

Annual Report of the Gwynedd Corporate Parenting Panel

2012-13

Introduction

This report is in four sections, appertaining to the role and responsibilities of the Council, contributions from Council departments, contributions from partners and then a discussion of what has been achieved and steps needing to be taken for the future.

1.0 The Council's Role and Responsibilities

The Corporate Parenting Panel was established in Gwynedd, as in every other county in Wales, as a body to maintain an overview of the wellbeing and interests of children in care. There is an expectation from the Welsh Government that staff members in every county should have a positive attitude towards the role of corporate parent. In 2009, the Welsh Government, jointly with the Local Government Association, released a document entitled 'If this were my child...' which highlights the role and responsibilities of members as corporate parents.

The role of corporate parent has the expectation the parent will strive to ensure that children in care receive appropriate care, that the accommodation they live in is of a good standard and that they receive good health care and progress successfully in education. This it to happen without the parent ever meeting the child in care. For the children themselves, it's important they feel they are supported by the Council and the Council's partners during a very challenging period of their lives.

In order to support this role, the Council has established a Corporate Parenting Panel that includes relevant members of the Cabinet, Young People's Champion and a member selected by the Scrutiny Committees. The Panel also includes the relevant chief officers in the field (see below). Through this Panel the Council, namely all the elected members, delegate their responsibility in the field to the Lead Member for Children and Young People. This Panel has the right to ask for matters causing concern to them to be scrutinized on their behalf.

1.2 Letter from the Deputy Minister for Children and Social Services, Gwenda Thomas, A.M.

The Panel received a letter from the Minister, setting out the challenging expectations on local authorities and members to ensure that children in public care achieve the same results as every good parent would wish for their own children. It notes clearly that one of the main responsibilities of Elected Members is to ensure that children in their care are able to thrive, and notes a wide range of information points that members need to be satisfied on. This gives the Panel clear messages as it develops a new strategy for the future.

1.3 Members' Training

The training for Council members was held on 28 November 2012. It was an opportunity for members to learn about their role and consider different scenarios regarding the needs of children in care within the county. There were 24 members present. It is intended to hold another session in the new year.

1.4 Establishing the Cabinet

Following changes to the council's management arrangements and the adoption of a Cabinet model, the Panel's arrangements were adapted so that it reported to the Cabinet and was chaired by the Lead Member for Children and Young People.

A fixed membership was set for the Panel, with the following Cabinet Members as Panel members:

- Council Leader
- Lead Member for Children and Young People and Education Portfolio Leader
- Cabinet Member – Deprivation
- Cabinet Member – Care
- Member nominated by the Scrutiny Committee
- Champion for Children and Young People's Voice

and the following officers:

- Chief Executive
- Lead Director Children and Young People/Corporate Director
- Statutory Director/Head of Social Services, Housing and Leisure
- Head of Education
- Senior Manager Children's Services
- Service Manager – Care Resources

- Representative from the Health Board

1.5 The Panel's Strategy for 2013-17

The Panel has identified the need to act more strategically in future. Because of this, a developmental programme has been drawn up to assist the Panel in ensuring its future direction, ensuring that it hears the voice of children in care and responds to the challenge of safeguarding standards for services provided by Council departments and external partners. The programme will include a clear input from children and young people who are and were able to offer feedback and other suggestions based on their experiences. It is intended to have a strategy in place by the end of April 2014.

2.0 The Voice of Children in Care

2.1 'Have your say' sessions

The Children and Families Service holds regular 'Have your say' meetings with a group of children in care. The chair of the Panel and the Children's Champion are invited to join the meeting. Recently, the group has been working on producing information documents for children in care, on matters that have come up through that work, including discussion about:

My family and friends – very important people, maintaining contact is important but it can be difficult for some.

People in my life – a substantial number of people are involved in the life of the young person in care - the social worker, foster carer or residential unit staff, teachers, nurses and advocates. These are all important and offer support of different kinds.

Placements – it would be good to have more information about their placement locations and carers before commencing on a placement, where it is, what kind of house and so on.

Education – education can be a challenge because some have to change schools and have lost out on their education.

Social Worker – ideally one who listens and is able to answer complex questions about relationships with family, care needs within the accommodation and education, and ensure that things happen.

The group is now working diligently on the information pack and hopes to be able to release it in the new year.

