

**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, 17<sup>th</sup> March 2015 at 5.00 pm.

**Present:**

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

**County Borough Councillors:**

W J David	C Davies	A S Fox
(Mrs) S Jones	I Pearce	(Mrs) J Rosser
B Stephens	L G Walker	(Mrs) J S Ward
D H Williams		

**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 A Wilkins – Head of Legal – Corporate and Democratic Services  
Mrs A Edwards – Scrutiny Support Officer

**In Attendance**

Ms Denise Moultrie – Area Manager, CSSIW

**43. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors S Evans, S Lloyd, R W Smith and D Weeks.

**44. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The following declaration of interest was made in relation to the agenda;

Mrs A Edwards (Scrutiny Support Officer) – Agenda Item 5 – “My mother is in receipt of Home Care Services.”

**45. MINUTES**

**RESOLVED** to approve as an accurate record the minutes of the meeting of the Community and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held on 27<sup>th</sup> January 2015.

**46. VISIT TO VISION PRODUCTS**

The Chairman invited those Members who had attended the visit to Vision Products, Pontyclun on 10<sup>th</sup> February 2015 to comment.

All Members who had attended commented positively on the visit and commended the work being undertaken there. Some Members commented that they had been unaware of the facility and it was suggested that more should be done to raise awareness of the facility.

**47. PRESENTATION - TOGETHER FOR MENTAL HEALTH**

The Service Director, Adult Locality Services and Short Term Intervention explained that the report in respect of the 'Together for Mental Health' strategy was the first report presented to scrutiny specifically relating to mental health issues. He pointed out that the report was of a high level nature but explained that further reports could be presented in the future providing more detail on specific issues.

The Service Director introduced Mr James McMahon from Cwm Taf University Health Board and explained that he would be providing Members with a presentation to assist in their understanding of the Together for Mental Health strategy.

With the aid of PowerPoint presentation slides Mr McMahon outlined the key principles of the Welsh Government's 'Together for Mental Health' strategy, namely that all agencies should work together to improve mental health, both mental wellbeing and mental illness; support should be applicable to all ages, focus on recovery and enablement, reduce stigma and discrimination and be based on a Human Rights approach. He explained that Rhondda Cynon Taf Council was one of the partners of the multi agency 'Together for Mental Health' Partnership Board for Cwm Taf. He reported that the current 3 year delivery plan would end in March 2016 and that work would shortly begin on preparation of the next 3 year plan. He pointed out that it was therefore an opportune time to draw attention to any issues and influence the Delivery Plan for April 2016 onwards.

Mr McMahon reported on the work underway to promote better mental health and wellbeing examples of which included improved co-ordination across the agencies providing services and the Support Samaritan's Project. He also reported on a number of local initiatives which included ensuring that users of secondary care mental health services have their own care and treatment plan and mainstreaming the Mental Health 'Time for Change' Corporate Pledge campaign within the local authority and the University Health Board.

Members were informed of some of the achievements in the development of an integrated network of care, such as a psychiatric nurse based at the new South Wales Police Bridewell facility in Merthyr Tydfil and a mental health advisor based with the Cwm Taf Youth Offending Team. Priorities for the next 12 months included reconfiguring the CAMHS service in response to the review of the service and undertaking further work on services supporting people with co-occurring mental health and substance misuse issues.

Mr McMahon reported that work has been undertaken to ensure those with mental illness have access to a range of welfare and debt advice services and

improved access to learning opportunities and accredited education. He also informed the Committee that accommodation was an issue for older people as well as young adults and one of the priorities for the next 12 months will be to improve access to sheltered or supported accommodation as there is insufficient EMI provision for those leaving hospital.

Following the presentation, Mr McMahon and the Service Director Adult Locality Services and Short Term Intervention responded to Members' queries.

A Member referred to the 'Valleys Steps' initiative, a support programme which aims to provide alternatives to anti-depressants and he questioned the amount of spending on anti-depressants.

