



To:
Councillor Elliott King, Cabinet Member for
Children Services (Early Years) / Councillor
Sam Pritchard, Cabinet Member for
Children Services (Young People)

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Date 20 January 2020
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Summary: This is a letter from the Child & Family Services Scrutiny Performance Panel to the Cabinet Members for Children Services following the meeting of the Panel on 18 December 2019. It covers Regional Adoption Service, Corporate Parenting Board and Performance Monitoring

Dear Cllr King and Cllr Pritchard,

The Panel met on 18 December to receive updates on the Western Bay Regional Adoption Service and the Corporate Parenting Board and to discuss the Child and Family Services Performance Monitoring Report for October 2019.

We would like to thank Cllr King, Julie Thomas, Nichola Rogers and Gemma Whyley 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:

Update on Regional Adoption Service

Nichola Rogers, Regional Adoption Manager for Western Bay Adoption Service updated the Panel on the work of the service, improvements in performance and plans to address areas for development.

We were informed that an independent review report is expected in January 2020 on whether Bridgend remains as part of Western Bay Adoption Service.

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We heard that there have been improvements in performance in many areas over the last year since the new adoption manager has been in post and that Nichola should be congratulated. We were very pleased to hear this.

We noted that there are mostly women in the structure and mentioned that we felt children need a male role model. We were informed that this is not a significant issue in the adoption service, as staff don't work directly with children.

We were informed that there are currently no white children placed with BME adopters and that adoption is driven by the adopters. We heard that culture is taken into account but care and wellbeing of children comes first.

We heard that a new framework has been introduced for Life Journey Data. Also, a framework worker has recently been appointed to work with Authorities to improve quality of work, and to work with social workers to help children understand about Life Journey data. We were pleased to hear this.

We heard that work has been done on Western Bay's 'offer' and how it will support children and adopters going forward. We also heard that there were issues with 'letterbox' but that these have been resolved.

We were informed that all areas meet regularly to share practice and that some of the good practice by Western Bay has been shared in this forum.

We discussed that there was concern about the shortage of adopters in this region but heard that the gap has got smaller and the project manager thinks it will continue to reduce.

We agreed that the adoption manager would bring this year's performance results to a panel meeting early in the next municipal year.

Corporate Parenting Board Update

Gemma Whyley, Child and Family Services Project Manager updated the Panel on activity undertaken this year including timeline, work plan, projects and next steps.

We heard that there have been six opportunities for corporate parents to engage with children this year.

We were informed that the Best Start Book Project, undertaken this year, has been praised by the Children's Commissioner. We heard that you hope to expand on this next year. It was agreed that a PDF copy of the book will be circulated to the Panel by email.

We heard that Bays+ is currently working well. We also heard that a new bespoke performance report for Bays+ is being developed in the new year and that this will be added to the CFS Performance Monitoring item in future.

We were pleased to hear that the Participation Task and Finish Group has been nominated for an award.

We heard that a Joint Corporate Parenting Board workshop was held and that this will feed into the annual Corporate Parenting Board Plan.

We were informed that the Welsh Government Ministry Advisory Group is discussing changes to legislation and that this could be very positive.

We heard that the Big Conversation was very successful at linking in with schools.

We raised the issue that there was no performance data provided in the report and that in the previous report we had been concerned about educational attainment for Looked After Children. We heard that the Annual Report, including performance data, will come to this Panel in the next municipal year.

We queried if partners are participating as they should and we were informed that Housing and Culture and Leisure are now taking their corporate parenting role seriously and are participating well.

You told us that you are keen to improve attendance and engagement at Board meetings and believe changing from objectives to themes will help with this.

You also informed us that there has been a push to involve children in Board meetings but that the structure of meetings needs to change. We suggested you speak to the Head of Democratic Services about changing the format to a more workshop style.

Performance Monitoring

Julie Thomas, Head of Child and Family Services updated the Panel.

We heard that it was an extremely busy 3 months with lots of activity around the Looked After Children population including some serious issues and some really complex issues.

We were informed that the Workforce Wellbeing Strategy is being developed and that it is really important to keep experienced staff especially senior practitioners.

We heard that the vacancy monitoring policy is no longer being applied in CFS as it delays recruitment of staff. We were pleased to hear this. We also heard that the retention policy has been approved to enable progression of staff through to senior social workers. The Panel heard that there has been a big drive towards targeted early work and early help hubs are in place. The Head of Service agreed to bring caseload information to each Panel meeting in future to reassure us.

We noted that child protection activity has increased. We heard that work is being undertaken to slow this down and that the police will be working with us on this and we should see a reduction in figures.

We heard that there has been more activity around county lines recently and that the police have been asked to up their disruption activity.

We were informed that the Department is doing a piece of work with Lancaster University on the 'Born into Care' project.

We heard that the Department is working with Housing on providing housing for care leavers with complex needs who still need this support.

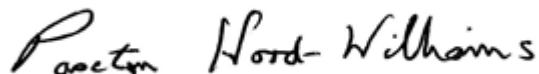
Work Programme

We discussed the possibility of adding the budget proposals for Child and Family Services to the February Panel Meeting for discussion. However, the budget proposals are due to go to Cabinet on 20 February 2020 so an additional CFS panel meeting has had to be arranged on 18 February at 12pm. Relevant Cabinet Members and officers are invited to attend this meeting.

Your Response

We hope you find this letter useful and informative. We would welcome your views and comments on any of the issues raised and in this instance please provide a formal response by 10 February 2020.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paxton Hood-Williams". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

PAXTON HOOD-WILLIAMS
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