

GWYNEDD COUNCIL CABINET

Report to a meeting of Gwynedd Council Cabinet

Date:	23 July 2019
Title of Item:	Performance Report of the Cabinet Member for Children and Supporting Families
Purpose:	To accept and note the information in the report
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Dilwyn Morgan
Contact Officer:	Morwena Edwards, Corporate Director

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update my fellow members on developments in the fields within my remit as Cabinet Member for Children and Supporting Families. This includes outlining the latest developments of pledges within the 2018-2023 Gwynedd Council Plan; the progress of performance measures; and the latest on the savings and cuts schemes.
- 1.2 I would like to remind you that all matters have already been the subject of discussions and have been scrutinised at the management team meetings of the Children and Supporting Families Department, which also included a representation from the Scrutiny Committee.
- 1.3 I am generally satisfied with the progress of the projects within the Council Plan and the performance measures for which I am responsible. Nevertheless, it has become apparent that endeavouring to deliver the savings schemes scheduled for the Department would be challenging. The main reason for this, regrettably, is the increasing demand placed upon us to bring more children into the Council's care.

2 THE DECISION SOUGHT

- 2.1 To accept and note the information in the report.

3 GWYNEDD COUNCIL PLAN PROJECTS 2018-2023

3.1 Supporting People's Well-being

Until the end of March this year, the Council supported our most vulnerable residents by focusing on the attempt to mitigate the impact of poverty by offering support on issues such as benefits and bringing individuals back into employment. Since the beginning of April, our focus has changed, and the aim of the 'Supporting People's Well-being' is to cast the net wider and offer

Cyswilt:
01286 679868
01286 679490
cabinet@gwynedd.llyw.cymru



support to a range of additional fields such as difficulties with raising a family, living healthy and active lives, loneliness, and substance and alcohol misuse. We have already begun the year's work of agreeing on the direction, scope and work programme for 'Supporting People's Well-being'. This is to ensure we make the best use of available resources to address need without delay, to jointly plan services and appropriate interventions, and consider the efficiency of our current provision arrangements. The comprehensive work programme for the year is already yielding results, such as the commencement of tracking and simplifying the grant application systems, to make it easier and faster for families to receive the necessary support. A series of training sessions for Council workers and the Police, collectively, are also in place for the autumn.

3.2 **Supporting Families Strategy**

Work has taken place to identify the demand for support for families across the Council's departments, and to map out the provisions that are already available to support families across Gwynedd, and the way people gain access to these services. This work will improve our understanding of the current situation and will guide the way we plan our response to the needs, jointly with our partners. An exciting development over recent months was the launch of the Gwynedd Family Hub that will provide information on-line for families about the support available to them. Preparatory work has been undertaken to appoint Community Connectors for Families, who will expand on the work of the Gwynedd Family Hub by offering practical support locally. Work is also under way to plan the support that families need in the medium term; a draft work programme has been developed, and financial applications are being prepared to support this important work.

