

Child and Family Services Scrutiny Performance Panel Update

1. Remit of the Panel

The overarching purpose of the Panel is to provide ongoing challenge to performance in Child and Family Social Services and to ensure that as the Service is undergoing major change, performance is maintained and that further improvements are made across all areas of the Service.

2. Key Activities

The Panel is currently meeting on a six-weekly basis and since the beginning of this municipal year the Panel has looked at the following:

Meeting	Topic(s)
22 May 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child and Family Complaints Annual Report 2021/22 • Delivery of Corporate Priorities / Policy Commitments in relation to Child and Family Services • Panel Review of the Year 2022-23
20 June 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance Monitoring • Update on Regional Adoption Service • Draft Work Plan 2023-24
2 August 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual Wellbeing / Performance Report • Residential Care Services (including update on Ty Nant)
13 September 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation by Young Carers • Adolescent Strategy and Action Plan
24 October 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update from Regional Safeguarding Board • Service Quality Unit Annual Report • Commissioning Reviews Progress Update
5 December 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance Monitoring (including session on qualitative auditing) • Update on Child and Family Improvement Programme • Update on Contextual Missing Exploited & Trafficked (CMET)

3. Achievements / Impact

We have sent 5 letters to the relevant Cabinet Members since our first meeting of the municipal year in May 2023, in order to give our views, raise concerns and make recommendations, for example:

Positives:

- Western Bay Regional Adoption Service - Panel asked about life stories, which the Service was struggling to get done in the past, and what the situation is currently and was informed Wales is making improvements in this area. From a regional perspective, a small team has been developed within the Service which looks at life journey work offered to adopters and childcare social worker workshops in achieving the best life journey work for children. Panel heard the Service's check in process is also influential and that in addition, the Western Bay Regional Adoption Manager chairs the National Life Journey Sub-Group which looks at best practice.
- Annual Wellbeing/Performance Report 2022-23 - Panel queried the situation with staff shortages and heard that there are only around four agency staff currently. Panel pleased to hear that some benefits are being seen from the All-Wales Memorandum of Cooperation recently introduced to help control what is paid. Panel also heard there has been huge interest in the Academy, that the Service is looking to recruit three additional newly qualified social workers and is moving those social workers who were in the Academy last year into area teams.
- Residential Care Services – Panel pleased to hear there has been significant improvement at Ty Nant and that at the last CIW visit all priority action notices were removed and there was only one area for improvement related to provider assessments, and this was being revised at the time and officers are confident that when inspectors next visit it will have a clean sheet.
- Presentation by Young Carers - Panel queried how the Service finds out how many young carers there are and what percentage are being reached and heard PSE sessions have been held in schools and awareness raised through the 'Understanding Young Carers' professional training. Panel noted that Swansea's statistic matches the national statistic i.e., three young carers in every single classroom in the UK, so the number is huge. Panel informed young carers are identified through PSE sessions, they listen to the presentation, engage in activities, and complete a questionnaire stating if they would like to identify as a young carer. They can access support in school through lunchtime clubs or can access support within the YMCA.
- Contextual Missing Exploited and Trafficked (CMET) - Panel queried how often the 'pop up' youth club in Mayhill is held and what happens for the rest of the time and heard the Team now has a blended approach. Panel also heard that Mayhill is held once a week but there are five Local Authority youth clubs altogether, all held on different nights in different areas, and the hours staff work in them has increased. Panel noted that on the other nights, youth workers go out and about in the community to the places young people spend time and that not all young people want to go to a youth club. Panel informed there are also a few independent youth clubs running in the area.

