
EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE CARE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 6/11/18

- Present:** Councillor Eryl Jones-Williams (Chair)
Councillor Dewi Wyn Roberts (Vice-chair)
- Councillors:** Menna Baines, Alan Jones Evans, Elin Walker Jones, Cai Larsen, Beth Lawton, Dafydd Owen, Peter Read and Angela Russell.
- Officers present:** Gareth James (Members' Manager - Support and Scrutiny) and Eirian Roberts (Member Support Officer).

Present for item 4 below:

Councillor Dilwyn Morgan (Cabinet Member for Children and Young People)
Marian Parry Hughes (Head of Children and Supporting Families Department)
Sharon Eastlake (Chief Inspector, Care Inspectorate Wales)

Present for item 5 below:

Councillor Dilwyn Morgan (Cabinet Member for Children and Young People)
Marian Parry Hughes (Head of Children and Supporting Families Department)
Dafydd Paul (Senior Safeguarding and Quality Manager)

1. APOLOGIES

Councillors Annwen Daniels, Anwen Davies, R.Medwyn Hughes, Linda Ann Jones, Rheinalt Puw and Catrin Wager.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

Councillor Elin Walker Jones declared a personal interest in Item 4 (Inspection of Gwynedd Council's Children's Services) and Item 5 (Annual Report on Dealing with Complaints and Information Requests by the Children and Supporting Families Department for 2017/2018) as she was employed by the Betsi Cadwaladr Health Board and that the head of her service worked for Derwen.

She was not of the opinion that the matters were prejudicial interests, and she did not withdraw from the meeting during the discussion on the items.

3. URGENT ITEMS

No urgent items were received.

4. INSPECTION OF GWYNEDD COUNCIL'S CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Sharon Eastlake, Chief Inspector of the Inspection Team was welcomed to the meeting to submit the Inspection of Gwynedd Council's Children's Services.

The Cabinet Member set out the context and noted that submitting the inspection to this committee was the last step in the process of inspecting the Council's children's services. He emphasised that he took great pride in the positive messages in the report and he thanked the Chair and committee members for their input into the inspection.

The Chief Inspector gave an overview of the inspection's findings and fields to develop and the Head of Children and Supporting Families Department elaborated on work that was already in the pipeline to respond to recommendations in the report, and noted:-

- The Department had addressed matters in the report that referred to fields to develop in detail, and rather than developing an improvement programme, the Department had an Ambition Programme as matters that were already being built upon needed to be strengthened.
- Rather than waiting for the publication of the final report in August, the work of examining the fields to develop in detail had been immediately commenced in light of receiving oral feedback from the inspectors on the last day of the inspection in May.
- The Department's Management Team discussed quality assurance arrangements and progress monitoring arrangements at every meeting and that discussions were also held in the performance challenging meetings.
- The Inspectorate would also keep a close eye and that there was a responsibility on the Department to report on progress in the meetings biannually with the Inspectorate.
- The development of the Information, Advice and Assistance Service since the inspection included:-
 - Undertaking work with our partners to draw attention to the services available.
 - Adding to the structure within the team so that one front door was available for the statutory service, but also for the early intervention and preventative services. Also, the family information service was now included within this service.
 - Developing information for the website so that what was available for families and individuals who required support could be advertised.
 - Re-branding the service as the 'Gwynedd Family Hub', and that this was now the new referral portal into the service.
- The Supporting Families Strategy was a priority under the Council's Strategic Plan. The direction had been reported to the Leadership Team and the Cabinet and an additional resource on a senior manager level had been obtained to develop and lead the supporting families strategy as a matter of priority for the Department and across the corporation.
- In terms of reviewing care plans for looked-after children, there was a need to examine how to improve the outcome for the child and that the Team of Independent Reviewing Officers, under the guidance of the Senior Safeguarding and Quality Manager, were developing their own work programme that would intertwine with this Ambition Programme.
- A lack and shortage of suitable fostering placements was a national challenge, and not only for those children with the most complex needs. The increasing pressures of this on the Fostering Team had been seen and an increase had been seen in the number of looked-after children and children placed with their extended families. Work was undertaken on a regional and national level via the National Fostering Framework and the Head of Department explained that she was a member of the steering group for that framework as the Lead Head of Department for north Wales. In addition, a regional work programme led on recruitment and marketing for fostering in north Wales. In light of increasing pressures for the Council to be assessing families to be foster carers, releasing resources to recruit and market was difficult, as we did not have those officers ourselves within our resources in Gwynedd. Therefore, pressures from the courts to undertake assessments and guide families through the Fostering Panel weighed heavily on the Fostering Team and it was likely that this had been done at the expense of the recruitment work that used to be undertaken. However, nine families that were eager to foster in general

for the Council had been obtained through the Fostering Panel last year, and this was a high priority for the Department as it met the needs of our children within the county.

