

## REPORT TO COUNCIL

DATE	12 <sup>TH</sup> July 2018
CABINET MEMBER	COUNCILLOR DILWYN MORGAN
REPORT TITLE	CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL ANNUAL REPORT 2017-18
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### Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report

#### 2017-18

#### Introduction

The report is presented to outline the roles and responsibilities of the Council to act as Corporate parents for children who are in the care of Gwynedd Council; to share information about the activities of the panel over the last year and to outline the panel's intentions for the future. The report includes current information in respect of the numbers and patterns in relation to looked after children.

#### 1.0 The Council's role and responsibilities

A Corporate Parenting Panel has been established in Gwynedd as in all other Welsh authorities as a means of ensuring an oversight on the welfare of looked after children. There is an expectation from Welsh Government that members and officers from each Local Authority develop a positive approach to the role of the Corporate parent. In 2009 the Welsh Government and the Welsh Local Government Association published a document entitled 'If this were my child....' which gives clarity on the role of elected members as corporate parents.

Within the role of the Corporate parent it is expected that the parent will:

- Know our children – their needs, talents, dreams, and promote their interests
- Be ambitious about their future and expect the best from them on their behalf
- Be interested in their successes and problems and be proud of their successes and celebrate with them
- Listen to their opinions and ensure that this influences our practice and developments in services and policies
- Ensure that they are part of planning their own lives and that we consult with them on their decisions
- Acknowledge, support and respect their identity in every way
- Promote and support their educational attainment to the best of their ability, ensuring access to a high standard of education and broad learning opportunities

- Support resilience in their health and emotional wellbeing
- Support their journey from childhood into adulthood and promote their economic potential and prepare them to be responsible citizens who contribute to society as a whole
- Ensure that children and young people feel that they receive support from the Council and its' partners through challenging times in their lives.

In order to fulfil this role, the Council has established a Corporate Parenting Panel. It includes as its' members a former looked after young person, the Cabinet Member for Children and Family Support, the Leader of the Council, other relevant Cabinet members and a foster carer. The Panel also includes the Chief Executive, the Corporate Director and Statutory Director of Social Services, the Head of Children and Family Support Department, along with representation on a Senior level from the Adults, Health and Wellbeing Department and Economy and Communities. Gwynedd Council, i.e. all elected members, through the Corporate Parenting Panel, delegates their responsibilities in this area to the Cabinet Member for Children and Family Support. The Panel can request that the relevant Scrutiny Committees call in any matters that are a cause of concern on their behalf.

On a day to day practical basis, the operational tasks that ensure that the Council is fulfilling its' statutory duties and responsibilities for looked after children sits with the Head of Department for Children and Family Support via the social work teams and service. The Head of Department is accountable to the Statutory Director of Social Services.

The term 'corporate parenting' describes the joint responsibilities between the Council and its' partners to ensure effective, safe and appropriate care for children and young people who are looked after and young people who are care leavers. Looked after children are at a higher risk than their peers who are not looked after of being socially isolated. It is therefore essential that the Council as the Corporate parent is able to ensure that the experience of being in care is positive and supportive. The role of the Corporate Parenting Panel is to ensure that the promises that we make to children and young people are realised.

### **1.1 Members' training**

Corporate parenting training for elected members is provided annually, and a workshop to raise awareness and provide training was held on January 10th, 2018. Positive feedback was received following this workshop, and it is intended to repeat this training during the year. The workshop explored what makes a good parent; what the level of understanding is amongst members of the role of the corporate parent; exercises and group work to help better understand the experiences of being in care and a discussion as to how members can have access to the right information in order to ask the right questions. Awareness was also raised in respect of the Corporate Parenting Strategy 2017- 20.

### **1.2 Corporate Parenting Strategy 2017-20**

During 2017 the Corporate Parenting Strategy for 2017-20 was developed and adopted. This is a new strategy that replaced the previous 2013-17 strategy, and it focuses on how the Council

needs to operate as parents in order to ensure that children and young people who are looked after and care leavers are given the best opportunities. The strategy was accepted and adopted in the panel's meeting in October 2017. The strategy was formed on the basis of powerful and impactful letter from a former looked after child in respect of what members and officers should have an awareness of when we provide care to a child. The panel recognised the need to be far more operational in their role of ensuring the best opportunities for children and young people, and also to look further into some matters, for example education, health, emotional wellbeing, stability of placements and so forth. As a result of the strategy, five task and finish groups have been established which are led by members of the panel. They concentrate on specific matters in relation to the quality and standard of provision and take into account the views of parents, carers, children and young people regarding the support and services that they receive. The five areas are health and wellbeing; education; being protected; making a positive contribution and economic wellbeing and becoming an adult. The groups report back to the panel and identify any areas that need further work or strengthening. The purpose of working in this different way is to place the child at the centre of the panel's activities, resulting in a better understanding of the experiences of children and young people. It will provide an insight into the obstacles that they face in any aspect of their lives, leading to being able to work with partners to remove those obstacles and change practice.

