

MEETING	Care Scrutiny Committee
DATE	4 June, 2026
TITLE	Performance Report of the Cabinet Member for Children and Supporting Families
REASON TO SCRUTINISE	For Committee Members to scrutinise performance matters within the Department.
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CABINET MEMBER	Councillor Menna Trenholme

1. Why it needs scrutiny

For Committee Members to scrutinise performance matters within the Department.

2. Background / Context

2.1 Background / Introduction

The purpose of this report is to update you on what has been achieved in the area for which I am responsible as the Cabinet Member for Children and Supporting Families. This includes outlining the latest regarding the pledges in the Council Plan; the Department's day-to-day work; as well as the latest in terms of the savings scheme and cuts.

We are implementing the Council Plan for 2023-28, and here I report on the progress made up to the end of March 2026 for an autism scheme and residential provision for looked after children in small group homes. All matters have been the subject of discussion and have been challenged by me at a performance challenge meeting, and I am satisfied with the performance of the Department.

2.2 Rationale and justification

Performance of Projects in the Council Plan

The Children and Supporting Families Department has two projects in the Council Plan, namely the Autism Plan and a Plan for developing a residential provision for looked after children in small group homes.

Autism Plan

The Autism plan is continuing to thrive, with an increasing demand for service. The needs and complexities of autistic individuals and their families are complex to analyse especially if there is a cross-section of needs such as trauma, poverty, neurodivergent parents, Looked after children, Child protection cases, so social workers need to be able

to consult, discuss cases and seek the direct input of a key worker who specializes in the field - this has proven to be successful with a number of cases, which has resulted in a decrease in need and status (from Child Protection to a Care and Support Plan) and a number of cases have closed following intervention. There is now a short waiting list for direct support from a key worker.

The staff training programme is continuing and developing with different levels of training, depending on the job. From basic training for all the workplace through to advanced training for specialist jobs such as social care workers and team managers. The team now trains workers to facilitate and run support and educational groups and programmes for parents and carers as well as identity groups for autistic young people. A training programme for foster parents is also underway.

Groups such as 'Paned a Sgwrs' for parents and carers who have guest speakers to attend to discuss specific issues and a Neuro club for young people continues to be successful. The joint-working with the Education Department, the Neuro-developmental service, internal and external staff and engagement with the third sector is also continuing.

The Neuro Wales App developed by Autism Gwynedd for providing Information, Advice and support to the ND community and professionals continues to be very successful. Use of the App is on the rise and other counties regionally are interested in using the App.

Transition age work is increasing, and more cases are being identified to prepare and plan and collaborate with adult services to ensure that if there are needs then these are addressed by one of the post-18 teams. Vulnerable adult case group re-established, role for the autism team to support adult statutory services to address needs and look at cases through the ND lens and to prevent individuals from falling between services.

We trust that there are no current concerns as a result of this scheme at this time. Concern arises about next year where funding for the scheme will expire in March 2027 and therefore will cause instability about the continuity of the service and the impact this resource would have on a service user.

Residential provision for looked after children in small group homes

The Plan for developing residential provision for looked after children in small group homes has now progressed significantly. The home in Morfa Bychan has been operational with 2 children living there since 2025 and we have received a registration from Care Inspectorate Wales. For the home in Deiniolen, it is now operational with 2 children living in it. We are still awaiting registration from Care Inspectorate Wales as a piece of building control work needs to be completed but we hope that the registration will have reached us before the summer. We are in constant contact with Care Inspectorate Wales about the registration application.

The third house we have in Edern continues to undergo refurbishment to ensure that the requirements of the regulations are met to receive a registration from Care Inspectorate Wales. This is already the case for the house in Criccieth. We are hopeful that these 2 houses will be operational before the end of the year.

The detailed search for a suitable house in the Meirionnydd catchment area has been carried out for many months, however due to the standard of the houses on the current market they are not suitable and do not meet the standard within the regulations for Care Inspectorate Wales registration. Perhaps in the future it will be necessary to look at places outside this catchment area to ensure that Gwynedd has adequate provision to be able to provide residential care for the children of Gwynedd through the Government's plan to remove profit from care by 2030.

