

CORPORATE PARENTING ADVISORY COMMITTEE

1 MARCH 2016

Present: County Councillor Lent(Chairperson)
County Councillors Kirsty Davies-Warner, De'Ath, Evans,
Goddard, Merry, Sanders and White

73 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No Apologies for absence were received.

74 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chairperson reminded Members of their responsibility under Part 3 of the Members' Code of Conduct.

Councillor Sanders declared a personal interest on the basis that she has a family member employed at Tros Gynnal Plant, an agency working closely with the Local Authority.

75 : MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of 26 January 2016 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairperson.

76 : THE NEEDS OF ADOPTED CHILDREN IN SCHOOL

The Chairperson welcomed Ann Bell, Director Wales, Adoption UK to the meeting. Members were provided with a presentation outlining the ongoing work and aims of Adoption UK in Wales, focussing particular attention to educational attainment.

Members were also shown a video providing an insight into the views of adopted children, their educational attainment and the difficulties they face.

The Chairperson invited questions and comments from Members.

- Members discussed some of the reasons why children are adopted, including sexual abuse and queried whether being made aware of the reasons for the adoption, or the publicity that follows sexual abuse cases, makes it much more difficult for them to cope. Members were advised that it is important that those young people are constantly reassured that they are safe from the abuse.
- Members asked whether it would be good practice to make available therapeutic counselling? The Committee were advised that there should be additional information for parents about the background and reasons for adoption and also that from the Life Journey Work which is undertaken parents are able to understand and absorb the difficulties the adopted child is facing and therefore be able to have informed conversations with the adopted child.

- Members were advised that bullying is a problem faced by many adopted children as, because of their background, they are often more sensitive and believe that they are different. It is therefore both necessary and important that schools operate a good bullying policy.
- Members queried when it was felt that children/young people should be told that they are adopted and were advised that children should be told and that there has to be good support in place and available.
- Members asked whether it was the responsibility of the school to provide training for teaching in these circumstances and were advised that a percentage of the Pupil Deprivation Grant can now be used. Schools are purchasing good training packages for staff. Members were advised that there was also designated teacher training to equip teachers to deal with these types of issues. Members were informed that not all teachers are aware of that, but were now aware that the Pupil Deprivation Grant can now be used for both foster and looked after children.
- Members asked advice about the best way forward for them and the Local Authority as they believe that there are issues surrounding teacher training and whilst it accepted that there are unhealthy attainment issues it is not always foster and looked after children with those issues. Members were advised that it is important that there is widespread understanding and awareness of the adopted children, that has to apply to parents as well. There should be more openness about adopted children; every person has a different history. Officers advised that there are attainment difficulties with those children and young people who are not adopted and that adoptive parents and children should be allowed anonymity.
- Members were advised that there was little difference in the level of attainment between adopted children and looked after children, but as with other children whilst the support and help is there it does not follow that there will be high educational attainment and it is important that other ways to measure attainment are used.

The Chairperson thanked Ann Bell for her attendance, presentation and for answering Members questions.

77 : EDUCATION REPORT/ITEM

The Chairperson welcomed Gillian James, Achievement Leader, Closing the Gap to the meeting.

The Committee were provided with an update on the Cardiff Visual Tracker, It is currently being refined by Trevor Covey to include more detailed information. Leading on from that a Designated Teacher Forum has now been established.

78 : QUARTER 3 COMPLAINTS AND REPRESENTATIONS REPORT 2015/2016

The Chair person welcomed Kim Brown, Service Manager, Policy and Performance to the meeting.

Members were provided with an update on Children's Services Complaints and Representations between 1 October 2015 and 31st December 2015 (Quarter 3).

The Chairperson invited questions and comments from Members.

