

Child and Family Services Scrutiny Performance Panel Update

1. Remit of the Panel

The overarching purpose of the Panel is to provide ongoing challenge to performance in Child and Family Social Services and Poverty and Prevention to ensure that as the Service is undergoing major change, performance is maintained and that further improvements are made across all areas of the Service.

2. Key Activities

For three months from December 2020 to February 2021, joint panel meetings were held between the Child and Family Services Panel and the Adult Services Panel due to the ongoing crisis with the Covid-19 pandemic and resulting increase in workload. The situation was reviewed in February 2021 with separate meetings reconvening in March 2021, still on a remote basis.

Since the last update to the SPC in March 2021, the Panel has looked at the following:

- a) WAO report: Tackling Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (March)
- b) Performance Monitoring (March)
- c) Safeguarding Quality Unit Annual Report (March)
- d) Update on progress with CAMHS (May)
- e) Briefing on Youth Offending Service (May)
- f) Update on Regional Adoption Service (June)
- g) Initial feedback from CIW Assurance Visit (June)
- h) Review of the year and draft work programme (June)
- i) Performance Monitoring (August)
- j) CIW Assurance Visit Full Report (August)
- k) Outcome from Ty Nant CIW Inspection (August)
- l) Progress on Child and Family Improvement Programme (September)
- m) Corporate Parenting Board Update (September)
- n) Appreciative Inquiry video (September)

3. Achievements / Impact

We have sent 6 letters to Cabinet Members since March 2021 in order to give our views, raise concerns and make recommendations, for example:

Positives:

- WAO Report on Tackling Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) - Five generic recommendations came out of the WAO Report and the Council has made good progress and has met all five of them. Swansea's work around the Domestic Abuse Hub had a mention in the Report and was found to be an innovative way of working. The Panel was very pleased to hear this.
- WAO Report on Tackling Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence - Panel informed there is a lot of support available for everyone affected by domestic abuse and that people can go online to the Council's website www.swansea.gov.uk/youarenotalone if they need help or are worried about anyone else. The Panel expressed its confidence in the support that was outlined.
- Update on progress with CAMHS - Mary Jones who had previously chaired the scrutiny inquiry on CAMHS attended for this update and stated that Scrutiny had previously recommended this Service had a single point of access, and was very pleased to see this now in place. Panel heard that as a result of this single point of

access being in place, some of the performance indicators need to be re-developed to show what we need to know locally and to evidence the work now being done. Panel noted it would eventually see performance on CAMHS coming through in Performance Monitoring Reports to the Panel.

- Update on progress with CAMHS – Panel sought reassurance that when a child is in absolute crisis, despite the pressures, the Service is able to provide an urgent response. Officers confirmed the Crisis Team is fully staffed and would be able to respond to a child in absolute crisis, despite access to beds being at crisis point. Panel was very pleased to hear this.
- Briefing on Youth Offending Service – Panel very pleased to hear that the Youth Justice Board has provided a letter of de-escalation as they are satisfied the Service is working in the right direction. This is a great achievement and shows huge improvement over the last year. Panel also heard the Service is continually focussing on the improvement journey and the Improvement and Action Plan is reviewed on a six-monthly basis.
- Update on Regional Adoption Service – Panel heard that 2020 was a difficult year for the service. It adopted a business as usual approach via virtual means and the service was able to maintain performance despite the pandemic. Panel was very pleased to hear this.
- Update on Regional Adoption Service – Panel felt that the figures in the report showed lots of stability. Panel previously concerned that the number of children was increasing and there was a need to increase the number of adopters but this seems to have changed around. Officers confirmed that Western Bay is currently well placed for placements and that the service does not just rely on local adopters; they have a wider pool.
- Update on Regional Adoption Service – Panel wanted to know if the Life Journey work has improved and were informed that a Life Journey Worker was appointed, to help improve Life Journey work, and that there has been improvement.
- CIW Assurance Visit Full Report – Panel heard that the draft letter has been received by the Authority and that we will receive the final version in due course. This will be shared with the Panel together with the full thematic report in the next few months. Panel heard that the written feedback from the inspectors is consistent with the verbal feedback from them following the inspection and that the feedback is entirely consistent with the Authority's own self-assessment. This is really positive. Inspectors reflected positively on the following:
 - Staff are committed, loyal and positive and good visibility of managers at all levels
 - Front door - easy to access, work around signposting, good at providing timely responses
 - Recognise demand and complexity increasing at front door.
 - Early Help Hubs – really liked, and good feedback from partners and others about effectiveness of that work despite impact of Covid
 - Signs of safety and signs of wellbeing work – really good shared vocabulary across workforce and for children and families
 - Liked innovation around communication and engagement
 - Acknowledged improved partnership working with education colleagues and schools, really crucial during pandemic
 - Reflected positively on co-production focus in Corporate Parenting Board.

Issues / Concerns:

- Safeguarding Quality Unit Annual Report - Officers do not know why only a small number of children want to take up the offer of advocacy. The Panel felt this is something that needs to be looked at. The Panel heard that the take up is similar in other regions and that the Service is keen to hear from children themselves why they are not taking up the advocacy service. The Panel queried if the advocate is a consistent person and heard that it should be the same person with a child through the whole time. The Panel was pleased to hear that feedback from youngsters who have used advocacy has been positive.
- Update on Progress with CAMHS - Panel queried the waiting time for the Neurology Development Service that had previously improved from 26 weeks and heard it improved initially with 80% completed in 6 months, however, referrals have now increased three-fold, so the waiting period has increased to over 6 months. Panel heard that discussions are being held Wales-wide on what can be done and that it is being kept under review but it definitely needs improvement.
- Briefing on Youth Offending Service – Panel raised its concerns about young people’s involvement in the riots in May Hill and the word ‘culture’ being raised. Officers confirmed there was a huge coordinated response with 50 agencies involved. They are aware of issues and are trying to get ahead of the game and identify where problems are and what could be done differently to start intervening. Panel heard that issues around violence and young people are being looked at across Swansea with partners and that there is a need to continue to think about this and plan. Officers believe having more of a presence in the community should make a difference.
- Update on Regional Adoption Service – Panel queried why some children from Swansea had been placed in England and was informed that for some children, in larger sibling groups, and some with additional needs, there were no adopters locally. The service used the adoption register to identify placements further afield in these cases. Panel heard that the complexity of children coming through the system does not match the number of adopters available who will take on these children and that marketing is currently doing a piece of work to try and increase these adopters.
- Performance Monitoring – Panel felt that the number of re-registrations currently appears high. It is concerning if cases are being closed and then children are being re-registered again in a short period of time. Officers stated they are currently looking at this in more detail and hope to pull some common themes together.
- Performance Monitoring – Panel queried how the change over to a new information system has impacted the Authority’s ability to run the Service as they want to and heard that the Service is doing more manual reporting and using more manpower currently. The Director informed the Panel that it has had an enormous impact and it operates completely differently to the old PARIS system but they were expecting this. He believes the Service will quickly pick up the new approach. He stated that they did not appreciate the national issues around performance of the system but these are being picked up. Also they did not appreciate the time involved in recording information but have enough assurance from manually tracking that they are doing what needs to be done and no one is being put at risk. Panel also heard it is putting an added burden on social workers. The Panel was encouraged to keep the pressure on and was informed that if it wants further information, where there are gaps in the report, the Panel should ask officers for feedback from their audit activity.

- CIW Assurance Visit Full Report – Panel heard about the Issues from the inspection:
 - Staff feeling under significant pressure
 - Quality Assurance (QA) – overall arrangements – inspectors see evidence of improvement but still work in progress.

Director felt there may be issues the Panel will want to pick up re QA on the work plan going forward ie some specific examples on how QA is being improved. He stated it is not just about the numbers, it is about a range of audit activities and checking case files and interviews with children and families etc.

- Outcomes from Ty Nant Children’s Home CIW Inspection – Panel informed Cabinet Member that it felt it was a concerning document with a number of actions for the Service. However, details of the action plan showed the Department knows what needs to be done. Panel heard that the report identified a number of issues and challenges but they were issues the Department anticipated. There were some positives identified and one of the areas for improvement is Quality Assurance. Panel raised concern that it had taken CIW to highlight the problems and not management. Panel heard that they were already aware of a lot of things highlighted in the report but the last year had been a very difficult year to implement changes as dealing with the pandemic and there was an issue with the management of the home. Panel heard that it was planned to take forward these actions anyway but it had not been done before the CIW visit. CIW will be undertaking another visit shortly. Actions in the Action Plan are to be completed by the end of September and officers are confident this target will be met. An update on progress with the action plan has been scheduled in the Panel’s work programme for December 2021, to ensure things are going in the right direction.

Actions Recommended / Agreed:

- WAO Report on Tackling Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence - The Panel noted that the report mentions a funding gap for prevention work and queried if there is currently enough funding for the work that needs to be done. They heard that there has been additional funding but there is still a gap. Discussion took place about how funding is positive but comes with a risk as the work is funded by grants that are uncertain going forward. This is not helpful for sustainability and the long term. The Panel heard how this issue is brought up with Welsh Government continually, as it needs to be mainstreamed. The Panel asked if there is anything it can do to help with this situation. Officers confirmed they will come back with any suggestions of how scrutiny can help.

Cabinet Member Response: We request the permission of the Panel to submit its comprehensive letter to the Welsh Government VAWDASV team, and ask for a response as to how we can move this forward. *The Panel agreed to this request.*

- WAO Report on Tackling Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence – Panel asked for more information on prevention and work being carried out with children in particular, in respect of educating them as well as making them aware of support. Panel heard that the domestic abuse hub is preventative but is secondary and that the new approach is primary prevention. Welsh Government is encouraging a ‘whole school’ approach and it has been incorporated into school’s new curriculum. Cabinet Member told the Panel she felt it would be useful if schools could have a domestic abuse governor looking out for staff too and that it is all about awareness raising. Panel Members agreed that their role as governor in schools is very important and asked if it is possible to arrange training for all councillors. Cabinet Member supported this suggestion and agreed, along with officers, to put this in place.

Cabinet Member response: We will plan and deliver a number of training sessions on 'Awareness and Understanding of Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence', within a Swansea context. These will be held online via Microsoft Teams, and will be available to all councillors. In addition to this, there are a series of videos available, named 'The Strengthening Leadership Series', which was developed by Welsh Government and Welsh Women's Aid. These are aimed at people in public leadership roles, which we will circulate to councillors for viewing. The films offer short bursts of information which can be used to shape strategic direction, and improve knowledge.

4. Future Work Programme

The programme for the remainder of this municipal year is as follows:

Meeting date	Item to be discussed
3 Nov 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance Monitoring • Adolescent Strategy and Action Plan • Update on Child Disability Services
13 Dec 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update on Support for Carers (including Assessments) • Complaints Annual Report 2020/21 for Adult Services / Child and Family Services • Ty Nant – Update on progress with action plan
25 Jan 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivery of Corporate Priorities in relation to Child and Family Services • Performance Monitoring
February 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft Budget Proposals for Child and Family Services
9 March 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safeguarding Quality Unit Annual Report • Update from Regional Safeguarding Board on how regional arrangements are working

5. Action for the Scrutiny Programme Committee

None.