

CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING - WEDNESDAY, 27 JULY 2022

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING HELD REMOTELY - VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON WEDNESDAY, 27 JULY 2022 AT 14:00

Present

Councillor J Gebbie – Chairperson

F D Bletsoe
W R Goode
AJ Williams

JPD Blundell
J E Pratt
HM Williams

HJ David
T Thomas

N Farr
A Wathan

Apologies for Absence

JC Spanswick

Officers:

Steve Berry	Corporate Parenting and Participation Officer
Alex Fitzpatrick	Team Manager Placements
Mark Galvin	Senior Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Raeanna Grainger	Independent Reviewing Service Manager
Lindsay Harvey	Corporate Director Education and Family Support
Laura Kinsey	Head of Children's Social Care
Michael Pitman	Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Mark Shephard	Chief Executive

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting dated 2 March 2022, be approved as a true and accurate record.

3. TO RECEIVE A PRESENTATION ON THE BRIDGEND INFORMATION, ADVICE AND ASSISTANCE SERVICE

The Chairperson introduced to Members the Interim Group Manager – IAA and Safeguarding, in order to give a power point presentation entitled MASH/IAA Annual Performance.

She explained the structure of the presentation would take the shape as follows, in terms of covering:-

- Performance
- Workforce
- QA
- Finance
- Compliments and Complaints
- Improvements achieved
- Summary

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The Interim Group Manager – IAA and Safeguarding confirmed that during Quarter 3 of the year, performance had shown a decline within the team whereby the staffing situation then deteriorated. There were very high sickness levels including many related to Covid and a number of staff had also left the service.

Therefore, a critical incident was called by the Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing on 1 March 2022. Gold, Silver & Bronze command structures were initiated to ensure governance, whilst the team was in a critical incident.

In view of this situation, daily meetings were held to consider the performance data and staff deployed from other areas of Children's Services, in order to bolster the service.

An IAA action plan was developed and this identified the short, medium and long term actions required to make the changes to enable the service to exit the critical incident. The action plan focuses on increased situational awareness, communication, workforce, practice and quality assurance, systems, processes, policies & procedures & practice and assurance work.

An Innovate Team were introduced which commenced work on the 21 March 2022.

In January 2022, she advised that the screening rate was below an acceptable level. This was as a result of staff sickness, high rates of Covid 19 within the team and vacancies increasing, which all in all created a backlog of work. There had been as a consequence of this, some significant work carried out, in order to increase Social Worker and Team Management capacity.

The team then introduced a number of agency Social Workers. This enabled the team to screen within acceptable levels and as a result of this recruitment push, screening rates had now improved month on month.

Enhanced practice had taken place, to ensure that when a contact is received every sibling in the household is subject to the assessment. This has impacted in part on the number of assessments open to the service.

In Quarter 4, the team successfully allocated all of the outstanding C&S assessments. TM oversight was also strengthened and staff are now provided with their assessment deadlines on a daily basis which are colour coded to highlight what to prioritise first, from a work perspective. It was hoped this will further improve the number of assessments completed within the required timescales.

The focused work plan, additional support and the deployment of the managed agency team had also allowed the service area to begin to turn the corner in respect of performance.

A graph displayed as part of the presentation slides, reflected the improvement in performance that had taken place from January to May of this year, she explained.

This was confirmed in the form of statistical information added the Group Manager IAA and Safeguarding, by the fact that in Quarter 4, the service received 1332 reports, 577 of these became Care & Support assessments (43%). Compared to the previous quarter only 29% had gone onto a C&S assessment.

Also, added the Interim Group Manager – IAA and Safeguarding, the level of Strategy meetings being held increased over this same period from the previous Quarter 3 at 118 to 184 in Quarter 4.

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In terms of the Services Workforce, she advised that there had been an increase in staff capacity of 25% and a commitment had been made, to keep caseloads in the region of 25 per FTE.

Alongside providing initially weekly and subsequently fortnightly supervision, cases had been progressed more efficiently than previous cases, including the transfer of these to the Safeguarding Teams.

The additional Team Management capacity had also had a positive impact as staff now felt better supported, were more confident to manage their workload, which in turn, had reduced issues of drift.

