

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 Monday, 15th December 2014 at 5.00 pm.

Present:

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

County Borough Councillors:

W J David
(Mrs) S Jones
(Mrs) A Roberts

C Davies
I Pearce
R W Smith

S Evans
(Mrs) S Rees
L Walker

Officers:

Mr G Isingrini – Group Director, Community & Children's Services
Mr N Elliott – Service Director, Direct Services, Business and Housing
Mr R Gatis – Service Director, Adult Locality Services and Short Term Intervention
Mr A Gwynn – Service Director, Children's Services
Mr B Davies – Director of Financial Services
Mr C B Jones – Service Director, Legal & Democratic Services
Mrs A Edwards – Scrutiny Support Officer

30. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors S Lloyd, (Mrs) J Rosser, B Stephens, (Mrs) J S Ward, D Weeks and D H Williams.

31. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made in relation to the agenda.

32. MINUTES

RESOLVED to approve as an accurate record the minutes of the meeting of the Community and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held on 4th November 2014.

33. GENERAL BUDGET CONSULTATION

The Director of Financial Services provided the Committee with a presentation in relation to the General Budget Strategy consultation process which he explained would focus on the three key areas, namely, services and priorities, Council Tax levels and the Council Tax Reduction Scheme. He pointed out that it did not include the separate consultation activity in respect of service change proposals although the opportunity was being taken to gather the

views of the public through the service change 'drop-in' sessions which had been organised. He explained that the general budget consultation process would be focussed on the Scrutiny Committees, the Schools Budget Forum, Older People's Advisory Group, representatives from Schools Councils and the public via online/hard copy questionnaires.

The Director of Financial Services reported on the consultation timetable and drew Members' attention to some key facts relating to the Council's Revenue spending and the key headlines relating to the Welsh Government's Provisional Settlement including the Welsh Government direction that local authorities are to increase school budgets by 0.6% in 2015/16. He reported on the development of an equitable budget strategy and highlighted the projected financial position of the Council and the need to bridge an expected funding gap rising cumulatively to £62.3M by 2017/18. He also reported on the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme and the local discretions available to the Council.

It was reported that the final settlement was published on the 10th December 2014 with no significant change to the provisional settlement.

Members were asked for their views in relation to the key issues and informed that their comments would be used to assist Cabinet in its deliberations before preparing a draft budget strategy which would be consulted upon as part of the Stage 2 consultation process and before making its recommendations to Council.

Before responding to the set questions, a Member asked whether any information would be brought back to Members in relation to those who had responded to the consultation. He explained that he had concerns that those without access to the internet or the elderly might be excluded from the process and as a result the Council would not be getting a clear picture.

The Director of Financial Services explained that this information would be included as part of the Consultation report which will be provided to Cabinet. He also reminded Members that the consultation had included the Older People's Advisory Group and the service change drop-in sessions were also being used to gather views and all this information would form part of the report which would go before Cabinet in January 2015.

RESOLVED that the views of the Community & Children's Services Scrutiny Committee be passed on to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in consideration of the Council's Service Improvement Priorities and Budget Proposals for 2015-2016 and the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme, as follows:

1. Service & Improvement Priorities

A Member agreed that the seven listed priorities were the right priorities to focus on and added that he would like to see more if it were not for the financial situation of the Council.

A Member agreed with this statement but expressed his concerns that the last priority, 'making best use of our budget' would be the most difficult in terms of convincing the public that the right approach was being taken.

2. Budget Consultation 2015/16 – What are your views on Council Tax levels for 2014/15?

A Member commented that the Council would be criticised whatever the level of increase decided upon.

Another Member felt that it needed to be pitched at an affordable level pointing out that Council staff had received a 1% pay rise. He also pointed out that increasing the Council Tax level too much would increase the number of defaulters. He suggested that a rise between 3.5% - 4% would be the most that would be accepted.

A Member asked whether there was any information available on the levels being set by other authorities. The Director of Financial Services reported that this information was not available at this stage.

3. Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme – Views on the Council's Discretionary decisions that may be added to the National Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

Members were in agreement that the current discretions should remain.

4. Any other Comments?

In response to a query, the Director of Financial Services explained that the scrutiny committees' views would be reported to Cabinet as part of the production of their draft budget strategy which would then be consulted upon (stage 2).

