Cabinet Member Report October 2014

Cabinet Member: Cllr Sue Perkins
Portfolio: Cabinet Spokesperson for Education and Safeguarding
Electoral Division: Pembroke Dock Llanion
Political Group: Independent Plus

Cabinet Portfolio Activity

Since writing my last report to Cabinet my portfolio has been extended to include Education as well as Safeguarding. The portfolio encompasses a wide range of service areas relating to children and young people including Children’s Services, Education, Inclusion, School Effectiveness, Pembrokeshire Youth (including Youth Justice), Children’s and Young People’s Rights and Participation as well as Adult and Community Education.

I am the designated Lead Member for children and young people’s services, as required under Working Together Under the Children Act, 2004.

As the Poverty Champion I have lead responsibility for promoting anti poverty measures within the Local Authority.

I also have lead responsibility for children and young people’s advocacy

Role and Responsibilities

I sat on the following Committees:
- Cabinet
- Disciplinary Investigation Committee

I have also attended the Safeguarding and Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committees to report to these committees on matters within my portfolio

I sat on the following internal groups:
- Corporate Parenting Board (Chair)
- PLC Safeguarding Committee
- Adoption and Foster panels
- 21st Century Schools Strategic Programme Management Board
- Family of Schools Governors forum
- Pembrokeshire schools forum
- Anti Poverty Group
- Autistic Spectrum Disorder Stakeholder Group

I represented the County Council on the following external organizations:
- Communities First (Chair)
Progress Report

This is my fifth report as lead member and I am pleased that the many areas of progress that I have reported on previously have been maintained, and that continuous improvement has been achieved.

1. What has gone well:

Children’s rights
On March 31st Pembrokeshire made a very public commitment to the rights of children and young people when the Authority formally adopted the United Nations Convention for the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) at a high profile event in County Hall attended by children and young people from across the county and the Children’s Commissioner for Wales, Keith Towler. The adoption of the UNCRC is a key element of the Pembrokeshire Strategy for the Participation and Rights of Children and Young People. Children and young people in Pembrokeshire will be scrutinizing the authority against the UNCRC, and reporting their findings to the Welsh Government as part of the UNCRC reporting cycle. The innovative work which Pembrokeshire is undertaking in this area has attracted considerable interest nationally, and I have met with the Children’s Commissioner for Wales and his Chief Executive Eleri Thomas, and also with Sarah Hooke, the UNICEF Professional Adviser for Wales, Rights Respecting Schools to discuss our approach.

Estyn
Following the Inspection by Estyn of Education Services for children and young people in October 2012, Pembrokeshire was identified as requiring special measures. Recommendations were made by Estyn in respect of arrangements for safeguarding including the handling of cases of alleged professional abuse, raising educational standards, improving leadership and management in underperforming schools, oversight by elected members and officers of performance and safeguarding, and strengthening arrangements for self evaluation and planning. My previous reports have noted the measures that have been put in place since October 2012, and the progress which has been made in meeting these recommendations.
In late June Pembrokeshire received a monitoring letter from Estyn concluding that:

‘Pembrokeshire County Council is judged to have made sufficient progress in relation to the recommendations following the inspection of October 2012. As a result, Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales considers that the local authority is no longer in need of special measures and is removing it from further follow-up activity’.

Shortly after the receipt of the monitoring letter I accompanied Senior Officers from Pembrokeshire to the annual conference of the Association of Directors of Social Services in Wales, where we gave a presentation on the steps that Pembrokeshire has taken to address the significant failings in safeguarding in education which had been identified by Estyn in October 2012. The fact that Pembrokeshire was invited to share our experiences at this high profile event indicates that there is a national recognition of the scale of our journey and the progress that has been made both within Children and Schools and also across the whole Council. In particular the progress that has been made in developing robust arrangements for managing allegations of professional abuse has been recognized nationally as sector leading.

I would like to acknowledge the level of commitment and hard work that has been required from Senior Officers and staff throughout the Children and Schools directorate to achieve these substantial improvements in both safeguarding and standards.

