

ISLE OF ANGLESEY COUNTY COUNCIL Scrutiny Report Template

Committee:	Corporate Scrutiny Committee
Date:	12 th September, 2018
Subject:	Children's Services Improvement Panel
Purpose of Report:	Progress update on the work of the Children's Services Improvement Panel
Scrutiny Chair:	Cllr Aled Morris Jones
Portfolio Holder(s):	Cllr Llinos Medi Huws
Head of Service:	Caroline Turner, Assistant Chief Executive / Fon Roberts, Head of Children's Services
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Local Members:	Not applicable

1 - Recommendation/s

R1 The Corporate Scrutiny Committee is requested to note:

- Progress made to date with the work of the Children's Services Improvement Panel in terms of achieving its work programme
- That all work-streams pertaining to the Service Improvement Plan appear to be on target thus far
- The outcomes of the recent self-evaluation work-stream to measure impact and added value of the Panel
- The ongoing development programme for Panel members much of which is delivered in-house

R2 Escalate the following matter for the Corporate Scrutiny Committee to be aware:

- Although good progress has been made on implementing the revised staffing structure, some social worker posts remain filled by agency workers. This is being addressed by appointing social workers (experienced and newly qualified) and supporting experienced support workers to qualify. The actions taken to address this should be noted.

2 – Link to Council Plan / Other Corporate Priorities

Direct link with the Council Plan / transformation priorities. The Panel's consideration of the service improvement plan for children's services will provide assurance to the Executive that the Council are responding in a robust manner to the recommendations of the recent CIW report on children's services (dated March, 2017) and that steps are in place to mitigate any risks.

3 – Guiding Principles for Scrutiny Members

To assist Members when scrutinising the topic:-

3.1 Impact the matter has on individuals and communities [focus on customer/citizen]

3.2 A look at the efficiency & effectiveness of any proposed change – both financially and in terms of quality **[focus on value]**

3.3 A look at any risks **[focus on risk]**

3.4 Scrutiny taking a performance monitoring or quality assurance role **[focus on performance & quality]**

3.5 Looking at plans and proposals from a perspective of:

- Long term
- Prevention
- Integration
- Collaboration
- Involvement

[focus on wellbeing]

4 - Key Scrutiny Questions

At the request of the Panel:

1. Does the Committee have any views on the priority of the work streams included in the Panel work forward programme?
2. Are the actions of the Panel thus far sufficiently robust and at pace?
3. Does the Committee have any views on the outcomes of the recent self-evaluation measuring the impact of the Panel's work on the improvement programme in Children's Services?

5 – Background / Context

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 Members will already be aware that scrutiny has developed over the past year through the work of 3 scrutiny panels namely - Finance Scrutiny Panel, Schools Review Scrutiny Panel and the Children's Services Improvement Panel. This report summarises progress made to date as regards the **Children's Services Improvement Panel**.

1.2 Panel Governance Arrangements

As previously reported to this Committee¹, robust governance arrangements are in place to underpin the work of the Panel and it is the intention to endeavour to continue to convene monthly Panel meetings until at least the end of the current financial year. A process is in place for quarterly progress reporting by Councillor Richard Griffiths, as the Corporate Scrutiny Committee representative on the Panel.

2. FOCUS OF WORK OF THE CHILDREN'S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT PANEL

2.1 The Children's Services Improvement Panel has now met on 13 occasions since the Summer of 2017:

- 17th July, 2017
- 21st August, 2017
- 25th September, 2017

¹ Corporate Scrutiny Committee convened on 4th September and 13th November, 2017

- 26th October, 2017
- 28th November, 2017
- 19th December, 2017
- 23rd January, 2018
- 26th February, 2018
- 20th March, 2018
- 25th April, 2018
- 24th May, 2018
- 4th July, 2018
- 30th July, 2018

2.2 This report focuses on the work of the Panel for the period May – July, 2018:

- **Service Improvement Plan (SIP)** – an overview of the Service Improvement Plan was given at meetings of the Panel to ensure that the entire programme remains on target. Also, to enable the Panel to identify any early indication of slippage or lack of progress. The Panel requested progress reports on the following aspects as part of its ongoing monitoring of the SIP:
 - i. Quality assurance framework
 - ii. RAG status of each section of the SIP to ensure effective tracking of progress by the Panel against key priority areas
 - iii. Examples of joint working with North Wales Police which demonstrate improved outcomes for children and families.

