

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

29th APRIL 2015

ITEM 3 - QUARTER 3 BUDGET & EXCEPTION REPORT FEEDBACK

FEEDBACK FROM THE 4 SERVICE SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

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Feedback

Education & Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee – 8th April 2015

A Member questioned whether the Special Educational Needs overspend was linked to the provision of the new facility at Buarth y Capel for young people with autism.

The Service Director for Schools and Community explained that the opening of the Buarth y Capel facility was not the reason for the overspend. She explained that the unit is not suitable for some young people and is not a residential facility. However, she hoped that in the long term the Buarth y Capel facility will help reduce the need for some of the more expensive out of county residential placements which are sometimes jointly funded with Children's Services.

Referring to the performance indicator trends contained within the report at page 13, a Member asked whether there was any further information available to assist in understanding the worsening trend.

The Service Director for Schools and Community explained that the targets set are ambitious and are aimed at continuing year on year improvement in performance. The Service Director also explained that not all of the missed targets were due to the performance of the young people and that performance indicator results, along with other relevant information, is reviewed on an on-going basis to inform future service planning.

The Member also suggested that the reduction in visits to libraries, including school visits indicated a reduction in the quality of life for service users as a result of library closures.

The Service Director for Schools and Community acknowledged that following the introduction of the service change, the number of visits to libraries had reduced as a result of there being fewer libraries. The Service Director indicated that user information and feedback will continue to be taken into account to help ensure the best possible service and experience for users.

The same Member also referred to Appendix C of the report and the missed targets in relation to attainment levels in both English and Mathematics for Year 7 to 9 pupils and the number of publicly accessible computers. She commented that the performance information did not paint a positive picture.

The Service Director for Schools and Communities explained that the accessibility of computers had been affected as a result of the library closures and work was ongoing to improve the situation. In relation to English and Mathematics attainment, whilst much had already been done, the Service Director acknowledged that there is still more work to do. She also pointed out that changes to the way in which the indicator is now being calculated had impacted on the figures for 2014/15 and as a result a true comparison could not be made.

A Member referred to the figures relating to the Estyn inspection of schools and asked what measures are being put in place to improve the performance of those schools which have been graded as adequate.

The Service Director for Schools and Communities reported that work to improve performance is being undertaken in a number of ways, in particular through the work with Central South Consortium and the work being undertaken with the Governing Bodies. She explained that key to school improvement is good leadership and management and reported that there are a number of leadership and management programmes being used together with work to ensure there are robust processes in place around the quality of recruitment in the workforce. She added that a major part of the work being undertaken by the Consortium is the development of a culture whereby schools learn from each other and by doing so standards are raised. However, she pointed out that these processes would take time to embed and show results.

The Cabinet Member also pointed out that she, along with the Service Director, met regularly with the Senior Leadership Teams and Chair of Governors of those schools in an Estyn follow up category to ensure that there is now a level of challenge present which was not there previously.

A Co-opted Member commented that in his opinion there are far too many performance indicators and he welcomed the move to reduce the numbers. He also felt that the improvements in performance as signified by the data set out at page 20 of the report (KS4 results) should be viewed as a positive achievement,.

A Member pointed out that as well as being ambitious, targets also have to be realistic. He commented that whilst the data at the key stages is useful, it does not demonstrate how the improvements are going to be achieved.

The Service Director agreed that targets had to be realistic but pointed to the importance of being ambitious in order to stretch the young people. She explained that a programme has been started for the 'more able and talented' which is the Seren Programme aimed at potential Oxbridge or Sutton Trust University candidates. Whilst agreeing with the earlier comment that there are too many performance indicators she pointed out that the service covered a wide area and key indicators had been identified to enable progress to be measured. In response to further questioning on the Seren Programme, the Service Director suggested that Members might wish to receive further information on the programme which has only recently been introduced and proposed that a progress report be brought back to the Committee in six months time.

The Cabinet Member added that the Central South Consortium is very active in ensuring that all head teachers are being challenged to reach targets and ensure the development of teaching staff.

