

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITY & CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting of the Community & Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held at the County Borough Council Offices, The Pavilions, Cambrian Park, Clydach Vale, on Wednesday, 9th October 2013 at 5.00 pm.

Present:

County Borough Councillor (Mrs) M E Davies – in the Chair

County Borough Councillors:

C Davies	A S Fox	I Pearce
R W Smith	L Walker	(Mrs) J S Ward
D Weeks	D H Williams	

**Cabinet Members in attendance in relation to Agenda Item 3
(Mrs) A Davies – Children's Social Services
M Forey – Partnerships and Adult Social Services**

Officers:

Mr N Elliott – Service Director, Direct Services, Business and Housing
Mr R Gatis – Service Director, Community Care
Mr A Gwynn – Service Director, Children's Services
Mr N Griffiths – Head of Financial Services, Community & Children's Services
Mr P Griffiths – Service Director, Performance & Resources
Mr C B Jones – Service Director, Legal & Democratic Services
Mrs A Edwards – Scrutiny Support Officer

16. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors W J David, S Lloyd, (Mrs) S Rees, (Mrs) A Roberts, (Mrs) J Rosser and B Stephens.

17. WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed County Borough Councillor C Davies to his first meeting of the Committee.

18. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

RESOLVED to note that in accordance with the Code of Conduct, there were no declarations of personal interest relating to the agenda.

19. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Community & Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held on 10th July 2013 be approved as a correct record.

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

20. WALES PROGRAMME FOR IMPROVEMENT: THE COUNCIL'S DRAFT ANNUAL DELIVERY REPORT FOR 2012/13

The Service Director, Performance and Resources introduced the report which set out the draft 2012/13 improvement priority assessments for the priorities which had been allocated to the Community & Children's Services Scrutiny Committee for 2012/13, namely Children & Family Centred Services and Maintaining People's Independence. He explained that the Council's draft Annual Delivery report would aim to set out what difference each improvement priority had made during 2012/13; areas for improvement in 2013/14; and the contribution made toward the Community Strategy.

The Service Director, Performance and Resources explained that as part of the process the Committee had a key role in reviewing and challenging the draft assessments that would be included in the 2012/13 delivery report. In addition he indicated he would welcome Members' feedback in relation to what extent the assessments correlated with performance updates the Committee had received during 2012/13 and to what extent the assessments set out the difference the improvement priority areas had made or helped to make in 2012/13.

To assist Members in considering the above issues, the Service Director, Children's Services and the Service Director, Community Care each provided the Committee with a presentation in relation to the information set out in their draft assessments and the evidence in support of service performance for 2012/13.

At the conclusion of each presentation, Members questioned the relevant service director in relation to the information provided.

RESOLVED:

- (i) to note the information received;
- (ii) that the views of the Community & Children's Services Scrutiny Committee be passed to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, in consideration of the Council's Draft Annual Delivery Report as follows:

Priority Area – Children & Family Centred Services

A Member pointed to the increased demand for Children's Services in recent years and asked what measures had been put in place to deal with this increase. The Service Director, Children's Services reported that there were a number of preventative initiatives in place such as the Rapid Response Team which will go out and work with families to deal with problems before they escalate. Additional support can be provided by the Integrated Family Support Team who work with families with complex needs, often involving substance misuse and they can assist in keeping young people at home when it's safe to do so. The 'Team Around the Family' (TAF) framework provides support in communities, bringing agencies together in an integrated and collaborative way. In addition, there were also the specific initiatives contained within the Looked After Children Action Plan.

The Member further asked whether these families were generally responsive to these initiatives and was informed that often they were although there would be some who were not in which case, if necessary, the statutory functions would then apply. The Service Director pointed out that other agencies also provided a level of support, some more than others and explained that it was vital to engage with these providers to ensure that all the pieces of the jigsaw were in place.

A Member asked what checks were in place to ensure the quality of the assessments undertaken by social care staff and was informed that a Quality Assurance Framework is in the process of being developed with the aim of ensuring standards are met. It was also explained that social workers undergo regular supervision sessions with their team manager every 4 – 6 weeks. These sessions may include the sampling of cases to ensure the quality of work. In addition, there were usually many occasions when there was a need to go through a case file in detail and take the opportunity to look back on actions taken, such as when preparing for court proceedings.

