



To:
Councillor Louise Gibbard
Cabinet Member for Care Services

BY EMAIL

cc Cabinet Members

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Date 14 November 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 24 October 2023. It covers Regional Safeguarding Board, Service Quality Unit and Commissioning.

Dear Cllr Gibbard

The Panel met on 24 October 2023 to receive an update on the West Glamorgan Safeguarding Board and discuss the Service Quality Unit Annual Report 2022-23. The Panel also received an update on Commissioning.

We would like to thank you, David Howes, Julie Davies, Jane Whitmore, Alison Mathias and other 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.

Update from Regional Safeguarding Board

We heard from the Director of Social Services that West Glamorgan Safeguarding Board has four sub-groups and that three out of four have good evidence of progress against objectives, but the fourth is a work in progress as to how to bring together performance reporting across the partnership. We heard there is good reporting on Children's Services within the Local Authority, but amalgamating this with information

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available in other organisations and trying to make sense of what it says about the effectiveness of how the Safeguarding Board operates as a partnership is difficult. We noted there are some recommendations nationally for how to do this, but the Board is still struggling with it and moving forward the Director feel there needs to be some progress. We expressed concern that the Regional Board is not as effective as it should be and heard the Director was just raising an opportunity for improvement in the area, as it is difficult to translate performance of individual organisations and amalgamate into evidence of whether the Board is effective as a partnership. We heard that all safeguarding boards are struggling to evidence this, however, the Local Authority's oversight of its own safeguarding performance is much more robust than it was in the past.

We were informed that an objective going forward is to increase the contribution from children and families in the region and for them to drive the agenda around safeguarding. We were pleased to hear you are starting to see some progress on this with some initiatives, for example, a Junior Safeguarding Board has been established and the Parent Advisory Network.

We discussed an article in the media about the increase in safeguarding issues coming through to councils and queried if there is a big problem with numbers of safeguarding issues in Swansea. We were informed Child and Family Services are not seeing a significant increase in referrals and contacts as quoted in the media as being seen in other areas. We heard that Swansea is seeing an increase in the level and range of need which means there is more intense input required and the level of intervention may be higher. We also heard there are challenges recruiting qualified social workers, but the Service has plans in place to overcome that.

We feel there are areas in terms of safeguarding, particularly in terms of drugs, where the Safeguarding Board should be putting their efforts into ensuring coordination between agencies is working. We were informed the Safeguarding Board needs to have an interest in how the region is responding collectively towards challenges its population has but there are other boards more closely involved in the actual work taking place, and the Safeguarding Board seeks assurance that all these arrangements are in place and over time are making a difference in terms of safeguarding.

Service Quality Unit Annual Report

We discussed how difficult it must be for children going into care for the first time – surrounded by new people and a huge amount of paperwork and often having significant literacy issues. We suggested that as well as writing letters, or providing spider diagrams for younger children, more is done orally with these children, such as a recording, so they have a record of who is doing what and what was talked about, which they can go back to and hold the Service to account. Officers said they felt the suggestion was a very good one and will explore the option further.

We queried why the rate of advocacy take up is so low and heard there are lots of reasons. For child protection conferences, parent consent is needed to offer it to the child, or it has to go via the parents. For looked after children, sometimes it is about them understanding the benefits of advocacy and how it could help them. We were pleased to hear the Service is working with its commission provider NIAS to help

understand how this can be communicated better to looked after children and that you are also trying to be creative and listening to what children want.

Commissioning Progress Update

Officers emphasized that commissioning is different to procurement, it is not just contract and grant management, it is about identifying the gaps and who is best to deliver the best outcomes for children and families across Swansea. We asked how effective the Service is at keeping costs of services under control while making sure it is delivering the service people want. We heard there are some services that must be provided and the spend is out of the Authority's control, but where there is a choice in terms of getting best value, the teams work hard negotiating prices with suppliers/providers to make sure they get best value. We were informed that spend is monitored closely through Performance and Financial Monitoring in terms of grant spend and core spend, and that grant spend also has to be reported back to Welsh Government. We noted there are huge challenges for some of the grant budgets in terms of forecasting for future years.

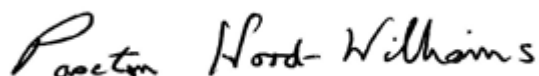
In terms of providing services via commissioning, we queried if every opportunity is taken to talk to clients in terms of their requirements and heard feedback is received from beneficiaries and they are involved as part of forward planning.

We are aware the not-for-profit element is causing certain problems in the market and asked if there was any feedback on this from Welsh Government since the previous meeting. You confirmed that you attended a Cabinet Member network meeting with the Minister, that this issue was on the agenda, and that you were informed there is currently a working group looking at the definition of not-for-profit so there has not been a lot of progress, but you hope to have more clarity soon. We heard the absence of this information is making some providers nervous in terms of staying in the market in Wales, which means the choice for children is more limited and makes it more challenging to always meet the range of needs of a child.

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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