

Cllr Paxton Hood-Williams
Convener
Child & Family Services Scrutiny Panel

BY EMAIL

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Date: 1 December 2017

Dear Cllr Hood-Williams

Child and Family Services Scrutiny Performance Panel – 30 October 2017

Thank you for your letter of November 21st, 2017 and the positive comments made about the presentations and information provided to panel. I will address the particular areas noted for development or comment in turn.

Monitoring performance and progress of Western Bay Regional Adoption Service
Placing children with complex needs and sibling groups is an ongoing issue not only within WB but nationally. This is despite the work of the National Adoption Service in raising awareness and the profile of adoption. There is a two year recruitment strategy in place in WB and the National Adoption Service is monitoring progress in this area.

Performance around life journey work has been poor across the region. The following actions have been undertaken to influence improvements to performance related to life story work:

- Within the Local Authorities, life story work project groups have been established with representatives from a range of teams taking part including staff from Fostering, LAC teams, and children's community/safeguarding teams. To date the group has developed a set of minimum standards for life journey work for children who are looked after and for children whose plan is adoption. The standards for children who are/will be placed in adoptive placements follow those set by the National Adoption Service.
- Standards for life journey work have been approved by the Children's Services Senior Management Group. The standards have been shared with WBAS and have been/will be disseminated to staff and are available for staff in the Local Authority via their interactive practice guide/staff manual.
- Training has been delivered to all practitioners who are involved in undertaking life journey work with children. It is recognised that across the region, different models of completing life journey work are used.
Consideration was given to streamlining the model used; however was felt that there was no *right* model and that a range of tools to support life journey work was valuable in meeting the differing needs of different children.

- 'Champions' have been identified within each Local Authority to be the links with WBAS for Life journey work and Fostering. The Champions will be the interface on the front line between the Adoption Service and the Local Authority practitioners.
- WBAS has developed a Transition/Moving on programme which aims to standardise and provide guidance for practitioners and foster carers who are moving children on to adoptive placements. The programme has been agreed by the PO/WBAS interface group and is starting to be rolled out across the Local Authorities.
- Local Authority Fostering Team Managers and Local Authority training managers have met with WBAS to discuss the programme and agree a plan for implementation,
- Staff from the 3 Local Authorities attended the National Adoption Service Conference in March 2017 where there was a focus on transition to adoption. WBAS staff delivered a workshop to the conference on their transition/moving on programme which was well received.
- Funding has been made available for Fostering Services to purchase resources to support the transition/moving on programme.
- Senior Managers from the POWBAS interface group have agreed to provide management oversight of life journey work while performance requires improvement. PO's will be notified by WBAS of those children who are due to be presented at matching panel and will liaise with the relevant team manager to ensure that the minimum standards are being applied.

The situation regarding regional arrangements is being managed by the Regional Partnership Board.

Performance and progress on the Leaving Care Team

I would agree that information on measuring actual outcomes for children is essential moving forward. It is important we understand how services are making a difference to improving children's lives. This is not an easy task, however a distant travelled tool is being developed to measure outcomes across the continuum of need, including Bays +. This will be a focus of work in the New Year but it is unlikely that information will be made available to Panel until the new financial year.

There are challenges to all partnership arrangements but by reviewing the vision for the service with staff, a more cohesive and effective service will develop.

Performance report September and second quarter performance 2017

It is important to monitor the numbers of children placed in residential care in its totality; there are a variety of reasons why children are placed in out of area residential placements. This may be due to risks within the community in Swansea in terms of CSE or risk taking behaviours such as access to legal highs or indeed risks posed by parents or family members. In addition, due to the current position around placements for children with complex needs generally i.e. a chronic shortage of placements nationally, choice of placements is limited. Sometimes it is better to place a young person out of area if the other factors, such as education on site and a nurturing therapeutic environment can better meet the needs of that particular child. However careful

monitoring of any out of area placements takes place via weekly Y Siarad meetings attended by HOS and all Principal Officers.

The timeliness of assessment activity continues to be a challenge for us as is under-reporting around statutory visits. There is an action plan in place to address these issues but it is unlikely that any significant improvement will be achieved until the New Year, when the redesigned SCP service will be in place.

I hope this information is helpful.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Child', written in a cursive style.

Councillor Mark Child
Cabinet Member for Health & Wellbeing