



Report of the Cabinet Member for Care Services

Child and Family Services Scrutiny Performance Panel – 5 December 2022

Child and Family Services Improvement Programme Update

Purpose	To update scrutiny panel on the improvement and intervention programme within Child and Family Services.
Content	This report provides an update against the priority improvement areas that are being taken forward by CFS during 2022/23.
Councillors are being asked to	Consider the report as part of their routine review of performance and improvement in Child and Family Services.
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Lead Officer(s)	Gemma Whyley, Principal Officer for Transformation Julie Davies, Head of Child and Family Services
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1. Improvement Priorities for Child and Family Services

1.1. Swansea Child and Family Services is facing a number of challenges and pressures on its road to recovery post-pandemic. These are not dissimilar to those faced in other Local Authorities – increase in and different types of demand; social work recruitment crisis; the expectations from Welsh Government as articulated in their programme for change, and more recently the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on our vulnerable children, young people and their families and carers.

The improvement priorities for the service are focused on three critical areas, with more detail provided below on key actions to deliver the necessary change:

- Prevention and early intervention
- Placement sufficiency
- Workforce

This report will provide an update as to some of the work ongoing to support the improvement of the service under these three themes.

2. Prevention and Early Intervention

2.1. FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES – SINGLE POINT OF ENTRY

The Family Support service is currently piloting a new way of receiving and allocating work into this service. The Single Point of Entry (SPOE) has been operational for a number of months and recent progress has enabled the service to think and respond differently to what matters. It means working with the social worker to respond more appropriately to what matters at an earlier stage so that the right people can be tasked with the right work and at the right time for the family. Initial feedback suggests that this way of working is helping the service to tailor its support packages to meet what matters more holistically to the children and young people that need they help. Feedback from staff who are working in this new way has been positive with the majority reporting it has had a positive or extremely positive impact on their moral. Likewise, stakeholders that access this provision have suggested that it “Saves social workers 'hours of time’”, that it is, “Much quicker and much easier to get support” and that the, “Family get support quicker”.

2.2. THERAPY SERVICES

Our therapeutic service underwent a review in 2021 and have designed a new model as a result of their learning. This new model incorporates the therapeutic recovery model and supports staff in understanding basic emotional needs such as safety and relationships before progressing on to building emotional resilience and reflection.

These basic skills are needed before a child, young person or family can fully engage in group or one to one therapeutic intervention. The model aims to understand what matters from the perspective of the service user by identifying need early on and building more robust plans with the Social Worker to support the child or young person through the therapeutic model. It is hoped that this will enable us to provide more meaningful and longer lasting therapeutic interventions at an earlier stage of the care plan. The model is in its initial scoping stages and a test of this way of working is being set-up to measure success in this area.

An additional element of therapeutic work is ongoing within our Foster Wales service. The service has recently acquired Welsh Government funding via the regional partnership board to support a therapeutic foster hub. This hub aims to support children and young people to step down from residential care with a more effective model of support to help their foster carers understand and respond to their therapeutic needs. This involves offering wrap around support for the foster carers of each young person as they step down from residential care to allow the foster carers to understand their trauma nurture timeline in order to respond more appropriately. This hub will also support in wider development, training and upskilling of our foster carers as well as targeted recruitment of foster carers, who will be provided with an enhancement to their funding, to care for children with more complex needs.

2.3 CONTINUUM OF NEED

Our work at the early stages of the continuum of need is progressing and schools across Swansea now have Senior Lead Workers within their buildings. This means that workers from our Early Help Teams are more closely aligned to schools so that multi-agency discussions, which can also include the family, can happen more effectively during the referral process. The purpose of piloting this way of working was so that children, young people, their families and professionals are able to access the right information, advice and assistance at the earliest opportunity and not have to go through lots of different processes before they get the right help at the right time from the right people.

Support does not always have to be from services. It might be better from people around them like family or friends. They might need it to come from other organisations or charities. To support this, school-based professionals are also able to have conversations with our Senior Lead Workers without consent of the family. These conversations happen anonymously without the need to disclose identifying factors. This helps school professionals with their own reflective practice supporting them to exhaust their own support before the need for more professional support which is available after obtaining consent.

