



City and County of Swansea

Minutes of the **Scrutiny Performance Panel – Child & Family Services**

Remotely via Microsoft Teams

Wednesday, 24 March 2021 at 4.00 pm

Present: Councillor P R Hood-Williams (Chair) Presided

Councillor(s)

C Anderson
Y V Jardine
W G Lewis
D W W Thomas

Councillor(s)

A M Day
S M Jones
H M Morris

Councillor(s)

K M Griffiths
J W Jones
G J Tanner

Other Attendees

Louise Gibbard
Elliott King

Cabinet Member - Supporting Communities
Cabinet Member - Children Services

Officer(s)

Julie Davies
Liz Jordan
Damian Rees
Jane Whitmore
Kelli Richards
Megan Stevens

Head of Child & Family Services
Scrutiny Officer
Safeguarding & Performance Quality
Strategic Lead Commissioner
Principal Officer CFS
Practice Lead (VAWDASV Partnership Development)

Apologies for Absence

Councillor(s): M Durke and E T Kirchner

1 Disclosure of Personal and Prejudicial Interests.

No disclosures of interest were made.

2 Prohibition of Whipped Votes and Declaration of Party Whips

No declarations were made.

3 Minutes of Previous Meeting(s)

No matters arising from Minutes of the Joint Social Services Panel meeting 15 February 2021.

4 Public Question Time

No questions submitted.

5 **WAO Report: Tackling Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence**

Louise Gibbard, Cabinet Member for Supporting Communities, Jane Whitmore, Strategic Lead Partnership and Commissioning, Kelli Richards, Principal Officer CFS and Megan Stevens, Practice Lead (VAWDASV Partnership Development) attended to brief the Panel on this item.

Discussion Points:

- This is a matter of concern to Adult Services and Child and Family Services.
- There is a range of work going on in this area despite the pandemic and there is a cross council approach involving Social Services, Housing, Tackling Poverty and Third Sector organisations.
- Five generic recommendations came out of the WAO report. The Council has met all five recommendations. Swansea's Domestic Abuse Hub also mentioned in the report as an innovative way of working.
- There is an emphasis on developing work with perpetrators.
- All the teams sit under one portfolio in Child and Family Services, making it a much smoother process.
- Report mentions a funding gap for prevention work. We have had additional funding but there is still a gap. Funding is positive but comes with a risk as work is funded by grants that are uncertain going forward. This issue is brought up with Welsh Government continually, as it needs to be mainstreamed.
- Panel queried if there is anything they can do to help with this situation. Officers will come back with any suggestions of how scrutiny can help.
- Lots of support available for everyone affected by domestic abuse. Go online to Council's website www.swansea.gov.uk/youarenotalone if need help or worried about anyone else.
- Panel requested more information on prevention and work being done with children in particular, in respect of educating them as well as making them aware of support. Informed domestic abuse hub is preventative but is secondary. New approach is primary prevention. Welsh Government encourage 'whole school' approach. It has been incorporated into school's new curriculum. Panel felt their role as governor in schools was very important and queried if it was possible to arrange training for all councillors. CM supported this suggestion and agreed, along with officers, to put this in place.
- Panel raised the issue about men suffering from domestic abuse, and queried if we are making it just as easy for them to get support. Informed men have access to services too. Data shows majority are women but numbers have been increasing for men recently.
- Officers believe male victims are under reported due to ego and stigma. The numbers we know are probably far less for men and women.
- Panel very surprised to hear that 4,300 children are affected by domestic violence in Swansea.

Actions:

- Information to be provided on how Panel can assist with lobbying Welsh Government regarding grant funding.
- Training to be put in place for all councillors as governors to raise awareness.

6 Performance Monitoring

Julie Davies, Head of Child and Family Services briefed the Panel on the Performance Monitoring Report for January 2021 and informed the Panel that overall performance across CFS is very good. The main highlights: There are increasing referrals through Early Help Hubs. Average caseloads have gone down but they are more complex, in part due to Covid restrictions. Assessment timelines have improved. Number of children on child protection register have slightly reduced. LAC Reduction Strategy is working well in Swansea. Placement stability very strong during pandemic due to good support provided through foster carers and social workers. Youth Justice Service on improvement journey; targeted plan in place and in January, all assessments required to be achieved in 20 days were. All children and care leavers have a pathway plan.

Discussion Points:

- Children in Need of Care and Support number dropped considerably in last few months. Reduction is due to removing children who do not need to be there or due to stepping down.
- Signs of Safety numbers low, partly due to pandemic but also there is an issue recording on PARIS system. Panel was assured Signs of Safety work is happening and will be much simpler to record when new WCCIS system goes live on 12 April 2021.
- Discussed how relationship between CFS and schools is going and if CFS is getting level of co-operation needed to identify any problems. Informed positive working relationship with some schools and strategically but they could do more. Weekly meetings are held with Education and schools are engaging with CFS on 'Threshold'.
- Supervision figures for Townhill Pod 1 quite low as there is a system recording issue and CFS has records that have not been uploaded yet.

7 Safeguarding Quality Unit Annual Report

Damian Rees, Principal Officer Safeguarding Performance Quality briefed the Panel on the Annual Report, which included an overview of the Service, Child Protection Conferences, and Looked after Children Reviews.

Discussion Points:

- Education are involved in de-escalating child protection cases and their attendance is very good. Panel pleased to hear this.
- On the advocacy issue, Panel pleased to see an increase in number of children knowing what 'advocacy' means.
- Officers do not know why only a small number of children want to take up offer of advocacy. This is something they need to look at. They believe that take up is similar in other regions. Officers keen to hear from children themselves why not taking up advocacy service.

- Panel queried if advocate is a consistent person. Confirmed it should be same person with a child through the whole time.
- Feedback from youngsters who have used advocacy has been positive.
- Officers confirmed there is still work that needs to be done around Personal Education Plans (PEPs). It is not just the social worker involved; have to work with the school. Consistency needs to improve.
- Panel queried if Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) involved with Health Assessments. Informed it is not incorporated into these plans. However they meet regularly with CAMHS and they are monitoring that children the Council looks after, has access to these services.
- Cabinet Member confirmed not all young children will need the primary help CAMHS provide. Update on CAMHS is scheduled for discussion at May CFS Panel.
- Officers confirmed an increase in completion of life story work to 60% but it needs to improve more. It is at the forefront of the action plan. There are some issues with recording on the system but WCCIS should address these issues.
- Panel queried if the Directorate is satisfied with service they are getting from Barnardos and BAYS+. Informed Directorate is doing a piece of work to look at this service and may make some changes. A paper will be brought to the Panel on this in the future.
- CM felt it was helpful for scrutiny to see this Annual Report and would like to bring it to the Panel again in the future.

Actions:

- Add 'Adolescent Strategy and Action Plan' to future work programme after September 2021.
- Add 'Safeguarding Quality Unit Annual Report 2020-21' to future work programme.

8 Work Programme Timetable 2020-21

The Panel considered the work programme.

Date of next meeting moved from 5 May to 25 May due to Senedd Elections.

9 Letters

Letters received and considered by the Panel.

The meeting ended at 5.50 pm