

Meeting of the Cross Party Group for

Looked After Children

Tuesday 10th July 2018

12.30–1.30

AMs present:

David Melding AM – Chairperson (DM)

In attendance:

Anna Collins – Consultant Social Worker – Bridgend (AC)

Deborah Jones – CEO, Voices From Care Cymru (DJ)

Sean O’Neil – Children in Wales (SON)

Sharon Lovell – NYAS Cymru

Reverend Philip Manghan - Catholic Education Service

Rachel Thomas – Policy Adviser, Children’s Commissioner for Wales

Lucy Treby – Improvement and Development Manager, Social Care Wales

Heidi Keiser – NSPCC

Menna Thomas – Barnardo’s Cymru

Llinos Madeley – Clerk, Assembly Policy & Legislative Committee Service

Paula Foley – Caseworker Jenny Rathbone AM

Ashley Lister – Councillor for Grangetown

Luke Young – Head of Policy & Communications for Jeremy Miles AM

Sian Thomas – Research Team Leader, Assembly Commission Staff

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

Apologies received from:

Lee Waters AM

Bethan T James – Carmarthenshire County Council (BTJ)

Dan Willis – Stepping Stones

Maria Boffey – Head of Operations, The Fostering Network Wales

Charlotte Wooders – Programme Manager, The Fostering Network Wales

Catriona Williams – Chief Executive, Children in Wales

1. Welcome and introduction from the Chair

DM opened the meeting and welcomed those in attendance. Apologies were then taken.

2. Annual General Meeting

DM presented the Annual Report to the group, explaining that it showed who had attended the CPG on Looked After Children in the past year, what had been discussed and any expenditure. He highlighted that the only expenditure related to in-kind secretariat services provided by Voices From care Cymru. There were no further questions about the report.

As there were no other AMs present to nominate DM to the position of Chair, he stated that he would assume that everyone was happy for him to continue in that position and would speak to other AMs, who attend the group, and ask that they nominate him in retrospect.

3. Minutes

Minutes of the meeting held on 13th March 2017 were reviewed for accuracy. DJ confirmed them as accurate.

4. Matters Arising

Matters arising were picked up through the agenda.

5. Public Accounts Committee

DM updated the group on the progress of the PAC. Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG) officials including DM have given evidence. The committee has been looking at how Local Authorities manage and develop services and consider aspects such as whether the private sector is too dominant.

Lynne Neagle AM gave evidence in private regarding the work of the Children, Young People and Education Committee (CYPE) such as the Mind over Matter report.

Sally Holland (Children's Commissioner for Wales) gave evidence regarding profit making in the private sector and targeted support.

There will be an interim report at the end of each phase.

DM stated that PAC reports are given the highest authority due to the intensive nature of the investigation.

6. Ministerial Advisory Group

The group last met on the 16th March and are now in the middle phase. Reports are coming through and will be published on the website. The Mind over matter was discussed as well as targeted outcomes for educational attainment.

DM stated that work is well advanced on updating Corporate Parenting guidance.

The approach in Scotland is that the First Minister is seen as the Corporate Grandparent. DM is keen to visit Scotland to see their approach to corporate parenting, as they have a strong model. Their process leading towards legislation whereas it is likely to be guidance in Wales. DJ and Chris Dunn from VFCC will be going and will invite Bethan T James from Carmarthenshire*.

DM went on to say that the group will be moving to some form of annual reporting*.

SL said that it is good to celebrate the achievements of MAG. There will be a conference planned with the Minister.

7. Mind Over Matter report

The National Assembly report; Mind Over Matter has now been published, a section of which focuses on looked after children.

The report was particularly alarming in that it described services* as:

‘being at “breaking point” and “in crisis”, with joint working arrangements between the NHS and local government on therapeutic services described as arguably falling “backwards”.’

There is a summary of evidence regarding looked after children in the report.

The reports states that the emotional and mental health needs of looked after children are not being assessed.

Action – CPG members to read ‘Mind Over Matter’ recommendation 23 as it relates to looked after children

SL stated that NYAS gave evidence and reported that there has been a significant increase in the call for advocacy for care experienced young people regarding mental health.

DM stated that some of the recommendations from the report were accepted ‘in principal’ by the Welsh Government. There was then some discussion as to what this meant in reality.

The Children, Young People and Education Committee are to focus on the recommendations from the report. Lynne Neagle is not content with the Welsh Government’s response.

DM said that there is evidence in the report that there is not enough intervention at the primary end and therefore CAMHS is overwhelmed.

AC asked if there is MAG representation from health. DM replied that this has been strengthened over the last few years. Previously the MAG was very children services focussed. Involvement from Youth justice has also increased.

8. AOB

DJ informed the group about research that CASCADE had undertaken into young care experienced parents who have had children removed. She mentioned that NYAS have run a conference looking at the issues.

A discussion then took place around whether all looked after children should have a wellbeing assessment rather than a mental health assessment, in order to avoid triggering services that are not needed. It was also recognised that there is a stigma around having a mental health diagnosis, whereas wellbeing should be the aim. DM stated that they should look at preventative services rather than acute services.

DJ stated that trauma related to abuse or being taken into care is being labelled as a mental health issue when it is a natural process. A more holistic approach should be adopted in addressing issues of trauma.

9. Date of next meeting

13th November 2018 at 12.30 in Committee Room 5, Ground Floor, Ty Hywel.