



RHONDDA CYNON TAF
CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD
ANNUAL REPORT 2017/18



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FOREWORD



Chair – Councillor Geraint Hopkins

Welcome to the Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report for the 2017/18 Municipal Year.

The Corporate Parenting Board consists of Elected Members, Officers and representatives of children whose purpose is to prevent, where possible, children coming into Corporate Care and instead, ensure that they remain safe and happy in their homes. Where necessary, when the vulnerable are placed within corporate care, it is our duty to make certain that they have the best possible start in life and move on to achieve great things.

We have created a comfortable environment where we are able to come together on a regular basis, as critical friends to support, challenge and analyse issues which will, in turn, result in positive outcomes for our young people.

In this report, I have aimed to capture just some of the work the Board has undertaken through the Municipal Year, which has varied across wide areas of the Children's Service. We are aware of the high numbers of children in our care and have been committed to improving the services that we deliver within the Looked After System, whether the young people are with us temporarily or for the whole of their childhood.

I would like to thank my fellow Board Members, officers and NYAS for such an open and transparent method of working. With one another's support, we have discussed some robust and challenging issues throughout the year but we cannot ignore that we have also had the opportunity to witness the tremendous work by our hard working staff and managers.

Once again, I extend my biggest thanks to the truly inspirational young people whose powerful presence at our meetings has echoed why we need to constantly strive to improve our services. They have given up their time to attend the Board and speak to us, through the Blueprint Forum and their confidence has shone

through. We take great pride in hearing the success storied from the young people and their many exciting initiatives and take on board any concerns they have.

I will conclude by echoing our continued aspiration which is to see the day that every child is treated with love and respect and where no child is taken into care but until then, we will, of course, continue our commitment as Corporate Parents to ensuring that the children and young people of Rhondda Cynon Taf are given the care and support they deserve.

Geraint Hyskin

WHAT IS THE CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD?

The concept of Corporate Parenting was introduced in 1998 by the then Secretary of State for Health, Frank Dobson, who outlined the duties of members towards Children who are Looked After:

“For children who are looked after, your council has a legal and moral duty to try to provide the kind of loyal support that any good parents would give to their children...you should do your utmost to make sure that those children in public care get a good start in life...”

The role of the Corporate Parenting Board (CPB) is to ensure that the Council is fulfilling its corporate duties towards Children Looked After (CLA). The Board was established to monitor, challenge and develop areas within the Children’s Services to ensure the best outcomes for our children and young people.

We all agree that every child should be happy, healthy and safe; they should be provided with support for them to thrive and achieve their goals; and they should be open to developing emotionally and socially.

It is our duty, as Corporate Parents, to ensure that the children and young people who enter our care system are given these opportunities. They should be treated with the same level of care and support as any other child, as they are no different.

Our vision will:

- Result in better outcomes and life experiences for children looked after
- Compensate for any disadvantage they experience
- Improve the Council’s performance
- Produce lower costs to the Council in caring for children

“As Councillors, you have a major role to play in ensuring that those children who are cared for by your council have the best care that they can possibly receive...the duty on you is to do all you can to ensure these children can be the best they can be.”
Keith Towler, Children’s Commissioner for Wales, 2009

RHONDDA CYNON TAF'S CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD.

The Corporate Parenting Board is a cross party Board comprising of 7 Members as listed below and has been in existence since 2007. The Board meetings are non-political, with Members with different experiences and opinions all fighting one corner for the children in our care.

- County Borough Councillors: G. Hopkins (Chair), C. Leyshon (Vice Chair), J. Rosser, S. Rees-Owen, M Weaver and J. James
- NYAS (National Youth Advocacy Service) is also invited to attend the meetings. This enables both NYAS and Children Services to discuss issues that affect service delivery in the community on a strategic level and to work in partnership to provide improved and better outcomes.

Terms of Reference:

- To take the lead in ensuring that the Council fulfils its responsibilities as corporate parent to Children who are Looked After and formulate Council policy in respect of Children who are Looked After and children in need.
- To ensure that all Groups and divisions within the Council work together in order to promote best outcomes for Children who are Looked After and children in need.
- To promote effective relationships with key partner agencies in the best interests of Children who are Looked After and children in need.
- To monitor the implementation of the Action Plan arising from the Best Value Review of Services to Children who are Looked After, in addition to monitoring outcomes for Children who are Looked After and children in need.
- To consider the outcomes and promote positive learning practices following consideration of Child Practice Reviews
- In accordance with HMIP to routinely review the offending rates of Children who are Looked After by gender to ensure that the Corporate Parenting Board understand patterns of offending by girls and are able to take actions to address where necessary.
- To consider the impact of relevant other systems/agencies (e.g. health, courts, schools) and see how these could be improved.
- To seek the views of Children who are Looked After – the advocacy service will be asked to facilitate.
- To invite representatives from other agencies to attend as appropriate.
- To report directly to Cabinet on a regular basis (frequency to be agreed).