- Members requested information about the mechanism used to identify emerging themes and were advised that it is a subjective test undertaken by the Complaints Officer.
- Members indicated that previously they had been advised that contact between Social Workers at Young People had been raised as a 'theme' and the Director advised that whilst the issue was still not being managed as effectively as it should be it has been addressed in the Annual Report.
- Members discussed the access to records, in particular, by young people and Officers advised that care has to be taken when providing information to young people to try and ensure that others are not affected by the disclosure of information. A complaint was lodged by the mother of a young person to whom information had been provided due to the nature of some of the information therein.

The Chairperson thanked the Kim Brown for her attendance, presentation and for answering Members questions.

AGREED: To note the content of the report

79 : QUARTER 3 PERFORMANCE UPDATE

The Chairperson welcomed Kim Brown, Service Manager, Policy and Performance to the meeting who presented the report, the purpose of which was to enable the Committee to understand the factors that impact on outcomes for children in need and looked after children and also to enable them to consider opportunities for improving those outcomes.

Members were advised that Quarter 2 was a strong quarter and that there had been some slippage in progress against some of the milestones in the Corporate Plan relating to the Child Sexual Exploitation Strategy and some against the milestones in the Children's Services Plan.

The Chairperson invited questions and comments from Members.

Members asked how many children were currently the subject of 'Out of County Placements' and were advised that at the present time there were 100 children in out of county placements.

Members expressed concern as to whether or not there would be enough foster placements in the coming months. The Director advised that he was content that

there would be enough placements. The Director also advised that currently all Social Worker vacancies had been filled.

AGREED: To note the content of the report

80 : MEMBER VISITS - VERBAL UPDATE

The Committee welcomed Tony Young, Director Social Services and Irfan Alam, Assistant Director, Children's Services to the meeting to provide updated information in relation to the visits conducted by Committee Members to services and frontline teams as an ongoing part of the Committee's Annual Programme of work. The Director outlined the positive feedback from the various visits conducted.

The Chairperson had conducted a number of visits; concerns were raised about work loads and the capacity of staff to take leave and in the circumstances does that necessitate the employment of more Social Workers; whilst moral is good in the Looked After Children Service concerns were raised about the placement of children at home by the Courts; and during visits with Foster Carers concern was raised, not about the level of payment, but about the difficult tasks that Foster Carers were being asked to undertake and the banding of payments.

The Chairperson invited comments and questions from Members.

- Members discussed the purpose of the visits and felt that it was important that when issues are raised by them as a result of visits that they receive a response to those issues and that those involved also receive a response and further that they are advised as to what changes are made as a result.
- Members were advised that if there are concerns as a result of visits and information provided they could be addressed in the Work Programme.
- Members noted from visits that schools are sometimes reluctant to admit Looked After Children. Officers advised that some schools have different approaches to Looked After Children, some embrace it and other have experienced difficulties previously with placements. However, partnership working within the various teams has improved and any difficulties that arise are not allowed to drift. It was noted that whilst all schools should be inclusive, what is required is the best placement for a particular child. Some schools are highly inclusive but what is offered is not necessarily the best placement for the child. Members felt that this should be followed up. Officers advised it is difficult to ascertain whether it is endemic in a particular school – officers have said that some are better than others whilst Estyn reports that all schools are inclusive.
- Members queried whether it would be of any benefit to meet officers are visits whilst the information is current. Officers advised that consideration would have to be given as to how to move forward having received comments from Members to more specific actions. Views of officers will be canvassed and information reported back to Members.

- Members queried the opportunities for work experience for those young people. Officers advised that there was a Looked After Children Traineeship Scheme, there is to be a presentation at the meeting in May in relation to that scheme, but were able to confirm that 6 young people had started with the Parks Department and 2 young people had obtained apprenticeships with the Council, one in IT and the other in the Youth Service.
- Officers advised in relation to the Foster Carer Banding, work is ongoing to ensure that it is more equitable and suggested further visits to Foster Carers are arranged so that Members can be updated.

81 : REGULATION 32 REPORT

This item was not for publication by virtue of Paragraph 12 of Parts 4 & 5 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972. It was RESOLVED that the public would be excluded for this item.

This item was deferred to the next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee.

82 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee is 24 May 2016 at 2.00 pm.