

RHONDDA CYNON TAF  
**CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD**  
ANNUAL REPORT  
2019/20

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**RHONDDA CYNON TAF**



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# FOREWORD

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**Councillor Christina Leyshon**  
**Cabinet Member for Children's Services**  
**Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board**

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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...”*

It is with great pleasure, that I present to you the Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report, which provides a summary of the role and work of the Board undertaken in the 2019/20 Municipal Year.

The Council as a whole shares the ‘Corporate Parenting’ responsibility and all Elected Members must be proactive within their own remit. The Corporate Parenting Board is the principle place within the Council for a select few cross-party Elected Members and officers to meet on a regular basis as critical friends, to support, challenge and strive for stronger collaborative working to ensure the best possible outcomes for the children and young people who are looked after in our communities. The environment in which the Corporate Parenting Board conducts its meetings, is non-judgemental and allows for both officers and Members to freely voice their opinions to ensure the correct decisions are made in relation to such a key service area.

It is essential that as Corporate Parents, we do not become complacent and continually strive to improve the services that we deliver. Through emotional and academic support, we will remain united to ensure that our children and young people

feel happy, safe and in control of their lives and are able to overcome the barriers they face.

During the 2019/2020 Municipal Year, the Corporate Parenting Board have considered a vast range of reports, which often resulted in challenging debates. However, along with the challenge, it is important to note that we have been overwhelmed by the positive outcomes and success stories of our children and young people, which is a credit to the staff who work tirelessly to continuously improve the services we provide.

Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 outbreak, the last two meetings of the Corporate Parenting Board were cancelled and as such, a number of the reports detailed on our work programme were postponed to the following Municipal Year. We all recognise the importance of Children's Social Services and are assured that our officers continue to carry out their roles effectively.

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. We are fully aware of the rising numbers of Children Looked After on both a National and Local level but our commitment as Corporate Parents is to ensure that the children and young people of Rhondda Cynon Taf are safe from harm and given the care and support that they deserve, regardless of numbers. I would like to take this opportunity to extend my thanks to all Members of the Corporate Parenting Board, both new and longstanding; and, of course, to the officers who continue to work hard and have been integral in stimulating robust discussion at our meetings.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Leysha', is centered on the page. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'C'.

# WHAT IS THE CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD?

*“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.*

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.

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.

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

## MEET THE CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD



Councillor C Leyshon  
(Chair)



Councillor G Hopkins  
(Vice Chair)



Councillor J Rosser



Councillor R Yeo



Councillor E Griffiths



Councillor S Rees-Owen



Councillor J James



Councillor S Rees

## 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 looked after, in addition to monitoring outcomes for children 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 CLA 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 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 through an Annual report of the Board.

### CROSS PARTY MEMBERSHIP:

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- Cabinet Member for Children's Services (Chair),
- Cabinet Member for Adult Community Services and the Welsh Language (Vice Chair)
- Cabinet Member for Education & Inclusion Services,
- The Chair of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee,
- One Member from the Largest Opposition Party,
- One Non Executive Member of the ruling group,
- One Member of the Council not from the ruling group or the majority opposition group.
- Tros Gynnal Plant (TGP) Cymru is also invited to attend the meetings. This enables both TGP Cymru 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.

## THE OFFICERS WHO SUPPORT THE CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD ARE:

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

## VISION

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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 IN RHONDDA CYNON TAF

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As at the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020, there were a total of 717 children and young people within the Local Authority's care.

The reason children become looked after throughout the country, cannot be based solely on a singular reason. The reasons are complex and include a dynamic interaction of factors including neglect, abuse and childhood trauma, 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.

Age Band	Total
0-3	129
4-7	128
8-11	164
12-14	137
15	49
16	44
17	66
<b>Total</b>	<b>717</b>

Children Looked After remains a key priority and the Council continues 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.

March 2020 figures show that the largest number of children looked after within RCT were between the ages 8 and 11.

