

MEETING	Care Scrutiny Committee
DATE	20 November, 2025
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 does it need to be scrutinised?

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 with 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 September 2025, 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, Children in care, Child protection cases etc. therefore the need for social workers to be able to consult, discuss cases and seek the direct input of a key worker

who specialises in the field is proving to be successful on a number of cases, which has resulted in a decrease in need and status (from CP to CASP) and several cases 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 the entire 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 and the Neuro club for young people continue to be successful. Joint-working with the Education Department, the Neuro-developmental service, internal and external staff and engagement with the third sector is also continuing.

The Niwro Cymru App which was developed by Autism Gwynedd for providing Information, Advice and support to the ND community and professionals has been very successful following a soft launch at the Eisteddfod, and is being discussed regionally and nationally as a wider IAA tool.

We are confident that there are no current concerns as a result of this scheme, and that the work is progressing to develop and promote opportunities for autistic individuals and their families. It is important to note that funding for this scheme expires in 2027 which therefore creates a risk in the longer term. We will need to consider how to ensure continuity of service in future for this valuable resource.

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 is operational with two children living in it. For the home in Deiniolen, a recruitment event was organised at the Celt Hotel in Caernarfon in July and was attended by 30 people. Following this, a deputy manager and 5 residential workers were appointed for the second home in Deiniolen. The staff have already started in their jobs. We are still awaiting official registration for the first home, however we are not concerned as we are in ongoing contact with Care Inspectorate Wales and the registration should be completed very soon. A registration application for the second home in Deiniolen has been made and we are waiting to hear back from Care Inspectorate Wales.

We are also in the process of buying a house in Cricieth and hopefully the work on this house will be completed in the new year. To make sure that there is provision in every catchment area in Gwynedd, we are still looking for opportunities to buy a house in Meirionnydd but at the moment this is not possible because of the housing market. This is because there must be a certain specification in order to be registered by Care Inspectorate Wales.

The Department's day-to-day work

There are currently 283 children in care here in Gwynedd. Positive news that emerged over the last year is that 4% of children have left care and 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 94%, and although it was lower than the previous quarter, we are still working hard to make sure that the child's voice is heard. In the Youth Justice Service the number of people entering the service for the first time fell to 37 (-13%), which is welcomed given the efforts made by the service and the Management Board over the last 12 months. The Out of Hours Team is also doing excellent work ensuring that every call is responded to before the shift ends. The Gwynedd Family Service has managed to extend the 2-year-old childcare scheme to a further 9 provisions, which enables more families to receive support. The play trailer had been hugely successful over the summer.

On the other hand, we must note the concern regarding the number of referrals received by the admissions team. We note that this has been the busiest year for the team since its establishment. As a result, the team feels the pressure considering the number of referrals and the complexity of the cases. The Derwen Service is also feeling the pressure, with over 500 cases open to them. The 16+ Team is also continuing to report that the demand for services is at its peak, and that 238 cases are currently open to them. This is the highest number of cases since establishing the team. A high number of cases and staff shortage creates concerns 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. For the first time ever the number of referrals has almost reached 8,000, which is a 5% increase over the past year. The forecast for this year is that the number of referrals will stay the same around the 8,000 mark, if not higher.

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 a number of 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 increased. As well as the fact that more families need the input of the Children's teams. By being successful with the bids it 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 (if relevant)

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.

We are also being audited jointly with the Education Department by Care Inspectorate Wales and Estyn the week commencing 10 November. We will update members in the next report.

3. Consultation

The report has been produced based on the information and content of the latest meeting to challenge and support the performance of the Children and Supporting Families Department. The Director, the interim Heads, Service Managers, Senior Operational Officer and I were present in this meeting.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Project milestone progress reports for projects in the Council Plan

Appendix 2: The Department's Performance Measures