

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING CABINET COMMITTEE
HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOMS 1/2/3, CIVIC OFFICES, ANGEL STREET, BRIDGEND,
ON TUESDAY, 6 MARCH 2012 AT 4.00 PM

Present:-

Councillor A E Davies - Chairperson

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

Invitees:-

Councillor K R T Deere
Councillor K S Hunt
Councillor R D Jenkins
Councillor K J Watts
P Clutton - Inspector - Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CCSIW)

Officers:-

D MacGregor - Assistant Chief Executive - Performance
H Anthony - Corporate Director - Children
A Harris - Corporate Director - Wellbeing
L Fradd - Corporate Director - Communities
C Turner - Head of Safeguarding and Family Support
K Williams - Adoption Service Manager
N Echanis - Service Manager – Connecting Families
N Young - Assistant Chief Executive – Performance (Designate)
J Monks - Democratic Services Officer - Committees

127 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor M Thomas due to other Council business.

Councillor M Thomas - Other Council Business
M Shepherd, Head of Healthy Living - Other Council Business

128 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

129 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED: That the minutes of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee held on the 17 January 2012, be approved as a true and accurate record.

130 CORPORATE PARENTING POLICY STATEMENT

The Corporate Director – Children submitted a report inviting the Committee to review the existing Corporate Parenting Policy Statement, shown at Appendix 1 to

the report, to decide whether it is still fit for purpose. Looked After Children (LAC) is a key responsibility for the Council as corporate parents. No specific changes to the Policy were proposed by Officers, as it was evident that there is still a commitment to improving the corporate parenting responsibility.

The Committee had endorsed the final draft Corporate Parenting Policy in mid-2009, after consultation with young people and partners, and the Policy Statement was launched in October 2009.

Discussion took place and Members commended Officers on their work in bringing to fruition the review of looking after young people after they have left care.

RESOLVED: That the Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee reviewed and agreed the Corporate Parenting Policy Statement, subject to the following amendments:

Improving Life Chances

2. Should now read:

“Being ambitious for Looked After Children, young people and care leavers and encouraging and supporting their person development to assist them reach their potential, whether through education, training or employment and other social and interpersonal skills”.

3. Should now read:

“Ensuring that Looked After Children and care experienced young people have ready access to play, leisure, sporting and cultural activities and also work experience”.

Empowering Children and Young People

9. Should now read:

“Ensuring that young people’s transition to independence is properly planned and prepared for in a holistic and supportive manner, which appreciates young people’s considerations about leaving care”.

14. Should now read:

“Continuing, strengthening and improving the role of Councillors as effective corporate parents”.

15. Should now read:

“Helping ensure that services are integrated across Education, Social Care, Health, Leisure and Cultural Services and that effective communication and information sharing takes place amongst partner agencies, to include housing advice”.

The Committee agreed that the Corporate Parenting Policy Statement should be reviewed annually.

The Committee also agreed that the Policy Statement should be the first item to be placed on the Committee’s agenda at its first meeting following the Election, so that the newly formed Committee can formerly adopt it.

131 THE RESIDENTIAL CARE RE-DESIGN PROJECT

The Corporate Director – Children submitted a report, the purpose of which was to provide an update to the Committee on the progress of the implementation of the Residential Re-design project.

The Residential Services Review was initiated in 2008 as part of the Corporate Supporting Vulnerable Children programme; described in detail under paragraph 3.2 of the report. In January 2012, two new services became operational as part of the project, described in full under paragraph 4.2 of the report.

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support reported that a decision was taken by the Committee to undertake a review of the residential child care provision in Bridgend, which had led to comprehensive research being undertaken by external researchers to look at children requiring care, against placement demand. As a consequence, numerous reports were presented to the Committee, which resulted in the decision last year to de-commission one of the three residential units, and make significant changes to the remaining two units. He advised that the plan was to place those children who displayed complex behavioural needs into a custom designed Specialist Unit, called the “Complex Needs Unit”. Additional resources had been put into the remaining unit, referred to as the “Transitional Unit” to accommodate those children aged 16 years of age and over in order to assist them with the important transition into independent living within the community.

He advised that the Committee had an interest in the closure of one of the original three units, due to its impact on the number of staff who were employed across the three homes, and the concern of the young people who would be affected by some of these changes. He reported that all the staff involved were consulted during the process and had responded positively. After that consultation period, each member of staff was re-positioned within the remaining two units; except for one part time employee who had elected to take redundancy.

