



## **SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, TREDOMEN,  
YSTRAD MYNACH ON TUESDAY, 22ND OCTOBER 2019 AT 5.30 P.M.**

---

PRESENT:

Councillor L. Binding - Chair

Councillors:

A. Angel, C. Bezzina, M. Evans, A. Gair, J. Gale, L. Jeremiah, B. Owen, S. Skivens and C. Thomas.

Cabinet Member: C. Cuss (Social Care and Wellbeing).

Together with:

D. Street (Corporate Director - Social Services and Housing), G. Jenkins (Assistant Director Children's Services), M. Jones (Interim Financial Services Manager), M. Jacques (Scrutiny Officer) and A. Dredge (Committee Services Officer).

Users and Carers – Mrs M. Jones, Ms J. Lawton and Mr C. Luke.

Also Present –

Wales Audit Office – Non Jenkins

### **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors J. Bevan (Vice-Chair), Ms D. Cushing, Miss E. Forehead, D.C. Harse, V. James and Mrs A. Leonard.

### **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor C. Bezzina declared a personal interest in Agenda Item No. 5 – Social Services Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme and Agenda Item No. 8 – Welsh Government Looked After Children Reduction Expectations, details are minuted with the respective items.

### **3. MINUTES – 10TH SEPTEMBER 2019**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Social Services Scrutiny Committee held on 10th September 2019 (minute nos. 1 - 8) be approved and signed as a correct record.

#### **4. CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE CALL-IN PROCEDURE**

There had been no matters referred to the Scrutiny Committee in accordance with the call-in procedure.

#### **5. SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME**

Councillor C. Bezzina declared a personal interest in this item as she has adopted a child.

The Scrutiny Officer introduced the report that informed the Committee of its Forward Work Programme planned for the period October 2019 to April 2020. Members were asked to consider the work programme and to make any amendments or request additional agenda items to be included for future meetings.

A report on the In-house and Independent Sector Home Care was requested by the Chair and supported by the Committee. The future report was to focus on the service breakdown between in-house carers and the independent sector and outline planned policy development in this area. The Director for Social Services and Housing suggested that an additional report on "Rebalancing the Care Market" could come to Committee on 4th February 2020. Members agreed that this should be added to the Committee Forward Work Programme.

The Scrutiny Officer reminded Members that the Regional Partnerships Boards report had been moved to 4th February 2020 from 22nd October 2019 to create space for the Corporate Safeguarding Arrangements Report. This move had been agreed by Committee in June.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendation in the report be approved. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that subject to the aforementioned changes, the Forward Work Programme appended to the report be approved.

#### **REPORTS OF OFFICERS**

Consideration was given to the following reports.

#### **6. BUDGET MONITORING REPORT (MONTH 5)**

The report provided Members with the projected revenue expenditure for the Social Services Directorate for the 2019/20 financial year and an update on the progress made against the savings targets built in to the 2019/20 revenue budget for the Directorate. The report identified the reasons behind a projected underspend of £507k for Social Services in 2019/20, despite a significant increase in demand for residential care placements for children since the beginning of the financial year. It also identified the progress that has been made to date towards achieving the £2.261million savings target that was included in the Social Services budget for 2019/20.

The Scrutiny Committee thanked the Officer for the report and discussion ensued.

In noting the increase in demand for Foster Care Placements, and the success of the ongoing foster care recruitment campaign, a Member queried the number of Foster Carers appointed in proportion to demand. Officers explained that there is a greater demand on the in-house service and as a result of the recruitment campaign, there has been a reduction of 27 cases to Independent Foster Care Agency Placements. In addition, it was noted that training is provided to all Foster Carers, some of which are mandatory, and the MYST Service (My

Support Team) provides individual and bespoke training where required. The Committee noted that a report on this service will be brought to Social Services Scrutiny Committee in March 2020.

Members discussed the potential underspend of £507k against this revised budget, and a Member queried the underspend in the context of the overall budget. Officers explained that as in previous years, the underspends at this stage are as a result of the winter pressures to come. Members noted that over the coming week's hospitals and home care services will see an increase in demand from service users due to winter pressures and hospital discharge.

