



SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REPORT

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Service Area	Children's Services
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To: Chair, Ladies and Gentlemen

Corporate Parenting Board Update

1.0 SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

1.1 This is the second Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report. It provides information about the work of Corporate Parenting Board and our next steps in improving outcomes for looked after young people.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION

2.1 Scrutiny Committee receive this report and raise any questions or challenge that might lead to improvements for care experienced young people.

3.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

3.1 When a child or young person becomes "looked after", the local authority has a responsibility to ensure that looked after children and young people experience the highest quality of care and opportunity and achieve outcomes that reflect each individual's greatest potential.

3.2 This is known as "Corporate Parenting" and it is the collective responsibility of the Council to understand this.

3.3 In Merthyr Tydfil we take our corporate parenting responsibilities seriously. We are all collectively responsible for looked after young people and support continuous improvement of outcomes for our looked after young people.

3.4 The Code of Practice for looked after and an accommodated child which has been published under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 has defined the corporate parenting duty in s.400-401.

3.5 It is not just social services that impact upon these young people. Once a child is in care all elected members and officers of the local authority, as corporate parents, need to be concerned about that child and must take the following principles into account when engaging with them and making any decision concerning them:

- is this good enough for my own child?
- does this provide a second chance if things don't go as expected?
- is this tailored to the child's individual needs, particularly if they are more vulnerable than other children?

3.6 This concern should encompass the child's education, health and well-being; what they do in their leisure time and holidays; how they celebrate their culture; and how they receive praise and encouragement for their achievements. This concern continues as the child becomes a young person and begins to prepare for the time when they leave care.

4.0 WHERE WE WERE

4.1 This is the second report of its kind. Last year's report concluded recommendations that can be found in the table at 5.1 below alongside an update.

5.0 WHERE WE ARE NOW

5.1 The table below updates progress against last year's recommendation:

Recommendation	Progress as at 10.01.20
Celebrate the success of our looked after young people	Achieved. Celebration event took place in November 2019, in line with young people's wishes.
Continue to involve care experienced young people in our work and receive reports from IROs about the views of younger looked after young people.	Partially Achieved. We have carried forward a summary of young people's views in this report, Care Leaver's Strategy: <u>Make your Own Decision</u> , and in the Placement Commissioning Strategy. IROs have been asked to re-design data capture systems in order to bring forward themes from young people's views to inform service improvements. There has been regional collaboration in pursuit of learning more about 'what works' and the contract with Voice From Care who run our participation group will be reviewed for 2020-21.
Improve stability by increasing the supply and skills of foster carers and suitable placements that are close to home.	Progress has been made. The Placement Commissioning Strategy has been completed and related action reviewed. It will take some time to see a suitable supply of Merthyr Tydfil

	foster carers being available for all our looked after young people.
Increasing the capacity of leaving care services given the age profile of our looked after young people, ensuring that the support they provide is in line with the views expressed at the Care Leavers' Conference.	Progress has been made. New provider in place and increased resources have been made available to extend the personal adviser service to those up to 25 years who wish to take it up. Close working with Housing colleagues has increased the availability of accommodation with support, Housing First opens end of this month and further work is underway on a second project. Some individual care leavers have benefitted from intense support when they need it most. ICF funding has been secured to deliver support required under the Pathway to Work. However, further work is required under the implementation of the Action plan linked to <u>Make Your Own Decision</u> .
Enhance access to services for improving the emotional well-being of looked after young people.	Progress has been made. RPB task and finish group agree specification – meeting planned for February.
Whilst children in Special Guardianship arrangements are not looked after – there is a need to enhance the support arrangements to prevent re-entry to the looked after system.	Achieved. We will need to keep this under review. The Special Guardianship Policy has been reviewed and a new process is in place linked to the Early Help Hub. ICF funding has been secured for a post to develop support for Special Guardians and their families.
Implement the Pathway to work, and employment options for care leavers within the Council. Invite Council departments to report quarterly on their involvement with looked after young people and carer leavers.	Progress has been made. Corporate Management Team have supported the development of the Pathway to work, a final draft of which will be available later this month for sign off at Corporate Parenting Board in March 2020. The initiative will see all Council departments look for opportunities for work experience, or traineeship within their departments or care experienced young people. In year colleagues in Housing Benefit and Finance have supported the Regional Development Manager for the National Fostering Framework in the work leading up to the enhances offer to Merthyr Tydfil Foster Carers.
Improve and re-launch our arrangements for transition planning.	Progress has been made. Documents will be brought to March 2020 Corporate Parenting Board for sign off.

