

RHONDDA CYNON TAF
CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD
ANNUAL REPORT
2018/19



RHONDDA CYNON TAF



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FOREWORD



Councillor Christina Leyshon
Cabinet Member for Children & Young People
Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board

It is with great pleasure, that I present to you the Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report for the 2018/19 Municipal Year.

Before delving into the breadth of work undertaken by the Corporate Parenting Board, I think it is important to firstly define the role of a Corporate Parent and make it clear what our responsibilities are to the young people in our care. The concept of Corporate Parenting was introduced in 1998 by the then Secretary of State for Health, Frank Dobson, who outlined the duties of members towards Children who are Looked After: *“For children who are looked after, your council has a legal and moral duty to try to provide the kind of loyal support that any good parents would give to their children...you should do your utmost to make sure that those children in public care get a good start in life...”*

The Council as a whole shares the ‘Corporate Parenting’ responsibility and all Elected Members must be proactive within their own remit. The Corporate Parenting Board is the principle place within the Council for a select few cross-party Elected Members and officers to meet on a regular basis as critical friends, to support, challenge and strive for stronger collaborative working to ensure the best possible outcomes for the children and young people who are looked after in our communities.

During my first year as Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board, I have taken part in many challenging debates and discussions but it is important to note that with these challenges, often arise positive outcomes and success stories. Within this report, I hope to shed light on the wide range of areas covered at the Corporate Parenting Board meetings, which, in my opinion, has allowed all professionals, and young people who have participated, a transparent and non-judgemental environment to voice our thoughts on what is an ever-challenging service area.

As Corporate Parents, we will never become complacent and where possible, we will continue to improve the services that we deliver. Through emotional and academic support, we will remain united to ensure that our children and young people feel happy, safe and in control of their lives and are able to overcome the barriers they face.

I would like to take this opportunity to extend my gratitude to all Members of the Corporate Parenting Board, both new and longstanding; and, of course, to the officers who continue to work hard and have been integral in stimulating robust discussion at our meetings. Lastly, I would like to say thank you to the young people who have given up their time to attend our meetings. As always, their presence at our meetings has been fundamental, as it is not only vital to hear of their personal concerns, but we also take great pride in hearing of their great successes.

I will conclude by echoing our continued aspiration, which is to see the day that every child is treated with love and respect and where no child is taken into care. We are fully aware of the rising numbers of Children Looked After on both a National and Local level but our commitment as Corporate Parents is to ensure that the children and young people of Rhondda Cynon Taf are safe from harm and given the care and support that they deserve, regardless of numbers.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Leysha', is centered on the page. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'C'.

WHAT IS THE CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD?

“As Councillors, you have a major role to play in ensuring that those children who are cared for by your council have the best care that they can possibly receive...the duty on you is to do all you can to ensure these children can be the best they can be.” Keith Towler, Children’s Commissioner for Wales, 2009.

The role of the Corporate Parenting Board (CPB) is to ensure that the Council is fulfilling its corporate duties towards Children Looked After (CLA). The Board was established to monitor, challenge and develop areas within the Children’s Services to ensure the best outcomes for our children and young people.

Every child should be happy, healthy and safe; they should be provided with support for them to thrive and achieve their goals; and they should be open to developing emotionally and socially. It is our duty, as Corporate Parents, to ensure that the children and young people who enter our care system are given these opportunities.

Our vision will:

- Result in better outcomes and life experiences for children looked after
- Compensate for any disadvantage they experience
- Improve the Council’s performance
- Produce lower costs to the Council in caring for children

MEET THE CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD



Councillor C Leyshon
(Chair)



Councillor G Hopkins
(Vice Chair)



Councillor R Yeo



Councillor J Rosser



Councillor L Jones



Councillor S Rees-Owen



Councillor J James

TERMS OF REFERENCE

- ✚ To take the lead in ensuring that the Council fulfils its responsibilities as corporate parent to children who are looked after and formulate Council policy in respect of children who are looked after and children in need.
- ✚ To ensure that all Groups and divisions within the Council work together in order to promote best outcomes for children who are looked after and children in need.
- ✚ To promote effective relationships with key partner agencies in the best interests of children who are looked after and children in need.
- ✚ To monitor the implementation of the Action Plan arising from the Best Value Review of Services to children looked after, in addition to monitoring outcomes for children looked after and children in need.
- ✚ To consider the outcomes and promote positive learning practices following consideration of Child Practice Reviews
- ✚ In accordance with HMIP to routinely review the offending rates of LAC by gender to ensure that the Corporate Parenting Board understand patterns of offending by girls and are able to take actions to address where necessary.
- ✚ To consider the impact of relevant other systems/agencies (e.g. health, courts, schools) and see how these could be improved.
- ✚ To seek the views of children looked after - the advocacy service will be asked to facilitate.
- ✚ To invite representatives from other agencies to attend as appropriate.
- ✚ To report directly to Cabinet through an Annual report of the Board.

CROSS PARTY MEMBERSHIP:

- Cabinet Member for Children & Young People (Chair),
- Cabinet Member for Adult Community Services (Vice Chair),
- Cabinet Member for Education & Lifelong Learning,
- The Chair of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee,
- One Member from the Largest Opposition Party,
- One Non Executive Member of the ruling group,
- One Member of the Council not from the ruling group or the majority opposition group.
- NYAS (National Youth Advocacy Service) is also invited to attend the meetings.

THE OFFICERS WHO SUPPORT THE CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD ARE:

- Group Director, Community & Children's Services
- Director, Legal & Democratic Services
- Service Director, Children's Services
- Service Director, Access, Engagement & Inclusion
- Head of Safeguarding and Support
- Head of Looked After
- Complaints & QA Manager
- Senior Executive & Regulatory Business Officer
- Other officers depending on the business of the meeting.