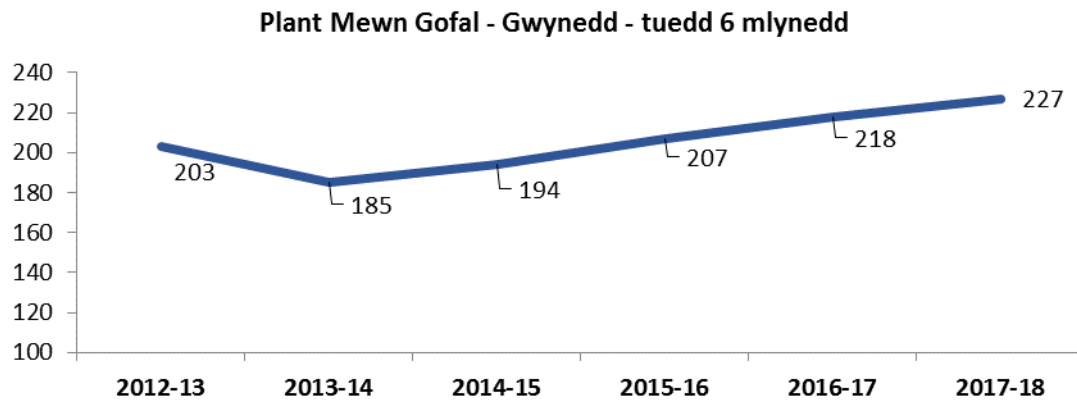
In its' April 2018 meeting, the panel considered Council tax exemption for care leavers. This matter has been a focus for the Children's Commissioner for Wales following her report 'Hidden ambitions' in order to ensure that care leavers are not falling into council tax debt whilst establishing themselves independently as young adults. The panel agreed in principle to the recommendation and a report to Cabinet will be provided shortly for a decision on the issue.

## 2 The current situation

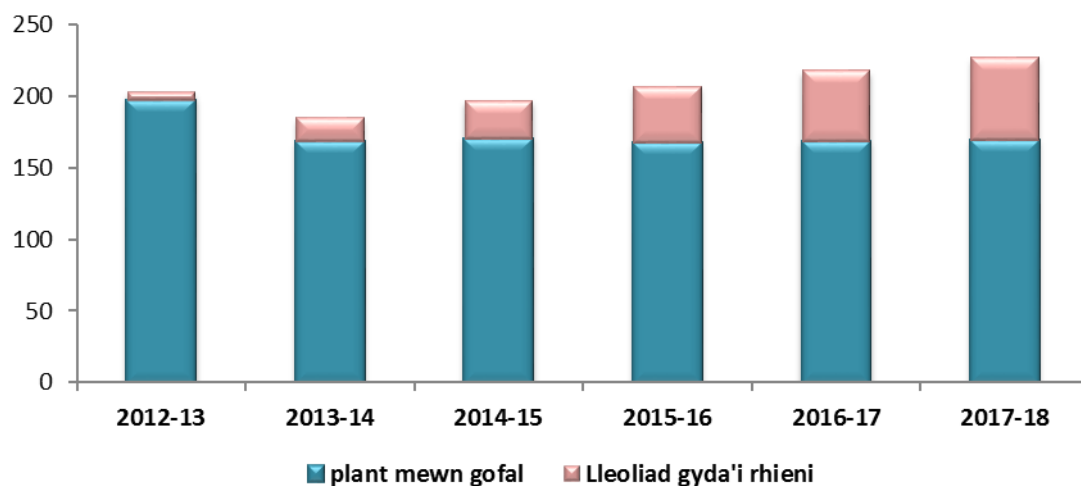
The following information is based on the data at the end of Q4 this year. The table includes comparative figures for the last three years.