5.2 We have included here key features of the Corporate parenting Board Annual Report for 2018-90.

5.3 Here are some of the important messages from young people about our service:

Good Practice	Poor Practice
Take time to get to know us for who we really are; speak to us like young adults	Base your knowledge of us only from reading records ; talk to us like a bossy parent
Involve us in new experiences	Leave me to my own devices
Keep in touch, keep in touch more when I need extra help	Only doing the minimum you have to
Believe in us and fight our corner	Going through the motions of what is expected ... visits, write ups, reviews and reports... with no intrinsic interest in who I am and my well-being
When talking to us keep it real, be straight forward and say things as they are	Avoid giving negative information because you don't want to upset somebody or make promises that cannot be kept
Understand that because of our experiences, we need second chances; we don't always have family and friends we can call on	Criticise young people for 'bad behaviour' or not taking responsibility; blame us for repeat mistakes
Check out how the service is going once in a while with care leavers, involve us in service developments	Assume everything is going well because you haven't been told otherwise

5.4 Care experienced young people from Merthyr Tydfil also took part in Listen Act Thrive which is published by NSPCC. During this consultation care experienced children and young people informed researchers that they are not receiving the emotional and mental health support they need. This is an issue that young people have also talked about with Corporate Parenting Board. Key issues identified during the consultation include: health assessments, access to services, training, and multi-agency working. Here are some of the young people's views that were included in this piece of work:

- Went to doctors and went straight to antidepressants.
- “[There is] more stability for a young person if carers understand behaviours that may come with mental health.
- Professionals (should) work together so young people don't have to repeat their story. We are not troubled teenagers, it's what we have been through.

5.5 Last year, we saw an increase in the numbers of looked after young people to 198 at year-end. The national comparative data puts the authority as having the third highest number of looked after children per 10,000 capita in Wales, followed by RCT with the 4th highest and Bridgend with the 5th highest.

A deep dive of cases linked to the significant increase during 2018-19 points to the following factors:

- Increase in demand at front door of high-risk cases where preventative work would not have been a safe and viable option.
- Improvement work that identified a cohort of cases where there was no alternative other than for the Authority to safeguard the children by looking after them.

- 5.6 Reassuringly, at quarter 2 end 2019-20 we have noted a reduced demand for looked after services and the rate of which children have become looked after has reduced by 50%.

Date	Number of looked after young people
31.03.15	163
31.03.16	141
31.03.17	145
31.03.18	156
31.03.19	198

5.7 Looked After Young People experiencing 3 or more moves

There was a small decrease in the number of looked after young people who experienced 3 or more placement moves to 12.6%. Improving performance, and an achievement given a significant increase in demand and complexity. However, this result is in the highest quartile in the national comparison and we have plans for improvement. At the time of writing we are on target for a result of 10% for 2019/20 which should bring us closer to the welsh average of 10%.

Date	% of CLA experiencing 3 or more moves
31.03.15	6.1%
31.03.16	9.22%
31.03.17	11.72%
31.03.18	13.46%
31.03.19	12.63%

5.8 Exits – returning home

The authority has a high rate of number of looked after young people who return home. National data published for 2018-19 identifies the welsh average as being 9.6% of the overall population of looked after young people returning home, with Merthyr Tydfil recording a result of 15.2% putting us in the higher quartile for performance.

