

## Children's Services - Christine Richards

As you are aware, I am still fairly new to this portfolio but I am looking forward to meeting with the Scrutiny Programme Committee next week.

The areas of work in my portfolio include supporting children to grow up safe, happy & healthy; and able to live within their own families, communities & to attend local schools.

For the small number of children unable to live safely within their own families, we try to support them to be able to live in or as close to Swansea as possible; and within a family rather than an institutional setting.

Our aim is to support children to grow up into adults best able to live independent, productive lives that meet their aspirations, whilst enjoying meaningful & satisfying social relationships

We must also ensure that that the voice of children is at the heart of all that we do.

In terms of **Child & Family Services**, my portfolio objectives include safeguarding, safe LAC reduction strategy, implementing the Signs of Safety Practice Safeguarding Framework for children and working towards a financially sustainable Child & Family services.

I have visited some of our frontline child protection teams and I have other visits planned. The feedback that I have received from the front line is a marked contrast to the last time I spoke to front-line staff. When Child & Family Services was in special measures and subject to the Intervention Board, staff morale was low and we had difficulty keeping social workers. I have been pleased to hear that our staff now feel they are able to do a great job.

I have also attended the Foster Carer and LAC children consultation event and Child & Family Service's whole service staff day.

Progress:

- LAC numbers have reduced by about 50 this year and we now have the lowest number of LAC for about 5 years.
- The overwhelming majority of our LAC children now live in, or as close to Swansea as possible.
- Only a very small number of children continue to live further away. These include a small number of children with complex autism, for whom there is no local educational provision.
- We also have less than 40 children living in residential care. The lowest number for 4 years.
- An important part of the strategy is that children remain safe. Low re-referral rates into children's social services, strong performance in terms of the timelines of child protection conferences, 100% allocation of child protection cases to qualified social workers and positive feedback from families, professionals and the CSSIW are all indications that safeguarding practice remains robust in Swansea.
- The 5 year whole service implementation of the Signs of Safety practice framework remains on track.
- Last financial year Swansea children services cost approx. £1 million less than the previous year. This is the first time that children services has cost less from one year to next for about a decade.
- This year children services remain on target to achieve a similar year on year saving. It will probably be slightly more than a £1 million.

- Going forward, challenges are clearly around the budget. I believe that reductions in the Child & Family services budget needs to remain linked to the Safe LAC reduction strategy.
- Above all, children must remain safe

In relation to the wider agenda for children's services and the preventative agenda, my portfolio priorities are:

**Development of the Council's commitment to the UNCRC** – Council has now approved its UNCRC scheme and has had a formal launch event.

- The work with schools to support their development to achieve the Rights Respecting Schools Award continues, with 90% of schools now having begun their journey to Level 1, and our first secondary school achieving Level 1 earlier this Autumn.
- A flag with the logo developed by the children at Glynollen Primary School will be raised on 18 December and will fly over the Civic Offices for a month, to show our commitment to this agenda.
- Young people have again been included in budget consultation this year. I recently attended an event at Blaenymaes Youth Centre. Further event planned for January.

**Reducing number of young people who are not engaged in employment, education or training** remains a challenging area, as over successive years we have significantly reduced the NEET numbers and are now working most closely with those young people who are the very vulnerable.

- The snapshot for 2014 is yet to be moderated, and partners in the NEETs Board are working to analyse the data to present in the new year.
- Swansea is leading Wales in its development of a Lead Worker approach and in implementing the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework to ensure that we are tracking all young people, and working with them at an early stage to provide support to continue in employment and training.