



SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE DIGITAL MEETING HELD VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON TUESDAY 1ST DECEMBER 2020 AT 5.30 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor L. Binding - Chair
Councillor V. James - Temporary Vice Chair

Councillors:

A. Angel, D. Cushing, K. Etheridge, M. Evans, A. Gair, J. Gale, L. Jeremiah, S. Skivens and W. Williams.

Cabinet Member: S. Cook (Social Care).

Together with:

D. Street (Corporate Director - Social Services and Housing), J. Williams (Assistant Director – Adult Services), G. Jenkins (Assistant Director – Children’s Services), C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Manager) and C. Evans (Committee Services Officer).

Users and Carer – Mrs M. Jones.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors J. Bevan, C. Bezzina, D. Harse, A. Leonard, C. Thomas and C. Luke (User and Carer).

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received at the commencement or during the course of the meeting.

3. MINUTES – 20TH OCTOBER 2020

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Social Services Scrutiny Committee held on 20th October 2020 (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

The Scrutiny Manager introduced the report that informed the Committee of its Forward Work Programme planned for the period December 2020 to April 2021.

It was noted that there are two items scheduled for 2nd February 2021, which included a Budget Report and the Directors Annual Report, however Welsh Government have advised that due to the current pandemic, the Annual Report will not be required this year.

In addition, it was noted that a report on the Respite Facility and a presentation from the Aneurin Bevan Health Board on Mental Health and Learning Difficulties provision is scheduled for 16th March 2021.

A Member, in noting that the Grange Hospital has now opened and has received several queries and concerns from the public in relation to staffing, transport links, critical care and minor injuries and requested a presentation from the Aneurin Bevan Health Board addressing some of the issues. Members were asked to provide the Scrutiny Manager with any further questions for a presentation to be arranged.

A Member, in noting that the Annual Report is no longer required, queried whether this is as a result of the Pandemic, or whether it will continue going forward. Officers explained that the Annual Report will be produced next year but is not this year due to the Pandemic. Officers agreed to produce a report to demonstrate the developments and progress made and provide it to the Scrutiny Committee.

Following consideration and discussion, and subject to the changes proposed, 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 for the coming year be approved and published on the Councils' website

6. CABINET REPORTS

There had been no requests for any of the Cabinet reports to be brought forward for discussion at the meeting.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

7. DEVELOPMENT OF A MULTI AGENCY SAFEGUARDING HUB IN CAERPHILLY

The report provided the Scrutiny Committee with details of the proposal to develop a multi-agency Safeguarding Hub with Gwent Police. The Hub will be based in Caerphilly but support the West of Gwent i.e. covering Caerphilly, Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent local authorities, and sought Committee support for the operational and strategic principles underpinning this development.

Members were asked to note that Gwent Police commissioned a review of the way they were delivering their Public Protection functions and specifically their role in safeguarding.

Through engaging with partner agencies as part of the review, it soon became apparent that there was an opportunity to develop multi-agency safeguarding hubs and to support this, a pilot project commenced in Newport in the spring of 2018 involving a Police Decision Maker

being co-located in the Council's Information, Advice and Assistance (IAA) Service. Shortly afterwards, the pilot was extended to Blaenau Gwent and learning from both sites has been incorporated into the final review recommendations.

It was noted that based on the work to date, the Review's key recommendation was to have a Police Officer decision maker co-located in each local authority IAA service supported by Senior Officers, Conference Support Officers and Business Support in two regional hubs covering East and West Gwent. It was proposed that the East Hub will be based in Newport covering Newport and Monmouthshire and the West Hub will be in Caerphilly covering Caerphilly, Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent.

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

A Member sought clarification on the collaboration and operational challenges as a result of the hub, and whether the collaboration is effective now and going forward. Officers explained that there is effective collaboration in place, with a partnership approach being undertaken for safeguarding. Whilst the ABHB provision will not be taking the same approach as the Police, they propose to establish single points of contact in each of the relevant divisions providing a reporting mechanism will improve the existing arrangements.

A Member sought further information on the criteria to identify and map the principles. Officers explained that the review was undertaken by Gwent Police, and the findings were reported to the partner agencies and implemented. However, it was agreed that the mapping process will be clarified, and the information provided to the Committee.

Further information was sought around the virtual conferencing facilities. Officers explained that several services will be co-locating to Foxes Lane, and therefore facilities will be required in order to accommodate the various services. In addition, as a result of the Pandemic, it was found that video conferencing was very effective for enabling agencies to participate, and therefore it would be appropriate to future proof the hub and make it fit for purpose.

A Member sought further information around the co-location proposal and whether there would be a separation between specialists for safeguarding children and adults. Officers explained that similar arrangements to those currently in place will be maintained in that there will be a clear split between the service areas, but with the added advantage of police presence. The co-location will enable multi-agency decision making and involvement at the earliest point of contact, creating a more effective service.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations in the report be approved. By way of electronic voting this agreed by the majority present.

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

- i) The development of a multi-agency Safeguarding Hub in Caerphilly be noted and supported;
- ii) The broad strategic and operational principles that will inform the development be agreed.

8. THE SAFE REDUCTION OF THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER IN CAERPHILLY

The report provided the Scrutiny Committee (Committee) with an update on the actions taken to implement Welsh Government's expectation to safely reduce the numbers of Children Looked After in Caerphilly.

It was noted that the First Minister for Wales made a manifesto pledge to reduce the numbers of Children Looked After in Wales by 2022. As part of a national programme of work, Welsh Government officials and advisors visited Caerphilly in March 2019 and the Council was invited to submit a reduction plan to Welsh Government by the end of April 2019.

