

CORPORATE PARENTING ADVISORY COMMITTEE

22 APRIL 2015

Present: County Councillor Lent(Chairperson)
County Councillors Evans, Goddard, Sanders and White

Apologies: Councillors Joyce and Magill

13 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Joyce and Magill.

14 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

15 : MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 February 2015 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairperson.

Matters arising from the minutes:

- DBS checks needed to be completed for all Members of the Committee.
- A programme of visits for Members needs to be scheduled – Councillor Lent to write to Members with dates and seeking expressions of interest.

16 : CORDIS BRIGHT RESEARCH REPORT PRESENTATION

Members were provided with a presentation on the research work undertaken by Cordis Bright entitled 'Review of the numbers of looked after children in Cardiff'. The presentation focused on Remit and Methodology; Context; Trends and Findings, with the main priorities for improvement also outlined.

Tony Young welcomed the report and stated that it had been commissioned and would be a useful tool to plan for the future. He added that the report had been agreed in September last year and operational by October/November; lots had changed since then and the Council had had a positive LAC inspection; caseloads had reduced from 25 to 19; there had been a restructure which had established a dedicated LAC service and delivered best practice to 180 staff. Issues that had not already been dealt with were planned for in the business plan for the forthcoming year. With regards to the LAC strategy, plans were in place and further information would be available to share with partners by the first quarter.

Members noted there were no comments from elected Members and asked why this was. Members were advised that this was not part of the brief for the research, it was stated that there was no particular reason for this and the information was presented to Members at this committee.

Members sought clarification on what was meant by Partners. It was explained that partners referred mainly to agencies working together but did also refer to internal working too. Officers added that there was now a joint Education and Childrens Services management forum that meets monthly; this was established to break down barriers between directorates; there had been relaunched Governance arrangements with external partners and joint working with Vulnerable Children and Family Partnership Board.

With reference to Sampling, Members asked whether the sample had been chosen by Cordis Bright or pre selected. Members were advised that Cordis Bright had set the parameters of who they wanted. Members considered that young people could have been more involved; that Member buy-in was important and there was a need to drill down into practitioner culture.

Members considered that further information on the Continuum of Support would be helpful.

Members noted that the Threshold issue was interesting and it identified varying practices. It was considered that training was important for practitioners to know what outcomes are. Members discussed the importance of evaluation.

Members discussed 'drift' and it was noted that this was one of the focus groups. Tony Young added that this would be an individual piece of work for the business plan, there would be a deep dive into all parts of the process of care planning. Elly Jones asked if IRO's had been asked for their views on drift. It was stated that IRO's had agreed complicity that there was drift, they had stated that they hadn't been a strong enough voice for young people as they were conscious of their colleagues workloads.

Members noted that there could be an increase in numbers and asked whether officers were prepared for the increase in workload. Members were advised that a piece of work on payments by results had been undertaken with external partners, it had already identified that there was an issue whereby once a child is identified as a LAC they were difficult to move through the system, it was important therefore to ensure that the experience within the care system was as good as it could be and there were opportunities there for them. It was added that where possible it was best to avoid coming into care if not needed so early help and intervention was paramount; step up and step down needed to be better and it was important that partners were signed up to the strategy, all of which can impact on whether numbers increase or not.

17 : LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN TRAINEE PROGRAMME - PRESENTATION

Members were provided with a presentation on the Looked After Children Trainee Scheme, which included information on: Ambitions for Children and Young People who are looked after or leaving care; Pathfinder Year May 2014 – March 2015; Relaunched Programme March 2015 – March 2016; Referrals; Placements; New Trainees and Next Steps.

Members were advised that 28 places had been offered and 3 were now in place.

Members congratulated Nicola Wood on her work to date and were really encouraged by progress so far.

Members asked whether bus passes were made available for young people attending placements. Members were advised that they were, they were also provided with lunch money and payment for their placement.

Members discussed strengthening the link between traineeships and apprenticeships and it was noted that conversations needed to take place with Human Resources to enable this to take place. Tony Young considered it would be useful for the presentation to go to Senior Management Team in the future to help foster these discussions with HR.

Members asked if the 16/18 year olds were from foster care. Members were advised that the majority of them were and that the older ones were very enthusiastic to start work, there was the financial benefit and their housing/accommodation situations were more vulnerable.

Members enquired if there were similar schemes in other local authorities and were advised there were. Officers explained that Rhondda Cynon Taff had been running a scheme for almost 10 years and had lots of funding secure for it; they spent £38k on each trainee; the manager was an All Youth Worker who sat in HR; trainees were paid the living wage from the start. Members considered this type of scheme is what Cardiff should be aiming for.

18 : INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER PERFORMANCE REPORT

Members were advised that the report provided the Statutory Director of Social Services with information about the role, function and activity of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) service.

The Adoption and Children Act 2002 requires the Local Authority (LA) to appoint Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) to conduct reviews for looked after children and monitor the Local Authority's performance in relation to implementing the care plans for individual children. Specific guidance is entitled "Independent Reviewing Officer Guidance Wales 2004".

