



SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE DIGITAL MEETING HELD VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON MONDAY 1ST NOVEMBER 2021 AT 5.30 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor D. Cushing - Chair

Councillors:

C. Bezzina (Vice Chair), C. Bishop, K. Etheridge, M. Evans, A. Gair, J. Gale, V. James, L. Jeremiah, S. Skivens, C. Thomas, W. Williams.

Cabinet Member: S. Cook (Cabinet Member for Social Services).

Together with:

Officers: D. Street (Acting Chief Executive), G. Jenkins (Assistant Director - Children's Services), J. Williams (Assistant Director – Adult Services), M. Jones (Financial Services Manager), C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Manager), E. Sullivan (Senior Committee Services Officer), S. Hughes (Committee Services Officer) J. Lloyd (Committee Services Officer), and J. Thomas (Committee Services Officer).

Users and Carer: M. Jones, C. Luke and P. Cook.

Also in attendance: M. Robotham and Councillor C.P. Mann

RECORDING AND VOTING ARRANGEMENTS

The Chair reminded those present that the meeting was being filmed but would not be live streamed, however a recording would be available following the meeting via the Council's website – [Click Here To View](#). She advised that decisions would be made by Microsoft Forms.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors A. Angel, J. Bevan, D. Harse, and A. Leonard.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. MINUTES – 13TH SEPTEMBER 2021.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Social Services Scrutiny Committee held on 13th September 2021 (minute nos. 1 - 9) 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 November 2021 to March 2022.

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

RESOLVED that the Forward Work Programme as appended to the meeting papers be published on the Council's website.

6. CABINET REPORT

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

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

7. NOTICE OF MOTION – DAY CENTRES.

Members were referred to the Notice of Motion on Day Centres submitted by Cllr. C.P. Mann and were asked to consider the details included in the Notice of Motion and to make an appropriate recommendation to Council.

Councillor Mann outlined his notice of motion and the reasons for bringing it forward for consideration. Councillor Mann acknowledged that some of the provisions with the motion had been superseded since its submission, however he still felt that it should progress as submitted. The Scrutiny Committee were asked to note the views expressed to Councillor Mann from Carers that they had lost a vital lifeline and were unable to cope with the reduced day services provision, placing stress and anxiety on families.

The Acting Chief Executive addressed the committee in relation to the second sentence in paragraph 3 of the motion and although he would not usually pass comment on the content of a motion, he felt that he should do so in this instance as he fundamentally disagreed with the view expressed. The reference projected an entirely unfair appraisal of Officers who had worked with the best of intentions in relation to the consultation process and having seen the work they had done throughout the pandemic to safeguard service users he felt no other option but to challenge the comments made. He accepted that the reduced provision had consequences for families, but the high infection rates levels, the risks associated for very

vulnerable services users and the need to safeguard the public health could not be underestimated.

A Member expressed his disappointment that the motion had progressed as submitted despite his attempt to work with fellow Councillors on this issue as he would have preferred a collaborative approach and endorsed the comments from the Acting Chief Executive in relation to Social Services staff. To his end Councillor Kevin Etheridge proposed an amendment to the motion to read: -

“In view of those recent concerns raised by users and carers at a public meeting and a petition of over 1000 names and the worry, distress, anxiety upset, and stress caused for many in our communities we are pleased that the authorities have recognised that the original consultation exercise was withdrawn, and a more effective robust exercise will be undertaken by an Independent person with all stakeholders: users, carers and families.

We therefore call for all parties to work together, and in order to work in partnership a working group is set up with specific terms of reference to monitor and evaluate progress to ensure fairness and consistency. The Group would therefore be Chaired by the Cabinet Member, Cllrs from this Scrutiny limited numbers 2/3, Carer and Users, Officers from Social Services and Union representative. A report will be produced with recommendations for evaluation and consideration with options going forward ensuring regular engagement with all parties.”

The Chair sought clarification as to whether Councillor Etheridge could propose such an amendment as his was not a signatory of the original motion and it was confirmed that this would need to be accepted by the proposer or one of the signatories and the Chair would need to consider how significant the change to be. The Chair confirmed that as this was on a similar theme, she did not consider this to be a significant change and sought confirmation from Councillor Mann as to whether he was prepared to accept this as the motion to progress on to Council.

Councillor Mann confirmed that he would be prepared to remove the previously referred to sentence from his motion and take this forward. This amendment was then moved and seconded by the Committee.

