



RHONDDA CYNON TAF

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL
CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD**

Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board held on Tuesday, 30 January 2024
at 1.30 pm.

This meeting was recorded, details of which can be accessed [here](#)

County Borough Councillors – The following Councillors were present:

Councillor R Lewis Councillor J Bonetto
Councillor S Hickman Councillor S Rees

Officers in attendance

Mr C Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication
Ms C Jones, Head of Access & Inclusion
Ms A Lloyd, Service Director, Children's Services
Mr P Mee, Chief Executive
Ms C Miles, Childcare Solicitor
Ms J Thomas, Complaints & QA Manager, Social Services
Ms L Hawkins, Virtual School Head Teacher
Mr L Lewis, Acting Head of the Youth Offending Service

28 Welcome and Apologies

The Vice-Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board and noted that apologies for absence had been received from the Chair of the Board, Councillor G Caple and the Director of Social Services.

29 Declaration of Interest

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, there were no declarations made pertaining to the agenda.

30 Minutes

To approve as an accurate record, the minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board held on the 2nd October 2023.

31 Evaluation of the School Cluster Model for expenditure of the Pupil Development Grant (PDG) Looked After Children during the financial years 2022 - 2023

The Lead for Wellbeing and Vulnerable Groups – Central South Consortium and the Virtual School Head Teacher provided the Corporate Parenting Board with an update on the evaluation of the school cluster model for the Pupil Development Grant for Looked After Children (PDG LAC) funding during the

financial year 2022/23 in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

Members were provided with background in terms of the grant allocation process and it was advised that for 2022-23, the overall PDG LAC allocation for the consortium was allocated as follows:

- Salary for Regional Lead based in Central South Consortium;
- Support for CLA pupils placed outside of Wales;
- Local Authority delegated Bursary Grant;
- Training calendar provided to school staff; and
- School to school working through the cluster plans.

Officers informed the Board that Post 16 destinations for RCT CLA learners continued to be a priority for the Virtual School and the close links were maintained with the Care 2 Work Team, the Youth Engagement and Participation Service, colleges and training providers.

In terms of the PEP process, Members were informed that there had been an increase in numbers of pupils attending their PEP reviews. It was explained that the PEP process is person-centered and includes what is important to and for the child/young person, what is working/not working and aspirations for the future. Further work needed to be completed to ensure all younger pupils know what a PEP is and that all pupils are engaged in the PEP process. It was added that the main drawback of the evaluation was the lack of foster carer engagement, which needed to be improved for the future.

One Member sought clarification on the lack of foster carer engagement. The officer acknowledged the concerns and explained that the pandemic had had a negative impact but assured the Board that there had been improved engagement with foster carers following the period covered within the report. The officer stated that there was a need for the virtual school to be more involved with pioneering classes for foster carers; and as such, Members learned that the officers would be presenting in respect of the virtual school at the Fostering Wellbeing Programme Annual Conference in February to reach a wider audience. The officer also informed the Board of a CLA celebration event, which took place in November 2023 and spoke positive of the engagement with foster carers who had put forward their foster children for awards and attended to support them.

The Chair thanked the officers for the detailed presentation and was pleased to note that the Pupil Deprivation Grant for Looked After Children was being used to assist those most vulnerable in the County Borough with particular emphasis on wellbeing. The Chair welcomed the use of the funding by schools to broaden expertise and skills in the particular area and spoke positive of the post-16 emphasis.

The Corporate Parenting Board **RESOLVED:**

1. To consider the information contained within this report;
2. To comment on the information provided; and
3. To receive a further report to evaluate the PDG LAC cluster model for 2023/24.

32 Tros Gynnal Plant Cymru

Tros Gynnal Plant (TGP) Cymru provided the Corporate Parenting Board with an update on the progress made during the period July – September 2023.

Members were informed that, during the period, 61 young people accessed Issue Based Advocacy; and of the 61 presenting with 72 issues. 19 were care experienced, which was a vast increase in comparison to the previous quarter of 8 care experienced young people. Of the 19 young people, 9 were accessing Issue Based Advocacy for the first time. During the period, 11 young people had been referred for the Active Offer and all apart from 1 became eligible in the quarter or the previous quarter.

