

REMOTE CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

Minutes of meeting held on 13th September, 2021

Present: Councillor B.T. Gray (Chair), P. Drake, Dr. I.J. Johnson, K.F. McCaffer, R. Nugent-Finn, N. Thomas and, E. Williams; Mrs J. Ballantine (Principal HR Business Partner), L. Carver (Director of Social Services), Mrs. M. Coles (Vulnerable Groups Manager (CLA Education Co-ordinator)), Ms. A. Condy (Operational Manager CYPS), Ms. K. Conway (Operational Manager CYPS), Mr. M. Dacey (Lead Officer for Social Inclusion and Wellbeing), Mrs. T. Dickinson (Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development), Mrs. R. Evans (Head of Children and Young People Services), M. Hudson (Head of Standards and Provision), Mr. M. Ingram (Head of Housing and Building Services), C. O'Dare (Team Manager) and Mr. M. Swindell (Cabinet & Committee Services Officer).

Invited attendee: Amy McArdle (Marketing and Recruitment Coordinator).

(1)	Apologies for Absence –
	No formal apologies for absence had been received.
(2)	Minutes and Matters Arising –
	<p>The minutes of the meeting held on the 5th July, 2021 were agreed as an accurate record and would go on in Part I form to a future Cabinet meeting.</p> <p>There were no matters arising from the minutes.</p>
(3)	Foster Wales –
	<p>Amy McArdle (AMc) provided Panel Members with an update concerning Foster Wales with a video and PowerPoint presentation on-screen, with the following additional points noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The National Fostering Framework had been working on an all-Wales brand for each Local Authority Fostering Service as Foster Wales.• There were 6 Regional Marketing Officers working together to support the brand and looking to compete with independent agencies.• It was important to support those interested in fostering and actually fostering throughout their journey and competitive to that on offer from independent agencies.• The brand identity would allow Authorities to sell the offer to a wider audience and compete collectively via social media to target wider demographics.• It was important to note that decision making for Foster Wales would be undertaken locally which was not the case for some independent agencies who were based in London and Manchester.

- Collective advertising from the 22 Authorities should mean that searching for foster care on platforms such as Facebook would bring up the Foster Wales advert first rather than other providers.
- It was important to share the Foster Wales Values with all prospective foster carers.
- The 6-week national advert campaign would begin on Monday 20th September, 2021 and local Communication Officers would work to support the TV and radio advertising.
- Enquiries through September had increased after the summer and easing of restrictions due to the pandemic.
- Eight new foster carers had already been approved since April of this year, with an aim to double that number by the end of the year.

The Chair thanked AMc for the informative video and presentation and invited questions from Members.

Councillor McCaffer referred to the importance of having a voice on social media and for people to be aware of Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) costs to the Authority, noting the huge amount of work that had gone into the launch.

Councillor Nugent-Finn asked if there were examples of endorsements of the service from foster carers that could be shared. AMc said that one of the foster carers had sat down with Julie Morgan as part of the launch which was recorded and shared. Officers were also looking to speak to someone supporting teenagers to share their story and experiences. Case studies released over the 6 weeks of the launch would include information from real people. The Chair emphasised the importance of AMc's role in marketing and putting the message across to a wider audience.

Councillor Nugent-Finn also asked if any work was proposed to be done with schools, Parent/Teacher Associations or Governors. AMc confirmed that Governing Bodies had received notices before the branding work had been completed, but more work was required with those working in schools, Pupil Referral Units, etc. The campaign would provide an added opportunity to meet and speak to people. Councillor Nugent-Finn said she would mention it informally to schools she was involved with and was happy to circulate information, as appropriate. The Chair advised that as part of the national campaign there would be messaging sent to all Members to use.

Councillor Thomas said that demand had led to the need for an increase in foster carers who needed to be supported financially and asked if the Authority were still rigorous in vetting and interview processes for applicants and could the Authority be more efficient than the IFAs in order to compete with them.

AMc said that the Authority's assessments were still rigorous and in-depth and would remain so. Applicants had to be made to feel valued whether they would go on to become foster parents or not. Improvements had been made for their journey, including better training and receiving better customer service.