A Member sought further information on the reasons for the large drop-off in demand for residential care, which demonstrates a potential underspend of £597k for all adult residential and nursing care provision. Officers explained that this was largely down to the successes of keeping people at home and supporting them to remain in their own homes. Members were asked to note however that this can have an impact on nursing services, as more and more patients have greater needs, but remain at home.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations in the report be approved. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the Officer's report:

- (i) the projected underspend of £457k against the Social Services budget for 2019/20, inclusive of transport costs, be noted;
- (ii) the progress made to date towards delivering the £2.261million savings target that was included in the Social Services budget for 2019/20, be noted.

## **7. WALES AUDIT OFFICE REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE SAFEGUARDING ARRANGEMENTS**

The report, which was presented by Ms N. Jenkins (Wales Audit Office), advised the Scrutiny Committee of the Wales Audit Office (WAO) Review of Corporate Safeguarding Arrangements within Caerphilly County Borough Council undertaken in May 2019 and the implementation of an action plan in response to the recommendations made by the Review.

The Committee noted that the WAO undertook a follow up review of Corporate Safeguarding Arrangements for Children in Caerphilly in May 2019. The subsequent report was presented to Corporate Management Team for approval in June 2019 and the Performance Audit Manager from WAO also presented the report findings to the Corporate Safeguarding Board in June 2019.

The Review report, as attached at Appendix 1 of the report concluded that; although the Council has made some progress in addressing previous recommendations, the Council needs to further strengthen its corporate safeguarding oversight and assurance arrangements.

Members noted that in response, the Council was required to complete a Management Response and which was appended to the report (Appendix 2) and refers to the strategic recommendations made in the Review. The Corporate Safeguarding Board has developed an action plan to address both the strategic recommendations made and the areas of good practice for consideration identified in the Review and this was also appended to the report (Appendix 3). The WAO Auditor acknowledged that there were many positive developments in place and planned to address the areas for improvement but because some of them were yet to be fully realised, their conclusion was that further work is needed to strengthen corporate governance and oversight.

It was important to note that this was a review of the corporate governance of safeguarding arrangements and did not consider safeguarding children practice and procedure.

Scrutiny were asked to note that the report was considered and approved by Cabinet on 18th September 2019.

Members were referred to Exhibit 1 within the report, which detailed the national recommendations that the Council had not fully met and Exhibit 2, which sets out the assessment of the Council's progress in addressing the national recommendations and local proposals for improvement.

The Scrutiny Committee thanked the WAO Officer for the report and discussion ensued.

The Chair of the Committee assured Officers that the Social Services Scrutiny Committee will ensure that actions and recommendations as outlined in the report are closely monitored to ensure that the role of Scrutiny is fulfilled.

In discussing the Corporate Safeguarding Board, it was noted that the Chair of the Social Services Scrutiny is a Member and in discussing the role of Scrutiny Committee, it was agreed that the Chair meet with the relevant Directors in order to determine the parameters and role of Scrutiny moving forward. In addition, the Cabinet Member added that the Safeguarding Group will write to Group Leaders to seek additional members from outside of the group to monitor the action plan.

A Member queried whether peer group audits could assist with the monitoring process. Officers explained that currently there is best practice sharing underway with colleagues in neighbouring authorities, which contributes to a regional footprint.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that subject to an additional recommendation (ii), the recommendations in the report be approved. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained therein,

- (i) the content of the WAO Review report and the progress made in implementing the recommendations detailed in the Council's Action Plan, be noted;
- (ii) Scrutiny to consider with the Directorate, the development of a reporting regime and the areas to be reported upon.

## **8. WELSH GOVERNMENT – LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN REDUCTION EXPECTATIONS**

Councillor C. Bezzina declared a personal interest in this item as she has adopted a Looked After Child.

The report advised the Scrutiny Committee of Welsh Government's expectation on all Council's in Wales to safely reduce the numbers of children Looked After and seek support for the proposed actions to be undertaken in Caerphilly in response.

The First Minister for Wales made a manifesto pledge to reduce the numbers of children Looked After in Wales by 2022.

In February 2019, Welsh Government advised that they would be visiting each Local Authority to discuss local plans to reduce Looked After numbers. Members were advised that their visit to Caerphilly took place at the end of March 2019 and the Council was invited to submit a reduction plan to Welsh Government by the end of April 2019. Subsequently, Welsh

Government amended the report template and the final version that was submitted in July was attached for information at Appendix 1 of the report.