He informed Members that the children and young people affected by the changes were consulted throughout the process and encouraged to get involved in the design of the new units. He reported that all those children who were accommodated prior to the commencement of the new service had been moved either to other accommodation, through being placed within families, or through independent living in the community. Others, who previously would not have been able to cope with such a move, were placed in foster care. The remaining children were either moved to the Transition Unit or the Complex Needs Unit. He assured Members that each child who had been involved in the changes was progressing well in terms of working hard to achieve the outcomes of their individual care plans. Also, extensive refurbishment had been carried out in both units to ensure that the buildings were fit for purpose.

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support further advised the Committee that since the closure of the Maesteg home, the property had subsequently been de-commissioned and placed for sale on the open market. It was hoped that this would result in capital funding once the property is sold. A full evaluation of both units would be undertaken in July to establish whether they were achieving all the requirements; followed by a further evaluation six months later.

He reported that the children had also been involved in deciding the new names for the units and had enjoyed answering the phone with those new names.

The names agreed for each unit were:

- “Sunny Bank” for the Complex Needs Unit
- “Newbridge House” for the Transitional Unit

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support concluded by informing Members that savings amounting to £100k had already been achieved, as well as the prospect of additional funds resulting in the sale of the Maesteg home.

Discussion took place and Members asked if there would be any provision made for emergency admissions.

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support advised that provision for emergency beds was still under discussion with some providers who were able to utilise emergency provision. Consideration had also been given to in-house provision, which presented as a real challenge, due to the high demand for placements. However, he reassured Members that emergency provision would be put in place for evenings and weekends, and he would report back to the Committee once a resolution had been found. He explained that ideally this would be in-house, as there would be local carers for local children, but he stressed that this would be a formidable challenge to achieve. The Authority was in collaboration with 18 other local authorities to share foster carers, and it was also pursuing relationships with neighbouring authorities in order to avoid involving the private sector, which was expensive.

One Member asked whether there would be the facility within the Complex Needs Unit for those children who had extreme behavioural problems, or whether an annex would be provided for them.

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support advised that the two newly formed units did not have any current residential facility for emergency cases. He explained that emergency provision was more effective in a solo placement, as an assessment would need to be conducted to establish the level of the problems. Also, the safety of the other children was fundamental, as it could upset the balance. Furthermore, if a vacancy arose at the Unit, they would want to utilise those specialist resources.

RESOLVED: That the Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee noted the report.

132 OVERVIEW REPORT ON THE ADOPTION PROCESS

The Chairperson welcomed the CSSIW Inspector to the meeting.

The Corporate Director – Children submitted a report, the purpose of which was to provide the Committee with an understanding of the role and function of the Adoption Service in delivering services to those affected by adoption in the County Borough.

The Adoption Service Manager took Members through the report and advised that this was the first time the newly formed Adoption Service had presented to the Committee. She outlined for Members what had been achieved over the past six years since the Service became customised and separated from Safeguarding and Fostering, to become an Adoption Service. As there had not been a large investment made in the Service, existing resources were utilised to achieve lean

and agile processes, with the main agenda item being the reduction of Looked After Children through permanent placements. Timely plans were devised to consider the needs of all those affected by adoption, and she described the five practice areas required of an adoption agency:

- Adoption Assessment.
- Adoption for prospective adopters that were not registered with an adoption agency and already had a child living with them.
- A range of services for people who are affected by adoption pre-1975.
- A variety of adoption support services for anyone who is affected by adoption (1 in 5 people are affected in some way, including children left behind when siblings are adopted, as well as children of foster parents when a fostered child moves on).
- Providing support to children already adopted, who may come to the attention of the Adoption Service after adoption.

She informed Members that due to the number of assessments of prospective adopters being undertaken, the Adoption Team had been temporarily expanded by utilising the Council's secondary employment policy, allowing suitably qualified and experienced employees to undertake assessments. She advised that the calibre and quality of adopters in Bridgend was high, and in some cases had been successfully matched with a child within a few months of them being approved; the current disruption rate for our own adopters stands at zero. The Adoption Team now had a full complement of staff, and some recent additional investment had meant that a further member of staff would be joining the Team next month. In terms of adoption support, there had been a great deal of concern regarding the Consequential Amendments Order to the Adoption Children's Act in 2005, as it was felt that there would be a large influx of assessments and separate services needed. However, the Team is highly efficient and managed the increasing demands on the service by being proactive in placements, and were improving delivery of the Service year on year. Recent collaboration with the Vale of Glamorgan Council had resulted in joint training of adopters and sharing of information and practice ideas, involving joint support groups and activities.

She concluded by saying that the Team always strived to surpass the Welsh average for adoption placements, and it was currently on target to place 23 children this year. There was concern regarding enquiries from people moving into the Borough, as there were insufficient resources to assess everyone, especially as Bridgend had such a good reputation, and also with other local authorities closing their books.