VISION

The role of the corporate parent is to seek for children in public care the outcomes every good parent would want for their own children. The local authority has a legal and moral duty to provide support to the children it is responsible for looking after.

All Elected Members must be confident that the children who are looked after within RCT:

- Are safe.
- Have good homes in a secure and caring environment.
- Are placed within the local authority area, close to their homes and communities, as far as is possible.
- Have decent schooling.
- Are not being drawn into antisocial behavior.
- Are healthy.
- Are developing socially and emotionally.
- Are provided with help to cope with the problems they have in growing up.
- Are prepared for their transition to adulthood.
- Have ambitions for themselves.
- Are helped to achieve to the maximum of their ability.
- Have high aspirations and are able to show pride in their achievements
- Are provided with support to cope with their failures.

CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER IN RHONDDA CYNON TAF

On 31st March 2019, there were a total of 674 children and young people under the Local Authority's care. The figure is largely in line with that of the previous year, which demonstrated that 676 children and young people were looked after within Rhondda Cynon Taf.

The reason children become looked after throughout the country, cannot be based solely on a singular reason. The reasons are complex and include the interaction of demographic and socio economic trends, as well as factors connected to the way the local area organises and deploys its services to vulnerable children and families. Rhondda Cynon Taf has some of the most deprived communities in Wales and it is, therefore, impossible to determine an 'appropriate' number for the rate of children becoming looked after.

Age	Total
0	35
1	35
2	36
3	36
4	22
5	26
6	36
7	41
8	38
9	29
10	38
11	43
12	43
13	34
14	39
15	45
16	55
17	43

Although the demand for children and young people becoming looked after continues to pose a financial risk to the Council, it remains a key priority to continue to strive for a safe reduction in Children Looked After numbers and to deliver the best possible outcomes for the children and young people of our County.

March 2019 figures show the broad age range of the children and young people looked after within RCT, with 70 aged between just 0 – 1 and 98 aged between 16 and 17.

Gender	Total
Female	297
Male	377

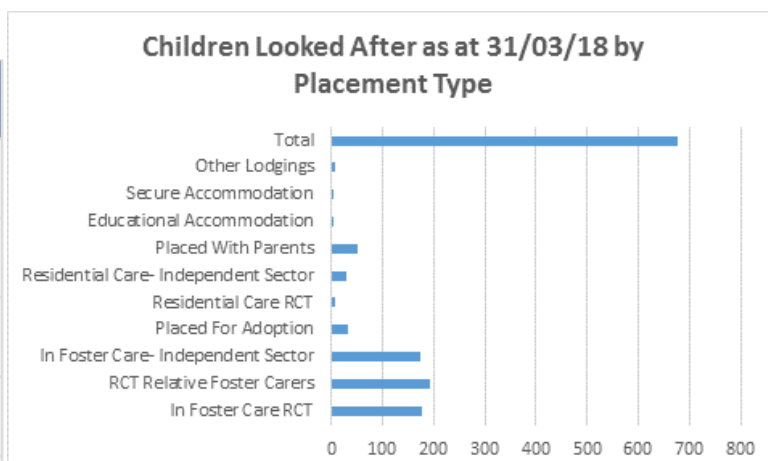
674

Figures highlight that there were 80 more males than females by 31st March 2019.

The below tables outline March 2019 Placement Type Data in comparison to March 2018 data.

CLA Placement Type	Total
Education	1
In Foster Care Ind Sector	158
In Foster Care RCT	171
Other Lodgings	10
Placed For Adoption	24
Placed With Parents	60
RCT Relative Foster Carers	204
Residential Care Ind Sector	33
Residential Care RCT	12
Secure	1

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The 2019 data evidences that the majority of children and young people in Rhondda Cynon Taf are placed in foster placements (including kinship carers), which is largely similar to the previous year of 80%; and other Local Authorities.

Where it is safe to do so and in the interest of the young person, the child is placed with their parents but other options include adoption, independent living, secure units and educational accommodation.

It is recognised that each young person placed within our care has a plethora of different needs and that although a specific placement work for one young person, it may not be suitable for another.

KEY INITIATIVES OF THE CHILDREN'S SERVICES AREA

- **The RCT Resilient Families Programme**, which aims to assess the circumstances at home, identify key actions and prevent destructive behaviour cycles in the hope that the children can remain safely at home. Details can be found [here](#).
- **Cwm Taf Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)**, which continues to have a positive impact on outcomes for children, as well as identifying further improvements for the future.
- **A Placement Strategy**, which provides children who cannot stay at home, a greater choice of high quality local placements
- **Cwm Taf Safeguarding Board website**, which provides information, advice and guidance to the public and professionals whose work brings them into contact with children, young people, adults at risk and their families. Details can be found [here](#).

WORK OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

Among other updates, the Corporate Parenting Board remain committed to the work programme, which consists of regular visits and updates in respect of certain aspects of the Children’s service area. These regular updates allow us to continually review data, progress and outcomes; along with having first hand experiences with our staff, young people and service users.

FRONTLINE VISITS

The Corporate Parenting Board has established a systematic process for ensuring that regular visits are undertaken to the frontline teams in Children’s Services to ensure that we continue to meet high standards. This practice is consistent with both recommendation 41 of the Victoria Climbié report and with a previous CIW safeguarding inspection report recommendation.

