

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 Tuesday, 8th April 2014 at 5.00 pm.

Present:

County Borough Councillor W J David – in the Chair

County Borough Councillors:

C Davies	(Mrs) S Jones	(Mrs) J Rosser
R W Smith	B Stephens	L G Walker
(Mrs) J S Ward	D Weeks	

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 P J Lucas, Director of Legal & Democratic Services
Mr N Jones – Service Director, Operational Finance
Mrs A Edwards – Scrutiny Support Officer

58. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from the Chairman and Vice Chairman, (County Borough Councillors (Mrs) M E Davies and (Mrs) S Rees respectively) and County Borough Councillors, A Fox, S Lloyd, I Pearce, (Mrs) A Roberts and D H Williams.

59. CHAIRMAN

In the absence of the Chairman and the Vice Chairman, it was **RESOLVED** that County Borough Councillor W J David be appointed as Chairman for the duration of the meeting.

60. MESSAGE

The Chairman read a letter that had been received from the Group Director, Mr Ellis Williams thanking Members for their best wishes following his recent illness and it was **RESOLVED** that a letter of thanks be sent to the Group Director for his service to the Authority given that it was now known that he intended to retire later in the year.

61. 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.

62. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Community & Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held on the 5th March 2014 be approved as a correct record.

REPORT OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR, CORPORATE SERVICES

63. THE OUTCOME AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE WELSH GOVERNMENT AND RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL (2013/14 TO 2015/16)

The Service Director, Performance & Resources reported on the Outcome Agreement between the Welsh Government and the Council for the period 2013/14 to 2015/16, which had been agreed by Cabinet on the 19th March, 2014.

The Service Director, Performance & Resources highlighted the main points of the report, in particular that the maximum funding available to the Council through the Welsh Government's Outcome Agreement revenue grant was £2.5m per year explaining that this was based on performance results

Members were advised that to ensure the effective management of outcome agreement performance, updates would be incorporated into the existing performance reporting arrangements and be subject to review and challenge by the Council's scrutiny committees to help improve outcomes in the five strategic themes selected. It was explained that of the five outcome themes identified by the Council, one would be aligned to the Community & Children's Services Scrutiny Committee for review, namely 21st Century Health Care.

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

- (i) Note the content of the report;
- (ii) Endorse the proposed allocation of the outcome agreement strategic theme to the Community & Children's Services Scrutiny Committee for the period of the agreement.

REPORTS OF THE DIRECTOR OF LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

64. PROPOSED SCRUTINY PROCESS OF THE CORPORATE PLAN 2014/15

The Director of Legal and Democratic Services reported on the proposed scrutiny arrangements for the production of the Council's 2014/15 Corporate Plan.

Members were advised of the duties placed on Local Authorities to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement through the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 and the requirements to publish their improvement objectives annually, in the form of 'Wales Programme for Improvement action plans' which would be incorporated into the Council's Corporate Plan. It was explained that this would need to be published in June and the Annual delivery report, assessing progress against improvement objectives would be published in October of each year.

Members were informed that in previous years there had only been officer involvement in the development of the action plans. Members were also informed that to further strengthen existing arrangements it was proposed that scrutiny working groups be established to scrutinise each of the WPI action plans. It was intended that the findings of these working groups be reported to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, before the Corporate Plan is considered by Council in June, prior to the statutory deadline of the 30th June 2014. It was also proposed that the appropriate Cabinet member be invited to attend each of the working group meetings.

The Director of Legal and Democratic Services advised Members of the draft timetable and pointed out the commitment which would be required by the working group members as it was intended for the working groups to follow the process through to assess the progress made by improvement priorities at the Annual delivery report stage in the summer/autumn 2015.

RESOLVED:

- (i) to approve the proposed process and timescales, as set out in the report;
- (ii) Establish a working group of the Community & Children's Services Scrutiny Committee to consider the Adult Services Action Plan;
- (iii) Establish a joint working group with Members of both the Education & Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee and the Community & Children's Services Scrutiny Committee to consider both the Children's Services and Education WPI Action Plans

65. EXCEPTION REPORT – COUNCIL PERFORMAMCE REPORT – 31ST DECEMBER 2013 (QUARTER 3)

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 31st December 2013. He highlighted a number of key issues and also informed the Committee that the staff turnover rate of 5.41% for 2013/14 was slightly higher than last year. 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 19th March 2014 and the two priority areas within the remit of the Committee i.e. Children & Family Centred Services and Maintaining People's Independence.

A Member referred to the target set for those taking up their Flying Start entitlement and asked whether the failure to meet the target was related to the 'post code lottery' issue raised previously by Members.

The Service Director, Children's Services reported that as Members were aware, there were stringent criteria laid down by the Welsh Government with regard to Flying Start provision. He explained that the failure to hit target was not linked to this issue rather take-up had been slower than anticipated. He explained that Flying Start was a voluntary scheme and it was hoped that the new placement officer would be able to encourage take up.

The Member reported that he had been trying to establish Flying Start in his ward without success and was encouraged to hear of the appointment of the placement officer.

With reference to the review of care plans, a Member asked how the new Locality Teams were working.

