

REPORT ON CORPORATE PARENTING WITHIN FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

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INTRODUCTION

The Children's Services Forum remains the focus for corporate parenting activity within the county council and the annual Pride of Flintshire Awards held in the autumn are the major events held to celebrate the achievements of our looked after children and care leavers.

Flintshire has adopted the following Corporate Parenting Pledge which is:

- To be a good parent to the children we look after
- To make sure those children have the best life possible
- To make sure everyone works together to make this happen
- To help children become health and independent adults

The following sections outline some of the detail around corporate parenting activity during 2012/13.

1. CHILDREN'S SERVICES FORUM

During 2012/13 a variety of topic areas were discussed. These included some external speakers, i.e.

- National Youth Advocacy Service
- Looked After Children's Nurse
- Child + Adolescent Mental Health Service
- Supported Lodgings Evaluation (BAAF)
- Children + Young People's Partnership

A Forward Work Programme was drawn up to ensure that ideas and suggestions are logged and members can contribute to the activity.

The CSF had been in existence since 2005 and I therefore suggested that a self – assessment event was long overdue. An external facilitator was appointed to guide us through the self assessment. The event took place on the evening of the 28.11.12. and the outcomes were included in our forward work plan.

2. EDUCATION OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

A separate report has been produced by the Looked After Children (Education) Coordinator.

3. CARE LEAVERS IN EMPLOYMENT

During 2010 a “skillbuild” initiative was piloted with the assistance of Deeside College and our Corporate Training Department. The scheme could not be repeated due to grant funding changes with partners. Care leavers will be given consideration within Flintshire’s Apprenticeship Scheme and in the interim the CYAS Team (Children’s and Young Adults Support Team) encourage our care leavers to access further education and work opportunities.

During 2012/13 one of young care leavers was offered a placement within the Corporate Finance Team as part of his accountancy studies, funded jointly by Social Services for Children and the County Treasurer’s Department.

3. CARE LEAVERS’ HOUSING SUPPORT NEEDS

This is an ongoing preoccupation and the impact of Welfare Reform heightens the need to ensure appropriate accommodation is available for care leavers given the increased restrictions placed upon the payment of benefits to this group. Isolation is often an issue for young people and current legislation seeks to ensure that children within the care system have access to support until they are 21 years of age and 24 years of age if they are in full time education. That support includes support to remain in foster care, should that be their choice post 18, by “re-badging” the placement as supported lodgings. Other forms of supported living are available and in conjunction with the Housing Department a “shared living” scheme was developed for 3 young people which we hope will be extended in the coming year. Close working between the children’s services and housing departments ensures that young people leaving care have access to a range of accommodation to meet their needs and an action plan is in place to continue to develop targeted accommodation support for this group alongside our responsibilities to all young people in need following the Southwark Judgement.

4. THE HEALTH OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AND CARE LEAVERS

The Looked After Children’s Nurse continues in post, monitors the health assessments of Looked After Children and assists with GP and Dentist registration. These activity areas are governed by PI reporting and at the end of Quarter 4 the results were as follows:

- Health Assessments within timeframe **45.4%**
- Teeth checked by a Dentist within a 12 month period **35%**
- Registered with a GP within 10 days of placement **100%**

Timeliness of LAC medicals is dependant upon many variables – the availability of the LAC Nurse, paediatrician, carers and child or young person and the willingness of older children to participate in the process. The same is true for dental checks and when young people reach 15-16 years of age they often make their own life choices in this regard.

In the summer of 2012 a new Transition Team was launched and cases open to the Children’s Integrated Disability Service currently transfer at 16 to the new team. The new arrangements seek to ensure that the journey into adulthood for this group of young people with complex health needs is as smooth as possible. Some of these young people will be deemed looked after and the team have had training in LAC processes as part of the implementation plan. A service review is to be completed in the summer of this year.

5. OTHER SUPPORT TO LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AND CARE LEAVERS

All children are allocated a key worker and we have a group of volunteer mentors available to enhance the support available. We support our children to engage in leisure activities and provide funds for additional tuition if that is required.

Our participation groups [Care Leavers Support Network and Speaking Out for Children in Care Group] ensure that our work is child – friendly and act as critical friends to activity and information. The group have recently reviewed our “LAC Pack” contents and contributed to several publications. Amongst these was “My Planner” an initiative led by the Children’s Commissioner for Wales’ office which is now provided for all our looked after children.

We continue to commission the National Youth Advocacy Service to provide advocacy and independent visitors for our looked after children and care leavers. Our Independent Reviewing Officers ensure appropriate levels of support during the review process and are diligent in their duties towards this group of young people ensuring that care plans are followed through and the voice of the child is heard during the process.

For some years we have been contributing to Child Trust Funds for our looked After Children based on agreed funding formula, viz,

Child Trust Fund

	<u>2010-2011</u>	<u>2011-2012</u>	<u>2012-2013</u>
No. Children	73	58	54
Average No. of Weeks LAC	41	44	18
Payment Per Week Per Child	£ 10.00	£ 10.00	£ 10.00
Spend	£ 29,720.00	£ 25,807.00	£ 25,741.43

Junior ISA

The Child Trust Fund ceased in 2011 for new LAC (although we are still topping up the CTFs for existing LAC), and has been replaced with the Junior ISA.

No Junior ISA as yet has had any contribution from the LA. The Share Foundation was provided with a list of 75 Looked After Children who were

eligible and not in receipt of a Child Trust Fund account in December 2012. These children have has an account set by the Share Foundation and accounts have been credited with £200 by the government.