Mr McMahon reported that Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda Cynon Taf had the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> highest use of prescribed anti-depressants in Wales and that the Cwm Taf region had the highest incidence of prescribed antidepressant use outside of Scotland. He explained that whilst anti-depressants are generally cheap, because of the amount prescribed a small increase in cost can have a significant impact on resources. He reported that in general, people tend to be on anti-depressants longer than they need to be although some GPs are better at dealing with this issue than others. He explained that the 'Valleys Steps' initiative was being funded through the Social Investment Fund with the hope that costs could be reduced or at the very least plateau and that the savings made would over time repay the loan. In response to further queries he added that educating patients, GPs, Pharmacists and Primary Care workers were all key to reducing anti depressant use and that to date GPs are responding positively to the initiative.

In relation to anti depressant use, a Member questioned what the position would be for Care Homes and Mr McMahon explained that the Welsh Government was keen to promote Prudent Healthcare and was attempting to educate the public to consider resources and reduce waste. He explained that psychiatric care would be in place and that the intention would be to work with staff to consider what meaningful things could be undertaken which might then lead to improved behaviour.

In conclusion the Chairman thanked Mr McMahon for his presentation.

**RESOLVED:** to note the information provided.

**48. CSSIW – PERFORMANCE EVALUATION REPORT 2013-14**

The Committee considered the CSSIW's Performance Evaluation Report for 2013-14 which was based on the Director of Social Services Annual Report. The Committee proceeded to question the officers in relation to issues highlighted within the report.

A Member referred to the comment that there had been a significant decline in care standards in several private care homes.

The Service Director, Adult Locality Services and Sort Term Intervention explained that standards had declined in two homes in particular and despite attempts to work with the establishments to raise standards, there was an escalation which resulted in the one home being served with a notice to close and all residents having to be moved to alternative accommodation. The Area Manager, CSSIW added that due to the good efforts of both the Health Board and Social Services staff, the residents had all been re-located by the time the notice to close was served and it was an example of good joint working. With regard to the inspection of homes, the Service Director Adult Locality Services and Sort Term Intervention explained that the CSSIW inspected and published reports on all care homes. In addition, health workers and social workers visited care homes to review clients' care plans at least on an annual basis. He explained that this knowledge is pooled and provides a good picture of the standard of care provided.

A Member questioned the level of support provided to carers in the community.

The Service Director, Adult Locality Services and Sort Term Intervention explained that any assessment would be personal to the needs of the individual. However, he was confident that social workers across the board did consider the needs of carers. He explained that the Council does provide respite care. However, this can be difficult to manage as the availability of this 'one off' type of care can depend on what is available in the market place and Christmas, Easter and the main summer period can be challenging. He explained that respite care is not always the answer and that 'sit in' services and organisations such as crossroads can put in place targeted support.

The Member asked whether the closure of some of the day centre provision had impacted on service users.

The Group Director, Community & Children's Services reported that a review of Adult Service provision was underway and would be reported upon in the summer. He explained that there is a need to better use the resources available in order to meet the demands of the Social Services & Wellbeing Act (Wales) 2014.

A Member referred to the comment in the report that the waiting list for adaptations had been reduced by 600 and she asked if the starting figure had and current figure could be provided.

The Service Director, Adult Locality Services and Sort Term Intervention explained that he did not have the initial figure to hand but could report that there was no longer a waiting list.

The Member also questioned the communication within Children's Services itself and in response the Service Director, reported on the introduction of a single point of contact for the Prevention Team and the development of the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).

A Member referred to the comments relating to children on the Child Protection Register having an allocated social worker. The Service Director, Children's Services explained that new arrangements had been put in place which had resulted in all children on the Register having an allocated social worker.

A Member asked whether the take-up of the Flying Start provision had improved with the appointment of the new placement officer.

The Service Director, Children's Services reported that the officer was in post but that participation in Flying Start is voluntary. He explained that geographic constraints attached to the provision meant that the Council could not always put the provision where it would like. However, some changes to the Welsh Government's Flying Start programme were being made which might give local authorities more flexibility.

In response to a further query in relation to Flying Start, the Service Director, Direct Services, Business and Housing explained that the biggest issue was the ability of families to access child care provision and often the eligible catchment boundaries, which were based on Lower Super Output areas did cut across streets effectively splitting communities.

