



To:
Councillor Elliott King, Cabinet Member for
Children's Services

BY EMAIL

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Date 10 January 2022
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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's Services following the meeting of the Panel on 13 December 2021. It covers Matters Arising, Performance Report and Emergency Staffing Plan and Update on Ty Nant.

Dear Cllr King,

The Panel met on 13 December 2021 to receive a briefing on the Performance Highlight Report for October 2021 and the Emergency Staffing Plan and an update on Progress with the Action Plan following the CIW Inspection of Ty Nant Children's Home.

We would like to thank Dave Howes, Julie Davies, Chris Francis and Mike Repetti for attending to present these items and answer the Panel's questions. We appreciate their 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:

Minutes of Previous Meeting

Under matters arising I raised a query. Following the meeting on 21 September we had requested data on the progress of looked after children in education compared to others. Your response stated that this information was not available, as an analysis of the data was not currently being carried out. I sent a follow up email stating that I

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believed the Authority must hold the relevant information and requested a response at this meeting.

Officers responded that following discussion with Education colleagues they could confirm that the Welsh Government run system that would normally provide the data has been paused due to the pandemic, and that the Education Department did not have the resources to do this manually at present in a way that could be shared to be able to see the comparison. However, for individual children, this would be done as part of the Looked After Children statutory reviews. We heard that the department hope to be able to provide some analysis in the new year and this will be shared with the Panel.

The Chair of the Education Policy Development Committee informed the meeting that the Committee currently has a strong focus on vulnerability and if any relevant information is received there, he will pass it on to the Panel.

Performance Highlight Report and Emergency Staffing Plan

We heard that the Panel is receiving a shortened performance monitoring report due to the transition and issues with the new computer system and a shortage of staff. We were informed that to offer a level of assurance the Directorate has introduced manual tracking systems to capture the most important data. We also heard that you hope to provide data on time limited assessments and conferencing reviews from November 2021 and hope to resume full performance reporting from February 2022 onwards.

We were informed that the outcomes from the inspection of the Youth Offending Service will be brought to a future CFS Panel meeting.

We raised the recent tragic case in Solihull and asked officers to give an idea of what went wrong. We also sort reassurance that this would not happen to children in this local authority area.

We heard that the Directorate had had worries about being able to recruit social workers for two to three months. In this time, staff have been brought in from other areas of the Service to assist and support so that looked after children and those on the child protection register continue to be seen when they need to be and visits that need to be taken, and statutory reviews take place on time. We also heard that risks have been managed well by Social Services and their partners by ensuring core groups happen when they need to happen for children on the register and that the right partners attend when they need to. We were informed that dialogue with Education has been improved and strengthened with weekly safeguarding meetings held with Education, Health and Police to ensure you keep in contact with children you are most worried about. We heard that this was one of the challenges raised in the case in Solihull – keeping in contact with children Authorities are most worried about, “having eyes on them” - and that this has been a real worry for Social Services across the UK but officers in Swansea believe you are doing everything you possibly can.

We asked about the difficulty in recruiting to the Service and stated that in the past the Authority had tried raising salaries to attract people, but it did not work as everyone

else did the same. We queried if there were longer term strategies, what the supply of students was like and if there were any links with universities to potential students. We heard that local authorities across Wales recognise they are searching in the same pool and have spoken to the Welsh Government about medium-and long- term strategies such as a pay scale for social workers, and how the agency market can be monitored. Officers confirmed that you are very keen on and are pursuing 'growing your own' and stated that Swansea has a good intake of newly qualified social workers into CFS but that numbers of students qualifying as social workers are down overall in Wales and England. We heard that the Authority is strengthening links with universities and supporting staff to pursue qualifications. We commented that it is also a question of caseload and not just pay and asked if there are any measures the Council can look at in terms of addressing workload for social workers. We heard that there is a model in Swansea that you work to, but this has been challenged recently and some of the senior social workers may be holding higher caseloads than usual. However because additional family support worker posts have been appointed, you are confident this will make a difference in the new year as they can hold some of the non-statutory cases. We were informed that there is also a strong wellbeing support programme in Swansea which is available to the whole team.

We requested a breakdown of the total CFS staff team including the number of social workers, length of service, what they do, where they are and what roles are statutory roles that only a qualified social worker can do. Panel Members feel we need people with skills, knowledge and aptitude and should be encouraging these people into key roles and not just looking for people with degrees. We also felt the Authority should consider having a conversion process worked out with the universities. We heard that you very much recognise the value of all staff and the contribution they make, including individuals who are not qualified social workers. We also heard that you are looking at how you can support these individuals across the Service to progress their careers and are pursuing with universities the possibility of conversion courses. We heard that the job of a social worker is not currently attractive in the UK and is not helped by the poor press the profession receives.

The Director stated that you value all staff and all staff contributions, that Social Services have hundreds of differently qualified staff, and that they are the bulk of the workforce, however there are some statutory requirements about having qualified social workers in particular roles and it is for these roles that there is a shortage of social workers. He agreed it would be good if people coming into the profession were drawn from the cohort of individuals who had worked in those other settings or differently qualified roles and confirmed that some do but the majority coming through are newly qualified social workers.

We asked about the market supplements mentioned in the report and if they are only to be offered to social workers and senior social workers in the three locality teams and heard that no other financial incentives are planned for CFS currently but there is a big focus on wellbeing.

I stated that progress with the Department over the last 10 years has been remarkable and it gives me confidence that the Head of Child and Family Services came from a safeguarding background.

The Panel then went into closed session to discuss the following item:

Ty Nant – Update on Progress with Action Plan

We heard that going forward the Directorate wants to go much further than what was in the action plan and that a number of checks and mini reviews will be taking place to check on impact.

We were reminded that the inspection highlighted several areas where the process was positive including management.

We heard that officers who work at the Home felt the inspection gave an unfair reflection on their practice in some areas as there were periods of crisis management throughout that time due to the pandemic. Also, with regards to quality assurance, we heard that there were fantastic examples of good practice, however these were not documented anywhere. Therefore, when the inspection was held the inspectors could not see what had happened to achieve the outcomes. We also heard that training deficiencies were mentioned in the inspection report and officers felt this was unfair as their practice was underpinned by really good training but as it was not captured in the training matrix, it was not readily identifiable to inspectors.

We queried if the deputy manager was still having to undertake a working role as well as managing. It was confirmed that in the new structure this member of staff is 'off rota' when undertaking the managerial function.

We stated that if there is anything we can do as a scrutiny panel, in terms of the performance element, to help officers with their job to let us know. We heard that an annual report will be produced in April 2022 and it could come to the Panel to check out the findings.

We were interested to hear any ideas for the Panel to see exactly how this Service works. Officers responded that they could think about producing a 'Life in the day of' video of children in Ty Nant, for some time in the future. We agreed that this would be useful.

We discussed school exclusions and officers stated that they have been talking to Education about school exclusions with regards to looked after children and different ways of dealing with this and that you would like to bring a report on this to the Panel in the future.

We were pleased to see a lot of thought going into the report received from Care Inspectorate Wales and that you are dealing with the issues. We informed officers that if there is anything Panel Members can do to support officers they will, not to criticise but to understand what they are going through and to help out if they can.

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 on this occasion please provide a formal written response by Monday 31 January 2022 to the following:

- Information on breakdown of CFS workforce to be provided to Panel.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paxton Hood-Williams". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'P'.

PAXTON HOOD-WILLIAMS
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