



*Neuadd y Sir / County Hall, Llandrindod, Powys, LD1 5LG*

## **QUESTIONS AT ANY TIME TO CABINET PORTFOLIO HOLDERS**

Response by the Portfolio Holder:

During the pandemic the Service has experienced different patterns of demand.

For example, there was a significant jump in March (from 57 assessments in February 2021 to 103 in March 2021). There have been days when every social worker in the Assessment Team was out undertaking a separate Section 47 child protection investigation at the same time.

The Service has seen an increase of referrals when other agencies have opened up following the easing of lockdown rules (for example children going back to school) and we have taken some children through to the assessment step in the process as we have not always had the usual access to other agencies to consider risk.

A significant proportion of the Assessment Team Social Workers live out of county; because they are working from home, responding to unplanned urgent referrals can be a challenge and add significant amounts of travel time to their working day. This impacts on their effectiveness in being able to focus on the through flow of work.

This has been exacerbated by ongoing significant performance issues with WCCIS. Both of these challenges are being actively addressed. More time working from local offices and less travel time to see families will contribute to staff to be able to manage the challenges more effectively.

Right across the Service, from Early Help to Leaving Care, the impact of the pandemic is creating more intractable and complex issues for families, and all of this has an impact on performance.

We have put additional resources in place to try and support the recovery of assessments. There is an additional decision-maker in the Front Door and 2 additional Social Workers in the Assessment Teams. However, the pressure on the service, new ways of working, responding to Covid and the impact of all of this on the health and wellbeing of the workforce has resulted in colleagues leaving this part of the service and/or being unable to undertake their roles in recent months.

The Service has been mindful of the impact on the wellbeing of colleagues and have put in place a range of measures to support this. Staff have been consulted on their wellbeing and what support would be helpful and Managers have reported back to the workforce on how they have listened and acted on the messages received. For example, the twice weekly wellbeing sessions continue, corporate wellbeing initiatives have been promoted, as has the employee assistance programme. Work is underway to return colleagues who work directly with children, young people and their families, to their local office bases in a safe and staged way.

The performance indicator in this area considers the assessment at the point in time it is completed and signed off by the Manager. Every child is seen during the assessment process and social workers complete the work with families as quickly as they can passing the assessment to Team Managers to review and sign off. Volume of work when there is a surge in demand, as well as the very real difficulties caused by poor WCCIS performance mean that even though the work with families have been completed in good time, they are not always signed off by the Team Manager. When we see the service dip, it is usually because the service is catching up with a back log.

There are weekly performance meetings between Team Managers and Senior Managers which is an assurance mechanism ensuring assessments are being carried out and any areas of difficulty can be understood.

As we move forward with recovery this will be one of our main focusses. I have asked for data to be included in our monthly reports, on the longest wait and average time for completion of assessment. This will provide a more rounded view of what is happening and any back logs.

We have also considered, as part of our recent Dragons Den event with front line officers, some proposals on how to do further work upstream with partners, including schools to try and prevent the escalation of need and deliver better outcomes for children and young people. I am confident that some of these proposals will support us with recovery over the next few months.