Good progress reported has been reported on implementation of the SIP. Also, it was again noted that some social worker posts continued to be filled by agency staff and which needed to be filled on a permanent basis.

Detailed consideration was given by the Panel to the following aspects of the Service Improvement Plan:

- **Theme 3² (SIP)** – ensuring a quality assurance and performance framework that supports the local authority in effectively managing its responsibilities towards children. This included looking in detail at the outcomes of a recent file audit exercise. It was noted that 77% of the files audited³ were graded as Good with the remaining 23% Requiring Improvement. None were graded Poor
- **RAG status of each key priority (SIP)** – detailed overview of the status of each key priority to ensure adequate progress. It was noted that 5 sections of the SIP were ragged Amber and were a priority over the coming months. These had been broken down into smaller work streams in order to collate evidence and effectively measure progress.
- **External evaluation** – the Independent Support Team reported back to the Panel in July⁴ on the findings of their review of progress in implementing the Service Improvement Plan (SIP).

Key Findings:

 - i. A determined, well-led response to the inspection report

² Meeting of the Children's Services Improvement Panel convened on 30th July, 2018

³ A random sample of 13 casefiles were audited in April, 2018

⁴ Meeting of the Children's Services Improvement Panel convened on 4th July, 2018

- ii. Significant organisational and structural changes had been introduced
 - iii. The pace of change in Children's Services was impressive
 - iv. The challenges of the new national case management software package were undermining progress locally
 - v. An excellent foundation had been put in place but improvement must continue
 - vi. The ability to sustain the improvements and also to maintain a process of continuous change was vital.
- **Laming Visits** – a robust reporting process in place for Laming Visits with the objective of bringing the Panel closer to cases, creating the conditions for Members to appreciate the complexity and challenges of the responsibilities of the Service eg by meeting front line staff to discuss casework in general. Panel Members looked at 2 aspects over the last quarter:
 - i. **Annual report** – was received summarising the Laming Visits themes during 2017/18:
 - ✚ Workforce / child placement team (October, 2017)
 - ✚ Teulu Mōn (November, 2017)
 - ✚ Resilient Families / Children's Specialist Services (December, 2017)
 - ✚ Quality assurance and safeguarding (January, 2018)
 - ✚ Support for disabled children (February, 2018)
 - ii. **Monthly Laming Visits** – Members reported back on the April → June Laming Visits under the strengthened governance framework. These Visits focused on:
 - i. IFSS (30/04/18) – Team role, with particular focus on the Team contribution to Theme 4 of the Service Improvement Plan (working proactively with families to manage risk and working alongside families helping them to change so that the family is a safe place for their children)
 - ii. Early intervention (29/05/18) – purpose of the Team and a focus on its contribution to the Service Improvement Plan
 - iii. Specialist Children's Services (19/06/18) – observing a multi-disciplinary case discussion on a child with complex care needs
 - **Training / awareness raising sessions** – incorporated into the Panel work programme, these sessions are convened at the beginning of each Panel meeting. Topics covered over the last few months included – Risk Model framework for assessing risk of significant harm (Bruce Thornton); key messages from the recent National Review "*Crisis in Care*" (which examined the factors contributing to the national increase in the number of LAC children and the increase in applications for care orders).

4. MEASURING OUTCOMES AND IMPACT OF THE PANEL

4.1 Context

As previously reported, capturing and assessing the impact of Scrutiny is a challenge to achieve as the outcomes of scrutiny activities are not always tangible and often do not lend themselves to being measured in a systematic way. Also, it is not easy to measure the effectiveness of Scrutiny's ability to influence decision makers through discussion and debate. The journey of the Children's Services Improvement Panel is however an example of where the input of scrutiny has added value and influenced the way in which proposals have been implemented by the Council.

