



To:
Councillor Louise Gibbard
Cabinet Member for Care Services

BY EMAIL

cc Cabinet Members

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Date 11 January 2023
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Summary: This is a letter from the Child and Family Services Scrutiny Performance Panel to the Cabinet Member for Care Services following the meeting of the Panel on 5 December 2022. It covers the Improvement Programme, Performance Monitoring, Regional Safeguarding Board and Safeguarding Quality Unit Annual Report.

Dear Cllr Gibbard

The Panel met on 5 December 2022 to discuss the Child and Family Services Improvement Programme and Performance Monitoring Report for October 2022 and to receive an update on the Regional Safeguarding Board and the Safeguarding Quality Unit Annual Report.

We would like to thank you, Dave Howes, Julie Davies, Gemma Whyley and Damian Rees for attending to present the items and answer the Panel's questions. We appreciate your engagement and input.

We are writing to you to reflect on what we learned from the discussion, share the views of the Panel, and, where necessary, raise any issues or recommendations for your consideration and response.

Child and Family Services Improvement Programme and Performance Monitoring

We were pleased to hear about the Social Work Academy and feel it is very innovative.

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We asked about neuro diversity and what effect the backlog in diagnosis is having. We heard that across Wales there are waiting lists for diagnostic assessments and that the Welsh Government has agreed additional funding for regional partnerships, but it is unlikely to have much effect on waiting times. We also heard that the Service hopes further funding will look across the continuum of need so the Authority can think about how it might work in education, Child and Family Services and Adult Services so there is a range of support and services available.

We noted that there is still an acute shortage of social workers and no sign this is coming to an end.

At the previous meeting we requested figures for the number of looked after children not looked after in Wales. Officers confirmed that of 479 looked after children, 112 are living in neighbouring authorities, 52 are living in other authorities in Wales, 20 living in England and 1 in Scotland with extended family members. We noted that the number of looked after children living outside Wales is rising and that one of the reasons is lack of suitable placements in Wales, partly due to Welsh Government's 'Eliminate' Programme, making some providers nervous about their future in Wales.

We noted there were quite a number of items in the Performance Report where it says 'report to be developed'. We queried if this was significant and if we should be flagging it up. We were informed that some of it is because of the changeover to WCCIS, that you had to develop new systems and you have focussed on the core data and information, and the gaps are mainly new asks. We heard one of the biggest challenges is validating the data and this takes time and there have also been challenges with how you get data out of the system. We said that we fully understand the issue, as it is vitally important you get the data right as decisions are being made based on that data.

We requested that where this month and last month data is shown in the report if it can be shown the other way around.

We queried what a Section 47 inquiry is and heard it is the investigation part and sets out the framework for what all agencies need to look at.

We noticed that the Number of Cases Awaiting Allocation seems to be rising. Officers confirmed there are more cases coming in and they are waiting for more staff to come into post in Early Help to allocate them to.

In the Performance Report it says, 'HR processes continue to create a block to filling posts quickly to prevent waiting lists occurring'. We asked if there is anything we can do to help in terms of, for example writing letters, to let us know. We heard the Department is in discussion with Corporate HR and that a combination of churn of number of posts within the Authority and capacity issues linked to Oracle Fusion led to a backlog in the service centre. The Department anticipated this might be a problem and established an additional resource to support the corporate centre to concentrate on social services posts, but this didn't work as well as hoped. We heard that subsequently the Authority has established a vacancy freeze so work in the service centre has decreased and the Department has had assurance this week that all the backlog has been caught up, and that resource to prioritise some of the most urgent

posts, including CFS posts will be prioritised. We noted the Department hopes to see improvement in the next few weeks and will be monitoring closely.

We noted the Department has approximately 159 vacancies at this time and 12 agency staff. We mentioned that a concern for us when the Authority was coming out of special measures in the past was that the number of agency staff needed to decrease. We are concerned with the number of vacancies across the Service, about coming back to the situation we had in the past with staff shortages and agency staff who do not fully understand situations. You commented that it is important to see the vacancy part of the report against the previous report on the Improvement Programme in terms of strategies that are being taken, for example the Academy, to try and help with the vacancies. We agree that it is not a quick fix but will hopefully create the home-grown workforce and longevity needed so the Department won't need to have agency backup. We feel that with the Academy being set up, the Department is making a big effort in respect of this issue.

Regional Safeguarding Board

We heard about the opportunities from the Parent Advocacy Network (PAN) and felt that the Service being informed by people who have used that particular Service was very advantageous.

We queried if the Department was happy the Regional Safeguarding Board is working as well as it should. We heard there are additional challenges and complexities working on a regional basis rather than having a local board, but it also provides greater opportunities. We also heard there is a good level of reassurance overall from having our own corporate safeguarding board; having good feedback from WAO about the arrangements; having our own Audit Committee taking an interest; having a positive Estyn inspection which reflected well on these arrangements and having good feedback on CIW reports on safeguarding. We noted however that this scrutiny board it right to focus on issues such as impacts around shortage of social workers and increased reliance on agency staff because if these are not turned around it could cause problems.

Safeguarding Quality Unit Annual Report

We were pleased to see a reduction in the number of re-registrations in 12 months on the child protection register and a reduction in the number of children coming off on first review. This is positive.

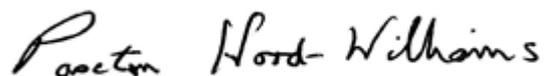
In response to our query we were informed that personal educational plans would be looked at in all the looked after reviews if the child was still in education.

We felt the discussion on Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) was very useful and will look at it again in a year's time.

Your Response

We hope you find this letter useful and informative. We would welcome your comments on any of the issues raised, however in this instance, a formal written 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'.

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