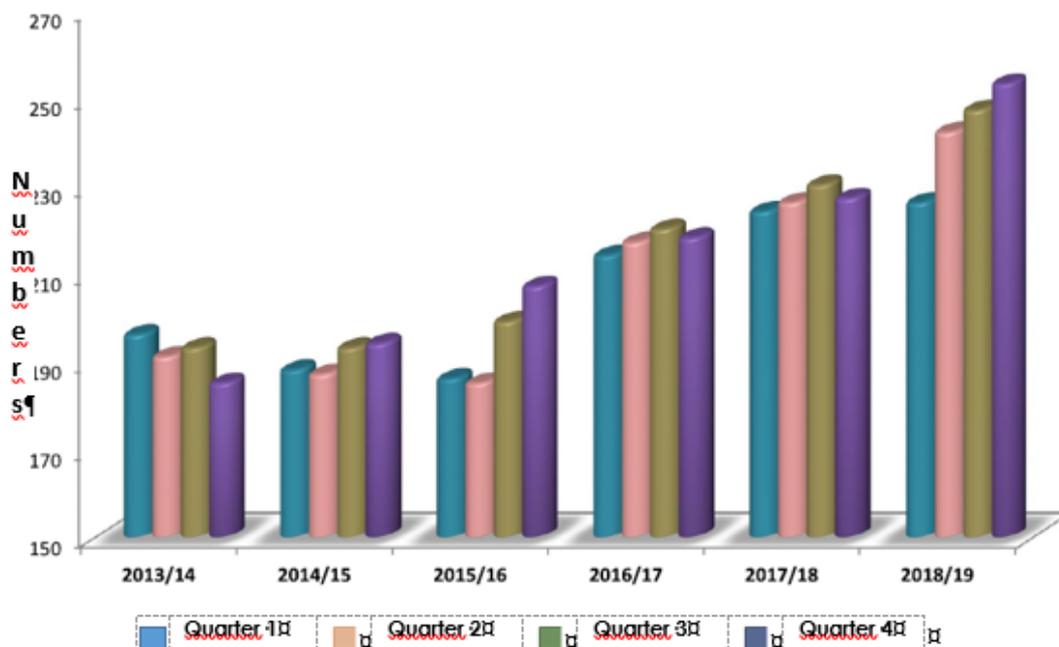
4. **PERFORMANCE AND MEASURES**

- 4.1 In terms of the Department's Performance, the measures continue to suggest a strong performance in practice and safeguarding.
- 4.2 I am pleased to report that the '**Effective Child Protection**' project funded through a Healthier Wales transformation grant is progressing satisfactorily. Staff have been appointed to lead on the work, and the work programme for the year ahead is clear. By the time I issue my next performance report, I will be able to report on the initial developments and outcomes of this work.
- 4.3 Both measures for the Safeguarding field (SCC21 and SCC14), looking at the figures for the end of 2018/19, have slipped somewhat. The SCC14 measure has slipped substantially (**SCC14 - Percentage initial child protection conferences that should have been held during the year and**

which were held within 15 working days of the strategic discussion 59%). The average for the year was 77%, and 14 individual cases were not discussed within the timetable. I accept that there are reasons for several of these, e.g. one case dealt with early pregnancy, and there were delays because of the Court timetable. However, we also lack capacity, which causes delays, such as the Chair's lack of time. Despite the slippage, I have no concerns that unnecessary delays are taking place, and the service keeps a close eye on the reasons for the delays, and on the number of days beyond the expected timetable, in order to identify any problems as soon as possible.

4.4 Another major challenge of which the Service is aware is the increasing demand on our staff's time because of the increasing number of children entering the Council's care. At the end of March 2019, 253 children were looked after by the Council, an increase of 11% since the end of March 2018. Looking at the **SCC021** measure, **Percentage of looked after children reviews held within the statutory timetable during the year**, it is clear that the lack of staffing capacity can lead to delays in holding reviews. This percentage was at 90% between April and June, and although it compares well with previous years, the Department still seeks to improve the situation.

Children in care at the end of a quarter

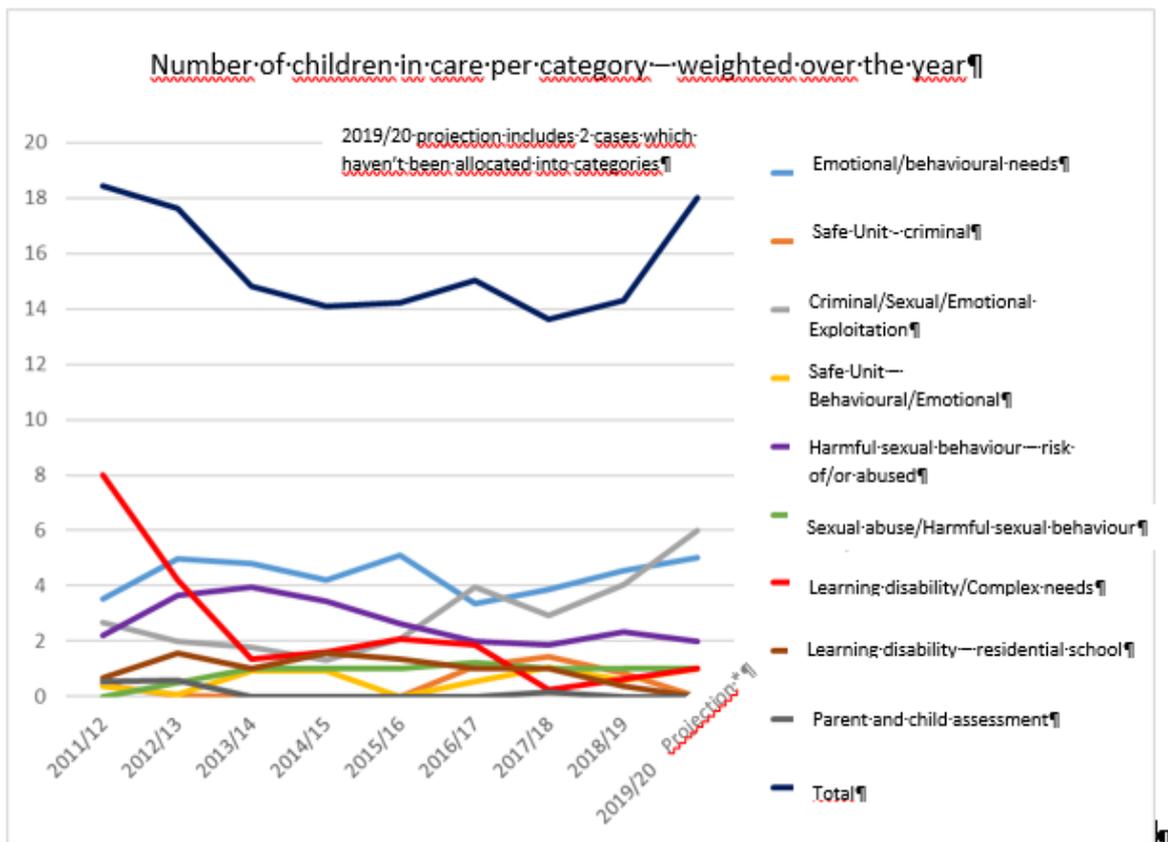


4.5 At the end of March 2019, 65% of looked after children lived in **foster placements**, and 35% of the total were family or friends foster carers. We are concerned about the current lack of general foster placements to fully meet the demand using our own resources. I will discuss this matter with the Department over the coming months.

