



Report of the Cabinet Member for Care Services

Child and Family Services Scrutiny Performance Panel 24th June 2024

DELIVERY OF CORPORATE PRIORITIES/POLICY COMMITMENTS IN RELATION TO CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

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| Purpose | To update scrutiny panel on the delivery of the corporate priorities and policy commitments in relation to Child and Family Services |
| Content | This report provides an update for each relevant policy commitment on the activity undertaken and progress made during 2023/24. |
| Councillors are being asked to | Consider the report as part of their routine review of performance and improvement in Child and Family Services. |
| Lead Councillor(s) | Cllr Louise Gibbard, Cabinet Member for Care Services |
| Lead Officer(s) | Julie Davies, Head of Child and Family Services |
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1. Background

- 1.1 The Council's policy commitments statement for 2022-2027 covers a broad range of topics, along with outlining commitments that will deliver against specific objectives within the first one hundred days of term. These were adopted by Swansea at its full council meeting on 7 July 2022.
- 1.2 The commitments reflect the priorities of the people of Swansea and the priorities the council is committed to delivering through the corporate plan. The report agreed by Council also pledged to make progress on many of those commitments within 100 days of the commitments being adopted.
- 1.3 The Council's corporate plan [Corporate plan 2023 / 2028 - Swansea](#) provides the strategic framework for the transformation that is needed to achieve the council's vision while ensuring it is able to respond to the challenges of the present and the future.
- 1.4 Six well-being objectives are prioritised in order to meet the challenges ahead. These objectives include safeguarding people from harm, so that our citizens are free from harm and exploitation. The ambitions behind this objective are detailed below:
- Swansea is a fair and equal city in which children can have the best start in life to be the best they can be, safe within their families.
 - Swansea is a healthy city in which all people can expect to live happy, healthy, fulfilling lives; to achieve their own wellbeing outcomes and age well.
 - Swansea is a human rights city committed to enhancing the health, wellbeing, safety and to promoting the rights of vulnerable adults, children, and families.
 - We aim to prevent and intervene early, where a person or child is at risk of harm, abuse, neglect or exploitation, and to ensure the right care and support at the right time.
 - We will continue to promote safeguarding vulnerable people as everyone's business, across the council, through a skilled and professional workforce, our elected members and any organisation or person who undertakes work on our behalf.
- 1.5 The policy commitments cover education, better care, climate change, communities, housing, regeneration and attractions. For Child and Family Services, the relevant commitments for Child and Family are:

Better Care:

- Swansea Council will commit to investing £750 million for better care in Swansea.
- The Council will commit to fairer pay for care workers.
- Swansea Council will strive to provide new children's care facilities within Swansea.

100 days target – Better Care

- We will progress a new children's care facility.

An overview of the activities delivered, and progress made against the Council's corporate objectives and also its policy commitments, relevant to Child and Family Services, is given in the following sections of this report.

2. Safeguarding people from harm, so that our citizens are free from harm and exploitation.

- 2.1. The priorities for the service are focused on three critical areas, in support of the corporate safeguarding objective:
- Prevention and early intervention
 - Placement sufficiency
 - Workforce

Prevention and Early Intervention

- 2.2 Our Early Help Hub model is now fully developed ensuring that children and families in Swansea have access to the right support at the right time from the right person regardless of age and location. In addition, the Signs of Wellbeing model is fully embedded and implemented in the Hubs and further training and development in relation to family finding and circles of support is currently being rolled out.

Over 1700 referrals came in to our Early Help services in 2023. 55% of those referrals closed with goals achieved and only 7% of total referrals were stepped up into our statutory social work teams.

- 2.3 We have embedded our approach to contextual safeguarding to protect children and young people from extra familial harm and to have spaces and places where they are able to feel safe. The core Contextual Missing Exploited and Trafficked (CMET) team is now in place made up of social workers and youth workers. Referrals in relation to extra familial harm are considered at a multi-agency CMET panel which takes a solution focussed and strengths-based approach to supporting young people who have experienced or are at risk of experiencing extra familial harm. Support is provided to young people in relation to contextual, missing, exploited, trafficked, and serious youth violence to create safety in the spaces and places that they spend time. This includes the development of area and peer group assessments and plans and involves multi

agency partners across social services, health, education, housing, community safety, police and the third sector.

The CMET Team were runner up in the Safer Wales Community Award and best practice from the team has also been published in Contextual Safeguarding literature.

CMET have supported 5649 young people, professionals, and members of the community. This includes youth panels, small group work, professional training, professional meetings, community engagement, community meetings, volunteering training, and detached youth work and pop-up youth clubs. CMET also held 180 strategy meeting in 2023 and supported 58 young people on protocol for extra-familial harm.