The reduction in caseloads had also enabled staff to attend further training, engage with peer supervision and participate in well-being sessions, such as Mindfulness and shortly Building Resilience workshops were to be introduced.

Also being rolled out, was a Back to Basics Training programme which would be mandatory for all Social Workers (agency included) as an outcome of a Rapid Review undertaken at the end of 2021. This training would concentrate in particular, upon professional curiosity and recognising coercive controlling behaviour.

Quality Assurance methods introduced, had also concentrated upon important headlines such as for example, Dip Sampling, ISW Audits, a strengthening of management oversight, TM's chairing Strategy meetings and monthly WCCIS audits by Team Managers.

In terms of finances, the Interim Group Manager - IAA and Safeguarding explained that costs for the Innovate Team and the 11 agency Social Workers so employed for the Mash/IAA service, would be in the region of £1.2m by the end of the year. This would cover recruitment and retention issues and other associated issues, such as International Social Work Recruitment costs, Grow your own Increased Places, as well as covering Market Supplements

The Interim Group Manager – IAA and Safeguarding then explained how the team had improved in terms of responding to complaints more quickly and this had been acknowledged in the form of receipt of compliments from key partners and stakeholders.

In terms of improvements made overall, she explained that these could be summarised as follows:-

- By the Innovate Team;
- Through Pen Pictures of staff;
- Consent avenues;
- The Exploitation Screening tool;
- Greater business support in place;
- Peer Supervision being introduced;
- Mentoring being implemented;
- Daily Traffic Signal RAG's timescales;
- Commitment to caseloads being in the region of 25 max;
- Chronologies and genograms;
- Since February there has been a significant increase in performance compared to previous to that

By way of summary to her submission, the Interim Group Manager – IAA and Safeguarding confirmed that in the current quarter the Mash/IAA Service had made significant improvements. However, it was still acknowledged that there was still work to be done. The priorities here were

- Completing the Action Plan
- All staff to attend Back to Basics Training
- Improvement in recruitment and retention
- Continuing to offer well-being initiatives
- Safe and workable staff caseloads

A Member asked if calls to schools for advice or information regarding young children and pupils were now being logged and documented for reasons of data capture and any required follow-up action etc.

The Interim Group Manager – IAA and Safeguarding confirmed that this was being considered as part of future designs for Children’s Services..

The Leader commended the work that had taken place to date in relation to Multi Agency Safeguarding Hubs, where there had been involvement from key partners such as the South Wales Police, together with other operational groups and stakeholders.

RESOLVED: That both the presentation and the positive progress that had been made in respect of the Bridgend Information, Advice and Assistance Service, be noted.

4. **IMPLEMENTATION OF A FOSTER CARER CHARTER**

The Team Manager – Kinship Care and Permanence submitted a report, the purpose of which, was to provide the Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting with an update into the development of a Foster Carer Charter for Bridgend Fostering Service and to approve the adoption and implementation of the Charter on behalf of the Council as Corporate Parents.

She explained that as part of Bridgend Fostering Service’s Service Development Plan for 2022/23, a questionnaire was developed in conjunction with liaison foster carers and sent to all foster carers asking them a range of questions. The questions included how satisfied foster carers are with the Service, what is working well and areas for improvement.

Feedback received in relation to the questionnaire, was contained in the background section of the report.

In addition to the above, a State of the Nation survey undertaken by The Fostering Network in 2021, highlighted that both foster carers and fostering services agree that improving the status of foster carers in the team around the child is the number one thing that will change children’s experience of foster care for the better, going forward.

Furthermore, advised the Team Manager – Kinship Care and Permanence, since 2011, the Fostering Network has been campaigning for every fostering service to commit to a Foster Carers’ Charter, setting out clear expectations for how foster carers should be treated, trained and supported which is agreed by the Corporate Parents, fostering service and foster carers. A Charter can also assist in helping to build understanding between those involved in delivering care to children, promoting more cohesive working in the team around the child and improving experiences and outcomes for children in care.

The Foster Carers’ Charter supports local authorities’ responsibilities as Corporate Parents and sets out a framework of rights and expectations for foster carers. It sets out

mutual roles and responsibilities, which are 'owned' by both foster carers and the fostering service. It covers issues such as supervision, involvement in planning and decision making, information and payments.

