

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOMS 2/3, CIVIC OFFICES ANGEL STREET BRIDGEND CF31 4WB ON MONDAY, 12 OCTOBER 2015 AT 10.00 AM

Present

Councillor – Chairperson

M Gregory
PJ White

MEJ Nott OBE
HM Williams

CE Smith

HJ Townsend

Officers:

Nicola Echanis
Mark Galvin
Laura Kinsey
Jackie Morgan
Mark Shephard
Wendy Willcox

Head of Strategy Partnerships & Commissioning
Senior Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Head of Safeguarding and Assessment
Corporate Director - Communities

106. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from the following Officers for the reasons so given:-

D Mepham – Attending CMB meeting
D McMillan – Attending CMB meeting
N Young – Attending CMB meeting

107. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following declarations of interest were made:-

Councillor M E J Nott – Personal interest in Agenda item 4 in that he was Chairperson of the National Adoption Service

Councillor D B F White – Personal interest in Agenda item 4 in that his role as an employee in Swansea City Council involved foster caring as part of the Western Bay Programme

108. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee dated 30 July 2015 be approved as a true and accurate record, subject to Councillor E Dodd being added to the list of attendees present at the meeting

109. OVERVIEW OF WESTERN BAY REGIONAL ADOPTION SERVICES

The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing submitted a report, that provided Members with an overview of the current position regarding the Western Bay Regional Adoption Service.

By way of background information, she confirmed that the creation of a National Adoption Service is one of the key policy strands of the Welsh Government, as enacted in the Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Act 2014. A new model for delivering Adoption Services was introduced by Welsh Government, which dictated that all Councils are expected to deliver Adoption Services collaboratively. In the case of City and County of Swansea, Bridgend County Borough Council and Neath Port Talbot County this is the Western Bay footprint.

Paragraph 3.2 of the report confirmed that a Regional Adoption Project was initiated under the Western Bay programme and was funded via the regional collaboration grant in 13/14 and 14/15, and this section of the report detailed the aims of this Project.

In terms of the current situation, the Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing confirmed that membership of the Regional Management Board/Committee which has replaced the Steering Group has been agreed and complies with the requirements set out in the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (Joint Adoption Arrangements) (Wales) Directions 2015.

The flexible/remote working arrangements as part of the functional model were working well. At the initial set up of the Western Bay Adoption Service, differences to staff terms and conditions caused some difficulties. These issues have now been resolved stated the Officer.

Performance in the first quarter of the year and to date had been good in relation to a number of PI's, as was reflected in paragraph 4.3 of the report, with these figures demonstrating a positive trend for the service.

The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing added that Western Bay had achieved 50% of the children matched within six months although doing well compared to performance across Wales, it was an area the required some improvement.

On a more positive note however, the conversion rate of enquiries to approvals was the highest in Wales.

Attached to the report at Appendices 1 and 2 was data and associated information which showed the qualitative performance to date across the region, with the specific cumulative Bridgend numbers of children being reflected at August 2015.

In terms of some key issues, the Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing confirmed that there are currently a number of social work and business support vacancies which have placed some pressures on the service since it became operational. There was a Strategy in place to address this with a combination of both permanent and temporary arrangements being progressed, including collaboration with one of the partner Voluntary Adoption Agencies.

She then outlined for the benefit of Members, the key milestones/priorities for the coming year, as were listed in paragraph 4.15 of the report.

The Cabinet Member Regeneration and Economic Development in response to a recent news press release, proposed that a Presentation be given at a future Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee of the court processes that are followed prior to a child

being proposed for adoption, so that Members have a full understanding of the 'checks and balances' that are followed during this process.

A Member referred to paragraph 3.3 of the report, where it stated that the Western Bay Adoption Service aimed to increase the recruitment of local adopters by 100%, given the high number of LAC across the Western Bay Region. He felt that data in respect of this should be included in any future reports.

Officers stated that this could be arranged, and that further information regarding this could be shared with the Member outside of the meeting.

A Member also added that some of the data attached to the report should be broken down further, in order to make it more easily explained and in turn understood.

The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing agreed that in future such reports this information would be set out more clearly, though this supporting data was only confirming the information contained in paragraph 4.3 of the report.

The Cabinet Member Children's Social Services and Equalities enquired if certain categories of children we are seeking to place in adoption are harder to place than others, for example those of a certain age or with a severe disability.

