



To:
Councillor Louise Gibbard
Cabinet Member for Care Services

BY EMAIL

cc Cabinet Members

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Date 12 July 2023
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Summary: This is a letter from the Child and Family Services Scrutiny Performance Panel to the Cabinet Member for Care Services following the meeting of the Panel on 20 June 2023. It covers Performance Monitoring and Regional Adoption Service.

Dear Cllr Gibbard

The Panel met on 20 June 2023 to receive a briefing on the Performance Monitoring Report for April 2023 and an update on the Western Bay Regional Adoption Service.

We would like to thank you and relevant officers for attending to present the items and answer the Panel's questions. We appreciate your engagement and input.

We are writing to you to reflect on what we learned from the discussion, share the views of the Panel, and, where necessary, raise any issues or recommendations for your consideration and response.

Performance Monitoring

Julie Davies, Head of Child and Family Services briefed us on the Performance Monitoring Report for April 2023 and answered questions.

We heard that in April CIW undertook a rapid review of child protection in Swansea and that feedback was positive. There will not be a formal report for Swansea but there will be a national report.

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We noted that numbers in residential care have gone up slightly. We heard this links to a lack of foster carers. We were pleased to hear that you anticipate a rise when we see the next report, following a recruitment drive in May with Foster Care Wales, but you need to ensure this is converted into applications and timely approvals.

We queried the step increase shown on the graph for people going to Early Help Hubs in April 2022. We were informed that this was due to a change in recording between March and April 2022 and that it now shows a more accurate reflection of caseloads and demands in this area.

We queried if the Independent Carers Assessors Team is in-house, and if so, how it is independent. We heard that it is because you look at just the carers in their own right, as opposed to a parent/child assessment.

We noted 'number of children registered previously' was about one third of the number on the register and thought this seemed high. We were informed the main reason is change of circumstances. We stated we would be concerned if a child came back onto the child protection register less than a year after being taken off it. Officers confirmed you look at this and have a specific indicator for it and agreed to include 'number of children added to Child Protection Register, within 12 months of de-registration who've been re-registered under the same category' in future analysis for the performance report.

We queried if there were problems with rolling out the new forms for reporting of child protection activity and if the Department was satisfied with them. We heard it has progressed as anticipated and continues to evolve and that getting the system right is an ongoing piece of work.

We noted there was no indication of staffing levels in the report, particularly numbers of agency staff and were informed at last count you were down to four agency social workers but would welcome more currently and are trying to recruit two more.

Update on Western Bay Regional Adoption Service

Nichola Rogers, Regional Adoption Manager attended to brief the Panel and answer questions.

We were informed that following covid it had been a challenging two years for the Service in terms of performance. We heard there was a huge reduction in the number of placement orders granted, that this is increasing now, but it is unlikely to increase to pre-covid levels.

We were pleased to hear the Service is able to continue placing the majority of children with regional adopters and about the development in its adoption support service, which the Service is most proud of and ensures the Service is caring for everyone in the process.

We queried how the Service generates income and heard that over the covid years the Service had more adopters waiting than children available. Many adopters therefore went onto the adoption register for Wales and looked at children available for adoption

across the UK. Western Bay Regional Adoption Service gained a placement fee for these placements and used this money to put into the adoption service.

We queried what is meant by 'twin tracking' referrals. We heard that when a local authority decides it needs to issue care proceedings and look for the best plan for the child, if adoption is a likely option, it will refer it to the regional adoption service at that point and the service starts its work with birth parents and childcare social workers, and not all regions do this.

We discussed how four or five years ago the Service did not have enough adopters for the number of children needing to be adopted. We felt that during covid this was more or less in balance and asked about the situation currently. We were informed the Service still has a pool of waiting adopters, and through the market share project has additional placements it can use, so thinks that this year it will break even. However, if the number of inquiries and adopters coming through does not increase it could find itself in a similar position next year.

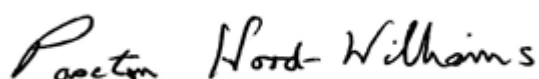
We noted the reduction in the number of approvals and asked if this was a concern. We heard it is a concern, has become a national rather than a regional problem and is on the national agenda. This is an issue the Panel will need to monitor.

We asked about life stories, which the Service was struggling to get done in the past, and what the situation is currently. We were informed Wales is making improvements in this area. From a regional perspective, a small team has been developed within the Service which looks at life journey work offered to adopters and childcare social worker workshops in achieving the best life journey work for children. We heard the Service's check in process is also influential and that in addition, the Western Bay Regional Adoption Manager chairs the National Life Journey Sub-Group which looks at best practice.

Your Response

We hope you find this letter useful and informative. We would welcome your comments on any of the issues raised, however in this instance, a formal written response is not required.

Yours sincerely



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