In order to address some of the areas for improvement identified within the Foster Carer feedback and to improve the status of foster carers, it was proposed that Bridgend County Borough Council implements a Foster Carer Charter (attached at Appendix 1 to the report) in line with the work and recommendations of The Fostering Network following their State of the Nation report in 2021.

The proposed Charter sets out Bridgend Fostering Service's Vision Statement (launched with our Foster Carers at the Information, Consultation and Engagement (ICE) Event on 19th May 2022

She added that the Charter sets out the following commitment:

'The Foster Carers' Charter represents a commitment on behalf of Bridgend County Borough Council in its role as the Corporate Parent, the fostering service and the foster carer to work in partnership in the best interests of the children for whom they care. It is a promise, owned by everybody involved, to always strive for best practice.'

The proposed Charter was shared with foster carers at the ICE meeting on 19 May 2022, providing opportunity for discussion amongst carers and feedback. Overall, the proposal and Charter were well-received by those attending and agreement that establishing this within Bridgend County Borough Council would assist in raising the status of foster carers.

The Team Manager – Kinship Care and Permanence stated, that if the proposal and Charter are accepted by the Cabinet Committee, the next steps would be the development of an Implementation Plan which will include a self-assessment for Councillors and Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) Officers and Foster Carers, which would in turn, establish a baseline and set out the actions to be taken to improve on this baseline.

A Member commended the Charter and its content, including the Provide for Sport initiative which he thought was excellent. He also felt that it was important to acknowledge within the document, praise for children who were involved in Foster Caring and the Charter also recognised this.

The Chairperson echoed these sentiments, adding that she was proud to confirm that BCBC was the first local authority in Wales to introduce the Foster Carers Charter.

The Leader concluded debate by stating that it would be helpful to receive a further report in due course, on how the Charter and its aims and objectives, were progressing.

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the information contained within the report and approved the adoption and implementation of the Foster Carer Charter on behalf of the Council as Corporate Parents.

5. PROPOSED CORPORATE PARENTING DEVELOPMENT

The Corporate Parenting Participation Officer submitted a report, the purpose of which, was to set out proposals for consideration by the Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting for the development of Corporate Parenting in Bridgend.

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He confirmed that the first Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting meeting of the municipal year was an opportunity for Bridgend to begin and establish a revised approach to Corporate Parenting.

As a starting point to a refreshed approach, it was important there is a shared understanding of:

- what Corporate Parenting is;
- who has Corporate Parenting responsibilities and specifically,
- what these responsibilities are

Following on from a shared understanding of Corporate Parenting, through the engagement of Councillors, workforce, partners and importantly our children and young people, there needed to be a strategic and operational plan for how these responsibilities are fulfilled, monitored and evaluated. It is proposed to develop a clear Corporate Parenting Vision and Strategic plan through the methods outlined in paragraph 4.3, sub-headed as follows:

- 1) Establishing a shared vision for Corporate Parenting responsibilities;
- 2) Establishing a governance structure that supports the Strategic and Operational approach to Corporate Parenting;
- 3) Establishing a Corporate Parenting Performance Framework, and;
- 4) Establishing Care Experienced Forums to provide our Children and Young People with a collective voice

In terms of the report's financial implications, the Corporate Parenting Participation Officer advised that the proposed Consultation Workshop event as referenced to in the report, scheduled to be held in September 2022, would cost approximately £400 and will be funded by the Social Services & Wellbeing Training budget.

He added further that the specialist participation support provided for 12 months will cost approximately £10,000 and will be funded from within existing Children's Social Care budgets.

The Leader shared that Corporate Parenting was not just the role of the local authority and its Members, but it was more collective than that, ie with active involvement from other public sector statutory bodies, such as the Police, Health Authority and our Schools amongst others.

He added that he hoped that all key partners would attend the Consultation Workshop scheduled to be held next month.

RESOLVED: That the Committee considered the contents of the report and supported the reports proposals, in order to establish:

- a shared vision for corporate parenting responsibilities;
- a governance structure that supports the strategic and operational approach to Corporate Parenting;
- a Corporate Parenting Performance Framework;
- care experienced forums to provide our children and young people with a collective voice.

6. URGENT ITEMS

None.

The meeting closed at 15:05