

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

21ST JUNE 2018

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF CHILDREN'S SERVICES
CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER QUALITY ASSURANCE PANEL
WORK PLAN 2018-2019**

**REPORT OF GROUP DIRECTOR, COMMUNITY AND CHILDREN'S
SERVICES, IN DISCUSSIONS WITH THE RELEVANT PORTFOLIO
HOLDER, CLLR LEYSHON**

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to brief Cabinet on the work being carried out by the Children Looked After Quality Assurance Panel. The Panel's function is to ensure the right children and young people are being brought into the children looked after system and that those who can return home from care do so as soon as possible.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Cabinet:

- 2.1 Note the information contained within this report and the actions being taken to address areas of further improvement.

3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To provide Cabinet with details of the actions being undertaken to safely reduce the number of Children Looked After (CLA) as appropriate.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 The children looked after population within RCT has increased over the past five years from 621 in 2013 to 676 at the end of 2017-2018 financial year, an increase of 55 children. Over the years, however, the numbers and profile of the children and young people becoming looked after has changed and numbers have fluctuated with 2017-2018 seeing an overall decrease in admissions of 42% compared with the

same period in 2016-2017. The profile of overall admissions in 2017-2018 also showed 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+

4.2 The unpredictability of demand for children and young people becoming looked after continues to pose a key financial risk to the Council. The number of children looked after continues to be a priority within the service area being subject to continuous focus and action.

4.3 A Children Looked After Group was first established in 2010. The purpose being to provide the necessary scrutiny to this very vulnerable group of service users. Over the years the purpose and focus of the Group has changed due to new developments being introduced, and outcomes being achieved.

4.4 In 2017 a report by Practice Solutions: "The Review and Re-Focus of the Accommodation and Placement Provision for Children Looked After and Care Leavers", suggested that the Children Looked After Group needed to be reviewed again as its remit had become too broad and was beginning to distract it from its intended purpose. This resulted in the Children Looked After Quality Assurance Panel being set up. The aim of the panel was to ensure that children looked after and care leavers in RCT achieved their potential and received good quality placements that support them to live safe, healthy and fulfilled lives. The key areas of focus of the panel were:

- **Prevention** - essentially this is identifying key actions that will enable the service to prevent children entering the children looked after system. This includes examining the effectiveness of existing prevention work and developing new initiatives on the basis of national evidence of effectiveness.
- **Child's journey in Care** - with a focus on ensuring that rehabilitation or community based options are actively pursued in relation to each child looked after at any given time.
- **Discharge from Care** - this focuses on children leaving the care system permanently and can include SGO, adoption or the discharge of care orders.
- **Commissioning mix** - This includes issues such as making our residential facilities and foster carers more effective, increasing the number of in-house foster carers and negotiating with external providers.

- **Partner influences** - this requires working with partner agencies who have particular influence on children becoming or staying in the looked after system i.e. Courts, CAFCASS, Legal Services, CAMHS

4.5 The overall governance of the Panel is facilitated by Children's Services Senior Managers and includes partners from Health and Education and Housing.

5. CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER QUALITY ASSURANCE PANEL WORK PLAN 2018-2019

5.1 The Children Looked After Quality Assurance (CLAQA) Panel's key objectives and actions as contained in the Work Plan for 2018-2019.

Objective 1
To develop a framework of quantitative and qualitative performance information that supports robust analysis of current placement provision in RCT.
Objective 2
To monitor the children looked after budget, highlighting areas of financial pressure and identifying areas where improvements in the use of resources can be made.
Objective 3
To identify a commissioning mix and range of placements that support children looked after and care leavers to achieving positive outcomes.
Objective 4
To promote engagement with children looked after and partner agencies to ensure co-production and that the voice of children and young people is heard.
Objective 5
To monitor and drive service change and improvement.

5.2 The detailed CLAQA Panel's Work Plan 2018-2019 is attached (see Appendix 1) for consideration. The work plan outlines, in detail, the actions required to deliver the outcomes noted above.

5.3 The revised Management Information Report that supports and informs the work of the CLAQA Panel can also be found in Appendix 2.

6. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 (Public Sector Single Equality Duty) requires public authorities to demonstrate in decision making that they have paid 'due regard' to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

6.2 The United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child also requires the Council to demonstrate that decision making has paid due regard to the rights of children and young people.

6.3 An Equality Impact Assessment is not needed because the contents of the report are for information purposes only.

7. CONSULTATION

7.1 Consultation with children looked after, care leavers and partner agencies are integral to the work of the CLAQA Panel. A number of consultation activities are noted within the work plan, some having been completed e.g. the Bright Spots Survey with further consultation to be conducted throughout 2018-2019.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

8.1 There are no adverse financial implications associated with this report.

9 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

9.1 The legislation and guidance that underpins the work of the CLAQA Panel is as follows:

- Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014
- SSWB Act Part 6 Code of Practice (Looked After and Accommodated children) 2014
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (Wales) Regulations 2015 ('the CPPCR Regulations')

10. LINKS TO THE CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT

- 10.1 The work of the CLAQA Panel supports the implementation of the Children's Services Delivery Plan 2018-2019 priority to ensure that children that cannot live with their own parents live in suitable accommodation in RCT.
- 10.2 This links to the Council's priorities as set out in the Corporate Plan 2016 of promoting independence and positive lives for everyone, ensuring a great start in life for every child and that young people are well prepared for adulthood.

11. CONCLUSION

- 11.1 In general the rates of children becoming looked after needs to continue to be a priority within the service area. However, it is important that we continue to prioritise a safe reduction in CLA numbers and to deliver the best possible outcomes for the children and young people of RCT. The reasons why children become looked after are complex and include the complex 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. This therefore would require us to continually monitor how we undertake this function.

Other Information:-

Relevant Scrutiny Committee

Children and Young People

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

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Background Papers – none

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