

GWYNEDD COUNCIL CABINET

Report to a meeting of Gwynedd Council Cabinet

Date:	28 January 2020
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 against 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 will 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 Families Strategy

The purpose of this project is to identify the demand for support for families, and map out which provisions are already available to support families across Gwynedd. We have already completed the short-term work programme, and set up the Gwynedd Family Hub which provides information to families about what support the Council could offer.

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In May 2018, Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) held an inspection of the Council's children services, and found that "the children services have significant strengths with a committed and stable workforce which is responding to an increasing workload." A subsequent Focus Activity was held by CIW in October 2019 to look at some elements of the Department's services, and the following is its finding in relation to the work of developing the Gwynedd Family Hub (IAA) - "We saw a number of examples of the Local Authority collaborating effectively with statutory partners and the third sector, and the result of this created improvements in the lives of children and their families."

Therefore, our priorities for the rest of the current year will be to agree on a clear vision with our key partners such as the Health Board, our communities and the third sector, in order to ensure that we jointly plan our services for families. It will also be essential for the work to intertwine with the broader learning that will come from the work of Ffordd Gwynedd which takes place within the Department, and the associated work for the Supporting People Board.

3.2 **Supporting People's Well-being**

The report on the development of the work on this project has also been submitted to this meeting of the Cabinet under the title 'Performance Report of the Leader and Deputy Leader on the Programme Boards' Rather than repeating information may I refer you to that report.

4. **PERFORMANCE AND MEASURES**

- 4.1 In terms of the Department's Performance, the measures continue to suggest a strong performance in safeguarding practice and arrangements.
- 4.2 One of the exciting new schemes in the pipeline in the **Early Years field** is to extend the Welcomm tool's screening work for schools within the areas of the Flying Start scheme. This is work that is attempting to improve a child's language development, and the initial outcomes are promising. The Department has submitted a grant application for language therapists to collaborate with health visitors and to further develop the provision.
- 4.3 Another success that derives from the Flying Start scheme is the **Bridging the Generations** project. Six sessions were held recently in order to bring the residents of the Bryn Seiont care home and the children of the Plas Pawb nursery in Caernarfon together to enjoy activities. Rest assured that everyone benefitted greatly, and enjoyed the experience. In a questionnaire to the parents of the children who attend the Plas Pawb nursery, 4% said that they were 'satisfied' with the nursery building and facilities, and the remaining 96% stated that they were 'very satisfied'.