CSSIW Inspection
During the spring the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) undertook a national inspection of services for looked after children and care leavers exhibiting vulnerable and risky behaviours.

Individual authority reports were published at the end of August, and a national overview report is expected shortly. The Pembrokeshire report identified 30 areas of positive practice including

- The corporate priority given to Childrens Services and its location within the Children and Schools directorate
- the effectiveness of the Corporate Parenting Board and commitment to collaborative working
- the priority given to recruitment, retention and development of the social
services workforce
- good working relationships with partners, in particular the Police and Health staff, senior officers, elected members and partners had a good knowledge of looked after children and care leavers and potential vulnerabilities and risky behaviours at both the individual and population levels
- the stability and experience of the Independent Reviewing Officer Service and the mechanisms in place to support the influence of the IRO service
- the early adoption of ‘When I’m Ready’ arrangements
- care leavers responded well to support they received from their personal advisers, a child friendly format had been developed for pathway plans, and weekly drop in sessions were being held for young people
- the work of the looked after children educational support service was clearly valued including their ability to negotiate and resolve issues within schools
- the development of therapeutic services to support children with more complex issues

2. What still needs to be improved:

Whilst the CSSIW inspection report was positive overall, inevitably some areas for further development were identified. These relate to governance, strengthening independent challenge via the Independent Reviewing Service, the quality of planning, assessment and evaluation of risk, risk management and preparation or independent living. Actions to address these issues have been included in service improvement plans.

Integration of services for children with additional learning needs and disabilities
In my last report I noted that a full review of services for children with disabilities and additional learning needs was to be completed with a view to moving towards the integration of all services for children with additional needs. Considerable work has now been undertaken towards this end, with a restructure within Inclusion Services and also a realignment of caseloads within the Children with Disabilities Team to enable a focus on disability rather than statutory social work. There is still a degree of work to be completed before full integration can be achieved, and an implementation plan has been developed.
Performance

Performance in Children and Schools is monitored closely via a monthly directorate Performance Management Board meeting, ensuring that potential trends and issues can be identified at an early stage and corrective actions put in place.

Education

I was very pleased to see that outcomes for children in our primary schools improved significantly this year – at the Foundation Phase (age 7), performance on the key indicator improved by over 4 percentage points, and Pembrokeshire now ranks 5th amongst the Welsh authorities. At Key Stage 2 (age 11), performance on the key indicator improved by almost 6 percentage points, and we now also rank 5th.

In our secondary schools, performance is more mixed – we saw improvement at KS3 (age 14) of just over one percentage point on the key measure, and now rank 10th. At KS4 (age 15/16), we saw improvement of less than 1 percentage point on the key indicator. At the time of writing, we don’t have the full set of data for other Welsh LAs, but we do know that Pembrokeshire now ranks 6th amongst the 6 LAs that make up the ERW region. It is encouraging to see the improvement in the schools which have received the most challenge and support from the school effectiveness service, but it is clear that all our schools have more to do to ensure that Pembrokeshire’s children achieve to their fullest potential.

I would like to thank the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the close interest it has taken in educational standards in the County, and in particular the sessions that have been held with Headteachers and Chairs of Governors. I think it is important that these continue, and I know the Committee has plans in hand to do this.

Youth Service

In July of 2014 a former youth worker of Pembrokeshire County Council Mr Michael Smith was convicted for a series of serious offences against a friend’s child. At the time of his arrest a significant number of obscene images of children were found on his computer.

Mr Smith had been dismissed from the Youth Service in 2012 for breeches of Health and Safety.

An Historical Complex Abuse Inquiry was conducted by Police and Social Services and so far despite 150 young people being contacted and a great deal of media coverage there have been no further offences as yet identified.

A review of the previous handling of Mr Smith’s Disciplinary Hearing has been concluded and confirmed the finding of Estyn back in 2012 that there were serious defects in the Education Service’s handling of the allegations.
These have been fully addressed as noted in the Estyn Reports of 2013 and 2014.

A further ‘lessons learnt’ event will be held to ensure these messages are delivered.