Members learned that, during the period, 23 Care Experienced young people became eligible for the Active Offer, 10 of those offers were rejected, 9 became eligible for the service in the quarter and 2 were not referred as it was felt they could not consent.

Members were pleased to note that 39% of eligible young people were referred for Active Offer compared to the 25% in the previous quarter.

It was advised that the most popular issues were placement and contact issues with most young people wanting to spend more time with family members or friends; and the most popular referral type was self-referral, which was often as a result of a successful active offer meeting.

Members were then provided with a case example, which highlighted the positive work of the advocacy service.

Prior to concluding, Tros Gynnal Plant Cymru provided the Board with an update on the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Independent Visitor Service for the period April – September 2023. There had been 3 children and young people referred into the service but there were no current matches within RCT at present. Members learned that the intention was to pool resources where possible to grow the service area and to continue to recruit volunteers before promoting the service, in order to avoid long waiting times for young people.

The Chair thanked Tros Gynnal Plant Cymru for the informative report and praised the use of accessible data and case studies to gain further insight into the valuable work of the advocacy service. In terms of trends, the Chair questioned if the previous quarters had demonstrated a similar increase in those accessing the service, to which Tros Gynnal Plant Cymru confirmed and advised that there would likely be another increase in quarter 3.

One Member was encouraged by the increase in user figures of the advocacy service and questioned if there was a reason behind the increase in younger children and increase in girls using the service. Tros Gynnal Plant Cymru advised that there was no explanation and that the data tends to change between quarters.

The Corporate Parenting Board **RESOLVED:**

1. To acknowledge the work undertaken by TGP Cymru.

33 Vale, Valley & Cardiff Regional Adoption Annual Report 2022-23

The Service Director of Children's Services provided the Corporate Parenting Board with information in respect of the performance of the Regional Adoption Collaboration (RAC) Board.

The Vale, Valleys, and Cardiff Adoption Collaborative (VVC) as part of the National Adoption Service in Wales (NAS), provides a regional adoption service to the Vale of Glamorgan Council, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, Cardiff Council and Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council. Members' attention was drawn to the VVC's seventh annual report, which covered the period 1 April 2021 to 30 September 2022.

Overall, the Service Director advised that the service performance had been positive with good governance arrangements in place. The Service Director was pleased to note that RCT had been a great supplier of adopters and was ahead of Cardiff; and that RCT was a leader in Welsh early permanence. The Service Director took the opportunity to commend the work by practitioners and most importantly, the adopters for coming forward.

The Service Director continued and drew the Board's attention to the 72% matched in region; and the 90% performance in life journey work, emphasising the importance of supporting adopters with the critical and attachment development work.

The Service Director spoke positive of the reduction in rate of service referrals for RCT, which was linked to the evidence-based family support work.

As an Adoption Panel Member, one Councillor was pleased to note the number of RCT residents coming forward to adopt and praised their quality and commitment to the children. The Member was also pleased to note that there had been no disruptions to the adoption process reported during the period and spoke of how upsetting it can be for both the adopter and the child involved. The Member also took the opportunity to praise the quality of the later life letters.

The Chair echoed earlier comments and was pleased to note the increase in the approved pool of adopters in the region. However, the Chair recognised the need to reduce the waiting list for referrals for those most in need and the need for more adopters for children with more complex needs. The Chair noted from the report, that the region had not experienced a marked reduction in referrals for adoption as apparent in other areas and sought an explanation. The Service Director advised that during the pandemic, there was a noticeable dip in adoption referrals and that in some areas, there had been a continued reduction. It was explained that it differs from area to area due to the distance travelled, in terms of family support proposals and the culture run practice in each area. The Service Director advised that an ambition in RCT was to give families more choice and if it is deemed not safe for a child to remain with their family, the next option was to look to relatives for placements, which was not the case in all regions.

The Chair thanked the officer for the report and the Corporate Parenting Board

RESOLVED:

1. To note the information.

The Participation Officer updated Members on the quarterly progress achieved in taking forward the implementation plan as part of the Participation Strategy 2023-2026 and provided feedback on the participation activities Children's Services have held in the last quarter.

The officer drew Members' attention to section 3 of the report, which detailed several initiatives which all had the aim of encouraging the voice of the care experienced children and young people. One initiative was for the young people to better engage with the Board and learn of what it represents.

