



City and County of Swansea

Notes of the **Scrutiny Performance Panel – Child & Family Services**

Committee Room 5 - Guildhall, Swansea

Tuesday, 28 August 2018 at 4.00 pm

Present: Councillor P R Hood-Williams (Chair) Presided

Councillor(s)

C Anderson
P K Jones
D W W Thomas

Councillor(s)

M Durke
S M Jones

Councillor(s)

Y V Jardine
I E Mann

Officer(s)

Val Jones

Regional Adoption Manager, Western Bay Adoption Service

Liz Jordan

Scrutiny Officer

Julie Thomas

Head of Child & Family Services

Apologies for Absence

Councillor(s): K M Griffiths

1 Disclosure of Personal and Prejudicial Interests.

No disclosures of interest were made.

2 Notes of meeting on 25 June 2018

The Panel agreed the notes as an accurate record of the meeting.

3 Public Question Time

No members of the public were present at the meeting.

4 Update on Adoption Service

Val Jones, Regional Adoption Manager, attended to brief the Panel on the 2 recent inspections of the Western Bay Regional Adoption Service including a summary of the findings and the subsequent regional action plan. The Panel also received an update on progress and performance of the Regional Adoption Service during 2017/18.

Discussion points:

- There is an attempt being made to standardise the adoption service across local authorities.
- All adopters are on a national register but each region/third sector organisation has its own process and adoption panels for approving adopters.
- Western Bay Adoption Service makes contact with other regions to try and identify adopters if it cannot find an appropriate adopter locally, for example, for sibling groups and children with special needs.
- Page 37 – it states that 38% of adoption applications made in the region were contested in 2017/18. However none of the contested applications were successfully achieved. The important thing is for the child to have permanence.
- Page 51 – Panel queried why Swansea had such a high dropout figure for referrals during the year. They were informed that a piece of work needs to be undertaken to try and identify the reason for this. It could be because Western Bay has an early referral system.
- Page 57 – it was felt that the focus should be on 'placement order' for monitoring of performance of the adoption service.
- It was confirmed that Bridgend will continue to be part of the Western Bay Adoption Service when it is no longer part of Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University Health Board.
- The Panel congratulated the Adoption Service on the outcome of its recent inspections and the action plan which it has put in place as a result.

5 Advocacy Update

Julie Thomas, Head of Child and Family Services updated the Panel on the implementation of the national approach to Statutory Advocacy, including some of the issues concerning the implementation and issues for the service going forward.

Discussion points:

- Dave Howes, Director of Social Services now chairs the national board
- There is still an issue over costs and future funding and the Panel is concerned about this
- The Panel has offered to help, if they can, to progress the issue.

6 Bright Spots Survey

Julie Thomas provided the Panel with an overview of the survey and the responses and updated the Panel on the next steps which includes an integrated action plan and answered the Panel's questions.

Discussion points:

- Child and Family Services in Swansea was asked to be involved in the research which 6 authorities took part in.
- The survey was undertaken with Looked After Children (LAC) who were asked to give their views on a range of different issues.

- The children who completed the survey cannot be identified but some of the issues that were raised can be discussed in LAC review meetings.
- Social workers need to be looking more broadly at children's wellbeing and to realise how essential it is to form relationships with children and parents. Training for social workers is going to be introduced to try and improve this.
- The Service is talking to Education about some of the results and what they can do to help, for example, increasing friendship groups.
- There is a lot of learning for the Service from the survey.
- Swansea will be taking part in the survey again next year.
- The survey highlighted some bright spots for Swansea and where improvements need to be made. This will be included in the Corporate Parenting Board Plan
- The Panel was pleased that Swansea has taken part in the survey and that issues are being addressed.

7 Work Programme Timetable 2018/19

The Panel considered the work programme.

8 Letters

Letters received and considered by the Panel.