A Member referred to staff sickness levels and in response the Service Director for Schools and Communities explained that all sickness is recorded via the Council's Vision management system. She further explained that a housekeeping exercise is currently underway, for example, to ensure all sickness is recorded timely, accurately

and follow up action / support provided, the results of which will be fed into future up dates. She also explained that the service included the Council's catering staff and food hygiene requirements prevents them attending work if they have stomach upsets, this impacting on sickness figures.

A Member questioned how the effectiveness of the Consortium's School Improvement Groups could be measured.

The Service Director for Schools and Community explained that both Sue Walker and Bernard Whittingham who were Heads of Achievement for Primary and Secondary Schools respectively, held dual roles in that they also acted as Senior Challenge Advisors for the Consortium and as such will scrutinise the work and monitor progress.

The Member also questioned how Critical Improvement Action 3 MO1 which requires that the Council works collaboratively with the Central South Consortium (CSC) in providing School Governor Support will be measured.

The Service Director for Schools and Community explained that it is intended that some elements of Governor Support services will be approached through the Consortium and pointed out that strong Governing Bodies are key to challenging the senior management and performance of schools. She explained the authorities in the CSC currently have different levels of support for governors whilst Rhondda Cynon Taf has one of the largest teams. It is intended to work together to improve training and governor access to training is currently being monitored. Governing Bodies are also encouraged to undertake self evaluation which can lead to accredited awards.

The Cabinet Member suggested that it might be a good idea to invite someone from the Consortium to report on the progress being made.

A co-opted Member reported that he represented Rhondda Cynon Taf on the Consortium's Governor Steering Group and he explained that he would welcome the opportunity to report back to the Committee individually or alongside the relevant officer on the work being undertaken.

The co-opted Member also explained that he had a number of questions which he wanted to be clear about which related to the prospects for improvement. Firstly, is there the capacity to close the gap between the current standards and the targets, secondly, how many of those indicators showing as red are statutory and lastly, has the drop in target performance arisen because the targets have been increased.

The Service Director for Schools and Community responded that she did feel that there is capacity to improve even further. She explained that since Estyn had taken the decision that further monitoring of the local authority was not required, school performance had not worsened. She also commented that there is now an appetite within the schools themselves to tackle the issue of underperforming staff which will improve teaching and learning and work is ongoing with trade union support where there are competence issues.

With reference to the performance measures, the Service Director, Performance and Improvement explained that over time the number of statutory performance indicators had reduced and the majority of indicators reported as 'red' as at December 2014 were local indicators. With regard to target setting, he reiterated that the overall aim for Education has been to set ambitious targets and indicated that a range of information is taken into account to inform this process including previous performance results, known changes in future service delivery and the professional judgement of officers. He reminded the Committee that Scrutiny Working Groups would be meeting in the coming weeks to provide a challenge in this area, including target setting.

In response to a further query, the Service Director, Performance and Improvement clarified that the 26% of indicators that did not hit target by more than 5% were spread across the Education priority action plan and the Data Table that was included within the main quarter 3 Performance Report.

A Member referred to the Health Check measures and the drop in the number of activities undertaken by young people in comparison with the previous year.

The Service Director for Schools and Community commented that the Youth Service had been reconfigured, providing a more targeted rather than universal provision, around the school cluster groups.

A Member referred to the introduction of the Welsh Government's Early Years Pupil Deprivation Grant and pointed out that schools are anxious to have more information in relation to the payment of the grant in order to plan for the new academic year.

The Service Director, Schools and Community reported that she would obtain the information available and circulate to all Members of the Committee.

Feedback

Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee –9th April 2015

A Member referred to the 'Improving our Communities' action plan and sought clarity on the delay in proceeding with those projects dependent on European Funding and asked if an update could be provided at the next meeting of the Committee.

Feedback

Community & Children's Services Scrutiny Committee –15th April 2015

The Committee voiced its concern in relation to the increase in sickness absence and the turnover of staff.

The Group Director, Community & Children's Services explained that the 'expression of interest' initiative undertaken by the Council has led to a restructuring of the workforce and a reduction in posts. The Service Director, Direct Services, Business and Housing also pointed out that the reduction in the number of Community Day Centres had affected the equivalent of 50 full time posts and in addition just over 100 Home Care Staff had left the service.