**Children’s services**

There has been a continued improvement in performance against national measures for Children’s Services, with results for Pembrokeshire for 2013/14 sitting in the upper quartile for 26 of the 46 indicators which are ranked. Improvements have been sustained over the first 6 months of 2014/15.

Of particular note are improvements in the percentages of Initial Assessments which have been undertaken where the child has been seen or seen alone by the Social Worker completing the assessment. At 60.7% for 2013/14 Pembrokeshire Children Services achieved the highest percentage in Wales for Initial Assessments where the child had been seen alone and at 91.9% the 4th highest in Wales for the child having been seen.

The timeliness of reviews of children in need plans has also shown significant improvement from 64.7% in 2012/13 to 83.4% in 2013/14.

Increases in the percentage of looked after children who have experienced one or more school moves during the year (22%) and the percentage of looked after children who have had three or more placements during the year (14.5%) reflect changes in the profile of the looked after children population. The number of children looked after by Pembrokeshire County Council has decreased steadily, as a result of improved preventative services and a focus on rehabilitating children home. With 124 children looked after at the end of March 2014, Pembrokeshire now has the lowest rate of looked after children per 10,000 in Wales (50). With a reduced population those children and young people who remain looked after are tending to have more complex difficulties, which may make it more likely for changes in school or placement to occur. The new therapeutic services which are being developed will provide valuable additional support for these children and young people.

**Learning and Development**

I have attended the following courses/seminars

Elected member events

- Police and Crime Commissioner
- Adult Protection
- Safeguarding Awareness - Cabinet
- The Child's Journey
- Welfare Reform
To fulfill my responsibilities as Lead Member for children and young people’s services I meet regularly with all Senior Officers within the Children and Schools directorate. I also undertake visits to frontline teams within Children’s Services, which since my last report have included the Children in Need Team, the Children with Disabilities Team and the Assessment Team. I intend to visit all teams within the next few months. Since the extension of my portfolio to include Education I have also commenced a rolling programme of visiting schools, meeting with head teachers and talking to school councils.

I have also been involved in a number of additional activities, including the following:

**Education events**

- Raising Standards for the Emotional, Social and Behavioural Aspects of Learning Conference
- Parent Workshop for Children and Young People with Additional Learning Needs
- Oversight of School Improvement Hub Arrangements
- Looked After Children’s Education Event
- Raising the bar - tackling poor attendance
- Time to talk Special Educational Needs

**Other Activities and Issues**

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I have also been involved in a number of additional activities, including the following:

- Planning - Affordable Housing
- Pay and Grading - Appeals Process
- School Data
- Mental Health in Schools
- Financial Settlement AM
- Financial Settlement PM
- Leisure Watch
- Autism Spectrum
- Performance Management
- Financial Settlement 2
- Hywel Dda Health Board - Reconfiguration of Services Briefing
- Secondary School Reorganisation Proposals
- Welfare Reform Update
- Working Effectively Together
- Domiciliary Care/Reablement Contract Award
- Cost Reductions and Efficiencies
- School Organisation
- Developing Governance in Schools in Pembrokeshire
- Press statement regarding former youth worker
- Media Training for Cabinet
- Cost Reductions and Efficiencies 2015-2016 and Beyond
• Reception for German student teachers
• Pembrokeshire Outdoor Schools presentation at Scolton Manor
• Adult Learners Awards
• Broad Haven School- Welsh Learners Event
• Childrens’ Commissioner for Wales visit to Pennar School
• St Davids Cathedral Graduation Ceremony
• Meeting with Wales Audit Office regarding Pembrokeshire Safeguarding Study
• Anti poverty meeting with Swansea Head of Poverty and Prevention alongside PCC officers and Communities First, sharing good practice to inform developments locally
• Pembrokeshire Schools Music Festival
• FAST (Families and Schools Together) Graduation at Pembroke Dock Community School
• Meeting with Pembrokeshire College to discuss current and future working with PCC
• Meeting with Monmouthshire County Council sharing good practice regarding safeguarding