



To:
Councillor Elliott King, Cabinet Member for
Children Services

BY EMAIL

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Date 01 July 2021
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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 Services following the meeting of the Panel on 22 June 2021. It covers Regional Adoption Service, CIW Assurance Visit and Review of the Year.

Dear Cllr King,

The Panel met on 22 June 2021 to receive an update on progress with the Western Bay Regional Adoption Service, Initial Feedback on the Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) Assurance Visit and the Panel's Review of the Year 2020-21 and draft Work Programme 2021-22.

We would like to thank you, Julie Davies and Nichola Rogers 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:

Update on Regional Adoption Service

Nichola Rogers, Regional Adoption Manager for Western Bay Adoption Service attended to update the Panel on the work of the service and review of its performance in 2020-21.

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We heard that 2020 was a difficult year for the service. It adopted a business as usual approach via virtual means and the service was able to maintain performance despite the pandemic. We were very pleased to hear this.

We noted that there was a reduction in the number of children being referred for placement in Swansea in 2020-21.

We queried how many children are currently available for adoption in Swansea. How many adoptive parents are in place and if children waiting for adoption are in foster care. We were informed that the service is currently matching for four children; at the end of April 2021 there were 15 sets of adoptive parents in place and at the moment there are some adopters waiting but this changes from month to month. We heard that if no adopters are available, the service will go back and consider if long term fostering is the right plan. We also heard that it is an improving position.

We felt that the figures in the report showed lots of stability. We were previously concerned that the number of children was increasing and there was a need to increase the number of adopters but this seems to have changed around. Officers confirmed that Western Bay is currently well placed for placements and that the service does not just rely on local adopters; they have a wider pool.

We noted that the impact of the pandemic on numbers is currently unknown as it may take time to come through the system and that the service is monitoring this.

We mentioned an article that said we are too quick to put children up for adoption (not necessarily in Swansea). Officers confirmed that the three authorities have looked at safe LAC reduction and good practice, and that in Swansea, there was a reduction in the number of children having a placement order in the last year.

We queried why some children from Swansea had been placed in England. We were informed that for some children, in larger sibling groups, and some with additional needs, there were no adopters locally. The service used the adoption register to identify placements further afield in these cases. We heard that the complexity of children coming through the system does not match the number of adopters available who will take on these children and that marketing is currently doing a piece of work to try and increase these adopters.

We noted that no disruptions were recorded last year, and queried if the service is satisfied that there are no problems occurring, where there needs to be disruption. Officers confirmed there were some matches that did not proceed, but no disruptions once a child was placed.

We wanted to know if the Life Journey work has improved and were informed that a Life Journey Worker was appointed, to help improve Life Journey work, and that there has been improvement.

We felt it was a very positive report, the best we have seen for some time and thanked Nichola and the staff for all their hard work.

Initial Feedback on CIW Assurance Visit

Julie Davies, Head of Child and Family Services provided initial feedback on the CIW Assurance visit in relation to Child and Family Services and informed us that the visit took place virtually in the week commencing 07 June 2021.

We heard that the visit focussed on two things – 1/ How well the LA discharges its statutory duties, and 2/ How well the LA prevents the need for children to come into care. We also heard that there were four priority areas – People-voice and control; Prevention; Well Being; Partnerships.

We noted that CIW chose five cases, selected randomly, to look at.

Julie told us she believes CIW felt assured that the LA knows its service well and that nothing needed escalating.

We felt one of the positives in the initial feedback is the high profile of managers. Historically this was not the case.

We felt there was very little criticism of what the LA has been doing and that the initial feedback was very good. We look forward to seeing the detailed report at the next Panel meeting in August.

Review of the Year 2020-21 and Draft Work Programme 2021-22

The Convener stated it had been a difficult year for scrutiny as it had been a difficult year for Social Services management and staff. Not as many panel meetings were held last year and three of the meetings were joint Adult Services and Child and Family Services Panel meetings, to receive updates on dealing with the pandemic.

We felt that the last year had shown us that a good way forward is for topics of relevance to both Panels to go to one Panel, with members of the other Panel invited to attend, rather than the item going to both Panels. This reduces the strain on officer's time.

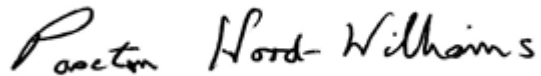
We raised the issue of children's homes in Swansea going through planning. You confirmed that members of the Planning Committee are in a difficult position as it is a planning issue and they cannot take into account the opinions of the Social Services directorate. You stated that the Department had been helpful in trying to bring together members and providers to try and alleviate concerns of residents in the area. We noted that the issue has been raised with the Minister, as you feel it needs to be an all Wales approach.

In terms of the draft work programme for 2021-22, we mentioned the importance of looking at when cases get closed in the performance report, and requested to see some practical examples. The Head of Service suggested the Panel see videos on 'Appreciative Inquiry' from time to time at panel meetings. We agreed the Head of Service should seek consent to show a video to the Panel and agree a suitable panel meeting date in the near future.

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, we do not require a formal written response.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paxton Hood-Williams". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name "Paxton" starting with a large 'P' and the last name "Hood-Williams" following in a similar style.

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