

REPORT TO:	Safeguarding, Communities & Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee
REPORT NO:	HCSC/05/18
DATE:	19 December 2018
LEAD MEMBER:	Councillor William Baldwin (People – Children’s Services)
CONTACT OFFICER:	Susan Evans (Tel: 295490)
SUBJECT:	Children’s Social Care Departmental Service Activity & Performance Half Yearly Update (Quarters 1-2) for 2018/2019
WARD:	N/A

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The purpose of this report is to advise elected members of the Safeguarding Communities & Well Being Scrutiny Committee of key performance management information within Children’s Social Care Services for the period 1 April 2018 – 30 September 2018. Where appropriate, comparison data such as Welsh averages has also been included. The data provides elected members with the opportunity to monitor performance and discuss any issues that relates to the information provided.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2.1 The core purpose of children’s social care services is to:

- Provide support to families in partnership with other agencies that enables them to better care for their child/children.
- Investigate allegations of abuse and take appropriate action to safeguard/promote the welfare of the child.
- Act as corporate parents for those children who cannot be cared for within their own extended family by providing residential or foster care.

- Maintain the full range of adoption services.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

Members of the Committee formulate their conclusions and recommendations based on the information in the report and the discussion at the meeting.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- (i) To enable the Committee to scrutinise performance and discuss any issues that relate to the information provided in Appendix A & B.

4. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 4.1 In April 2016, the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 was introduced. As a result, the performance framework for both Adults & Children's Social Care changed. In order to understand both demand for services and contribute to driving improvements to service delivery, the Children's Social Care Department have taken the decision to retain many of the previous national indicators and keep them as "local" indicators.
- 4.2 A workshop for Members was held on 8 November 2017 and as a result, the performance information contained in Appendix A has been provided. The content of Appendix A was discussed at the Members' Workshop and contains a mix of both national and local measures/information. A recommendation for the Safeguarding, Communities and Well-being Scrutiny Committee is to provide the information in the current format and to review every 12 months, in line with any potential changes or additions to the national framework.

Care Inspectorate Wales Improvement Conference

- 4.3 The Children's Social Care Department was informed by Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) of their intention to visit in January 2018. During this visit, 6 cases were taken for examination and following this, the need for further work and improvements was noted. On 2 & 3 July 2018, a follow up visit was undertaken and CIW re-examined a few of the earlier six cases, along with a number of new cases.
- 4.4 During the July CIW visit, the inspectors also met with staff and management teams. Following the re-examination of cases, CIW asked that an Improvement Conference be scheduled and an action plan drawn up to address the main areas of concern which were staffing, quality assurance and departmental processes.

- 4.5 Care Inspectorate Wales were complimentary in their feedback to the Department about the openness and honesty of the managers they met. Staff had put forward ideas and observations about the service and how improvements could be made. CIW noted that staff within the Department were 'very motivated and committed to providing good outcomes for children.'
- 4.6 Following the development of an Action Plan (see Appendix B), an Improvement Conference was held in October 2018. Areas discussed with CIW included working arrangements and how to make the best use of office time and technology, potential duplication in documentation and processes, the Legal Planning Framework and Case Monitoring processes, experience, skill sets and developmental needs of staff, and working in partnership with Human Resources to address vacancies in the Department, along with comparing pay and conditions with other Local Authorities.
- 4.7 To ensure that staff remain aware of all work identified within the Action Plan, a Communications Strategy has been developed and updates to all staff are shared through messages from the Head of Department, as well as added as topic of discussions in all Departmental and Team Meetings. The Action Plan and Communications Strategy were shared with CIW during the Improvement Conference and no recommendations to change were identified.
- 4.8 To promote staff engagement with the Action Plan, a series of Whole Service Workshops have been scheduled throughout November and December 2018 to ensure all staff have an opportunity to contribute to the ongoing developments and improvements within the Department.
- 4.9 It is envisaged that a follow-up visit from CIW will take place within six months of their last visit and further updates will be provided, as they are received.