A Member suggested that the 34-35% increase in demand over 3 years was a huge leap and asked whether staffing levels had risen to meet this demand and if not did it mean that there was less time to give to each case. The Service Director reported that there had been increased investment in the service and work was underway to consider how services may need to be delivered differently. However, there was an impact on staff and increased pressures and that the timeliness of responses in particular had suffered.

A Member asked if the situation could get worse given the economic climate and the Service Director agreed that it could but pointed out that the issues which result in family breakdown are often complex and that actions were being taken that were intended to help alleviate this. The Member asked whether this pressure was translating into an increase in staff sickness levels. The Service Director explained that sickness levels were monitored and support provided. To date there had been no rise in sickness; however, it may have impacted to some extent on their ability to retain staff.

A Member referred to the first page of the draft Improvement Priority Assessment which commented that improvement in areas where it needed to do better was mixed and that some performance was in the bottom quartile. Whilst accepting that the economic climate was challenging he suggested that other authorities were facing the same challenge and asked what plans the Authority had to improve the situation. The Service Director responded by explaining that the increase in referrals had placed services under pressure and had a negative impact on some areas of performance. In the instances referred to, the number of assessments completed within seven days had actually increased however because of the increase in the number of referrals the overall percentage within timescale had decreased. The number of Looked After Children allocated to a qualified social worker had also increased but due to the greater number needing to be allocated, the percentage had reduced. How the Assessment Care Planning Services are currently organised is being reviewed to establish whether they could be targeted more productively. Models of delivery in other parts of the country were being looked at to see what lessons could be learnt. He added that all performance indicators not achieving their target would be reviewed to consider ways to improve.

A Member questioned the impact of the 'bedroom tax' on the service. The Service Director, Children & Young People explained that it would certainly have an influencing factor. He suggested that whilst some families might try harder to keep their young people at home in general it could lead to an increase in homelessness amongst young people.

The Member explained that he had been informed that whilst some families have been managing to pay the additional amount throughout the summer they would not be able to do so once they have to pay for heating and the situation will get tougher. Another Member added he had concerns that the number of Looked After Children would rise as a result of the additional pressures placed on families.

A Member noted the progress around Special Guardianship Orders and asked whether these tended to be undertaken by close friends or extended family members. He also asked how many children were placed with relatives and was it known if the outcomes for these children were better than for those placed outside their community. The Service Director reported that the placements could be with close friends or extended family; in some cases it could be a step-parent who had built a good relationship with the child. He reported that the number of children placed with relative foster carers had risen from 89 in 2011/12 to 119 in 2012/13. In relation to outcomes, he explained that generally children benefit from a stable family environment; however each child needed to be considered on an individual basis. Whilst in general children did better with family members there were exceptions to this and some young people did better in a residential setting. He explained that what was important was the individual needs of the child.

A Member referred to the work which had been undertaken to bring children & young people who had been placed in 'out-of-county' care back to Rhondda

Cynon Taf. She asked whether the Authority had the capacity to deal with those young people who might still need residential care. The Service Director, Children & Young People reported that before changing a child's placement all aspects of care would be considered. Increased investment had been devoted to improving the capacity of fostering services.

A Member asked whether there were hidden costs to the costs of placements in the draft Improvement Priority Report. The Service Director reported that the costs of a placement would be monitored as part of the very strong procurement arrangements in place and it was always made clear what was included as part of the care package. The cost of placements in the report represented the average cost of placements.

The Member asked what was the current furthest placement and the Service Director reported that it was Blackpool.

Another Member pointed out there were other hidden costs associated with 'out of county placements' such as the cost of social worker visits.

A Member welcomed the improvement to the timeliness of Case Conferences and asked what had brought about the improvement. The Service Director, Children & Young People reported that there had been an increase in Independent Reviewing Officer capacity and the benefits of this were now being seen.

A Member referenced the recent budget statement from the Welsh Government and asked what implications this would have for the service. He noted that there had been an announcement that there would be additional investment in Flying Start. The Head of Financial Services, Community & Children's Services reported that the detail of the provisional settlement for Rhondda Cynon Taf would not be known until the following week.

Priority Area – Maintaining People's Independence

A Member referred to the Memory Project and asked whether this would become a permanent service. The Service Director, Community Care explained that the intention was that it would be a permanent service as part of the Intermediate Care and Reablement service. He explained that at present the referrals were coming via hospitals mainly through Occupational Therapist involvement. There was now a need to develop the process so that referrals could be received from the community.