Issues / Concerns:

- Western Bay Regional Adoption Service - Panel noted the reduction in the number of approvals and asked if this was a concern. Panel heard it is a concern, has become a national rather than a regional problem and is on the national agenda. This is an issue the Panel will need to monitor.
- Annual Wellbeing/Performance Report 2022-23 - Panel noted 24 children were re-referred to the child protection register within the year, and asked if there was a breakdown of the reasons for re-referral. Panel was informed that it varies depending on a child's circumstances, for example, a change in family circumstances; impact of covid on people's behaviour who now cannot cope. Panel heard that circumstances are looked at in weekly safeguarding meetings and also that officers are pulling together themes to help them understand this data better to see if anything can be done differently that will help reduce referrals in future.
- Residential Care Services – Panel feels the Service is in a state of flux currently due to the requirements in terms of eliminating profit. Panel heard the Service would like to reduce use of external providers but will still be dependent on them and it would be useful if Welsh Government gave a proper definition of what 'not for profit' means, so that external providers know if they can continue to be registered from April 2026. Panel noted that feedback from across Wales is the same, Authorities have not got the capacity to meet the demand coming through and are heavily reliant on external provision, so it is a national issue. Cabinet Member added there is a Social Services and Wellbeing Cabinet Members Networking meeting with the Deputy Minister coming up and this is one of the topics on the agenda and she will report back on progress. Panel offered support in terms of writing a letter to Welsh Government if it would be useful.
- Adolescent Strategy and Action Plan - Panel felt there was more talk about the Youth Justice System in the report and asked if this is an indication that more youngsters are beginning to present with problems. Panel heard that in terms of accommodation, more young people are presenting needing additional support and it is difficult to know the cause specifically. Panel was informed in terms of youth justice, not seeing significantly more numbers of young people coming through at the statutory end but having different conversations in respect of exploitation, so the prevention offer within youth justice is growing significantly in terms of that.
- Improvement Programme - In relation to Residential Care, Panel believes the Service is still struggling to find appropriate properties to purchase and modify and queried the current capacity and if the Council is still having to send children out of county to get appropriate accommodation. Panel was informed the Service is seeing an increase in numbers of children in residential care, partly linked to insufficient foster care placements available, however, officers hope the position will improve over the next few months. Panel heard there are currently four in house beds, and the Service is looking to increase this to 15 over the next three years, but this depends on identifying properties in the right place and right condition. Panel noted that alternative ways are being looked at to achieve this.

Action Recommended / Agreed:

- Performance Monitoring - Panel noted 'number of children registered previously' was about one third of the number on the register and thought this seemed high. Panel was informed the main reason is change of circumstances. Panel stated it would be concerned if a child came back onto the child protection register less than a year after being taken off it. Officers confirmed this is looked at and they have a specific indicator for it and agreed to include 'number of children added to Child Protection Register, within 12 months of de-registration who've been re-registered under the same category' in future analysis for the performance report.
- Annual Wellbeing/Performance Report 2022-23 - Panel asked for an explanation of 'qualitative auditing' as they had not seen this in the performance reports before. Panel was informed that every month the report includes some themes on the findings that have been specifically audited and that this has been brought together to give a whole picture, to evidence the learning pulled out of the auditing and what it says in terms of quality of practice. Everyone agreed it would be useful to have a session on this to understand it better, [added to work plan under Performance Monitoring item in December 2023] and that it would be helpful to include it in reports on a quarterly basis.
- Service Quality Unit Annual Report - Panel discussed how difficult it must be for children going into care for the first time – surrounded by new people and a huge amount of paperwork and often having significant literacy issues. Panel suggested that as well as writing letters, or providing spider diagrams for younger children, more is done orally with these children, such as a recording, so they have a record of who is doing what and what was talked about, which they can go back to and hold the Service to account. Officers said they felt the suggestion was a very good one and will explore the option further.
- Performance Monitoring - Panel discussed how Welsh Government is planning to move away from the current computer system, Welsh Community Care Information System (WCCIS). Cabinet Member confirmed it is currently in the engagement phase and agreed to look into the benefits, timeline etc of the new system and report back to the Panel.

4. Future Work Programme

The programme for the remainder of this municipal year is as follows:

Meeting	Item to be discussed
23 January 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Update on Progress with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)• Corporate Parenting Board Update
12 February 2024 Joint Social Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Draft Budget Proposals for Child and Family Services / Adult Services

12 March 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance Monitoring • Briefing on Youth Offending Service • Child and Family Services / Adult Services Complaints Annual Report 2022-23 (Adult Services Panel Members to be invited for this item)
1 May 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivery of Corporate Priorities / Policy Commitments in relation to Child and Family Services • Panel Review of the Year 2023/24

5. Action for the Scrutiny Programme Committee

None.