Gender	Total
Female	303
Male	414
<b>Total</b>	<b>717</b>

The Gender figures show that there were 111 more males than females within RCT care, which is consistent with the figures from March 2019, where there were 80 more males than females.



The below tables outline March 2020 Placement Type Data in comparison to the same data from March 2019:

#### **Children Looked After by Placement Type**

<b>Placement Type</b>	<b>Total as at 31/03/2020</b>	<b>Total as at 31/03/2019</b>
Independent Sector Foster Placement	161	158
RCT Foster Carers	161	171
RCT Relative Foster Carers	233	204
Placed For Adoption	22	24
Placed With Parents	70	60
Education Placement	1	1
Other Lodgings	6	10
Independent Sector Residential Sector	53	33
RCT Residential Care	10	12
Secure	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b><u>717</u></b>	<b><u>674</u></b>

It is recognised 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.

The 2020 and 2019 data evidence are largely similar and show that the majority of children and young people in Rhondda Cynon Taf are placed in foster placements, and in particular, with Relative Foster Carers.

Where safe and possible to do so, children and young people are placed with their parents. In 2020, placements with parents totalled 70 in comparison to the 60 in 2019.

# WORK OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

Among other updates, the Corporate Parenting Board remain committed to the work programme, which consists of regular visits and updates in respect of certain aspects of the Children’s service area. These regular updates allow us to continually review data, progress and outcomes; along with having first hand experiences with our staff, young people and service users.

## FRONTLINE VISITS

The Corporate Parenting Board has established a systematic process for ensuring that regular visits are undertaken to the frontline teams in Children’s Services to ensure that we continue to meet high standards. This practice is consistent with both recommendation 41 of the Victoria Climbié report and with a previous CIW safeguarding inspection report recommendation.

<u>Location</u>	<u>Team</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Attendees</u>
Tonypandy Office	West Intensive Intervention Team	10am Wednesday 18 <sup>th</sup> September, 2019	Cllr Leyshon Cllr Yeo
Ty Trevithick Office	East Intensive Intervention Team	10am Wednesday 16 <sup>th</sup> October, 2019	Cllr Leyshon
Glyncornel	Glyncornel	10am Wednesday 29 <sup>th</sup> January, 2020	Cllr Leyshon Cllr Rosser
Tonypandy Office	West & East Enquiry & Assessment Team	10am Wednesday 15 <sup>th</sup> January, 2020	Cllr Rosser Cllr Griffiths
Ty Trevithick Office	Childcare, Play & Youth Services	10am Wednesday 5 <sup>th</sup> February, 2020	Cllr Leyshon Cllr Rosser Cllr Griffiths
Ty Catrin	Ty Catrin	11:30am Wednesday 11 <sup>th</sup> March, 2020	Cllr Leyshon Cllr Rosser

The Children's Services area within the Council is huge and has a number of different teams who work tirelessly to excel in their remit. The above visits were organised to provide each of the Board members with an opportunity to meet with each of our teams and to hear firsthand of both the achievements and the pressures placed upon them. It provides us with a great opportunity to gain a better understanding of the day-to-day work carried out and the goals and improvements needed within each area.

Once again, the Corporate Parenting Board would like to take the opportunity to extend its gratitude to the management and staff for providing us with a warm welcome and giving us time out of their busy schedules. I think we can all agree that we learn something from the informal style visits, which gave us the chance to have various open discussions with one another. Furthermore, the sheer amount of knowledge, commitment and enthusiasm shown by the staff was humbling and gives the Corporate Parenting Board the assurance that our children and young people are in safe hands.

In the 2020/21 Municipal Year, the Corporate Parenting Board hope to continue making these vital visits to our teams.

## **REGULATION 73 REPORTS**

Regular updates are presented to the Corporate Parenting Board in respect of the current position of the residential Children's Homes and respite service. The reports are exempt to ensure that the Board receive a detailed picture of the goings on at each home, and are inclusive of case studies, which inform us of the everyday challenges faced by our hardworking staff, any areas of concern and, of course, the wellbeing of the children who occupy the homes.

