

**CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING - THURSDAY, 10 JANUARY 2019**

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING HELD IN CIVIC OFFICES ANGEL STREET BRIDGEND CF31 4WB ON THURSDAY, 10 JANUARY 2019 AT 10:00**

Present

Councillor PJ White – Chairperson

HJ David	DK Edwards	J Gebbie	T Giffard
CA Green	RM James	D Patel	CE Smith
CA Webster	DBF White	HM Williams	RE Young

Apologies for Absence

MC Clarke and N Clarke

Officers:

Susan Cooper	Corporate Director - Social Services & Wellbeing
Val Jones	Regional Adoption Manager
Andrew Rees	Senior Democratic Services Officer – Committees

184. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor DBF White declared a prejudicial interest in agenda item 5 – Monitoring the Performance and Progress of the Western Bay Regional Adoption Service as he is employed by Swansea Council which is part of Western Bay and withdrew from the meeting during consideration of the item. Councillor DBF White declared a personal interest in agenda item 6 – Care Inspectorate Wales – Inspection of Western Bay Adoption Service – Action Plan and remained in the meeting to hear the presentation.

185. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting of 17 October 2018 be approved as a true and accurate record.

186. REMODELLING FOSTERING SERVICES PROJECT

The Head of Children’s Social Care reported on the work which has been undertaken as part of the Remodelling Foster Services project and the resulting changes to Fostering Services.

She informed the Committee that a wide-reaching review of residential services has been undertaken, with fostering services identified where further service development and potential efficiencies could be made. She outlined the proposals made, the initiatives which had been implemented together with the main changes and proposals following the review.

The Head of Children’s Social Care reported that the Fostering Team has been separated into two distinct areas; one with responsibility for relative carers and one with responsibility for general foster carers. She informed the Committee that the existing five liaison carer roles will be maintained, with one being dedicated to relative carers and the other four to general carers. In respect of training, in the short term, the Skills to Foster course will be reshaped to align with the Directorate wide training programme. In the longer term, it was proposed to strengthen in-house training for foster carers, through the development and delivery of in-house courses.

The Head of Children's Social Care informed the Committee that for payments and fees to be competitive with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs), the authority needs to pay fees to general carers at an earlier stage in their fostering career. Foster carers would receive a fee, post approval, with the expectation they complete the core training programme within their first year. In terms of upskilling of foster carers and as part of the fee eligibility process the criteria for receiving higher fees will also include attendance at support groups. In respect of bonuses, carers would be offered a £250 bonus when they refer a friend to be a foster carer for Bridgend, which is paid when that new person is approved and they receive their first placement.

The Head of Children's Social Care informed the Committee that a new process to review IFA placements which have been in place less than 16 weeks has been implemented, with a view to transferring as many of these placements as possible in-house. She stated that a long-term marketing campaign will be implemented, aimed at maximising the number of in-house foster carers. She informed the Committee that two members of social work staff who are responsible for promoting and assessing potential Special Guardianship Order applicants are now situated within the Fostering Team. The Head of Children's Social Care informed the Committee of the appointment of a Development Officer and additional assessing social work capacity for the Fostering Team is underway.

The Chairperson welcomed Rebecca Walsh and Clive Richards to the meeting to hear their views and experiences as foster carers.

Mr Richards informed the Committee of his involvement in the remodelling project with the Interim Group Manager Placements which had been well put together. He stated that there is a need to implement changes and commented that there are very committed foster carers in Bridgend.

Ms Walsh informed the Committee of the changes which have occurred over recent years which had resulted in foster carers returning from Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) to Bridgend. Ms Walsh commented on the need for foster carers to work together with the authority in order to make things better for children and to save on out of county placements.

The Cabinet Member Communities thanked the foster carers for their comments and also the work of officers and the input of foster carers for turning the service around as part of the remodelling project ensuring that the majority of carers are in-house.

The Committee requested detail on the number of children in foster placements and the figures of foster placements over the past 3 years. The Head of Children's Social Care informed the Committee there are 279 children in Bridgend living within a fostering placement, 58 children are placed with IFA providers, 156 children are with in-house carers and 65 placed with Relative (kinship) carers. She stated that it was encouraging that the numbers of fostering placements are going in the right direction with fewer children being in IFA placements, in that 70 children were in IFA placements in the previous year.

