



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board held on Monday, 31 January 2022
at 10.00 am.

County Borough Councillors - Corporate Parenting Board Members in attendance: -

Councillor C Leyshon (Chair)
Councillor G Caple (Vice-Chair)
Councillor S Rees-Owen
Councillor E Griffiths
Councillor J Bonetto
Councillor S Rees

Officers in attendance

Ms A Lloyd, Service Director, Children's Services
Ms S Edwards, Service Manager
Mr A Cope, Regional Development Manager-Fostering Services
Ms M Davies, Tros Gynnal Cymru
Ms J Thomas, Complaints & QA Manager, Social Service
Ms C Jones, Head of Access & Inclusion
Ms C Miles, Childcare Solicitor

Others in attendance

Annabel Galt at Vfww/Blueprint Forum – Development Officer
Tracy Greuter – Foster Carer Pioneer
A W- Young person Representative

43 Declaration of Interest

A declaration of interest was raised from County Borough Councillor S Rees for Agenda item 3; as she is a representative of RCT as a Member of the Adoption Panel.

44 Welcome

The Chair took the opportunity to welcome County Borough Councillor G Caple to the Committee along with Officers from Voices from Care Cymru to the meeting, with a particular welcome to the young person representative.

45 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillor L Hooper and Mr P Mee, Group Director – Community & Children's Services.

46 Minutes

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the Corporate Parenting Board Committee meeting held on the 29th November 2021.

47 VOICES FOR CARE CYMRU- YOUNG PERSON REPRESENTATIVE UPDATE

The Development Officer introduced the young person representative (AW) to the Committee; AW provided Members of the Committee with an update on her recent activities within the last 3 months. She highlighted her attainment of an award known as the Young Achiever of the Year through Care to Work. She highlighted the significance of Care to Work and the RCT social services team who aided her in attaining permanent accommodation and bill management support. AW informed Members of the continued support provided by Voice for Care Cymru (VfCC) to young people throughout the Pandemic for instance through, event arrangements via Zoom, and phone, and video calls to maintain contact.

The Chair took the opportunity to congratulate AW on her award attainment and was pleased to see all the progress made within her personal life.

The Development Officer informed Members of recent event cancellations as a result of the Pandemic; however, VfCC were able to adapt their services by introducing outdoor activities, online events and one-to-one support. As restrictions are lifted, the Development Officer from Voice for Care Cymru (VfCC) informed Members of future projects to be implemented to attract wider groups of young people within RCT. The Officer also highlighted a collaboration with the Service Director of Children's Services to set up a workshop for the Best Practice Charter for parents who have been in care.

The Chair was pleased with the verbal update and recognised the need to resume face-to-face services to connect with young people in RCT.

Following the Verbal update, it was **RESOLVED**:

- To note the update provided to the Board

48 VALE, VALLEYS & CARDIFF REGIONAL ADOPTION ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21

The Service Director of Children's Services provided a brief overview of the Vale, Valleys & Cardiff Regional Adoption Annual Report. It was highlighted to Members of the Committee that consideration of the report had already been undertaken by the Scrutiny Committee in December 2021; the report was favourably received.

The Service Director of Children's Services highlighted to Members that the report is the 6th Annual Report of the Regional Adoption collaboration established based on the Social Services Well-Being Act (2014). The report provided details of the performance reporting surrounding matters such as Adopter recruitment, decision-making for Children to be placed in Adoption, Family Finding and Post-Adoption support.

Members were informed of the slight decline in demand during the first period of the Pandemic however, demand has since begun to increase.

The report highlighted the 26 placement orders, however, when performance was last investigated in Children's Services, 33 Adoption orders had been made during 2020/21. During the reporting period 2020/21 the Service Director of Children's Services confirmed the placement of 22 children for Adoption by the end of 31st March 2021.

Members were advised to note the effectiveness of the recruitment campaign and increases in the number of adopters which has created a positive impact of reduced numbers of out of agency adoptions. The Service Director of Children's Services advised Members of the increase in requests for post-adoption support and acknowledged the significance of providing support to adopters. The Service Director of Children's Services recognised the need for additional resources for adopters as demand has increased.

The Chair was pleased with the information provided and referred to Members for questions.

One Member was pleased with the funding provided to attain a part-time social worker to support birth parents; however, the member queried the referral mechanisms and the type of support which can be implemented to support birth parents.

