

Meeting of the Cross Party Group for

Looked After Children

Wednesday 15th November 2017

12.30–1.30

AMs present:

Lee Waters AM —Chairperson

In attendance:

Tim Crahart – Business Support Manager, Voices From Care Cymru – (minute taker)

Beth Beynon –Stepping Stones

Mary Clune – BASW

Deborah Jones – Voices From Care Cymru

Reverend Philip Manghan - Catholic Education Service

Sean O’Neil – Children in Wales

Emma Sullivan – Children in Wales

Menna Thomas – Barnardo’s Cymru

Rachael Vaughan – Voices From Care Cymru

Catriona Williams – Co-Chair Voices From Care Cymru/Children in Wales

Charlotte Wooders – The Fostering Network Wales

Apologies received from:

David Melding AM —Chairperson

Tom Davies Childrens Society

Sharon Lovell, NYAS

Leoni Oxenham, Policy Adviser, Children’s Commissioner for Wales

Simon Thomas AM

1. Welcome and introduction from the Chair

LW opened the meeting and explained that he would be chairing, as DM was unwell.

He also explained the Huw Irranca-Davies AM would no longer be part of the group as he is now the new minister for children and social care.

2. Minutes

Minutes of the meeting held on 20th June 2017 were confirmed as accurate by PM and DJ.

3. Matters Arising

SL was due to deliver a presentation to the group but had to give her apologies. It was proposed that it is rescheduled for the next meeting of the group.

Action – SL to present to the next group

An update was requested regarding the St David's Fund. The fund has gone to Local Authorities who are required to report back to the Welsh Government. Attendees were unaware of this.

Action – LW to write to the new minister to ask for an update on the St David's Fund.

4. Public Accounts Committee

LW reported to the group that the committee is taking its time to get the investigation right.

Adam Price AM and Vikki Howells AM are now on the Committee and LW will remain on it. The Committee is considering scene setting a series of evidence. They would also like to take a child's life cycle point of view of the system. MT stated that Barnardos are releasing a paper on Care & Adolescence in the forthcoming week. It highlighted the need for a multi-agency approach. Barnardos would also like to see a focus on adolescence in the PAC investigation.

Action – MT to circulate the Care & Adolescence paper to the group

PM raised the issue that there is no consistency across Wales. There are four Education Consortia but they do not match the police authorities or health boundaries. LW stated that Bridgend had been an anomaly in boundary issues but that is being addressed. CW said that accountability is an issue with consortia.

DJ raised the issue of young parents having children removed due to their care status. VFCC has undertaken desktop research into this area. She also said that there hasn't enough research into understanding the trauma caused by being placed into the care system.

DJ stated that this was the first time that value and young people has been considered.

LW said he had a discussion with the Children's Commissioner for Wales and was told that young people are feeling that they are a commodity. This raised the question of whether private care companies should be involved in the delivery of care.

AC said that there is a perverse financial incentive for private companies to hold on to young people for longer than they need to.

PM said that we need to stop pathologising young people. Is there an issue of re-traumatising them within care services. Do young people have mental health issues or are they reacting to poor services?

MC was concerned that in order to reduce costs, private companies would be using poorly paid staff, who were also poorly trained and then delivering poor services.

DJ would welcome scrutiny of private companies.

Action – DJ to send LW a paper on the private residential sector.

5. Ministerial Advisory Group

LW started by asking for an update on the MAG.

DJ stated that Voices From Care Cymru (VFCC) is coproducing guidance on corporate parenting as part of the MAG workplan.

CW said that it is a large group and was unsure how stakeholders were being involved. She felt there should be more opportunity for people to give their views. SO'N said there is an opportunity for third sector representatives to be the vice chair. There has been a meeting the day before which had been chaired by Phil Evans, where an update on the programme had been given. It was noted that a lot of the current activities are due to end in April 2018. The next MAG meeting is taking place on the 7th December where there will be an update on the whole plan.

There is a Welsh Government aspiration for less children being admitted to the care system. Education, courts and the youth justice system are not strongly emphasised in the current plan. It was identified that kinship care is an area which needs further development within the plan.

MC and AC fed back that Social Workers had no knowledge of the work of the MAG. They were unfamiliar with the term of reference or aims of the group.

LW was keen to hear any issues in relation to the MAG.

Action – To provide LW with feedback on the MAG

SO'N said that the next CPG meeting is vital in the shaping of the MAG.

It was also stated that CAMHS representation on the MAG would be valuable

Action – LW to check whether there is a CAMHS representative on the MAG.

6. Presentation and Q and A Session from VFC on Contact and lack of contact with siblings

Rachael Vaughan delivered a presentation on contact.

ES stated that wellbeing is an issue, which keeps being raised by young people. AC asked whether there were any examples of resilience being built through having contact with family/siblings. It was believed that there had not been any research in this area. The importance of a strengths based approach was recognised by the group. LW stated that he was struck by the vulnerability of care experienced young people when he attended VFCC events. DJ added that VFCC is doing a lot of work to flip the stigma around having experience of the care system and gave the example of the Proud to be me event. They are also linked with their sister organisations around the UK through the Five Nations one voice project which is also working on addressing stigma.

ES updated the group on a piece of work CIW and VFCC were leading on. They are developing a guide for young people on contact with siblings and their rights. It was noted that there are differences in their rights depending upon whether children are adopted or looked after. ES also stated that there are issues with sibling caregivers, for example when a sibling is caring for a child who is then subsequently adopted and they are not allowed contact. This can be traumatic for both parties.

7. Any other business

MC raised the issue of educational outcomes for care experienced young people. Northern Ireland has seen a large increase in academic attainment. DJ is aware of positive attachment schools in Carmarthenshire.

Action – DJ to see if someone from Northern Ireland or Carmarthenshire could present to the CPG on educational attainment

8. Date of next meeting

DJ to liaise with David Melding regarding the date of the next meeting.

ACTION: DJ to liaise with David Melding