

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**HEALTH & WELLBEING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**MINUTES** of the meeting of the Health & Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee held at the County Borough Council Offices, The Pavilions, Cambrian Park, Clydach Vale, on Wednesday, 20<sup>th</sup> January 2016 at 5 pm.

**Present:**

County Borough Councillor R W Smith – in the Chair

**County Borough Councillors:**

(Mrs) J Cass	W J David	C Davies
S M Evans	A S Fox	I Pearce
(Mrs) S Rees	G Stacey	

**Officers:**

Mr G Isingrini – Group Director, Community & Children’s Services  
Mr P Howells – Head of Community Housing Services  
Ms S Nowell – Head of Transformation  
Ms G Holliman – Head of Service, Long Term & Direct Services (Adults)  
Mr P Nicholls – Principal Solicitor  
Mrs A Edwards – Scrutiny Support Officer

**In attendance:**

County Borough Councillors:  
M Adams – Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee  
G Davies – Chairman of the Public Service Delivery, Communities & Prosperity Committee (agenda item 3)  
K Montague – Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Tackling Poverty, Engagement & Housing (agenda item 3)

**42. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors (Mrs) A Calvert, J Davies, (Mrs) M E Davies, (Mrs) A Roberts, (Mrs) M Tegg, L Walker, D W Weeks and D H Williams.

**43. WELCOME**

The Chairman welcomed Councillor G Davies who had chaired the Empty Properties Working Group and Councillor K Montague, the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Housing who were in attendance in relation to agenda item 3. The Chairman also welcomed Councillor Cass who was returning to her committee duties following surgery.

**44. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

**45. MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Health & Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee held on 16<sup>th</sup> December 2015 were approved as a correct record.

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

**46. RESPONSES FROM CABINET TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SCRUTINY WORKING GROUP IN RELATION TO EMPTY PROPERTIES**

The Head of Community Housing reminded Members of the work carried out by the working group of the former Environmental Services Scrutiny Committee chaired by Councillor Geraint Davies in response to concerns raised in relation to the number of empty properties across the county borough.

The Head of Community Housing reported that the report of the Empty Properties Working Group had been considered by Cabinet on 15<sup>th</sup> December when all the recommendations had been agreed in principle. As a result, in consultation with Cabinet Member for Tackling Poverty, Engagement & Housing, an action plan had been developed which sets out the actions needed to address the recommendations made, along with proposed timescales and the names of those responsible for carrying out the actions.

The Cabinet Member for Tackling Poverty, Engagement & Housing conveyed his thanks to the working group for reviewing the issue of empty properties which he acknowledged could have a huge negative impact on a neighbourhood. He provided the Committee with an overview of the Action Plan and pointed out that he would welcome the Health & Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee monitoring its progress.

Following presentation of the Action Plan, Councillor Geraint Davies thanked the Cabinet Member for his response and also thanked the Committee for allowing him to speak. He welcomed the general response from the Cabinet but wished to stress the urgency of the situation and asked that the pilot Housing & Health Action Area be rolled out to other affected areas as soon as possible. He also felt that more staff resource should be given to the service.. With regard to Recommendation 1 and its reference to the vision for the valley communities he spoke of the need for jobs and facilities in these communities which would give people a reason for living there. And he hoped that there would be opportunities in the future through the City Deal.

The Committee discussed Recommendation 9 which proposed that the current arrangements for Council Tax discounts allowed for empty properties be reviewed. Some concern was raised that a decrease in the current

discount scheme would penalise those people who had inherited property and now found themselves unable to sell these properties.

The Cabinet Member pointed out that the intention is to carry out an impact assessment to understand the implications of changing the Council Tax discount and he agreed that the main focus had to be to incentivise those absentee landlords who were leaving properties fall into disrepair rather than penalise those who found themselves in a difficult situation through no fault of their own.

In response to a query the Head of Community Housing explained that the new legislation requiring private landlords to be registered will not help with regard to empty properties but is aimed at ensuring that properties are fit for habitation and should also improve the standard of management by requiring that landlords are 'fit and proper' persons. However, he explained that there are other tools which the Council can use to bring properties back into use including enforcement action if necessary. He also reported that there is a need to explore how those who have found themselves with properties which they cannot dispose of can be given the knowledge to become landlords through encouragement and training and he explained that potentially the Housing Advice Centre could play a part in this.

