

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING CABINET COMMITTEE
HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOMS 2/3, CIVIC OFFICES, ANGEL STREET, BRIDGEND, ON
WEDNESDAY, 31 JULY 2013 AT 10.00AM

Present:

Councillor H J David - Chairperson

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

Invitees:

Councillor N C Clarke
Councillor E Dodd
Councillor H Townsend
Councillor D B F White

Officers:

H Anthony - Corporate Director - Children
S Brindle - Corporate Director - Wellbeing
M Shepherd - Interim Corporate Director - Communities
S Cooper - Head of Adult Social Care
V Jones - Group Manager Service Provision
N Silcox - Team Manager - Fostering
V Watkins - Group Manager - Case Management
J Smith - Head of Finance and Property
A Fletcher - Principal Solicitor - Corporate
M A Galvin - Senior Democratic Services Officer - Committees

37 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from the following Member/Officer, for the reasons so given:-

Councillor R D Jenkins - Holiday
C Turner - Holiday

38 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

39 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED: That the minutes of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee held on the 29 April 2013, be approved as a true and accurate record.

40 CSSIW INSPECTION INTO BRIDGEND FOSTERING SERVICE

The Corporate Director - Children submitted a report, that updated Committee on the outcomes and findings of the annual inspection of the Bridgend Fostering Service, by the Care and Social Services for Wales (CSSIW) required in accordance with the provisions of the Fostering Services Regulations (Wales) 2003.

The Group Manager Service Provision explained that the recent inspection undertaken had been very positive with no compliance issues, and she referred Member to Appendix 1 and the full inspection report, which had been published on 15 April 2013.

She explained in summary, that the inspection report reflected what the service did well; what had improved since the last inspection, and what needs to be done in future to improve the service further.

The Group Manager Service Provision then outlined what the service had been assessed as doing well, summarised as follows:-

- Men in Foster Care Group held in evenings to enable male foster carers who work to access training;
- Promotion of children's achievements through an annual award ceremony which promotes the success and achievements of children (BFC);
- Fostering Panel undertake quality assurance feedback for each report presented to panel;
- Foster carers are given opportunity to feedback on the experience of attending panel in a questionnaire;
- Panel members receive an appraisal at least annually;
- Panel training in new areas of service is delivered in a timely fashion;
- Panel monitor timeliness of annual reviews of foster carers;
- The Accommodation and Permanence Panel ensure all looked after children have a plan for permanence;
- Robust policies and procedures in place.

She then confirmed areas of the service that had improved since the last inspection, which were:-

- Placement support worker recruited to work with identified foster carer for support with moving children on for adoption, support when an allegation or complaint has been made and support with behaviour management and specific issues identified;
- Commissioning & Placement Officer position has been made permanent;
- A social worker has been appointed to specifically assess and supervise Support Carers;
- The role of the Level 4 foster carers has been reviewed to ensure its effectiveness and replaced by four 'Liaison Carers', one of whom has the responsibility for family and friend carers;
- 'Carers own Children Group' established, although this is still in development and not well attended;
- 'Family and Friends Carer Group' established;
- Resolutions carer handbook developed but not yet launched;
- Greater involvement of Resolution carers in recruitment and retention of carers and promotion of the service;
- Resolution support groups held every six weeks;
- Family Link carers have been provided with training portfolios;
- Family Link carer handbook reviewed and updated;

- Timescales for introductions to placements improved;
- Development of Person Centred Child profiles.

Finally, the Group Manager Service Provision explained to Committee that there were four identified areas where practice could be further developed for the mainstream fostering service (Bridgend Foster Care), two of which were the responsibility of the childcare teams; one being for development in relation to Resolutions and one for the Family Link Scheme. She expanded upon these as follows:-

- Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks for foster carer should be renewed every three years;
- Respite arrangements to be revised to ensure these are provided in a timely way to meet the needs of children;
- Children's passports should be provided in a timely way to ensure children are not disadvantaged from being able to access holidays abroad as part of their foster family;
- The service would benefit from having a group specifically for looked after children;
- Review staffing levels within the Resolutions service due to current levels not being sustainable.