2.4 YOUTH WORK

In November 2021 we undertook a review of our youth service and sought the views of young people, parents/carers, community stakeholders and staff, in order to determine whether we would return to the model of 5 youth clubs or continue with the blended approach introduced through the pandemic. This concluded in February 2022.

Through this process, young people and staff told us that they liked the blended approach and in light of the fact that the reach of the open access youth service in Swansea increased from 493 sessions reaching 891 young people in 2019/20 (when our offer was restricted to youth clubs) to 297 sessions reaching 4286 young people in 2020/21 (when we offered a blended approach of youth club, outreach, targeted group work, school work and access to online support) the review concluded that we would continue with the blended model of open access youth provision in Swansea.

In order to enable us to deliver on this blended model of youth work in Swansea, a number of staffing changes were made. As well as the additional capacity in the open access youth service, Child and Family Services have developed a new team that sits under the same Principal Officer's portfolio.

Our Contextual, Missing, Exploited and Trafficked (CMET) panel have been continuing to work with young people who are at risk of these exploitations. So far, the success they've achieved through our detached youth work model and multi-agency work includes;

- The creation of a CMET panel of young people including those of have experienced Extra Familial Harm
- Over 5,500 young people have engaged with our work
- More than 80 detached youth work sessions and 182 group sessions focused around safety
- Trained 60+ adults working in supported accommodation on the risks associated with Extra Familial Harm
- Ran 72 community engagement events and 28 pop-up youth club sessions
- City Rangers have updated their procedures to include guidance on child welfare approaches
- A number of professionals from different organisations across Swansea have attended our CMET panel and are committed to working in partnership with us

3. ENHANCED SUPPORT FOR PARENTS

3.1. NEURODIVERSITY LEAD WORK

Early Help has had a significant increase in the number of referrals received for families whereby Neuro Diversity is presenting as a significant issue for both children, young people and their parents to understand and manage. Quality assurance work undertaken with

managers of the hubs has highlighted that a large number of the current workforce are not skilled or equipped to deal with issues around all aspects of Neuro Diversity.

Appointing a new Lead Worker dedicated to the development and delivery of interventions for families, providing work force development opportunities and staff consultations will ensure we have robust offers in place whilst building on a whole service response to all aspects of Neuro Diversity.

3.2. OUT OF COURT DISPOSAL

A specialist role has been created within our Early Help Hubs to help support parents outside of the court process as a result of the Welsh Governments removal of reasonable chastisement. This role will work with parents to manage behaviour in a different way that to prevent the need for prosecution. The role will deliver child development programmes and behaviour management programmes on both an individual and group basis.

3.3. PARENTAL CONFLICT

Since the pandemic SPOC and Early Help have had a significant increase in the number of referrals received for families whereby parental conflict is a significant issue impacting on the behaviour of children of all ages. Quality assurance work undertaken with managers of the hubs has highlighted that a large number of the current workforce are not skilled or equipped to deal with issues around parental conflict whereby parents co-parent but live independent of each other.

The creation of a Lead Worker post dedicated to development and delivery of interventions for families, providing workforce development opportunities and staff consultations will ensure we have a robust offer in place whilst building on a whole service response to parental conflict.

3.4. PARENTAL ADVOCACY NETWORK

Additionally, the parental advocacy network has been developed to provide parental peer support for those who might be experiencing the child protection process. This work includes parent cafes that are ran exclusively for parents by parents. The volunteers who run these cafes have often experienced these processes themselves and are able to provide ad-hoc, relational support to other parents in similar positions. This also gives us the opportunity to support parents into this voluntary role which helps to develop their skills and experiences. This scheme is currently funded by Welsh Government, and it is hoped that the provision will be commissioned in future to sustain this work.

3.5. CARERS ASSESSMENTS

A new Carers Hub has been developed within the Single Point of Entry as a result in an increase in demand for carers assessments. This

work will now be prioritised within The Academy so that newly qualified workers can deliver these assessments.

3.6. FAMILY NETWORK PROJECT

This pilot has been underway since December 2021 and supports families to develop their networks to help them achieve safety for their children and to exit safely out of social services by developing their own plan, supported by their naturally occurring network. Since the beginning of this project the team have worked with 27 children, 25 of which were on the child protection register. This work has avoided the additional cost associated with children becoming looked after but more importantly, has supported children to remain at home with their families.