The Chairman asked whether the continual housing development in the south of the county borough is having a detrimental effect on the North.

The Head of Community Housing agreed that the housing market is more buoyant in the south. The Cabinet Member reported that it is hoped to bring forward some work in the near future which potentially could have a positive effect on the rest of the housing stock. He explained that the northern parts of the county borough had housing stock which consisted of too many 3 bed roomed properties whilst the demand is for 1 or 2 bed properties. He also pointed out that younger people tended not to want to live in terraced properties. The Head of Community Housing explained that there is a need to reconfigure some of the housing stock to provide appropriate accommodation at the appropriate rent.

**RESOLVED:**

- (i) to support the implementation of the Action Plan;
- (ii) that progress of the Action Plan be monitored by the Health & Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee.

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

### **47. SOCIAL SERVICES & WELLBEING (WALES) ACT – IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAMME**

The Head of Transformation provided the Committee with a presentation on the progress of the Social Services & Wellbeing (Wales) Act implementation programme which set out;

- The fundamental principles of the Act;
- The Statutory Framework'
- The Cwm Taf Social Services & Wellbeing Programme;
- The Cwm Taf Implementation Plan and its Strategic Priorities; and
- The additional requirements for the Authority.

The Head of Transformation reported that the second draft of the Cwm Taf Regional Implementation Plan had gone before the Cabinet in November 2015 and this was attached to the agenda pack for Members' information.

The Head of Transformation reported that the delay in the publication of the regulations and codes of practice had delayed the implementation of the training modules for staff. She explained that training was set to commence the following week and it was the aim to get those staff deemed a 'priority' trained by the introduction of date of 6<sup>th</sup> April 2016.

The Head of Transformation reported on the great number of priorities within the strategic plan which she explained demonstrated the amount of work which needed to be undertaken and she also updated Members on the actions being undertaken to support these.

The Committee voiced concern at the late publishing of the regulations and codes of practice which had left little time for analysis and interpretation before implementation.

The Group Director, Community & Children's Services reported that funding had been secured in part from the Regional Grant and in part from the Association of Directors of Social Services Cymru to develop a national approach to the Act but this had been a difficult process. On a more positive note he reported that IPS who had worked with the Welsh Government in developing the Act and the training materials had been secured to provide training support locally. However, he pointed out that it would not be possible to get complete consistency across organisations until a common IT is established.

The Committee questioned what action had been undertaken to make the public aware of the changes arising from the Act.

The Head of Transformation reported that it is intended that each organisation will place information on their website. At the moment the public are directed to the Care Council's website which is easier to transverse. In addition, the

Welsh Government has information on their website signposting people. She explained that work is currently being undertaken to establish how best to place the information on the Council's website given that it has to complete with so much other necessary information.

The Group Director, Community & Children's Services suggested that scrutiny could play an invaluable role in assisting the department in developing how information, advice and guidance is delivered to the public.

The Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee commented on the importance of public engagement and pointed out that the elderly would be unlikely to look to the website for information.

The Head of Transformation explained that the fundamental principles of the Act are positive. However, the challenge now was to work toward these principles and raise the public's awareness of the vision of the Act and what it means for social services across Wales.

It was noted that some elements of the Act will take time to develop and that there may be some tension between the publicity launching the new Act inferring that people will be able to get more help and support and the pace of change in supporting increases to community capacity which are unlikely to be achieved overnight.

The Group Director pointed out that it is important that all members of the social care family including voluntary organisations and Communities First give out the same message.

The Chairman asked whether a baseline assessment had been carried out to determine community capacity.

The Group Director explained that a self assessment had been carried out of the Council's services but that there is a need to carry out a more comprehensive assessment of all available services across the region.

The Chairman commented that at the appropriate time the Committee could seek to engage with the public in considering the issue of advice and guidance. He also proposed that the next stage in the Committee's work should be to engage with the voluntary sector to establish their position in relation to the requirements of the Act.