4.2 Children's Services Improvement Panel

Scrutiny of the improvement journey in children's services has matured over the past year or so, through the input of the Children's Services Improvement Panel. Care Inspectorate Wales have commended this development journey:

"....We recognise the continued corporate commitment provided to ensure that children's services improve and the willingness to reach a shared understanding of the challenges being faced. Similarly, the increased scrutiny and challenge from elected members has been a positive development....."

Panel Members have undertaken a self-evaluation of the work of the Panel⁵ in order to:

- i. measure the impact of the Panel on the improvement programme in Children and Families' Services
- ii. enable Panel Members to grade the RAG status of Theme 1.5 of the Service Improvement Plan for children's services. This is concerned with progress to date against 2 recommendations of the recent Care Inspectorate report⁶ which directly relate to the role of Members.

4.3 Outcomes of Self-evaluation by Members of the Children's Services Improvement Panel

4.3.1 The following questions were used as a framework to enable Members to evaluate the contribution of the Panel on the journey towards improving Children's Services:

Q1 In terms of the work of the Panel, what were the highlights for you as individual Panel members during the last year?

Q2 In your opinion, what impact did the Panel have in challenging and holding Children's Services to account in a significant improvement journey?

Q3 Are there any aspects of the Panel's work that could be improved or delivered more effectively in moving forward?

Q4 What development needs do you have in order to support you in your role?

Q5 Any general observations on the influence and / or impact of the work of the Panel on decision making processes?

4.3.2 This work-stream has evidenced the following positive outcomes:

- A team of Members, drawn from across the political parties and groups, who have developed a high level of knowledge about the complexities of children's services and a level of expertise in the service area
- Development of a model of working that focuses on a smaller group, encouraging good attendance and teamwork
- Creating conditions that are conducive to effective Scrutiny eg there has been a tangible improvement in the level and depth of questioning by the Panel
- Scrutiny activity is well planned, efficient and objective and based on evidence from a range of sources
- Better understanding by Elected Members of the complexities and risks in Children's Services in order to be able to effectively scrutinise, hold to account and identify priorities in moving forward.

⁵ Meeting of the Children's Services Improvement Panel convened on 24th May, 2018 & 30th July, 2018

⁶Inspection of Children's Services: Isle of Anglesey County Council (March, 2017)

4.3.3 Development areas were identified by Panel members as part of the self-evaluation and these have been summarised under 7 key themes:

- ✚ Link with monthly Member Briefing Sessions
- ✚ Laming Visits
- ✚ Panel forward work programme
- ✚ Partnership working
- ✚ Frequency of meetings
- ✚ Member development needs
- ✚ Measuring scrutiny outcomes and impact

These themes have been included in the Panel's forward work programme and progress will be reported to this Committee on a quarterly basis.

A copy of the report on the self-evaluation is attached (**Appendix 1**).

5. MATTERS TO BE ESCALATED FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE PARENT COMMITTEE

The following matters be escalated for consideration by the Corporate Scrutiny Committee:

5.1 Although good progress has been made on implementing the revised staffing structure, some posts remain filled by agency workers (which has been previously reported to the Committee by the Panel). This is being addressed by appointing social workers (experienced and newly qualified) and supporting experienced support workers to qualify. The actions taken to address this should be noted.

5.2 The Corporate Scrutiny Committee is requested to come to a view about the robustness of the Panel's monitoring thus far.

