



City and County of Swansea

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

Remotely via Microsoft Teams

Tuesday, 25 January 2022 at 4.00 pm

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

Councillor(s)

C Anderson
K M Griffiths
D W W Thomas

Councillor(s)

A M Day
Y V Jardine

Councillor(s)

M Durke
W G Lewis

Other Attendees

Elliott King Cabinet Member - Children Services

Officer(s)

Julie Davies Head of Child & Family Services
Liz Jordan Scrutiny Officer

Apologies for Absence

Councillor(s): 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)

Panel agreed the minutes of the meeting on 13 December 2021 as an accurate record of the meeting.

4 Public Question Time

No questions were submitted.

5 Performance Highlight Report and Emergency Staffing Plan

Julie Davies, Head of Child and Family Services attended to brief the Panel on this item.

Discussion Points:

- Performance Monitoring - More families are being supported through early help hubs which is indicative of them being more proactive in their approach. Continuing to have higher number of children registered on child protection register at birth which continues on an upward trend. Noticeable reduction in average number of days children on child protection register.
- Officers confirmed the figure for Number of Days on Child Protection Register indicated a more driven proactive approach to support families so children are not on the Child Protection Register any longer than they should be.
- Panel noted the increase in unborns being taken into care and queried how much explanation is given to the mother. Officers stated the Directorate looks at every case individually, the focus always is on working with parents to try and enable the baby to stay in the family unit.
- Panel concerned about support for refugees and asylum seeker families as many families are placed temporarily and are then moved to a different part of the city. Panel queried if any special provision is made and what the support system is for them. It was confirmed that if they meet the statutory threshold or come through the Early Help Hub, the Directorate works together with the Council's services and local services to offer support to families they are aware of.
- Panel stated that the figures are impressive in terms of the way the numbers of looked after children have been reducing, especially in current circumstances, which is a credit to the Department. Department is satisfied that in terms of re-referrals and registrations, they are still comparatively low.
- Emergency Staffing – Directorate has still not recruited to vacant social worker posts in locality teams. Had more success in Front Door as able to appoint support workers which is easing some of the pressure in the locality teams. Department continues to pull in support from across the Service to ensure key statutory duties are met and independent social workers if needed for key tasks.
- there are not sufficient placements available, so the Department is having to use a lot of its own staff to provide care and support for children in unregulated placements and more children are being placed in England. Part of the problem is the Welsh Government initiative to eliminate profit from children's social care resulting in some providers deciding to stop future plans to move into Wales to develop placements or deciding they are not going to continue offering placements to children in Wales.
- The Directorate continues to work with local universities so that for newly qualified social workers it can get a more direct feed into the Service to work on lower-level cases.
- Officers confirmed that the current pandemic has not affected staffing as much as feared and that the Covid contingency plan had been re-introduced.
- Panel sought confirmation that independent fostering companies are looking at stepping away from Wales and heard that some providers are stepping away because of uncertainty in terms of what the programme will mean in terms of elimination of profit from children's residential care.
- Panel queried if Welsh Government are thinking along the lines of re-investing the profit into education of looked after children in order to help fund this type of provision for the most vulnerable young people. Cabinet Member stated

that it is a Welsh Government desire to remove profit from children's social care but believes investment from Welsh Government will be in the long term.

Work Programme Timetable 2021-22

Panel noted items on the work programme for the remainder of this municipal year.

The meeting ended at 4.45 pm.