

GWYNEDD COUNCIL

Report to the Cabinet

Date of Meeting:	9 January, 2018
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Dilwyn Morgan Cabinet Member for Children and Supporting Families
Contact Officer:	Morwena Edwards, Corporate Director
Contact Number:	Telephone 01286 679468
Title of Item:	Children and Supporting Families Performance Report

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to update you on the performance of the field I am responsible for as the Cabinet Member for Children and Supporting Families. This will include outlining the latest with the pledges in the Strategic Plan; where the performance measures have reached; and the latest in terms of the savings and cuts schemes.
- 1.2 I will remind you that all matters have already been the subject of discussions and have been scrutinised at meetings of the relevant management team, which also included representation from the scrutiny committee.
- 1.3 On the whole, I am satisfied with the performance of most projects and measures for which I am responsible. As I have reported previously, a number of the performance measures in the children field represent a general increase in work pressure as a result of a high number of looked-after children.

2. THE DECISION SOUGHT

- 2.1. To accept and note the information in the report.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDING THE DECISION

- 3.1. In order to ensure effective performance management and that we respond pro-actively to the need to achieve efficiency savings as expected.

4. STRATEGIC PLAN PROJECTS

4.1. P8 - Early Intervention / Preventative Programme for groups of vulnerable children and young people in Gwynedd

- 4.2 As I have already reported to the Cabinet, the Children and Supporting Families Department is facing an exciting period as it designs suitable services for the future. The Supporting Families Strategy has been identified as a priority programme and it will be included in the Council's Plan from 2018 onwards. The strategy will lead to transforming traditional areas of providing services to children and families. Early intervention will be a priority ensuring that we make a difference at the earliest opportunity to prevent problems from escalating.

- 4.3 As the current Families First Programme comes to an end, the Department has been undertaking work to recommission and prioritise the Future Families First Programme. As noted in my previous report, an independent consultant had been commissioned to evaluate the current Families First programme in Gwynedd. This work has been completed and a comprehensive report has been submitted to the Department outlining the successes of the provision over the programme period as well as identifying models of good practice and identifying opportunities for the future programme in accordance with Welsh Government priorities and the local needs of Gwynedd.

- 4.3 A meeting was held at the end of December which brought providers and the Council together to discuss the intention of the New Plan. A tendering process is currently being undertaken and a new programme will be operational from 1 April, 2018.

5. MEASURING PERFORMANCE

- 5.1 Over the past months, the Department has been working on developing purposes for its units and measures that measure progress against their purposes. Their purposes were submitted during the departmental performance challenging meeting and it was very encouraging to see that so much progress had been made since the last time I reported. Although there is further work to be done by the Department to sharpen their purposes and to ensure that the measures measure the correct things, I am very glad to report that the Department is on the right track in developing measures that mean something to their service users. In my next report, I will be in a position to share some of these measures with you.

- 5.2 Welsh Government has confirmed that the measures of **SOGS (Schedule of Growing Skills)** Assessments in Flying Start are now irrelevant. As I have already noted, the unit is in the process of developing new measures and I am confident that these will be ready for submission in my next report. The Flying Start unit has invested in a Capita information management system. This system will assist to identify educational needs and measure progress that will lead to improved transition arrangements for children from Nursery to Primary education. The Unit reports that collaboration with the Education Department has increased recently.
- 5.3 I will now focus on the measures that are causing concern to me and the Department. I am of the view that the Measures associated with Looked-After Children, specifically those relating to Education and Health, are unacceptable. These issues have been brought to your attention previously and I can confirm that they were addressed at a recent Corporate Parent Meeting where the Independent Reviewing Officers also confirmed their concern.
- 5.4 Therefore, as a matter of priority, and as part of the Corporate Parent strategy, Task Groups have now been established to consider these fields to ensure that we place the required emphasis on Education and Health, but also to ensure that we provide the correct support at the correct time for the children we look after. I will expect the task groups, in the same way as the units have been doing in developing meaningful purposes and measures, to develop appropriate measures jointly with our partners and I look forward to present these to you. It was encouraging to see an officer from the Education Department at the performance meeting as I feel that this shows cross-departmental commitment to this agenda and it coincides with the long-term direction of the department.
- 5.6 The Measures relating to Child Protection Conferences (**SCC21, SCC14, SCC34**) show some deterioration. There are various reasons for this but the Department notes that the lack of commitment shown by the Police in attending Case Conferences is one reason for this. This leads to meetings that are not quorate. This causes me considerable concern and this issue has been escalated by the Head of Department to the Police, although we are yet to see a satisfactory resolution. This issue is not unique to Gwynedd and discussions are taking place on a regional level in an attempt to challenge a better commitment. I will be monitoring the situation as it is essential for the Police to be involved in these key discussions.
- 5.7 The Performance Measure **PMC 33 – Percentage of children who have had 3 placements or more during the year** has seen an increase. (an increase from 2 to 7 children). Historically, this performance measure has been performing the best in Wales. The Department reports that a hospital birth is reported as an initial placement and this has influenced the figures. The greatest challenge for the Department is those individuals who are very difficult to place due to complex and intensive needs, mainly teenagers. During the quarter, the Department has faced challenges from placements breaking down at short notice and that attempting to identify placements for these children with intensive and complex needs is very difficult. This situation is not unique to Gwynedd and the issue has been escalated to the Regional Commissioning Board. There is an intention to carry out a piece of work to look at suitable solutions on a more local level.
- 5.7 For similar reasons, we see an increase in the **Percentage of children who have experienced more than one change of school during the year (SCC002)**. The Department highlighted that local schools found it difficult to maintain the teenagers with intensive and complex needs. In situations where risks to

