

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING CABINET COMMITTEE
HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOMS 1/2/3, CIVIC OFFICES, ANGEL STREET, BRIDGEND,
ON TUESDAY, 13 JULY 2010 AT 3.30PM

Present: -

Councillor A E Davies - Chairperson

Councillor D Sage - Deputy Leader
Councillor H J David - Cabinet Member - Resources
Councillor L C Morgan - Cabinet Member - Wellbeing

Invitees -

Councillors M W Butcher
Councillor K S Hunt
Councillor R D Jenkins
Councillor M Thomas
Councillor K J Watts

Officers

H Anthony - Corporate Director - Children
L Harper - Head of Safeguarding and Family Support
V Watkins - Principal Officer - Corporate Parenting
S Pryce - Head of Regeneration and Development
P Williams - Human Resources Officer
S Hughes - Legal Officer
C Branford - Cabinet and Committee Officer

57 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from the following Members and Officers for the reasons stated:

Councillor M E J Nott - Holiday
Councillor J C Spanswick - Holiday
M Shepherd - Prior Commitment

58 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

59 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 22 June 2009 be approved as a true and accurate record.

60 RESIDENTIAL REVIEW – FEEDBACK FROM CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Chairperson advised that with the Committee's agreement this item would be considered first. The Committee agreed to consider the item first. The Chairperson welcomed the Chairperson of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee to the meeting and invited him to present the

Committee's recommendations. The Chairperson Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee advised that the Committee had discussed the proposal in depth and had been reassured by the answers they had received from Officers that Option A best met the needs of the Borough's Looked after Children (LAC). Although the Committee were able to support Option A they had also made with a number of recommendations which were outlined in the report. The Chairperson of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee further advised that the Committee had been reassured by the Head of Safeguarding and Family Support that the issue of surplus staff would be dealt with through redeployment and retirement but had wished to emphasise in their recommendation that efforts were made to eliminate the threat of redundancies.

The Chairperson thanked the Chairperson - Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee and his Committee for asking searching questions about the proposals. She advised that she agreed with the first point about the need for greater clarity as to the rationale behind the proposal as this was also an issue that the Corporate Parenting Committee had identified. She suggested that, given the current economic climate, the phrase 'eliminate the threat of redundancies' would be better expressed as 'reduce to a minimum the threat of redundancies'. With regard to recommendation C, she felt that qualified staff were best placed to decide what the most appropriate option was for the child concerned.

Members asked if support staff such as drivers and administrative staff would be retained when the residential provision was reconfigured.

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support advised that the service had no specific drivers and the administrative staff were incorporated in the overall business support service which had recently been restructured. The proposed service reconfiguration would affect care workers rather than support staff.

The Deputy Leader advised that he had been pleased to read in the Social Services Annual Report how the concerns of young people were being addressed. It was important now to look at transition protocol and how this could be improved. The Cabinet would continue to work with Scrutiny colleagues when looking at future service delivery.

The Committee thanked the Chairperson - Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee for his report.

RESOLVED: The Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee received and considered the recommendations of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee in relation to the residential review.

61 PERFORMANCE DATA

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support introduced the report and emphasised the importance of the Committee continuing to request data on the performance of LAC on a regular basis. In terms of what constituted 'performance' this covered a wide range of areas including education issues. Data on the percentage of first placements of LAC during the year which began with a care plan in place would be reported at least twice a year to the Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee.

Members requested more information on Bridgend's progress in reducing numbers of LAC in relation to the other Local Authorities.

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support advised that the current LAC figure was 302. The figure had been under 300 for some time but had risen recently due to a number of sibling groups becoming looked after. There had been a difference of 34 LAC between 2009 and 2010 which did not represent a significant increase. Behind each of these children there might be care proceedings or care orders. The Magistrates Courts placed a considerable demand on social workers in terms of their duties towards children once they became subject of care proceedings.

The Principal Officer – Corporate Parenting described how the LAC project had attempted to bring about a reduction in the numbers of LAC by finding alternatives to local authority care such as special guardianship orders and encouraging people to become foster carers. Attempts were being made to reduce the number of children placed with independent fostering agencies. An update report would be produced for the Committee shortly.

The Chairperson asked what the financial implications were for foster carers of special guardianship orders.