The Group Manager Service Provision confirmed that an Action Plan had been introduced to address the above issues, and this had been submitted to the CSSIW.

All actions aside of two had been completed, with these remaining as standing items on the Fostering Panel and Looked After Children (LAC) review agenda.

She added that the Resolutions Management Board had recently commissioned an independent person to undertake a review of the service, to include a review of the staffing complement.

The Chairperson asked what progress had been made to date with regard to the two incomplete actions.

The Group Manager Service Provision referred Members to pages 2 and 3 of the Action Plan, which gave an update on these two outstanding Actions, including an estimated timescale for their completion.

A Member referred to the last area of the Action Plan in terms of the Resolutions Service. This acknowledged that there was a requirement for a review of staffing levels, as current staffing levels could not be sustained and compromises the health of staff employed. The Member noted also that there had been a history of long term sickness in the Resolutions Service and the use of temporary staff, and he raised concerns regarding this element of the Inspection Report.

The Group Manager Service Provision advised that the above had been highlighted in the Inspection Report following discussions between the Inspector and members of staff in the Resolutions Team.

The Team Manager - Fostering added that since the Inspection Report had been completed, a further member of staff had been seconded to the Resolutions Team and some of the work covered by the Service had been reviewed and streamlined, including annual Reviews that were now undertaken by a different Section.

She added that there now existed 19 carers divided between two full time social workers and this ration of staff was considered to be appropriate in terms of supporting the service.

The Corporate Director - Children further added that the comments made by the Inspector in the Inspection Report regarding the Resolutions Service, following discussions that took place between them and certain team members were challenged in that they were illustrated as being over negative, however, this challenge was unsuccessful.

A Member referred to Page 1 of the Action Plan and asked what process is used to ensure that Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks for Foster Carers are renewed every three years.

The Team Manager - Fostering confirmed that this was undertaken through the Ddraig system, that automatically gave an alert three months before any Disclosure Barring Service check (formerly CRB) was required. This was carried out as part of the annual Review process.

The Chairperson noted from the Action Plan that there was a timescale of to be confirmed (TBC) against an area of identified development, i.e. setting up a group specifically for Looked After Children, which was something it was felt would benefit the service.

The Group Manager Service Provision confirmed that this was on-going, and although the Local Authority would pursue the development of this group, the success of it was dependent upon the willingness and the wish of young people to sit on and adequately support such a group.

RESOLVED: That the Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee noted the positive information provided within the reports which also evidenced Cabinet's continued and recognised commitment and support to Bridgend Fostering Services.

41 SAFEGUARDING AND FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICE 2011/12
HEAD OF SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT

The Corporate Director - Children presented to the Committee prior to its formal submissions to the CSSIW, the Annual Report of the Head of Service - Safeguarding and Family Support submitted for and within the Annual Council Reporting Framework.

This was the fourth such Annual Report following the introduction of the current arrangements for evaluating Social Services in Wales.

The Corporate Director - Children advised that the process centred on self-evaluation involved consultation with CSSIW, and would continue to be the major source for the CSSIW's Inspection Programme.

She added that this was one of two reports (the other being by the Head of Adult Social Care) that sat directly beneath her report as the Director of Social Services within the BCBC, a large part of which concentrated upon the effectiveness of the Service and plans for future improvements and development of the Service.

The Corporate Director - Children confirmed that certain elements of the Head of Service Annual Report would be considered at next week's Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee, particularly insofar as it relates to Looked After Children and the increase in their numbers and the future financial impact this would have on the Council, and plans proposed to introduce a Strategy to assist in mitigating this. Her overarching

report would be shared with both Cabinet and Council in due course the Corporate Director - Children added.

A Member referred to page 9 of the Annual Report, and the number of Case Management Reviews undertaken in 2011/12, whereby the amount of children in need and open cases presented during this period was extremely high. He noted that extra staff in the form of an additional Safeguarding Team Manager and a number of new Social Worker posts had were to be recruited. He asked how this recruitment exercise had progressed.

