

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
Children, Young People and Education Cabinet Board

Thursday 3 November 2016

Report of the Improvement Member Panel

Matter for Monitoring

Wards Affected: All

**Report from the Children and Young People Services
Improvement Member Panel on to Social Work Teams
2015/16**

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide the Children, Young People and Education Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet Board with feedback from the recent visits of the Improvement Member Panel to social work teams in Children and Young People Services.

Executive Summary

2. The Improvement Member Panel visit Children and Young People Services social work teams on a regular basis to ensure there is sustainable improvement in the Service. The Panel reports back to the Children, Young People and Education Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet Board a summary of the information and highlight the main themes raised by the teams. Members have found this information useful as it complements other workforce development reports.

Background

3. The Improvement Member Panel provides the Leader of the Council and Cabinet with additional assurances that sustainable improvement is continued in Children and Young People Services. The Panel provides a format where Members can receive direct feedback from frontline social work services and address any issues that arise with senior officers. Areas of significant concern are reported directly to the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People. The Service has now been taken out of the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales Special Concerns Protocol and the Leader has requested that the Panel continues its work.
4. The Panel has met with Children's Services Social Work Teams on several occasions to discuss the changes that have taken place and to help identify any issues that need to be addressed. The Panel once again visited all Teams during 2015/16.
5. The meetings with the teams provided Members with an insight of what progress has been made and to gather social workers views on how the Service is progressing. It also identified areas of concern to be addressed. The notes of the meetings are shared with the Head of Children and Young People Services and the relevant Principal Officers to facilitate service improvements. This report provides Members with a summary of the information.

Workforce

6. The Panel are pleased to report that morale was high in the majority of teams. New starters in all teams highlighted that they felt supported and were given clear expectations and guidelines. Senior management was felt to be approachable and there was regular contact with the Director of Social Services, Health and Housing and the Head of Children and Young People Services. The teams reported that the Principal Officers made time to assist teams and there was a good relationship with them. It was commented that the new Principal Officers were working well with teams. The teams based in Neath Civic Centre felt that it was positive that they were in the same building as Senior Management.
7. Overall the teams were positive about their team managers and there were good working relationships. The environment and ethos of teams

was positive and most staff seemed to be happy and worked in a cohesive and supportive way.

8. Social Workers commented that the work of the Practice Support Workers was invaluable. It was noted that there was discretion amongst the teams in how they were utilised, which helped them to make the most of the skills base by the team managers. It was also commented that the Business Support Officers provided vital support to the teams and they were integral part of the teams.
9. The teams that were still based in the community, for example Dyffryn and Sandfields, were pleased that they were still based in the community and felt that for them it was the best option. They had good relationships with their communities and they were able to work more effectively as it reduced travelling times between visits. This allowed them to undertake more quality interventions with the families.
10. There were examples of close partnership working and sharing of good practice across teams. In some instances team members were starting to spend time with other teams to have a clearer understanding of their work. There were also opportunities for social workers to make connections with other professionals, such as during training events.
11. Most teams were stable in regards to staffing, with few vacancies and sickness absence and there were low numbers of agency staff. It was noted that if there was long term sickness in a team then it does have an impact on the capacity of the team. Some teams did highlight that there can be capacity issues during holiday periods and sometimes more assistance was required around these times, as there can be a surge in cases. There had been extra contact workers employed at Pendarvis contact centre, which allowed the Practice Support Workers to concentrate on other aspects, such as life story work. However, there were some requests for more contact workers to be employed, particularly during school holidays.
12. There were some accommodation issues mentioned, such as teams being split between rooms, some repair work being required and new chairs. The Panel addressed these issues with the Head of Service to take forward and resolve. It was noted that during the last visits concerns had been raised regarding car parking for teams based in Neath Civic

Centre but they had been alleviated with the completion of the new multi-storey car park.