THE OFFICERS WHO SUPPORT THE CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD ARE: -

- Group Director, Community & Children's Services
- Director, Legal & Democratic Services
- Service Director, Children's Services
- Service Director, Access, Engagement & Inclusion
- Head of Safeguarding and Support
- Complaints & QA Manager
- Senior Executive & Regulatory Business Officer
- Other officers depending on the meeting business.

VISION

The role of the corporate parent is to seek for children in public care the outcomes every good parent would want for their own children. The local authority has a legal and moral duty to provide support to the children it is responsible for looking after.

All Elected Members must be confident that the children who are looked after within RCT:

- Are safe.
- Have good homes in a secure and caring environment.
- Are placed within the local authority area, close to their homes and communities, as far as is possible.
- Have decent schooling.
- Are not being drawn into antisocial behavior.
- Are healthy.
- Are developing socially and emotionally.
- Are provided with help to cope with the problems they have in growing up.
- Are prepared for their transition to adulthood.
- Have ambitions for themselves.
- Are helped to achieve to the maximum of their ability.
- Have high aspirations and are able to show pride in their achievements
- Are provided with support to cope with their failures.

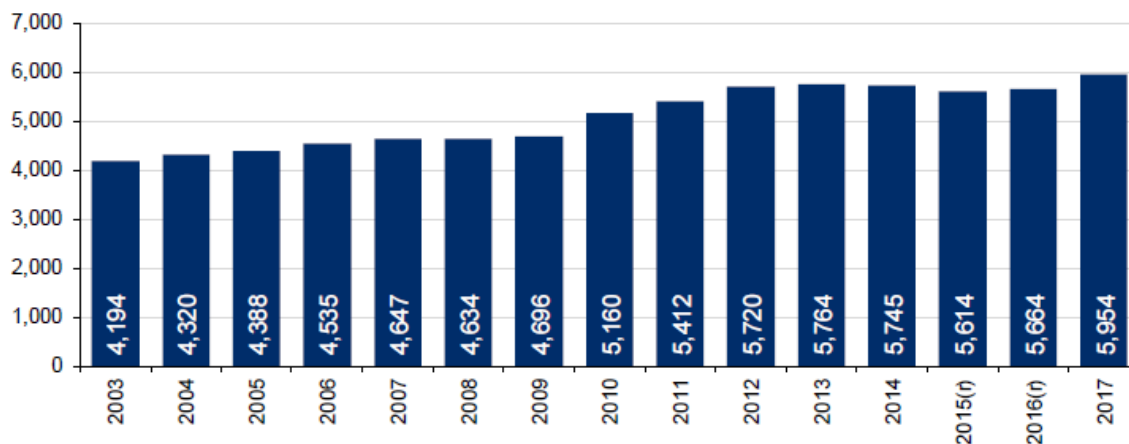
CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER WITHIN RCT

The Council's corporate priorities include the promotion of independence and positive lives for everyone by ensuring:

- Health and social care services will be personalised and integrated with more people supported to live longer in their own homes.
- Rhondda Cynon Taf's children and young people will receive a great start in life

Moving into the 2017/18 Municipal Year, 5,954 children were looked after in Wales, an increase of 290 (5 per cent) over the previous year and a rate of 95 per 10,000 population aged under 18.¹

Chart 1: Number of children looked after in Wales, at 31 March (a)



(a) Excluding children looked after in short-term placements.

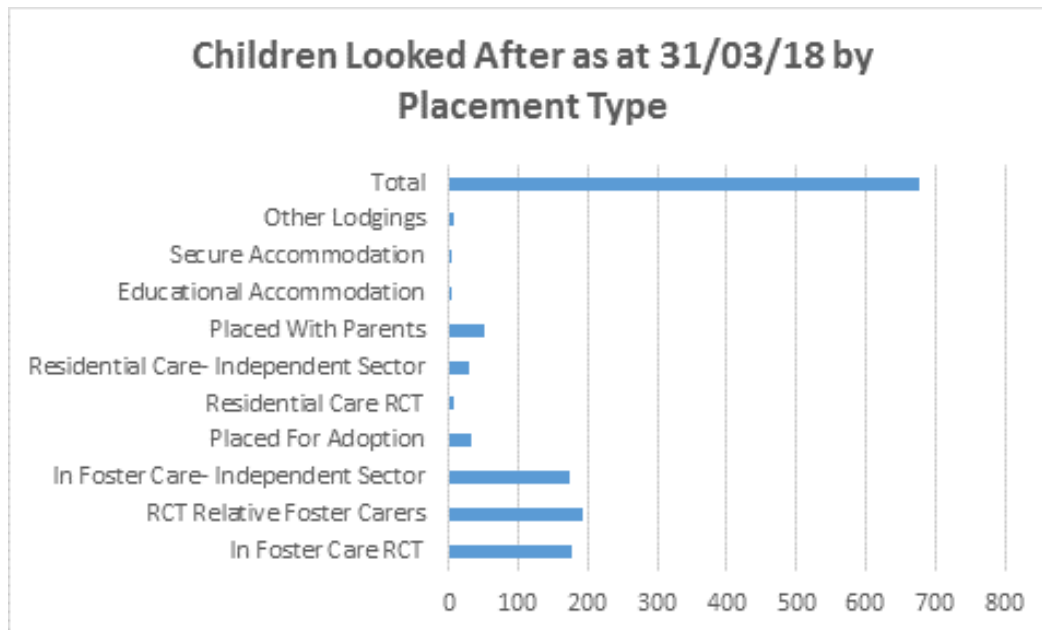
Source: Looked after children census

(r) The data has been revised since previously published.