In response to the concerns raised the Committee asked for a report to be prepared for a future meeting to enable Members to have clearer picture of the current trends in sickness absences across the service areas.

A Member referred to the reduction in the number of Renovation Grants and Maintenance and Repair Grants completed in comparison with 2013/14.

The Service Director, Direct Services, Business and Housing explained that this drop in numbers was a result of the reduction to the Capital Funding programme which has impacted on the number of grants which can be awarded.

In relation to the Capital budget, a Member asked for explanation of the delayed implementation of some schemes/projects within the Modernisation Programme for Adults.

The Service Director, Direct Services, Business and Housing explained that some of the work within the Maintaining People's Independence WPI Action Plan was linked to the Social Services and Wellbeing Act and money had been held back to support the changes which will have to be made in response to the implementation of the Act in May 2016.

In response to a Member's question relating to funding deficits the Service Director, Direct Services, Business and Housing explained that the Council has been pioneering the Welsh Government's new initiative 'When I Am Ready' which relates to a young people's transition from care into adulthood and independence. However, there has been no additional money from the Welsh Government to support this new policy and Rhondda Cynon Taf as a result of its pioneering work has been hit by these additional costs sooner than other authorities.

A Member referred to the overall performance figures and asked whether following the reconfiguration of Children's Services whether the performance information could be front loaded rather than have a 'catch-up' situation.

The Service Director, Children's Services explained that the changes would be introduced on a phased basis through into 2016 and linked to the implementation of the Social Services & Wellbeing Act in April 2016. He reported that some progress

could already be seen and the signs were that the full Quarter 4 figures would show an improvement.

A Member conveyed her concerns regarding the performance indicator relating to the percentage of open cases allocated to someone other than a social worker where the child is receiving a service (children on the child protection register).

The Service Director, Children's Services reported that those children on the Child Protection Register were prioritised and at the end of the 4th Quarter there were no unallocated cases. However, he explained that sometimes cases were allocated to student social workers who were overseen by qualified social workers or sometimes there was a delay in the recording mechanism when children became registered and re-allocated. He added that the aim was that all children on the Child Protection Register should be allocated to a social worker but if this were not the case there was always a good reason.

The Group Director added that during the last 6 months radical work had been undertaken to transform the way in which the service operated and there were signs that this was beginning to have a positive impact.

A Member referred to the delay in appointing a manager to the Regional Adoption Service given the urgent need to reduce the LAC numbers.

The Group Director explained that the performance of the Adoption service was not in itself the key issue and referred to his earlier comments and the need to focus on safely reducing the number of children coming into Looked After Children system by considering the reasons behind the placements.

The Cabinet Member for Children's Social Services and Equalities commented that the number of referrals had reduced quite dramatically and as a result the number of Looked After Children should also reduce. However, he pointed to the need to look for a mix of solutions such as more foster carers rather than more expensive residential care and the provision of more effective early intervention services which should then lead to a reduction in the pressures.

The Cabinet Member for Partnerships & Adults' Social Services referred to the introduction of the Social Services Health & Wellbeing Act in May 2016 and the shift in emphasis that this will bring. He explained that whilst Councils were still awaiting the more detailed guidance and regulations, the intention of the Welsh Government is that service users and carers will have a stronger voice. He pointed to the challenges that this would bring given that 34% of Wales's Lower Super Output areas lie within Rhondda Cynon Taf and its increasing elderly population and explained that that the Council could not continue to deliver services at it does and that there was a need to look at how things can be done differently.

Given the large numbers of performance indicators that did not meet target by more than 5%, the Chair asked Officers to provide an explanation and update in relation to those set out in the exception report and those remaining which were listed at Appendix C to the report, the key elements of which are summarised below:

Children's Services related:

The Service Director, Children's Services referred to the re-modelling work being undertaken and the introduction of the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub and reported that improvements are beginning to be seen. The percentage of initial assessments undertaken within 7 working days had increased to 76% in January and stood at 79% for February. The latest figures for Looked After Children show a decrease to 623.

The Cabinet Member for Children's Social Services and Equalities referred to the work being undertaken by the Looked After Children Scrutiny Working Group and thanked the Chairman for providing an update on the work to the Corporate Parenting Board.