In November 2019, a new residential home 'Carn Ingli' became operational and as such, the Corporate Parenting Board received regular updates on its progress.

Each of the reports received during the Municipal Year, provided the Corporate Parenting Board with honest and reliable feedback from the young people who occupy the homes and further insight into the particular challenges associated with looking after and trying to develop young people who have been disadvantaged. It was pleasing to note that robust action plans and careful risk management planning had been established to ensure the necessary improvements.

Once again, it was evident to see from the updates, that our staff continue to carry out an excellent job by ensuring that our young people are provided with a high standard of support and safe placements.

## **SOCIAL SERVICES COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS**

An integral role of the Corporate Parenting Board is to receive quarterly updates in respect of the operation and effectiveness of the statutory Social Services complaints procedure. At each meeting, we monitor the number of complaints received, the nature of the complaints and any lessons learnt, along with noting those enquiries received from Elected Members, A.M's and M.P's.

The importance of feedback from those who use our services is invaluable to the Corporate Parenting Board as it allows us to better understand the service, note the improvements that are needed and just as importantly, note the vast amount of compliments received for our hardworking staff.

Once again, the reports received during the year were transparent and full of detail; and our questions were always responded to by the officer. The Board noted that there were still complaints dealt with outside of the statutory timescale, but were pleased to note that the issues were resolved to a high standard. It was also pleasing to note that the service was continued to be used by A.M and M.P colleagues, which builds upon the already strong relationship with our officers.

During the year, a steady flow of compliments were received in relation to the various departments from the service users. The Corporate Parenting Board acknowledge that the compliments are often overlooked and not recorded by staff, but would like to encourage staff to note the positive responses in the future.

## **ADVOCACY**

In the 2019/20 Municipal Year, Tros Gynnal Plant (TGP) Cymru were appointed as the Local Authority's new advocacy service. TGP have since attended their first few Board meetings and have already contributed greatly to discussions. The reports clearly broke down the issues by age, gender, referral source and issue type, which is interesting for the Corporate Parenting Board to monitor the various trends and compare to previous quarters.

The Corporate Parenting Board look forward to TGP's attendance at future meetings to present their quarterly updates on advocacy, which will strengthen the link between the two services and provide improved outcomes for the children and young people in RCT.

[More information on the services provided by Tros Gynnal Plant \(TGP\) Cymru can be found here.](#)

# UPDATES TO THE CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

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

## COMMUNITY WELLBEING AND RESILIENCE SERVICE

In November 2017, the Cwm Taf Public Services Board (PSB) agreed to work with the Welsh Government to undertake a joint collaborative approach to redesigning Early Years arrangements across Cwm Taf. The aim of the work was to reconstruct the Early Years and Flying Start service, to create an integrated delivery model.

As such, the Corporate Parenting Board were fortunate enough to receive an overview of Rhondda Cynon Taf's Community Wellbeing and Resilience Service, which was developed in conjunction with the PSB's vision.

The Corporate Parenting Board welcomed the changes and were supportive of a service which promotes early intervention and prevention, in addition to supporting children returning to their families.

Furthermore, Members were pleased to learn that the service moves away from the delivery of services that are determined by geographical postcodes to a model that promotes universal access to services for all families in RCT.

In the 2020/21 Municipal Year, the Corporate Parenting Board would welcome a further update in respect of the service.

[A copy of the PowerPoint presentation can be found here.](#)

## **YOUNG CARERS OPERATING MODEL**

In conjunction with the Social Services and Wellbeing Partnership, a Regional Partnership Group had overseen the development and implementation of a Carers Strategy. As a result, a Blueprint had been identified, which sought to outline what a comprehensive carers service should look like and whilst Rhondda Cynon Taf had a good record for supporting carers there were also some areas identified for improvement. As such, a carers review was undertaken, led by the Carer's Support Project, which considered the wider implications of the SSWB Act.