The Group Manager Disability, Transition and Case Management confirmed that those individuals with complex needs and older children are sometimes hard to place under a fostering arrangement, but there were other organisations that accounted for these children, such as Barnardo's and certain other key organisations.

The Chairperson concluded debate on this item by thanking the Adoption Team in the Wellbeing Directorate for their hard work which had contributed to the report's positive outcomes.

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

110. OVERVIEW OF SERVICES TO YOUNG CARERS IN BRIDGEND

The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing submitted a report, that provided the Cabinet Committee with an overview of the current service provision for Young Carers in Bridgend.

The Group Manager Disability, Transition and Case Management, advised that a carer was defined in the Carers Strategy (Wales) Measure 2010 as an individual, whether an adult or a child, who provides or intends to provide a substantial amount of care on a regular basis for:-

- a) A child who is disabled within the meaning of part 3 of the Children Act 1989, or
- b) An individual aged 18 or over

According to Carers Wales research, there are currently over 369,186 unpaid Carers in Wales with 17,855, in Bridgend. This is an increase of 10% since the previous census figure which was 16,164. Carers in Wales save the economy £7.72 billion per annum which is more than it costs to run the NHS. The NHS and Social Services rely on the willingness and ability of carers to provide support to people with health and social

needs. The cost of replacing this care has been estimated at £7.72 billion each year. The 2011 Census identified 1372 Young Carers in Bridgend. (Carers UK, 2011).

She explained that a Young Carer is someone aged under 18 years old who takes responsibility for someone who is disabled, elderly, experiencing mental distress or affected by substance misuse, or has substantial responsibility for caring for a sibling (ABMU Carers Strategy 2013-2016).

The report included information illustrating the number of children who are carers in the Bridgend area based on the 2001 and 2011 Census data information, ie with there being 509 in 2001 and 1,372 in 2011. She added that obviously there were more carers than this total suggested that the Authority weren't aware of, as they had not made themselves known for whatever reason that they were carrying out such a support role.

In terms of Local Support for Young Carers, a Carers Strategy for Bridgend County Borough has been developed by the Bridgend Carers Forum in partnership with statutory and non-statutory organisations and was reported to Cabinet in April 2010. Young Carers were also specifically mentioned in page 12 of the ABMU Carers Strategy, highlighting their specific needs.

The Head of Strategy, Commissioning and Partnerships then referred to the Carer Strategy (Wales) Measure 2010. This enabled the National Assembly of Wales to introduce legal duties on the NHS (lead organisation) and Local Authorities in Wales to work together and, in consultation with Carers, to prepare, publish and implement a joint Carers Information and Consultation Strategy. The Measure is not targeted at specific age groups but encompasses Carers of all ages including Young Carers (under the age of 18) and Young Adult Carers (aged 18 – 25 years).

Guidance issued by Welsh Government in relation to the Information and Consultation Strategy, specifically seeks to ensure that which was outlined in paragraph 4.3 of the report.

Paragraph 4.7 of the report then referred to some of the work that had been achieved through funding streams available under the Carers Measure, and that in October 2013, a Carers Co-ordinator for both Adult and Children's services was appointed, and a component of the role of this, was for the development of services for Young Carers. The next section of the report expanded upon some of the work this Officer had undertaken.

Paragraph 4.14 of the report then gave details regarding the appointment in July 2014 of a Young Carers Co-ordinator, and this part of the report gave an overview of service provision for Young Carers and Young Adult Carers within the County Borough (to date).

The Group Manager, Disability, Transition and Case Management concluded her submission by referring to the reports financial implications which confirmed that funding for the posts referred to would expire at the end of March 2016.

The Chairperson confirmed that he had attended the launch of the Young Carer's ID Card which had been an excellent event, as invitees were able to discuss and implement some of these young people's recommendations and suggestions.

A Member noted that sessions had been delivered to schools in relation to the matter subject of the report, and sought clarification if this had been delivered in primary and comprehensive schools across the County Borough.

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The Group Manager, Disability, Transition and Case Management explained that this had been delivered in comprehensive schools, though the intention was to also roll this out to primary schools.

The Chairperson added that those Members who were also School Governors could arrange with teaching staff at schools there were governors at, to introduce such sessions if they had not already taken place at that particular school.

Members were unanimously in favour of looking for a funding stream that could continue in order to extend the Contract of the Carer's Co-ordinator post.

The Chairperson further asked if all the actions included in the Action Plan that supported the Carers Strategy had now been completed.

The Group Manager Disability, Transition and Case Management confirmed that she would obtain information regarding this request and feed this back to the Deputy Leader outside of the meeting.