With regard to updated assessments for Looked After Children the Service Director explained that the Council was dependent in part on Health to meet this target. In the case of children placed out of county the Authority is dependent on these assessments being carried out by the health services in the areas where they are placed and therefore the problem is difficult to resolve.

In relation to the percentage of former LAC known to be engaged in education, training or employment at the age of 19, the Service Director, Children Services explained that there could be a number of reasons for this such as the young person being a parent themselves, they may have mental health issues or a criminal record which might make it difficult to gain employment. However, on the whole he did not think that the percentages were that dissimilar to the general population.

Members were informed that with regard to Personal Education Plans, the service is dependent on schools and the Service Director informed Members that he would endeavour to liaise with the education services to seek an improvement.

Adult Services related:

The Service Director Adult Locality Services and Short Term Intervention explained that Delayed Transfers of Care would be dealt with in detail later in the agenda.

The Service Director explained that the failure to meet the target in relation to the rate of older people supported in the community was actually conveying a positive message. The principle reasons for supporting fewer people in the community are down to the success of the Intermediate Care and Reablement Team and the fact that there have been fewer referrals coming through.

With regard to the timeliness of Care Plan Reviews the Service Director explained that some teams were under more pressure than others in this respect and that work was underway to see what could be done differently to improve the situation.

The Service Director reported that the targets in relation to young carers had dipped as a result of staff absences in what is a very small team. However, the team is now back to full strength and the performance figures have improved over the last three months.

Following this summary of performance Members further questioned officers in relation to the performance information.

A Member re-iterated his concerns in relation to the reduction in the number of child care teams from three to two.

The Group Director explained that the key issue was the delivery of the right service and pointed to the success of the single Intermediate Care and Reablement Team in adult services. The Service Director, Children's Services explained that the reduction from three Intermediate Care and Assessment Teams to two would help reduce the impact of staff sickness and that there would be no reduction in the number of staff as a result of the changes.

A Member questioned whether the failure to meet the target in relation to the Adult Care Plan reviews impacted on the numbers having to be admitted to hospital,

The Service Director, Adult Locality Services and Short Term Intervention explained that whilst there may not always be a timely review, caseworkers would always be aware of change of circumstances. He pointed out that staff are now often dealing with clients in the 95 plus age bracket and sometimes due to their age there can be a number events over short period of time which need to be addressed.

As a general point, the Cabinet Member for Children's Social Services and Equalities pointed out that a target showing as green did not mean that the Council was outperforming other authorities and that there was a need to be mindful of the performance of all key indicators.

A Member asked whether it would be possible to receive information with regard to comparative performance and the Group Director explained that this information is available and would be provided to Members.

In conclusion the Cabinet Member for Partnerships and Adults Social Services reminded Members that the move to more collaborative work meant that the Council was often reliant on its partners to deliver on targets.

Feedback

Environmental Services Scrutiny Committee – 20th April 2015

Fly Tipping

A Member referred to the positive performance set out in the report in respect of the percentage of reported fly tipping incidents on relevant land cleared within 5 working days (statutory) yet queried the time taken for the Council to respond to a reported fly tipping incident which from the Member's personal experience had taken three weeks to address. The Director, Highways & Streetcare stated that this was not usual as highlighted in the positive performance for Environmental Services and any such incidents would be thoroughly investigated.

Staff Sickness Trend

One Member commented on the Staff Sickness Trend Comparison within the report which was showing a high overall sickness trend for the relevant services. It was queried whether the trend was due to long term stress related sickness following agreed service restructuring being implemented with less staff covering the same workload and a further breakdown of the percentages was requested by the Member for the benefit of Committee in order to clarify and understand the reasons behind the increase. It was agreed that this would be reported.

Exceptions – Domestic Abuse

One Member enquired about the exceptions in relation to Domestic Abuse and the percentage of clients having an improved quality of life and feeling safer as a result of the Independent Domestic Violence Advisor service (IDVA) with the Quarter 3 performance measuring 81% compared to the target of 85%.. The Service Director Public Health & Protection confirmed that the measures reported are part of the accreditations of CAADA (Co-ordinated Action against Domestic Abuse) who work alongside high risk victims of domestic abuse. Confirmation was given that the overall performance for the local authority is encouraging with clients reporting positive outcomes in the form of cessation of abuse and feeling safer as a result of IDVA intervention. It was acknowledged that domestic abuse is a complex area which can involve other wider issues such as substance misuse or financial problems. IDVA manage 80-90 cases per quarter with the more complex cases affecting the outcome of the PI's.