3.7. BORN INTO CARE

Following research across the UK into the population of unborn children being 'born into care' a report has been published which includes guidelines for local authorities to consider. As a result, a group of practitioners from across Child and Family Services came together to consider how best to address the recommendations and develop a road map for implementation of the draft guidelines alongside our existing services.

Initial work for this project team has included the creation of a new, early assessment panel for unborn work which includes multi agency, reflective discussions within 10 days of allocation. Family network meetings are also being used within this process to ensure that the whole family are involved in supporting the safety of the wider network and the future safety planning. The information collated as part of this assessment process is pulled together and discussed as part of a case conference which will inform the future intervention or support offered.

This development work means that staff can access support for families on unborn children prior to the families 12-week scan which will allow us additional time to work directly with families and support them to remain together once the baby is born.

Initial feedback obtained from service users who have accessed this support has been extremely positive with many families now successfully caring for their young children at home. This has had a direct impact on those families whose needs may have escalated into more intensive statutory support.

4. Placement Sufficiency

- 4.1 The availability of suitable placements in Wales continues to be an ongoing challenge. The Welsh Government programme for change will require local authorities to rapidly expand their in-house provision (residential and fostering) in the next 3 years.

The direction of travel from Welsh Government is to restrict the market to local authority and not for profit providers. Their intention is to legislate to prevent local authorities from commissioning for profit providers; and to introduce changes to the regulatory body (CIW) which will mean that for profit providers will not be able to secure registration.

There are a number of ongoing pieces of work designed to support the pressure in this area.

4.2 SGO DEVELOPMENT WORK

The Family and Friends Team (FAFT) are leading a specific piece of work to understand and respond to the needs of our young people and carers who are subject to a Special Guardianship Order. From a policy perspective, we are looking at:

- mapping the current process and flow relating to assessment and creation of SGO arrangements to understand the current system and identify opportunities to further develop to ensure that families in SGO arrangements are receiving the right information and support at the right time.
- development of an updated SGO Financial Arrangements Policy to ensure consistent payment arrangements for Special Guardians and outline an eligibility criteria for requesting enhanced payments.
- Development of updated overarching policy, process and practice guidance to ensure accessible information is available for all stakeholders, including children, young people and families.
- The Participation and Children's Rights Officer (PCRO) is further supporting this work by working alongside FAFT to understand what matters about SGO processes and arrangements from the perspective of both carers and children and young people.

4.3 FOSTER WALES

The work within our foster teams to continue to attract and retain foster carers is ongoing. Some key highlights include;

- Targeted recruitment campaigns for adolescents, and parent and child carers.
- Attract carers from Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) to move across to Foster Wales Swansea
- Foster Wales bid to Welsh Government for additional funding to expand local authority recruitment and assessment capacity (employing alternatively qualified staff).
- Commissioned Homes for Good to attract foster carers via faith-based organisations

- National fostering campaign to attract more carers from a range of backgrounds to meet the needs of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.
- Exploring community-based support service for parent and child placements (subject to securing grant funding).
- Explore collaborative approach with not-for-profit IFAs

4.4 ADOPTION

The adoption service has continued to develop significant areas of its work. Key priorities for the service identified at the end of 2021-22 are in progress, significant areas of the Good Practise Guides have been developed. Supporting the development of the WCCIS adoption module continues with all of the adoption processes being mapped and National templates being agreed. Good progress has been made in respect of addressing the waiting list for non-agency cases and access to records. The service has been able to allocate all adoption support assessments in a timely way with no waiting list for these assessments.

Areas and priorities for future development for the rest of this year have been considered within the body of the report, however the key priorities for the service are:

- Further embedding of the GPG's utilising the new adoption support workers to embed the check-ins and birth parent support.
- Offer all children over three an UTC day
- Redevelopment and launch of the website to improve online offer to adopters, birth parents and children and young people
- Birth parent support groups to be further developed across the region
- The service has a vast array of workshops being offered, need to ensure that the service can start to be able to report the impact of this work.