On 31st March, 2018, there were a total of 676 children and young people under the Local Authority's care. This shows a slight decrease compared to the 690 placements of Children Looked After within RCT on the 31st March, 2017.

¹ Statswales, Adoptions, Outcomes & Placements for children looked after by local authorities in Wales 2016-17

The demand for children and young people becoming looked after continues to pose a financial risk to the Council, but is a continued priority and focus within the service area.



Research has evidenced that the annual rise in children becoming looked after throughout the country, cannot be based solely on a singular reason. The reasons are complex and include the interaction of demographic and socio economic trends, as well as factors connected to the way the local area organises and deploys its services to vulnerable children and families. Rhondda Cynon Taf has some of the most deprived communities in Wales and it is, therefore, impossible to determine an ‘appropriate’ number for the rate of children becoming looked after. Looking after the children in our care is a key priority and we will continue to strive for a safe reduction in Children Looked After numbers and to deliver the best possible outcomes for the children and young people of our County.

The proportion of children in placement types remain similar to previous years and other Local Authorities; with a total of 543 young people accommodated in foster care placements compared to the 560 in the previous year.

Other children were placed with parents where possible, for adoption, at secure units and educational accommodation and a relatively small proportion were living independently.

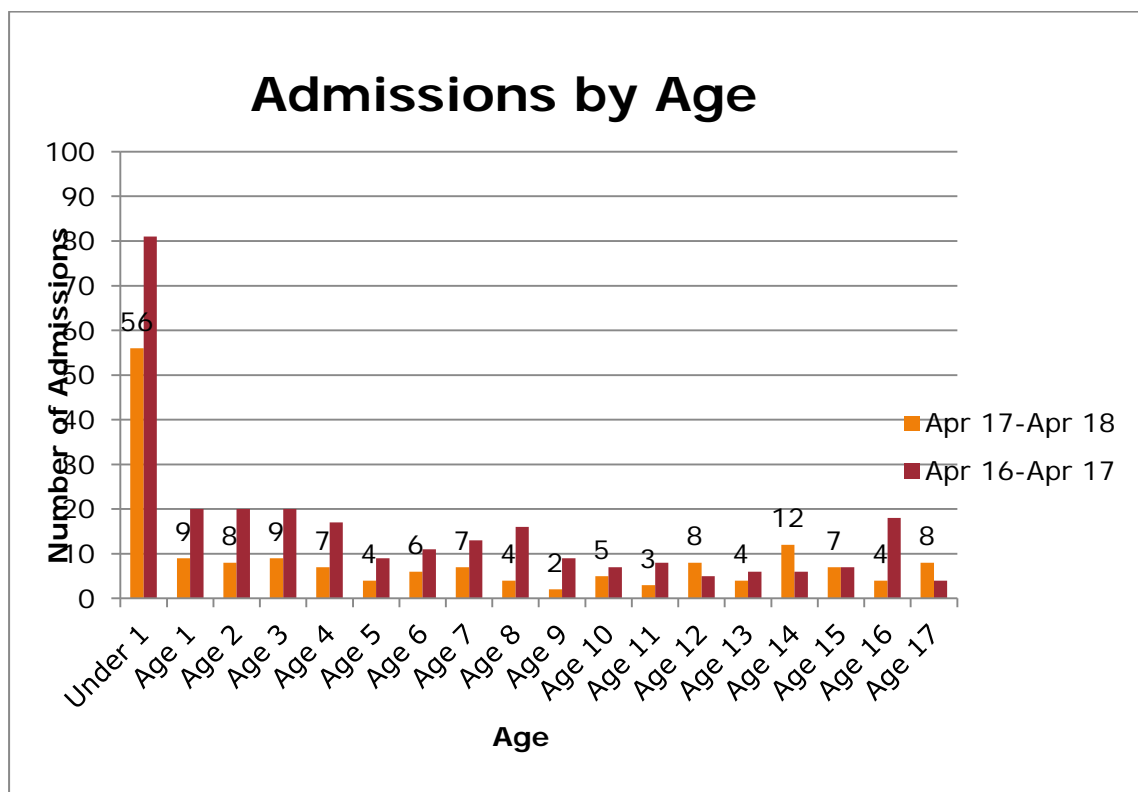
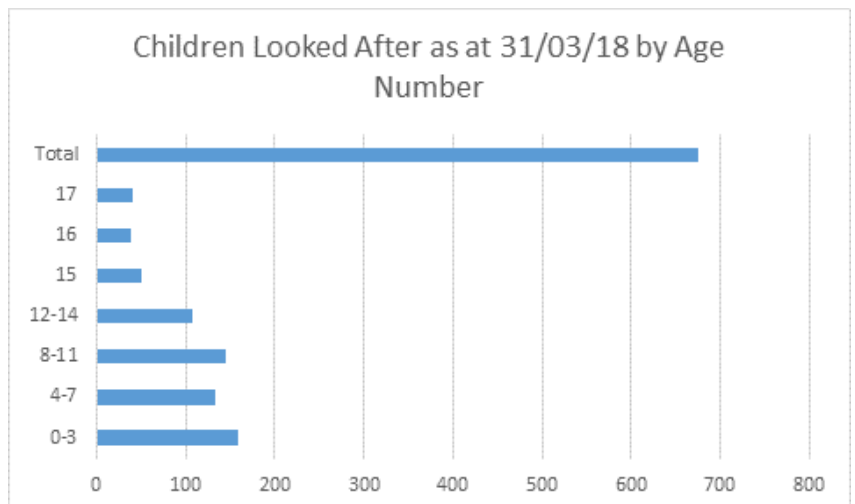
We recognise that each young person placed within our care has a plethora of different needs and that although a specific placement work for one young person, it may not be suitable for another.