Dog Fouling

A comment was made in respect of the low number of fixed penalty notices issued for dog fouling for Quarter 3. The Director, Highways & Streetcare Services confirmed that it is a difficult offence to capture with often little evidence provided by members of the public following their initial complaint. Currently several areas across the County Borough such as Barry Sidings and Dare Valley Country Park are being targeted by the Service as hot spot areas where dog fouling complaints have been received.

Green Waste

A Member of the Committee enquired about the systems currently in place to collect the green waste and specifically how the drivers know which areas to collect it from. The Director of Highways & Streetcare Services responded that this is the first year for the green waste to be collected separately and although the drivers do know which areas to target the service is also reliant upon members of the public contacting them on an individual basis. The Director added that currently the service is operating evening collections to keep up with demand and the tonnage collected to date has hugely increased.

Street Lighting

The Director, Highways & Streetcare Services confirmed that the time taken to repair street lamp failures has increased to 3.95 days in Quarter 3 compared to 2.7 days in Quarter 3 of 2013/14 and this is due to the volume of street lamps needing repair and the time it takes to carry out the work although the current performance is exceeding the annual target.

Domestic Bins (Black Bags)

A Member queried how the enforcement teams address the issue of additional black bags being left out for collection. The Director, Highways & Streetcare Services explained that initially stickers are placed on the offending bags and a note is made of the address which is verified. Enforcement officers will then speak to the appropriate residents and issue a fine if necessary. It was reported that the majority of residents are now complying. It was confirmed that flats and communal areas are proving more of a challenge for the enforcement officers in terms of identifying the owners and pursuing the FPN's if necessary.

Municipal Waste

The Director, Highways & Streetcare Services was asked whether the target for the percentage of municipal waste was challenging enough given that our Quarter 3 performance was 51.54% compared to a target of 55.00%. Committee was informed that although the target of 55.00% had not been achieved the currently performance measures 53.6% with the figure having increased during February and March reaching a target of 60%. The collections and subsequent figures for dry waste, green waste and food waste have all improved and Members were assured that all the measures are in place to further improve the figures by means of enforcement and awareness campaigns.

Rodent Treatments

With 95% of rodent treatments being delivered within target times in Quarter 3 the Service Director, Public Health & Protection reported that it was too early to confirm whether the recently introduced charges for rodent treatments was having an impact upon the volume of calls to the service. The officer added it

was estimated that there could be a 60% reduction in demand for the treatments although requests are still being received. It was confirmed that a progress report would be delivered to committee in due course outlining the effect of these charges upon the service.

A query was received from a Member in respect of the travellers who have been staying in Tylorstown recently and whether they are using council facilities for their waste collections. The Service Director Public Health & Protection confirmed that the travellers produce no waste and have composting toilets. As a result of this there have been relatively few complaints regarding the impact upon the site.

Substance Misuse

The Chairman referred to the % of cases closed as treatment completed (substance misuse) with Quarter 3 performance being 67% compared to a target of 74% and officers were reminded that a breakdown of figures in respect of both the local and National picture concerning substance misuse had previously been requested. A request was also made for comparison figures on a National and local level in respect of domestic abuse cases. The Service Director Public Health & Protection reported that of concern are the numbers of clients who are not completing treatment for a number of reasons such as relapses or contracts being broken compared to the positive outcomes for those who successfully complete the treatment programmes. The officer confirmed that currently they are working with service providers to address the issue and added that the PI service provider reports every quarter whilst the benchmark for substance misuse is set by Welsh Government. It was confirmed that it may be possible to get comparative data for the domestic abuse PI from CAADA.

In addition comment was made in respect of the outcomes on pages 21 and 22 of the report regarding Mediation Services and ASB interventions, both of which were due to be reported to Committee in March 2015. It was confirmed that they would be followed up and reported to committee in due course.