In recognition of the challenges facing Local Authorities, Welsh Government announced additional Integrated Care Funding (ICF) specifically focussed on supporting the safe reduction of the number of Children Looked After. The report included details of how this funding has been utilised within Caerphilly.

It was noted that in September 2019, 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 was reviewed next.

The reduction plan and an overview report were presented to Committee in October 2019 so the report provided a timely update for Members.

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

A Member, in noting the information in the report sought reassurance that the reduction was not as a result of lowering the criteria. Officers assured Members that the main priority will always be the needs of the child. Several measures have been put in place to assist with the reduction, however, regardless of how aspirational the target set, justification can be made for every child that is Looked After and that targets are secondary, the needs of a child remain the priority.

A Member queried whether the risk assessment process has changed as a result of the Pandemic. Officers explained that there have been some changes, which have strengthened the process and the way in which social services engage. Members were reassured that even during the lockdown period, the service remained business as usual.

Queries were raised around the placements of children outside of the borough. Officers maintained that the safety and wellbeing of the child is paramount. It was noted that often children can be placed outside of the borough as a result of a lack of foster carers in the area, or to be closer to family members or schools in order to maintain relationships and links where it is safe to do so. Where it has been necessary to place a child outside of the borough into residential care, every effort is being made to bring the child back into the area within the Council's provision.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendation in the report be approved. By way of electronic voting this was unanimously agreed

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the Officer's report the actions taken to implement plans to safely reduce the numbers of Children Looked After and to confirm the current position in Caerphilly be noted.

9. REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP BOARDS - UPDATE

The report provided the Scrutiny Committee with an update on the work and decisions taken over the last 4 months by the Regional Partnership Board.

It was noted that at its meeting on the 4th February the Scrutiny Committee received an update report regarding the work of the Gwent Regional Partnership Board, which was appended to the report at Appendix 1. One of the recommendations made, after members had considered the report, was for the Social Services Scrutiny Committee to receive quarterly reports on the work and priorities of the Board.

Members were asked to note that in March 2020 the local authority and its statutory partners began their response to the Coronavirus pandemic and as a result the Regional Partnership Board did not meet again until July 2020.

It was noted that Part 9 of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 required local authorities and Health Boards to establish Regional Partnership Boards (RPB's). RPB's were established on Health Board footprints with consequently seven Boards being established. The RPB for the Caerphilly area is titled the Gwent Regional Partnership Board.

Members noted that since their inception in 2016 the RPB has become increasingly influential in developing integrated health and social care services across the region. The Board has also been the recipient of significant amounts of grant funding from WG to support and develop an integrated service.

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

Members raised several concerns around the governance of the RPB, which have been expressed to Welsh Government.

A Member queried the cause for the delay in the RPB meeting during the pandemic. Officers explained that this was as a result of conflicting priorities within their own fields, however members were assured that joint working continued on a daily basis, but it was difficult arranging for a meeting for the board, when members were dealing with the impact and issues caused by the pandemic.

Concerns were raised around grant funding and the sustainability of the provision should this end. Officers explained that this is a concern, and should funding stop, it would require a formal evaluation of services, ceasing those which have not met their targeted outcomes.

A Member raised concerns around the difficulties recruiting to posts as a result of the uncertainty of grant funding. Officers agreed that there is a difficulty as secondment may not be an option, and a permanent position cannot be offered as a result of uncertainty with funding. However, recruitment campaigns are underway and links with colleges and universities can be utilised to encourage recruitment.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendation in the report be approved. By way of electronic voting this was unanimously agreed

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the Officer's report the content therein be noted.

10. SOCIAL SERVICES RESPONSE TO THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

The report provided the Scrutiny Committee with an overview of the Directorate's response to the coronavirus pandemic to date and an the approach taken to identify, mitigate and manage the risks that emerged during the first phase of the Pandemic and to identify the issues that continue to challenge the local authority as the end of the year approaches.

It was noted that the emergence of Coronavirus at the beginning of 2020 has presented unprecedented demands on public services and required Members, Officers and the people who rely on services to accept the delivery of services in a different way to the manner they would normally be delivered.

The report outlined the principle challenges faced and explained how the Directorate has responded to these challenges.

It was noted that clearly the Directorate has not responded to the virus in isolation and many of the actions taken have been as part of the Council's overarching response to the Pandemic. To that end, Members were asked to consider the report in conjunction with the report submitted to the meeting of Council on 10th September 2020.

The Scrutiny Committee thanked the Officer for the report and wished the thanks noted to all staff who worked above and beyond their normal duties during the pandemic, to continue delivering services to those most in need.

A Member sought further information on the impact the pandemic has had on Domiciliary Services. Officers explained that there was an early decrease in the demand for services, as families were caring for their relatives due to furlough or concerns with contamination, prior to the implementation of testing. However, demand has since increased and relied upon more so to keep vulnerable people at home and out of hospitals or care homes. However, links with the private sector in this area has also improved, becoming more streamlined and building a relationship of trust whilst working more closely together to deliver services.

Clarification was sought on whether there was a timeframe allocated for the re-opening of Day Centres, and if they would re-open. Officers explained that there is no timeframe set now, with the pandemic ongoing, but provision is available from many community services. Members noted that feedback from users has highlighted that the community provision is often preferred and therefore consideration may be given to a change in service provision in the future. Members were assured however that any proposals will be subject to scrutiny approval.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendation in the report be approved. By way of electronic voting this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the Officers report: -

- i) The Directorate's response to the emergence of Coronavirus in early 2020 and the ongoing challenges/ pressures that are likely to continue for some months be noted;
- ii) That further reports are provided in due course in relation to specific areas of the broad-based report.

The meeting closed at 7.16pm

Approved as a correct record, subject to any amendments agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on the 2nd February 2021.

CHAIR