Based on the above, if the LA was to contribute the same amount of £10 for each week a child has been LAC in a year, the approximate figure would be £32,000.

Discussions are ongoing as to how this is to be funded going forward given the existing commitment to annual top ups to the CTFs, albeit this could be a decreasing commitment.

6. CORPORATE PARENTING MONITORING

Following the death of Victoria Climbié all local authorities within the UK were asked to ensure that systems were in place to afford members and senior officers opportunity to monitor children's services activity. This matter was emphasised during the enquiries following Peter Connolly's death in Haringey some years ago. Recommendation 41 of the Victoria Climbié Report states:

“Chief Executives of local authorities with Social Services responsibilities must make arrangements for senior managers and councillors to regularly visit Intake Teams in the Children's Services Departments and to report their findings to the Chief Executive and Social Services Committee”

The inference here is clear. There must be a mechanism for ensuring that any issues arising from the frontline services are identified and dealt with. In particular, members and senior officers need to have information to ensure pressures on frontline operations are kept within reasonable limits.

Children's Services have a workload measurement system in place. Statistics on workloads, staff availability and unmet need are collated in a monthly basis and scrutinised by myself and the senior management group. Unmet need is shared with the Director and Cabinet Member at the Community Services Directorate Management Team Meeting.

The Children's Services Forum and Social and Health Scrutiny Committee are the obvious focus for this oversight but we also arrange "Climbié Visits" for the council leaders and senior officers. The last such visit took place on the 10th October 2012 and involved the Leader, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member. The Connah's Quay and Mancot sites were visited.

From time to time we are asked to arrange training for members on Corporate Parenting. Attendance at these events is disappointing and at the last such event only 7 members attended over 2 sessions. The 3 sessions were booked for 9.00 – 12 noon, 2pm – 5pm + evening. The evening session was cancelled due to lack of take up. We are open to suggestions as to how we can plan these sessions to ensure the attendance of members.

7. PARTICIPATION & ENGAGEMENT

For the latter part of 2012/13 we have had a dedicated Participation Officer in post who has worked alongside the CLSN and SOCC and supported them during this period. The major piece of work for him has been the launch of the A2A card last June and its rollout across Flintshire to LAC care leavers and young carers. The Children's Commissioner for Wales has been a huge supporter of this initiative as it is the first such card to be developed to ensure these young people have the support they need and priority access to service. The card is currently being piloted in 4 of our high schools and agreement has been reached to extend this to all our high schools over coming months. A project plan is in place to continue the rollout to other areas – in particular health.

From April 2013 new duties are to be in place for young people on remand, recognising the vulnerability of this group. The impact of this new legislation will be reported upon in the next update report.

CONCLUSION

Looked After Children activity is highly regulated and subject to intense external scrutiny e.g.

- Court processes during care proceedings
- Independent Reviewing Officers who can refer matters to CAFCASS should they feel that the local authority are negligent in their duties.
- Inspections of all services relating to looked after children by CSSIW. (child care teams, 3 yearly adoption inspections, annual fostering inspections, inspections of any residential units run by the county council).

The last CSSIW inspection of child care teams took place in March 2012 and had a positive outcome. The adoption and fostering service inspections are consistently found to be good and we are proud of all our achievements in this regard.

Outside of the formal processes described above Children's Services have commissioned external audits of areas of activity or surrounding specific cases, e.g.

- Suspend contact arrangements
- Case-specific adoption breakdown
- Case-specific child neglect issue

I believe this demonstrates our willingness to open ourselves up to an additional layer of scrutiny and to learn from areas where our practice could be improved. It demonstrates also our aspiration to contribute to the corporate parenting pledge outlined elsewhere in this document.

Over the coming months we will see the impact of the new Court Timeframes which will attempt to reduce delay in cases during proceedings. The target timeframe is 26 weeks (currently approximately 1 year) and there is an imperative to ensure that all possible avenues of parental support have been explored prior to the commencement of proceedings. Local authorities must therefore have access to a range of preventative services in order to demonstrate their attempts to support parents and safeguard children. The guidelines make it clear that reducing delay will benefit children and young people – especially in relation to their plans for permanence. Should attempts to improve the family functioning fail the children need permanence either through long term fostering or adoption. We welcome the new arrangements and we are working hard to review our systems to ensure we can meet the challenges ahead.

To monitor our improvements in the way we care for our looked after children a new reporting framework is being developed based on outcomes and not outputs – to better measure the difference we are making to the lives of children – especially those looked after and for whom the local authority owes a particular responsibility.

Against a background of continual fiscal challenge we will endeavour to ensure that our corporate parenting pledge is realised, that our interventions with families are purposeful and that if children can no longer remain with their birth families, their future needs are met via permanent placements with kinship carers, foster carers or adopters.

Purposeful and timely interventions are the key here.

“One of the most important issues to confront in promoting better outcomes for abused and neglected children is a mismatch between three timeframes; those of the developing child : those of the courts and those of the local authority”

**DECISION-MAKING WITHIN A CHILD’S TIMEFRAME
(August 2012)**

There are two strands to this – the new timeframes within care proceedings and plans for permanency once a child becomes looked after. Both need to be the focus for improvement if our roles as corporate parents are to be fully met and our aspirations realised.

**Carol Salmon
Head of Social Services for Children**

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