As part of additional services development, the Service Director of Children's Services informed Members of the introduction of a 'Pre-Birth Pathway' service. This aims to enhance the support in place to prevent child and parent separation. The Service Director of Children's Services informed Members of a new trial development service known as Parent Advocacy. This will involve support for parents attending meetings such as Child protection conferences. Great results have been identified from other Local Authorities trailing this as parents have felt better engaged in support services provided.

Regarding referral mechanism, the Service Director of Children's Services advised of the importance of birth parent counselling as part of the adoption process. Thus, before an agency decision maker can consider child adoption, they ensure referrals have been made to both parent counselling.

One Member expressed a welcome for the trials of parent advocacy and recognised it was vital in permitting parents to participate and express themselves. The Member requested further information on the services future on investments following an increase in demand the following year.

The Service Director of Children's Services agreed with the Member stating the need for further investment and funding to progress additional services further to meet demand. The Service Director of Children's Services informed the Committee of an arranged date in the following month to investigate how adoptive parents can attain the right support at the right time and ensuring adoptive parents are able to access all the early support services available to them. The Service Director of Children's Services confirmed the launch of the multi-Agency support service, which is a therapeutic service for adoptive and looked after Children. Further updates would be provided to the Corporate Parenting Board in future meetings to highlight the action plans and progresses made by the service.

Following Discussion, it was **RESOLVED**:

- To note the content of the report

48 FOSTERING SERVICE QUALITY OF CARE ANNUAL REPORT

The Service Manager began by introducing herself to the Committee as the named person for CIW purposes in fostering in RCT and informed Members of the Committee that the purpose of the report was to provide an overview of the annual quality of care in fostering 2020/21. The Service Manager confirmed the focus of the service during the period of 2020/21 was to ensure Foster Carers were provided with the utmost support. The Service Manager confirmed the use of technology had enabled consistent contact to be maintained with foster carers, for instance through phone or video calls, and had permitted adaptability of the service to undertake meetings virtually for instance the Foster Panel.

Along with on-going consistent support for foster carers, the Service Manager informed Members of a new service introduced which involved consultation for kinship carers and mainstream carers. The purpose of the consultations involved identifying improvements that could be made in attending panel meetings, panel processes, appraisals for panel Members, and rescheduling panel meeting dates to encourage attendance of social workers. The Service Manager recognised the need to work closely with parents, and as a result of consultation with parents for Children in foster, this has been implemented. The team are currently working with the IRO service to provide reports for parents in order to permit parents to express their views about the foster care received.

During the first Lockdown, the Service Manager confirmed collaboration with a Fostering Network as part of a wellbeing programme. Members were informed of the success of the wellbeing programme in introducing Pioneers. Members were informed of the significance of Pioneers in supporting new foster carers within RCT. Members were advised of challenges faced by the service such as the recruitment of additional foster cares willing to work with young people with complex needs, and older teenagers.

The Service Manager introduced Ms Greuter to the Committee, who then provided an overview of the role and experiences of a Pioneer within RCT. The Pioneer detailed the numerous activities undertaken within the role, these included collaboration with Fostering Wales regarding the Fostering 22 Door Launch, attending Employment Panels and discussing Policy effectiveness. The Pioneer advised of the significance of the role in creating support systems for Foster Carers and environments of encouraged open communication to discuss challenges faced and solutions. The Pioneer informed Members of the evolution of the role, with support being provided virtually to Foster Carers as a result of the Pandemic, however, the Pioneer hoped to resume the face-to-face service as restrictions are lifted.

The Chair was pleased with the work and supporting channels being provided to foster carers by Pioneers. The Chair acknowledged the importance of communication between foster carers and Pioneers in order to share experiences, advice and solutions.

The Corporate Parenting Board **RESOLVED:**

- To acknowledge the information in the report.

49 CWM TAF FOSTERING FRONT DOOR

The Regional Development Manager of Fostering Services provided an update on the two significant developments made since reporting to the Board in the previous year. It was confirmed that thus far Bridgend County Borough Council have joined the Regional Front Door to further expand on the collaboration and share resources, and good practice. Currently as a team, the Regional Development Manager confirmed dedication of the three Local Authorities in relation to Foster Care recruitment. Members were informed of the other significant development that surrounded the launch of Foster Wales, which was a national collaboration of all 22 Local Authorities under one banner heading. The Regional Development Manager was pleased with the investments provided by the Welsh Government.

