



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

BY EMAIL

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Date 28 March 2022
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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 9 March 2022. It covers Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, Youth Justice Inspection, Emergency Staffing and Panel Review of the Year.

Dear Cllr King,

The Panel met on 9 March to receive a presentation on the IICSA Report into Child Sexual Exploitation by Organised Networks, a presentation on the Youth Justice Service Inspection Report, a verbal update on Emergency Staffing and to discuss the Panel's Annual Review of the Year 2021-22.

We would like to thank you, Dave Howes Julie Davies, Kate Phillips, Jay McCabe, Helen Williams and Eve Davis of South Wales Police 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:

Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse

We heard that the Inquiry was a snapshot of practice between 2015 and 2019, that Local Authorities were chosen at random to give a spread of types of local authorities across Wales, that the learning is intended for all local authorities, and that the focus of the inquiry was the sexual exploitation of children by organised networks. We also heard that the Department fully supports the recommendations of the Report.

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Superintendent Eve Davis stated that from a policing perspective, they acknowledge the Report and its findings and are making some headway in terms of the learning identified and action planning to respond to it.

We were informed that an Annual Performance Report is being produced for Exploitation and Safeguarding and it was suggested that this is added to the Panel's work programme for the next municipal year. We also heard that a quarterly report and annual report will be produced going forward.

We expressed concern about outcomes and asked if the Department was confident that as much as possible is in place to identify and deal with these cases, and if cases are coming forward that may not have been expected in the past. We were informed that the Department is confident it focuses on outcomes once it has addressed the risks and that safety will come first but then you look beyond that and think about the journey the child can go on to be the best they can be, and that is where multi-agency working comes into the fore. We heard there is a team around the child which is very focussed on outcomes. We were also informed that things are being referred in and the Department is very busy, and that you never know if everything is coming in as its about people feeling safe to come forward, but you do have a very good relationship through the CMET (Contextual Missing, Exploitation and Trafficking) operational group where people share intel which you can take action on.

We queried if Covid has caused further problems i.e., with lockdown children have not been in school and whether this has exacerbated the problem in this area. We heard that some of the risks around criminal exploitation were removed as people were not allowed out but there was more online exploitation, so the Department had to rethink its approach. Now people are out and about forms of exploitation have changed again and you have to stay alert to the changing picture. The Head of Vulnerable Learners added that the pandemic was a really difficult time and that it was hardest when there was partial opening of schools and there was a period of time when certain year groups were out of school. We were informed that this was when partnership working between Education, Child and Family Services and the Police was critical and was hugely beneficial in how children and young people were supported. We heard some examples of this which included: quickly developing a system to monitor some of Swansea's most vulnerable children and young people, they were able to get a shared assessment across all services through partnership working. Also, they were able to develop a response quickly through blended learning and check-in approaches which enabled them to give children and young people a point of access with a trusted adult. This was done in partnership with C&FS. Also, during the period of re-opening of society, different places became quite challenging for some young people and shared intelligence between schools, CFS, police and youth workers enabled them to work collaboratively to target interventions.

We noted that in the presentation it talked about 'what matters to the child' but we felt the fact is overlooked that for familial exploitation some families are not going to want to report this, and the child will do what the family wants. We felt there is a need to take into account what the child thinks, but ultimately do what is best for the child. We were informed that abuse within the home is not a feature of the Report but in relation to this, children may be afraid to come forward. We heard that it is when children feel

safe, often in school, that they start to tell people and it is important a sensitive approach is taken to work through that and at the same time help them to continue to feel safe.

We mentioned that the Authority has a working partnership with EYST (Ethnic Minorities and Youth Support Team) but that this is only one organisation, so we think this is not a true representation. We therefore queried who will sit on the new BAME group mentioned in the presentation. Officers agreed that in terms of the BAME group, it is important to look at who sits on it and there need to be multiple voices and no one organisation can represent everyone. We added that there is a need to just deal with the person in front of you irrespective of race etc. Officers agreed that we should look at the person and not their colour, gender etc and they noted that in the report it says there is a real drive to collect data around this, but also felt the Department's workers in the Front Door help you to understand different cultures which is really important.

We felt that in terms of solutions, some of the most successful interventions are about multi-agency working and when communities understand the mind of the abuser and stated that for years Social Services promoted Faithful Foundation training linked to the 'Stop It Now' campaign, which was about understanding the mind of the offender and what they can do about it. We queried if the Department is looking to continue this type of training and to cascade it. Officers agreed to provide details of training for staff in particular, and multi-agency training following the meeting. The Principal Officer from the Youth Justice Service added that there is a slight interlink around the assessment of sexualised risk and that within the YJS they will be commissioning Aim 3 Sexual Risk Assessment training specifically for Youth Justice staff and will be looking to roll this out across CFS. We also heard that in relation to communities, the approach you are taking, particularly through partner agencies, is a huge opportunity to help communities understand and recognize what to look out for and you want to build on this and work with communities and young people.