It was noted that in recognition of the challenges facing Local Authorities, Welsh Government announced additional Integrated Care Funding (ICF) specifically focussed on the reduction of the number of Looked After Children. The report included details of how this funding will be utilised within Caerphilly.

Social Services Scrutiny Committee were asked to note that the content of the report was presented to Cabinet on 18th September 2019 and was approved. In addition, Cabinet agreed that the 'Safe reduction of Children Looked After' would be included within Wellbeing Objective 6 of the Corporate Plan: *Support citizens to remain independent and improve their wellbeing*, when the Plan is reviewed next.

The Scrutiny Committee thanked the Officer for the report and discussion ensued.

Members raised concerns around the terminology within the report and it was suggested that possible discussions could be undertaken with the Minister with an emphasis on "Early Intervention".

A Member, in noting the table in Appendix 1, expressed concerns at the lack of suitable residential accommodation across Wales, and the majority of Looked After Children are placed with families. Officers explained that no child will be refused the relevant support they require, even if this means that the child will be placed out of County, however this is determined on a case by case basis and dependent on the needs of the individual child. In addition, Members were assured that the standard of residential care in Caerphilly is very good.

The Scrutiny Committee were asked to note the successful integrated Care Funding Grant, which aims to support regional proposals to reduce the Looked After number and working in partnership with the Aneurin Bevan Health Board and 4 other Gwent Local Authorities, ICF grant funding has been secured to develop a regional service model approach consisting of key strands: Family Group Meetings; Special Guardianship Supports; Enhanced 'Edge of Care Services; and Mediation Services for children facing homelessness.

A Member sought assurance that staff within residential care are appropriately trained in safeguarding and ensure that parameters are in place. Officers assured the Committee that the appropriate measures are in place to safeguard residents. Members were also asked to note the CIW regularly monitor all systems and processes to ensure Care Standards are being met.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendation in the report be approved. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the Officer's Report:

- (i) the content of this report and the Welsh Government Template attached at Appendix 1, be noted;
- (ii) the service developments detailed within this report aimed at achieving an overall reduction in Looked After numbers, be supported;
- (iii) Cabinet's decision to include the 'safe reduction of children looked after' under Wellbeing Objective 6 of the Corporate Plan be noted when that Plan is reviewed next.

## 9. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL SERVICES 2018/19

The report provided the Social Services Scrutiny Committee with the key messages that have been identified in the preparation of the Annual Report of the Director of Social Services for 2018/19 and sought the views of the committee on the report prior to the presentation of the report to Council on the 19th November 2019.

It was noted that Part 8 of the Social Services & Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 (SSWBA) requires Directors of Social Services in Wales to publish an annual report about the exercise of the local authority's social services functions. The report, which was appended at Appendix 1 was written in a format that is compliant with the requirements of the SSWBA.

The Scrutiny Committee were referred to the partnership agenda, which is increasingly significant for Social Services Departments in Wales. The Regional Partners Boards are increasingly becoming the "vehicles of choice" for Welsh Government in implementing policy changes and as recipients of grant funding to assist partners to implement these changes. It was noted however that this regional work is becoming increasingly intensive, time consuming and poses challenges on engagement with elected members prior to implementation of new service delivery models. It was noted that a report on the work of the Regional Partnership Board in Gwent and how it impacts on our work in Caerphilly is scheduled for a future meeting of Scrutiny.

The Scrutiny Committee thanked the Director for his report and discussion ensued.

In noting the performance measures, a Member queried the care leavers measures and the reduction in the reported data and the reasons for this. Officers explained that these refer to very small numbers of children and Members were assured that 100% of care leavers are still receiving support or contact from Social Services until they are aged 24. Further queries were raised around the percentage of assessments completed for children within statutory timescales and the reasons for the 5% reduction. Officers explained that this is subject to additional validation.

Discussions took place around budget allocations and it was noted that there are some areas which are proving to be financially challenging in terms of ensuring that there are sufficient budget allocations to meet needs, such as Domiciliary Care. Officers explained that cuts have been made in other areas to boost deficit but due to the increasing ageing population, there are additional pressure on services, however, health and wellbeing remains the main concern and priority.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendation in the report be approved. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the contents of the Annual Director's Report for 2018-19 be noted, prior to its submission to Council on 19th November 2019, for its adoption.

The meeting closed at 7.05pm

Approved as a correct record, subject to any amendments agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 3rd December 2019.

---

CHAIR