



To:
**Councillor Elliott King, Cabinet Member for
Children Services**

BY EMAIL

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Date **15 April 2021**
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CC Cabinet Members

Summary: This is a letter from the Child & Family Services Scrutiny Performance Panel to the Cabinet Member for Children Services following the meeting of the Panel on 24 March 2021. It covers Performance Monitoring and Safeguarding Quality Unit Annual Report.

Dear Cllr King,

The Panel met on 24 March to discuss the Performance Monitoring Report for January 2021 and the Safeguarding Quality Unit Annual Report.

We would like to thank you, Julie Davies and Damian Rees for attending for these items and answering the Panel's questions. We appreciate your engagement and input.

We are writing to you to reflect on what we learnt from the discussion, share the views of the Panel, and, where necessary, raise any issues or recommendations for your consideration and response. The main issues discussed are summarised below:

Performance Monitoring

We heard that overall performance across CFS is very good and that the main highlights were that 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. The number of children on the child protection register have slightly reduced. The LAC Reduction Strategy is working well in Swansea. Placement stability was very strong during pandemic due to good support provided through foster carers and social workers. The Youth Justice Service is on an improvement journey with a targeted plan in place and in January, all

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assessments required to be achieved in 20 days were. All children and care leavers have a pathway plan.

We noted that the number of Children in Need of Care and Support had dropped considerably in the last few months and asked if this was a concern. Officers confirmed it is not a concern, as the reduction is due to removing children who do not need to be there or due to stepping down.

We queried why the Signs of Safety numbers were low and if it was due to the pandemic. We were informed that it is partly due to this, but also there is an issue with recording on the PARIS system. We were assured that the Signs of Safety work is happening and will be much simpler to record when the new WCCIS system goes live on 12 April 2021. We noted that Health have access to this system but Education do not.

We asked about the relationship between CFS and schools and if the Service is getting the level of co-operation needed to identify any problems. We heard that there is a positive working relationship with some schools and strategically but they could do more. We also heard that weekly meetings are held with Education and schools are engaging with CFS on 'Threshold'.

We queried the supervision figures, as Townhill Pod 1 were quite low. We were informed that this is a system recording issue and that CFS has records that have not been uploaded yet.

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.

We queried and received confirmation that Education are involved in de-escalating child protection cases and that their attendance is very good. We were pleased to hear this.

On the advocacy issue, we were pleased to see an increase in the number of children knowing what 'advocacy' means.

We were informed by officers that they do not know why only a small number of children want to take up the offer of advocacy. This is something that needs to be looked at. We heard that the take up is similar in other regions. We also heard that you are keen to hear from children themselves why they are not taking up the advocacy service.

We queried if the advocate is a consistent person and heard that it should be the same person with a child through the whole time.

We were pleased to hear that feedback from youngsters who have used advocacy has been positive.

We heard that there is still work that needs to be done around Personal Education Plans (PEPs) and that it is not just the social worker involved; the Service has to work with the school. We agree that consistency needs to improve.

We queried if Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) are involved with Health Assessments. We were informed that it is not incorporated into these plans, however there are regular meetings with CAMHS and monitoring that the children the Council looks after, has access to these services. We heard that issues have been raised with CAMHS on a number of occasions.

You confirmed that not all young children would need the primary help CAMHS provide, and reminded us that an update on CAMHS is scheduled for discussion at the May CFS Panel meeting.

We heard that there has been an increase in completion of life story work to 60% but it needs to improve more and it is at the forefront of the action plan. We noted that there are some issues with recording of data on the PARIS system but WCCIS should address these issues.

We wanted to know if the Directorate is satisfied with the service it is getting from Barnardos and BAYS+. We heard that the Directorate is doing a piece of work to look at this service and may make some changes and that a paper will be brought to the Panel on this in the future. We will add this to the future work programme.

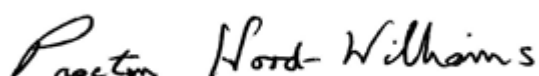
You stated that you felt it was helpful for scrutiny to see this Annual Report and would like to bring it to the Panel again in the future. We will add this to the future work programme.

We also received an update from Cllr Louise Gibbard on the WAO Report on Tackling Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence and we will be writing to her separately on this.

Your Response

We hope you find this letter useful and informative. We would welcome your views and comments on any of the issues raised, but in this instance, we do not require a formal written response.

Yours sincerely



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