The Group Director, Community & Children's Services informed Members that the Welsh Government had published a document which summarises the implications of the Social Services & Wellbeing ( Wales) Act for the NHS in Wales and he reported that he would send the details to the scrutiny support officer for circulation.

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

- (i) that the Committee will continue to monitor the implementation of the Social Services and Wellbeing Act;
- (ii) at the appropriate time, the Committee will take a role in informing the public and developing advice and guidance in relation to the Act and that the Committee should seek to engage with the public.

#### **48. LONG TERM & DIRECT SERVICES**

The Head of Service, Long Term & Direct Services (Adults) explained that her presentation linked into the earlier presentation in relation to the Social Services & Wellbeing (Wales) Act. She explained how Long Term & Direct Services had been re-structured and streamlined in readiness for the Act.

The Head of Service provided the Committee with the statistics for the service which set in context the environment in which the service is operating. She reported on the Direct Service provided through the Council's own residential care homes as well as supported living schemes and day centre provision. She pointed out that approximately 44% of all services are delivered by internal services which is higher than many other authorities in Wales.

The Head of Service reported on the many positives within the service which included a good relationship with its partner organisations and the relationship with its 3<sup>rd</sup> sector partners placed the service in a good position moving forward with the requirements of the Social SSWB Act. In fact she had received many enquiries from organisations with their proposals.

Members were informed of the quality assurance processes in place which provided confidence in the service. In response to a query she reported that during her time heading the service she was unaware of any complaint ever reaching Stage 3 of the Complaints procedure but she would check and confirm this position.

The Head of Service reported that there are areas of the service which need to improve and this included having clarity about what needs to be delivered in the future to be able to meet the demands of the SSWB Act. Progress needed to be made in targeted areas and there are five priorities for the coming year, namely:

- Improve the performance of completing timely reviews to manage cost and ensure effectiveness of delivery. Improvement has already been made in this area but the challenge will be to maintain performance;
- Reduce the number of people in residential/nursing care including specialist placements;
- Improve the number of carers assessments offered;
- Improve the number of Delayed Transfers of Care attributable to social care provision;
- Develop and begin implementation of a programme of modernisation for the delivery of learning disability services in RCT including accommodation.

In expanding on some of the points raised by Members in relation to performance issues in relation to Delayed Transfers for Care and the timeliness of reviews the Group Director reported on the hospital discharge liaison process which has improved pointing out that there are now much clearer lines of communication with Heads of Nursing as well as a number of practical measures introduced. Coupled with this there are monthly meetings held between the lead Service Director and Health to discuss shared developments but also allows the discussion and resolution of any difficult issues without the need to introduce formal measures.

The Group Director also reported that one reason why the service had been struggling to meet its targets for case reviews was that the social work teams had to deal with so many people reaching crisis point. He explained that a team has now been set up to concentrate on undertaking these reviews which is making a difference.

The Head of Service informed Members that a new Carers' Strategy for Cwm Taf is almost ready to go out to public consultation.

Overall, the Head of Service explained that there is a need to have different conversations with the public, Members and staff to promote independence and a greater use of community resources and ask 'what can you do for yourself?' rather than 'what can we do for you?'

Members voiced their concern regarding managing people's expectations and the Service Manager explained that to some extent the media's focus on the austerity agenda is easing the way for some of the difficult conversations which are having to be undertaken with service users and carers.

In conclusion, the Chairman thanked the Head of Service, Long Term & Direct Services (Adults) for her attendance and informative presentation.

**49. COMMITTEE REVIEW: SUPPORTING PEOPLE AT HOME**

Having received both presentations as detailed above (minute nos 47 & 48 refer), the Chairman concluded that the next stage of the Committee's work in relation to Supporting People at Home needed to be establishing the position of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sector and he therefore proposed inviting representatives from Interlink to the next meeting.

**RESOLVED:** that representatives from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sector be invited to the next meeting of the Committee to establish their position with regard to the implementation of the Social Services & Wellbeing (Wales) Act.

R W Smith  
Chairman

The meeting closed at 6.55 pm