Over the years, the numbers and profile of the children looked after has changed and numbers have fluctuated with 2017/18 seeing an overall decrease in admissions of 42% compared with the same period in 2016/17.

In March, 2018, of a total of 676 children placed in our care, 158 were of the 0-3 age range. The number of children aged 1-4 has dropped compared to last years figures, from 77 children (28%) to 33 children (20%).

The profile of overall admissions in 2017/18 evidenced that of those children becoming looked after:

- 34% of children were under 1 years old;
- 55% of children were under 4 years old;
- 7% were 16+



There were a total of 41 children looked after within our care who were of the age of 17 which is significantly lower than the younger age brackets. This is a consistent trend with previous years, which have evidenced that there were fewer children of the age 15, 16 and 17 within our care.

The number of young children and babies in care across the Country is due to a number of reasons, but by intervening at an early stage, and delivering integrated family support through our various initiatives such as the 'RCT Resilient Families Programme', we aim to assess the circumstances at home, identify key actions and prevent destructive behaviour cycles in the hope that the children can remain safely at home.

More information in respect of our RCT Resilient Families Programme can be found [here](#).

WORK OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

Among other updates, the Corporate Parenting Board remain committed to our work programme, which consists of visits where necessary and receiving regular updates in respect of certain aspects of the Children's service area. These allow us to continually develop and improve our services and to give us firsthand experiences with our staff, young people and service users.



FRONTLINE VISITS

The Corporate Parenting Board has established a systematic process for ensuring that the Members of the Board undertake regular visits to the frontline teams in children's services to ensure that high standards are continued to be met. This practice is consistent both with recommendation 41 of the Victoria Climbié report and with a previous CSSIW safeguarding inspection report recommendation.

Team	Location	Date	Attendees
West Intensive Intervention Team	Tonypandy Office	13 th September, 2017	Cllr Hopkins Cllr Leyshon Cllr Weaver
East Intensive Intervention Team	Ty Trevithick office	9 th October, 2017	Cllr Hopkins Cllr Leyshon Cllr Yeo
Glyncornel	Glyncornel	21 st November, 2017	Cllr Hopkins Cllr Hanagan Cllr Weaver Cllr James
West & East Enquiry & Assessment Teams	Tonypandy office	17th January, 2018.	Cllr Hopkins Cllr Hanagan Cllr Rosser
East – DCT & Early Years	Ty Trevithick	7 th February, 2018	Cllr Hopkins Cllr Leyshon

Youth Offending Service	Fairway Court, Pontypridd	14 th February, 2018	Cllr Leyshon Cllr James Cllr Rees-Owen
Ty Catrin	Ty Catrin	7 th March, 2017	Cllr Hopkins Cllr Hanagan Cllr Leyshon

Much like previous years, it was important to ensure that each Board Member had the opportunity to attend at least one team visit to enhance their understanding of the work of the service area. Each of the visits conducted, provided staff with an opportunity to informally discuss their work and suggest any improvements they felt necessary.

Board Members were, once again, pleased with the visits undertaken and feel that, in 2018/19, it would be beneficial for staff and Members alike if the visits are continued to further our understanding of the services to children in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

Members would like to take the opportunity to thank the management and staff for their valuable time and continuous hard work in ensuring that RCT provide its children with the best services and opportunities possible.



*VOICES FROM CARE
BLUEPRINT FORUM*

The primary focus of the Blue Print Forum is to provide looked after young people and care leavers in RCT the opportunities to have their voice heard and to enable their life experiences to contribute at a strategic, policy and legislative level both locally and nationally.

In 2017/18, the Board were fortunate enough to receive a visit from two representatives and a young person from the Blue Print Forum, who provided a summary of their work undertaken in previous months.

APRIL TO SEPTEMBER FIGURES

Number of Young People engaging with Blueprint;	10
Age range:	14-22
Foster Care:	3
Residential Care:	2
After Care:	5
Young People from RCT Linking in with VFC Regional / National Projects	9

We were pleased to see that the number of participants engaging with the Blue Print Forum remained consistent to the figures presented in 2016/2017 and that there was a diverse age range of participants using the service.