The Principal Officer – Corporate Parenting explained that the majority of foster carers sought special guardianship orders as this gave them greater parenting responsibilities towards the child. Level 1 payments to foster carers who had gained Special Guardianship Orders were protected for the first two years but the carers would be subject to a financial assessment after this period. The Local Authority was restricted in what it could pay to carers by the regulations in place. Twenty-five Special Guardianship Orders had been granted over the last 3 years. The vast majority had been to relative carers. WAG was currently reviewing Special Guardianship Orders to examine the Welsh picture of how these orders were being applied.

Members asked how the reasons for children becoming looked after were assessed, and what the difference was between 'Family in acute stress' and 'Family dysfunction'.

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support advised that an initial assessment was undertaken followed by a further core assessment. The category 'Family in acute stress' described a family in total crisis where a child might have to be removed and action taken within 24 hours. In these cases there was normally abuse, abandonment or homelessness. Family dysfunction referred to problems with a child's development, concerns about parenting capacity and about the environment in which a child was being brought up. In these cases the Authority would normally attempt to support the family through its services, such as housing and employment support.

Members asked what role early intervention had in reducing the LAC population.

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support advised that a reduction in LAC numbers would not be achieved without an increase in the support offered to families at an early stage in a child's life which included support from other agencies such as health. The consent and support of a family was required before agencies could begin intervention work. Families tended to be wary of social workers so it was important to find ways of helping them in order that the intervention of social services did not become necessary.

RESOLVED: That Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee noted the report on the performance of the Safeguarding and Family Support Service in meeting the needs of children and young people within its care.

62 WELSH AUDIT OFFICE STUDY REGARDING THE EDUCATION OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN: PROGRESS UPDATE

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support introduced the report explaining that the final report from WAG was not yet received but it was expected that it would contain general guidance, rather than specific recommendations for each local authority. An action plan had been drawn up by officers in order to address what were perceived as the Authority's shortcomings in this area. The project team had required each local authority to complete a detailed self-assessment form. It was disappointing, however, to note that WAG had not made any comments on these SA forms so it was difficult to understand what the value of the exercise had been. The action plan drawn up by BCBC would enhance education for LAC. Estyn, in their inspection report had pointed out the need for the Committee to receive more reports on the education of LAC.

The Corporate Director - Children advised that the educational attainment of LAC in the Authority had historically been relatively good.

The Principal Officer – Corporate Parenting added that because the cohort of LAC changed from year to year it was not always appropriate to expect year on year improvements in educational attainment.

The Corporate Director - Children advised that it was important for the Committee to receive further reports on this issue in the future and that Members should be ambitious for looked after children.

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support reminded the Committee of the need to be careful about making comparisons with the main school population as a high number of LAC had Special Educational Needs. It would be more appropriate perhaps to make comparisons with a control group. She explained that LAC had already been disadvantaged by disruption in their lives and this had been added to by moves and transitions within the care system.

The Principal Officer – Corporate Parenting advised that although local PIs allowed these factors to be taken into account, national PIs did not.

The Chairperson emphasised the need for Committee members to be aware of the factors that disadvantaged LAC and work towards tackling them.

RESOLVED: The Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee noted the report of the progress of actions in respect of the Welsh Audit Office Education of Looked After Children.

63 PROGRESS REPORT ON WORK PLACEMENTS AND TRAINEESHIP ARRANGEMENTS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE LOOKED AFTER OR WERE FORMERLY LOOKED AFTER

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support explained that this report should be considered alongside the report on the Council's Apprenticeship Scheme. The Committee agreed to do so.

The Principal Officer – Corporate Parenting advised that significant progress had been made on Work Placements which was detailed in the report. There had been a very positive response from managers who had offered placements in a wide range of areas. Another initiative stemming from this drive was the creation of a traineeship developed via a partnership between the youth service and the youth offending service. A group of young people had already been identified as possible candidates for the scheme and final arrangements were nearing completion; an Equalities Impact Assessment also needed to be undertaken. The initiative was funded partly through the Cymorth budget and partly through the Safer Communities funding.

RESOLVED: The Committee noted the report and the progress that had been made with regards to creating work placement opportunities within the Local Authority for young people who are or have been in the care of this Authority.