Members then debated the current risks around service provision and infection rates and concerns were expressed that a return to full service would go against Welsh Government Guidance, Risk Assessments, and place vulnerable people at an increased risk of infection. A Co-opted Member updated the Committee on the robust nature of the risk assessment they had in place and how increased infection rates made it impossible for them to run their services at original levels in order to safeguard service users and felt that everyone must be mindful of doing the upmost to reduce infection rates. Another Co-opted Member advised Members that the way in which day services had adapted their provision in light of the pandemic were popular with service users, getting them out and about.

A Member expressed concern regarding the negative impact on physical and mental wellbeing caused by the reduction of service but felt that consideration must be given to the wider range of implications and service provision.

Councillor Mann was then asked to reconsider the wording of his motion in line with the amendment proposed by Councillor Etheridge and Councillor Mann agreed to a combined motion which was moved and seconded to read: -

“In view of significant public concern about suggested changes to the council’s day care services, the Plaid Cymru group calls on the council to return to providing a full service of hours at day centres, pending an extensive review. We also call on CCBC not to withdraw previous transport arrangements for service users.

The proposals, as they stand, have caused immense distress and anxiety for carers and some of the most vulnerable members of our society which is having a detrimental effect on their Mental Health and Wellbeing.

We are concerned that the existing consultation exercise has not gone out to all Carers and those vulnerable individuals they care for. A better system of communication with service users and families is badly needed so that they are a proper part of the decision-making process

In the meantime, there should be a moratorium on any changes taking place for at least 12 months with a final decision on any changes being considered by the full council.

In view of those recent concerns raised by users and carers at a public meeting and a petition of over 1000 names and the worry, distress, anxiety upset, and stress caused for many in our communities we are pleased that the authorities have recognised that the original consultation exercise was withdrawn, and a more effective robust exercise will be undertaken by an Independent person with all stakeholders; users, carers and families.

We therefore call for all parties to work together, and in order to work in partnership a working group is set up with specific terms of reference to monitor and evaluate progress to ensure fairness and consistency. The Group would therefore be Chaired by the Cabinet Member, Cllrs from this Scrutiny limited numbers 2/3, Carer and Users, Officers from Social Services and Union representative. A report will be produced with recommendations for evaluation and consideration with options going forward ensuring regular engagement with all parties.

Councillor Etheridge expressed his reservations in relation to the proposed combined motion and emphasised the need for elected members, officers, and partners to work together.

The matter then progressed to vote by rollcall, verbal confirmation.

Amendment 2 – The Combined Motion from Councillor Mann and Councillor Etheridge having been moved and seconded proceeded to the vote and by way of verbal confirmation was declared lost by the majority present.

Amendment 1 – The Amended Motion from Councillor Mann with the removal of sentence 2 of paragraph 3 having been moved and seconded proceeded to the vote and by way of verbal confirmation was declared lost by the majority present.

Substantive Motion – The Original Motion from Councillor Mann was not moved or seconded and was therefore declared lost.

The Social Services Scrutiny Committee therefore RECOMMENDED to Council that the Notice of Motion not be supported.

With the approval of the Chair, it was agreed that Agenda Item No. 10 be brought forward for consideration with Agenda Items 8 and 9 following.

10. SOCIAL SERVICES COVID-19 POSITION STATEMENT.

The Cabinet Member introduced the report which provided Members with an update on the key issues which affected the service and the challenges faced by the changing guidance throughout the pandemic and wished to note his thanks to the whole social care workforce for their dedication and resilience during unprecedented times. The Acting Chief Executive also advised Members of the ongoing pressures currently being faced by social services staff.

The Assistant Director for Children's Services provided information to members on the provision of Children's Services throughout the pandemic. A blended/hybrid approach has

enabled the Service to continue to safeguard and protect the most vulnerable children and young people.

Members were advised that although Children's referrals have remained stable pre-pandemic, during the pandemic and in the year to date, the numbers of referrals progressing to assessment dropped by 10.5% in 2020/21, from 1840 in 2019/20, to 1640 in 2020/21 and for the year to date the figure is predicted to return to pre covid levels of around 1900. Members were also advised of the referrals progressed to assessment, where there was an even more significant reduction in those progressing to preventative services of 41% from 591 in 2019/20 to 347 in 2020/21. For the year to date, this figure is predicted to increase to around 400.

The numbers of children's names included on the Child Protection Register have remained constant over the last three years averaging around 170 at any time. Members were advised that this is positive, as despite the reduction in assessments undertaken, it is evident that those children in greatest need have continued to be safeguarded.