4.5 SUPPORTED ACCOMMODATION PATHWAYS (SAP)

We are reviewing our supported accommodation pathways to enable us to find appropriate placements for our young people that can meet their complex needs. An example of this work includes;

- Created regional offer for UASC in partnership with NPT LA, working in partnership with a local provider to acquire 3 homes, using grant funding, offering up to 10 placements.
- Reached out to Swansea based providers to expand their residential and supported accommodation locally
- Exploring a new model of care (LA, health and education) via the Regional Partnership Board for children and young people with complex needs
- Acquiring a further property (Home 5) for the in-house residential home portfolio

- Expanding edge of care offer for adolescents (subject to securing grant)

Due to the challenges in accessing provision for young people we are re-thinking the current SAP process, this includes running a workshop with SAP providers to consider a more strength-based approach to information sharing. Currently the referral form focuses on risks and concerns and this does not present a fair and balanced view of the young person. We want to focus more on providing a picture of the young person identifying how risks/concerns can be effectively and appropriately managed.

In addition we are looking at changing the SAP allocation meeting and moving away from presenting all young people who require accommodation to all providers, instead focusing on identifying which providers would be best suited to the young person and holding a multi-agency meeting to consider how best the placement could be supported. There is an appetite to support this approach by SAP providers.

4.6 RESIDENTIAL CARE HOMES AND EMERGENCY PLACEMENTS

As part of WG programme to eliminate profit from residential provision within our capital development programme we have made provision to purchase and develop homes. There are currently an additional three homes in the process of being developed;

- Tir Du is in the initial stages of registration with CIW. The home will provide a short to medium term placement to support semi-independent living and/or as a transition into supported accommodation.
- Home 3 is one of our new properties, we received the keys in late June. The plan for this home, after adaptations, is to support step up/step down from secure accommodation, meeting the requirements of children and young people who have more complex needs.
- Home 4 is the adjoining semi-detached property. The plan for this home is to support emergency/crisis placements for children and young people. In these situations, the placement move is not likely to be as planned as we would expect and usually needs to be available, with appropriately trained and the right number of staffing levels, to support the children and young people in very short time scales.

5. Workforce

- 5.1 We know that our staff are our greatest asset and that they want to be front and centre in the lives of the families they support to help them achieve what matters. Our staff love making a difference and when they can achieve what matters to a family, they feel a huge sense of satisfaction and value.

To support with some of the immediate workforce issues, a number of pieces of work are ongoing.

5.2 STAFF REWARD AND RECOGNITION

The workforce programme continues to focus its efforts on the presenting capacity issues faced by our front-line services. The programme recently agreed to deliver a reward and recognition programme which would see staff rewarded with vouchers and additional praise from senior officers to recognise their efforts.

Additionally, the service held two staff days through October and November. These were opportunities for the workforce to come together as a whole to celebrate the work to date and share learning and practice across the continuum of need. The days included thank you's to the workforce from the Head of Service and Directors as well as appreciative enquiry videos from a number of service areas. This gave the service a chance to reflect on the excellent work that continues to be done and the wonderful outcomes that are achieved as part of our daily work. It is hoped that this event, along with a reminder of some wellbeing tools, will help staff to feel valued, appreciated and maintain a healthy wellbeing throughout this winter period.

5.3 THE ACADEMY

Our Social Work Academy is now fully operational and a number of recently qualified workers have been recruited to fill the vacant positions in those teams. The Academy is now able to take new Child in Need of Care and Support (CINCS) cases and work with these families intensively. This will support a decrease in work within our statutory teams allowing staff in those areas a more appropriate workload. The Academy will also give us the opportunity to work quickly with families to prevent them from needing more intensive support.

The staff within the Academy are made up of newly qualified workers who have often completed their placement with us. These Newly Qualified workers will start their Social Work career with us and be nurtured and developed within the Academy. Having the time and space to develop their practice with less complex cases will help them build their confidence and skills. They will then be able to transfer their skills across the service as they move into the more complicated world of Child Protection cases. This is the beginning of our career progression pathway that will see these members of staff move on to different areas of the service in future, thus growing our own future workforce that are aligned to the values and principles of us as a Local Authority. To support this work, we are committed as a service in supporting our own staff to become qualified workers and are sponsoring a number of them to complete their qualifications through the Open University.

5.4 RECRUITMENT AND AGENCY STAFFING

The All-Wales approach to managing social worker recruitment agencies is ongoing and the Heads of Children's Services are working towards a set of principles that will guide this. Amongst those is the promise that local authorities will consider a collective response to the use of agency workers. Of course this is the very beginning of this work and will require a cohesive response from across Wales to be successful. We are hopeful that this work will continue to support the ongoing pressures faced by our social care staff.