A Member pointed out the importance of the elderly remaining active in the community as a means of combating memory loss. The Service Director commented that this would be a role for the voluntary sector in the future through older persons clubs etc and agreed that it was key to keeping people active. The Member referred to the roll out of the Butterfly Project to Dan y Mynydd and asked to what extent further roll-out would be dependent on resources given the latest Welsh Government budget statement. Members were informed that there was a commitment to completing the work in Dan y

Mynydd which was now half way through. It was explained that the Authority had worked with Dementia Care Matters for a twelve month period which had resulted in the very successful Butterfly Project at Clydach Court. The Service Director pointed out that whilst resources are always an issue and could affect the rate of roll-out it was intended that the service manager would be able to take forward the good working practices currently in operation in Clydach Court to other establishments. He was also aware that the Group Director was committed to taking this work forward.

A Member referred to the reported success of the Reablement Service and asked how the Authority compared with others. The Service Director explained that whilst there is no national league table for the service all 22 Welsh authorities were part of a national improvement network for Reablement services which he chaired. The purpose of the network is to share best practice and he was confident that Rhondda Cynon Taf was well placed in this field.

A Member asked whether the Reablement service was cost effective – were the overall costs lower than they would have been if there was no service. The Service Director reported that it was cost effective. He explained that whilst it was not a cheap service the success in promoting independence and lessening the need for long term support meant that over time it was cost effective to deliver.

A Member asked whether the increased life expectancy of many with learning difficulties was posing a challenge for the service. The Service Director agreed that many children and young people now lived well into adulthood whereas in the past this would not have been the case. This was down to a number of factors such as improved health care, diet and housing and better understanding of conditions. He reported that whilst this is welcomed it did bring its own challenges and more work needed to go into the transition stages between adolescence and adulthood. It was also known that many with learning difficulties such as those with Down's Syndrome developed illnesses such as alzheimers and dementia at an earlier age.

In relation to the integration of health and social care services a Member asked how the service would gauge success. The Service Director explained that information would come from a number of sources such as feedback from clients in relation to how seamless the transition between health and social services was in their experience. He also explained that the integration would need to involve Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council as well to provide an operation across the regional footprint. He pointed out that the Reablement service was already integrated and operating well and he would be looking to ensure the same efficiencies across all service areas. Whilst he felt that it was unlikely that the changes would result in cost savings he would expect the services delivered to be more efficient.

The Member commented that a common concern reported to him was that of consistency. People receiving care wanted it delivered by the same people. The Service Director agreed that this was a challenge. He explained that as

the service provided care on a 24/7 basis it would be impossible for the same one or two care staff to visit a client each time. He reported that the service was structured into teams and the aim was that a client would receive care from a pool of approximately 6-8 people.

The Member also referred to the recent press coverage of 15 minute visits. The Service Director confirmed that the Authority did use 15 minute slots but these visits had to be seen in the context of the whole package of care e.g. in addition to one 15 minute visit there could also be another 3 or 4 other visits made to that client each day of varying lengths depending on need. He also pointed out that it was always stressed to care staff that they had to carry out what needed to be done regardless of any overrun of time. Whilst he would check, it was his understanding that the minimum visit time provided by external agencies was 30 minutes.

In relation to further questioning, the Service Director reported that care staff were usually allocated to clients within their local area. This was not always the case in the independent sector although they would be organised on a locality basis.

In conclusion, it was agreed that that the draft assessments set out under Appendices B and D were in accord with the performance updates received by the Committee during 2012/13 and that the assessments reflected how the action plans had driven improvement.

PUBLIC HEALTH WALES

21. CHILDHOOD INJURIES

The Committee welcomed Nicola John, Director of Public Health, Cwm Taf Local Health Board and Dr Sarah Jones of Public Health Wales who provided Members with a presentation in relation to childhood injuries for the age range 0 – 4 years.

Ms John thanked the Committee for the invitation to attend and handed over to Dr Jones who provided Members with the detailed statistics. She explained that when considering the overall picture for childhood injuries across Wales, Rhondda Cynon Taf was only slightly above the Wales average. However, when considering the statistics for 0-4 year olds, the picture was much more concerning especially when considering the burden of such injuries ie the number of years lost, hospital years lived with a disability and non-hospital years lived with a disability.