<b>Looked after children</b>	<b>2017/18</b>	<b>2016/17 (end of Q3)</b>	<b>2015/16</b>	<b>2014/15</b>
Number of looked after children at end of quarter	227	220	207	194
Number of children who became looked after during the year	49	53	68	64
Number of children who ceased to be looked after during the year	40	44	52	56
Number of children adopted during the year	9	5	9	5

### 2.1 The looked after children profile in Gwynedd

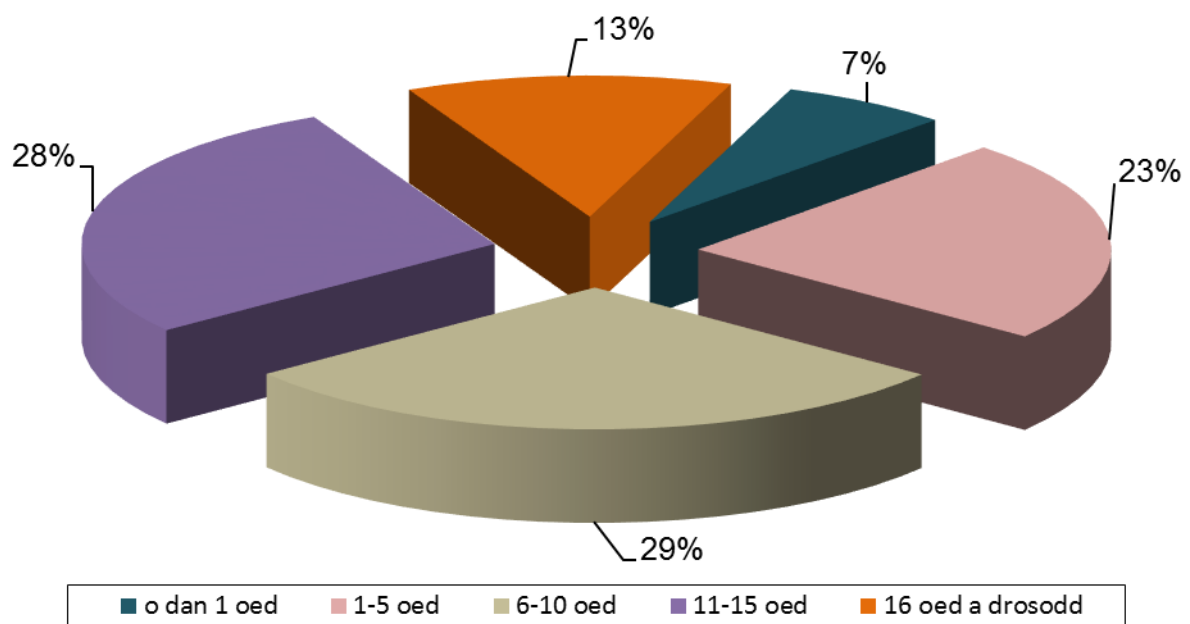


The profile over the last six years shows an 11.8% increase in the number of children who have been looked after over the period. When the profile is analysed, it is clear that the increase is as a result of children being placed at home with their parents. The other types of placements have either remained the same or reduced.



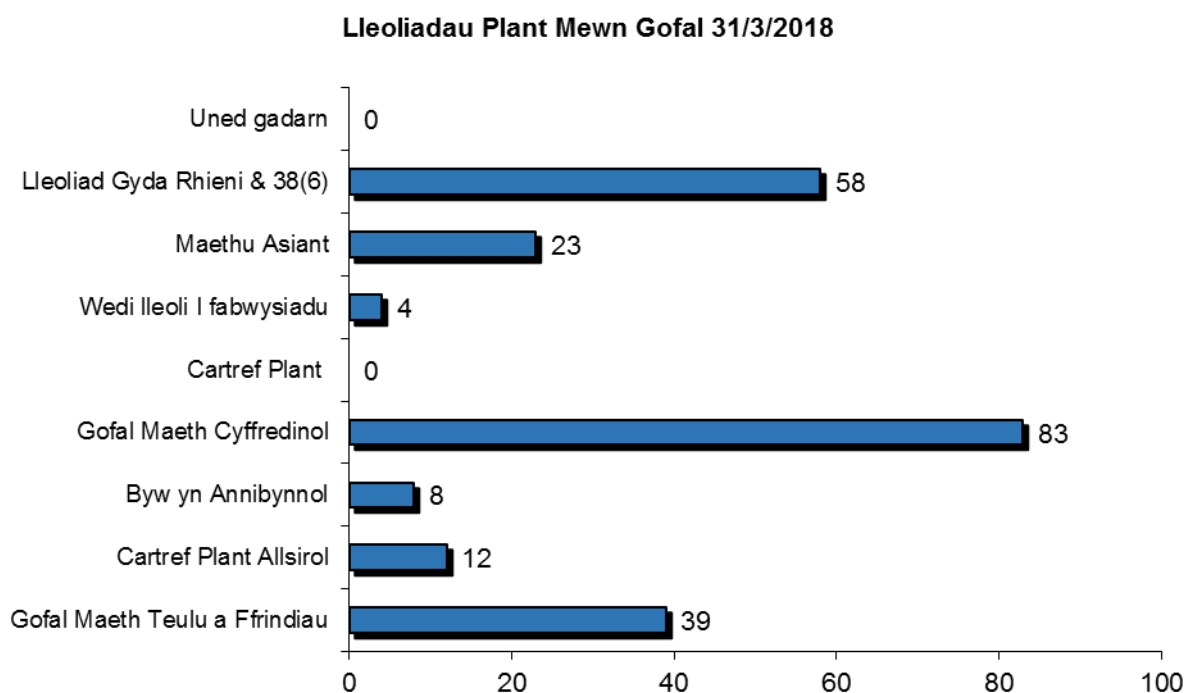
The significant increase therefore is as a result of the number of children who are placed at home with their parents under Placement with Parents Regulations, Children Act 1989. The threshold of significant harm has been proven in these cases, and as a result the children become subject of Care Orders which gives the Council shared parental responsibility for them under a Court Order. These cases are usually high risk, but managed through a proven good working relationship with parents which means that the risks can be managed at home and thus fulfilling one of the main principles of the Children Act 1989 in ensuring that children can be brought up within their own families.