It was pleasing to hear of the exciting activities undertaken by the Blue Print Forum, on both a local and national level. The Young Person representative took the opportunity to discuss some of the activities and achievements of the Blueprint Forum over the previous few months:-

- **Arts Consultation with Jessica Jenkins, Youth Arts Coordinator, RCT** – The young people learned of different creative opportunities available to them locally.
- **Cwm Taf Health Board Workshop** – An opportunity for young people to provide feedback on the services provided by the NHS – what was being conducted well and what could be improved?
- **Bristol Zoo** – A social opportunity for the young people
- **Erasmus Residential** – Trips to Llangranog and Glan Llyn, where the young people attended two National Conferences on Corporate Parenting to discuss their views and ideas
- **Choir** – This had been developed, not only for the young people, but for their carers etc to come together, in the hope of performing at Cardiff's Festival of Voice in the future
- **Alfie's Army** – Four young people took part in the BBC production Alfie's Army where they successfully completed Cardiff's Half Marathon
- **Street Football Wales Women's Cup** – Girls from the Blueprint Forum took part in their first football cup with others, and successfully went on to play in the Homeless World Cup.



As well as hearing of the fun memories made and companionship within Voices from Care, we also learned of the young person's own personal experiences from within the care system. The young person felt

comfortable enough to raise concerns around the mental health support service for young people which resulted in lengthy debate around the table and further feedback being submitted to Welsh Government. It was also an opportunity for us to signpost the young person to the services available such as the website, 'WICID' which provides support, information and guidance to young people aged 11-25 year old.

From this meeting alone, Members acknowledged just how fundamental receiving direct information from the young people at the Forum is as, often; the emotional concerns of the young person aren't represented within a report.

I speak for all Board Members when I emphasise the importance of young people of the Blueprint Forum attending our meetings and we would like to see more of them in 2018/19 to share their progress and more of their exciting initiatives. Receiving personal experiences of the Council's services from a young person who has utilised the system assists the Corporate Parenting Board in establishing where the Council needs to focus priorities for the benefit of the children in the looked after system and for care leavers to ensure that they receive the support and same start in life as everyone else.



REGULATION 32
REPORTS

As well as undertaking frontline visits to the staff teams, as part of the Corporate Parenting Board remit, regular reports are presented to the Board on the current position of the residential Children's Homes and respite service, to allow us to gauge a fuller picture of the service provision. These exempt reports provided us with important information surrounding the occupancy figures of the homes, any areas of concern and the general well being of the children within the residential service.

We were pleased to see that the reports presented continued to highlight the high standard of care provided by staff and the particular challenges associated with looking after and trying to develop young people who have been disadvantaged and traumatised by their life experiences. Where issues were identified, we have witnessed careful risk management planning and decision making to manage the needs of the young people.

Unfortunately, due to adverse weather conditions experienced during the year, we did not get the chance to welcome the author of the reports, Mr John Llewellyn-Thomas. However, arrangements are underway for Mr Llewellyn-Thomas to attend a meeting in 2018/19 for Members, new and experienced, to gain further insight into the visits.



*IMPROVING
OUTCOMES FOR
CHILDREN
MINISTERIAL
ADVISORY GROUP*

An exciting point of the 2017/18 Municipal Year, was that we had the opportunity to welcome Mr David Melding AM to our meeting, to hear of the work of the Ministerial Advisory Group for Improving Outcomes for Children and for Members to feed into their work. This was also an opportunity for Mr Melding to discuss the work of RCT and we were pleased to hear of his praise to the Corporate Parenting Board for developing best practice in the following areas:

- Partnership work with other organisations and in particular the open invitation to Chris Dunn from Voices from Care and the young person representatives & the invitation to Mr Melding AM to attend the Board to encourage a closer working relationship
- The culture of transparent and robust reporting on a variety of issues
- The review into Independent Sector reporting and the improving of connections
- The close monitoring of placements

All Board Members and officers collectively found the encounter with Mr Melding AM useful; as it reaffirmed that the work of the Board was a reflection of Welsh Government's wider agenda. For example, Welsh Government had committed further investment into supporting care leavers at an early stage, linking to the Authority's 'Resilient Family Programme' which focuses on interjecting at an early stage with family members as well as the children to make a larger impact later on in life. Our concerns in respect of the CAMH's service were also echoed by Mr Melding, which evidenced that improvements must be made in the future.

We, as a Board, strongly feel that the lengthy discussions could only strengthen the relationship between Corporate Parents on National and Local level and would welcome Mr Melding, AM to a future meeting for further updates.



CWM TAF MASH

MASH is the single point of access for all safeguarding concerns relating to Vulnerable Adults, Children and Young People. It brings together expert professionals from services that have contact with children, young people and families making the best possible use of their combined knowledge to keep children safe from risk of harm.

MASH is designed to provide the highest level of knowledge and analysis of all known information across the safeguarding partnership to ensure all safeguarding activity and intervention is timely and necessary; as a result the MASH will support:

- early identification and analysis of risk
- the identification of victims and emerging harm
- the early identification of repeat low level referrals

In the 2016/17 Annual Report, Board Members welcomed any updates in respect of the MASH since its launch in May 2015, acknowledging that it needed sufficient time to produce its ways of working and data.