The Corporate Parenting Board praised the hard work, which was put into the review and were pleased to learn of the following positive outcomes of the Carers Support Project review, which will seek to:

- improve the experience for carers in Rhondda Cynon Taf, particularly young carers who will now receive the statutory IAA, assessment; support planning and review within the new Children's IAA service;
- strengthen the leadership capacity across the Council to address carers issues, rights and entitlements;
- continue the service delivery within the Carers Support Project; and
- Deliver the Blueprint carers offer

In particular, the Corporate Parenting Board were pleased to note that as a result of the review, the profile of young carers and awareness of their pressures would be raised.

In the 2020/21 Municipal Year, Members would welcome the opportunity to meet a young carer and hear of their experiences first-hand.

## **INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER UPDATES**

The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 (referred to as the SSWB Act) and the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (Wales) Regulations 2015 and 16 (referred to as the CPPCR Regulations) provide legislation and guidance pertaining to the role and functions of an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). 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. As such, regular reports are presented to the Board to monitor the activities of the IRO service.

During the Municipal Year, Members were pleased to learn that a key priority of the service was the continuing emphasis on the child being at the centre of the Reviewing process, meaning that the IRO prioritises seeking the child's views, ensuring that the child and family understand the Care and Support Plan, and monitoring the progress of the Care and Support Plan in between review meetings.

The Corporate Parenting Board were also informed that the team were committed to strengthening links with the newly appointed Advocacy Providers and although the Board were disappointed that they were unable to receive an update of the Two Sides website, officers were able to assure them that the development was ongoing.

## **CARE INSPECTORATE WALES UNANNOUNCED INSPECTION**

The Corporate Parenting Board received an update in respect of the Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) unannounced inspection at Beddau Community Respite Home, which took place on 7<sup>th</sup> August 2019.

The inspection process involved an unannounced visit to the home, where individual meetings are held with the young people and staff. The report detailed the findings in relation to the well-being of the young people, the care and support provided, the environment, leadership/management and the recommendations for improvement.

The Corporate Parenting Board was humbled to learn that CIW found the staff to be caring and nurturing to the young people. Members were pleased that the report identified the staff's commitment to encouraging the young people to partake in social and leisure activities, whilst dedicating time to their family and education. Furthermore, within the report were areas identified for improvement such as specific training for staff.

As ever, the Corporate Parenting Board welcomed the report as it highlighted areas of good practice and the areas required for improvement and development within the RCT residential children's home. In 2020/21, Members encourage unannounced inspections by the CIW as it is essential to receive independent feedback, which minimises complacency and ensures that the high standards are continued to be met.

## REGIONAL FOSTERING UPDATE

The Corporate Parenting Board were provided with information on the recruitment and retention of foster carers and the changes to the operational delivery within fostering recruitment.

Members were informed of the three key messages of the service, which were promoted by the increase of paid social media, fostering events and content generation, i.e. videos and stories:

- Availability of placements, better matched to you;
- Links to Child's Social Worker/ Team around the Child; and
- Not for profit

Members were particularly pleased to note:

- That the 'Regional Front Door' collaborative project had launched in April 2019, between Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council and Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council to enhance the service provided to the public;
- The Regional Fostering website and its addition of a modern point of contact for members of the public wishing to enquire about fostering services within the two Local Authorities;
- The addition of a dedicated recruitment telephone line, hosted by RCT customer care centre, which allows for numerous points of contact for potential applicants; and
- That there had been significant improvements evidenced in respect of response times from initial enquiry to both follow up recruitment calls and initial visits.

During the meeting, discussions ensued around the daily recordings of significant events for the young person, which a foster carer must submit as part of their duty. Members agreed that it would be beneficial to modernise the service to allow the foster carer to submit this electronically.