Caseloads

13. The Panel discussed caseloads with each team as part of their visits. Overall teams felt that there had been a reduction and the Service was in a good position. Caseloads were more manageable and it was felt that there was no longer a “manic” working environment. Teams also felt more confident in stepping down cases to Team Around the Family or closing them.
14. It was noted that in some teams it would only take a few more cases for there to be capacity issues. There was further work required on early intervention and prevention to help to reduce the number of high level cases. Some teams requested additional staff and during feedback with the Head of Service they were requested to put forward a business case.
15. Teams highlighted that the Service was now more proactive rather than reactive and the reduction and stabilisation of cases had assisted with this. It was recognised that it was a huge achievement that the Service was reducing the number of Looked After Children.

Staff Appraisals, Supervision and Training

16. The Panel was informed that the majority of team members were receiving regular supervisions and were able to discuss issues with their managers and the wider team. There were fortnightly meetings between principal officers and team managers. It was noted that there were limited quiet areas for meetings and supervisions.
17. It was highlighted that the annual all Staff Conference was an opportunity for staff to share best practice and to make connections with different teams. One team suggested that inviting other local authorities to a similar conference could be useful to allow further sharing of good practice and ideas.
18. The Panel asked all teams about the new appraisal system being rolled out across Children’s Services and there was a mixed response within teams regarding their awareness of this. It was noted that team managers were being trained in the process and it had started to be rolled out.

However, there were some teams that were not yet aware of the new system.

19. Some teams discussed the training ideas and requests they had put forward. Such as training staff in areas that would result in those services not having to be outsourced to save money in the long term. It was felt that there was a case for more targeted training to be put in place to develop individuals and more upskilling of social workers. It was noted that there were limitations to career progression and there was some frustration that there was little flexibility to progress within teams. It was recognised that there were only so many posts within the Service and staff had to wait for posts to become available. There were concerns over losing experienced staff to other Local Authorities due to this.
20. The Panel were pleased to hear the very positive ideas being put forward to further develop the Service. There was a lot of enthusiasm to add value to the work of the Service and to develop skills and knowledge of the workforce. The Panel discussed the new ideas and potential training options that were put forward by teams with the Head of Service, who highlighted that the teams would be asked to make a business case for such options so it could be further analysed.

Improvements and Areas for Further Development

21. The discussions with the teams reflected some of the areas that had been considered by Members of the Children, Young People and Education Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet Board and the Corporate Parenting Panel. For example, no young person had been placed in Bed and Breakfast accommodation in the last year and the work undertaken in this area has been of a huge benefit. It was recognised that there had been a lot of positive work that had been undertaken around the 'When I am Ready' arrangements. However, it was highlighted that there were some financial concerns as there had been no additional funding received to implement the required changes. It was also noted that there had been a lot of success in young people gaining modern apprenticeships within Children and Young People Services, which had included some care leavers.
22. It was suggested that communication between Children and Young People Services and Adult Social Services has also improved. Some

teams highlighted that there was still room for improvement in the relationship with Adult Services. It was noted that the Gateway Team was the central point of contact for Adult Services however, there was sometimes a lack of understanding and delays in referrals. It was explained that it was not always clear who to contact and there were waiting lists for some services. There were particular concerns about transition from Children's Services to Adult Services and ensuring that the right support was in place. It was noted that there was a new post within Adult Services to track young people through the transition process.

23. It was highlighted that there were some communication issues with the Adoption Team since it had changed to the Western Bay Regional Service and it was felt that the links were not as strong as before. It was recognised that there had been significant changes and it would take time for the service to settle in.
24. It was noted that there had been a lot of positive steps in recruiting foster carers and there was still a need for more internal foster carers for teenagers in care. There were also some discussions regarding how the Service could be taken forward, for example developing more parent and child foster placements and enhancing prenatal support.
25. Members were informed that requests made during previous visits with teams had been met, where a suitable business case had been made. For example, Practice Support Workers in some teams, such as fostering, had been provided with blackberries. This had made a significant improvement to the efficiency of the team. Other teams had also requested blackberries for their Practice Support Workers, during these rounds of visits and it was agreed that it would be considered for all teams. One issue raised was that student social workers were not provided with mobile phones and it was felt that it was a health and safety issue. The Panel raised this with Senior Management who agreed to address this concern.
26. The Panel was informed that previous issues with IT had been resolved and this included spell check now being available on parts of system. It was noted that there were still other parts of the system that required it. There had been further developments of computer systems with new templates being put in place and changes to recording and monitoring of information, which had assisted with streamlining care proceedings. One concern raised was that there was only one member of ICT staff who

managed the implementation of software and it caused some issues when they were not in work. It was also highlighted that there was a lack of out of hours IT support for the Emergency Duty Team and the Senior Management Team were addressing these issues with the ICT Service.