The meeting ended at 5.45 pm



To:
Councillor Elliott King, Cabinet Member for Children's Services (Early Years) / Councillor Will Evans, Cabinet Member for Children's Services (Young People)

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Date Dyddiad: 20 September 2018

Summary: This is a letter from the Child & Family Services Scrutiny Performance Panel to the Cabinet Members for Children's Services following the meeting of the Panel on 28 August 2018. It covers Update on Regional Adoption Service, Advocacy Update and the Bright Spots Survey.

Dear Cllr King and Cllr Evans,

The Panel met on 28 August and discussed the Regional Adoption Service including the recent inspections, Advocacy and the Bright Spots Survey.

We would like to thank Val Jones and Julie Thomas for attending to go through the reports and answer our questions. We appreciate their engagement and input.

We are writing to you to reflect on what we learnt from the discussion, share the views of the Panel, and, where necessary, raise any issues or recommendations for your consideration and response. The main issues discussed are summarised below:

Update on Regional Adoption Service

We received a presentation from Val Jones on the two recent inspections of the Western Bay Regional Adoption Service including a summary of the findings and the subsequent regional action plan. We also received an update on progress and performance of the Regional Adoption Service during 2017/18.

We heard that there is an attempt being made to standardise the adoption service across local authorities. We also heard that all adopters are on a national register but each region/third sector organisation has its own process and adoption panels for approving adopters.

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We were informed that Western Bay Adoption Service makes contact with other regions to try and identify adopters if it cannot find an appropriate adopter locally, for example, for sibling groups and children with special needs.

Page 37 - it states that 38% of adoption applications made in the region were contested in 2017/18. We were told however that none of the contested applications were successfully achieved and that the important thing is for the child to have permanence.

Page 51 - we queried why Swansea had such a high dropout figure for referrals during the year. We were informed that a piece of work needs to be undertaken to try and identify the reason for this. It could be because Western Bay has an early referral system.

Page 57 – we heard that it was felt that the focus should be on ‘placement order’ for monitoring of performance of the adoption service.

We were given confirmation that Bridgend will continue to be part of the Western Bay Adoption Service when it is no longer part of Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University Health Board.

The Panel congratulated the Adoption Service on the outcome of its recent inspections and the action plan which it has put in place as a result.

Advocacy Update

Julie Thomas updated the Panel on the implementation of the national approach to Statutory Advocacy, including some of the issues concerning the implementation and issues for the Service going forward.

We heard that Dave Howes now chairs the national board. We were concerned to hear that there is still an issue over costs and future funding. We offered to help, if we can, to progress the issue.

Bright Spots Survey

We were given an overview of the Survey and the responses and were updated on the next steps, including an integrated action plan.

We were told that Child and Family Services in Swansea was asked to be involved in the research which 6 authorities took part in.

We heard that the survey was undertaken with Looked After Children (LAC) who were asked to give their views on a range of different issues. We also heard that the children who completed the survey cannot be identified but some of the issues that were raised can be discussed in LAC review meetings.

We heard that social workers need to be looking more broadly at children’s wellbeing and to realise how essential it is to form relationships with children and parents. We

were pleased to hear that training for social workers is going to be introduced to try and improve this.

The Panel was pleased to hear that the Service is talking to Education about some of the results and what they can do to help, for example, increasing friendship groups.

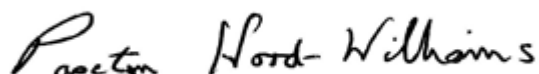
We heard that the survey highlighted some bright spots for Swansea and where improvements need to be made and that this will be included in the Corporate Parenting Board Plan.

The Panel was pleased that Swansea had taken part in the survey and that issues are being addressed. We feel that there is a lot of learning for the Service from the survey and were pleased to hear that Swansea will be taking part in the survey again next year.

Your Response

We hope you find this letter useful and informative. We would welcome your views and comments on any of the issues raised but please note that in this instance, a formal response is not required.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paxton Hood-Williams". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'P'.

PAXTON HOOD-WILLIAMS
CONVENER, CHILD & FAMILY SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL
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