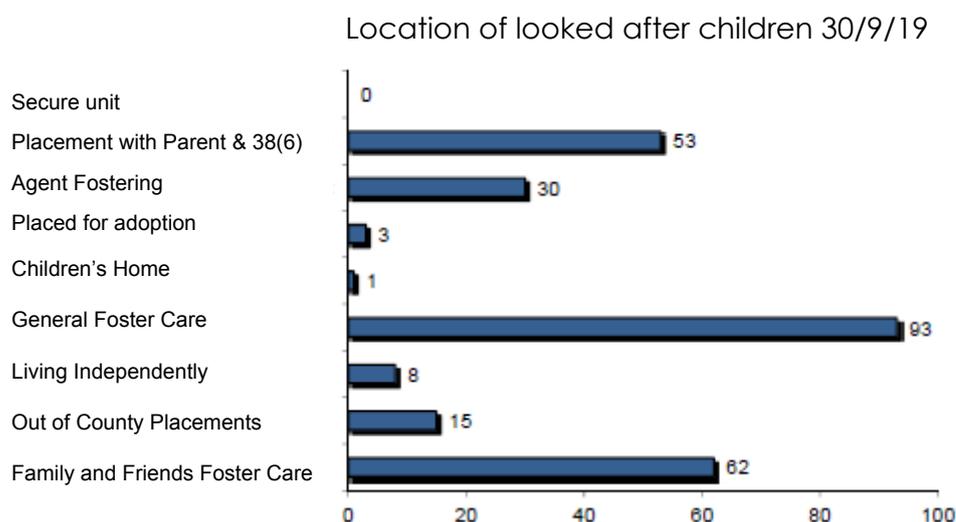
- 4.4 Unfortunately, one obstacle that we face is that much of the work of the early years is dependent on receiving grants, often from Welsh Government. As we receive this funding for a short period, it then becomes more difficult for us to retain experienced staff for a long period because we cannot offer them long-term or permanent contracts. In turn, the families lose out because situations arise when they have developed a good relationship with our workers, only to see the worker then moving on, and the uncertainty that comes with starting afresh with a new worker. It was agreed that the manager would look at the situation further with the Head of Department, with a view to resolve the matter as soon as possible.
- 4.5 The **Youth Service** has been reviewing its work over an approximate one-year period on the new model's form of service provision. They are confident that they are providing the service the young people need, and 1,277 sessions were provided across the county between April and the end of September. One relatively recent change that has emerged is that more and more young people with challenging behaviours are coming to the service's attention; however, this challenge is to be welcomed as it is an opportunity for the service to try to help. Despite this challenge, the service and I are of the opinion that we need to celebrate the successes of our young people, rather than look at the negative aspects, and we will consider ways of highlighting the successes in future.
- 4.6 Regarding the **Operational Services**, the service has a clear purpose, and it was reported that progress can be seen in terms of the number of cases being referred to the service, as well as the complexity of cases in general. A number of the referrals are seen as "incorrect" referrals by other agencies, and the aim of the work that is about to start, in terms of the Ffordd Gwynedd intervention, is to ensure that this is addressed. It seems that one of the main barriers that has been highlighted recently is the lack of access to emotional well-being support for children and young people. Discussions have commenced with the Health Board to attempt to look at the matter together. In addition, the service has identified the need to improve arrangements for parents with mental health difficulties to be able to gain timely access to support. The manager is in discussions with the relevant manager in the Adults Department, who will also ensure that this is highlighted as part of the work of the Supporting People Board.
- 4.7 The Operational Service is attempting to respond to the barriers that have been highlighted, and is developing and expanding the types of skills that the workforce has in order to cope with supporting families.
- 4.8 Unfortunately, I must report once again that the **number of children who become looked-after by the Council** is increasing. At the end of December

there were 284 children being looked-after by the Council, which is a 13% increase on the number of children who were being looked-after 12 months previously. The number of looked-after children has increased every year since 2013/14 and, currently, it looks unlikely that the trend will change. As members are aware, continued work is taking place in order to attempt to ensure that the appropriate support is available for families in an effort to ensure that children can remain with their parents safely. Additionally, information about the arrangements that are in place to manage the looked-after children's cases effectively was received. I should also note that important preventative work is being planned in order to attempt to reduce the demand for out of county placements in the first place. We have submitted a grant application in order to create a multi-agency team jointly with Anglesey that will mainly be working with families to reduce the likelihood that children will need to be looked-after out of county.

- 4.9 Welsh Government is eager to see a drop in the number of looked-after children and, although we as a County have not set a target to reduce the number, all of the Department's efforts revolve around ensuring prompt and appropriate support for families in order to keep them resilient and healthy. I will be working closely with the Department on their work in this field.
- 4.10 Along the same lines, the number of calls that reach us in order to record a concern about **the safety of a child** is on the rise. 2,981 contacts involving child safety were made between April and September 2019, and this number is higher than the same time last year, therefore we can anticipate that the total for the year will also be higher.
- 4.11 I have already referred to problems that arise from failing to retain experienced staff, but it is now also becoming a problem to **recruit competent Social Workers**. Fewer students are now choosing to study the course at universities, and therefore we could be facing a situation in the near future where we do not have an adequate registered workforce, especially a Welsh-speaking workforce. We will need to think creatively, and consider other options such as developing our own staff and, to this end, the Department has commenced discussions around apprenticeships and similar options, and a report by the Care Workforce Development Unit will be prepared in order to attempt to highlight the options for the Department.
- 4.12 The **Hafan y Sêr home** commissioned an independent review of the views of parents and children on the care and service offered there. Clear feedback emerged that the service successfully achieved its purpose, which is to provide respite, fun and enjoyment to children, and respite for parents who know that their children are safe and well looked-after there.

This feedback reinforces the messages of the CIW Inspection and previous quality assurance Care Quality reports.