27. It was highlighted that there continued to be difficulties in accessing Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS). It was noted that in house services were being developed with the psychologists at Hillside to assist teams with therapeutic work. It was commented that the teams felt the interface between Social Services and Health Services had improved.
28. It was noted that quality assurance had improved and the new forms were a useful tool. It was felt that the reputation of the Service had improved with both families and external organisations. It was highlighted that partnership working had been further enhanced with the development of the new Resource Panels.
29. It was noted that consultation booklets have been revamped with the input of children and young people to assist the Service with developing its feedback mechanisms. It was highlighted that some children and young people preferred one to one feedback and this was facilitated where necessary.
30. There was some discussion about the relationships with schools and overall there were good links. It was highlighted that on occasions children were sent home from school informally rather than the exclusion be recorded. The Panel requested that the Senior Management addressed this with the Education Department to establish if this was a regular practice.
31. Some useful suggestions had been put forward by teams on how to further develop the Service. This included development of the work around preventative measures and improved information sharing early on between services. Some teams would like more access to the services that were only accessible by the Team Around the Family. It was highlighted that there were a lack of services to address domestic violence, which was a problem in some areas. It was also felt that there was a gap in provision of preventative services for children aged five to eleven. It was noted that there was a lot of work being undertaken in commissioning services and teams were looking forward to seeing the

positive outcomes from the development of the Common Commissioning Unit.

32. It was noted that a lot of families rely on Foodbanks and Salvation Army donations. The community spirit in some areas was commended, for example, the generous donations from the Mr X Appeal and Tata Steel donating Easter Eggs.

Areas of Concern

33. As highlighted throughout the report overall the teams had high morale and were positive about improvements in the Service. However, there were two teams that raised concerns with the Panel.
34. The Panel followed the agreed processes and informed the Leader of the Council of their concerns. Meetings were then held with the Head of Service to address the issues raised and action plans put in place. The Panel assured the teams that all concerns raised with them were taken seriously and acted upon. The Panel has been updated by the Head of Service on the actions that have been taken and will be revisiting both teams to ensure sufficient progress has been made. Members of the team were also invited to contact the Panel in the meantime if they had continued concerns.
35. Overall the Panel are happy with the way the Service is being managed and any issues raised were addressed with urgency by senior management. The Panel will continue to be vigilant when they meet with teams.

Summary

36. During the visits in 2015/16 the Panel found that morale continues to improve and there was positive feedback from the majority of teams. There also appeared to be stability in the workforce and a good relationship with senior management. Members were pleased to hear of the creative ideas being put forward to continue to improve the Service. The Panel has taken forward minor issues that could easily be resolved and has addressed them with the Head of Service and Principal Officers. As outlined there were some concerns raised by two teams, which have been progressed by the agreed processes of the Panel. These incidents highlight the important role of the Panel and the continued value it adds to

Children and Young People Services. The information in this report complements other evidence on workforce performance information and staff feedback.

Financial Impact

37. There are no financial impacts associated with this report.

Equality Impact Assessment

38. There are no equality impacts associated with this report.

Workforce Impacts

39. Where there are no workforce impacts associated with this report.

Legal Impacts

40. There are no legal impacts associated with this report.

Risk Management

41. There are no risk management issues associated with this report.

Consultation

42. There is no requirement under the Constitution for external consultation on this item.

Recommendations

43. To note the report.

Reasons for Proposed Decision

44. Not required.

Implementation of Decision

45. Not required.

Appendices

46. None.

List of Background Papers

47. None.

Officer Contact

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