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF LEGAL & DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

34. EXCEPTION REPORT – COUNCIL PERFORMANCE REPORT – 30TH SEPTEMBER 2014 (QUARTER 2)

The Director 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 September 2014. Members were asked to consider the key issues extracted from the main report that had been presented to the Cabinet Performance and Resources Committee on the 20th November 2014 and the two priority areas

within the remit of the Committee ie Children & Family Centred Services and Maintaining People's Independence. He also referred to the Outcome Agreement area within the remit of the Committee, namely, 21st Century Health Care – Ensuring people receive the help they need to live fulfilled lives. Following the presentation of the report Members were invited to ask questions.

A Member referred to the pie chart which set out operational performance and voiced her concern regarding the number of performance indicators which had not hit target. She questioned whether the targets themselves were realistic and asked what needed to be done in terms of targeting resources in order to improve.

The Group Director commented that he did not feel that the targets were inappropriate and would prefer to aim high rather than set lower targets which would be more easily achieved. He explained that in some cases even achieving the set targets would still leave the Authority in the bottom quartile for performance. He further explained that the service was going through a period of transition with the Social Services and Wellbeing Act bringing challenges which required cultural changes which were difficult to bring about in an area of high levels of deprivation. He reported that the most important priority during this time was to keep people safe.

A Member asked whether any research had been undertaken to establish the level of need in each of the County Borough areas and asked whether the Act set out any requirements with regard to targeting resources.

The Group Director reported that the Act did not include any such requirements but explained that as a service they did prioritise and move staff around as necessary.

A Member pointed out that the sickness levels were high, particularly in relation to long term sickness and asked what was being done to respond to this.

The Group Director agreed that the sickness levels were too high and informed Members that work was being undertaken with Human Resources to maximise attendance. He informed Members that he was aware of the financial impact of sickness and as a Group it was intended to target long term sickness and revisit the management of the monitoring systems. He hoped to update Members at the time of the next quarterly monitoring report.

A Member referred to the exceptions set out at page 12 of the report and voiced her concern that those in relation to Children's Services were some way off target. She asked for reassurance that work would be undertaken to improve the situation.

The Service Director, Children's Services reported that significant staff issues coupled with the rise in referrals had placed pressure on the service. He

reported that improvement was now being seen but that the starting base had been low.

The Group Director advised that the latest figures for the % of initial assessments carried out within 7 working days showed that the service was now hitting target and felt that the Service Director should be credited for bringing about this improvement. He also informed Members of the work being undertaken across the teams to re-model the service which would lead to improvement in relation to the performance indicators in the long term.

A Member pointed out that this indicator was a statutory obligation and also pointed out that the Committee had a responsibility to ensure that this issue was being addressed. The Group Director advised that he had met with CSSIW that day. He reported that they had acknowledged that improvement was being made and their main concern was the continued high numbers on the Child Protection Register and Looked After Children. The work being undertaken with staff was making a difference and he hoped that they had turned a corner. However, the performance figures over the coming months would confirm whether or not this was the case.

With reference to the indicator in relation to the percentage of open cases of children with an allocated social worker he explained that the staff were all qualified and experienced but not necessarily social workers. He reported that work was being undertaken with regard to the mix of social workers and those not qualified as social workers across the teams which again should improve the performance of the indicator.

A Member asked if it was known what percentage of staff were not qualified social workers. The Service Director explained that an exercise had been undertaken to establish this and he would provide this information to Members.

A Member asked whether it was intended to continue delivering services on a locality based module ie Rhondda, Cynon and Taff.

The Group Director reported that it would be unwise to give a blanket assurance but did assure Members that any decision on the type of model used would be based on what was best in terms of delivering the service.

A Member asked for an explanation of the 'additional external support' referred to at page 20 of the agenda - Me08 'the number of applications for mainstream Foster Carers presented to Panel during the year'.

The Group Director reported that Children's Services was now 1 year into a 2 year contract with an independent agency engaged to support the recruitment of foster carers. Whilst this approach was generating more enquiries there was still work to do to ensure that these enquiries translated into an increase in approved foster parents.

A Member questioned the delay in the implementation of the new SWIFT based Single Core Assessment and the Service Director, Children's Services confirmed that this did 'go live' on 17th November. He explained that this combined assessment approach was part of the work to reduce bureaucracy.

The Chair referred to the Outcome Agreement indicator in relation to the number of attendances at carer training events during the year. The Service Director, Adult Locality Services and Short Term Intervention reported that whilst they had been unable to run as many large events this year they had undertaken more smaller group work.

A Member pointed to the importance of hitting the Outcome Agreement targets in order to maximise funding. The Director of Financial Services informed Members that it was a requirement to hit 80% of the targets to qualify for the maximum funding available and funding was then tapered depending on performance.