Members were provided with key points from the report and appendix including:

"Independent Reviewing Officers Guidance Wales 2004" sets out the requirements of the IROs and responsible authority in more detail. The key outcomes envisaged are:

- Focus on needs of children and ensuring they are addressed.
- Minimising drift.
- Consistency of care planning and decision-making.
- Involvement of appropriate persons in the process. The Reviewing Officers Guidance 2004 clearly requires an IRO to chair reviews of children who are:
 - o In an adoptive placement prior to an adoption order being granted;
 - o Looked after subject to a statutory order or accommodated with the agreement of parents.
 - o Young people in Young Offender Institutions subject to a care order.

- o It is also good practice to review those to be looked after s20 on release from custody and also pathway plans for young people up to age 18 years. This more recent guidance (2004) strengthens the existing requirements of the Review of Children's Cases Regulations 1991 and its accompanying guidance made under the Children Act 1989.

Members were advised of the frequency of reports; the Independent Reviewing Service; the Independent Reviewing Officer Workload; Purpose and Frequency of reviews; Activity; Thematic Issues and Development Work.

Members considered the report was very helpful and congratulated officers on establishing the unit.

Members asked that given what had been said on Thematic issues and the practical examples that had been given, was there a process of bringing the two together so that engagement with young people could increase along with going in the right strategic direction. Officers stated that it was important to take into account the view of young people, the IRO's views of young peoples views were in place already. It was added that once the strategy was in place it was unlikely that things would change quickly but that it would be reported to Committee every six months.

Members asked how many out of County foster placements there were. Officers advised that there were approximately 260/270 but some of these could be very close to Cardiff. Members would like information on those who are further away from County, officers agreed that it would be useful to reflect this in future reports.

With reference to foster placements further away from County, Members asked how sibling visits were arranged. Officers advised that they would try and place them together, when this is not possible there are always contact arrangements put in place, this would be in the care plan. It was noted however that long distance placements were usually adoption placements.

Elly Jones asked if there was any scope for the Participation Group to work with NYAS. Officers advised that there was, it was early days but it was part of the strategy, it was important to hear the voice and feelings of the children, especially children with learning disabilities.

19 : EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN - UPDATE

Members were provided with an update on what was being done to raise the profile of Looked After Children in schools and across the directorate. There was a dedicated role specifically for this purpose.

LAC was now a focus across directorates and in schools, with every school having a dedicated LAC teacher who received training.

It was noted that further improvement was needed with regards to data collection and the use of that data to further enable targeted and personalised support.

Members considered that as Corporate Parents, they should know the attainment of the children they are responsible for and asked for information regarding this. Officers advised that things were moving forward with Virtual Schools, Tracking

Training and Personal and Educational plans. All LAC teachers were being given a pro forma very soon to complete details of the attainment of the children and this information would be available to Members from September. It was noted that this would also help to highlight children who needed additional support such as tutoring for GCSE's.

Members noted practical examples of where designated LAC teachers could make improvements for children such as sending letters home for school trips.

20 : CSSIW INSPECTION REPORT - CROSSLANDS - REPORT ATTACHED

Members were advised that this was overall a very good report with no areas identified for improvement. The Director of Children's Services stated that this was the best Childrens Home he had seen and it was testament to the good leadership at Crosslands.

Members considered it would be useful to have a presentation at a future Committee meeting to show what work is being done there.

Members requested to send a letter to the staff at Crosslands to congratulate them on the work they are doing at the Childrens Home.

21 : REGULATION 29 VISIT - CROSSLANDS - REPORT ATTACHED

Members were advised that this report should have been an appendix to the CSSIW Crosslands report and therefore required no discussion or questions.

22 : YOUNG PERSONS CONSULTATION ON DIRECTORS ANNUAL REPORT - VERBAL UPDATE

Elly Jones provided Members with an update on the work being undertaken on consultation with young people through the National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS).

Members were advised that preparation sessions were being held with Young People in May and an event was planned for June which would also be attended by the Director of Childrens Services and Operational Managers, whereby young people would have the chance to ask questions on the Annual Report. Views would then be fed into the process.

Tony Young advised Members that it would be useful if two or three Members of the Committee could also attend the event planned for June.

23 : CORPORATE PARENTING ADVISORY COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT - FORMAT & CONTENT (TO FOLLOW)

Tony Young provided Members with a draft format for the Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee Annual Report and sought Members comments.

Members asked if the section entitled 'New Corporate parenting Governance' would be based on an agreed Terms of Reference and were advised that it would.

Members asked what period the Corporate Parenting Facts and Figures covered and were advised they would cover up until the end of March.

Members asked that no acronyms be used in the report.

Members discussed representation by young people on the Committee. Elly Jones suggested it could be revisited as other local authorities have a representative or care leaver on their panels. It was suggested that involvement could be strengthened with maybe periodically attending to present reports, newsletter groups etc.

Members considered it would be best if this was revisited in the new year and a participation strategy was put together.

Members noted that for next years Annual Report they could explore the possibility of producing a short film or video made by young people to accompany the Annual Report.

24 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Members were advised that the next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee was scheduled for 16 June 2015 at 2.30pm.

Members asked that the start time of the meeting be changed to 2.00pm.