Although, as a Board, we are aware of the continual effort of MASH through other reporting avenues, we welcomed the opportunity to witness firsthand the excellent work undertaken by staff. Management at the MASH were kind enough to show Members and Mr Melding AM around the facility. This was an opportunity for staff to have informal discussions around the work conducted and for us to proudly showcase Cwm Taf's highly affective safeguarding service.



COMPLAINTS

&

COMPLIMENTS

The Corporate Parenting Board appreciates the importance of feedback from users of our services and we are always looking to improve the service where possible. Therefore, we regularly receive updates in respect of the operation and effectiveness of the statutory Social Services complaints procedure. A vital part of our role is to monitor the number of complaints received, the nature of the complaints and any

lessons learnt as well as detailing councilor, A.M and M.P enquiries and the number of compliments received.

Throughout 2017/18, we have raised queries on various issues in respect of staffing and timescales, but we have been pleased to learn from the officer's responses. We have been made aware of improvements being put in place to improve on these areas but have also learned that, not all issues can be resolved within a statutory timescale, but that more importantly; issues are resolved to a high standard.

We have been pleased to see that more Councillor and MP/AM's have been using the correct avenue of enquiries and that although this has resulted in a rise in numbers, it can be viewed as a positive. It has been delightful to hear that our officers have a strong relationship with our colleagues in Welsh Government and that their queries are being dealt with quickly and effectively.

As always, we were pleased to see that the amount of compliments received throughout the year remained constant and would like to take the opportunity to thank the staff for their hard work within what can be a challenging service area.

In 2018/19, we welcome further transparency within the reports, which officers have already demonstrated by including additional information on contacts etc.

UPDATES TO THE CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

Alongside our regular work programme which includes statutory items, the Board receive updates and annual reports where necessary. We welcome information in respect of the exciting new initiatives within Cwm Taf, reviews into our service areas and the opportunity to have a positive impact on the lives of the children and young people within our care.



IRO REPORTS

The Adoption and Children Act 2002 requires the Local Authority to appoint Independent Reviewing Officers to conduct reviews for Children who are Looked After 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".

Regular reports are therefore presented to the Board to monitor the activities of the IRO service.



*CARE AND SOCIAL SERVICES
INSPECTORATE -
UNANNOUNCED INSPECTIONS*

In 2017, Members received an update in respect of The Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales unannounced inspections at, Beddau and Bryndar Children's Homes, and Nant Gwyn Respite Home.

The inspection process involved unannounced visits to each home, individual private meetings with young people and staff, and the use of confidential questionnaires.

It was incredibly pleasing to note that the reports were positive with regard to the standards of care within our homes and in particular, the strong relationships built for our children. We welcome external reviews to ensure that these high standards are continued to be met.



FOSTERING WELLBEING PROGRAMME

Board Members received information in respect of an exciting new initiative which was being delivered in partnership with the Cwm Taf Social Services and Wellbeing Board. The aim of the two year programme would be to improve outcomes for our children, by conducting master classes which would allow multidisciplinary teams to work together, whilst underpinning the principles of Social Wellbeing and complementing the work of the Cwm Taf Public Services Board.

Not only was this an opportunity for the Board to pose questions to delve deeper into the objectives of the programme, it provided us with the chance to praise the team for their work on such a positive project and to offer our support and guidance along the way. In 2018/19, the Board would welcome a further update on the Fostering Wellbeing Programme.



INDEPENDENT SECTOR MONITORING

As a Board, we have shown commitment to receiving regular updates on our residential care homes and this is something we will continue to monitor. However, following discussions we felt it was important for us to receive additional updates in respect of our independent sector and non framework providers. Although we are confident in our officers and Cabinet Member who receives regular updates, we still feel that it is vital for us to be more consistent with the monitoring of the Residential and Independent Sector. We have since received an initial update and in 2018/19, we would like to consider a report outlining any issues and further context into the

amount of Framework/Non Framework Providers. There would also be an opportunity for this to be reported to Scrutiny should they wish to do so.



YOUNG CARERS
ANNUAL REPORT
2016-17

As well as being invited to attend moving and powerful events such as the Young Carers Conference and Social Care Awards in 2017/18, the Board received a detailed update on the excellent work of the service area.

- 293 young carers were currently known to the service and receive information and support. This was more than the 240 young carers in 2016-17, which positively illustrates that more young people are being identified.
- Of the 81 Young Carers assessed in 2016-2017, 41 were referred onto the Young Carers project (Action for Children), 34 were actively engaged and 27 accessed the new sibling support groups proving its success.

The RCT Young Carers Project created an inspiring film which not only showcased their talent but highlighted the everyday struggles they face. ([Behind Closed Doors](#))

It was superb to see that the concerns around education support outlined within the short film were already being tackled with schemes such as the Young Carers Schools Award being a huge success at our comprehensive schools. With this being piloted at our primary schools and college campuses, we look forward to hearing the positive results.

