

Corporate Parenting Panel

Annual Report

2017/18 and 2018/19

Chair's Foreword

I am pleased to present the Annual Report of the Corporate Parenting Panel for 2017/18 and 2018/19. The Panel was set up in July 2013 to ensure that the Council was undertaking its duties as corporate parents and to ensure that children the Council look after have the same opportunities as others in the County Borough. All members of Neath Port Talbot Council are corporate parents and as part of that role was to ensure that looked after children receive a standard of care that we would deem good enough for our own children.

Elected members on the Panel have once again shown commitment and enthusiasm, which has resulted in the Panel continuing to make progress.

The work programme for 2017/18, 18/19 has focussed on the following areas:

- Educational Attainment
- School Exclusions
- Out of County Placements
- Young People and Families experiences of the Care System
- Aspects of health for children in care
- Participation and Engagement work with Looked After Children

The Panel will continue to work with officers to ensure that looked after children achieve the best outcome possible and that they reach their full potential.

Cllr. Alan Lockyer

Cabinet Member for Children's Social Services

1. Introduction

The Corporate Parenting Panel was established during the 2013/14 civic year. The terms of reference for the Panel provides for an annual report to be produced and presented to full Council. The focus of the Panel was:

- To ensure looked after children and young people are seen as a priority by the whole of the Council and its partners.
- Scrutinise the policies, opportunities and procedures in place across the Council to support looked after children and young people in achieving their potential and make recommendations, where appropriate to the Cabinet, for improvement.
- Gather the views of, and act as advocate for looked after children and young people and care leavers.
- To monitor and evaluate the responsiveness of partners in supporting children and young people looked after to achieve their potential.
- To hold officers and partners to account.

The main aims of this report are to highlight the work that has been undertaken by the Corporate Parenting Panel during 2017/18 and 2018/19.

The Panel is chaired by the Cabinet Member for Children's Social Services and has thirteen elected members, including the Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Culture. A foster carer representative also attends the Panel and arrangements are being made for the Engagement and Participation Officer based within Social Services, Health and Housing to attend the panel to represent the views of the Looked After Children Youth Council. Support is provided to the Panel by the Democratic Services Team, the Head of Children's Services, the Head of Participation and other Council officers as and when required.

The Panel helps to deliver one of the Council's Corporate Plan objectives:-

- To improve the well-being of children and young people by providing these families struggling to provide good parenting for their children with tailored support;
- To ensure that children and young people in need of protection, care and support will be protected and safeguarded and more of those children will be able to grow up in a stable family setting;
- To enable all children and young people to be helped to have a say in matters that affect them and for them to be safe and feel safe.

2. The Work of the Corporate Parenting Panel during 2017/2018

Purpose of Panel

Looked after children are one of the most vulnerable groups in our society. Improving the lives of these children is a national priority. Care and support is provided by staff employed by the Council, partner agencies, foster carers and elected members. The Council's elected members all have a role as 'corporate parents' and this means that they are responsible for ensuring that looked after children receive a standard of care that they would deem good enough for their own children. The role of the Corporate Parenting Panel is to champion the rights of those children and young people to ensure their needs are being met, they are safe and have the best chances in life. The Panel monitors services that impact on looked after children and hold partners and officers to account.

The Work Programme

The Work Programme included:

Improving Educational Attainment for Looked After Children

The Panel wanted to look at the educational attainment of looked after children. Reports were received identifying the links between performance levels and areas of deprivation and the negative impact this was having on childrens' performance which had identified a decrease in performance nationally. In addition, the Panel explored how the numbers of looked after children with additional learning needs contributed to Neath Port Talbot being below the Welsh average, particularly in Maths.

Next Steps

The Panel asked that the performance of a cohort of looked after children be tracked and monitored and that the Panel continue to receive reports on the outcomes of those children to ensure their educational needs are being met.

Looked After Children and School Exclusions

The Panel requested information on looked after children who had been excluded from schools within Neath Port Talbot.

The Panel was pleased that the number of exclusions has continued to reduce. Fewer pupils are being excluded compared to three years ago but the Panel was concerned that the number of days children were excluded had not decreased due to the additional complex behaviour being displayed by children. Discussions took place on how schools were adapting to those specific needs. In addition, the Panel looked at the reason for school exclusions and the process that is in place after a child is excluded from school. Members were reassured that work is undertaken to find the catalyst for inappropriate behaviour and to

ensure support mechanisms are put in place to prevent further exclusions from school.

The Panel looked at the process for ensuring children who had been excluded from school continued to receive education at home by receiving text books. Members were concerned at the delay in issuing text books to children and asked for a commitment that this be monitored. Members would also raise in school governor meetings.

Next Steps

To monitor the numbers of children that are being excluded from school and to understand the reasons for exclusions.

Children who go missing from home or care

The Panel received information on the Neath Port Talbot review of compliance with the Guidance for Local Authorities for Children who go missing from Care in 2016/17 in collaboration with South Wales Police.

As a result of the review, a database had been developed and became operational on the 1 December 2016. The database identifies the number of contacts made to Children's Social Services of children who are reported missing from care. Each period of when a child goes missing is monitored and the timeframes for each period is added to the database with the details of the return interviews that takes place with the young person/child.