- 2.4 We continue to successfully support and lead regional and local work around emotional health and wellbeing. We have designed and embedded the Emotional Health and Psychological Wellbeing cluster meetings around the school's model for multi-agency practitioners. We have overseen the ongoing development of the schools counselling model, including a pilot for the Dexy website. We also oversee Swansea's element of the Tidy Minds website. Alongside this, we are supporting the upcoming recommissioning of the schools counselling model and are involved in the development of the strategy for the health-led Kooth online website which is ending due to funding reductions.
- 2.5 We have undertaken a review of our Additional Learning Needs (ALN) and short break provisions to better understand demand, capacity and resources to support commissioning activities. Initial findings from the review have suggested that we need to: increase provision over holiday periods, set up community parental groups to help deliver activities and source funding; develop improved communications / information; develop a preventative service group to join up disability / ALN provision in Swansea.

Alongside this, we are leading cross-authority development work around neurodiversity with partners from Health and third sector to ensure that neurodiverse people and their families / carers are able to access the right support, in the right way, at the right time.

- 2.6 The Single Point of Entry (SPOE) within Family Support Teams has been operational since June 2022. 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.

Edge of care and supporting care experienced children and young people

- 2.7 We have implemented our Born into Care guidance to ensure that newborn babies are able to stay with their birth parents wherever possible. Implementation of the new Born into Care mapping process allows professionals work together earlier in the pregnancy to plan support and prevent delay in assessment and birth planning. Alongside this we have developed new data capture information which has supported us to understand the nature of unborn work and provide information to the placement teams about upcoming births / removals.

Our Born into Care work has resulted in a 30% reduction in unborn babies being removed at birth during 2023 and was a winner at the Social Care Wales Accolades Award in April 2024.

- 2.8 We have continued to target recruitment of foster carers and to develop therapeutic links for the fostering teams to support the retention of foster carers. The Regional Development Manager for Foster Wales Swansea has put together a plan on a page which underpins our recruitment drive for foster carers. Current enquiries have surpassed the target set and a creative recruitment drive is yielding increased engagement.

Foster Swansea did have a therapeutic hub for a period of time however the grant funding ended for this in March 2023. Moving forward, the new Internal Therapeutic Service and model has been designed to meet these required needs. In addition, there is an identified lead designated person for Fostering from the internal therapeutic service, providing advice and support for both Foster Wales Swansea and the Family and Friends Team.

- 2.9 We are involved in the ongoing work to create a new regional model of care for complex young people (including step down from and preventing the need for secure accommodation) through the Regional Partnership Board. The group is currently focussing on tracking demand, type and frequency of requests for secure accommodation across the region via the CYP Accommodation Group. Developing further clarity on how the group progresses to meet its objectives is a focus for the next phase, along with inclusion of our partners from Health.

- 2.10 We continue to expand the local and regional supported accommodation for young people aged 16+ (including Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children) with existing local and new providers. A review has been undertaken of the homeless service delivery to ensure that we understand demand, capacity, and resources to support our commissioning activities. Adult Services have updated the Framework for Housing Support Grant funded Supported Accommodation and we will further develop the way in which we work with young people, families and carers to prevent accommodation breakdown and the exploration of family networks to offer additional support to young people.

- 2.11 We work jointly with Neath Port Talbot to deliver support for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children. A regional Young Person's Advisor supports young people living in properties based in Swansea. Further work is due to be undertaken to develop our policy framework in this area and to outline financial support arrangements.
- 2.12 The Family and Friends Team are continuing to review and develop their processes and systems to ensure that we understand and respond to the needs of our young people and carers who are subject to a Special Guardianship Order (SGO). We have created a new overarching Special Guardianship Order Policy and alongside this, ongoing work continues to:
- map 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.
 - develop an updated SGO Financial Arrangements Policy to ensure consistent payment arrangements for Special Guardians and outline an eligibility criteria for requesting enhanced payments.
 - engage directly with children and young people in SGO arrangements and Guardians to understand what matters to them about our SGO processes and arrangements.

Workforce

- 2.13 We continue to inform workforce thinking with the voice of the child/young person not by processes and systems. Our Participation and Children's Rights Officer is working widely across the service and numerous Teams have requested involvement from children, young people and families to inform service development. This will continue to grow as we develop our updated Participation Strategy.

We have recently developed Corporate Parenting pledges alongside care experienced young people. A plan of work is underway to further inform the work plan for the Board and the Council to ensure that we are able to fulfil these pledges. These pledges were presented by care experienced young people to a meeting of Full Council, following sign off at the Corporate Parenting Board.

- 2.14 Our Academy Team and Practice Development Pod has been expanded. The purpose of the Academy is to develop innovative and creative practice to work to create safety plans and wellbeing plans based on what matters to the parents and children, while also ensuring that there are either family relationships or a support network available for families in need. The Academy has also been focusing on developing staff skills and practice through their Practice Development pod, offering opportunities and progression for staff as well as supporting

newly qualified social workers to expand their knowledge, experience, and practice in a safe and supportive environment.

The success of the Academy model has resulted in 11 social workers moving in to our care and support social work teams to undertake statutory work with some of our most vulnerable families. This supports us to recruit and retain social work qualified staff at a time when there is a national shortage of social workers.