Discussion took place and one Member asked whether grandparents were considered as prospective adopters, as he believed they would be ideal.

The Adoption Service Manager explained that adoption within a child's family can very often be confusing for the child concerned, as children who are adopted by extended family members often struggled with identity issues. She advised that the LAC Project had looked at adoptive grandparents and found many cases where they were the sole carers. Ultimately, however, whatever was right for the child and the family would always be considered. The Chairperson added that grandparents were not excluded from adoption, however there were other methods of permanance through fostering.

In response to a question from Members, the Adoption Service Manager advised that matching an adopter and child took no longer than six months on average. As there was a lack of adopters in the Borough, a base line budget meant that a wide search for adopters could be carried out.

One Member asked for an update on the proposal around collaboration for a national adoption service.

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support informed the Committee that since the announcement of the Deputy First Minister's vision to establish a national adoption agency, consultation with adoption agencies, Social Services and Heads of Service had provided vociferous feedback, and it was established that it would be impossible from a practical point of view. The final decision regarding this had not yet been confirmed, and efforts were being made to protect localism. The Welsh Government wanted to see more collaboration, which Bridgend already had locally with the Vale of Glamorgan, as well as the South Wales Adoption Agencies Consortium (SWAAC), whose aim is to find a place for a child through a specialist computer system listing the possible links of the children to the adopters and selecting the most appropriate.

Members congratulated the Adoption Service Manager on the success of the Adoption Service.

RESOLVED: That the Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee:

1. Noted the overview of the Adoption Service.
2. Would make representation as a Committee to the Minister for Children and Young People, to the effect that any collaboration undertaken will not be at the expense of the high quality service provided by the Adoption Service in Bridgend.

133 **SAFEGUARDING AND FAMILY SUPPORT: CONNECTING FAMILIES SERVICE**

The Corporate Director – Children submitted a report which provided an overview of the Connecting Families Project and the initial operational functions and performance of the Team. Appendix 1 to the report details the structure of the Team and Appendix 2 provides the Connecting Families Bi-Monthly report for July to December 2011.

The Service Manager – Connecting Families gave a presentation to Members on the work of the Team. She explained that the Project was led by the Local Service Board (LSB), who wanted more effective ways of working with those families in the Borough who had the most chronic and complex needs. The project, which is based in Bridgend Police Station, became fully operational in December 2011 and is a multi-agency activity. The location of the Team had proved advantageous, as the Team had interaction with other agencies who were also based in the building, such as the Probation Team and the Community Safety Partnership. The Team had an external phone line so that clients would not associate them with the Police, and meetings with families either took place in the family home, or failing that, in a community centre.

The Team adopt a holistic approach and will work in collaboration with a family, encouraging them to articulate their own needs by drawing on the resources within that family by looking at strengths and building on them. Intensive support of up to 20 hours a week is offered in the initial stage when a family is in crisis, with the second stage being less intense as the family are supported to consolidate.

She informed the Committee that as a result of this new approach, so far 15 children had been prevented from entering the care system. She explained that central to the delivery of the Connecting Families Project is the evidence of outcomes, which included a reduction in the cost to a range of public services, as well as the reliance on those services.

The Service Manager – Connecting Families then described the following case study to Members, where intervention had led to a positive outcome:

The Team had started working with a family who had been on the Child Protection Register for three years, and Social Services had reported that they could not go any further with the family, as it had not shown an improvement and the children would need to be removed as they could not move the case on.

The Connecting Families Team then became involved with the family. They went to the home, which was a mess, and helped the family to clean it up and amongst other things, laid new carpets for them. There had been a lot of domestic violence from the father towards the family and the mother was not engaging with the children, whose behaviour was appalling.

After the house had been cleaned up, the mother started to talk to the Team and it transpired that the father had bereavement issues, with a history of alcohol abuse, triggered by a family bereavement. The father worked with a mental health worker proactively, as well as a substance misuse worker around his alcohol problem.

In the process of this, the mother got better because the father was being nicer to her. She started proactively engaging with the children, with the result that their behaviour improved. Finally, the family were removed from the Child Protection Register and in January Social Services closed the case”.

The Chairperson commended this project, and commented that such evidence had proved that early intervention and prevention was extremely beneficial.

RESOLVED: That the Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee noted the report.

134 INFORMAL FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME – MARCH 2012 TO JULY 2012

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support presented a report which sought approval of the proposed Informal Forward Work Programme (IFWP) covering the period from March 2012 to July 2012. He stated that the topics detailed in the Appendix to the report had previously been accepted for inclusion in the Informal Forward Work Programme.

RESOLVED: That the Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee approved the proposed Informal Forward Work Programme.

The meeting closed at 5.40pm.