Members were pleased that the review had been successful and that there was a multi-agency approach to work with children/young people

Risky Behaviour Panel

Members were pleased with the establishment of the Risky Behaviour Panel. The Panel was made up of partner agencies and considers referrals at an early stage, working pro-actively to prevent behaviour escalating to require further intensive services.

Next Steps

To continue monitoring.

National Fostering Framework

The Panel received information on the National Fostering Framework which updated Members on remuneration to foster carers and how work was taking place to develop a consistent approach to foster carers payments. In addition, a foster carer recruitment campaign was taking place jointly with the City and County of Swansea to increase the number of foster carers, especially for children with challenging behaviours.

The Panel was pleased with the feedback given by the Foster Carers' Association on the support that carers receive from Childrens' Social Services and the positive relationship that exists between carers and social workers.

Next Steps

To continue to monitor the recruitment campaign to ensure there is a continued rise in the numbers of foster carers.

Children and Young People's Survey – Summer 2018

The Panel was reassured at the positive outcome from the survey of children/young people in foster care and asked that further surveys be undertaken with looked after children subject to child protection measures and other children in need and for the results to be used when developing future services.

Next Steps

To continue to receive the outcomes of future surveys.

Accommodation and Care Leavers

The Panel received reports in relation to the accommodation and support services provided for children and young people to ensure it was suitable and appropriate, with an emphasis on young people leaving care. Members also wanted to ensure that the number of vulnerable young people having to access and reside in temporary accommodation including bed and breakfast accommodation was reducing. As a result a new service specification was developed and a tender exercise took place in March 2018 to ensure that the service meets the needs and demands required.

The Panel were concerned at the intention of Welsh Government to extend the leaving care age to 25 regardless of whether young people were in further education or not and the additional pressure it would put on the Council.

Next Steps

To continue to monitor the number of young people being placed in bed and breakfast accommodation.

To monitor the impact of extending the leaving care age to 25.

Looked After Children – Health

The Panel considered information in relation to the health of looked after children and in particular received reports from the Looked After Children Health Team. The Team undertakes the statutory health assessments with young people/children in the care system to ensure that their health needs are met.

Members considered information in regard to whether looked after children were accessing dentists and G.P.'s to satisfy themselves that their health needs were being met in a timely manner. 98.9% of looked after children had been registered with a G.P. within 10 days of being accommodated but that nearly half of the children accommodated were not registered with a dentist by the second review with their social worker. The Panel was reassured that this issue had been identified with foster carers in the placement

meeting which is held within seven days of the placement and that they must ensure that children in their care are seen by a dentist.

Information was received that the Health Team undertake initial assessments on all looked after children including children placed out of county. Members were pleased that the Health Team and Children's Social Services access the same I.T. system so that all information can be recorded and accessed easily.

Members were re-assured that the role of the Team is pivotal in the early identification of health needs and facilitating prompt support and assistance. The Team looks at the care of the child holistically, working in partnership with other agencies.

Next Steps

To continue monitoring the health needs of looked after children to ensure their health needs are addressed.

Out of County Placements

The Panel looked at the reasons why looked after children/young people were placed out of the Neath Port Talbot area. The Panel were pleased with the introduction of internal therapists which had reduced the need for specialist out of county placements by preventing escalating behaviour in children and young people and assisted looked after children to stay in home areas.

Members were informed that a Placement Panel reviews every child/young person placed out of county. Social workers regularly visit and monitor the wellbeing of the child/young person. In addition, if a child has complex needs these children are reviewed by the Complex Needs Panel.

Information was received on children who were returned to home areas from out of county placements. Members were reassured that the wellbeing of the child was paramount when deciding whether to move children back to home areas.

Next Steps

To continue monitoring the number of out of county placements.

Looked After Children Youth Council

The Panel met with the Looked After Children Youth Council which contributed to the information booklet that the Youth Council was developing for children who were brought into care, from the looked after child's perspective. Discussions took place with the Youth Council on how children and young people feel when brought into care and asked what the Council could do to improve that experience.

As a result of the Looked After Children Youth Council project and the input from Members. Foster Carers had to complete a profile on their home, family and interests which would enable the child/young person to gain an understanding of the family they were going to be staying with. The profile would be updated on an annual basis during the foster carers review.

Next Steps

The Engagement and Participation Officer was invited to attend the Corporate Parenting Panel to ensure there is a link between the Panel and children and young people in care. The Panel would continue to attend the Looked After Children Youth Council meetings on an annual basis.

Elected Members as Corporate Parents

The Corporate Parenting Panel developed mechanisms to ensure all elected members were aware of the work of the Panel and their role and responsibilities as corporate parents. To assist with this a Member Seminar was arranged for the 21 March 2019.

The aims of the Seminar were:

- To understand the role of Corporate Parenting.
- To be aware of the Council's duties and responsibilities to children who are in their care and young people who are care leavers.
- To understand the role of scrutiny and the corporate parenting panel.
- To hear young people's experiences of being looked after by the local authority.

Members who attended the Seminar gave an overall rating of 9.1 out of 10.

Conclusions

The Corporate Parenting Panel will continue to monitor services that have a direct impact on the lives of children and young people in care. The Panel will bring further information to Members on the progress of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

Contact Information

The Corporate Parenting Panel is supported by Democratic Services Team located in the Chief Executive's Department.

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