We understand that identifying these young people can be difficult, but were pleased to hear that in 2016/17, there had been a 23% increase in referrals during the first six months. Without a doubt, carers of all ages should be treated equally within our communities, and we are pleased that the Cwm Taf Carers Partnership commissioned the Welsh Institute of Health and Social Care to consult with carers, with the aim of developing an integrated regional model of service delivery.

During our meeting, we spoke of the sustainability of the increased resilience of the service and would very much welcome a further update into the results of the Regional Model in the future. We also feel it would be useful for the Board to personally speak to one of our young carers to hear whether they feel we are doing enough to support them and their families. The young carers of RCT are truly inspirational and it is important for us to hear their voices.



REGISTERED CHILDCARE PROVISION

The Board received its annual update in respect of our six CIW registered childcare settings that are run by the Local Authority:

- Aman Flying Start Childcare
- Penrhys Flying Start Childcare
- Pontypridd Day Nursery and Flying Start Childcare
- Tonyrefail Flying Start Childcare
- Tylorstown Flying Start Childcare
- Ynscynon Day Nursery and Flying Start Childcare

We were pleased with the review, as not only did it evidence that the teams were enhancing their provisions from the recommendations of CIW, but they were performing additional internal monitoring of the services to maintain the high quality of work. The teams showed a pro-active approach in developing action plans to improve the Council Services for our users.



MISKIN ANNUAL REPORT

Following the successful integration of the Miskin Project and the Rapid Intervention Response Team in April to form a single provision, the Board were pleased to hear that in 2016/17, both teams had been invaluable in saving the Authority large sums of money by intervening at an early stage, but more importantly, increasing the number of young people who are able to stay at home and out of the care system.

In 2018/19, we would welcome a further update on the work of Miskin and would like to see the combined data now the services are fully integrated.



MIDWAY TRANSITIONAL CARE
AS A
NON – FRAMEWORK PROVIDER

In 2017/18, the Board received an update in respect of 16+ accommodation and we acknowledged that young people have a range of additional needs and therefore, do not always settle in certain establishments. It was beneficial for us to hear about the care packages tailored to the needs of individuals and it was comforting for us to know our young people's individual needs were being met.

The meeting was also an opportunity to hear of the recommendations of our young care leavers and their praise of the supported lodgings and training flats available in RCT. Following the meeting, officers have been in the process of developing accommodation to meet the needs of our 16+ care leavers.

Without this update, we would not have realised just how important certain aspects of our services are to those who use them.

SCRUTINY AND THE CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

The Board highly values the work of the Council's Scrutiny Committees and considers that there is a good synergy between the both.

It has been particularly useful having the Chair, Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee as a new member to the Board, as it has created a stronger link and helped to avoid any unnecessary duplication of work.



VALE, VALLEYS & CARDIFF
REGIONAL ADOPTION
ANNUAL REPORT

Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Adoption Collaborative (VVC) provides a regional adoption service to the Vale of Glamorgan Council, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, Cardiff Council and Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council. VVC is one of the five regional Collaboratives which form part of the National Adoption Service in Wales (NAS). All adoption services are required to provide an annual review of their service as set out in Regulation 22 of the Local Authority Adoption Service (Wales) Regulations 2007.

Members value the service and feel that it is important to have sight of and review its progress. During our meeting, we raised various concerns around the service, but were content with the knowledge that our Scrutiny Committee Members and Chair who sits on the Board were taking an in depth review which we did not want to duplicate.

During the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee meeting, Members were given the opportunity to pose all concerns and questions to the Regional Adoption Manager and resolved to receive further feedback on whether the issues raised by both meetings had been addressed. [Minutes of the Scrutiny meeting can be found here.](#)



CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER – EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

In 2017, both the Corporate Parenting Board and the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee received detailed feedback on both Local and National data in respect of Foundation Phase, Key Stage 2 & 3 and the provisional Key Stage 4 outcomes for the 2015-16 academic year.

Overall, the report was pleasing and evidenced that Rhondda Cynon Taf had performed well with high levels of improvement in a number of areas. Members were pleased to note that Key Stage 2 and 3 results were either in line or above the all Wales average with a significant increase shown in the Core Subject Indicator at Key Stage 3.

Discussions varied between both meetings, with the Corporate Parenting Board raising issues around the CAMHS service and how it was vital for each service area to take preventative measures to fully support the CLA at an early stage.

Both the Corporate Parenting Board and Scrutiny raised concerns around Key Stage 4 progress. To avoid duplication, it was resolved that Scrutiny would receive detailed school by school information in relation to Key Stage 4 data once verified by Welsh Government.

In January, 2018, Scrutiny received the verified data from Welsh Government which indicated that RCT's performance had significantly decreased due to the changes in the Key Stage 4 curriculum. Members acknowledged that these changes meant the data was incomparable and both Scrutiny and the Corporate Parenting Board look forward to monitoring future progress.

