



To:
Councillor Louise Gibbard
Cabinet Member for Care Services

BY EMAIL

cc Cabinet Members

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Date 29 August 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 02 August 2023. It covers Annual Wellbeing Report and Residential Care Services.

Dear Cllr Gibbard

The Panel met on 2 August 2023 to receive a briefing on the Annual Wellbeing/Performance Report for 2022/23 and an update on Residential Care Services including Ty Nant.

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.

Annual Wellbeing/Performance Report

Julie Davies, Head of Child and Family Services briefed the Panel on the Annual Wellbeing Report for 2022/23 and answered questions.

We heard from you that it had been another challenging year but with a lot of positives including new ways of working being embedded and a lot of learning taking place. You thanked the Head of Service and officers for their incredible hard work.

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY / TROSOLWG A CHRAFFU

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Officers asked for feedback on the Report, and we stated that it was very easy to read, laid out well and showed officers strength of conviction.

We noted 24 children were re-referred to the child protection register within the year, and asked if there was a breakdown of the reasons for re-referral. We were informed that it varies depending on a child's circumstances, for example, a change in family circumstances; impact of covid on people's behaviour who now cannot cope. We heard that circumstances are looked at in weekly safeguarding meetings and also that officers are pulling together themes to help them understand this data better to see if anything can be done differently that will help reduce referrals in future.

We queried the situation with staff shortages and heard that there are only around four agency staff currently. We were pleased to hear that some benefits are being seen from the All-Wales Memorandum of Cooperation recently introduced to help control what is paid. We also heard there has been huge interest in the Academy, that the Service is looking to recruit three additional newly qualified social workers and is moving those social workers who were in the Academy last year into area teams.

We asked what is meant by the phrase 'Voice, Choice and Control', as we had not heard the phrase before, and heard it is a phrase in the Social Services and Wellbeing Act and that the Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) lead inspector will ask how it is being evidenced every time you meet.

We asked for an explanation of 'qualitative auditing' as we had not seen this in the performance reports before. We were informed that every month the report includes some themes on the findings that have been specifically audited and that this has been brought together to give a whole picture, to evidence the learning pulled out of the auditing and what it says in terms of quality of practice. We agreed it would be useful to have a session on this to understand it better, [added to work plan under Performance Monitoring item in December 2023] and that it would be helpful to include it in reports on a quarterly basis.

We noted the number of carer reviews completed within timescales was very low between June 2022 and March 2023, which implies they were done late. We heard that there was a backlog of reviews but that this has been caught up and the picture is much improved.

We felt it was a very comprehensive and positive report which is a credit to the Head of Service and the Department.

Residential Care Services

Chris Griffiths, Principal Officer Residential Services attended to give an overview of Children's Residential Care Services including plans to develop in-house services, challenges and proposed next steps and progress with Ty Nant.

We were concerned to hear the biggest challenge currently is staffing and the Welsh Government drive to limit profit in the care of looked after children from April 2026, leading to a reduction in external providers.

We were pleased to hear Home 2 is now fully registered with Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) since 27 July 2023.

Officers were asked to explain the difference between 'regulated' and 'unregulated'. We heard that from a statutory perspective, regulated homes have been approved and risk assessed by CIW and it has given the Authority the go ahead to place young people there. With unregulated, CIW has not approved the provision but because of this, risk assessments are carried out more robustly as the regulatory body is not overseeing it.

We queried what problems/challenges the Authority faces when consulting with residents in areas where children's homes are being considered. We were informed that under CIW guidance, location and premises assessments are undertaken before liaising with communities. We heard some of the challenges with new properties have been purely about location, however, with Homes 3 and 4 there are some concerns from the community around safety. We also heard that officers have learnt a lot about the way they communicate with the community and that having these conversations early is vital. You added that communities will be reticent when they hear a residential home is opening on their doorstep and that it would be useful if Members help with community cohesion if it comes up in their wards, and put forward a positive case on how important these are and how well run they are.

We feel the Service is in a state of flux currently due to the requirements in terms of eliminating profit. We heard the Service would like to reduce use of external providers but will still be dependent on them and it would be useful if Welsh Government gave a proper definition of what 'not for profit' means, so that external providers know if they can continue to be registered from April 2026. We noted that feedback from across Wales is the same, Authorities have not got the capacity to meet the demand coming through and are heavily reliant on external provision, so it is a national issue. You added that there is a Social Services and Wellbeing Cabinet Members Networking meeting with the Deputy Minister coming up and this is one of the topics on the agenda and you will report back on progress. We offered support in terms of writing a letter to Welsh Government if it would be useful.

We were pleased to hear there has been significant improvement at Ty Nant and that at the last CIW visit all priority action notices were removed and there was only one area for improvement related to provider assessments, and this was being revised at the time and officers are confident that when inspectors next visit it will have a clean sheet.

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

Paxton Hood-Williams

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