

CORPORATE PARENTING ADVISORY COMMITTEE

9 JANUARY 2023

Present: Councillor Merry (Chairperson)
Councillors Ash-Edwards, Kaaba, Lay, Lewis, Lister, Littlechild,
Molik and Naughton

1 : APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR AND COMMITTEE

The Committee noted that Council, at its Annual Meeting on 27 May 2021, appointed Councillor Sarah Merry as the Chairperson and the following Members to the Committee for the municipal year 2022/2023:

Councillors Ferguson-Thorne, Kaaba, Lay, Littlechild, Lister, Molik, Naughton and Proctor.

Councillor Margaret Lewis was appointed by Council at its meeting on 30 June 2022.

2 : TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Committee noted that Council, at its Annual Meeting on 26 May 2022 agreed the Terms of Reference for the Committee.

3 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Deborah Driffield, Director of Children's Services, and Candice Lloyd, National Youth Advocacy Service.

4 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

5 : MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting on 15th March 2022 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

6 : ELECTED MEMBERS ENGAGEMENT SESSION

The Committee was provided with an overview of an engagement session that took place with some members of the Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee and Bright Sparks group in September 2022, including an outline of activities that were undertaken in the session and the key themes identified by care experienced young people.

Members expressed their satisfaction with how the session had gone and commented on the openness and candour of the young people present.

Members discussed a proposed pledge that finance issues should not be discussed in front of Children and Young People Looked After. The importance of such a pledge

was stressed, along with the view that children and young people must not feel that they are there to generate cash for carers and organisations. Officers advised that frontline practitioners would be trained in the importance of not having certain conversations in front of young people.

Members mentioned the importance of Care Experienced Young People being able to put a face to a name. It was urged that Councillors be reminded of their corporate parental responsibility should they come into contact with Care Experienced Young People. The importance of raising the profile of corporate parenting with Councillors was discussed.

Officers advised that the Children's Services Strategy offered an opportunity to look at some of the issues raised. Work was being done on a participation strategy, asking young people what they want from services.

Members discussed the number of Children Looked After in Cardiff and the value of Members visiting schools to engage with them. Members were advised that the subject of visits would be discussed in Item 9.

The Committee RESOLVED to note the update.

7 : CASCADE - GOOD PRACTICE CHARTER FOR SUPPORTING PARENTS IN AND LEAVING CARE

The Chair welcomed Rachael Vaughan, Engagement Officer at Cascade, to the meeting, and invited her to give a presentation on the development of a good practice charter designed to strengthen support for parents in and leaving care.

The development was the result of a 5-year study which included interviews with parents and professionals. Analysis of the data revealed stigmatised views of parents, systemic disadvantage, and disadvantaged access to support.

The Charter has been developed in consultation with Care Experienced parents. It has been shared with practitioners and organisations and has received positive feedback.

Members were advised that an Action Group would be put together with key stakeholders to consider the next steps in the implementation of the Charter, and that it would be necessary to request financial support should the Charter be adopted.

The Committee RESOLVED to note the development of the Good Practice Charter for Supporting Parents in and Leaving Care.

8 : VIRTUAL SCHOOL AND VIRTUAL SCHOOL HEAD TEACHER UPDATE

The Chair welcomed Deborah Williams, and Gillian James, Achievement Leader, Key Groups, to the meeting.

Deborah Williams provided the Committee with an update on the Virtual School (VS) and Virtual Head Teacher (VSH). Cardiff Council was successful in applying to Welsh Government for funding for a pilot which will run from April 2023 to August 2024,

before future evaluations are submitted to Welsh Government leading to establishing both the VS and VSH in Cardiff to further improve the educational outcomes of all children and young people who are looked after, and care experienced.

Gillian James, Achievement Leader, Key Groups, advised the Committee that the Welsh Government funding did not cover all of the post. A detailed job description and person specification is being prepared and it is hoped to recruit and appoint in time for the start of the pilot in April 2023.

Members observed that projects often fail due to a lack of communication between various departments and services and engagement with external bodies. Officers agreed that contact with the relevant people was vital.

Members sought clarification on whether the VS and VSH were only for school age children. Officers confirmed that this was currently the case but that it could be extended to cover pre-school and post-16 ages in the future.

Members sought further information on the role of the VSH in regard to children placed out of county. Officers advised that the role was for all children of Cardiff in or out of county. Once the VSH was in post, there would be a need for conversations in regard to expansion of the team, in relation to psychological support for example.

Members discussed the additional challenges relating to children out of county. Officers advised that placing children in Cardiff was preferred as it offered the best chance of meeting their needs. It is more challenging when children are placed out of county, as it can be difficult to secure the right ALN provision when the children are in different LA areas. It would be desirable for there to be a national approach and it is hoped that the VSH could drive forward conversations in relation to this.