The Cabinet Member, the Chief Inspector and the Head of Children and Supporting Families Department then responded to questions / further observations from members.

The following points were raised by individual members:-

- It was asked how Gwynedd's inspection results compared with other counties. In response, it was noted that Gwynedd was one of six local authorities across north Wales that had an inspection in the same field and that the six reports had been published on-line so that they could be compared.
- In response to an enquiry regarding staffing levels in future, it was noted that this Council was very fortunate in terms of the adequacy of staff and social workers. The Council did not employ any worker through an agency and staff lived locally, with a high percentage of them fully bilingual and able to offer a service for families in their chosen language. The workforce was very competent, experienced and committed and the service examined a wide range of different qualifications and skills within the workforce, with people who had not qualified as social workers but undertaking excellent work with families. The service managed to attract people to posts very easily, with it usually involving an internal promotion or a worker moving from one team to another to broaden their experience and very few staff left the Council. The Service had greatly invested over a number of years in staff mentoring and support and the Management Team was available for staff to ask for advice or guidance. It was very much hoped that savings within the workforce would not have to be sought as it would substantially increase risks for the Council. Also, it was anticipated that staff adequacy would become more difficult in future as the number of referrals increased.
- Whilst welcoming the fact that nine new fostering families had been recruited, it was enquired how many fostering families were lost over the same period. In response, it was explained that some families retired and others decided that they did not wish to continue fostering, but on the whole, that the number of fostering placements remained consistent. Should he wish, the exact figures could be provided to the member.
- In response to an enquiry, the Chief Inspector elaborated on the role and process of the Inspectorate when addressing the development fields. She also noted that there would be a reference to work undertaken with the Council in the Inspectorate's annual letter, which would be published at the beginning of next year.
- In response to an enquiry, it was explained that it was premature to say what impact the Social Services and Well-being Act 2014 would have in terms of preventing children from becoming looked-after, and the outcome of this work would possibly not be seen for many years.
- In response to an enquiry, it was explained that it was very difficult to judge whether or not the preventative work had prevented a child from becoming looked-after, as perhaps that child would never have become looked-after in any case. It was not believed that evidence was available in Gwynedd, or on a national level either. A group within the Government was examining early intervention and preventative work and attempting to establish the link, but thus far, this had not come to fruition unfortunately. If this link could be created, there would be a case for moving resources to the preventative side in order to reduce the numbers that become looked-after.
- It was enquired how many children were still at home awaiting a placement. In response, it was noted that the service scrutinised these cases very carefully. If a child was seen to be at risk of significant harm and that the threshold was reached in

terms of commencing a court case (which meant that the Council took parental responsibility for the child), the Department would act immediately, whatever the situation in terms of placement. The Placement Scrutiny Panel examined all cases of looked-after children and ensured that there was no delay or risk to those children, and as head of department, she confirmed that she had no concerns that there were children at risk in Gwynedd due to a lack of placements.

- Referring to paragraph 3.11 of the report, it was enquired what the size of the sample of review documents that had been seen by the inspectors was. In response, it was noted that the sample was small, but evidence from the children's focus group, the interviews with staff across the department and staff surveys had come to the same conclusion, namely that there was a need to look in more detail at the voice of the child and arrangements in terms of making the review a more positive experience.
- It was enquired whether or not it was intended to undertake more life story work with the children. In response, it was noted that this was very important work that needed to be undertaken in all cases of looked-after children. There were good examples of this, but it did not occur consistently across the services, mainly due to work pressures on social workers. Staff had been employed over the summer to come in to assist within teams and there had been examples of life story work commencing. The teams had also worked with children's families in order to collect photographs etc. On a national level, a support package had been developed to undertake life story work which focused on key matters for that and on the contribution of foster carers to that work. It was recognised that more work needed to be undertaken in this field, and although workers were very eager to do so, it was inevitable that this slipped down the priority list as other work came through the door.

It was noted that the report was very positive and the department was congratulated on maintaining such a high standard. Members expressed their appreciation in understanding that:-

- development fields were already being addressed;
- nine new fostering families had been recruited;
- attracting people to posts occurred easily;
- detailed, good quality assessments undertaken in a timely manner;
- staff felt that they were supported by managers;
- families were positive on the whole in terms of the support provided by the Council;
- young people appreciated the honesty of their personal advisors.