Members were informed of the implemented changes to services such as new branding, and Website across all Local Authorities. Members were advised of the significance of the new Websites across all Councils to aid in promoting the message for Local Fostering and to maintain the Mission statement of 'Local Children are at the Heart of everything we do'.

Despite the successes of the Service, the Regional Development Manager of Fostering Services recognised the challenges faced in fostering recruitment across the UK. Members were advised of the 50% drop in inquiries and initial visits for foster caring roles, as a result investigations have been undertaken to gain an explanation. It was identified that the drop was a result of post-pandemic recovery and on a Local level, people's unawareness of the re-branding. Despite the reduction in inquiries and initial visits, the Regional Service Manager of Fostering Services was pleased to see an increase in the number of people proceeding into investment and approvals. Within the last 3 years it was identified that there has been an increase of foster carers year on year. The Regional Development Manager of Fostering Services informed Members of improvements that need to be made surrounding provisions of foster care retention and ensure Local Authorities abide by the National Commitment.

In relation to the future, plans will be implemented to promote Foster Wales in order to attract younger generations to become foster carers. Successful Campaigns have been launched, for instance through Radio, TV, Spotify, and social media in order to promote Foster Wales. On a Local level, the Regional Development Manager of Fostering Services informed Member of a campaign launch which advertises Foster Wales on Buses and Radios (Capital FM) across Cwm Taf.

The Chair thanked the Regional Development Manger of Fostering Services for his report and work undertaken as part of the Corporate Parenting Board across the three years. The Chair wished him the best of luck within his new role at Cardiff County Borough Council.

50 TROS GYNNAL QUARTERLY REPORT

The Board received an update from Ms Davies who provided an update of progress made by Tros Gynnal Plant (TGP) Cymru. Ms Davies began by focusing on the Active offer section of the report. Based on the Active Offer in Quarter 3, 32 young people accessed the Issue based service along with 12 young people who were referred to Active Offer. Over half of the young people who accessed the Issue based service were doing so for the first time. Members were advised of the decreases in both Issue Based Advocacy (IBA) and Active Offer in Quarter 3 compared to previous Quarters (2). During Quarter 3, 86 young people became eligible for the Active Offer, out of those, 18 were from Children Looked After (CLA). Members were made aware of 2 young people who were counted twice as they met the eligible criteria via the CP and Looked After Children criteria thus making the number to 84 young people.

Based on the information provided from Local Authorities (LA), 50 children and young people rejected the Active Offer meeting when suggested by there social workers however, 11 accepted, and then referred. 20 young people rejected the Active Offer without a reason and 30 young people rejected the offer to meet with an advocate and 12 stated they preferred to speak to a family member.

Ms Davies directed Members to the graphs within the report which provided a breakdown of eligibility criteria of the Active Offer Referrals, Issue Based Advocacy, and demographics of service users of Quarter 3.

It was **RESOLVED:**

- To note the content of the report
- To receive updates on future progresses made by TGP

51 Exemption of Press and Public

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.

52 Social Services Quarterly Complaints and Compliments

This report provided the Corporate Parenting Board with an overview of the operation and effectiveness of the statutory Social Services complaints procedure between **1st October 2021 – 31st December 2021**.

The report contained information on 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.

Following discussions relating to the exempt item, Members **RESOLVED**:

- To note the content of the report and the work undertaken by the Complaints Unit.

53 TO RECEIVE AN UPDATE FROM THE SERVICE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN SERVICES

The Service Director of Children's Services provided a verbal update regarding three main activities which have occurred thus far. Members were informed of the approval of the Looked After Children prevention strategy by Cabinet.

Secondly the Service Director of Children's Services credited the work undertaken by Ms Ceri Jones- Head of Access & Inclusion and Ceri Webster- Deputy Principal Educational Psychologist for their role in leading the appointment of a Headteacher for Looked After Children (LAC). The Service Director of Children's Services advised Members of the significance of the Headteacher in transforming Education for Looked After Children (LAC). Lastly, The Service Director of Children's Service informed Members of a recent research project undertaken by CASCADE which identified a significant need for meaningful support for young people who become parents. The Service Director of Children's Services informed Members of a Workshop due to be Post-election, with the Board being invited whereby the findings of the research will be presented.

The Chair was very pleased with the update and looked forward to attending the Workshop to gain further insight on the research.

The Corporate Parenting Board **RESOLVED**:

- To receive a report on the Looked After Children Strategy.

**This meeting closed
at 11.11 am**

**Cllr C Leyshon
Chairman.**