Front of House Services

- 4.10 The Children's SPOA (formerly MASH) is the single point of access for the Department and the team support timely information sharing, informed decision making and prompt access to services for those families in need of support. All contacts coming into the department require recording on our case management system, liaison with other agencies and a manager's decision within 24 hours of receipt. Contacts can lead to information and advice being provided, allocation for assessment and/or are open cases and will be passed on to the team originally involved. In each case, a contact generates work.
- 4.11 The contacts into the Department in 2017/18 were a 2.3% rise from the previous year and based on the first two quarters of 2018/19, the Department will see a further increase in the total contacts received by the end of 2018/19. In the first two quarters of 2018/19, we can evidence almost 6,000 contacts, with each one requiring initial screening, a multi-agency approach, timely decision making and assessment or signposting to another team or service. The challenge for the Children's SPOA is to meet this increasing demand

within existing resources whilst maintaining good performance.

Appendix A, Figure 1

- 4.12 Each Contact received into the Children's SPOA, requires a management decision and as a Department, Children's Social Care always aim to make these decisions within 24 hours. This timescale is not a national indicator and there is no Welsh average.
- 4.13 Children's Social Care has always performed well with decision making within 24 hours. In Quarter 2 of 2018/19, there was a slight dip in performance; however, that can be attributed to changes in staff and the management team within the SPOA. Understandably, changes in personnel can impact upon performance whilst new team members familiarise themselves with team and system processes. Whilst there was a slight reduction from 99.6% to 95.6%, in Quarter 2, it is noted that performance remained good and the continuous monitoring of this measure assists the Department in ensuring that actions to identify and rectify causes are implemented quickly.

Appendix A, Table 3

Looked After Children and Child Protection

- 4.14 Since 2016, the Department has seen a steady increase in numbers of both Looked After Children and those subject to Child Protection. At the end of Quarter 2 of 2018/19, there were 179 children subject to Child Protection Plans and 271 Looked After Children. There are multiple factors which contribute to these increases, however, the rise in Looked After Children which Wrexham has experienced during the past two years is in line with a national trend across England and Wales.

Appendix A, Table 4

- 4.15 Further, large family groups often impact on the numbers of Looked After Children and since 2016/17, the Department has seen a total of 21 family groups of 3 or more children coming into care. In addition, courts are now making more Full Care Orders where the children remain at home on Placement with Parent Agreements. Although these children remain living at home with their parents, they continue to be subject to a court order, and remain looked after children, subject to all of the statutory processes until the Department is assured they are safe and the Care Order can be discharged. At the end of Quarter 2, there were 53 young people placed at home with parents on Full Care Orders.
- 4.16 The implementation of the Social Services and Wellbeing Wales Act has also added to the increase in our LAC population as the Department must launch care proceedings on children who are voluntarily accommodated (formally Section 20) after 16 weeks of accommodation. This leaves the Department very little time to facilitate rehabilitation home before initiating court proceedings. At the end of Quarter 2 2018/19, 73.3% of the population of Looked After Children were placed under a Care Order (either Interim or Full) compared to the 23% placed voluntarily (Section 76).

- 4.17 The number of children subject to child protection registration has also seen a 37.7% increase since the beginning of the financial year. The Department continue to analyse and investigate throughout to understand these increases in demand and identify strategies to address them.