The Group Manager - Case Management advised that there were four Safeguarding Teams, i.e. North, South, East and West, and primarily the team in the North were experiencing a larger number of referrals when compared to the three other teams, so extra staff were needed to be recruited there in the form of social workers. As the work this team generated was too much for one Safeguarding Team Manager, it was proposed to reconfigure the teams to cover five rather than four areas and to recruit an extra manager to supervise the fifth team. This appointment was made in July.

The Group Manager - Case Management added that in terms of the recruitment of all the required social workers, this had not yet been finalised though it was currently work in progress.

There was a problem she added, in that these positions were attracting newly qualified rather than experienced social workers and therefore half to three quarters of the number of social workers assigned to each of the five teams would be newly qualified when the recruitment of these was completed.

There were both advantages and disadvantages with recruiting such newly qualified staff, in that they brought with them new ideas and methods of working though they did not initially have the sufficient experience to process unassisted the more complex care work cases. In light of this, they would receive appropriate support and training from the senior practitioners.

The Group Manager - Case Management added that the Department were looking, following the teams being increased in number from four to five, to reduce the number of cases from the figures that currently existed to 16-17 cases per team. Though there had been a heavy reliance in the past on agency support staff, things had improved in this area and the numbers of these staff employed had reduced significantly from that to which previously existed to just two.

She reiterated that it was extremely difficult to recruit and also difficult to retain senior practitioners and social workers, though the opposite applied in terms of unqualified support staff.

The Corporate Director - Children supported these comments, and added that previously prior to the economic downturn, the Authority had a good track record in training staff to such a degree, that they were able to be promoted from unqualified positions to that of a more responsible nature, however, the Council no longer had the resources for this.

A Member asked how many qualified social workers an Authority of Bridgend County Borough Council's size should have. and how many there were currently in post.

The Corporate Director - Children confirmed that she would provide a response on this outside of the meeting, though the CSSIW guidance was 16 -17 cases per social worker and as was touched upon earlier in the meeting, there had been cases in the past where there had been up to 30 cases per social worker at a time.

The Member asked if officers had identified the reasons why there were difficulties in the Authority recruiting and /or retaining social workers.

The Corporate Director - Children confirmed that there were a number of possible reasons for this.

One was the rise in numbers of Looked After Children and children that required extra support mechanisms, both locally and from a national perspective. Also, a considerable number of Social Services Departments in Authorities had been placed in Special Measures due to failings of one sort or another, and in some circumstances, this resulted in individual social workers in person being identified and given bad publicity due to such failing. She concluded therefore that it was for reasons such as this, that the professionals in this area of work were becoming more difficult to recruit.

A Member noted from page 18, paragraph 44 of the Annual Report, that the service had identified several cross cutting issues and independent projects required to deliver improved services including a review of procedures and processes in the Department conducted by Workwise, one of which was an exercise to save paper.

The Group Manager - Case Management confirmed that as a result of this review, the Department were now looking to wherever possible, rely on data capture etc electronically rather than in a paper version, and to look by the end of the year to achieve a paperless office with staff working entirely off PC's.

The review also picked up on eradicating areas of the Department where certain work was being duplicated.

The Group Manager - Case Management added that a lot of paper documents had been generated since the Children's Services had been placed in special measures some considerable time ago. The Department were also looking at introducing a new IT system within the Department.

Both the Group Manager - Case Management and the Head of Adult Social Care, in turn confirmed that universities and other places that taught higher education in the field of social work, needed to look at training initiatives including placement training for newly qualified workers in Children and Adult Services, and this was a matter that could be taken up with the CSSIW.

RESOLVED: That the Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee considered and noted the report of the Corporate Director - Children, including the attached Annual Report of the Head of Service - Safeguarding and Family Support.

42 INFORMAL FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME (IFWP)

The Corporate Director - Children submitted a report, seeking approval for the proposed IFWP for the above period, that was appended to the report.

Paragraph 4.1 also highlighted a number of additional items over and above those shown in the report Appendix, to be included in a future version of the Informal Forward Work Programme.

RESOLVED: That the Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee approved the Informal Forward Work Programme as appended to the report.

43 THE IMPACT OF RECENT CHANGES ARISING OUT OF THE FAMILY JUSTICE REVIEW 2011

The Corporate Director - Children and the Assistant Chief Executive - Legal and Regulatory Services submitted a joint report, which advised the Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee of the impending changes to the Public Law outline (PLO), and the impact of these on the Safeguarding and Family Support Service and Legal and Regulatory Services.

