



To:
**Councillor Elliott King, Cabinet Member for
Children Services**

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Date 7 October 2020
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Summary: This is a letter from the Child & Family Services Scrutiny Performance Panel to the Cabinet Member for Children Services following the meeting of the Panel on 16 September 2020. It covers Service Specific Update on Covid-19 Pandemic.

Dear Cllr King,

The Panel met on 16 September 2020 to receive an update on the impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Child and Family Services.

We would like to thank you, Sam Pritchard and Julie Thomas for attending and answering questions. We appreciate your 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:

Service Specific Update on Covid-19 Pandemic

You introduced the item stating that it had been an unprecedented situation and that there had been a close working relationship with the Health Board and internally with Education. You stated that you are incredibly proud of what the Service has achieved and that this is due to the staff. Julie then updated us on the effects of the Pandemic including impacts, activities, challenges, and recovery.

We heard that a Recovery/Modification Plan is in place.

With regards performance, we heard that the headline figures are stable although there is a level of child protection activity and the front door is busy, but is diverting more cases. We also heard that a focus is needed on assessment, signs of safety metrics and care and support plans.

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We were informed that it is unlikely the Service will return to the pre-covid model and that what has been learnt will be used to strengthen the Service going forward.

We expressed our appreciation to staff working in a very difficult situation and who have adapted the service to meet demands so quickly. We felt success of the Service had been due to front line face-to-face and that this could not happen working from home. You said you felt it was important to strike a balance. Julie told us she is proud of staff throughout the Service who have been exceptional.

We mentioned two points in the Modification Plan that we felt were very important and asked for your comments.

- Page 5, Point 2.6 – We were informed that the Service had been concerned about producing signs of safety work but that they have still been able to do this both virtually and face-to-face. We heard that the Service is three quarters of the way through the staff wellbeing programme, which demonstrates commitment to staff. We were pleased to hear that the building had been opened to staff on a voluntary basis. Also that the Service is working more closely with the Health Board which is a positive coming out of this situation.
- Page 14, Table – Face to face between staff and the public. We were concerned about the number of areas that had red status. We were informed that other than one area, things have moved on since this report was produced and the Service is dealing with all of these issues. We heard, for example, that children do not currently have drop-in opportunities, however, a meeting is taking place with unions to discuss opening up InfoNation. We also heard that EHH home visits are picking up.

We were asked to look at the document on Child and Family Safe Looked After Children (LAC) Reduction Strategy. Looking at the detail it is very impressive. We heard that in Swansea the vast majority of LAC are placed close to home. We were very pleased to hear this. Julie Thomas agreed to circulate this presentation to us for information.

We discussed the fact that Julie Thomas would shortly be retiring from the Council. We expressed our thanks for all her hard work, and for everything she has achieved, and wished her a long and happy retirement. Julie thanked us for all the support we have given her.

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, in this instance, a formal response is not required.

Yours sincerely

Paxton Hood-Williams

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