6 – Equality Impact Assessment [including impacts on the Welsh Language]

N/A

7 – Financial Implications

N/a

8 – Appendices:

Measuring the Impact of Scrutiny: Self Evaluation by Members of the Children's Services Improvement Panel (Appendix 1)

9 - Background papers (please contact the author of the Report for any further information):

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Cllr Richard Griffiths

Corporate Scrutiny Committee representative on the Children's Services Improvement Panel / Children in Care Champion

Date: 23/08/18



**MEASURING THE IMPACT OF SCRUTINY
SELF-EVALUATION BY MEMBERS OF THE
CHILDREN'S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT
PANEL**

May, 2018



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1. Background

1.1 Care Inspectorate Wales Expectations

A recent inspection of the Council's Children's Services by Care Inspectorate Wales¹ clearly states the expectation as regards political leadership:

“That Elected Members have a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of practice and performance to enable them to discharge their responsibilities effectively.”

1.2 Care Inspectorate Wales Inspection

Care Inspectorate Wales made 14 recommendations following its inspection, two of which directly related to the role of Members:

- *The Council should continue to support senior leaders to improve their knowledge and understanding of the complexities and risks involved in delivering children's services to assure themselves, partners, staff and communities that their responsibilities are discharged to maximum effect*
- *Strong political and corporate support for children's services must continue to ensure the service improvements needed are prioritised and the pace of improvement accelerated and sustained.*

1.3 Role of the Children's Services Improvement Panel

The Corporate Scrutiny Committee² established the Children's Services Improvement Panel as a standing sub-panel of the parent committee, with the following elements and building upon the previous work of the Panel:

- Developing a model of working on children's services matters focusing on a smaller group to enable Members to become more involved, develop a level of subject expertise, encourage good attendance and teamwork
- Strengthen the capacity of Members to challenge performance by improving the quality of information regarding services and experiences of children and families who receive support and / or services
- Forum to discuss information regarding Service risks, as a basis to inform the forward work programme of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee
- Forum to develop a group of Members with the expertise and ownership to lead discussions with regard to children and young people's issues in the Corporate Scrutiny Committee
- Offer support to the Young People's Champion and the Children in Care Champion, a new role since the 2017 Election.

¹ Inspection of Children's Services: Isle of Anglesey County Council (March, 2017)

² Corporate Scrutiny Committee at its meeting of 10th April, 2017

1.4 Service Improvement Plan (SIP)

An Improvement Plan was put in place by Children's Services as a framework to prioritise and monitor improvements and also in response to the inspection by the Care Inspectorate. This Plan was further refined recently to include a RAG status for each of the key areas for improvement. Below is a high level summary of the RAG grades:

RED – 0; AMBER – 5; YELLOW – 10; GREEN – 5

During a recent discussion on the Plan³, the Children's Services Improvement Panel decided to give further consideration to the RAG status of Theme 1.5 of the Improvement Plan. Theme 1.5 considers the role of Elected Members in the improvement journey for Children's Services. This was achieved through completing a short self-evaluation process.

2. Measuring Outcomes and Impact of Scrutiny

2.1 Context

Capturing and assessing the impact of Scrutiny is a challenge to achieve as the outcomes of scrutiny activities are not always tangible and often do not lend themselves to being measured in a systematic way. Also, it is not easy to measure the effectiveness of Scrutiny's ability to influence decision makers through discussion and debate. There are however some examples where the input of scrutiny has added value and / or influenced the way in which proposals have been implemented by the Council. The work of the Children's Services Improvement Panel is a positive example in this regard.

2.2 Improvements and Performance of Children's Services

Scrutiny of the improvement journey in children's services has matured over the past year through the input of the Children's Services Improvement Panel. The purpose of this self-evaluation was therefore to provide a framework for Panel Members to review 4 aspects:

What worked well

Identify what impact the Panel had

Areas for improvement

Member development needs

³ Meeting of the Children's Services Improvement Panel convened on 25th April, 2018

3. The Task

3.1 Elected Members were invited at the beginning of a recent meeting of the Children's Services Panel⁴ to grade the status of Theme 1.5 of the Children's Improvement Plan using the following framework:

- **RED** – overdue
- **AMBER** – behind schedule
- **YELLOW** – on track
- **GREEN** – completed

3.2 A development session at the beginning of the Panel meeting was used to complete the self-evaluation exercise, before moving on to consider the Panel's other business. It was also a means to confirm Member ownership and establish a further foundation for the next period.