5.9 Age Range Profile as at 31.03.18 and at 31.03.19

The increase noted here reflects the increase in the overall population. Bulk increase is in the lower age range reflecting our ambition to make the right decision at the right time in order to improve longer term outcomes for children and young people. Despite our concern about the increasing numbers, it is encouraging to see this change in the age ranges. This should not distract from the implications of having over 50% of our looked after population in the 10 years plus age range which is good intelligence for planning future services for older looked after young people and care leavers.

Age	Numbers of looked after young people in age range as at 31.03.18	Numbers of looked after young people in age range as at 31.03.19
0-4 years old	34	56 (+22)
5-9 years old	22	35 (+13)
10-14 years old	55	61 (+6)
15 -18 years old	45	46 (+1)

5.10 Placement Type as at 31.03.18 and 31.03.19

Family placement by placement within the family network or with foster carers is the lead model of provision for looked after young people in Merthyr Tydfil. This is reflected in the break down below where we can see that 172 children looked after are in family placement made up of Kinship Care (43), Merthyr Tydfil Foster Carers (62), and Independent Foster Care (45). The increase in demand for residential care is associated with an increase in the number of young people whose need cannot be met in family placement, this has been the source of particular concern given the impact for the Council's resources. During 2019/20 we have implemented the Closer to Home project which has supported step down to lower dependency provision for a small number of young people.

Placement Type	Numbers of looked after young people in placement type as at 31.03.18	Numbers of looked after young people in placement type as at 31.03.19
Placed for Adoption	1	3
Kinship (Family/ Friends approved as foster carers)	22	43
Merthyr Tydfil Foster Carers	26	62
Independent Foster Care Agency	44	45
Placement With Parents	23	22
Independent living	5	9
Residential	8	14

5.11 Care Leavers in Education Employment and Training

During 2018-19, we saw a reduction in the numbers of care leavers who were in education, employment or training at 12 months after leaving care, this same figure improved for those at 24 months after leaving care, 70% of whom were in education, training and employment.

6.0 WHERE WE WANT TO BE

6.1 We want to make the following changes:

- Reduce the number of looked after young people who have experienced unplanned placement moves.
- Increase the number of looked after young people who are living close to home.
- Improve the support available for care leavers to access housing, employment and training.
- Develop the support that is available to help carers and looked after young people through the distress of trauma and separation.

7.0 WHAT WE NEED TO DO NEXT

7.1 Our looked after young people have made us proud again this year. They really are outstanding people, being supported by inspirational carers and committed professionals.

7.2 It is clear that if we are to be able to meet the need of our looked after young people, focused work is required once more in the year ahead across the Council. This work is summarised below and should be included in the Action Plan for the Strategy for Stability, Success and Transition with progress reports at Future Corporate Parenting Boards. Corporate Parenting Board can help make a difference to the lives of looked after young people by agreeing to prioritise the Council's resources to make the action plan a reality in delivering better experiences and improve wellbeing for looked after young people and care leavers:

- Celebrate the success of our looked after young people.
- Continue to listen to young people's voices and involve them in service developments. Re-design Independent Reviewing Officer systems to bring forward themes from young people's views that will support service improvement.
- Implement the Action Plan linked to the Placement Commissioning Strategy.
- Support young people to achieve great educational outcomes and implement the requirements of the Additional Learning Needs Reforms.
- Implement the Action Plan linked to Make Your Own Decision.
- Re-launch and implement revised Transition Planning arrangements when they are finalised.
- Enhance access to services for improving the emotional well-being of looked after young people.
- Implement the Pathway to Work

8.0 CONTRIBUTION TO WELLBEING OBJECTIVES

8.1 This area of business is located in the following wellbeing objective:

People are empowered to live independently within their communities, where they are safe and enjoy good physical and mental health.

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CHIEF OFFICER SOCIAL SERVICES

COUNCILLOR CHRIS DAVIES
CABINET MEMBER FOR
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BACKGROUND PAPERS		
Title of Document(s)	Document(s) Date	Document Location
Corporate Parenting Board – Scrutiny Report 2017-18	January 2019	MTCBC Website
Does the report contain any issue that may impact the Council's Constitution?		No