



Report of the Cabinet Member for Care Services

Child and Family Services Scrutiny Performance Panel – 5th December 2023

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 2023/24, following the report presented previously to scrutiny panel.
Councillors are being asked to	Consider the report as part of their routine review of performance in Child and Family Services.
Lead Councillor(s)	Cllr Louise Gibbard, Cabinet Member for Care Services
Lead Officer(s)	David Howes, Director of Social Services Julie Davies, Head of Child and Family Services
Report Author	Linzi Margetson, Principal Office for Safeguarding, Quality & Performance
Legal Officer	N/A
Finance Officer	N/A
Access to Services Officer	N/A

1. Improvement Priorities for Child and Family Services

1.1. Swansea Child and Family Services continue to face 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 and complexities; 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 updates on further progress made that is supporting the improvement of the service under these three themes.

2. Prevention and Early Intervention

2.1. FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES – SINGLE POINT OF ENTRY

The Pilot for the Single Point of Entry (SPOE) within Family Support Teams has been operational for over a year. Support services are able to slow thinking down and respond differently to what matters to children and their families at the right time. 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 a time where they feel is best for them to achieve better outcomes. 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.

The therapeutic work in Foster Wales is continuing to develop with the support of our internal therapy service. The intention is to provide wrap around support for the foster carers of each young person to help them understand the child's trauma nurture timeline. This fostering team is enhancing its wider development through the training and upskilling of foster carers as well as targeted recruitment and retention support.

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

Our Contextual, Missing, Exploited and Trafficked (CMET) panel have been continuing to work with young people who are at risk of these exploitations. As of the 1st of January 2023, there were 22 young people subject to Protocol whom the Local Authority has responsibility for.

From January to September 2023, we placed another 29 young people on protocol, considered 25 young people and we removed from protocol 31 young people.

ENHANCED SUPPORT FOR PARENTS

2.5 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.

A Lead Worker has since been appointed, the role is 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. The lead worker has also completed training sessions with support services with Family Support to enable them to offer weekly parenting sessions on Neuro Diversity.

2.6 BORN INTO CARE

There has been an increase in staff within the JigSo Team that works with both Health and Child and Family utilising the updated Born into Care birth plan. The team have been able to support parents to share their decisions and best hopes. A Parent and Carer PAC team has also been created within JigSo to support parents at home with their newborns and create safety where there are worries.

This development work enables Health and Child and Family to work directly with families and support them to remain together once the baby is born.

The feedback obtained from service users who have accessed this support continues to be 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.

3. Placement Sufficiency

3.1 RESIDENTIAL CARE HOMES AND EMERGENCY PLACEMENTS

We are continuing to recruit highly skilled and experienced staff, focusing on retention through developing their expertise and providing specific training and high levels of supervision, to ensure the workforce are supported, confident and the children and young people have the

quality of care they deserve. A New Assistant Manager has started (October) and is in their induction phase.

Advert for an additional eight residential childcare officers is currently out.

The embedding of PACE and trauma informed approaches is a current focus for all managers and will align to each home's Statement of Purpose. Working with designated therapists who provide advice, guidance and consultation sessions to teams across the service, including our Fostering service, will support assessment, admissions and the further development of policy and guidance to improve practice. Initial meetings with the therapist have taken place throughout October and November.

- Ty Nant – Plans for the development of move-on (post 16) accommodation bungalows on site are progressing.
- Heol Tir Du - After a prolonged period of building improvements, Heol Tir Du was CIW registered in Summer 2023.
- Hendy Cottages – after more in depth assessments, plans for the home were redeveloped and are with the surveying team. Work is planned to start early in the New Year.
- Ty Rhossili - Repurposing the existing space at Rhossili to incorporate 2 bedrooms for children and young people requiring short-term breaks has gone into the pre planning stage. Completion by the 31st of March 2024.

We are continuing to search for appropriate residential homes by utilising expertise in the Residential and Commissioning workforce and develop collaborative approaches with local providers so that we are able to offer creative solutions to growing local residential homes,

We have visited nine 4/5-bedroom properties since the last update; however, none have been suitable as additions to our portfolio and have not proceeded past our initial location and premises assessment tool.

We are working with Finance and Commissioning teams to maximise funding opportunities and scope out available finance options, with a view to having a multi-option model to provide flexibility and improve purchase/lease arrangements.

4. Workforce

- 4.1 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.

4.2 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.

The service held three staff days in 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.

4.3 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.

In addition to the above the Academy now has a development Pod where staff who require some additional support, for a variety of reasons, can temporarily move over to the Academy for a 6-month period (although, this can be extended dependant on the needs of the worker). During this time, they will have the opportunity to access the range of opportunities and support mechanisms that the Academy has to offer. This can include CINCS, CDT and ISH as well as working with Child Protection cases, should we be able to progress working with cases where there are higher levels of risk. The idea is that we can support them to further develop their skills set /confidence before they return to their original team. It is also about acknowledging that staff may become overwhelmed in their respective teams and become 'burnt out', so the team allows staff to revisit their passion for social work in a supportive environment and 'refresh'.

4.4 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.

5. **Legal implications**

5.1 None

6. **Finance Implications**

6.1 None

7. **Integrated Assessment Implications**

7.1 None

Glossary of terms: None

Background papers: None

Appendices: None