2.2 Personal Experiences

At one meeting, the group received an honest and challenging presentation from a young person who was a service user, on her experiences in care, and feedback from the Customer Care Officer of Social Services on the work of gleaning the views of young people in care. The main matters were involved with the nature of the support that young people in care felt they were receiving from Council departments and the partners. Young people in care were generally appreciative of the support from their personal social worker, but felt there was less support for them from individuals in other departments. It was also felt that having more information about their current situation would be very useful to them in understanding what was happening to them.

2.3 Young people who have left care

Two young people who had used this Service in the past gave a presentation. Their comments were as follows:

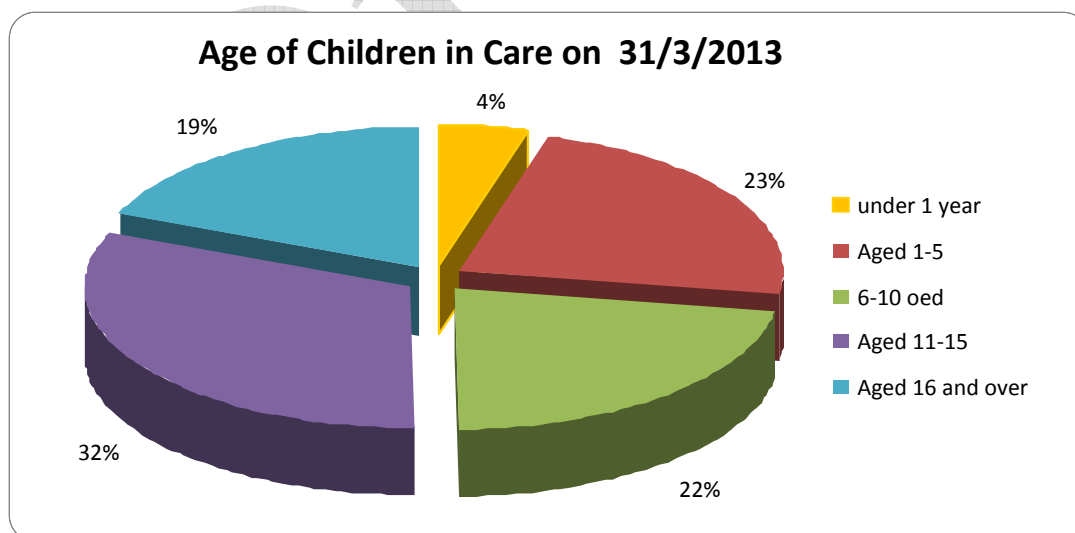
- The quality of foster placements was all-important and it was necessary to ensure the best care, particularly during the period between 14 and 16 years old.
- It was difficult to contact the service out of office hours.
- Their educational experiences had been difficult because they did not feel they had received enough support at school, as children in care, to reach their potential.
- They had received very good support from the Aftercare Team of the Children and Families Service.

2.0 Support from the Council

2.1 Children and Families Service, Social Services Department

Recent data is shown below on the number of children in care in Gwynedd

Children in care	2012/13	2011/12
Number of children in care at the end of the year	203	195
Number of children coming into care during the year	56 (B.33/ M.23)	54
Number of children leaving care during the year	49	36
Number of children adopted during the year	9	3



At the end of March 2013 there were 203 children in the Council's care. This is an increase of 4% from the number in care at the end of March 2012 (195). Nine children were adopted during the year, taking on average 24 months between the placement order and the adoption date, and therefore going out of the Council's care.