In the next Municipal Year, the Corporate Parenting Board would welcome a further update in respect of the progress made by the Regional Fostering Network and further information on the core offer for Local Authority foster carers.



## PUPIL DEPRIVATION GRANT

The Corporate Parenting received an overview of the Pupil Development Grant by the Regional Lead PDG CLA Central South Consortium, along with an update on the school cluster model by the Deputy Principal Educational Psychologist.

Members were provided with a detailed presentation, which outlined the Central South Consortium's vision, which was for every CLA to have the right to provision and support to enable them to fulfil their potential. She went on to speak of the key priority, which was to reduce exclusions, which often lead to bigger problems in the future; and the need for teachers to understand the reasons behind the child's behaviour.

Members were also informed of the various areas of training, which had been successful across clusters. These included, but were not limited to, play and lego therapy, trauma training, ELSA/Thrive training, relationship based training and training in relation to adverse childhood experiences and attachment issues.

In respect of CLA Friendly Schools, Members acknowledged the importance of all schools becoming CLA friendly in readiness for the potential of a vulnerable young person attending in the future. The Board were pleased to note that 14 RCT schools had achieved the Quality Mark, with 5 schools attaining gold and 9 schools attaining platinum awards. A further 12 schools within RCT would be undertaking the Quality Mark for the academic year 2019/20.

In the next Municipal Year, the Corporate Parenting Board would welcome a further updates on the Pupil Deprivation Grant. The Board are particularly interested in the progress of CLA Friendly Schools and the training opportunities provided by the Central South Consortium.

## **CWM TAF REGIONAL STATEMENT OF INTENT FOR SUPPORTING CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES**

The Corporate Parenting Board were provided with an update on the Cwm Taf Statement of Intent for Children and Young People: 'A Shared Regional Strategy for Supporting Children, Young People and Families'.

Since the Statement of Intent was approved, the Children and Young Persons Group had become well established; meeting regularly to work more effectively together, to commission and deliver services and to ensure that the voice of children and their families are embedded within any processes or systems developed.

The Board learned of the following regional priorities, which had been identified to better meet the needs of children and young people with complex needs:

- Regional Commissioning Opportunities
- Emotional Wellbeing

Members were particularly pleased to note that the robust pathway to improve the mental health had been identified as an area for action, as it was chosen by the young people themselves. Both the Corporate Parenting Board and the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee have continuously raised concerns in respect of the mental health provision available for our young people to access.

## **NEWLY ESTABLISHED RCT CHILDREN'S HOME CARN INGLI**

During the year, Members were fortunate enough to be provided with an update in relation to Rhondda Cynon Taf's newly registered Children's Home, following work throughout 2018/2019, to source an appropriate property, refurbish the home to a high standard and gain Registration with CIW to begin operating.

The home was established to look after 2 children and young people, between the ages of 8 -18 at any one time. Members were informed that the staff team would be trained in Trauma Informed practice to ensure that all young people moving into the home experience a high standard of care, which is sympathetic to their needs and experiences. Placements would be

time limited up to 3 months, and will aim to ensure that all children and young people move on successfully to an appropriately assessed alternative.

The report included various photographs of the furnishings and the effort put into the home by all. Members were particularly pleased with the room layouts, which assured staff could monitor the use of social media, without being obstructive to the young people's social time.

## ANNUAL UPDATES TO THE CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

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### MISKIN ANNUAL REPORT

The Corporate Parenting Board were provided with an update in respect of the work undertaken by Miskin between April 2018 to end March 2019, which consisted of various informative case studies for Member consideration.

The Board were presented with a summary of referrals, which identified the age and gender demographic, which did not appear to change significantly in comparison to previous years; and the accommodation status following intervention.

Members noted that there had been a year on year rise in the numbers of referrals that had met Miskin criteria and which had been accepted and worked with. Members were pleased to learn that the team had been integrated in to the Miskin older teams which has enabled them to further maximise their capacity and support offered to children and families.