Dr Jones reported on the main causes of injuries in the 0-4 year olds such as:

- falls from beds, windows, stairs and falls which can lead to strangulation;
- Road traffic accidents

- although there were few pedestrian injuries this is mainly because children are now less active which gives rise to other concerns related to obesity;
- Unrestrained passengers is a major concern as children grow out of cars seats so quickly and they are expensive; in addition some parents do not use them;
- Burns and scolds
- Poisonings
 - Ligitabs used in washing machines and dishwashers – this was a new phenomena and a particular problem as they looked attractive to children but caused very serious internal burns when ingested;
 - Medicines – whilst manufacturers have become better at providing childproof tops to medicine containers the introduction of sachets is a concern;
- Carbon monoxide this is still a major issue and whilst there is no the evidence available at present there have been reports of liquid nicotine from e'cigarettes causing death.

In conclusion, Dr Jones reported on what action could be taken to reduce the number of injuries and reported on the importance of awareness raising and the introduction of community programmes. She explained that childhood injury rates were highest in more deprived communities and therefore it was sensible to focus attention on Communities First areas and she informed Members of some of the work which was being carried out across Wales such the Parents Pledge which had been introduced to mother and toddler groups in Wrexham.

Following her presentation, Dr Jones responded to Members' queries and confirmed that non-accidental injuries were not included in the statistics. She explained that the collection of data for non-accidental injuries was more problematic and not her area of expertise.

A Member pointed out that whilst the registered social landlords had carbon monoxide sensors fitted he expressed his concern in relation to the private sector. Dr Jones added that there were some suggestion which was yet to be evidenced that the sensors picked up a sudden increase in carbon monoxide emissions but not a gradual increase and she would provide Members with an update when the outcome of evidence review was available.

A Member asked whether there was any input into schools and Dr Jones felt that there could be especially in areas such as raising awareness of the dangers of window blind cords. She reported that her organisation was in the process of developing a poisoning education programme for schools and Ms John added that it was known that children did take their learning home thereby educating the parents as well.

Dr Jones provided Members with copies of the Public Health Wales' report into injuries and explained that she would be happy to provide additional copies.

Members thanked Ms John and Dr Jones for the very informative and interesting presentation.

RESOLVED: to note the information provided.

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF LEGAL & DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

22. EXCEPTION REPORT – COUNCIL PERFORMANCE REPORT – 30 JUNE 2012 (QUARTER 1)

The Head of Financial Services presented Members with the Exception Report which outlined the financial and performance management information for the Community & Children's Services Group for the period to 30th June 2013. He reported on the variances within the revenue budget and outlined the key issues and measures which have been put in place providing Members with a summary of the progress being made with regard to the Looked After Children Action Plan which is detailed within the main Cabinet report. In relation to the Wales Programme for Improvement Action Plans within the remit of the Committee he explained that these had been discussed during agenda item 3. Members were asked to consider the key issues extracted from the main report that had been presented to Cabinet Performance and Resources Committee on the 23rd September 2013.

The Committee was pleased to note the reduction in the sickness absence trend for the Group.

RESOLVED to note the information in the report.

REPORT OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR COMMUNITY & CHILDREN'S SERVICES

23. SOCIAL SERVICES AND WELLBEING (WALES) BILL – REPORT ON COMMITTEE STAGE 1

The Service Director, Direct Services, Business and Housing presented Members with a report which updated Members on the progress being made in relation to the passage of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Bill in the Welsh Assembly and also the deliberation at Stage 1 of the Health & Social Care Committee. The report provided a summary of some of the key elements of the Committee's recommendations as highlighted by the WLGA.

The Service Director, Direct Services, Business and Housing provided Members with an update reporting that the general principles of the Bill had been debated that morning and it had now moved from Stage 1 to

Stage 2. He explained that all parties welcomed the Bill in principle but that concerns were expressed in relation to scope; a lack of detail around the eligibility assessment and also financial input and he pointed out that there was still work to do before the Bill would progress any further. He reported that updates would be provided to the Committee as information becomes available.

RESOLVED: to note the information contained within the report, in particular, the WLGA position on elements of the Bill.

FFRAMWAITH

24. MINUTES

RESOLVED to note the minutes of the Fframwaith Partnership Board meeting held on 17th June 2013.

(Mrs) M E Davies
Chairman

The meeting closed at 6.58 pm.