The Chairperson also suggested that events for Young Carers be set-up in order to discuss and make known their achievements.

The Group Manager Disability, Transition and Case Management replied that she would take this suggestion up with the Action for Children Group and the Carers Centre.

- RESOLVED:**
- (1) That the Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee noted the report.
 - (2) That the Committee receives a further report within 6 – 12 months time, giving an update on the services to Young Carers in Bridgend to include resource implications relating to the support of the services by BCBC

The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing submitted a report, that provided the Cabinet Committee with a report that was in line with the statutory duties under the Independent Reviewing Officers Guidance (Wales) 2004. The report would also provide an overview of the role and function of the Independent Reviewing Service.

The report gave some background information, that included information which outlined that Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) are required to independently review the Care Plans of all Looked After Children, and in Bridgend they also independently oversee those children with a Child Protection Plan, subject to the Child Protection Register (CPR) through child protection conferences.

The Looked After Children Statutory review process requires the IROs to undertake bi-annual and annual reviews of children and young people's circumstances and they must consult with and ensure the attendance of relevant agencies including health, education and Police in some instances.

The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing confirmed that, within Bridgend County Borough Council, the IRO Service was responsible for the review and oversee the effectiveness and the appropriateness of Care Plans for those Children and Young People the Council had responsibility for. This included the Chairing of all Child Protection Conferences with Bridgend County Borough Council area on behalf of Western Bay Safeguarding Children Board, Looked After Children Reviews, which included children who are Looked After and placed in foster care, residential care, secure units, placed with parents, placed for Adoption and young people subject to Pathway Plans (for young people moving towards independent living and for those living Independently up to age of 21 years old or 25 if in full time education).

In terms of the composition of the IRO Service, there had been some change in the composition of the Team since the last Annual Report dated April 2014. There were currently 6 full-time posts and one ½ time post.

She explained that the current IRO cohort have a wealth of experience and all have been qualified Social Workers for a substantial period of time. The IRO Manager has been in her current post since June 2013 she added.

The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing then covered the following areas, information upon each of which was expanded upon within the report:-

- IRO caseloads
- Reviewing activity
- Qualitative information
- Case Dispute Resolution and Complaints, and
- Service Challenges for 2014-15

Paragraph 4.8 of the report, then covered some Service Priorities and the Officer expanded upon some of these for Members' benefit.

The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing confirmed that there was one issue that was very important from a Quality Assurance perspective, and that was that all children who are looked after have in place a suitable Care Plan for them.

She added that since April of this year, improvements had been made to the Independent Reviewing Service and an Action Plan had been introduced for this purpose.

A Member stated that the report not only made for good reading in that it highlighted improvements to the service, it was also honest through highlighting weaknesses that needed to be worked upon, as well as emphasising the future challenges that lie ahead.

The Head of Adult Social Care recognised these issues the Member had raised, and she added that training and mentoring was also being addressed in the Social Services team, particularly in respect of Social Workers so as to achieve improved work practices.

The Group Manager Disability Transition and Case Management

The Head of Safeguarding and Assessment added that the IRO's were supportive including in the role of critical friends in terms of achieving guidance and support that would lead to and result in improvements to the service in question. She added that last year had been a difficult one, as there had been a considerable amount of sickness absence affecting Managers in this area of work, as well as Social Workers. This had improved this year however, and coupled with increased collaborative working, future challenges would be met more effectively than previously.

The Group Manager Disability Transition and Case Management added that a considerable amount of supportive work was being carried out through the various Hubs that had been established in parts of the County Borough, particularly in respect of Performance Indicator statistics.

A Member noted that the IRO caseloads in BCBC were higher than in neighbouring authorities, and she asked Officers why this was the case.

The Head of Safeguarding and Assessment advised that this was because there were more Independent Reviewing Officers in certain neighbouring authorities, that included Neath Port Talbot CBC.

She added that in terms of caseloads, 80 was an acceptable number for 6.5 IRO's which was the current number in BCBC, however, they had a total of 100 cases to manage, which meant that they were carrying a heavy workload.

With regard to Case Dispute Resolution Complaints, the Chairperson asked if all these complaints were resolved in 5 working days as was the directive.

The Head of Safeguarding and Assessment confirmed that they were.

RESOLVED: That the Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee noted the contents of the report and the accompanying Annual Report of the Manager of the Independent Reviewing Service.

112. URGENT ITEMS

None

The meeting closed at 11.37 am