A Member suggested that it was misleading to imply in the WPI Action Plan that the Regional Adoption Service was established. The Group Director explained that whilst the actual tasks referred to within the Plan had been completed he agreed that the way it was set out was misleading. He informed Members that he was presenting a progress report to Cabinet the next day.

A Member asked whether it was known what proportion of sickness was attributable to stress related reasons.

The Group Director reported that there was data available in relation to sickness attributable to stress but that this may not show if it was work related or due to other reasons.

The Member commented that given the increase in workload he was concerned for the welfare of the staff especially in a time economic uncertainty.

The Group Director acknowledged that many staff did go above and beyond what was expected of them and explained that the Service Director, with the support of the unions, had maintained an effective workforce despite a level of absenteeism.

With reference to the Sickness Absence Health Check information a Member queried the role of 'Technician' referred to under occupational health activities. She was informed that this would be established.

A Member referred to the delay in the Prevention Strategy being reported to Cabinet. The Service Director, Children's Services informed the Committee that the Strategy had been completed but it had been considered sensible to delay presenting the report until the completion of the re-modelling work should there be a need to make any adjustments. He informed Members that the model itself had been agreed but that options to deliver the model were still under consideration. However, it was hoped to be complete by April 2015.

RESOLVED to note the content of the report.

REPORTS OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR, COMMUNITY & CHILDREN'S SERVICES

35. RHONDDA CYNON TAF SAFEGUARDING ANNUAL REPORT – 1ST APRIL 2013 TO 31ST MARCH 2014

The Service Director, Adult Locality Services and Short Term Intervention presented Members with the Rhondda Cynon Taf Safeguarding Annual Report 2013/14 which provides an overview of the operation and effectiveness of arrangements to safeguard adults across the County Borough and also progress in the development of the Cwm Taf Safeguarding Adults Board. The report also provided an overview of future actions which would need to be undertaken during 2014/15.

The Service Director assured Members that the significant increase in referrals during 2013/14 from 514 to 1097 were as a result of the centralisation of the referral process and not symptomatic of increased incidents of abuse. He reported that half of the referrals were dealt with as safeguarding concerns as the threshold to apply the full safeguarding procedures was not met. In all cases action was undertaken to ensure that the individual was safe and protected.

The Service Director led Members through the statistical data responding to queries.

Following consideration of the report it was **RESOLVED**:

- (i) to note the contents of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Adult Safeguarding Annual Report 2013/14.
- (ii) to note the work undertaken by all staff involved in the protection of vulnerable adults.

36. ESTABLISHMENT OF A CWM TAF MULTI AGENCY SAFEGUARDING HUB (MASH)

The Group Director, Community & Children's Services reported on the development of a Cwm Taf Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) which will be based at Pontypridd Police Station. He explained that the purpose of the MASH was to provide a consistent multi agency response and improve decision making. The Group Director explained that it was intended to commence the Adult Protection element within the MASH from January 2015 with the commencement of the Children's Safeguarding element in April 2015. However, he advised that there could be a slight slippage with regard to Adult Safeguarding timescales. He reported that in order to drive progress an executive group had been formed in addition to the MASH Programme Board which reports to the Cwm Taf Children and Adult Safeguarding Board.

Following consideration of the report it was **RESOLVED** to note the contents of the report and the progress made by all agencies involved in the project.

FFRAMWAITH

37 PARTNERSHIP CHANGES

The Service Director, Direct Services, Business and Housing provided Members with an oral update with regard to the Fframwaith Children & Young People Partnership. He reported on the recent decision of the Local Service Board to take a new approach towards partnership working and that as a result the Safety, Health, Prosperity and Fframwaith Partnerships were being stood down. He reported that as a result the Fframwaith Board had met for the last time on 31st October 2014. However, the multi agency work would remain in place and services would continue to be delivered being incorporated into the new model of working for Children's Services. He explained that Fframwaith would be producing a 'legacy' report to highlight what had been achieved by the Partnership and how partners could continue to contribute to the LSB "skills and jobs" strategic priority which would be brought back to the Community & Children's Services Scrutiny and Education & Lifelong Learning and Committees in due course.

In response to a question the Service Director reported that the decision to disband Fframwaith had not been a financial decision. He explained that should there be any monetary saving this would be fed back into the system toward bridging the budget gap.

RESOLVED to note the information.

(Mrs) M E Davies
Chairman

The meeting closed at 18:35 pm