Members discussed the need to build relationships with Children's Services at all levels, and to ensure that foster carers and children know who to contact in case of problems. There needs to be clear communication in this regard. Officers agreed that it was important that people had a good understanding of the role of the VSH.

Officers advised that there had been a post of VSH a few years ago.

Members were advised that there is a database with information on how many children from out of county are in Cardiff schools and that the Council is trying to support them. The data is in the hands of the Education Coordinator. Cardiff Council is further ahead in this regard than some other LA's; however, there is a need to progress to the next level. There are 62 LA's that need to be linked in.

The Committee RESOLVED to note the pilot of the Virtual School and Virtual School Headteacher Cardiff.

9 : MEMBERS VISIT PROGRAMME

Leigh Vella, Corporate Parenting Officer, explained that a programme of Members' visits was proposed for discussion, in the hope that the visits would help members of the Committee to find out about the services and organisations that support care experienced young people in Cardiff.

Gillian James, Achievement Leader, Key Groups, suggested that it would be beneficial for Members to have a timetable of visits to different schools in order to hear different perspectives and speak with a wide range and number of young people. There was a new Wellbeing Lead in Children's Services and it was appropriate that the work be done under that umbrella.

Members expressed the view that where there were restrictions on the number of Members who could attend, it was important that Members not accept the opportunity of a visit and then fail to attend. There should be a reserve list for Member attendees. Officers advised that this could be followed up, and that it was expected that Members attending would report back to the Committee.

Members sought clarification on why there so many children looked after at St Teilo's Church in Wales High School. Officers advised that there were a large number of foster carers in the Rumney area, and that consequently many children looked after attend Rumney Primary School and subsequently St Teilo's CIW High School. An increasing number are now attending Eastern High School. St Teilo's CIW High School has a good record in dealing with children looked after.

Members considered it desirable to have dates and times of visits in advance so that Members were able to commit to visits. It was suggested that the timetable be sent out to Members. Members suggested it was desirable that each Member should attend at least one visit. Members stressed the importance of feedback to the Committee after visits.

The view was expressed that it would be valuable to visit children looked after who are in custody.

Members expressed the hope that Members on the reserve list would receive at least 1 day's notice if asked to attend. The need for Members to inform Officers as soon as possible that they were unable to attend was stressed. It was stated that an Officer would be present at all visits.

It was suggested that fostering events would provide a good opportunity to meet children and young people looked after, there being a large number of unaccompanied asylum seeker children currently. Members discussed the importance of meeting frontline Social Workers in order to gain an insight into how the work was undertaken. It was noted that Social Workers often feel isolated in their work.

The Committee RESOLVED to agree the Members Visit programme.

10 : PERFORMANCE MONITORING

Leigh Vella Corporate Parenting Officer, and Matthew Osbourne, OM Safeguarding and Reviewing Hub, introduced the report which seeks approval from the Committee on the proposal for a draft Key Performance Indicator Dashboard showing a range of key data from internal departments and outside agencies that have an impact on the lives of Children Looked After and Care Leavers, and Case studies to be a standing agenda item at future committee meetings.

The Dashboard would bring together key data regarding Children Looked After and would encompass different areas such as Children's Services and unaccompanied asylum seeker children, number of placement moves, different placement types and the change in placement types over time, information on key achievements and educational performance of Children looked After.

Members discussed the appropriate frequency for presenting Dashboard data to the Committee, and whether Members would prefer more case studies rather than data. It was suggested that data need not be presented to every meeting and that the progress over time was the most important information. Members expressed a preference for visual presentation of data and a combination of data and case studies. The importance of case studies was mentioned as being the voice of Children Looked After.

Members noted the diversity of Children Looked After and wished to know whether the Council was able to cater for their diverse dietary and cultural needs. Officers advised that the Council attempts to match care provision with need. There is currently a lack of diversity among care providers and there are plans to target growing diversity in care provision.

Members expressed the view that it was important for them to receive case studies of any negative experiences to highlight any difficulties and problems. Officers advised that legal advice would be sought regarding presentation of any case studies to the Committee to ensure the identify of any young person involved would remain confidential.

Members expressed concern about the lack of data sharing as it hinders the ability to track the experiences of different groups of children over time. Officers advised that schools gather data in different ways. Officers advised that it was difficult at present to report on educational outcomes, in part because of the new curriculum. It would be the task of the VSH to familiarise themselves with the new curriculum. It is currently difficult to gather information holistically, but that will hopefully improve over time.

The Committee RESOLVED to recommend that data be presented biannually.

11 : FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair invited Leigh Vella, Corporate Parenting Officer, to present the work programme and invited Members confirm whether there were any specific issues they would like covered at the next meeting of the Committee in March.

Members noted that there were a large number of acronyms in reports and requested that explanations be provided.

12 : URGENT ITEMS (IF ANY)

No urgent items were received.

13 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be on the 27th of March 2023 at 2pm.

The meeting terminated at 3.55 pm