Members were also informed that a draft Corporate Parenting Board Pledge for RCT had been prepared, that builds on Welsh Government's 'Corporate Parenting Board Charter- A Promise from Wales'. The draft pledge would be presented to a future Cabinet meeting for approval, prior to sharing with the Corporate Parenting Board. This builds on the voice and participation work in RCT from September 2022 to the present for care experienced young people and how the Local Authority develops its key priorities to engage and support care experienced children and young people in RCT.

One Member praised the work of the service and was fully in support of the pledge.

The Chair echoed the Member's comments in terms of the pledge. In relation to the participation strategy, the Chair felt that any work undertaken with the aim of amplifying the views of the young people was a positive and a great way to shape services. The Chair spoke of the opportunities highlighted in relation to the Corporate Parenting Board and welcomed the opportunity to engage with young people to demonstrate the work of the Board and its ambitions.

The Chair informed the Board that he was fortunate to attend a Children Looked After celebration event in 2023 and commented that it was fantastic to celebrate the achievements of the inspirational young people.

The Corporate Parenting Board **RESOLVED:**

1. To acknowledge the information contained within the report; and
2. To comment on the information provided.

35 Cwm Taf Youth Justice Service

The Head of the Cwm Taf Youth Justice Service updated the Corporate Parenting Board regarding the 'All Wales Protocol for Reducing the Criminalisation of Children and Young People 2022' and provided updated local information regarding care experienced children in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

Referring to the increase in numbers of children in the youth justice system, one Member queried whether the mental health implications following the pandemic had played a part, to which the officer agreed. It was explained that since the pandemic, children with more complex needs were entering the system and that there was a push for more health provision in terms of both CAMHS and health visitors. Members were pleased to learn that an additional resource of a CAMHS worker had been appointed in-house for one day per week, which would assist practitioners with informing any intervention plans going forward.

The Chair acknowledged the after affects of the pandemic and sought further

information in respect of first-time entrants to the system. The officer advised that it was a similar position across Wales and that following a recent piece of work undertaken, which investigated first-time entrants, it was discovered that during past 12 months, the seriousness of the offences meant the service had not been diverting as well as they had previously. It was explained that children were going straight through to the statutory part of the service and becoming subject to referral orders. The officer assured the Board that further clarity would be provided at a future meeting following further analysis of the numbers.

The Chair acknowledged the over-representation of care experienced young people in the criminal justice system and emphasised the importance of challenging early criminalisation due to the detrimental impact it has on future prospects. The Chair welcomed further reports and the opportunity to invite partner agencies to a future meeting.

The Corporate Parenting Board **RESOLVED:**

1. To acknowledge the publication of the report;
2. To receive further reports in due course in order to be updated on local/regional data and how progress and improvements made contributes to better outcomes for care experienced children; and
3. To invite to relevant partner agencies on their use of the All Wales protocol and any service developments planned or currently in place that promotes practice that reduces unnecessary criminalisation of care experienced children.

36 To consider passing the following under-mentioned Resolution:

It was **RESOLVED** that the press and public be excluded from the meeting under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act (as amended) for the following items of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of the exempt information as defined in paragraph 14 of Part 4 of the Schedule 12A of the Act.

37 Update in relation to the Children Looked After: Residential Care Strategy 2022-2027

The Service Director of Children's Services provided the Corporate Parenting Board with information about children in settings known as Operating without Registration (OWR), and Children's Services plans for supporting those children, and ending those arrangements.

Following consideration of the exempt report, the Corporate Parenting Board **RESOLVED:**

1. To acknowledge the information contained within the report; and
2. To receive subsequent reports until such time as there are no OWR situations for Rhondda Cynon Taf looked after young people.

38 Social Services Complaints and Compliments

The Service Improvement, Engagement & Complaints Manager provided the Corporate Parenting Board with an overview of the operation of effectiveness of the statutory Social Services complaints procedure between 1st April 2023 – 30th

September 2023.

The report contained information on the number of complaints received, the nature of the complaints and any lessons learnt, as well as detailing Councillor, A.M and M.P enquiries and the number of complaints received.

During discussions, Members were in favour of receiving reports on a six monthly basis going forward.

The Corporate Parenting Board **RESOLVED:**

1. To note the contents of the report and the work undertaken by the Complaints Unit.

39 Urgent Business

This meeting closed at 3.00 pm

Chair

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