

## Meeting of the Cross Party Group for

### Looked After Children

Wednesday 20<sup>TH</sup> June 2017

12.30–1.30

#### **AMs present:**

David Melding AM —Chairperson

Lee Waters AM

#### **In attendance:**

Deborah Jones – Voices From Care

Rhian Williams - PA / Administrative Secretary, Voices From Care – (minute taker)

Tim Crahart – Voices From Care

Philip Manghan - Catholic Education Service

Menna Thomas – Barnardo’s Cymru

Danielle Cope – Action For Children

Charlotte Wooders – The Fostering Network Wales

Sharon Lovell – NYAS

Leoni Oxenham – Children’s Commissioner for Wales Office

Hywel Dafydd – NAFW Research Service

Jack Sellers – Researcher for D. Melding AM

#### **Apologies were received from:**

Tom Davies – Children’s Society

Huw Irranca-Davies AM

Cecile Gwilym – NSPCC

Maria Boffey – The Fostering Network Wales

## **WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION FROM THE CHAIR**

DM opened the meeting by welcoming everyone; extending a special welcome to those who were new. Roundtable introductions took place and DM gave a brief overview of the group for those new members present.

## **MINUTES**

Minutes of the meeting held on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2017 were noted and approved.

## **MATTERS ARISING**

There were no matters arising.

## **PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE ENQUIRY INTO LAC SERVICES**

DM explained that the Committee; which looks at the efficiency and value for money of public spending on and the educational attainment of looked after children, is expected to commence work in the autumn and DM is anticipating quite a lot of interesting work coming through to the group.

LW confirmed that that work of the Committee is likely to commence in the autumn and extended an open invitation to group members to contact him if they had any questions and he will try his best to assist them. It was noted that the Terms of Reference for the Committee were quite robust and comprehensive. It was further noted the initial hearing in November is a general overlook of the work and not task and finish. LW informed that the Auditor General had agreed to undertake his own piece of work on looked after children to support the work that the Committee are undertaking. HD thanked LW for the useful update and informed that he would be meeting with the Audit Office in the near future.

DM encouraged members to engage with the PAC inquiry as appropriate.

## **MINISTERIAL ADVISORY GROUP (MAG)**

DM informed the next MAG meeting would be taking place on Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> June where police would be delivering a presentation on MISPA (missing persons) work being carried out in the Bridgend area. Some significant developments are expected on corporate parenting to raise standards and consistency. DJ raised the significant themes between the National Fostering Framework (NFF) and care leavers for example apprenticeships.

In terms of corporate parenting and what is working, DJ stated that fundamentally one issue for Voices From Care, is anecdotal evidence that certain departments in local authorities are not communicating with each other. DM stated that Welsh Government (WG) need to ensure that it was practising corporate parenting approach within its various departments.

DM reported that Sally Holland, Children's Commissioner for Wales, had given a good presentation on the Hidden Ambitions Report. The report asked the Welsh Government, local authorities, charities and private enterprises to pledge their support to make sure that young people leaving care had the right support to realise their ambitions and also highlighted some of the inequalities faced by care leavers and those in care

In terms of independent visiting for looked after children and Keith Towler, former Children's Commissioner for Wales research report, SL raised the questions of looking at the value of independent visitors as some local authorities use it, whilst others do not.

A short discussion took place around care leavers where SL raised Scotland's good initiatives for care leavers e.g. supporting them on entering further education. DM informed that Caerphilly have a very good programme in linking in with care leavers and further education and he felt that it was now time to raise the age formally to 25. DJ expressed the need to address why some young people are leaving the care system at 16 and 'dropping off the radar'.

DM proposed and it was agreed to retain the MAG as a rolling agenda item for future group meetings.

#### **ST. DAVID'S FUND AND OTHER FUNDING ANNOUNCEMENTS**

In terms of the St. David's Fund DM informed that he was not certain if a plan has been worked out as of yet, but the Civil Service will be addressing this in due course. DM announced that it was his understanding there would be between £8 – £10 million to support looked after children's services in addition to existing services.

#### **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

DJ informed an issue around the stigma attached to being in care had been identified through the 5N1V and a report was due out in a weeks' time. It was agreed that DJ would forward DM a copy of the report.

**ACTION: D. JONES**

HD informed that he would be attending an Assembly Research meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> July.

CW informed that The Fostering Network's report on kinship caring and foster care identified the need for consistency across the board which was not always being carried out. It was agreed that CW would forward the report to LW.

**ACTION: CW**

It was proposed and agreed to add the lack of contact with siblings to the agenda at the next meeting in the autumn.

**ACTION: RW**

In terms of future group meetings, DM welcomed ideas from members and to feed them directly to RW.

It was proposed and agreed that there would be two 15 minute presentations including a five minute Q and A slot each at the next meeting. VFC would deliver a presentation on Contact and NYAS a presentation on The National Advocacy Approach.

HD informed that Dr. Emily Warren, former Director of The Fostering Network Wales is currently working in California and her recent findings are very interesting. DM stated that he was aware and would be meeting with Dr. Warren in the near future.

There was no further business raised.

**DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

RW to liaise with S. Sharpe and forward details of the next meeting to group members.

**ACTION: RW**

DM thanked everyone for attending and there being no further business the meeting closed.