The report confirmed that since the inception of the Children Act 1989, there had been a drive to speed up the Court process behind the application for Care Orders. The rationale for this was that if children cannot be safely cared for at home by their parents and alternative accommodation (and families) are required to be sought for them, the younger the child, the better the outcome.

The report gave a considerable amount of background information, and the Group Manager - Case Management gave a résumé of this and then the Principal Solicitor - Corporate advised that from a Legal and Regulatory Services perspective, the Revised PLO comes into force in the Cardiff Care Centre from 1st September 2013, but there is already an expectation that between 1st July 2013 and 1st September 2013 local authorities will take as many of the steps in the Revised PLO as are possible. New Court forms and standard orders were already in place and must be used. The Court Issue Fees had increased from £2,225 per case to £3,320. The fee to list a case for final hearing had increased from £1,900 to £2,155.

In the 2011-12 financial year, the Welsh Government transferred £116,000 into the RSG to cover Court fees. This allocation had not since been increased. The projected spend on Court fees for 2013-14 was £270,000 (£220,000 in 2012-13), more than double the amount BCBC was originally allocated.

The responsibility for case preparation was now placed solely on the local authority. In the past, this was shared between the local authority and the Children's Guardian, who assumed responsibility for the instruction of experts. This had resulted in the level of involvement of the local authority lawyer with conduct of the case being greatly increased. There were more tasks to be undertaken and these must now all be undertaken by the local authority. This meant that each lawyer's caseload had to be reduced in order to take account of the additional work each case now required. In the future this may mean that more lawyers are required to maintain the level of service.

The above situation was compounded by the fact the Childcare Section in Legal were understaffed, and that recruitment of good experienced childcare lawyers was not a straightforward process, resulting in excessive hours being worked by existing staff, which could not be sustained.

Non-compliance with Court directions would not be tolerated also, stated the Principal Solicitor - Corporate. If directions (orders) could not be complied with, the lawyer had to file an application for permission to have an extension of time. This attracted a fee of £90 and takes the lawyer approximately 3 hours to draft and issue. The number of these applications was running at a high level as social workers failed to comply with court orders. Her Honour Judge Parry had made it clear she added, that she will order wasted costs against Local Authorities who do not comply with court orders.

The Group Manager - Case Management confirmed that in the case of frontloading of assessments, whereas previously specialist assessments such as psychological, psychiatric, independent social worker, cognitive, PAMS (Parenting Assessment Manual

Software, which is an evidenced based assessment developed to assess parents with learning difficulties, developed by Dr. Sue McGaw.), etc. were completed within proceedings and were jointly commissioned between the parties and therefore the costs were also shared, now there was an onus of the local authority that where these assessments are needed, they are completed prior to care proceedings being issued. There had therefore been a sharp increase in the costs incurred within Safeguarding pre-proceedings. For example, a PAMS assessment which was an assessment specifically designed to look at the parenting capacity of parents who may have learning disabilities or difficulties, on average cost £4000. Prior to October 2012 none were requested or completed, however since this time there have been approximately 10.

There was also now more emphasis placed on the evidence of the social worker than ever before she confirmed. The social worker needs to be confident about their assessment, analysis and report writing skills. They need to be particularly adept at ensuring there is clear evidence that thresholds have been met regarding the concerns and that appropriate processes have been followed without delay. They can no longer rely on the evidence of experts she added. Bearing in mind the information shared in a previous report regarding the recruitment of experienced social workers, the changes brought about as a result of the 2011 Review had put even more pressure upon the Safeguarding Team.

“An Order is an Order” - Judge Parry in Cardiff County Court had made her expectations very clear. Every party needed to adhere to the order and file any required reports or statements on time. Anyone failing to comply, risked having wasted costs awarded against them. Social workers had struggled to balance all their responsibilities within the time available to them and there had been occasions when reports had not been shared with the team manager and legal services in a timely way because of other competing demands, which in turn had caused delay with the report being filed at court.