individuals have been highlighted, it is inevitable that they will have to move schools to safeguard them. One of the Department's concerns is moving children out-of-county. Of course, when moving to out-of-county placements it is not always possible to continue to offer a Welsh-medium education and this is challenging and the Department regularly weighs up these issues when making decisions that are best for the child. There are current discussions with the Education department around providing 'distance learning' packages for these individuals utilising information technology such as skype and iPad. It is also important to note that at times, placements are moved for positive reasons and lead to positive outcomes for the child.

- 5.8 When discussing performance measure **PMC 35 (Percentage of children who have experienced homelessness during the year)**, I can confirm that the individual who has experienced homelessness is not homeless any more. A further discussion is required with the Housing Department regarding the support available for children leaving our care. The Department reports that children leaving our care have to register themselves as homeless, as was done in this particular case. This does not make any sense to me and I have asked for a resolution between both Departments. Housing and the support being offered to the children in our care as they reach adulthood and leave care will be addressed within the Corporate Parent Panel Task Groups as well.

6. FINANCIAL/SAVINGS SITUATION

- 6.1 In January 2014, a report was submitted to the Cabinet entitled "Improving Benefits by Transforming Children Services". This report anticipated that as much as £3m could be saved over a period of years by reducing the number of looked-after children and reviewing the residential provision. Although the Department is confident that the work programme in place to realise the savings is working, they are now concerned that the aim could have been overly ambitious. At the performance challenging meeting on 22 November 2017, and as a result of the expectations of the plan, it was agreed that the department needed to review the financial outcomes to date, compared with the original theories. I can confirm that the Department is working with the Finance Department to submit a report on the situation to the Cabinet, in order to approve any changes to profile and/or the sum of anticipated savings.
- 6.2 The 2017/18 schemes are an extension of those from the previous year and relate to the field of looked-after children's placements. There is increasing pressures on the department to place children in expensive placements and now, the department is concerned that the financial aim could have been too ambitious. It is important to bear in mind that the care needs in 2017/18 are very different to previous years and are much more costly. The placements are being scrutinised in detail by the Department but it is likely that the over-spend will increase. There is concern about contracts with Health to joint-fund some placements for young people with intensive needs.
- 6.3 The report on the Second Quarter Review of the 2017/18 Revenue Budget, submitted to the Cabinet on 21 November, suggests a risk that the Department will be in a position where there will be a substantial over-spend, and recommending that the Department takes firm actions to ensure control of their

budget by 31 March 2018. I can confirm that I am working with the Department in an attempt to ensure this.

- 6.4 This situation of over-spend referred to above is not unique to Gwynedd. Discussions are in progress regionally in an attempt to come to a decision as to whether there is a need to develop local placements. There is a regional desire for this and the Regional Commissioning Board will be completing a piece of work on this. In addition, scoping work is being carried out regionally to see whether there is a need for a 'mother and child' provision which will again contribute towards reducing the costs for local authorities.

7. NEXT STEPS AND TIMETABLE

- 7.1. **None to note.**

8. ANY CONSULTATIONS UNDERTAKEN PRIOR TO RECOMMENDING THE DECISION

8.1. Views of the Statutory Officers:

i. Monitoring Officer:

Although reporting on performance, matters have been highlighted in the report specifically arrangements within Children's Services that are appropriate to bring to the Cabinet's attention.

ii. Head of Finance Department:

I confirm that the observations in section 6 of the report are a fair reflection of the Children Department's position in relation to realising the savings and the financial context. The Cabinet will be updated on 16 January regarding the pressures on the 2017/18 departmental budget but I confirm (as noted in section 6.4 of the report) that the increasing trend is consistent across the region in terms of the need to place more children in expensive placements.

As well as the unavoidable increase in placements, I note that section 6.1 of the Cabinet Member's report details concern about the savings amount which the Children Department had anticipated with its main savings scheme, namely "Improving Benefits by Transforming Children Services". I am given to understand that the Children Department is lagging behind, but moving forward with this transformational savings scheme, and that this has also contributed to departmental overspend this year.

I agree that it is a priority to identify the financial outcomes from the transformational savings scheme in order for the Cabinet to consider the need for the Children Department to present an alternative scheme to realise the relevant financial savings to seek to achieve the historical departmental savings target.

8.2. Views of the Local Member:

Not a local matter.

8.3. Results of Any Consultation:

None to note.

Appendices:

Appendix 1 Performance Measures