Once again, Members were complementary of the staff for their hard work, acknowledging that the service plays a vital role in preventing children coming into care.

## VALE, VALLEYS & CARDIFF REGIONAL ADOPTION ANNUAL REPORT 2018-19

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.

ALSO CONSIDERED BY  
THE CHILDREN &  
YOUNG PEOPLE  
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

[CLICK HERE](#)

During the meeting, Members learned of the following:

- There had been 259 enquiries from prospective adopters in total for the year 2018-19;
- That 46% of children were recorded as having life journey materials at the second adoption review;
- The number of children referred for adoption totalled 218, which marks a decrease on the previous year; and
- That 100 children had been placed for adoption during the year, a 16% increase on the previous year.

Members were informed of the Welsh Government grant of £2.3M, which had been awarded to the VVC to improve the provision of adoption services in Wales. The grant would be allocated to initiatives such as improving life journey work and pre-settlement support to families.

Members noted that the report evidenced a 7% increase on the previous year for enquiries from prospective adopters, which evidenced positive progress following the successful recruitment of the Marketing and Recruitment Co-ordinator in August 2018.

Members were particularly pleased to note that the VVC had appointed a marketing officer to specifically work on increasing the number of adopters in the region.

Members value the service and feel that it is important to have sight of and review its progress. In the next Municipal Year, the Corporate Parenting Board hope to see more marketing focus on RCT, as it was felt that there was more focus on the Vale of Glamorgan.

Members also hope that the 'Life Journey Letters' process is refined to ensure it is a more timely and integral part of the work, following the appointment of the Senior Adoption Practitioner.



Vale, Valleys  
and Cardiff  
**Adoption** | **Mabwysiadu**  
yn y Fro, y Cymoedd  
a Chaerdydd

# SCRUTINY AND THE CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

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## RCT PLACEMENT COMMISSIONING STRATEGY MAY 2019 - APRIL 2022

Members were presented with the RCT Placement Commissioning Strategy from May 2019 to April 2022. The Strategy outlined the priorities for the development within the placement service and our external commissioning up to 2022. It sought to provide insight into the current services and identify the priority areas.

The priority areas were as follows:

- Recruit more foster carers able to meet the more complex needs of children and young people;
- Provide more in house residential placements within the local area to meet needs;
- Provide better support packages to carers to encourage them to apply for Special Guardianship Orders rather than be kinship foster carers;
- Provide a range of accommodation for 16+ and care leavers;
- Improve our commissioning processes for external placements including integrated commissioning with key partners; and
- Develop a reunification model to return young people safely to their family members.

At the meeting, the Corporate Parenting Board were informed that the report had been presented to the Council's Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee and were provided with an overview of their colleague's observations in respect of out of County placements and unplanned placements.

In addition to the Scrutiny Committee, the Corporate Parenting Board was happy to endorse the Strategy.

The minutes of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee can be found [here](#).

## IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BRIGHT SPOTS SURVEY FINDINGS

In 2018, RCT Children Services supported children who were looked after to complete the Your Life, Your Care Survey. The survey had been developed through the Bright Spots Programme to measure the well-being of children looked after.

Following the survey, the following areas of improvement were identified:

*‘Social workers need to:*

- *Ensure that children and young people understand who they are.*
- *Work with children and young people to involve them in decisions.*
- *Explain to every child why they are in care and regularly review this with them to establish if they would like more information.*
- *Continue to communicate with schools to identify and help children who feel bullied at school and those who feel that they do not have a good friend.*
- *Give carers further training in therapeutic parenting.*
- *Consider not just organised activities but contact with nature when reviewing opportunities to have fun/hobbies*
- *Regularly review contact plans taking into account children and young people’s wishes and feelings*
- *Be aware of gender difference and give opportunities to young people (11-18 years) to build self-esteem and a positive self-image.’*

Members spoke of the importance of involving young people in decisions and ensuring that their voices are heard; and were pleased to learn that the areas identified had been incorporated into improvement plans, all with the aim of improving the care experience and well-being of children looked after and care leavers.