Reviews

- 4.18 Each child in need of Care and Support, Looked After by the Local Authority or subject to a Child Protection Plan is required to have their Care and Support Plan reviewed within statutory timescales. For those children who are classified as a Child in Need of Care & Support, their plans should be reviewed every 6 months (although Wrexham have a local requirement to conduct the first review within 3 months); for those children who are looked after, their first review should be within 20 working days of becoming looked after, a second review no more than three months from the first review and all subsequent reviews within 6 months of the previous review. Children who are subject to child protection plans have their first review within 3 months of the initial Child Protection Conference and subsequent reviews within 6 months of the last case conference for the duration they are subject to the plan.
- 4.19 Wrexham has a local benchmark of 90% for all cases which require care and support plans to be reviewed. Performance for the first two quarters of 2018/19 has fallen below this at 74.2%. There are many reasons why a review cannot take place within timescale and it is recognised that recruitment issues within the role of Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer (ISRO) combined with the changes in staff within the Assessment & Intervention (AIT) and Family Support Team (FST) have impacted on performance.
- 4.20 Working in partnership with Human Resources, staffing in both AIT and FST is more stable and a successful recruitment campaign to the ISRO posts has recently taken place. With staffing levels stabilising in all teams, it is expected that the percentage of reviews held within timescale will continue to improve.

Appendix A, Table 10

Prevention

- 4.21 Wrexham's Family Information Service (WFIS) run an expanded service through a number of different funding streams which include those from the Home Office, Families First and Big Lottery. This enables the service to provide information outreach, advice and one to one support to parents who find themselves in challenging situations, those who are refugees and asylum seekers, and/or are young parents who have children with disabilities or additional needs.
- 4.22 In order to enhance the effectiveness and accessibility of this support, WFIS has recently moved from the central library to Wrexham's Council Contact Centre. A staffing restructure and office move to the departmental building

has also enabled WFIS to work in a more integrated way with social care teams in the Department.

- 4.23 The new Families First Programme of prevention services is fully embedded in Wrexham following last year's transition to the new guidance. A collaborative programme of workshops and training supports improving practice across the programme.
- 4.24 Wrexham is a pathfinder area for the First 100 Days (FTD) initiative and a First Thousand Days Partnership is working collaboratively, supported by Public Health Wales to improve the provision offered by all partners to pregnant women and their families and families of babies up to the age of two.
- 4.25 Staff from Families First and the 1st 1000 Days have worked jointly with the Wrexham and Flintshire Home-start organisation, local schools and Women's Aid to develop an Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) Champion project which has now been awarded Early Intervention funding from the North Wales Police and Crime Commissioner. This project is developing an expert ACE Champion approach to the provision of family support, as well as establishing a hub for information training and research on ACEs.

Fostering

- 4.26 The increase in numbers of children becoming Looked After not only impacts upon Assessment & Intervention, Family Support, Looked After Children and the Safeguarding People Teams, but also places significant pressure on our Fostering Team, who are responsible for the recruitment, assessment and approval of foster carers. The fostering team have to react quickly to requests for accommodation; think creatively on how to recruit new foster carers and meet the expectations of statutory procedures with existing foster carers.
- 4.27 One of the growth areas is the rise in the number of looked after children who are placed with family members. At the point of placement, the Fostering team is required to undertake a Viability Assessment, to consider suitability to care for the child/young person. If the outcome is positive the Fostering Service then has to complete a detailed Kinship Care Assessment. Often, these assessments are court directed and the timeframes given to complete them are considerably shorter than legislative guidance advises for generic foster carers.
- 4.28 Presently, there are 76 Kinship Foster Carers and the number of requests for Kinship assessments is increasing. Every week the Fostering Team receive new referrals and on average are receiving 7.5 referrals a month. Once kinship carers are approved, they are subject to all of the same statutory visit and review procedures which continue to impact on the team's resources. Kinship Carers do not enter into the pool of mainstream foster carers as they can only be used for the child/family member for whom they have been matched. However these placements do negate the need for placing the child with generic foster cares, so arguably do assist in managing the significant rise in looked after children experienced during the past two years.

Nevertheless, this work detracts from the team's core business of recruiting, assessing and retaining generic and therapeutic foster carers.