In terms of disclosure of all documents, the local authority needed to file the following documents at the start of care proceedings

- a. Care plan – one for each child within a sibling group
- b. Initial statement
- c. Genogram
- d. Chronology
- e. Core assessment
- f. Viability assessments of any family or friend that parent(s) have suggested could be considered to be an alternative carer.

In addition there are also a number of cases where further additional assessments are required such as: -

- g. PAMS assessment
- h. Cognitive assessment

In addition the social worker would need to ensure that the file recordings are up to date for each child within the family. This would include:

- a) Case recordings
- b) Core group minutes
- c) Statutory visit records
- d) Strategy meetings minutes
- e) S47 reports
- f) LAC review report
- g) Child Protection conference report

h) CIN review reports

All public child care cases to be completed within a 26 week time period as a maximum, explained Officers. The 26 week was from start to finish, therefore the real time for the social worker to assess, review and make final recommendations was much less in order to allow for the other parties, parent(s), extended family members and the Children's Guardian to have time to consider the local authority's final evidence and file their own statements. When the revised PLO arrangements come in on 2nd September the expectation will shift to expect that most cases are completed in around 20 weeks.

The tighter timescales meant that team managers now have more court documents to check and these have to be done within shorter timescales. For example, there are a number of care plans submitted throughout the proceedings to update the court of any changes to the assessment, plan, placement, etc. which all needed to be quality assured to ensure that the proposals for contact, placement, permanence planning are robust.

The next part of the report highlighted actions being taken to respond to the expectations and pressures referred to in the report that included the following:-

- (1) Legal surgeries now being held weekly (previously held twice weekly);
- (2) Successful recruitment campaigns for social workers as detailed in paragraph 4.17 of the report;
- (3) Expanding Safeguarding Teams from four to five teams following a staff restructure;
- (4) Extra training for practitioners with specific training events having been developed in respect of Public Law Outline.

Safeguarding social workers now all had laptop computers. This allowed them to work from home which was beneficial and enabled them to complete work uninterrupted.

Every Safeguarding team manager had now been provided with large whiteboards in their offices for them to track cases and have a permanent visual display of what needs to be completed and by when.

Where required, attempts were made to provide social workers with protected time where needed to complete the necessary records.

A new database system was also currently being commissioned. The aspiration for the new database will be to have a system that is more practitioner friendly to make information easier and faster to input and collate.

The Principal Solicitor - Corporate stated that examples of good practice were shared within the Safeguarding teams, so that practitioners could benefit from knowing what a good court core assessment or care plan looks like.

In addition the Safeguarding teams were now more proactive in their efforts to minimise drift particularly with young children and babies. Over the past 3 financial years (2010 - 2103) 84 babies under the age of one have become looked after within Bridgend.

2010/11 - 24

2011/12 - 21

2012/13 - 39

The Principal Solicitor - Corporate then referred to paragraph 4.31 of the report, which confirmed that 43% of babies were removed from the care of their mother within 1 week following birth; 30% had entered care because of concerns about drug misusing parents, 25% due to domestic violence by the father and 33% because of mother's mental illness or depression. It was these kind of situations which require the local authority to act in a robust manner to ensure that the baby was appropriately protected and a permanence plan is identified earlier in their lives. Furthermore, frequently these babies were part of large sibling groups so the care proceedings also needed to address the similar and different needs of these children.

The Principal Solicitor - Corporate concluded by advising that sadly the number of mothers who have been in local authority care and then had their baby removed had increased. The number of teenage mothers of babies entering care increased during 2012-13 with 12 babies in total taken into care where the mother is aged 19 or under. This compared to 4 during 2011-12 and 2 during 2010-11. This increase was mainly attributed to the rise in teenage mothers in Bridgend generally and BCBC acting more robustly in relation to child protection concerns. Where possible and appropriate, the local authority commissioned mother and baby placements to give young mothers the best chance of being successful parents. Such placements were expensive, but effective to either support the young mother make a move on to independence, or identify that this would not be a conducive plan for the child, and alternative permanency arrangements needed to be identified without delay.

Officers then responded to a number of questions on the content of the report, which was for information purposes.

RESOLVED: That the joint report be noted.

The meeting closed at 11.41pm.