## 2.2 Age profile 31/3/2018



### 2.3 Placements

Of the total of looked after children 145 (64%) are in foster placements, 12 (5%) in residential placements and 58 (25.6%) placed at home with parents. 4 children were in adoptive placements at the end of the Quarter and 8 young people living independently with support.



## 2.4 Geographical information

At the end of year, 52 (22%) looked after children were placed outside Gwynedd. 40% of these children were in Anglesey and Conwy, and 62% of children placed outside Gwynedd were placed in North Wales. 10 children are placed outside Wales, with 5 of these children in residential care. There are a number of reasons that lead to the need for residential placements, and in all cases the needs of the children and young people are complex and intensive, e.g. mental health and self-harm issues, sexual exploitation, harmful sexual behaviour. The biggest challenge facing the Council at the present time is the difficulties in sourcing appropriate residential placements for those with the most complex needs. This is not by any means unique to Gwynedd and it is currently a matter that is being looked at through several avenues by Welsh Government and it has also been the subject of discussion at the Public Accounts Committee.

## 2.5 Young children becoming looked after

The most recent data shows that there is a continuation in the high number of children under 5 years old who become looked after. At the end of Q4, 51% of new placements made were for children under 5 years of age. Over 5 years, children under 5 represent 48% of all new placements made. This is a result of many different factors, but specifically very young children being abused and neglected; domestic violence; parental substance and alcohol misuse;; deliberate ingestion of substances to children and subsequent children of mothers who have had previous children removed because of neglect and abuse who have not made the necessary changes in their lives to be able to care for a child appropriately and safely.

## **2.6 'When I'm ready....' a continuation of foster care**

The Social Services and Wellbeing Act (Wales) 2014 placed a new responsibility on Local Authorities towards young people in foster care who wished to remain in their foster placement post 18 years of age. The purpose is to be able to offer stability and consistency to young people, and to not expect them to move from their placements before they are ready to do so. Gwynedd was a pilot authority for 'When I'm ready' in 2013, and in 2015 it became a statutory duty on all Local Authorities in Wales.

During 2017-18, 11 young people have chosen to be part of the plan, and at the end of Q4 11 remained in a 'When I'm ready' arrangement. Since the beginning of the plan in 2013, 58% of all eligible young people have chosen to take advantage of the offer. The Gwynedd data shows that the arrangements vary, with 10% of young people remaining in their placements for less than 6 months, 40% remaining for between 6-12 months, and 50% for 12.-15 months. The arrangement can continue until the young person's 21st birthday.

## **2.7 Edge of Care team**

The Edge of Care Team became operational in January 2015. Since April 2017 the team has worked with 115 children (73 families). 55 children (34 families) continued to receive services at the end of the year. Interventions were concluded with 60 children (39 families) between April 2017 and March 2018.