[Minutes of the Scrutiny meeting can be found here.](#)

CONCLUSION

As highlighted, the 2017/18 Municipal Year has been successful for the Corporate Parenting Board in many aspects, such as new Membership, fulfilling previously set goals and considering a variety of reports and topics. We have been fortunate enough to speak to some of the young people in our care, which gave us further drive to make the necessary improvements within RCT.

In 2018/19, the Corporate Parenting Board will continue to work together to ensure the best possible outcomes for our children and young people. We seek to debate and challenge elements of our Childrens Service area within a comforting and supportive environment, as we understand the importance of learning from one another's opinions and experiences.

With the use of our fluid work programme, we will ensure that each meeting will be robust and productive with our aims from this year being a priority. We, of course, recognise that work programmes can vary, especially in respect of Children Services and Children who are Looked After.

I will conclude by echoing our continued aspiration which is to see the day that every child is treated with love and respect and where no child is taken into care but until then, we will, of course, continue our commitment as Corporate Parents to ensuring that the children and young people of Rhondda Cynon Taf are given the care and support they deserve.

Thank you for taking the time to read this report.

Councillor Geraint Hopkins

**Chair, Corporate Parenting Board 2017-18;
Cabinet Member for Adult & Children's Social Services**

THE CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD - MOVING FORWARD



Newly Appointed Chair – Councillor Christina Leyshon

As a long standing Member of the Corporate Parenting Board, I have been heavily involved in challenging discussions and decisions which, as a result, have assisted us in determining priority areas for consideration. Along with the challenges, I have been fortunate enough to witness great successes and positive steps forward by both our young people and the staff within the Children's Services area.

It is important for us to remember that the children who enter our system, have done so for a variety of different reasons, but ultimately because our system is considered to be the safest option for them. We are always looking to improve our system to make it not only safe and secure, but a happy place for the young people to grow up in. RCT strives to promote emotional stability, along with academic support and a place that our children and young people can call *home*.

As the Cabinet Member for Children & Young People and the newly appointed Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board, I would like to echo the aspirations of my colleague and continue to ensure that as Corporate Parents, we build upon the great work already established. It is vital that we continue to prioritise the safe reduction in children looked after numbers, in order to deliver the best possible outcomes.

Thank you to Geraint, and all Elected Members and Officers for your continuous hard work and I look forward to working with you in the year to come.

In moving forward, we, as a Board will remain united and focussed on our goals, paying particular emphasis to the following:-

RECEIVING REGULAR PERFORMANCE DATA

We were pleased with the reports which were presented to us during 2017/18, and welcomed their detailed contents which allowed us to effectively analyse, recognise our achievements and determine ways to further improve.

Moving forward, the Board would like to continue to receive the same level of qualitative information and statistics in order to compare our performance to previous years.

Along with our statutory updates, we would like to receive regular or annual updates on the following reports:

- CIW Inspection Reports in relation to the three Children's Homes
- Miskin Updates
- Youth Offending Service Updates
- Registered Childcare Provision Update
- Young Carers Updates & Information on the Cwm Taf Regional Model of Service Delivery
- Fostering Wellbeing Programme
- Blueprint Forum

We will also continue to visit our frontline teams and will report feedback at the end of the Municipal Year.

INTERACTION WITH OUR YOUNG PEOPLE

As previously mentioned within this report, in 2017/18, the Board would welcome young person attendance at our meetings. We enjoy the opportunity to hear of the positive work undertaken and first hand opinions of how our services can be improved.

It is important for us to show the young people that we are listening and always looking to improve our services and support given to them.

SCRUTINY MONITORING

The relationship between the Corporate Parenting Board and the Council's Scrutiny Committees is invaluable and the Board would like to see this built upon.

Although we recognise that it is important to not duplicate any work undertaken by Scrutiny, the Board would like to strengthen our relationship. To assist in our aim, it is useful that the membership comprises of the Chair of the Children & Young People's Scrutiny Committee who is able to update on any work being taken forward by the Committee and recommend any pieces of work that the Board may find useful.

In 2018/19, all Cabinet Members will be meeting with the relevant Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs on a quarterly basis to discuss their work programmes and share ideas to improve service areas. During the one to one meetings with the Chair & Vice-Chair of Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee, it will be useful to include our Corporate Parenting work programme, this will allow us to synchronise the three work programmes, resulting in all Members have sight of the work undertaken within the Children's service area.

WEBSITE MONITORING

Throughout our Corporate Parenting Board meetings, officers and Members take the opportunity to work together and signpost one another to various websites and sessions which can help our young people.

Through the next Municipal Year, Members of the Board would like to receive an update and demonstration of the Children Looked After Website. We are living in an age, where the development of digital skills through our communities can provide us with a multitude of benefits and with the internet becoming an integral part of a young person's life, now more than ever, it is essential that our website is a useful resource in providing important information around services and support available.

The Council's focus on delivering sustainable outcomes with the resources it has available to it and in doing so, supports the Council's priorities of:

- Economy - Building a strong economy;
- People - Promoting independence and positive lives for everyone;
- Place - Creating neighbourhoods where people are proud to live and work.



Councillor Christina Leyshon
Newly Appointed Chair, Corporate Parenting Board;
Cabinet Member for Children & Young People