At the request of a member, it was agreed to distribute copies of the Ambition Programme to all committee members.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member, the Chief Inspector and the Head of Children and Supporting Families Department for all their work in this field and for their responses to the questions/observations. The Cabinet Member thanked members for their contribution, noting that the relationship and regular dialogue between the Department, the Scrutiny Committee and the Inspectorate was appreciated.

5. ANNUAL REPORT ON DEALING WITH COMPLAINTS AND INFORMATION REQUESTS BY THE CHILDREN AND SUPPORTING FAMILIES DEPARTMENT

Submitted - the report of the Cabinet Member providing information on the number of complaints received by the Children and Supporting Families Department during the year, the reasons for them and the solutions. The report also contained a summary of the lessons learnt and the action taken on the complaints received, along with details about the number of information requests received during this period.

The Cabinet Member set out the context noting that this statutory annual report was a positive report. Due to the day-to-day nature of the job of workers, who had to make very difficult decisions, he explained that tensions were unavoidable, but that the well-being and safety of the young person was the main consideration. He added that the Inspectorate had not raised any concerns regarding the Council's complaints procedure and he referred to the positive observations listed on the back of the report by individuals and agencies that were partners of the Council.

The Senior Safeguarding and Quality Manager referred to some of the main matters in the report and the Cabinet Member, the Head of Children and Supporting Families Department and the Senior Safeguarding and Quality Manager responded to questions / general observations from members regarding the procedure.

The following points were raised by individual members:-

- In response to an enquiry regarding the ability to prepare information at short notice for court cases in the event of the relevant officer's illness / annual leave, it was explained that the service had not faced this situation as of yet, but the Department had other individuals that could undertake some parts of the work. It was emphasised that it was detailed work that had to be undertaken carefully and in some situations perhaps the court would have to be informed that it was not practicably possible to achieve the work within the time-scale.
- It was enquired how many families were clients of the service so that it could be estimated what percentage submitted a complaint about the service. In response, it was explained that the report mainly related to the period in history when there were approximately 600 - 700 cases, which included looked-after children, children in need and children that needed support, but that the preventative agenda had now significantly extended those numbers. As a result, it was currently very difficult to measure whether or not the levels of complaints were on the increase. It was also noted that it was difficult to identify trends as matters raised were very particular and unique to the circumstances of individual families.
- It was enquired when it would be suitable to bring a concern to the attention of the scrutiny committee. In response, it was explained that the annual report was the product of four quarterly reports, that were drawn up as part of the service's monitoring arrangements to examine whether or not any trends become apparent. It was confirmed that no matters of concern had been raised in this case. The Cabinet Member added that the Inspectorate kept a close eye on complaints, and the reasons for them, and that he also received regular reports. Currently, the responses that he and the Inspectorate received confirmed that all things possible were undertaken, but should he see a high number of the same complaint and that the matter needed to be scrutinised, he would ask the committee to examine it.
- It was enquired what occurred in a situation where the Council repeatedly received a complaint regarding a lack of facilities, because more complaints would be submitted unless those facilities were provided. In response, the Cabinet Member asked the committee to entrust in him, the Service and the Inspectorate to deal with the situation, but he confirmed that he would bring the matter to the attention of the scrutiny committee should he witness a loss of control or if there was a concern.
- In response to a question about the source of complaints, it was noted that it was possible, in theory, for a family to submit more than one complaint regarding the same matter as they were dissatisfied with the response given to their original complaint, but it was not believed that figures indicated this.
- In response to an enquiry, it was noted that it was astonishing that the number of complaints was so low in a field that had so much conflict and that every complaint seemed appropriate.

- It was enquired when was the whistle blown in terms of numbers and what would be the next step if a resource was not provided. In response, it was explained that this would be raised at the meeting of the Management Team and the Cabinet Member would be informed of the matter. Lessons to be learned from complaints would be examined, including any messages regarding the lack of resources and it would be expected that appropriate managers were aware of any problems.
- Referring to complaint GC/3971-17 in the table in Appendix 1 to the report, it was noticed that the last column noted '*Unfortunately, there is no such resource at present*' and it was enquired where the complainant could turn to next. In response, it was noted that this was a specific matter relating to the only occupational therapist within the Derwen Service, and in order to ensure service continuation arrangements during the absence of that person, a bid on a corporate level was submitted very recently to increase the resource.
- It was enquired what the time-scale was in terms of drawing up a complaints sheet. In response, it was explained that work to draw up the sheet had been postponed currently as the publication of amended regulations by the Assembly was awaited. The time-scale for this was unknown as of yet.

The Cabinet Member thanked members for the discussion and the good collaboration between everyone.

The meeting commenced at 10.00 am and concluded at 12.20 pm

CHAIRMAN