<u>Location</u>	<u>Team</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Attendees</u>
Tonypandy Office	West Intensive Intervention Team	10am Wednesday 19 th September, 2018	Cllr Leyshon Cllr Hopkins Cllr Yeo Cllr Rosser
Ty Trevithick Office	East Intensive Intervention Team	10am Wednesday 17 th October, 2018	Cllr Leyshon Cllr Hopkins
Glyncornel	Glyncornel	10am Wednesday 20 th February, 2019	Cllr Leyshon Cllr Hopkins Cllr Rosser
Tonypandy Office	West & East Enquiry & Assessment Team	10am Wednesday 16 th January, 2019	Cllr Leyshon Cllr Hopkins

Tonypandy Office	East DCT & Early Years	10am Wednesday 6 th February, 2019	Cllr Leyshon Cllr Hopkins
Maritime Industrial Estate, Pontypridd	Youth Offending Service	10am Wednesday 13 th February 2019	Cllr Leyshon Cllr Hopkins
Ty Catrin	Ty Catrin	10am Wednesday 13 th March, 2019	Cllr Leyshon Cllr Hopkins

Members of the Corporate Parenting Board recognise the pressures and challenges placed upon the teams in the children services area and strongly feel that it is important for Members and staff alike to have the opportunity to discuss any concerns they may have on an informal and friendly basis. Along with any issues, it is particularly warming for Members to hear of the staff's day-to-day achievements, which we might otherwise not have the chance to hear.

In an attempt to give each Board Member the opportunity to meet the teams working within the Children's Services departments, the above visits were scheduled to take place at various points throughout the Municipal Year. Unfortunately, a number of the Board Members were unable to attend the visits due to heavy workloads but for those who were fortunate enough to be there, it was once again pleasing to hear of the services provided to children in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

Members would like to take the opportunity to thank the management and staff for their warm welcome, valuable time and continuous hard work in ensuring that RCT provide its children with the best services and opportunities possible. Throughout all of the visits, staff impressed with their vast knowledge and enthusiasm and without a doubt; the Board hope to continue making these vital visits to our teams in the 2019/20 Municipal Year.

REGULATION 73 REPORTS

As well as undertaking regular visits to the frontline teams, updates are presented to the Board at each meeting, in respect of the current position of the residential Children's Homes and respite service. The reports are exempt to ensure that the Board receive a detailed picture of the goings on at each home, and are inclusive of case studies, which inform us of the everyday challenges faced by our hardworking staff, any areas of concern and, of course, the wellbeing of the children who occupy the homes.

The Board were pleased to see that the reports presented in 2018/19 Municipal Year, continued to highlight the high standard of care provided by staff. Each update gave further insight into the particular challenges associated with looking after and trying to develop young people who have been disadvantaged and traumatised by their life experiences and where issues were identified, the Board witnessed careful risk management planning and decision making to manage the needs of the young people.

At the beginning of the 2018/19 Municipal Year, the Corporate Parenting Board were delighted to welcome back Mr John Llewellyn-Thomas, who was able to provide Members with details into his independent visits to the Children's Homes. Although the regular reports received are highly informative, Members agreed that Mr Llewellyn-Thomas' presence provided the opportunity to gauge further into the process behind them and learn from his breadth of experience. Due to recent changes made to Welsh Government Regulations, children's home visits are now undertaken internally with quarterly updates presented to the Corporate Parenting Board. Members recognise the value of the independent reviews undertaken by Mr J. Llewellyn-Thomas, and the constructive criticism and challenge that came with them, and it was pleasing to learn that Mr Llewellyn-Thomas will seek to undertake annual inspections of the three children's homes. That being said, the Corporate Parenting Board would like to extend thanks to Mr. John Llewellyn-Thomas, whose work has been invaluable over the years.

SOCIAL SERVICES COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS

An integral role of the Corporate Parenting Board is to regularly receive updates in respect of the operation and effectiveness of the statutory Social Services complaints procedure. At each meeting, we monitor the number of complaints received, the nature of the complaints and any lessons learnt, along with noting those enquiries received from Elected Members, A.M's and M.P's.

The Corporate Parenting Board acknowledge the importance of feedback from those who use our services, as not only does it allow improvements to be made to the service where possible but further insight is gained into the fully deserved compliments received for the hardworking staff.

It is encouraging to note that the reports presented to the Board are comprehensive and fully transparent; and when questioned about the nature of the complaints, the officer was always able to provide further details for Member information. It was also pleasing to note the compliments received throughout the year; although Members are aware of the likelihood that many more compliments had been received but overlooked by the busy staff. The Corporate Parenting Board would like to take the

opportunity to thank the staff for their hard work within what can be a challenging service area and to encourage them to make note of all compliments in the future.

In 2019/20, the Board welcome further updates regarding the effectiveness of the statutory Social Services complaints procedure and hope that officers continue to produce results at such a high standard.

ADVOCACY

As part of the Corporate Parenting Board Terms of Reference, for many years, representatives from the NYAS (National Youth Advocacy Service) have also been invited to attend meetings. The attendance of NYAS at our meetings has been invaluable as it has strengthened the link between the advocacy service and Children Services and has allowed us to discuss in depth issues that affect service delivery in the community on a strategic level and to work in partnership to provide improved and better outcomes.



In the 2019/20 Municipal Year, Tros Gynnal Plant (TGP) Cymru will be the new advocacy service, in place of NYAS, following a retendering process with Merthyr and Bridgend Councils. The Corporate Parenting Board would like to thank NYAS for their invaluable contribution to discussions within our Board meetings.

[More information on the services provided by the NYAS can be found here.](#)

UPDATES TO THE CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

Alongside the regular work programme, which includes statutory items, the Board receive updates and annual reports where necessary. The Board welcome information in respect of the exciting new initiatives within Cwm Taf, reviews into the service areas and the opportunity to have a positive impact on the lives of the children and young people within our care.

INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER UPDATES

The Adoption and Children Act 2002 requires the Local Authority to appoint Independent Reviewing Officers to conduct reviews for Children who are Looked After and monitor the Local Authority's performance in relation to implementing the care plans for individual children. Specific guidance is entitled "Independent Reviewing Officer Guidance Wales 2004". Therefore, regular reports are presented to the Board to monitor the activities of the IRO service.

Members were pleased to learn that a key priority of the service was the continuing emphasis on the child being at the centre of the Reviewing process and that part of this process is to ensure that each child has the same reviewing officer throughout to ensure they fully understand the decisions made. It was explained that as a commitment to this priority, each of the IRO's were now chairing both the CLA reviews and Child Protection Conferences, which not only results in better planning but provides consistency for the child and is in line with good practice defined in the Social Services Wellbeing Act.

CARE INSPECTORATE WALES UNANNOUNCED INSPECTIONS

The Corporate Parenting Board received an update in respect of the Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) unannounced inspections at, Beddau and Bryndar Children's Homes, and Nant Gwyn Respite Home. The Corporate Parenting Board welcome such reports as they both highlight areas of good practice and the areas

required for improvement and development within the RCT residential children's homes.

The inspection process involves unannounced visits to each home, where individual meetings are held with the young people and staff. Along with the areas identified for improvement, there were many positives detailed within the inspection reports that it is necessary to draw attention to. The feedback from CIW gave confidence to the Board that the young people are well nurtured, experience a good sense of well-being and most importantly, they are listened to. It is also pleasing to note that when questioned about the points identified by CIW, officers provided honest feedback and personal case studies, which fully enlightened the Board Members.

In 2019/20, Members encourage unannounced inspections by the CIW as it is essential to receive external feedback, which minimises complacency and ensures that the high standards are continued to be met.

FOSTERING WELLBEING PROGRAMME

Following an update in the 2017/18 Municipal Year, Members were told that Welsh Government funding was awarded to deliver a social pedagogy pilot (April 2017 – March 2019) to test and evaluate social pedagogy principles (focused on education and the upbringing of children) in a foster care environment. Following an Expression of Interest, Cwm Taf was chosen as the pilot region to deliver learning and share best practise across service boundaries with the aim of embedding a shared approach. In the Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report for the 2017/18 Municipal Year, Members identified the Fostering Wellbeing Programme as an item that we would welcome further information on in 2018/19.



During the meeting, Members learned that the aim of the programme was for participants to establish a shared and consistent approach to meeting the needs of children and young people who are looked after and to develop skills, which will ensure that they are responsible advocates. There were three series of five master classes, which were based around various different themes and included key speakers who shared their knowledge on areas, which affect a child in the care system.

It was pleasing to learn that the classes were well attended with a 94% success rate and especially interesting for Members to learn of personal experiences and the evaluation process, which was undertaken in order to improve and sustain what had quickly become such a vital service. 182 participants and over ¾ attending three or four of the classes.

The Corporate Parenting Board was impressed by both the short-term and long-term outcomes of the programme and its holistic approach and would like to take this opportunity to thank all participants.

INDEPENDENT SECTOR MONITORING

In the 2017/18 Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report, Members highlighted the desire to receive future updates in respect of our independent sector and non-framework providers.

As such, during the year, Members were provided with information regarding the commissioning and monitoring of external placements for Children Looked After in RCT. It was interesting for Members to gain a better understanding of the process for identifying placements for children and young people and an understanding of the Children's Commissioning Support Resource (CCSR), an online secure portal developed by the Welsh Government, which is used to identify external placements.

During the meeting, the Board spoke of the Children's Commissioning Consortium Cymru (4C's), which RCT is a member of and are able to commission placement with external providers through the All Wales Framework. It was particularly assuring that although there are a number of Non-Framework providers available, which aren't subject to the quality assurance checks of the 4C's, they are continually monitored through the review process and must also be CIW registered.

Members learned that, as of the 18th October 2018, RCT had placed 163 children and young people within the external independent fostering sector; and 30 children and young people within the external residential care sector. During the 2019/20 Municipal Year, the Corporate Parenting Board remain committed to receiving updates in respect of our External Placements and it will be interesting to compare future figures to those received in this Municipal Year.

TWO SIDES WEBSITE

At the request of the Corporate Parenting Board in the 2017/18 Annual Report, Members received an informative presentation and demonstration of the Children Looked After Website 'Two Sides'. It is clear that we are living in an age, in which the internet is an integral part of the lives of many and now more than ever, it is essential that our



website is a useful resource to provide important information about the services and support available.

During the meeting, Members were pleased to learn that officers were working in partnership with Voices from Care and had held a consultation day with a small group of Children Looked After to revisit the Two Sides website with the vision to improve its content, concept and appearance.

Although the demonstration of the website left Members pleased with its bright appearance and content, it was widely appreciated that it is the opinion of the young people which truly matters and although they acknowledged the positive concept of the website, the young people felt that it lacked various opportunities, wasn't well publicised and was considered to be dated. The young people felt that in order to increase its use, it would need to be more interactive and modern in appearance, with less text.

During the meeting, Members were fortunate enough to be provided with a short demonstration of the 'Wicid' website, which is a central source of information for young people, regardless of whether they are looked after. As well as upcoming local events and cultural activities, the website seeks to promote mental health awareness and information on budgeting, housing and education. The Board learned that the young people from the consultation group also felt it necessary for hyperlinks to the 'Wicid' website to be included on the Two Sides website. The Corporate Parenting Board acknowledged the challenge of producing completely new content with few resources, and agreed with the young people, that links could be a simple way of directing users to and from each of the websites, in order for them to reap the benefits.