The purpose of intervention in 40 cases was to enable the child to remain at home and avoid care. At times, the work done by team identifies the need to intervene to commence care proceedings in order to remove the child from the family home due to the risks to the child. From these families 7 children (5 families) have become looked after. At the end of intervention 42 children (39 families) remained at home – care was avoided and significant improvements were seen that enabled families to cope better with their situation and family life in a positive and safe environment.

## **2.2 Education**

Within the academic year 2017 there were 17 pupils in Gwynedd who were looked after in their last year of statutory education, year 11, who had been looked after for more than 12 months on 31/08/17.

The legal status of the 17 pupils were as follows:-

- **17** were subject to Care Orders (Section 31 Children Act 1989)

- 7 pupils received their education in mainstream Gwynedd schools.
- 2 pupils were placed out of county and were receiving their education in mainstream schools.
- 1 pupil was living in Gwynedd and receiving their KS4 education as part of Gwynedd Council's home tutoring scheme.
- 1 pupil received their education in a special school in Gwynedd
- 6 pupils were placed out of county and received their education in a residential setting.

Pupils were given the opportunity to sit a wide range of external examinations, for example, GCSE's, BTEC, OCR, OCR National, Key Skills, Essential Skills, and Welsh baccalaureate

A summary is presented below of the qualifications gained by the 17 pupils who were eligible to sit external examinations this year (pupils within Gwynedd and out of county)

#### *Performance data*

Measure	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
<b>Number of care leavers 16+</b>							
Gwynedd	15	22	16	12	9	16	17
<b>% 16+ who gained at least 1 qualification</b>							
Gwynedd	40%	91%	94%	91%	67%	82%	82%
<b>% 16+ who gained at least 5 A*-G GCSE</b>							
Gwynedd	33%	45.5%	62.5%	50%	67%	82%	80%
<b>% 16+ who gained at least 5 A*-C GCSE (including language and mathematics)</b>							
Gwynedd	13%	18%	31%	25%	67%	62%	40%

#### **Summary:**

Percentage of children gaining 5 A\* - C = 40% - Trothwy Lefel 2

Percentage of children gaining 5 A\* - G = 80% - Trothwy Lefel 1

Percentage of children gaining at least 1 GCSE Grade A\*-C = 70%

Percentage of children gaining at least 1 TGAU Gradd A\*-G = 90%

#### **16+ provision**



From the **17** pupils,

- **8** have gone on to colleges to follow courses appropriate to their skills and needs.
- **2** have remained at school/6th form to follow an AS/A level course in year 12.
- **1** remains in a special educational needs school
- **3** remain in a residential placement with educational provision.
- **2** are not in education or training but are receiving 16+ support
- **1** is involved in voluntary work.

### **3.0 Health of Looked after children**

Historically there have been concerns regarding the ability of the Health Board to ensure that health assessments for looked after children were undertaken in a timely manner in order to plan for any health care needs. A national performance indicator exists in relation to this activity, but the performance in Gwynedd was an area of concern for many years. The Panel has been proactive in calling relevant officers from the Health Board to explain the difficulties and challenges and to attempt to resolve the problems, and at one point it was escalated to the Chief Executive of the Health Board. As a result, several discussions have taken place between Health Board and Children's Services officers, and progress was made which resulted in an improvement in the numbers of children who were becoming looked after receiving a health assessment in a timely manner. At the end of 2017-18, performance met its' target, which was 65% within timescales. 302 initial and review assessments were due during the year and 196 were undertaken within timescales. There has been an improvement in the information sharing process between Children's Services and Health. The panel is eager to receive information regarding any patterns that emerge in relation to the health of looked after children in Gwynedd, for example, are there any specific conditions that are of concern; are there any access difficulties to any disciplines within Health; are there any issues that the panel need to focus on in more depth and so on. It is hoped that by implementing the new strategy that it will be easier to have a better understanding of specific matters and that it will be easier to obtain a full picture of health needs that will provide qualitative information rather than only quantitative data that has historically driven the panel's agenda.

### **Summary**

As noted in the report, the Corporate Parenting Panel has recognised the need to be more proactive in its approach for the future. This has commenced through the specific task and finish groups that have been established. It was verbally reported at the end of a full Children's Services inspection by Care Inspectorate Wales in May 2018 that the panel's approach was positive and progressive, and that this will lead to ensuring that looked after children and young people in Gwynedd will have access to appropriate support throughout their period in care and beyond.

Therefore, by adopting a public statement of a promise of support to looked after children, and to the commitment to work effectively within the Council and with external partners that the panel will be able to effectively influence the outcomes for looked after children in Gwynedd Council.

