

CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL

County Council
18th October 2018

REPORT AUTHOR: County Councillor Rosemarie Harris, Leader

SUBJECT: Question from County Councillor Matthew Dorrance

It's more than a year since the Council's regulators inspected Children's Services and found serious failings. The latest Children's Services performance report (August 2018) shows the Council is failing to deliver against the top five performance indicators.

Will the Leader explain to Council why, a year later, her administration is still failing children, young people and families in Powys?

Response

Since the disappointing outcome of last year's Inspection report the authority has prioritised its efforts to meet the challenge to improve the services to vulnerable children.

In this time, we have seen a steady and significant increase in compliance from a low of 12% of Children Looked After (CLA) statutory visits completed on time in March last year and 28% in April 2017 to improving our performance to over 80 per cent on time over the summer.

We have implemented the CYSUR (Regional) Threshold document issued in October last year and rolled out training and awareness raising with partners to ensure we have common thresholds for supporting and intervening where necessary to promote and protect the wellbeing of children.

The authority's children service has a Quality Assurance framework in place and this engages managers across the service undertaking regular audits to consider the impact of our interventions.

The authority had little accurate performance data for children's services in 2017 and this is no longer the case. The information we had during the previous year was shown to be unreliable but the work across children's services and Business Intelligence has very significantly improved this.

Actions taken to strengthen the service.

Appointment of a permanent Director of Social Services
Appointment of a permanent Head of Children's Services
Appointed a Quality Assurance Manager

Establishment of the pilot Assessment team both in the North and South to provide timely, focused assessments for children and their families.

External audits by (DfE assured) auditors earlier this year.

Multi agency audits are undertaken in a number of cases.

Assembly Members are reporting fewer cases of concern are coming to their attention.

We have a programme of regular auditing by our managers and senior managers. Staff supervision is in place

We have had 3 monitoring visits by the Care Inspectorate for Wales (CIW) showing on each occasion improvements to aspects of the service accepting that we have much to do yet as we are on this journey of improvement.

Stronger working partnerships with Health, Police colleagues and schools and Education colleagues to provide more planned and co-ordinated approaches and plans for children.

We have established an access to resources Panel which carefully considers the packages of care high need children require and through our Multi Agency Partnerships (MAAP) agree placements where children have multiple and complex needs.

We have developed our multi agency early help offer under Start Well and developed a model for support to young people and are developing more sophisticated services to children on the edge of care.

A training programme for staff,

Increased recruitment of foster carers with a plan to recruit more and develop some specialist foster care provision.

Developed a Strategic Framework for CLA to provide a plan for delivering more and improved services to CLA over the coming years.

We are ambitious for our CLA and the re-establishment of the Corporate Parenting Group is building on this as we want to see them thrive.

Outcomes for Children

We continue to safeguard more children through the Children Looked After service. Our working arrangements through the Safeguarding services with partners has been strengthened.

We have re-established the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements through the Powys Local Operating Group.

We have re-established the working relationship with the Regional Safeguarding Board (CYSUR).

We have strengthened the workforce to meet the demands of the service and needs of children.

Albeit that we did not reach the targets we have set to undertake visits to all CLA and children on the Child Protection Register in August, I can confirm that all children who required a visit in September received a visit, with a small number of exceptions where it was agreed not to visit the family due to significant issue regarding illness and bereavement for example. These visits were all re-scheduled within a short timeframe.

We know that with the co-ordinated support across the Council from Policy and Performance teams, HR, IT, Finance and Adult Services we have created the foundations and some significant improvements for children and their families and

accept we are on a journey to continue to improve and make Powys a great place to grow up in and a great place for staff to work and be proud of.

Sustainable improvements will continue to be made and we continue to have high expectations for the whole council to do all we can to improve the lives of children and their families.

The current CIW inspection will in the next few months give us a new, independent assessment of our improvement journey to deliver quality services to children and we welcome this opportunity to reflect on our next steps for all members and officers to take to build on the work done to date.