- 2.15 System reviews have provided us with greater understanding across the service around system responses from a children and family's perspective. We are learning how our system responds and the time it takes us to provide a response which is providing us with evidence to think around how we change our system to meet needs better. An example of this would be the work we have been doing as part of the Direct Payments review.

Taking a system thinking approach to transformation of our services has allowed us to redesign systems and processes to focus on achieving what matters for children, young people and families. These redesigns have focussed on ensuring staff have adequate time to undertake value work with children, young people and families and have reduced the time staff spend on paperwork e.g. Single Point of Entry for Family Support Services. Feedback from the experiments running as part of our system thinking reviews has shown that workers are feeling more positive around their role and have a clearer understanding of how changes to ways of working can make experiences better for children, young people and families.

- 2.16 Our active programme of coaching and mentoring for current and aspiring leaders is supporting our vision to develop future leaders alongside individual and organisational performance. This assists us in shaping and developing a culture for our organisation based on learning and trust. Leaders and managers from across the Service are undertaking, or have already completed, coaching and leadership programmes and as a result, staff are successfully moving into leadership and management roles.
- 2.17 We uplift costs in line with inflation and encourage providers to pay the real living wage and adopt fair working practices as part of our contracting agreements.

3. Better care (including 100 days target)

- 3.1 The availability of suitable placements in Wales for looked after children continues to be an on-going challenge. The Welsh Government programme for change to eliminate profit and radically reform services for care experienced children will require local authorities to rapidly expand their in-house provision (residential and fostering) in the next 2 years.

- 3.2 Focus remains on growing at pace our in-house residential provision with the aim of having at least 4 registered care homes to ensure that children and young people are supported in Swansea local to their personal and professional support networks. We are committed to ensuring that the care and support needs of children and young people are met by well trained, well supervised, qualified childcare staff.
- 3.3 We currently have 2 registered homes in Swansea. Work is well underway to create a 1-bed emergency placement at Ty Rhossili. We are also working with partners to pilot two additional properties in the local area, with the intention of registering them with Care Inspectorate Wales, providing location and community impact assessments are without issue.
- 3.4 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. We currently have 2 Residential Care Managers and 2 Assistant Team Managers. We are currently recruiting for 2 Assistant Team Managers and 16 Residential Child Care Officers.
- 3.5 The embedding of PACE and trauma informed approaches continues to be a 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.
- 3.6 Identifying placements for children and young people whether, fostering or residential continues to be challenging against the backdrop of the eliminating profit agenda and the national shortage of foster placements. Developing Placement Finding Officer posts within our Commissioning service has provided greater consistency and capacity in developing stronger relationship with providers and developing an evolving directory of good quality placements for children and young people.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1 Our drive in terms of strategic vision this year has been to further develop our focus on engaging with and listening to children, young people, and families to understand what is important to them about their own care and support and the services we deliver. We have seen many positive developments in this area and alongside the strong and consistent practice framework that we have embedded in the service, this has

allowed us to achieve better outcomes for children, young people, and families.

- 4.2 There has been continued development and growth of our workforce, which is further supporting us to achieve better outcomes. Alongside this, we have continued to work with leaders and managers across the service to develop thinking that will support the service supporting to achieve our vision of growing a culture based on learning and trust.
- 4.3 We have moved forward positively in developing our prevention, early intervention, and enablement services to deliver better support for people, making best use of the resources available supported by our highly skilled and valued workforce.
- 4.4 There are ongoing challenges and key opportunities for the service which we have highlighted as part of our recent Service plan. These include securing of resources / direct input from health to meet the needs for some of our children with complex needs. To support this, we must strengthen our challenge to ensure that statutory agencies are meeting their respective duties.
- 4.5 We continue to focus on the recruitment and retention of highly skilled, experienced staff and our transformation activities for the forthcoming year will continue to focus on those areas of challenge and opportunity highlighted in the Service plan to assist us in achieving the ambitions of our transformation programme. We recognise that given the pressures facing those working in social care, it is often difficult to sustain the pace of change whilst fulfilling our statutory and regulatory duties. However, we continue to invest in the learning, innovation and transformation of our services to ensure that we are able to successfully develop and improve our services to meet the needs of the children, young people and families we work with, providing the right service at the right time.
- 4.6 We will continue to further develop performance measures which help us understand how we are achieving as a service against our purpose. As part of our approach to learning, innovation and transformation we are continuing to develop meaningful measures across all of our services based on achieving what matters to children, young people and families. What we have learned as part of our transformation programme in terms of information and data will further help us to direct and implement our new information management system moving forward. We are committed to systematically learn about our service through continuous improvement practices, gather information to support us in designing systems that will achieve our transformation aspirations.

5. Legal implications

- 5.1 None

6. Finance Implications

- 6.1 All of the budgetary implications associated with the service delivery, improvement and transformation are costed into the forecasted budget for Child and Family Services, as agreed at Full Council.

Our updates to the Transformation Board will highlight financial pressures created through flat or reduced grants, alongside those that result from increased or changing demand.

7. Integrated Assessment Implications

- 7.1 None.

Background papers: None

Appendices: None