The Service Director, Community Care reported that it was hoped to see an improvement in the performance indicator for quarter 4. With regard to the new operating model he explained that ongoing evaluation of the new arrangements indicates that the new model which has been put is working. However, the new Locality Teams have experienced high demand and as a result work has had to be prioritised resulting in the fall in the review of care plans. He added that a significant issue has been the number of clients whose circumstances have changed before their review date which impacts on performance. There are a number of reasons for this but mostly relate to the fact that many of the clients are very elderly i.e. in the 90s with aging carers who themselves are in poor health

A Member pointed to the slight reduction in spend on Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) compared to quarter 3 of 2012/13 and asked whether it was due to a reduction in grant budgets.

The Service Director, Direct Services, Business and Housing reported that the budget for these grants had been maintained. He explained that the nature of the grant meant that there could be a wide variation in completion times. He pointed out that more grants had been completed at quarter 3 compared to last year but that the cost of the work was less. The Service Director, Community Care added that whilst they had experienced a slight bottleneck at one point due to pressures on Occupational Therapists this had now cleared. The Service Director Direct Services, Business and Housing also pointed out that the Council's quarter 3 performance with regard to DFGs was amongst the best in Wales (when compared to all Wales performance results for 2012/13).

The Service Director, Direct Services, Business and Housing provided clarification in relation to the staff counselling service explaining that staff members would not need to be on sickness absence to be referred to the service as the aim of the occupational health activities was to prevent sickness or facilitate an earlier return.

A Member referred to the roll out of the Butterfly dementia project to Dan y Mynydd care home and asked what the reaction from residents and families has been.

The Service Director Community Care reported that feedback has been positive and explained that a key part of introducing the project had been to engage with families. He reported that Dan y Mynydd has been awarded the highest possible accreditation by Dementia Care Matters and that Clydach Court has also maintained this high level. He added that the project was proving to be very successful and had resulted in an overall improvement in the way that care and support was provided to the residents of the aforementioned homes and that it was being rolled out to our dementia care homes.

A Member suggested that 28% of performance indicators not hitting target seemed high and asked whether it was usual to be at this level.

The Head of Financial Services explained that this situation was not new and the Service Director, Direct Services, Business and Housing reported that whilst the situation was not ideal everything possible was being done to improve performance. He also added that there was a need to also consider how the targets were being set.

A Member asked why the usual reference to the budget pressures in respect of Looked After Children was not mentioned in the report.

The Head of Financial Services explained that the demand for such services had slowed over the period and also that there had been an improvement in the commissioning mix of placements which had resulted in a reduced financial pressure during the quarter.

A Member referred to the rise in the number of child care re-referrals and questioned whether this also impacted on the performance indicator for initial assessments carried out within 7 working days.

The Service Director Children's Services explained that a re-referral would not necessarily require a new full assessment as this would depend on the reason for the re-referral.

The Member suggested that the targets themselves were not conducive to the long term planning for the care of a child and the Service Director, Direct Services, Business and Housing agreed and indicated that this area would be reviewed as part of drafting new improvement plans for 2014/15.

A Member referred to the percentage of children on the Child Protection Register that are re-registered and questioned whether children were being removed too hastily.

The Service Director, Direct Services, Business and Housing reported that in his opinion the safeguarding arrangements within Rhondda Cynon Taf are strong and working practices and procedures were regularly audited through internal quality

assurance systems as well as through the work of the Cwm Taf Safeguarding Board.

The Member also wished to compliment the FAST programme (Families and Schools Together) which was proving to be a success in her area.

A Member asked for a response to a question which he had raised at a previous meeting which referred to performance indicators relating to children being seen by a social worker.

The Service Director, Direct Services, Business and Housing reported that he had investigated the issue going back as far as 2007/08 and this confirmed that the Authority had not been achieving 100% allocation of open cases to social workers. He reported that the figures had demonstrated an overall improvement over the reporting period but as Members were aware, the CSSIW had ongoing concerns in relation to our performance in that area. He explained that such was the demand on Children's Services, to meet the 100% target would require significant further investment and even then it would be unlikely that there would be sufficient social workers available to fill the posts in the short term. He reported that it was a key priority for the service to try and address but unfortunately there was no quick solution.

A Member referred to the delay in the launch of the Rapid Intervention & Response Team and the Service Director, Direct Services, Business and Housing explained that whilst there had been a delay in the first quarter it was now up and running and initial indications are positive. In response to a further query he also confirmed that the Cwm Taf Safeguarding website should be ready for launch in July 2014.

A Member raised the issue of work related stress due to increasing workloads and also questioned whether the Authority would be able to respond to the increasing demand on services given the budget constraints and lack of personnel.

The Service Director, Direct Services, Business and Housing indicated that there was an increasing demand for many services provided by the Group and this was generally mirrored across Wales. The Service Director also indicated that Management are very mindful of the potential effects on staff and the service was doing its utmost to listen to and work with staff and if necessary change systems and working practices to improve them by taking a whole system approach. He further explained that a great deal of work had been done in developing preventative measures such as the Rapid Intervention and Response Team and Team Around the Family (TAF), which was funded through the Families First Grant. There was also continued focus on fostering and adoption. He explained that there was no single answer to the problem but it was about utilising existing resources and investment as efficiently and as effectively as possible.

The Member referred to the difficulty in recruiting social workers and the Service Director, Direct Services, Business and Housing reported that they were experiencing pressures in Adult Services now as well as Children's Services.

However, they had recently been successful in recruiting 4 newly qualified social workers and 3 experienced social workers.

RESOLVED: to note the content of the report.

W J David
Chairman

The meeting closed at 6.15 pm.