4. Self-Evaluation Questions

4.1 Elected Members used a series of questions as a framework to enable them to evaluate the Panel's contribution to the Children's Services improvement journey:

Q1. In terms of the work of the Panel, what were the highlights for you as individual Panel members during the past year?

Q2. In your opinion, what impact did the Panel have in challenging and holding Children's Services to account in implementing a significant improvement journey?

Q3. Are there any aspects of the Panel's work that could be improved or delivered more effectively in moving forward?

Q4. What development needs do you have in order to support you in your role?

Q5. Any general observations on the influence and / or impact of the work of the Panel on decision making processes?

5. Conclusions

5.1 What Care Inspectorate Wales had to say about the Panel's contribution

In its recent review of progress in implementation of Children's Services improvements, Care Inspectorate Wales commended the contribution of the Panel:

"...We recognise the continued corporate commitment provided to ensure that children's services improve and the willingness to reach a shared understanding of the challenges being faced. Similarly, the increased scrutiny and challenge from elected members has been a positive development..."⁵

⁴ Cyfarfod o'r Panel Gwella Gwasanaethau Plant a gynhaliwyd ar 24 Mai, 2018

⁵ Correspondence dated 11/01/18 from Care Inspectorate Wales (Review of progress in implementation of Children's Services Improvement Plan)

5.2 Elected Member Observations on the Children's Services Panel

71%⁶ of the Panel's Elected Members participated in the self-evaluation. Below is a summary of what they had to say:

Q1. What were the highlights for you as individual Panel members during the past year?

Our understanding of the complexities of Children's Services is improving month by month

Establishing robust governance arrangements for the Panel is a significant achievement

Laming Visits:

Reporting arrangements back to the Panel has increased Councillors' understanding and accountability

Development sessions at the beginning of each meeting is an effective way of raising awareness and educating us as Members about the breadth of the Service. This is an opportunity to enquire and ask questions

Well organised work programme steering the Panel's work and as a result a broad range of areas have been examined by the Panel eg individual themes of the SIP; relationship with Schools, Housing Services & Police; quality assurance; social work practice; performance indicators and financial aspects; staffing structure

The level and depth of our questioning has improved over the past year which is a reflection of a better understanding of the area and increased confidence to scrutinise. We now ask much more probing questions

⁶ 5 of the 7 Panel members



Q2. What impact did the Panel have in challenging and holding Children's Services to account in implementing a significant improvement journey?

As Panel members, we can now appreciate the significance of the link between the staffing structure and the impact on the quality of services to children, young people and families

Our ability to ask probing questions now adds value to the improvement journey in Children's Services

As Elected Members on the Panel, we are able to follow up on our discussions and look for evidence to confirm progress when meeting staff of the Service on Laming Visits

It is true to say that there is evidence of joint ownership and understanding of the improvement journey in Children's Services across the political groups

Regular progress reports to the parent committee on the work of the Panel ensures focus and momentum for our work as Councillors on the Panel. Also, it is a good way of ensuring joint ownership of the improvement journey amongst other Members

We are leading more and contributing to discussions with our co-Members in committees when matters arise concerning Children and Families services



Q3. Are there any aspects of the Panel's work that could be improved or delivered more effectively in moving forward?

Strengthen the link between the Panel work programme and Member Briefing Sessions, in order to include all Councillors. Do this by including more children's services matters on the work programme of the monthly Briefing Sessions

Enabling us to get a better understanding of the fostering and adoption system - the process and range of options

Adding more finance related issues to the Panel work programme eg financial implications of casework decisions

Convene more Laming Visits in order to share more information

We should add the schemes that contribute to the Service prevention strategy to our work programme eg Flying Start, Youth Service

It would be beneficial for us to look at the work of other partners such as the Health Board, Youth Justice, Police etc

We may need to revisit how often the Panel should meet from 2019/20 onwards



Q4. What development needs do the Elected Members have in order to support them in their role?