The Group Director, Community & Children's Services commented that officers shared the frustration of Members with regard to this issue and suggested that it might be helpful if the Head of Service could be asked to attend a meeting of the Committee.

A Member referred to the data in the report which said that two thirds of care leavers are in education, employment or training at age 19. He questioned the situation for the remaining third and the level of aftercare provided.

The Service Director, Children's Services explained that generally the Council performed well in this area. He explained that there could be a number of reasons why the young people were not in education, employment or training, such as being parents themselves or if could be down to a refusal to engage. He did not feel that there was a problem in respect of staffing levels in the service and pointed out that in the current climate it was extremely difficult for all young people to access employment and training and for those with a background in the Looked After system it was an additional barrier to overcome.

The Service Director,, Direct Services, Business and Housing pointed out that a comparison of the figures for Looked After Children with youth employment figures in general showed that the percentage was quite favourable.

The Group Director Community & Children's Services commented on the work being undertaken to reconfigure children's services. He explained that whilst it would take a little time to get things right, he was confident but not complacent that at the end the changes being made would lead to a reduction in the pressures facing the service.

A Member asked about the monitoring of the Looked After Children (LAC) levels.

The Service Director, Children's Services reported that the figures had spiked during the summer months but had reduced slightly since Christmas. He reported that there were a number of factors influencing LAC figures which were being explored by the Looked After Children Scrutiny Working Group. He added that as well as the early intervention and prevention services, work was underway examining thresholds, the decision making processes and development of a new risk assessment model with the aim of reducing the numbers.

The Member asked what process was in place for the inspection of residential homes by the CSSIW.

The Area Manager, CSSIW explained that care homes were inspected by one or two officers on a yearly basis, or more often if there were concerns. The local authority was not part of this process. She explained that the CSSIW was exploring the use of Lay Members in North Wales but this had not been tested across Wales as yet. She also reported on the introduction of the Regional Advisory Boards which will assist in more citizen engagement.

The Service Director, Children's Services explained that in addition to this, the Authority engaged independent visitors to visit children's homes every month, the outcome of which was reported to the Council's Corporate Parenting Board.

The Chairman referred to the remarks made within the report in relation to scrutiny and reported that the Committee had now introduced pre-meetings for its Members to assist in improving the level of challenge.

A Member referred to the performance in relation to children's services assessments and asked whether performance was still dropping or had levelled off.

The Service Director, Children's Services reported that initial child care assessments had been an issue for some time. He explained that the introduction of the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub and the re-organisation and re-modelling of the child care teams from three to two will hopefully bring about improvement. However, this will take time for this work to impact on the figures.

A Member referred to comments within the report made by young people in care stating that social workers were often late, difficult to get hold of and changed frequently. He explained that both children and adults valued consistency in their care.

The Service Director, Children's Services reported on the pressures facing the service and the shortage of social workers. He reminded Members of the on-

going workforce review and the efforts to recruit and retain social workers but pointed out that the key was to reduce the numbers entering the Looked After system.

**RESOLVED:**

- (i) to note the content of the CSSIW's Performance Evaluation Report and the response of officers;
- (ii) to receive a report to a future meeting of the Committee in respect of the Welsh Government's Flying Start scheme.

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

**49. CHILDREN'S SERVICES – MODEL FOR CONSULTATION**

The Service Director, Children's Services reported on the progress in developing a Children's Services delivery model for Rhondda Cynon Taf. He reported that the draft operating model attached to the report would enable children, young people and families to access appropriate support as early as possible, to help them maintain their quality of life, prevent problems escalating and reduce the demand for high cost, specialist support services. It was reported that consultation is underway with staff and partners, including Cwm Taf Safeguarding Children's Board, Education Services, Health and the third sector, to finalise the model and once finalised a revised service structure will be developed. Following consideration of the report it was

**RESOLVED:**

- (i) to note the contents of the report and the progress made in developing a revised service model for Children's Services;
- (ii) to receive further reports, in due course, setting out the implementation arrangements,.

(Mrs) M E Davies  
Chairman

The meeting closed at 6.40 pm