Reasons for receiving a service

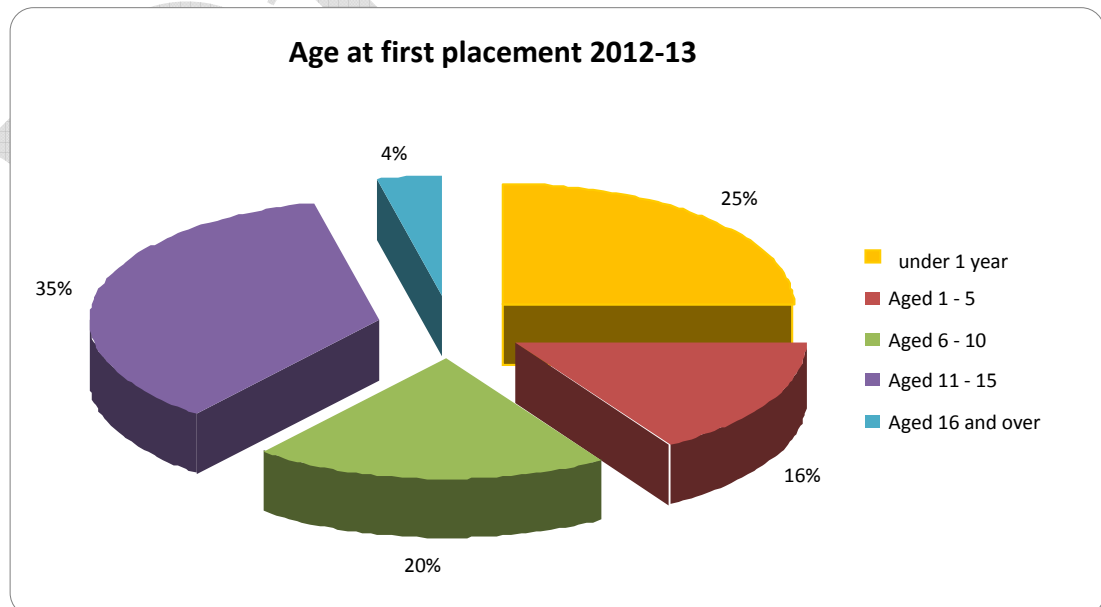
There was a turnover of 249 children in the Council's care between April 2012 and March 2013. The 'Category of Need Codes' used by the Welsh Government, shown below, refer to the reason the child is in need and receiving a service.

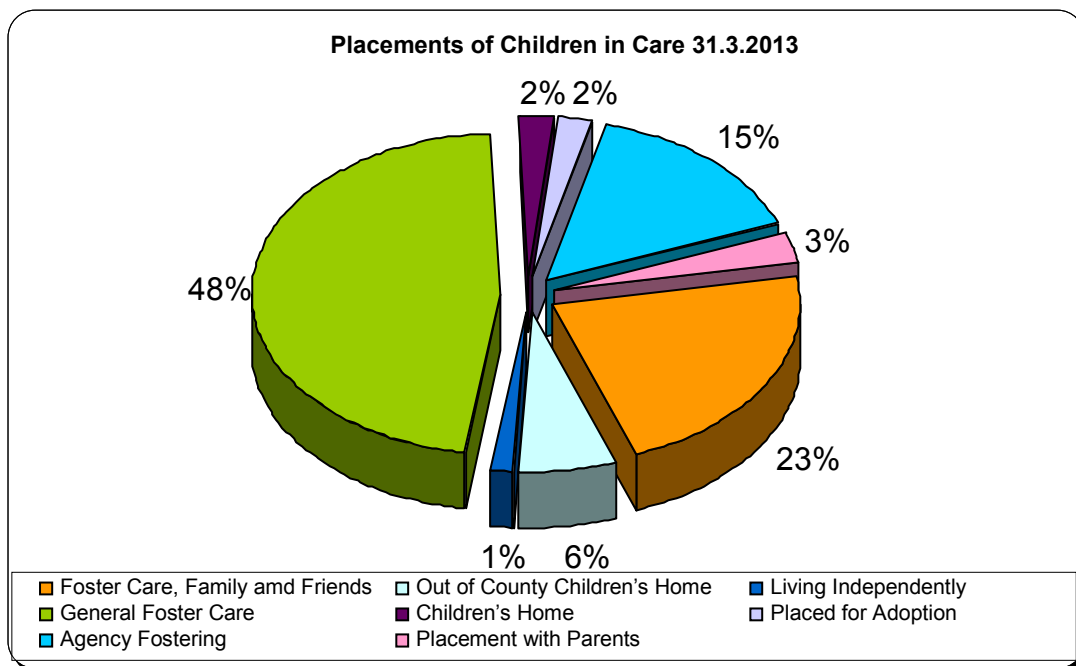
<u>Category of Need</u>	<u>Number of children</u>
N1 Abuse or neglect	150
N2 Child's illness or disability	5
N3 Parental illness or disability	15
N4 Family in acute stress	13
N5 Family dysfunction	49
N6 Socially unacceptable behaviour	10
N8 Absent parenting	6
N9 Disruption of adoption	1

It will be seen that abuse or neglect are by far the main reasons for receiving children and young people into care.

Placements for Children in care

At the end of 2012/13, 85% of the children in care were in foster placements. There were 172 children placed with foster carers, with 26% of the carers being family or friends. At the end of the year, there were 5 children in adoption placements.





