

CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING - WEDNESDAY, 19 APRIL 2017

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING HELD IN COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC OFFICES ANGEL STREET BRIDGEND CF31 4WB ON WEDNESDAY, 19 APRIL 2017 AT 2.00 PM

Present

Councillor HJ David – Chairperson

CL Reeves

CE Smith

PJ White

HM Williams

Apologies for Absence

HJ Townsend

Officers:

Susan Cooper	Corporate Director - Social Services & Wellbeing
Julie Ellams	Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Kate Giltrap	Team Manager Just Ask Plus
Lindsay Harvey	Corporate Director Education and Family Support
Alison McDonald	Group Manager
Mark Shephard	Corporate Director - Communities

149. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

150. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED That the Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting dated 18 January 2017 be approved as a true and accurate record.

151. HIDDEN AMBITIONS - A CHILDREN'S COMMISSIONER FOR WALES REPORT AND BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL'S POSITION

The Corporate Director, Social Services and Wellbeing presented a report on Hidden Ambitions – A Children’s Commissioner for Wales report and updated the Committee on the position of Bridgend County Borough Council in relation to the recommendations within the report.

The Children’s Commissioner had been working with the Welsh Government and the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) to explore ways that they could help care leavers achieve their ‘Hidden Ambitions’. Her report concluded with a series of recommendations which if realised, would ensure Wales became a country that truly enabled “every young person to be the best that they could be”. In Bridgend there was a Sixteen plus team which played a pivotal role in delivering the BCBC response to the recommendations.

In 2016 the Commissioner consulted care leavers, and surveyed every Local Authority across Wales to establish what opportunities they currently provided.

To deliver the suggested improvements the Children’s Commissioner stated that she would:-

- Visit every Local Authority's executive leadership team across Wales in 2017 to discuss what they currently offered to support care leavers to achieve their 'hidden ambitions' and what they planned to put in place;
- Monitor the progress Local Authorities made;
- Monitor the progress of the Welsh Government in supporting care leavers;
- Continue to listen to care leavers about their experiences and whether they were getting the help they needed.

The Corporate Director, Social Services and Wellbeing reported each of the nine recommendations listed in the report and the Council's position or planned action. Progress had been made under each recommendation, more in some areas than others.

A member stressed the importance of clear guidance and advice when it came to finance and gave as an example the problems that adults serving in the forces experienced when they left because they were inexperienced when it came to organising their own finances. The Team Manager, Sixteen Plus, explained that it was particularly difficult for foster carers to allow children to take responsibility for their finances and a huge problem for 18 year olds. The "When I'm Ready" scheme had been available in the last year and addressed the gap where 18 year olds were not ready to be independent. It was geared towards those in education rather than NEETS and it allowed the foster carer to continue to provide care and bridge the gap until supported accommodation was available.

The Cabinet Member for Social Services and Early Help stressed that all recommendations were important and these might not be enough to solve the issues. Housing was imperative when it came to the transitional period and helping find employment. Apprenticeships and traineeships were also imperative going forward. Carers were also appreciative of transitional support and younger carers in particular were not getting support in terms of education as they left school at the end of the day to start work at home.

The Corporate Director, Social Services and Wellbeing reported that targets for supporting young carers into apprenticeships were in the business plan but there was a lot of work still to be done. Some children needed pre support and there would be a report on this to a future meeting. They were aware of each recommendation in the report and each one was being tackled at some level.

The Leader commented that the right accommodation options were not available and the authority was failing vulnerable young people. A few 18 year olds could be left to set up home but the vast majority needed support. Consideration had to be given to how adequate accommodation could be provided and if more support was required. As a signatory to the document, issues had been raised with Welsh Government. This was not just the responsibility of local authorities but across the board. The state had a responsibility extending beyond Councils. He recommended that a report be submitted in six months on housing options and how we tackle this issue. It was important to be able to demonstrate that progress was being made.

The Cabinet Member for Social Services and Early Help stated that in order to address the housing element, representatives from the Communities Directorate and the Housing Solutions team had to be involved. The authority had to be innovative with empty houses in the borough.

A member asked why more than 2000 house were unoccupied in the borough. He was advised that a number of these were privately owned and had been unoccupied for a long period of time. Efforts had been made to encourage the owners to rent out the

property, including the offer of grants and loans but it was difficult trying to persuade landlords to make their properties available.

The Cabinet Member for Education and Regeneration explained that there was anecdotal evidence that this was a private sector issue and legislation was required to stop these properties going to rack and ruin. Enforcement powers were limited and related to health and safety hazards.

The Corporate Director, Social Services and Wellbeing reported details of a project looking at in-house residential care and pathways and included providing better responses to children's needs and options for when they left care. The project was currently consulting with stakeholders to enable an options paper to be produced and a report would be submitted to Cabinet in the autumn.

The Programmes Manager, from Voices from Care, agreed that the housing stock was not being utilised and recognised that vulnerable adults were sent into society with no idea on how to function. There was a stigma attached to people who had been in care and this had to be addressed.

Members then received a presentation from Chris Dunn and Deborah Jones, Voices from Care.

The presenters gave a background to Voices from Care including the groups of people they worked with and the opportunity they provided for young people to influence the looked after system in Wales. They also represented the views, rights and experiences of those looked after in Wales. Examples of services they provided included participation, influencing, advice and support, training and collaboration.

"Proud To Be Me" was a Voices from Care initiative which brought young people and professionals together, developing a conversation on what it meant to be looked after and how to promote positive aspirations and messages. Other initiatives included "Question Time", the "National Fostering Framework" and "Care Day" which was a 5 nation partnership where young people developed messages which were showcased at Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama and lit up Cardiff City Hall in celebration.

Future activities included the Hay Festival on May 26th 2017, Cascade Voices on April 25th, Royal College of Music & Drama between 8th and 10th August and VFC Regional Groups on 22 August.

Members raised a number of issues including media interest in the Big Build and DIY SOS, the benefits of sharing practical ideas and what was happening in other areas, collaboration and the Role of the Commissioner, raising the profile of safeguarding and the value of the Credit Union to help with advice regarding finance and cheap loans.

RESOLVED

- 1) That the contents of the report be noted and support be given to the Sixteen Plus team and other partner department and services in fulfilling the recommendations of the Hidden Ambition report for the children and young people of Bridgend.
- 2) That a further report on progress and achievements against each recommendation and specifically on housing options to meet care leavers needs, be submitted in six months.

152. URGENT ITEMS

None.

The meeting closed at 3.25 pm