The Corporate Parenting Board appreciate the value of having such a website for our Children Looked After and recognise the benefits of digital developments within our communities. In 2019/20, Members welcome a further update in respect of the Two Sides website in order for progress to be monitored.

[The Two Sides website can be found here.](#)

STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION PROGRAMME

Members were provided with an informative presentation in respect of RCT's Step in the Right Direction, which is a corporately funded, paid programme for young people aged 16 - 25 who are or were previously looked after. Much like the Council's Apprenticeship Scheme, Step in the Right Direction offers the young people two years of experience in a placement tailored to the individual's needs. Unlike many other programmes, Step in the Right Direction provides young people with a number

of placement opportunities in their first year to give them experiences in different departments, before deciding which is more suited to the individual. Following completion of the programme, the young person will have had relevant experience, transferrable skills and gained a number of qualifications, which could result in full time employment.

The presentation was a fantastic opportunity for the Corporate Parenting Board to ask questions and enhance the understanding of the support and employment opportunities available to the Children Looked After.

Officers from the Employment, Education and Training team have been invited to attend the Corporate Parenting Board in the 2019/20 Municipal Year to enlighten Members on the exciting initiatives available.

For more information on the Step in the Right Direction programme, please [watch this video](#).

CWM TAF REGIONAL STATEMENT OF INTENT FOR SUPPORTING CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES

The Corporate Parenting Board were presented with the Cwm Taf Regional Statement of Intent for Supporting Children, Young People and Families. Given Members' role as Corporate Parents, it was highly beneficial to receive the update on the shared vision, principles and objectives, which will direct the work of all partners when addressing Welsh Government legislation. The Statement will seek to support each partner agency in Cwm Taf in working together to provide an integrated service for vulnerable children, young people and their families.



The Corporate Parenting Board look forward to receiving the Implementation Plan for future consideration, prior to its final sign off by the Cabinet.

PUPIL DEPRIVATION GRANT

The Corporate Parenting received an update on the Pupil Development Grant for Looked After Children, which was funded by Welsh Government and managed by the Consortium. The Grant's purpose is to enhance the work already undertaken by the Local Authorities to raise the educational attainment of Children Looked After and Formerly CLA pupils to close the attainment gap.

During the meeting, it was interesting to learn that the Grant was currently managed centrally by the Central South Consortium, with Directors of Education from each Local Authority agreeing the key priorities of the monies. These priorities include:

- Raising attainment/achievement;
- Improving attendance;
- Reducing exclusions;
- Enhancing the capacity of schools to improve the outcomes for pupils through training and support, through school to school working and the sharing of good practice (hopefully within the cluster) and;
- Ensuring that partnerships across the region continue to develop within CSC, schools, Social Care and other agencies.

Members also learned of the pilot of the PERMA profiling tool at several schools. The software would support the identification of an individual, school and home approaches to develop self-awareness, resilience and better emotional awareness, which Members recognised as being essential.

Overall, the outcome data for academic year 2017/18 was positive and highlighted improvements in the educational attainment of pupils in Key Stage 2 and 3. It was also positive to learn that the attendance levels of CLA pupils was better than the general school population of RCT and although the overall exclusion rate within RCT had increased, the rate of exclusion per 1000 pupils had reduced in relation to CLA pupils.

In 2019/20, Members feel it would be beneficial to receive comparison data across other Local Authorities to ensure the best possible outcomes. Due to a number of concerns raised at the meeting, the Board would also appreciate the results of an evaluation of the school cluster model, which was undertaken in 2018/19 in comparison to providing the schools with the resources direct, which was the case in 2017/18.

VOICES FROM CARE – RCT FORUM

The RCT Forum, formally known as the Blueprint Forum had recently changed its name during a rebranding exercise. The main purpose of the Forum is to provide looked after young people and care leavers in RCT with opportunities to have their voice heard and to enable their life experiences to contribute at a strategic, policy and legislative level both locally and nationally.

In 2018/19, the Board were fortunate enough to receive two visits from representatives, including a young person from Voices from Care who had been successfully appointed as a Trainee Support Officer at the Forum. The Board were then provided with a summary of the work undertaken in previous months and had the opportunity to hear of the young person's personal progression, which was invaluable.

It would be impossible to detail *everything* achieved by the RCT Forum during 2018/19 but below is a taster of just a few of activities undertaken:

- ✚ **NSPCC** – The Forum had partnered with the NSPCC to focus on how positive mental health can be achieved;
- ✚ **NYAS Peer Advocacy Training** – Participants had undertaken a two day accredited course, focussing on becoming effective representatives for care experienced young people;
- ✚ **Two Sides Website** – Participants had worked closely with the RCT IRO team to consult with care experienced young people to develop the RCT Two Sides website content;
- ✚ **University of South Wales Atrium open evening** – Participants attended an open evening at the university where they were informed about the application process and higher education offers and were given the opportunity to partake in a taster session in Art, Music and Drama.
- ✚ **Corporate Parenting Youth Justice** – Participants learned about the support provided for care experiences young people in the criminal justice system and the preventative work undertaken to prevent re-offending.

It is important to note that as well as the engaging, influential and inspiring work outlined above which seeks to increase the confidence and wellbeing of the young people, the RCT Forum undertake an annual summer trip which is decided by the young people. In July 2018, the young people, accompanied by staff from Voices from Care, enjoyed a trip to Porthcawl Fair, where the group had copious amounts of fun together, which is an essential part of growing up.