Stability of Placements

Of the 203 children in care on 31 March 2013, 9 had three or more placements during the year. This reflects the efforts of the Service to ensure stable placements for children in care, accepting that at times children have to be moved to placements e.g. for them to be adopted, which brings better results for them. Gwynedd is amongst the counties with the best results in this field.

Geographical Locations

At the end of the year, 72% of children in care were located in Gwynedd, and the rest out of county. Of the 28% there were 8% of children out of county placed in Anglesey.

Response to the increase in number of children coming into care

The Service has taken steps to respond to the recent increase in numbers of children coming into care. In December 2012, there were 211 children in care but by the time of the Panel in April 2013 the number had fallen to 202. There were 57 new placements received during the year, with 13 received into care in November. This activity has brought about considerable pressure on the Service, particularly the Fostering Service, which organizes placements within the Service.

The Service is part of a partnership with the Health Board and other counties in North Wales trying to develop solutions to the demand for placements for children with inappropriate sexual behaviour. This kind of case is increasing,

and it is difficult to find suitable placements for them. The work is due to end at the end of March 2013.

The Children's Service has been collaborating with a 'Start to Finish' review led by the Head of Economy and Community to assess the best methods of reducing expenditure within the service, particularly on out of county placements. The current plans look at ways of strengthening the preventative provision that would lead to a reduction in demand for expensive placements.

The Service has also worked in partnership with North Wales Housing Association with the intention of opening accommodation for two post-16 young people in Bangor. The provision offers support for those living there, and has been open since September 2013.

Work and Training Scheme for Young People

The scheme has been established between Coleg Menai, Gwynedd Council and Careers Wales, to help young people in care or about to leave care. There are 11 young people in the initial group, and an officer from Careers Wales is supporting them in the enterprise.

The Service has arranged work placements for 4 individuals in departments across the Council, including one within Children's Services itself. The hope is to expand the experience within the council of providing placements for children in care, and as a result get more offers of placements.

2.2 The Education Department

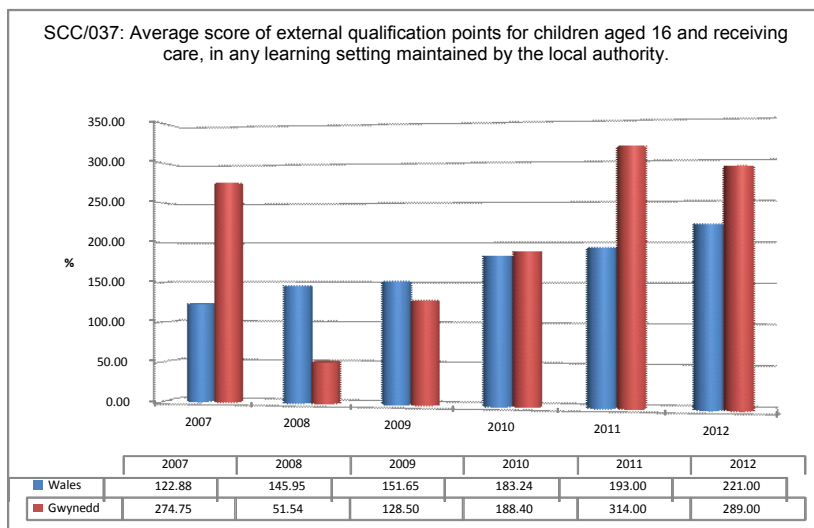
The 17 children (76% of the total) who were sitting for qualifications were attending schools in the County, and the remainder attended schools in Denbighshire, Anglesey, Conwy and Ceredigion.

Results - educational points score

The qualifications gained by these children include GCSE, BTEC, ESKW, ONAT, NVQ and others. Every qualification has an equivalent score calculated by Cynnal. There were 17 children in care who qualified for this indicator in 2012/13 (having been in care for over 12 months on 31/8/2012 and sitting GCSE exams in Summer 2012).