	<p>Karen Conway (KC) said that a lot of work had been done to increase the numbers of foster carers over the years and had received a significant pay increase supported by the Authority as the highest paying Authority in Wales. AMc had spent time getting the recruitment process right and ensuring that foster carers were supported from the point of first contact to the point of approval and beyond.</p> <p>The Chair thanked AMc for the presentation and all participants for their contribution on the matter. He looked forward to the forthcoming campaign and AMc if she would return to the Panel later in the year to report on its impact.</p>
(4)	Reduction Expectation Plan Progress Statement
	<p>Rachel Evans (RE) reminded Members that the submission was the third of three years where Welsh Government had asked the Authority to set intentions for reduction expectations for CLA.</p> <p>RE referred to the Quarter One submission detail that was presented at the meeting where the following additional points were noted:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The CLA population was reduced by the end of year 1 as intended, but intentions that were set three years ago were no longer realistic in light of the pandemic for years 2 and 3. • At the end of the first quarter there were 294 CLA. • Officers on the ground were continuing to work with families to provide support and assist them to stay together. • There was still huge demand for placements in an environment of resource scarcity. As a result, the appropriate needs of some CLA could only be met outside of the County and was an issue for most Local Authorities. • Welsh Government had asked for information relating to parents with additional learning needs, but the Vale Council had broadened that area to look at those with a diagnosed learning disability. • The next Reduction Expectation Plan Progress Statement to Welsh Government at the end of Quarter 2 would be made in September 2021. • Welsh Government had not yet communicated their future intentions for the end of the third year or questioned the data submitted to date but were compiling data from Local Authorities and the Vale of Glamorgan continued to provide that data as required. <p>The Chair thanked RE for the information provided and invited questions from Members.</p> <p>Councillor Thomas thanked RE for the comprehensive report and said he thought that there may be further categories other than parents with additional learning needs that Welsh Government may have chosen to focus on, including cycles of deprivation. He asked whether the out of County provision meant outside of the Local Authority provision but could still be found locally. RE clarified that it was provision wholly available outside of the County area but within Wales.</p>

	<p>Councillor Thomas noted that the numbers of CLA had gone up but that the pandemic had affected the figures and so did not provide an accurate picture of what was really happening, but those numbers had not risen by as many as some had thought they would have done, and he wondered if that had been due to pressure on the Courts. RE agreed that the Courts had been under a great deal of pressure initially and sufficient rationale for discharge supported by the Court had been more difficult. There had also been issues with capacity and a need to focus on safeguarding activity. Over time the Courts had become more able to receive applications for adoption, etc., and Officers continued to work proactively to try and achieve the best outcomes for families. KC added that there had been an initial backlog through the Courts as a result of the pandemic but had now caught up and were using hybrid hearings. There were however still considerable demands on both the Court, the Vale of Glamorgan Legal Department and other Local Authorities in terms of capacity.</p> <p>Councillor Nugent-Finn asked whether any communication from Welsh Government was anticipated regarding the data submitted. RE confirmed there had been none to date. LC said that the approach they had taken was however regularly being discussed. He was sure that there would be a perception that the figures were high and may take steps to manage that position. Councillor Nugent-Finn also referred to the out of County placements and asked what Officers would need in terms of support to try and reduce those numbers and keeping the children more local. RE said that Authorities both individually and collectively were working to manage those situations wherever possible, but it was a mixed economy and therefore there would always be a need to purchase and provide care depending on individual circumstances. Updates on what was being done locally and regionally could be brought to a future Corporate Parenting Panel meeting concerning increasing the placements option for children.</p> <p>The Chair advised he was the Chair of the Regional Partnership Board who had a Char's network across Wales and as part of their response to the White Paper on social care reform had provided information about our principles and proper funding frameworks for placements within Wales, so all avenues were being explored.</p>
(5)	Children Looked After - Breakdown
	<p>With regards the last CLA breakdown, KC further advised that the number of CLA as of Friday the 10th September, 2021 was 295, which was a small increase to the figure presented to Panel at the last meeting. Figures were continuing to fluctuate daily but there continued to be an upward trajectory trend.</p> <p>The following additional points were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There continued to be a lot of children in the 0-5 years age range and many were considerations with the parents of under consideration by the Court. • Many of those in the 11-15 years age range would transfer to the 15+ teams when they turn 15 and would require a service to leaving care.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adoption placements were being sought for 26 of those children. • Numbers of those placed with parents are slowly going down. <p>The Chair thanked KC for the information provided and invited questions from Members. None were forthcoming. The Chair asked if the secure order was the same as reported at the previous meeting. KC confirmed that was correct.</p>
(6)	Any Other Business –
	Members noted that there was a plan in place for the next meeting agenda but were able to submit any further matters for consideration in future.
(7)	Date of Next Meeting –
	The date of the next meeting would be Monday the 15 th November, 2021 at 4.30 p.m.