As well as hearing of the vast amount of achievements, Members were once again delighted to hear first-hand of the success of one young woman who was formerly part of Voices from Care, before she was provided with an exciting placement opportunity. The young person's attendance at the meeting was once again fundamental. Each young person who attends a Board meeting provides Members with an emotive insight into his or her lives, which is difficult to convey in a written report. Whether they speak of their achievements, concerns or struggles, the Corporate Parenting Board are willing to listen and learn. Members cannot stress enough just how fantastic it was to hear a personal success story and would like to wish the young woman every success in her exciting future.

In the 2019/20 Municipal Year, the Corporate Parenting Board welcome more representatives to attend our meetings and to share their progress and more of their exciting initiatives. Receiving personal experiences of the Council's services from a young person who has utilised the system assists the Corporate Parenting Board in establishing where the Council needs to focus priorities for the benefit of the children in the looked after system and for care leavers to ensure that they receive the support and same.

[More information on Voices from Care can be found here.](#)



ANNUAL UPDATES TO THE CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

VALE, VALLEYS & CARDIFF REGIONAL ADOPTION ANNUAL REPORT 2017-18

Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Adoption Collaborative (VVC) provides a regional adoption service to the Vale of Glamorgan Council, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, Cardiff Council and Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council. VVC is one of the five regional Collaboratives which form part of the National Adoption Service in Wales (NAS). All adoption services are required to provide an annual review of their service as set out in Regulation 22 of the Local Authority Adoption Service (Wales) Regulations 2007.

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SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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Members value the service and feel that it is important to have sight of and review its progress. During the meeting, Members spoke of the provision of Life Journey Material for children and stressed its importance; the progression of agile working for members of staff; and concerns were raised around the decrease in recruitment of adopters but Members recognised that this is a National issue. Members were particularly pleased to note that the VVC had appointed a marketing officer to specifically work on increasing the number of adopters in the region.

The Corporate Parenting Board were told that the Annual Report had been presented to the Council's Children & Young People Scrutiny who had considered the report in depth, which Members did not want to duplicate. The Chair of the Scrutiny Committee, who also sits on the Corporate Parenting Board, advised that the Committee Members were content that previous recommendations were implemented, with more resources.

YOUNG CARERS ANNUAL REPORT

As well as being invited to attend moving and powerful events such as the Young Carers Conference and Social Care Awards, the Board received a detailed update on the excellent work of the service area.

- 298 young carers were currently known to the service and receive information and support. This was a limited increase in comparison to the 293 young carers in 2016-17, due to database review.
- Of the 76 Young Carers assessed in 2017-2018, 35 were referred onto the Young Carers project (Action for Children), 17 accessed the new sibling support groups, 2 were referred to the YAC service, 6 were assessed with no further action needed and the remaining 16 received support but decided it was no longer needed or were referred to another service.

Members acknowledge the difficulty in identifying young carers but were pleased to learn that 2018 had seen a 30% increase in referrals from schools and college campuses during the first three quarters which indicated the success of the rollout of the Schools Award. This had been highlighted as good practice among Local Authorities and had received positive feedback from Estyn.

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During the Corporate Parenting Board meeting, discussions arose around the families of the young carers and whether their needs were assessed. Members were assured that discussions take place early on in the process, whereby parents can be referred to adult services or provided with more information on the services available to support them. Members were advised that following additional support from the Welsh Government, whole family activities were arranged, which include short breaks and time outs for young carers and parent carers alike, which is highly important. It was also wonderful to learn that a residential trip had been organised for young carers, which had been a great success.

The Corporate Parenting Board recognise that it is difficult for young carers to attend our meetings, which take place in school/college hours but always welcome the opportunity to speak these truly inspirational young people, should it ever be convenient.

REGISTERED CHILDCARE PROVISION QUALITY UPDATE

The Registered Childcare Provision Quality Update is presented to the Corporate Parenting Board on an annual basis, as its main form of evaluation.

During 2018/19, Members were updated on the Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) registered childcare settings overseen by the Community, Wellbeing and Resilience Service (CWRS), six of which are run by the Local Authority. Members learned of the results of two recent inspections and of three inspections, which were due to take place within the upcoming year. The Corporate Parenting Board were pleased to learn that the recommendations had been or were in the process of implementation during the time of the report.

Members value the annual update as it provides an opportunity to evaluate the ongoing progress of each of the childcare settings. A key example of this is the use of the Welsh Language within the settings, whereby in 2017/18, Members noted that there were confidence issues with staff communicating in the medium of Welsh. In 2018/19, Members were encouraged to hear of the appointment of a Welsh Language Champion and a Monitoring officer, which sought to improve the standard of the Welsh language within each of the childcare settings.

In 2019/20, the Corporate Parenting Board look forward to hearing of the inspections and action plans to ensure that high standards are continued to be met. In particular, the Corporate Parenting Board would like a further update in respect of the Welsh language provision within the childcare settings.

SCRUTINY AND THE CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

The Corporate Parenting Board values the work of the Council's Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee and considers that there is a good synergy between the both. The Chair, Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee is also a member of the Corporate Parenting Board, which has created a stronger link, whereby the views of Scrutiny are regularly reported back to us, which assists us in avoiding any unnecessary duplication of work.

In addition to those reports detailed above, below are a number of reports and issues, which were identified and considered by both the Corporate Parenting Board and the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee.

CHILD AND ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE

Following Mr David Melding AM's visit to the Corporate Parenting Board in the previous Municipal Year, to discuss the work of the Ministerial Advisory Group for Improving Outcomes, discussions ensued around the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), with a number of concerns raised by Members.