The Board were pleased to note that the survey would be undertaken every two years as part of the performance framework. Members would welcome a further update in the future and the opportunity to compare data.

The minutes of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee meeting can be found [here](#).

# THE CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD – MOVING FORWARD

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In the 2020/21 Municipal Year, the Corporate Parenting Board will develop a robust work programme and wish to consider the following:

## REGULAR PERFORMANCE DATA

Regular performance data allows Members to effectively analyse key areas, recognise the achievements; determine ways to further improve and enhance the services we provide; and to compare RCT's performance to previous years and other Local Authorities.

It is essential that the Corporate Parenting Board regularly receive the qualitative data and statutory updates at each meeting, in order to closely monitor progress:

- ✚ Regulation 73 Reports
- ✚ Complaints & Compliments
- ✚ Advocacy Updates
- ✚ CIW Inspections reports in relation to the four Children's Homes

The Corporate Parenting Board would like to receive annual updates on the following reports:

- ✚ Miskin
- ✚ Youth Offending Service
- ✚ Vale, Valleys & Cardiff Regional Adoption Annual Report
- ✚ Registered Childcare Provision
- ✚ Independent Reviewing Officer Reports
- ✚ Educational Outcomes
- ✚ Young Carers Annual Report

## INTERACTION WITH OUR YOUNG PEOPLE

In our work programme for the Municipal Year, we were due to receive a visit from the RCT Forum. The RCT Forum provide looked after young people and care leavers in RCT with 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.



Due to COVID-19, the meeting with the RCT Forum was cancelled for the safety of all. As such, Members were incredibly disappointed to not meet with any young people during the year and feel their presence is key for 2020/21.

Members enjoy the opportunity to hear first-hand of the successes and achievements; and acknowledge that is equally as important to hear of their concerns or suggestions for improvements. Not only is it important for Members, but it is the Board's duty to show the young people that they are listened to and supported.

## **TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES**

The Corporate Parenting Board welcome further training opportunities during the next Municipal Year. This would be useful for any new Members, and refresher training is always welcomed by the longstanding Members, in order to further strengthen our role.

## **TWO SIDES WEBSITE MONITORING**

As the Board was unable to receive its regular update in respect of the Children Looked After Website 'Two Sides', it is essential that a demonstration of the progress is provided early in 2020/21.

It is clear that we are living in an age, in which the internet is an integral part of the lives of many and now more than ever, it is essential that our website is a useful resource to provide important information about the services and support available.

In 2018/19, Members spoke positive of the website and were informed of a number of exciting developments due to be implemented. At the time, the young people felt that it lacked various opportunities, wasn't well publicised and was considered to be dated. The young people felt that in order to increase its use, it would need to be more interactive and modern in appearance, with less text.

In 2020/21, Members look forward to see the progress of the content, appearance and accessibility of the website and receive an update on the views of the young people.

## **STRENGTHENING THE LINK WITH SCRUTINY**

The Corporate Parenting Board's link with the Council's Scrutiny Committees is invaluable and as always, the Board strives to build upon this. The Corporate Parenting Board membership comprises of the Chair of the Children & Young People's Scrutiny Committee, who successfully takes it upon herself to update on any work taken forward by the Committee and recommend any pieces of work that the Board may find useful.

In the Corporate Parenting Board's 2019/20 Annual Report, it was stated that it would be beneficial if its reports outline the general discussions and thoughts of Scrutiny, in order to aid transparency and to allow Members to build upon the in depth discussions that have already taken place in Scrutiny. The Corporate Parenting Board has started to witness these changes being implemented into its reports and feels it has been beneficial in maximising resources and avoiding the duplication of discussions.

In 2020/21, the Corporate Parenting Board wish to see more of its reports, which have been subject to detailed scrutiny, inclusive of their feedback to continue the positive synergy.

