

Meeting of the Cross Party Group for

Looked After Children

Wednesday 29th June 2016

12.30–1.30

AMs present:

David Melding AM —Chairperson

Julie Morgan AM

Lee Waters AM

Llyr Gruffydd AM

In attendance:

Robin Lewis – AMSS for Vickki Howells AM

Fiona Openshaw – AMSS Researcher for Joyce Watson AM

Craig Lawson – AMSS for Suzy Davies AM

Paula Foley - AMSS for Jenny Rathbone AM

Sian Thomas - Senior Researcher NAW

Deborah Jones - CEO, Voices From Care

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

Reverend Philip Manghan - Catholic Education Service's Adviser (CSE) for Wales

Leoni Oxenham – Children’s Commissioner for Wales office

Hywel Dafydd – Children’s Commissioner for Wales Office

Tom Davies – The Children’s Society

Menna Thomas – Barnardos Cymru

Jackie Murphy – Tros Gynnal Plant

Apologies received from:

Dawn Bowden AM

Rachel Thomas, Policy Officer, Children's Commissioner for Wales Office

Jane Hutt AM

Simon Thomas AM

Dr. Emily Warren, Director - The Fostering Network Wales

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION FROM THE CHAIR

DM opened the meeting by welcoming everyone to the Inaugural Meeting in the 5th Assembly. Roundtable introductions took place and DM gave a brief overview of the group for those new members present. DM went through the agenda and highlighted the debate being discussed this afternoon in Plenary, adding that he was very fortunate to have a slot in the debate to discuss a proposal that the Welsh Government should examine ways to strengthen inter-departmental working to improve outcomes for looked after children.

It was noted that DM was looking at developing a work plan for the group in the autumn for the 5th Assembly.

MINUTES

Minutes of the meeting held on 27th January 2016 were noted and approved.

MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising.

INAUGURAL ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING: TO ELECT A CHAIR AND SECRETARY

Julie Morgan AM nominated and it was agreed for DM to continue as Chair of the Cross Party Group on Looked After Children and David Melding AM proposed and it was agreed that Rhian Williams, Voices From Care also continue as Secretariat to the group.

THE PRISON REFORM TRUST'S REVIEW ON "IN CARE, OUT OF TROUBLE" REPORT

In respect to the recent Prison Reform Trust's report DM felt that it made some very interesting facts that policy making frameworks are co-ordinated.

The report called for the UK Government to form a cabinet sub-committee to provide national leadership in protecting looked after children and young people from unnecessary criminalisation. The report also called for good joint working, proper regulation and policy development across the Welsh Government, to act as an example to local government services (it made the same calls for England).

DM raised the question of the Welsh Government following suit, informing a cabinet sub-committee. A short discussion followed around the Children's Commissioner for Wales report "The Right Care" Children's Rights in Residential Care. DM felt it was good to commend good practice.

In respect to the debate in plenary later this afternoon, DM confirmed he would open and JM would close the debate. Some of the areas that maybe addressed are advocacy, corporate parenting, education, residential care etc. DM emphasised the main priority was to ensure that looked after children's issues are in the arena early in the 5th Assembly and to endeavour to achieve outcomes.

JM stated there has been great progress and so much has been done, in terms of raising the profile of children looked after, but certain points need to be reinforced.

DM enquired if there were any questions from the group. In regard to educational matters, PM raised the question of there being no specifics to looked after children in ESTYN's report "Raising the Attainment, Achievement and Aspiration of Children who Are Looked After – A Best Practice Report. PM added in terms of accountability, he wasn't convinced that the Pupil Deprivation Grant was being looked at. It was suggested and agreed that the group write to Estyn asking them to undertake a thematic inspection of education provision for looked after children.

ACTION: DM TO WRITE TO ESTYN

In terms of good practice, HD stated a key scheme; which is linked to the When I am Ready Scheme needs to secure outcomes for looked after children. DJ stated she agreed with all the points raised, but there is still the need to 'pin down' what outcomes actually look like for looked after children as the stigma of being looked after is also affecting them. DJ added that Voices From Care are endeavouring to put out a positive image of looked after children.

JM raised the question of the All Wales Advocacy approach currently being stalled and it requiring a joined up approach to collate all the information from advocacy providers. JM would like to see the advocacy approach pushed forward as recommended by Sir Ronald Waterhouse in his report that an advocacy person is visiting residential homes.

DM stated that advocacy would be in the groups work plan as well as stability, educational attainment and poverty of ambition, emphasizing that advocacy is very important on a national basis.

HD informed that the Regulation Inspection Act would provide opportunities to influence the new Inspection Framework and encouraged all present to contribute to the consultations that are due out.

DM raised the question of looked after children being involved in the inspections of residential homes as he felt that participation is very important. DJ stated that looked after

children are not involved on a regular basis, with some local authorities more approachable than others, but there are 'pockets of both good practice and participation. JM raised the question of the inconsistency in good practice and that advocacy was about safeguarding and participation, adding that children and young people say that once the inspectors are gone, they are not seen again. JM felt in other words that young people 'put up' and 'shut up' and expressed her belief that visiting advocates are really good. DJ stated the need to remind people of the good skills that young people and care leavers have.

MT, in terms of participation felt there were two levels; input and practice on the ground level and felt there were better methods of engaging young people for example the internet. MT mentioned a piece of work that Barnardos have carried out on accommodation for looked after children and care leavers and the gaps that have been identified of which are currently being looked at under the Housing Act.

Linking in with what had previously been said; DJ informed that Voices From Care are working with a group of young people in Carmarthenshire which runs once a month in Llanelli Library; the group are working on the Attachment Aware(AA) School Scheme which is currently running in Bath looking to getting other young people's ideas around the Scheme. Although the Carmarthenshire group who are taking the lead on researching around Attachment Aware is made up of care experienced young people – the Scheme is for all young people within secondary school in Carmarthenshire. It has been mentioned that in the future an idea around training for teachers etc. could possibly be put in place to train professionals around the positives of the AA Scheme – hopefully inspiring the schools to put the AA Scheme into practice.

ACTION: DJ TO FEEDBACK A PROGRESS REPORT AT NEXT MEETING

TD raised the question of what happens to/with care leavers for example are they exempt from paying Council Tax as they are in England. A short discussion took place around care leavers needing a really good care package.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

DM informed; as they are the experts, he was seeking to put together a training and development package delivered directly from looked after young people for Assembly Members in the NAW.

It was noted the groups work plan would cover post legislative scrutiny for example to ask the NAW how things are working.

A short discussion took place around when the When I am Ready scheme may be coming in.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was agreed the next meeting be scheduled in the Autumn Term and to book a larger meeting room to accommodate members.

ACTION: RW TO LIAISE WITH S. SHARPE

There being no further business the meeting closed.