During this year's meeting, Members were advised of an evaluation, which was carried out by the Institute of Public Care (IPC) to assess the therapeutic needs of 50% of Children Looked After within RCT and the children within Merthyr Tydfil. It was disappointing to learn that the results of the review indicated that Cwm Taf lacked a robust, integrated approach when caring for the therapeutic needs of the children and young people. Members were assured that Cwm Taf were reviewing the effectiveness of the therapy process and planned to employ two new therapists locally.

Robust discussions took place and it was pleasing to learn that a Welsh Government Task Group would be established to focus on early intervention and to review the recommendations within the Mind over Matter report. This includes a specific recommendation relating to Children Looked After, which states: *"That the Welsh Government, within six months of this report's publication, undertake a piece of work on the provision of emotional, behavioural and mental health support for looked after and adopted children"*.

Members had a lengthy discussion regarding concerns about the capacity of the service and the average waiting time for clients to be seen by a therapist. Another concern raised by Members was the support provided in schools by the teachers and also, for the teachers. Although Members were aware of the work undertaken to improve mental health support for school pupils at an early age, there were still concerns in terms of the pressure placed on teachers, the links to the families and communities outside of school and the increasing influence that social media has on young people. It was, however, pleasing to learn that there discussions were taking place around the employment of non-teaching staff to specifically focus on children with mental health problems.

Members were advised that a representative from CAMHS would be attending a meeting of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee and that the Chair would kindly provide our feedback at the meeting.

[Minutes of the Scrutiny meeting can be found here.](#)

COUNCIL TAX DISCRETIONARY RELIEF FOR CARE LEAVERS

Both the Corporate Parenting Board and the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee were provided with an update on the use of the Council's Discretionary Council Tax Relief Scheme for Care Leavers during 2018/19 and information on the recent Welsh Government announcement in relation to Council Tax support for Care Leavers from 1st April 2019.

During the Board's meeting, Members were told that in December 2017, the Council successfully committed to extending its Corporate Parenting Responsibility to Care Leavers where they had a responsibility to pay council tax in order to assist those young people's transition into independent living. Members learned that the young people who would benefit from the scheme had been identified and were provided with an application form for officers to determine whether they were eligible for any additional support. It was encouraging to learn that of the 165 young people in the Council's care, 25% had been identified as being eligible to a range of reliefs, so that no young person was liable to pay council tax during 2018/19.

Discussions ensued and Members were informed of the new Welsh Government regulations that will replace the Scheme and ensure all Care Leavers across Wales receive the same level of support in relation to council tax from 1st April 2019. It was pleasing to hear of Welsh Government's announcement regarding additional support

for the benefit of care leavers and particularly, pleasing to note that RCT had taken initiative as Corporate Parents in 2017 prior to this additional support.

Due to the importance of the announcement, it was beneficial for both the Board and the Scrutiny to receive the positive news and have the opportunity to comment.

[Minutes of the Scrutiny meeting can be found here.](#)

CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

Both the Corporate Parenting Board and the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee receive regular updates in respect of Foundation Phase, Key Stage 2 & 3 and the provisional Key Stage 4 outcomes. During this Municipal Year, we were received Educational Outcomes data for both the 2016-17 and 2017-18 academic years.

Overall, the updates were pleasing and evidenced that Rhondda Cynon Taf had progressed well with high levels of improvement in a number of areas. Discussions ensued and Members recognised that there is still more to be done, especially in supporting vulnerable learners to access mainstream education where possible, to reduce exclusions and to continue improvements, particularly in relation to educational attainment in Key Stage 4.

During the consideration of the 2016-17 data, Members of the Corporate Parenting Board felt it would be necessary to receive comparison data with other Local Authorities in respect of education attainment. As a result of this request, when considering the 2017-18 data, the Board received Central South Consortium comparison data as data at an All Wales level was limited. It was useful to compare RCT's results to those across the Consortium and it was particularly encouraging to note that attendance levels of CLA pupils in RCT was similar to those identified on a consortium wide basis.

During the meeting, Members also discussed the importance of each child within the Looked After system receiving a Personal Education Plan (PEP) and were pleased to learn that local guidance had been developed, along with training provided to professionals to ensure the effective completion of PEPs.

Discussion varied between the Corporate Parenting Board meetings and the Scrutiny meetings, but both sets of Members agreed that although the information received is comprehensive and detailed, it lacks sensitivity which makes it difficult to benchmark the progress of the Children Looked After. Therefore, in 2019/20, Members would be

grateful if updates were inclusive of personal case studies in order for us to consider the progress of the young people. Members were also informed that Estyn were working on a revised framework in order to guide local authorities in bench-marking progress, and feel it would be beneficial for the Board to receive further information on this when it is available.

[Minutes of the Scrutiny meeting that considered 2016-17 Data can be found here](#)

[Minutes of the Scrutiny meeting that considered 2017-18 Data can be found here](#)

THE CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD – MOVING FORWARD

I hope that it is evident to see that the Corporate Parenting Board consider a range of reports, presentations and data, which allows Members to focus on shared goals. The goal is crucial and remains the same: we will continue to seek for children in public care the outcomes every good parent would want for their own children. Despite times of austerity and the national rise in the number of children who are becoming looked after, we are committed to our duty to safeguard and will continually strive to provide the best possible care to those children and young people under our care.

In the 2019/20 Municipal Year, the Corporate Parenting Board would like to pay particular emphasis to the following:

REGULAR PERFORMANCE DATA

As previously mentioned, the regular performance data, allows Members to effectively analyse key areas, recognise the multitude of achievements and determine ways to further improve and enhance the services we provide.