- 4.6 The number of children wishing to receive professional advocacy services remains low. Although the children eligible for this service are given information about it, only a small number take up the offer. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the children do not want to bring new adults they do not know into their lives at a difficult time for them. They are more likely to ask for support when there is a very specific matter to discuss. I, therefore, do not believe that we should have any concerns about this matter.
- 4.7 The **SCC24** measure, **Percentage of children receiving care during the year and who receive a Personal Education Plan within 20 school days of receiving care or starting at a new school during the year ending 31 March**, has received considerable attention from the Department jointly with the Education Department. Data for the 2018/19 year, at 31%, is of course disappointing. We, therefore, have begun responding in order to resolve any problems. The responsibilities to create a personal education plan ultimately lies with the school. Therefore, plans are beginning to fall into place with the aim of improving the situation.
- 4.8 The Complaints and Customer Care service came under considerable pressure once more between April and June. We received 38 information requests under the Data Protection Act, and only one response took longer than the target of 20 working days. Under the Freedom of Information Act, 15 requests were received, of which three received a response later than the target. Many of these requests are complex and information has to be gathered from archives in other counties. With a staff member returning to full time work in September, I am confident, by the time of my next performance report, that I will be able to report that we are meeting our statutory requirements in these fields.
- 4.9 Three young people experienced homelessness in 2018/19. The **PMC35** measure, **Percentage of care leavers who have experienced homelessness during the year, was at 3.0%**. Since then, all have found accommodation, and I am satisfied that the Service is not facing a long-term problem. Nevertheless, one obstacle, which the Housing Service is aware of, is the lack of suitable and affordable one-bedroom accommodation on the open market or to let. Some of our young people are unable to gain access to accommodation arranged by the Council as these remain full, often because the young people who are already there are unable to find suitable accommodation to move into.

5 FINANCIAL POSITION / SAVINGS

5.1 As you are aware, because of previous reports, the 'End to End' review has been the subject of a joint review between the Children and Supporting Families Department, Finance Department and the Research and Information Manager. This is an eight year, £2.4 million (in total) savings scheme, but we have reviewed the projections for the original savings model and the financial savings from the plan appear to have been too ambitious in light of recent developments in the child care field. The profile of the population of looked-after children has changed, the average cost of residential placements has increased, as have the complexity of cases. The Council faces high financial costs when funding residential placements for children outside the County as their needs are complex and profound, and it is not possible to find placements to meet the need locally in every case.



5.2 As the above graph shows, the number of children in certain types of placements, such as for learning disabilities, has fallen; others, however, such as sexual exploitation / emotional needs / behavioural issues, have increased. The average number of children in out of county placements increased again to 16 in April and May, compared to 14.3 in 2018/19. It is, therefore, unlikely that we will be able to deliver the savings proposed under this plan in 2018/19, or during the current financial year. We will now look at the financial cost and the cost in officer time to propose different solutions - e.g. placing children with their parents, or in out of county placements - in order to offer realistic savings for the future.

5.3 However, the most recent predictions confirm that, currently, we have either delivered a number of the other savings schemes for this financial year, or are on track to complete on time.

6 NEXT STEPS AND TIMETABLE

6.1 None to note.

7 ANY CONSULTATIONS UNDERTAKEN PRIOR TO RECOMMENDING THE DECISION

7.1 Views of the Statutory Officers:

i. Monitoring Officer:

No observations regarding propriety.

ii. Head of Finance Department:

The report portrays a fair picture of the Housing Service's progress regarding implementing its savings scheme, with a portion of the savings scheme already realised or on track to be delivered. Nevertheless, I note (in section 5.3 of this report) that there is a substantial risk to delivering the remaining savings required of the End to End Review, for the reasons already noted.

I have already met with the Children and Supporting Families Cabinet Member, the Finance Cabinet Member, the Chief Executive, Head of the Children and Supporting Families Department and other responsible officer, and as a result a 'Children's Finance Taskforce' has been commissioned which will cost associated activities.

Finance officers will also assist the responsible Cabinet Member to monitor the progress against all the schemes, and we will be in a position to report further on such alternative schemes following the next financial review.

7.2 Views of the Local Member:

7.2.1 Not a local matter.

7.3 Results of Any Consultation:

7.3.1 None to note.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Performance Measures