- 4.13 At the end of September 2019, 70% of the 265 looked-after children were in **foster placements**, which is a 5% increase from the period between April and June. Of this percentage, approximately 34% of the carers were family or friends, and 20% of children had been able to stay with their parents whilst they were being looked-after by the Council. We are still concerned about the current lack of general foster placements to fully meet the demand using our own resources. It is imperative that we retain the foster carers that we have, and continue to recruit new carers. The Fostering Service is carrying out a review of our arrangements as a Council, and the context given by the National Fostering Framework, with the aim of discovering whether we can meet the needs of the children and carers in the most effective way possible. I will be able to report on the results of this work in my next performance report.



- 4.14 The purpose of the **Derwen Service** is to offer a service for disabled children and young people and their families. Many serious and complex cases have been addressed over the most recent period, including applications for modifying houses. The general lack of suitable housing, or the possibility of modifying current homes, makes this work extremely challenging; however, the department is now working closely with the Housing and Property Department to seek the best possible resolutions for the children and their families, and I am glad to report that very positive feedback has been received in terms of the progress made to move cases forward.
- 4.15 Staff shortages in the **Post-16 Service** has also created a very challenging situation recently, especially as some individual cases have required intensive support. Nevertheless, I am confident that the service has managed to continue with statutory visits for the young people who are

being looked-after by the Council. As a Council, we support young people until they turn 25 years old, and 44 out of the total of 155 are between 21 and 25 years old, which demonstrates the commitment to continue with support for these young people.

- 4.16 The performance of the **Safeguarding and Quality Unit** is still good, although similarly to a number of the other services, there has been an increase in the demand and the complexity of cases. There was an increase in case conferences between July and the end of September compared to between April and June, where 52 (up from 47) initial case conferences were held, and 62 (up from 53) reviews. 96% of the initial case conferences were held within the designated timescale (up from 89%), and 82% of the reviews were completed within the designated timescale (up from 75%) - therefore, despite the pressure on staff, using an external consultant has reduced the burden.
- 4.17 A lack of staffing capacity can lead to a delay in carrying out reviews - see the **SCC021 Percentage of reviews of looked-after children held within the statutory timetable during the year** measure. This percentage was at 86% between April and June, and 87% between July and September. The performance is currently an improvement on the end of 2018/19 performance which was at 85%, however the Department is continuing to attempt to improve the situation.
- 4.18 A considerable challenge was also noted with regard to obtaining suitable venues to hold child protection conferences in terms of privacy and confidentiality, and discussions are taking place with the Housing and Property Department to attempt to remedy the situation.

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, the Finance Department and the Research and Information Manager. It emerged that the original savings scheme needed to be revisited, as it was too ambitious in light of the changes in the current situation within the field of Children. The profile of the population of looked-after children has changed, the average cost of residential placements has increased, as has the complexity of cases, and financial contributions from the health field have reduced, which all contributed to a situation where it is very difficult to cut costs.
- 5.2 There were 18 young people from Gwynedd in out of county placements between April and June 2019, compared to 13.6 in 2017/18, and 14.3 in 2018/19. There is a high financial cost for each placement, and we are facing a situation of overspending rather than a situation where we are able

to offer savings. A Children Budget Taskforce has now been established in order to address all financial matters within the Department, and it will review the savings schemes.

5.3 I should also note that important preventative work is also being planned in order to attempt to reduce the demand for out of county placements in the first place. We have submitted a grant application in order to create a joint multi-agency team with Anglesey that will mainly be working with families to reduce the likelihood that children will need to be looked-after out of county.

5.4 Despite the above, I am glad to be able to report that other savings scheme for the current financial year are on track to be completed 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. The Monitoring Officer:

No observations to add in relation to propriety.

ii. Head of Finance:

The Cabinet Member for Finance's report on the position of the 2019/20 revenue budget at the end of November 2019, which was presented to the Cabinet on 21 January, notes that the Children and Families Department's overspending has intensified this year to £3.2 million. It was also explained that a Children's Budget Task Force has been established to focus on this area's complex financial situation. Part 5 of this performance report expands on the risks associated with the relevant savings plans; I am satisfied that Part 5 of the report is a fair reflection of the situation.

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