The Board would like to continue to receive these comprehensive reports, which include qualitative information and allow Members to compare our performance to previous years and other Local Authorities.

It is key that Members regularly receive the statutory updates at each meeting, in order to closely monitor progress:

- ✚ Regulation 73 Reports
- ✚ Complaints & Compliments
- ✚ Advocacy Updates
- ✚ CIW Inspections reports in relation to the three Children's Homes

The Corporate Parenting Board would like to receive annual updates on the following reports:

- ✚ Miskin
- ✚ Youth Offending Service
- ✚ Vale, Valleys & Cardiff Regional Adoption Annual Report
- ✚ Registered Childcare Provision
- ✚ Independent Reviewing Officer Reports

Educational Outcomes

In addition, Members welcome the attendance of the young people who use our services. The Corporate Parenting Board thoroughly enjoy hearing of their successes and achievements; and recognise that is equally as important to hear of their concerns of suggestions for improvements. As such, along with updates in the following areas, Members wish to encourage the young people to attend future meetings, should their schedules permit:

 RCT Forum

 Young Carers Annual Report

Lastly, of course, Members will continue to visit our frontline teams and will report feedback at the end of the Municipal Year. Given the various changes made to services relating to office accommodation and that there is still relatively new service areas such as, the Resilient Families team, it is vital that the Board monitors progress against objectives. I hope to see all Board Members attending at least one visit, if their workload permits, in order to gain a better insight into the everyday work of our hard working members of staff.

In addition to the above updates, outlined below are the key themes, which, the Corporate Parenting Board wish to address in the coming year.

STRENGTHENING OUR LINK WITH SCRUTINY

As mentioned within this report, the relationship between the Corporate Parenting Board and the Council's Scrutiny Committees is invaluable and the Board would like to strengthen this. The Corporate Parenting Board membership comprises of the Chair of the Children & Young People's Scrutiny Committee, who successfully takes it upon herself to update on any work taken forward by the Committee and recommend any pieces of work that the Board may find useful.

Although Members work hard to maximise our resources and to avoid the duplication of discussions, it is often unavoidable given the content of the reports considered. In order to successfully assist this, the Corporate Parenting Board feel it would be beneficial if future reports outline the general discussions and thoughts of our colleagues in Scrutiny. This would further aid transparency and to allow Members to build upon the in depth discussions that have already taken place in Scrutiny.

In 2018/19, Cabinet Members and Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs have begun to meet on a quarterly basis to discuss their subsequent work programmes and share

ideas to improve service areas. The one to one meetings with the Chair & Vice-Chair of Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee have been key in developing our forward work plans and continuing the positive synergy. In 2019/20, Members would welcome further one to one meetings to help structure our work programmes and to ensure that all Members have the chance to comment on the important updates given by officers.

TWO SIDES WEBSITE MONITORING

As previously mentioned, the Corporate Parenting Board was pleased be provided with a demonstration of the Authority's website for Children Looked After 'Two Sides'.

During the next Municipal Year, it will be important for the Board to receive a further update and demonstration of the website. This will allow Members to monitor the improvements and to ensure that the feedback provided by the young people has been taken into consideration when developing the website's content, appearance and accessibility.

CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER – EDUCATION

A key objective of the Corporate Parenting Board is to ensure that the children and young people in the Local Authority's care receive high-level academic support to achieve positive educational outcomes. Members recognise that the reports received are comprehensive and full of detail, which allows the opportunity to compare outcomes to previous years and age groups. In 2019/20, the Corporate Parenting Board would like to continue to receive updates, but would welcome the addition of more comparative data across the Local Authorities when it becomes available, and would also like reports to be inclusive of personal case studies, as recommended by the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee.

In respect of the Pupil Deprivation Grant for Children Looked After, it will be important for the Corporate Parenting to receive a further update in 2019/20. Members would like to extend an invitation to the Central South Consortium to attend a future meeting and present the above report, as it will give Members the opportunity to pose any questions directly to the fund manager. As previously mentioned, it would also be useful for Members to have an opportunity to evaluate

the benefits of the School Cluster Model in comparison to providing the schools with the resources directly.

TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

The Corporate Parenting Board recognise the importance of the role and responsibilities of Elected Members and the duty we have to the Children Looked After. With the introduction of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, the Corporate Parenting Board welcome further training opportunities, which would be useful for any new Members, and even the longstanding Members, in order to strengthen our role and provide knowledge on areas such as:

- Corporate Parenting and the role and responsibilities of a Corporate Parent and Board Member;
- The needs of children looked after and care leavers; and
- Any new Early Intervention and Prevention Initiatives within the Local Authority.

CONCLUSION

The Corporate Parenting Board hope that the Annual Report for the 2017/18 has successfully detailed the commitment of its Members, to improving the outcomes for the children and young people who are looked after in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

During this Municipal Year, the Board has, again, considered a vast range of reports, which together, cover key objectives, in terms of placements, health, education and of course, care. With the aid of a flexible work programme, each meeting has been inclusive of a robust agenda, which helps focus discussions. The Corporate Parenting Board are looking forward to setting a full and varied Work Programme for the next Municipal Year, focusing on the items already mentioned in the previous section of the report as well as other business that the Board feels is appropriate.

In 2018/19, it is important that the Corporate Parenting Board remains a comfortable and honest place for Elected Members, key officers and young people to come together and to challenge and improve the services provided in Rhondda Cynon Taf. We hope to continue to work closely with the relevant Scrutiny Committee, to utilise our resources to maximum capability, which will ensure the best possible outcomes for those in our care.

Thank you for reading this report.



Councillor Christina Leyshon
Chair, Corporate Parenting Board;
Cabinet Member for Children & Young People