

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOMS 2/3 - CIVIC OFFICES ANGEL STREET BRIDGEND CF31 4WB ON WEDNESDAY, 18 APRIL 2018 AT 14:00

Present

Councillor PJ White – Chairperson

HJ David	DK Edwards	J Gebbie	CA Green
RM James	D Patel	JC Radcliffe	CE Smith
CA Webster	HM Williams	RE Young	

Apologies for Absence

N Clarke

Officers:

Susan Cooper	Corporate Director - Social Services & Wellbeing
Lindsay Harvey	Corporate Director Education and Family Support
Ruth Ronan	
Natalie Silcox	Group Manager Childrens Regulated Services

168. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following Declaration of Interest was made:
Councillor J Radcliffe declared a personal interest in agenda 4, Update On The Establishment Of A National Fostering Framework (Nff) And Current Work In Relation To In House Foster Care Provision as he is currently going through the adoption process.

169. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting 24 January 2018 be approved as a true and accurate record.

170. UPDATE ON THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A NATIONAL FOSTERING FRAMEWORK (NFF) AND CURRENT WORK IN RELATION TO IN HOUSE FOSTER CARE PROVISION

The Head of Children's Social Care presented a report informing the Cabinet Committee of the background information about and update regarding the progress of work undertaken on establishing a National Fostering Framework in Wales. She also provided an update on the Bridgend Foster Care service provision and the fostering service review that is underway.

The Head of Children's Social Care explained that phase 3 commenced in 2017 and included the National Adoption Service (NAS) central team being expanded and developed in order to provide unity and support the coordination and leadership of the National Fostering Framework. She then outlined the work programme upon which the regional plans are being developed as detailed in 4.4 of the report.

The Head of Children's Social Care advised that a review of Bridgend Foster Care is currently underway to ensure maximisation of the service potential and development of the approach model in a way that is consistent with residential Placement and Services remodelling project and the National Fostering Framework. She explained that the review is due to be completed by July 2018 and incorporates a number of workstreams

as detailed in 4.9 of the report. The findings will be collated into a report which will present recommendations and options with regard to any changes to systems, finance, policies and structure in the service.

A member asked for an update on the Welsh Community Care Information System (WCCIS) and the timeline for the establishment across Wales.

The Corporate Director, Social Services and Wellbeing advised that across Wales, 13 Local Authorities are currently on WCCIS. Merthyr were the last Local Authority to go live and RCT will follow shortly. It is planned to be delivered across all Authorities in the next 18 months, the development of the modules is rolling out slowly. The Head of Children's Social Care told the committee that the foster care module is live, with the foster care payment module due to go live in May.

A member commented that they understood in the past there had been difficulty in recruiting and retaining foster carers, could officers advise what the situation was currently?

The Group Manager Childrens Regulated Services advised that there had been consistent improvement in Bridgend by 2 to 3 households each year. There had been a lot of work done by the Communications and Marketing team to promote the service and as a consequence we now have a good pool of foster carers within Bridgend. The current carer recruitment and development programme is under review to improve career development opportunities for in-house foster carers and ensure that the Local Authority is competitive with independent fostering advisors. The Corporate Director, Social Services and Wellbeing explained that the push for recruitment is linked to the MTFS, if we "grow our own" we are spending less on outside placements. The Chairperson urged members to promote the service whenever possible as the Authority is always looking to recruit.

A member referred to Workstream 4 – Finance "a review of the financial packages for carers is being undertaken, this will include benchmarking in line with independent fostering agencies and other local authorities using the National Fostering Framework data" and asked if there will be a more parity between local authorities and private agencies after the review in relation to payments.

The Group Manager Childrens Regulated Services explained that the main issue was that the local authority fees were not competitive with private agencies below a certain level and that it was important that this was addressed as part of the review. The Corporate Director, Social Services and Wellbeing noted that there has recently been a lot negative publicity around independent fostering agencies with the result of foster carers looking to transfer to local authorities.