- 4.29 The focus on completing Kinship Care Assessments has meant that the Fostering Service has not increased its in-house foster care provision during the past two years. Therefore, the challenge within the Fostering Team is finding a balance between recruitment and retention of generic and therapeutic foster carers and dealing with the increasing demand in kinship care assessments.
- 4.30 Currently, we have insufficient in-house carers to meet the increase in children entering the care system and therefore have had to use expensive agency placements. For example in 2016/17 we had 44 children and young people placed in Independent Fostering placements (IFA's) and 13 placed in residential placements (RP). In 2017/18 this rose to 56 in IFAs and 26 in RPs and in 2018/19 there was a further increase to 61 in IFAs and 21 in RP. This increase has had a significant impact on our budget with the cost of Out of County provision increasing from £2175, 224.91 in 2016/17 to £4,115,960.22 in 2017/18 with the final figure for 2018/19 predicted to be on at least a par with 2017/18 if not higher.
- 4.31 The priority going forward is to expand our pool of approved foster carers and reduce our reliance on Independent Providers. To progress this, the Department has recently appointed a Recruitment Officer to increase awareness in the community and attract more interest in becoming a foster carer for WCBC. The focus of the post holder is to oversee the recruitment of generic and therapeutic foster carers, ensuring the needs of Wrexham's Looked After Children going forward are predominantly met from in-house provision. Already we have seen the benefits of this post with 7 new prospective foster families currently being assessed as generic foster carers, with an additional family already being approved in December. We also intend to recruit a Placement Officer in the New Year who will be responsible for dealing with all requests for placements. This will free up other staff in the fostering team to undertake assessments of potential new foster carers. Whilst these posts are new, we consider them as an investment to reduce the number of children placed with expensive private providers

Childcare

- 4.32 Please see Appendix C

Adoption

- 4.33 The North Wales Adoption Service is responsible for 3 Joint Adoption Panels which run each month across the region: Flintshire/Wrexham, Conwy/Denbighshire and Gwynedd/Ynys Môn.
- 4.34 Across North Wales, there are 24 children, awaiting adopters, 9 of which are from Wrexham. Of these 9 children, two have significant needs and the other seven have links identified. Although work is ongoing to progress these links, the challenge remains in finding suitable adopters who are able to meet the complex needs of the remaining two children. We know that this is not a

unique problem to Wrexham, as nationally, there is a shortage of individuals coming forward as prospective adopters.

- 4.35 In the first two quarters of 2018/19, there were 17 enquiries made by people wishing to become adopters. Of these 17 enquiries, 1 couple proceeded to make an application and eventually went on to be approved by the Agency Decision Maker.
- 4.36 The Adoption Service has noted a significant drop in the number of people coming forward to be assessed as adopters. Although there is no official evidence as to reasons why, this trend does link with the recent improved rates of couples who have accessed IVF treatment and the rise in couples undergoing treatment up to the age of 42. Previously, the NHS would only offer treatment up to the age of 40. Couples who were nearing the age of 40 who had not been offered treatment would have seen adoption as their next route to a family. Due to the relaxation in age for treatment, more couples are attempting IVF treatment, later in life.

Training

- 4.37 Having secured funding through Welsh Government, the Department's Practice Development Manager successfully commissioned and rolled out a series of training programmes to Social Workers and Support staff working directly with families at risk of or experiencing domestic abuse throughout May, June and September 2018.
- 4.38 This training included a one-day course focussing directly on coercive control and the how continuing use of threats, humiliation and/or intimidation can impact and be used to harm, punish or frighten their victim. This course was specifically designed to help staff understand the content, application and requirements of the Serious Crime Act 2015.
- 4.39 Upon completion of these courses, the Department successfully trained 18 members of staff and 12 agency partners.

Service Developments

- 4.40 Throughout the reporting period, the Department has continued to engage with staff, management teams and consultants regarding service improvements.
- 4.41 Following our own routine examination and audit of cases process, along with feedback from Care Inspectorate Wales, the Department has closely scrutinised our processes and paperwork to support how risk assessments are applied, in practice. In particular, the process for assessing and documenting risk analysis leading up to Child Protection registration. This very useful piece of work has identified duplication in paperwork and a project to streamline and reduce the need for multiple forms in practice will undoubtedly result in a reduction of social work time spent on form filling. The

greatest benefit of this review is a focus on analysing and evidencing risk which will lead to more meaningful, outcome-focussed Child Protection plans.

