



To:
Councillor Elliott King, Cabinet Member for
Children's Services

BY EMAIL

Please ask for:
Gofynnwch am:

Scrutiny

Scrutiny Office
Line:
Llinell
Uniongyrchol:

01792 637314

e-Mail
e-Bost:

scrutiny@swansea.gov.uk

Date
Dyddiad:

4 October 2021

CC Cabinet Members

Summary: This is a letter from the Child & Family Services Scrutiny Performance Panel to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services following the meeting of the Panel on 21 September 2021. It covers Child and Family Improvement Programme and Corporate Parenting Board.

Dear Cllr King,

The Panel met on 21 September 2021 to receive a briefing on progress with the Child and Family Improvement Programme, an update on the Corporate Parenting Board and, in closed session, a video on Appreciative Inquiry.

We would like to thank you, Dave Howes, Julie Davies, Gemma Whyley, Kate Ronconi and Tom Jones for attending to present these items and answer the Panel's 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:

Progress on Child and Family Improvement Programme

Julie Davies, Head of Child and Family Services and Gemma Whyley, Transformation Programme Manager attended to brief the Panel on this item.

We heard that the Service has revisited its vision.

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We felt that it all sounded very exciting – freeing up staff to do the real work rather than paperwork. We queried if the Service is starting to blur the line between senior social workers and other highly experienced staff. We heard that staff with alternative qualifications are as important to helping children. Social workers have to do certain tasks, but work around that, can be undertaken by staff with alternative qualifications.

We discussed conversations taking place with Welsh Government about the volume of information they require, for example, the new performance data that is being asked for. We felt too much of officers time is spent providing information for the Welsh Government and stated that officers need to flag up concerns to scrutiny. We heard that there is a level of legality that the Service has to go through but that your ambition over time is to build evidence of what is and is not helpful as it is important for this to be evidence based.

Presentation – Corporate Parenting Board Update

Gemma Whyley, Transformation Programme Manager and Tom Jones, Participation and Children's Rights Officer attended to present this item, which included a video made with looked after children, the Corporate Parenting Board's response to the video and resulting pledges by members of the Corporate Parenting Board.

We felt that issues come across better when we listen to children speaking for themselves. It makes you sit up and listen.

We discussed the fact that every councillor is a governor of a school and that this gives them an opportunity to question the Head and senior management team on what education and care is being provided for looked after children in schools.

We raised the issue that in the past we had received information on the progress of young people, particularly in education, as part of the update from the Corporate Parenting Board and that previously we had expressed our concerns about the difference in attainment of looked after children at Year 6 and Year 11. We requested to see some measure of what has been achieved by children who are looked after, in particular, comparison data on the attainment of looked after children compared to others to see where they are now. Head of Service stated the importance of focussing on the progression of looked after children and not just their attainment in school but said she would request comparison data from the Education department to share with the Panel.

We heard that work needs to be done on how to improve the learning opportunity for looked after children and that the pledges made by Corporate Parenting Board members have got some accountability attached.

We noted that the work of Education and Skills Policy Development Committee has a strong focus on vocational education and an alternative/appropriate curriculum. It will be discussing what works for looked after children who do well in education. It is important to focus on what can help looked after children to succeed.

We were pleased to hear about the good working relationship between Social Services and Education. This is really positive.

Appreciative Inquiry Video

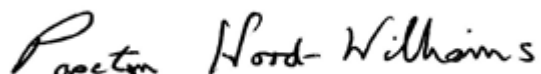
We were very pleased to hear this positive feedback.

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 on this occasion please provide a formal written response by 25 October 2021 to the following:

- Data to be provided to Panel on progress of looked after children in education compared to others.

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
CLLR.PAXTON.HOOD-WILLIAMS@SWANSEA.GOV.UK