Skills in order to analyse key performance indicator data in an informed way

Financial scrutiny skills

Better understanding of the cause of harm to children who come into the care of the Authority

Q5. Any general observations on the influence and / or impact of the work of the Panel on decision making processes?

We get significant benefit from being Panel members

There is no doubt that our level of understanding of the complexities of the Service has increased considerably over the past year

Our aim is to work as a "critical friend"

Our attendance levels as Members has been consistently high so far. This shows political ownership and commitment to making a contribution to the improvement journey and creating the conditions for continuous improvement for the vulnerable children and young people of Anglesey

5.3 Outcomes

We are able to evidence some outcomes in light of our scrutiny work in Children and Families Services:

- A small team of Members who have developed a high level of knowledge about the complexities of children's services and a level of expertise in this service area
- Development of a model of working that focuses on a smaller group, encouraging good attendance and teamwork
- Creating conditions that are conducive to effective Scrutiny eg there has been a tangible improvement in the level and depth of questioning by the Panel
- Scrutiny activity is well planned, efficient and objective and based on evidence from a range of sources
- Better understanding by Elected Members of the complexities and risks in Children's Services in order to be able to effectively scrutinise, hold to account and identify priorities in moving forward.

Based on the findings of this self-evaluation, Elected Members on the Panel decided that Theme 1.5 of the Improvement Plan should currently be graded **YELLOW** (with significant elements being green).

6. Next Steps

6.1 Local Context

Keeping vulnerable children and young people safe is a critically important role and one that requires the Council and partners to work together effectively. There has been significant public attention in recent years due to high profile examples where the system has failed vulnerable individuals, with tragic consequences.

In reporting poor inspection outcomes, care inspectorates⁷ often cite poor scrutiny practices amongst other system failings. Ensuring meaningful and robust scrutiny of policies and also support and / or services available to protect vulnerable children and young people is therefore a key element of the leadership role of Scrutiny members.

6.2 Priorities for the next period

Some matters have arisen from the self-evaluation which require attention over the next period. The following matters will therefore be prioritised on the forward work programme of the Panel:

⁷ Care Inspectorate Wales; Care Quality Commission (England)

Development Areas

THEME	HOW
Link with Monthly Member Briefing Sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Strengthen the link through better alignment between the work programmes of the Panel and Briefing Sessions ii. Negotiate items from Children and Families Services on Briefing Session agendas
Laming Visits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Continue to schedule monthly Laming Visits during 2018/19 and beyond ii. Continue to include a range of topics / themes for the individual Visits
Panel Forward Work Programme	<p>Add the following topics to the Panel forward work programme:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial matters eg financial implications of casework decisions • Projects that contribute to the Service prevention strategy • Fostering and adoption system
Partnership Working	<p>Add partnership working from the following areas to the Panel work programme: Health Board; Youth Justice; North Wales Police</p>
Frequency of Meetings	<p>Schedule a review of frequency of Panel meetings in early 2019</p>
Member Development Needs	<p>Add the following to the list of Panel development session topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skills in analysing performance indicator data • Financial scrutiny skills • Source of harm to children who come into the care of the Authority (Cordis Bright)
Measuring Scrutiny Outcomes and Impact	<p>Undertake a further self-evaluation by the Panel's Elected Members within the next 12 months</p>

6.3 Review of Scrutiny Panels

This report will form part of a broader review by the Council of the work of all scrutiny panels⁸ to ensure:

- i. Clear and robust work programmes
- ii. Appropriate pace and focus
- iii. Areas of focus are in accordance with corporate priorities.

Anwen Davies
Scrutiny Manager
[On behalf of Elected Members on the Children's Services Improvement Panel]

⁸ Schools Progress Review Scrutiny Panel; Finance Scrutiny Panel; Children's Services Improvement Panel