It is also worth touching upon the meeting held between the Cabinet Members and Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs, which are held twice a year to discuss their subsequent work programmes and share ideas to improve service areas. The Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board welcomes these meetings and has sought to leave space in the 2019/20 work programme, should more reporting ideas arise from the meetings.

# CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD WORK PROGRAMME 2020-2021

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A draft work programme of the Corporate Parenting Board is set out below. This is a fluid document, allowing the programme to be amended with changing priorities. The programme is based on factors highlighted within the Boards Annual Report and does not include the usual updates presented to the Board, or other items Officers deem appropriate to bring forward to the Corporate Parenting Board.

<b>REPORT</b>	<b>BOARD DATE</b>	<b>RESPONSIBLE OFFICER</b>
Developing the Work Programme	September, 2020	Hannah Williams
Employment, Education & Training Programmes for CLA	September, 2020	Emma Brabon (HR)
RCT Forum	September, 2020	Chris Dunn & Young Person Representative
Independent Sector Monitoring Update	September, 2020	Karen Benjamin
Children Looked After Website Advancements Presentation	September, 2020	Judith Davis/Ceri Mann
Miskin Annual Report	November 2020	Matthew Free
Vale, Valleys & Cardiff Regional Adoption Annual Report	January, 2021	Ann Batley
Pupil Deprivation Grant – evaluation of cluster based model.	January, 2021	Siriol Burford, the Central South Consortium /Hannah Bevan
Children Looked After – Educational Outcomes 2019-20	March, 2021	Ceri Jones / Kerry Webster
Youth Offending Service Annual Report	May 2021	Lyndon Lewis

Registered Childcare Provision – Annual Update	May, 2021	Jessica Allen
Young Carers Annual Report	May, 2021	Rachel Spry/Claire Williams & Young Person
Frontline Visits 2019/20	May, 2021	Chair

**Corporate Parenting Board – Frontline Visits 2020/21.**

<u>Team</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Date</u>
West Intensive Intervention Team	Tonypandy Office	10am Wednesday 14 <sup>th</sup> October 2020
East Intensive Intervention Team	Ty Trevithick Office	10am Wednesday 11 <sup>th</sup> November 2020
Glyncornel	Glyncornel	10am Wednesday 2 <sup>nd</sup> December 2020
West & East Enquiry & Assessment Team & the Information, Advice & Assistance (IAA) Team	Tonypandy Office	10am Wednesday 13 <sup>th</sup> January 2021
Childcare, Play & Youth Services	Ty Trevithick Office	10am Wednesday 3 <sup>rd</sup> February 2021
Youth Offending Service	Maritime Industrial Estate, Pontypridd	10am Wednesday 17 <sup>th</sup> February 2021
Ty Catrin	Ty Catrin	10am Wednesday 17 <sup>th</sup> March, 2021

# CONCLUSION

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Thank you for taking the time to read the Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report for the 2019/20 Municipal Year. The report seeks to highlight the commitment to improving the outcomes for the children and young people who are looked after in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

With the aid of a flexible work programme, the Corporate Parenting Board have considered many reports during the year, which have covered key topics ranging from education to social care. However, unlike previous years, there were few meetings of the Corporate Parenting Board due to the COVID-19 national pandemic. As a result, the Board were unable to consider all of the reports included within its work programme. Notwithstanding that, the annual report evidences that each of the meetings the Board did have, were robust and full of discussion.

In the 2020/21 Municipal Year, the Corporate Parenting Board will ensure that a full and varied work programme is set, which will focus on the above-mentioned reports, as well as any other urgent business which may occur at the time.

As always, it is essential that the meetings remain a comfortable and honest place for Elected Members, key officers and young people to come together and to challenge and improve the services provided in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

We will continue to seek the best possible outcomes for the children and young people in our care. Despite often uncertain times and the national rise in the number of children who are becoming looked after, the Corporate Parenting Board and the Council as a whole are committed to safeguarding duties.



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