A member commented that comparing allowances across the local authorities, Bridgend is more than generous. They asked however if it was practice to carry out an assessment on an individual basis to look at the financial implications when placements required extra financial support. The Head of Children's Social Care advised that in certain circumstances the authority already makes discretionary payments, however the review will look at this and also at how we encourage carers to save for a child's future requirements.

A member commented that generally publicity around Looked after Children is poor as there appears to be a lack of positive role models, for example Looked After Children who have gone onto University or other forms of further education. The member suggested that the authority look at promoting positive stories from Bridgend.

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The Corporate Director, Social Services and Wellbeing said that this was an excellent idea and will be taken back to the teams. We could look at developing a whole library of stories which can then be used as part of the recruitment. The Head of Children's Social Care advised that we have previously incorporated a social media clip into our strategy which featured a former Looked After Child and that this was very well received.

A member noted that "Voices from Care" are an excellent organisation and would welcome an invitation to speak to elected members. It was agreed that this would be put forward as a possible pre-council presentation or member development session.

A member asked about the percentage of placements which involve multiple children from the same family in one home. The Group Manager Childrens Regulated Services advised that we now have 35% of foster carers who will take 2 – 3 children and we aim to keep siblings together whenever possible. We also have a number of foster carers who are related and so this helps to keep siblings together.

A member asked for an update on peer support, the recruitment of new transition foster care and parent and baby placements.

The Group Manager Childrens Regulated Services told the committee that the carers campaign is due to go live on 30th April which would launch a new service: transition carers and raise the profile of fosters carers the 14th May is the beginning of fostering fortnight which will hopefully assist in recruitment. In terms of parent and baby placements we have had 2 households approved and are assessing another 2 . This issue was discussed in some depth at a recent scrutiny meeting and it was therefore agreed therefore to circulate this report to the committee.

A member asked what we are doing to support new foster carers and the families of foster carers?

The Group Manager Childrens Regulated Services advised that plans are in place to deliver a 16 week induction training plan for newly approved foster carers. This will improve and enhance their existing skills and knowledge. There is currently a support group for the sons and daughters of foster carers and this has proved to be very successful, they have previously produced a short book called "Dylan's Story", are working on producing a handbook and are produced a song.

A member asked what support is offered in schools to teachers around the issues of Looked after Children and their complex emotional needs.

The Corporate Director Education and Family Support advised that he would look into this issue and report back, however the authority would definitely look at working with social workers and headteachers to provide appropriate training.

A member raised the subject of home insurance for foster carers, especially in relation to the refusal of claims by certain companies.

The Group Manager Childrens Regulated Services told the committee that foster carers were advised in their written guidance they should notify their insurance provider of their changed status, some insurance providers also specialised in this area. She was unaware of this ever being an issue in Bridgend and the Chairperson confirmed that it had never been raised as an issue via the Fostering Panel. A full risk assessment and health and safety assessment was also undertaken prior to any foster care approval.

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A member referred to item 4.7 of the report which stated that 75 children were currently placed with independent fostering agencies and asked if this was through choice or an issue of capacity within the Local Authority.

The Group Manager Childrens Regulated Services advised that it was partly capacity but partly that some children needed to be in specialist placements or out of area. Nationally Bridgend was bucking the trend as this figure was relatively low and the authorities target was to reduce this figure by 4% this year.

The Chairperson advised the Committee that it had been decided to develop a forward work programme and asked members for items to be brought to future meetings.

Members suggested the following:

- An update on the Children's Inspection, work is being carried out on the action plan and it would be useful to bring this back to the committee so that they could see the progress.
- To receive an update on the review of Looked After Children focusing on early help and the Looked After Children focus group.
- Educational outcomes for Looked After Children with Special Educational Needs, this has been reviewed by the School Improvement Group and would be useful for the Committee.
- Multi Agency Support Hub (MASH) – to receive an update on the roll out of the MASH and its impact.
- Child practice reviews, to receive a report and presentation on an incident in Hillside when an appropriate time has lapsed.
- To invite former Looked After Children to present to Committee and share their experiences and achievements.

171. URGENT ITEMS

None

The meeting closed at 15:05