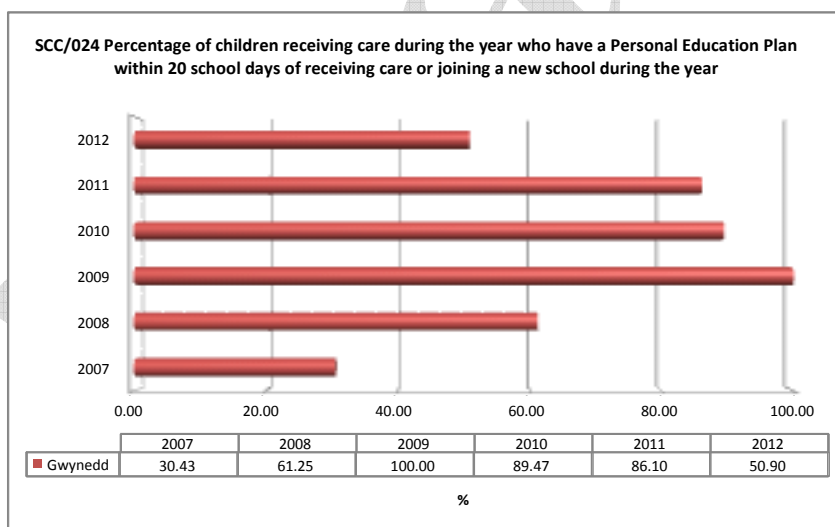
The results reflect the wide range of abilities and varied qualifications of a limited number of children in care in this age range – 17 between the ages of 15 and 16 at the time.

The average point score of children in care is 289. This compares with the average general point score for all children in Gwynedd of 525. Gwynedd had the highest general point score (EDU/011) of all the Welsh counties in 2013. The point score for children in care (SCC/0) is fifth amongst Welsh counties. This is a substantial gap, even though comparison is difficult because the numbers in care are small. The panel will be looking at this field in the future.



Additional children in care grant money will be targeted towards individuals this year (£450 per head) to improve outcomes for children in care. This is in addition to the bursary of £400 offered by the department for children in care during key stage 4. The money has been used to provide laptops and iPads to promote attainment by children in care.

Performance Report for Personal Education Plans



Although the reports on school performance have been very encouraging during the first part of the year, a substantial reduction was seen by the third quarter (from 100% to 62%). Schools are required to prepare a Personal Education Plan for each child in care when the child enters the school, and to do so within 20 days (4 weeks) of the child arriving. The Education Department has been working with the Authority's schools to ensure conformity, and this will continue into the future.

The system will highlight schools that have not conformed to this requirement within the first 15 days of the 20 day period. The Children in Care Officer will intervene directly following this.

Special Education Centre of Excellence

The panel welcomed the plans to establish the centre of excellence. The Head of Education gave an outline of the steps taken to achieve the objective of establishing a centre of excellence for the county. The Education Department and Children's Services are collaborating on this initiative. The new centre will offer respite care for between 5 and 10 children with disabilities and long term care for them, as needed. This will be a way of supporting families who have children with disabilities, in order to reduce the pressure on them and reduce the demand to bring children with disabilities into care. At present (September 2013) the Service has only one placement for children with disabilities.

A site has been identified and a comprehensive business plan for the provision presented to the Welsh Government. It is hoped the Centre will open in April 2016.

3.0 Healthcare for Children in Care

The panel is still concerned about the deficiencies in healthcare provision for children in care. The Senior Manager Children's Services gave a comprehensive presentation on the steps taken to try to persuade officers in the health service the service was insufficient. According to the Service, the Health Board was providing one third of the service to Gwynedd that it was to other counties, meaning there was a substantial reduction in healthcare for children in care compared to what was provided before. This has also meant a reduction in the health performance indicators for the Service at the end of the year. The matter was raised in different forums by members and officers, but the deficit continued for a substantial part of the year.

Following input by the Service, officers of the Health Board reviewed their plans, with the intention of maintaining a more comprehensive service from the beginning of July 2013. This field will need to be reviewed regularly in the future.

Summing up

As noted earlier, the Corporate Parenting Panel has identified the need to be more strategic in future. The appended document gives an outline of the process and the essential points. In order to move closer to the best practice, the Panel, departments of the Council and partners will need to ensure that children in care get appropriate healthcare that compares well with their peers across Wales. It will also be necessary to see how support can be increased for children in care, so that the educational point score moves closer to the average general point score for the county. It will be necessary to increase work experience opportunities within departments of the Council and partners, and maybe temporary jobs that are available over the summer.

English Counties have adopted a public declaration promising support to their children in care, and are working with representatives of children in care who are on their 'council' of children in care. They also have a training programme for all their staff, to inform them of their responsibilities towards children in care.

By developing a comprehensive strategy, the Panel will be in a situation to have an effectively influence for the benefit of children in care.

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