We queried a figure in the presentation of six cases of exploitation in the last 18 months and asked if this was correct. We heard that it was six cases of a particular type and was an attempt to provide the Panel with some reassurance. We asked for the overall incidence and if the Department is confident it is going down. Officers suggested a broader report around performance data is brought to a future Panel meeting, so the Panel has an understanding of the picture across Swansea and what this is saying about the risks across Swansea.

We informed you that we were assured by the measures that have and are being put in place now.

Youth Justice Inspection Report

Jay McCabe attended to present this item. We heard the regional arrangement was inspected in October 2018 by HMIP (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation) and received an 'Inadequate' rating. Significant improvement has been made over the three years since and the Swansea arrangement has moved to a 'Requires further improvement' rating. We were pleased to hear this.

We were informed that the Improvement Plan has been fully endorsed by HMIP and officers requested it come back to Scrutiny in six months-time for us to receive an update. We felt the Service has come a very long way over three years and will continue to monitor the improvement going forward.

We heard that a systems review of the whole of the Service will be taking place from March 2022 and that children and young people will be involved in helping to shape and redesign the Service.

Officers emphasised to us an important point about HMIP's comments on the Bureau – that they had no concerns with the outcomes of the cases they looked at. We were reassured to hear this.

We heard that Youth Justice Board Members are being invited to visit the Service and speak to staff and young people and that this offer is extended to Members of the CFS Scrutiny Panel. You encouraged us to take up this offer and we will let the Service know of any interested Members.

We heard that the Service is investing in purchasing a new building in Swansea to help support delivery of co-located services and increase capacity.

The Director of Social Services informed us that a press statement was put out when HMIP published their inspection report and he agreed to share this press statement with us.

Verbal Update on Emergency Staffing

Julie Davies, Head of Child and Family Services updated the Panel on the current position. We heard that there has been little change with the position on employing social workers apart from a slight positive trend and that a decision was taken to recruit more support workers which has had a positive benefit of social workers being less pressured. We also heard that in the longer term, if the issue with social workers continues you will need to decide what to do strategically at a Swansea and Welsh Government level.

We were informed that full performance reporting to Scrutiny will recommence in the new municipal year.

Panel Review of the Year 2021-22

Panel Members reviewed the year 2021-22 and discussed four questions. The comments are noted below for your information:

What went well?

- The most important aspect of public service is supporting the work of CFS. Panel has never been complacent. Very proactive and robust focus with all Panel Members and supported by officers. Difficult to think how can improve this.
- Panel has not shirked from dealing with difficult issues and being challenging.

- Direct engagement with client groups worked well – videos with young mums and talking to children and young people directly. It was very powerful and helped Panel see what the Department is actually doing in the most challenging circumstances. Would like this to continue in future.
- Department is working better now than it would otherwise because of this Scrutiny Panel. The fact the Panel has been here going over different aspects of CFS and having the Service at the top of its mind has made a difference to the efficiency of the Department. If this has made a difference to a child out there, the Panel has been successful.
- It has been a very strong Scrutiny Panel. Credit to the Chair who does not criticise and tries to ask good questions. Panel's strength has been looking at difficult things and seeing the reality because it wants to make a difference to children and families.
- What the Panel does is useful. It has seen the situation where the Department has gone from dire straits to where it is now. This is and has always been down to the management and staff. The Panel's role has been as a critical friend.
- Thanks and appreciation to everyone who has contributed on the Panel and thanks to the Scrutiny Officer and all Scrutiny team for all the hard work they do.

What did not go so well?

- Nothing that did not go well.

Has the Panel focussed on the right things?

No comments noted.

What have we learnt that will help us with future CFS Scrutiny?

- Think there should be more CFS Panel meetings in future, as it is so important and there is so much ground to cover.
- Outcomes are the most important – what impact is all this having on the lives of children and young people for whom we have a responsibility.
- Seeing linkages between CFS and Education. Very useful and positive.
- Don't celebrate enough all the cases we see closed every month due to the brilliant intervention from CFS. These lessons coming out more would be very useful.

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 written response is required by 18 April 2022 to the following:

1. Details to be provided to the Panel of any training, for staff and multi-agency, on understanding the mind of the abuser and what to do about it and information on if it will be cascaded.
2. Press statement by HMIP on Inspection to be circulated to the Panel for information.

Yours sincerely

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