The Committee questioned the foster carers what improvements had been put in place from their perspective. Ms Walsh informed the Committee that training has improved as there are many different aspects needed to equip foster carers. She stated that foster carers are able to have telephone contact with the Department and are able to source training and have access to a pool of resources available to them. The improvements made to training are due to the efforts of the Team of officers and foster carers. The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing informed the Committee that foster

carers are seen as part of a bigger team and the service is able to respond more flexibly to need and be proactive rather than being reactive. She stated that these were exciting times and there was a need to keep the momentum going. She commented on the success of the recent Christmas party which had been attended by over 100 people, which she and the Cabinet Member also had the privilege to attend. She also commented on the importance of training to foster carers in order to build up their skills and their families.

The Interim Group Manager Placements informed the Committee that it had been possible to use as a resource the extended families of foster carers. Foster carers are given a clearer voice and the Team and foster carers have worked hard to ensure foster caring is family based and that carers are part of the wider team.

The Committee thanked the foster carers for their dedication in making the lives of children better. The Committee questioned there had been an increase in children being fostered with complex needs. Ms Walsh commented there had been an increase in children in foster care with complex needs and there was support within the team by giving foster carers skills to keep the placements in-house. Mr Richards commented that the fostering landscape had changed with the advent of social media and relatives of foster children presenting challenges. He stated that uppermost is that children need to have stability and routine and not having to move around foster carers.

The Committee questioned whether schools are playing a supporting role in fostering. Mr Richards informed the Committee that schools are now more proactive and identify needs straight away, especially in the primary school sector.

The Committee questioned whether problems are encountered with other local authorities who place children within this county. The Head of Children's Social Care informed the Committee that this authority works well with placing authorities and there are robust arrangements in place and no issues had been brought to her attention.

The Committee questioned the timescale for the review of the fee structure being completed. The Head of Children's Social Care informed the Committee that the review is in its third phase. She stated that fees vary and there is an opportunity to influence IFAs by removing the element of competition. The review of the fee structure should be complete by the Spring. The Head of Children's Social Care also informed the Committee that each case is considered individually and a cautious approach is undertaken. She stated there were no plans to move children where it was not in the best interests to do so.

Ms Walsh informed the Committee that the establishment of an accessible hub should be considered where foster carers, social workers and families can meet as some visits have been taking place in the public areas of Civic Offices. The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing informed the Committee that many contact visits take place in the Civic Offices and alternatives are being considered due to the lack of parking and it not being child-friendly. She stated there was a need for a solution to be looked at as a priority with partners and that areas in the Civic Offices where contact visits take place are used which can be seen by the public must cease immediately. The Committee commented on the need for it to be informed of safe venues to hold contact visits with families.

The Committee commented that foster carers had been lost to IFAs and there was a need for an element of work on the review of fees. The Head of Children's Social Care informed the Committee that there is a basic fee which is paid to carers and further allowances based on holidays, birthdays and the age of the child being fostered. Foster carers were being incentivised to go IFAs, but there was now recognition that training

and support is better in-house. The Committee commented on the need for a nationally adopted fee structure.

The Chairperson commented that the in-house service is more inclusive and that the welfare of children and not money is uppermost. He thanked the foster carers for the valuable contributions they had made to the meeting.

**RESOLVED:** That the Committee noted the information contained in the report.

187. **MONITORING THE PERFORMANCE AND PROGRESS OF THE WESTERN BAY REGIONAL ADOPTION SERVICE**

The Regional Adoption Manager reported on the performance and progress of the Western Bay Regional Adoption Service (WBAS), including the Annual Report on Regional PI Performance 2017/18.

The Regional Adoption Manager reported that the WBAS is integrated into the National Adoption Service (NAS) as one of the five identified regional collaboratives. She outlined the management and oversight arrangements for the National Service which consists of a Governance Board; an Advisory Group and the Director of Operations and Central Team.

The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing informed the Committee that following the Health Board boundary change, it was likely that Bridgend would be required to form part of the Vale, Valleys and Cardiff regional collaborative, although it had been agreed that Bridgend would remain as part of the Western Bay collaborative, with the transition to a new region not taking place before April 2020 at the earliest.

The Regional Adoption Manager reported on the key achievements for the year, with the number of children placed showing a slight increase on the previous year. More children were placed with Western Bay adopters than in inter agency placements during the year. She stated there had been an improvement in the number of children who had Life Story Materials provided to adopters. The average time taken to approve adopters from inquiry stage to Agency Decision Making decision had decreased from 9.7 months to 8.2 months compared to the national benchmark of 8 months. Investment had been made in developing the WBAS website making it more interactive, user friendly and including the active offer. A members' page was also being developed and there are child friendly pages to encourage children to access the site. She informed the Committee that development and implementation of the Transition/Moving on model to assist in improving the preparation of children for adoption and in the provision of Life Story material has continued to be rolled out with training to staff across the region.