The Department's day-to-day work

There are currently 293 looked after children in Gwynedd which is an additional 10 children compared to last year. Positive news received over the last year is that 7% of children have left care and have returned home. Another positive percentage that should be highlighted is the number of case conferences where the child's voice/opinion (5+ years) was heard. That percentage was 96%, which is higher than the previous quarter, we're still working hard to make sure that the child's voice is heard. The percentage of assessments completed using the child's language has now increased to 100% which is good news for families. In the Youth Justice Service the number of people entering the service for the first time fell to 20 (-17%), which is welcomed given the efforts made by the service and the Board of Management over the past two years. The Out of Hours Team is also doing excellent work ensuring that every call is responded to before the shift ends. The Early Years Service has been doing excellent work over the year with families. 39 fun sessions were held during 25-26 with 1,142 children attending those sessions. In addition, 706 children and 323 parents attended 34 Play Trailer sessions during the year. During the year Families First Service was granted a green RAG status from the Government, which is good news.

This year has been very challenging for the Department with the workload having risen significantly in the last 2 years. Concern must be noted about the number of referrals to the admissions team which has reached the highest they have ever received which is over 8,000. As the number of referrals has risen, this raises the numbers of initial strategy discussions which have risen from 548 for the year 23-24 to 759 this year. This has then raised the numbers moving from initial strategies to Part 47 from 369 for the year 23-24 to 628 cases this year which had almost doubled in two years. With this all the teams are feeling the pressure with the number of referrals but also with the complexity of the cases. Each team has stated that cases every year are getting more complex with more children falling into the child protection category. This is evident in the day-to-day work with the number of child protection reviews having risen by 156 in the last 2 years with an additional 82 children having been on the child protection register in the last 2 years. The 16+ Team also continues to report that demand for services is at its peak, with 251 cases currently open to them. This is the highest the cases have been since establishing the team. A high number of cases and staff shortages causes concern and high work pressure. We see a clear pattern that the demand on the Children and Supporting Families Department is rising and hence the pressure on our staff.

We must emphasise that we have acknowledged this increasing work pressure on our workforce. In light of the increasing work pressures, we as a department have submitted bids and there are several successful bids for 2025-2026. This includes 5 bids in total. £400,000 for 7 posts in the operational teams. £300,000 for a specialist residential service in 1 house. £500,000 for out-of-county placements. £200,000 for Derwen Direct

Payments. £800,000 for Derwen Support Workers. These bids total £2.2 million. Several bids were made because the number of referrals had risen significantly and the complexities of cases had also become more complicated. As well as the fact that more families need the input of the Children's teams. By being successful with the bids this provides consistency to services and gives the best to children and families. We know that it will be challenging to attract staff, especially experienced and qualified staff, but with time we hope that these additions will bring some relief to our conscientious workforce.

External Auditors' Reports

The Child Practice Review 'Our Bravery Brought Justice' was published on Tuesday 4 November. We as a department are currently working with the Education Department to respond fully and promptly to the recommendations. The Department provides an update on the recommendations that have emerged from the review to response plan meetings. In addition to this, we have been successful in bids to create jobs for the 26-27 financial year arising from the recommendations of the 'Our Bravery Brought Justice' Child Practice Review.

There are a number of inspections for the Department of Children and Supporting Children and Families during the year. We had a joint inspection with the Education Department by Care Inspectorate Wales and Estyn the week commencing 10th of November which focused on safeguarding. Following the inspection, it was noted that there was positive work in both departments and there were 4 areas for improvement that needed attention. Consistency needed to be ensured with the child's voice, quality assurance arrangements in place and strengthening safeguarding training in the Council. The fourth area set out what the Authority had to do, namely responding to a referral in 7 days, engage with the child when they declare a risk of harm/abuse/neglect, strengthen commissioning arrangements and monitor service agreements and ensure the regular contribution of key practitioners to strategy discussions. Work is already underway to strengthen the relationship between the Education Department and the Children's Department. We are in the process of creating a child's voice strategy for the child's voice to be core in our current processes. The Children's Department now has a Quality Assurance Framework which has derived from the recommendations.

In the last 3 months we have been extremely busy with inspections of the Adoption Service, Derwen Service and the Fostering Service. All Services have had positive results following the inspections with recommendations which are being addressed by the Department to strengthen the services. With the Adoption Service a great deal of this work is covered regionally. Following the inspection the report was very positive for the Derwen Service. Everything in the report indicates a good standard from the Service. We have not yet received the full report for the Fostering Service inspection as the inspection was very recent.

3. Consultation

The report has been created based on the information and content of a recent meeting to challenge and support the performance of the Department for Children and Supporting

Families, with the Director, Head of Department, Assistant Heads, Service Managers, Senior Executive Officer and myself attending this meeting.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Progress reports on milestones of projects in the Council Plan

Appendix 2: The Department's Performance Measures