- 4.42 A review of our Team Around the Child (TAC) service and waiting lists has led to a change in practice which now means that every family awaiting TAC intervention will receive an introductory visit by our TAC Coordinator. This introductory visit will take place whilst families are awaiting allocation and allow both the family and the TAC Coordinator an opportunity to discuss their identified needs at an earlier stage.
- 4.43 To ensure that all staff are supported and given an opportunity to reflect on their practice within their routine supervision sessions, the Department has amended its Supervision Policy, to include the introduction of a “reflective practice” section. This move ensures that whilst caseload review is important, it is equally important that supervision sessions are used to analyse good practice and identify how this practice can be used across other cases, the team and the service.
- 4.44 The Children’s Services Department has seen a rise in the number of children/young people being Looked After, increased numbers of children and young people on the Child Protection Register and involved in interventions of a statutory nature. It is therefore necessary to review our approach especially in light of the increased financial constraints and the need to provide good outcomes for all the children and young people in Wrexham.
- 4.45 Wrexham and its partner agencies believe that in most circumstances, children and young people are best cared for within their own families. To support this, the Department has developed an ‘Edge of Care’ approach to support children and young people to remain within their birth families, wherever and whenever possible it is safe to do so.
- 4.46 Within Children Services, our vision is to support children and young people to be safe, learn, achieve and grow. The Department wants to achieve the best possible outcomes for all children and young people. In order to do this, an Edge of Care Panel has recently been introduced. The Edge of Care Panel will encompass various approaches simultaneously as outlined below:
- provision of targeted support and resources to those children/young people who are on the edge of care to prevent them becoming Looked After;
 - identify alternative permanent placements other than care for those children looked after by Wrexham when it is in the best interests of the child/young people; and
 - review and assess the permanence/care plans for children/young people currently in the care of Wrexham to ensure their placement(s) best meet their needs now and in their future.

- 4.47 The aims of the Edge of Care Panel are to:
- Manage the threshold for access to the looked after system
 - Ensure that resources are appropriately identified and allocated
 - Inform future commissioning strategies for Wrexham Council
- 4.48 The Edge of Care Panel will provide a robust approach to admissions into care and will be accountable to the Head of Children's Services.
- 4.49 The Edge of Care Panel will play an essential role in coordinating services and packages of support for children and young people who are on the edge of becoming Looked After. Decisions will be made, where it is safe to do so, to maintain the family by the provision of target support services rather than accommodate a child/young person, either on a voluntary basis or through legal proceedings. The panel will allocate resources according to the needs of a child/young person.
- 4.50 When children/young people are being considered for care, the Edge of Care Panel will act as an additional check point for social workers and other professionals to ensure all other avenues have been sufficiently tested before a child/young person is brought into care. However, there will always be occasions where irrespective of the support offered the home situation does not improve and children will need to enter the care system.
- 4.51 Alongside all of the service developments, the Department continues to work toward the rollout of the new joint Health & Social Care Database, WCCIS (Welsh Community Care Information System). A project board resides over this implementation team with regular input and feedback provided both nationally and regionally. As this system is a national system, there are many factors to consider before decommissioning of our current recording system and rollout of our new system can begin. The project is supported by the two Service Managers in Children's Social Care, members of the Information Technology service, Information Governance, Practice Development and Performance leads.
- 4.52 To ensure that when the new system is rolled out, we can access all of the time-saving features it is capable of, the Project Team has had to review the date of roll out. It is important that a realistic 'go live' date is agreed which allows for sufficient time and opportunity to review business processes and apply lean working strategies, before proceeding. The Project Board are currently in discussion with the system supplier to agree an implementation date.
- 4.53 To support the lean working initiatives and fulfil the recommendations made by Care Inspectorate Wales, the Department's Practice Development Manager is currently reviewing all our existing forms and business processes, in close liaison with the Project Team. This review includes recommending system improvements to rationalise time and effort required by social workers to complete paperwork and evidence practice.

