Work Programme, on the remit of the Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee and the responsibilities of members, being made at or prior to the ordinary meeting of Council in July 2009
- That a further item be added to the Forward Work Programme on the feasibility of LAC at school in Bridgend having some involvement in work experience placements, after discussions with Careers Wales and other interested parties and following the consideration of this suggestion by appropriate Officers, to be considered by the Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee in July 2009
- That a further item be added to the Forward Work Programme on the subject of training and employment of Social Workers, to be considered by the Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee in July 2009.

The meeting closed at 5.04pm

