



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

BY EMAIL

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Date 21 February 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 25 January 2022. It covers Performance and Emergency Staffing.

Dear Cllr King,

The Panel met on 25 January to receive a briefing on the Performance Highlight Report for December 2021 and the Emergency Staffing Plan.

We would like to thank you and Julie Davies 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:

Performance Highlight Report and Emergency Staffing Plan

Performance Monitoring –

We heard that more families are being supported through early help hubs which is indicative of them being more proactive in their approach. We also heard that the number of children on the child protection register remains at 200 which is in line with where it should be. However, there continues to be a higher number of children registered at birth and you are seeing more unborns in Swansea, in circumstances that give cause for concern and it continues to be on an upward trend. We heard that there has been a noticeable reduction in the average number of days children are on the

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child protection register and that the Directorate is undertaking some analysis of this to be assured children are moving on in the right way.

We queried if the figure for 'Number of Days on Child Protection Register' indicated a more driven proactive approach to support families, so children are not on the Child Protection Register any longer than they should be. Officers confirmed that it is exactly as it should be, and it is about robustness of plans and timeliness of responses to progress.

We noted the increase in unborns being taken into care and queried how much explanation is given to the mother. We heard that the figure in the report is for unborns on the child protection register and not necessarily who have come into the Authority's care. We were informed that the Directorate looks at every case individually and that the focus always is on looking at the positives and working with parents to try and enable the baby to stay in the family unit. We heard that parents have the option of having their own advocate to help them understand what is happening.

We expressed concern about support for refugees and asylum seeker families as many families are placed temporarily and are then moved to a different part of the city. We queried if any special provision is made and what the support system is for them. It was confirmed that if they meet the statutory threshold or come through the Early Help Hub, the Directorate works together with the Council's services and local services to offer support to families they are aware of.

We felt that the figures are impressive in terms of the way the numbers of looked after children have been reducing, especially in current circumstances, which is a credit to the Department. We queried if you are satisfied that in terms of re-referrals and registrations, they are still comparatively low. We were informed that you are satisfied.

Emergency Staffing -

We heard that you have still not recruited to vacant social worker posts in the locality teams but have had more success in the Front Door as you were able to appoint support workers which is easing some of the pressure in the locality teams. We also heard that the Department continues to pull in support from across the Service to ensure key statutory duties are met and independent social workers if needed for key tasks. We were informed that the ability to recruit permanent social workers is still a concern across Wales and that you hope to give some feedback at the next meeting on the advertisement, which is currently out for social workers, offering additional benefits to social workers in front line teams.

We heard that a key pressure currently is that there are not sufficient placements available, so the Department is having to use a lot of its own staff to provide care and support for children in unregulated placements and more children are being placed in England. We heard you are looking to return placements to Wales if and when placements become available. We also heard that part of the problem is the Welsh Government initiative to eliminate profit from children's social care resulting in some providers deciding to stop future plans to move into Wales to develop placements, or deciding they are not going to continue offering placements to children in Wales. We

heard you were already struggling to offer placements, and this is putting extra strain on staffing across the whole Service.

We were informed the Directorate continues to work with local universities so that for newly qualified social workers you can get a more direct feed into the Service to work on lower-level cases.

We heard that the current pandemic has not affected staffing as much as feared and that the Covid contingency plan had been re-introduced.

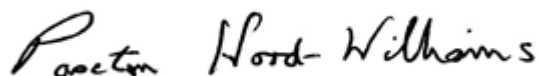
We sought confirmation that independent fostering companies are looking at stepping away from Wales and heard that it is true that some providers are stepping away because of uncertainty about what the programme will mean in terms of elimination of profit from children's residential care. We heard that together with Foster Wales and Foster Swansea the Authority is looking at more targeted campaigns for foster carers for teenagers.

We queried if Welsh Government are thinking along the lines of re-investing the profit into the education of looked after children, in order to help fund this type of provision for the most vulnerable young people. You stated that it is a Welsh Government desire to remove profit from children's social care but you believe investment will be in the long term. You confirmed that as a Service you are looking forward at ways you can deliver things differently to deliver some of these challenges.

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 not required.

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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