64 UPDATE ON THE PILOT PHASE OF THE COUNCIL'S APPRENTICESHIP SCHEME

The Human Resources Officer introduced the report and explained that the Council's Apprenticeship Scheme had been approved at Cabinet on 12 January 2010. Since this time the Scheme had operated successfully within the Building Maintenance Section. Eleven of the twenty students from Bridgend College's Construction Academy demonstrated an element of potential and had been invited for further assessment in Building Maintenance. During placement students were exposed to full trade experience and took an active role in tasks. One care leaver had accepted an assessment placement with BCBC with a view to enrolment on a painting and decorating course at Bridgend College. He confirmed that the experience he had gained at BCBC had strengthened his application for the College course.

Members suggested that the work placement opportunities available in BCBC seemed to be male orientated as craft and trade occupations seemed less likely to attract females.

The Human Resources Officer agreed that apprenticeships in the Building Maintenance Section were less likely to be attractive to females, however, when he had visited the Construction Academy in May there were some females on the course.

Members asked if data was collected on the correlation between criminal activity and lack of educational attainment and whether these statistics might be useful for the Committee to consider alongside other data.

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support advised that statistics were kept on those entering the justice system for the first time and there were significant indicators of a link between crime and low educational attainment. More Looked After Children, however, tended to become involved in a range of risky behaviours such as substance misuse although some did commit offences rather than crimes. She suggested that youth offending data could be included in the reports to Committee.

She emphasised the importance of ensuring that LAC benefitted from all the mainstream initiatives that were in existence in relation to youth employment and education.

RESOLVED: The Committee noted the content of the report and determined to continue to monitor the implementation of the Apprenticeship Programme.

65 SMOKING POLICY IN RESPECT OF ADOPTERS AND FOSTER CARERS

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support introduced the report, and began by explaining that there was considerable evidence demonstrating the negative impact on children of living in a home where adults smoke. BCBC therefore needed to consider if it wished to move to a position where children are only placed in smoke free homes. The South Wales Adoption Agency Consortium had developed a policy and procedure (attached as Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 respectively) which it was recommended that BCBC adopt. It was important that BCBC introduced some clear guidelines on smoking for would-be carers, whilst recognising that a balance had to be achieved between the rights of the child to be healthy and the rights of foster carers to smoke. Many carers had managed to give up smoking with encouragement and support.

Members welcomed the policy and advised that they had found from their own experience that foster carers had been willing to embark on smoking cessation programmes for the sake of a child's health.

Members asked if access to health education was provided for looked after children who smoked.

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support explained that there was a clinical nurse dedicated to LAC who provided advice on health matters. The care plan for a child would include issues such as health.

Following legal advice, the Chairperson proposed an amendment to the recommendation which was accepted by all the Cabinet Members, to the effect that the proposed policy be approved.

The Chairperson therefore proposed an amendment to the recommendation which was accepted by all the Cabinet Members, to the effect that the proposed policy be approved.

RESOLVED: The Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee considered and approved the proposed policy.

66 REVIEW OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING CABINET COMMITTEE'S FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support introduced the report and advised that suggested topics for future meetings were listed at paragraph 4.4 of the report and Members were invited to add to these.

Members discussed the possibility of meeting younger looked after children and obtaining their views on the care they received.

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support explained that previous reports on engagement with young people had included an agreement by the Committee that they were committed to continuing to undertake visits to looked after children and care leavers. She suggested that case studies could also be a useful way of illustrating how the Council was meeting its corporate parenting responsibilities. Members agreed that social occasions such as the Christmas party provided the best opportunity to meet with young people and discuss issues in an informal setting. She advised that the young people had benefitted considerably from the visits of Committee Members and had been motivated to embark on new challenges as a result.

RESOLVED:

The Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee:

(i) identified the following topics for inclusion in its Informal Forward Work Programme:

- rota visiting
- performance data and analysis of the Looked After Children population
- residential review implementation
- educational attainment of Looked After Children
- Looked After Children project
- Work experience and the apprenticeship and trainee schemes
- Employment opportunities for care leavers
- Housing opportunities for care leavers

(ii) identified no plans, policies and strategies for inclusion in its Forward Work Programme and finalised the Forward Work Programme for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 December 2010.

The meeting closed at 5.35pm.