The Regional Adoption Manager informed the Committee that work was taking place to improve website access and to develop a revised All Wales marketing and recruitment strategy.

The Committee questioned whether the adoption service gets the same level of publicity as the fostering service. The Regional Adoption Manager informed the Committee that there is a great deal of activity concentrated on raising the profile and awareness of adoption. The Head of Children's Social Care informed the Committee that the fostering service is more locality based, while adoption is a more national and regional service.

The Committee referred to the further development work planned for the IT system to feed into the reporting system and commented that data capture would be more complex. The Regional Adoption Manager informed the Committee that work is ongoing with Neath Port Talbot Council's ICT Department on data capture work. She stated that

data capture is resource intensive with the need to work across the region's 3 local authorities, moving the ICT systems within the adoption service on to the WCCIS system was being considered as the current system can be cumbersome.

The Committee asked which marketing campaign has been successful and why. The Regional Adoption Manager did not believe that any of the marketing which had been run had been more successful than others. She stated that the service is working with the NAS on developing newer ways of working.

The Committee requested an explanation of what Birth Record Counselling involved. The Regional Adoption Manager explained that these are requests received from adults who were adopted seeking historical information on their adoption.

The Committee congratulated the service on its success in placing groups of siblings together. The Regional Adoption Manager informed the Committee that the interests of children had been promoted in order to attract potential adopters.

The Committee requested clarification on the difference between Western Bay and Inter-agency adopters. The Regional Adoption Manager explained that Western Bay adopters are adopters who are approved by the region, while Inter-agency adopters are those that are approved by other local authorities or other agencies. Adopters can access details of children for adoption through an interactive site online known as Link Maker. Not all children are on this site, but there are proposed changes in the arrangements for the Adoption Register Wales, which would be hosted by Linkmaker and all Welsh children will be registered on this system

The Committee was pleased to see the work being done on life journeys and placed on record its thanks to the service as adoptions are more difficult to achieve during times of austerity.

The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing informed the Committee that with the impending change in health board boundary, work is ongoing on the transfer of services to Cwm Taf. She stated that the adoption service is not ready for transfer as Cwm Taf is part of a larger adoption region comprising five local authorities. There are a number of considerations requiring transitioning and it would take longer to transfer the adoption service to the new region.

**RESOLVED:** (1) That the Committee considered and noted the performance and progress of the Regional Adoption Service;

(2) That consideration be given to future adoption marketing campaigns and how elected members can play a part in promoting those campaigns.

188. **CARE INSPECTORATE WALES - INSPECTION OF WESTERN BAY ADOPTION SERVICE - ACTION PLAN**

The Committee received a presentation from the Regional Adoption Manager on an overview of the Inspection findings and recommendations relating to the Care Inspectorate Wales inspection of the Western Bay Adoption Service.

The Regional Adoption Manager informed the Committee that an action plan was developed in response to the recommendations made by the CIW, which is being monitored by the Regional Adoption Management Board. She provided updates against each recommendation which demonstrated the progress achieved since the publication of the Inspection report.

The Committee commended the good work and practice of the region which had been recognised by the CIW, but expressed concern with the transition of the service next year to the Vale, Valleys and Cardiff region and whether sufficient resources had been devoted to transfer ICT systems due to the boundary change. The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing informed the Committee that it had been agreed that a longer time is required prior to the transfer of the adoption service to the new region with a transition year in place and scoping work is being undertaken. If there is a requirement for more than a year to transition, a case will be put together for an extension. A sum of money is set aside to transition the service. The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing also informed the Committee that 1.5 officers had been allocated to the project and there is a need to scope whether there are sufficient resources available. The Head of Children's Social Care informed the Committee of the many work streams within the WCCIS system, which would make it easier to move ICT systems across. The Committee questioned whether there is an opportunity to do one transition to the WCCIS system. The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing commented that it could be feasible as both RCT and Merthyr Tydfil Councils use WCCIS.

- RESOLVED:**
- (1) That the Committee noted the CIW report on the inspection of the Western Bay Adoption Service, the associated Action Plan and the CIW report on the Review of the national Adoption Arrangements;
  - (2) That the Committee conveyed it's thanks to the Regional Adoption Service on the outcome of the inspection and requested a report to the Committee so that it can be reassured that all the recommendations in the Action Plan are being addressed.

189. **URGENT ITEMS**

There were no urgent items.

The meeting closed at 11:40