- 4.54 As there have been no additional resources for this project, it relies on the continued dedication from existing staff within the Department to ensure this extra work is completed, alongside the tasks associated to the roles they hold.

Staffing

- 4.55 During the last twelve months there has been a rise in the turnover of staff and an increased reliance on agency workers to cover vacant posts. While we still have a number of agency workers in the department, in recent months the workforce appears more settled. The difficulties we have experienced in recruiting and retaining social workers is not unique to Wrexham. This is a national problem with the demand for experienced social workers often outstripping supply. To address this, the department has worked closely with colleagues in the HR Service Centre to develop a Recruitment and Retention Action Plan. We are also holding a series of focus groups for permanent and agency staff, to give them the opportunity to share their ideas for improvement, such as making better use of technology and streamlining internal processes to free up social workers to concentrate more on frontline activities.
- 4.56 Whilst it is a very difficult market, we have experienced some recent success in recruiting to all the vacant management positions in the Assessment & Intervention Team (AIT) team. Some of these have been internal appointments, with experienced social workers moving into management roles. As part of our continuing commitment to career development, all of the new managers will be supported to attend the bespoke Operational Team Manager Development Programme for Wales, a year long programme. We have also been successful in recruiting to 2 of the 3 vacant Independent Safeguarding and Reviewing Officer posts following a re-grading of these roles. There are also a number of applicants for other vacant posts with interviews scheduled to take place shortly. To address any remaining shortfall, a new recruitment programme will be launched early in 2019 to progress the process of filling the remaining posts. Despite the challenges, staff throughout the department continue to work extremely hard and are committed to delivering good quality services.

5. IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 **Policy Framework** – The terms of reference for this Committee are aligned to the Council’s Strategic Priority “Children and Young People are Safeguarded” and the content of this report specifically relates to the Council Plan objective Pe3 - “Safeguarding those who are vulnerable.”
- 5.2 **Budget** – The Children’s Social Care Department continues to experience significant pressures. This is mainly attributable to an unprecedented

increase in Looked After Children. The Period 6 – September 2018 position for the Department was a reported net overspend of £515,265.

- 5.3 The pressure areas are Out of County Placements with an overspend of £846K and a Leaving Care Placements overspend of £147K. The Department continues to try and make savings in non-frontline services, but as these represent the minority of the overall budget, this will have a limited impact on the current overspend. Whilst every effort is being made to limit the overspend, as outlined in the report, the Department also has to balance this with fulfilling its statutory duty to keep children safe,
- 5.4 There have been a number of new initiatives implemented by the Interim Head of Children’s Social Care and these initiatives will reduce costs going forward. However, they will take time to bed in and it is unlikely the expected impact will be realised and demonstrate a reduction in expenditure levels for some months.
- 5.5 For the 2018/2019 Financial Year the service budget pressures will continue to be monitored through the council’s budget monitoring process.
- 5.6 **Legal** – The increase in Family Court Applications has had a significant impact on Legal Services capacity.
- 5.7 **Staffing** – There are no staffing implications arising from this report.
- 5.8 **Equality/Human Rights** – Members are advised to consider the full Equality Impact Assessment which is available at <http://vmwinsqld/equalityisalive/Menu.aspx> report number [PSC/EIA00007/2015](http://vmwinsqld/equalityisalive/Menu.aspx). Members of the public can request a full Equality Impact Assessment from the Contact Officer named in the header box of this report. A summary of the Equality Impact Assessment is attached as Appendix C.
- 5.9 **Risks** – A risk register for Children’s Services has been completed and is regularly updated and takes account of the contents of the attached Performance Report.

6. CONSULTATION

- 6.1 The Lead Member of Children’s Social Care has been consulted regarding the contents of the attached Performance Report.

7. EVALUATION OF OPTIONS

- 7.1 Not applicable

BACKGROUND PAPERS	LOCATION	WEBSITE INFO.