Members were advised that applications to court to protect children were already reducing and have continued to reduce since 2020. In 2018/19, the number of proceedings was 174. In 2019/20 this had dropped to 153 and in 2020/21 this reduced further to 130. For 2021/22, the number is predicted to be around 100. Overall, this is in line with the UK wide review of Public Law proceedings which reported that too many children were becoming subject of Care Orders.

Members were also advised that increasing numbers of chronic parental neglect cases are being reported. Whilst the exact reasons are not able to be confirmed, the reduction in monitoring, screening and surveillance of other professionals including Health Visitors and Teachers during the lockdowns has inevitably impacted on the early identification of concerns.

Members were referred to the increase in the numbers of young people presenting with emotional and mental health issues, often at the point of crisis leading to an Emergency Department admission. The majority of the young people have had no previous involvement with Children's Services but due to the risks of self-harm, are having to be accommodated by the Local Authority to ensure their ongoing safety. Due to the risks the young people present, foster placements are not appropriate, and we have seen an increase in the number of residential placements being commissioned with the inevitable associated budgetary pressures.

Members were advised that during the earlier lockdowns, family time was supported virtually with only those children subject of court proceedings or under two years of age being prioritised for physical meetings. As restrictions eased and the seasons improved, more use of outdoor contact was made. However, with the approach of autumn, Children's Services offices have had to be made safe for physical contact indoors to resume.

The Chair sought clarification on the blended approach to provide children's services and members were advised that work had been undertaken with telephone contact, facetime calls, and face to face visits, where necessary. Visits in person by social services would be pre-planned and would include risk assessments and personal protective equipment (PPE) when required. Members were advised that, where possible, these visits would be undertaken outdoors with the minimum number of persons required to be present. The Chair also queried the reduction in court cases and members were advised that social services had used different methods to deal with cases that did not then require attendance at court.

A member sought clarification on the staffing issues within social services and queried what effect an increase in mental health issues, due to the pandemic, would have on the current staff. Members were advised that recruitment into children's services had included a market supplement in order to attract new staff and to compete with salary scales of neighbouring authorities. Discussion followed in relation to mental health concerns for staff, parents, carers

and foster parents, and members were advised of the flexible working arrangements and support provided by social services.

The Assistant Director for Adult Services advised members in relation to the adult services aspect of the report and noted recurring themes similar to children's services. This included robust risk assessments throughout the provision of adult services with safeguarding as the main priority.

Members were referred to an increase of 57% in Occupational Therapy referrals, compared to the same period pre-covid. Members were advised that the 16 week waiting time had currently increased to 18 weeks, although it was hoped that this would soon be resolved with the additional recruitment of 2 persons into these roles and another 2 current members of staff due to return from maternity leave in January 2022.

Members were also referred to an increase in the demand for the service in relation to mental health and the work of social workers within the Gwent Police control rooms. This had increased from 248 requests in August 2021 to 293 requests in September 2021. Members were referred to the work of social care staff with the health board, in line with Welsh Government guidance, which restricted social care staff more than the general public. This had an effect on staff rotas which had to be covered, particularly within residential homes. This guidance has since been updated to allow less restrictions for social care staff, however with the continued use of Lateral Flow Tests.

Members were given an update on persons waiting to be discharged from hospital and those awaiting care packages, together with details of the total hours of care required in the community and the shortage of staff due to a decrease in numbers from one of the authority's care providers.

Members were advised that 11 care homes remain in 'incident' with 52 staff and 33 residents testing positive. 3 care homes are under review with a single staff member currently testing positive. Members were referred to the current situation with day services and the level of impact this had on unpaid carers and users of this service. Members were also referred to 2 other local authorities who have undergone an independent review of their day services provision and have co-produced a 'model' for day services going forward.

Members were made aware of the staffing challenges within residential homes, with the authority using agency staff for the first time in twenty years. Recruitment is ongoing using a variety of different avenues including advertising through social media and apprenticeships.

The Chair sought clarification on care homes in 'incident' and members were advised that this confirmed there were current covid cases within the care home. Clarification was also sought on attendance at day centres which were only open part time. Members were advised that there was a reduction in the day centre provision due to compliance with Welsh Government guidance and health and safety risk assessments and that priority for attendance at day bases had been identified by Social Workers.

The guest speaker gave a presentation to members on behalf of a group of 200 carers and service users that he represented. The speaker was very clear regarding the impact of individuals not attending had on carers. Members were informed that his son's non-attendance at a day centre could have a direct impact on his availability for employment. Members were advised that a carer could not pursue a career or further education due to the reduced provision of day services.

Members were given an insight into the life of a full-time carer and service users that would always require care throughout their lives. Members were referred to the Local Authority's duty under the Social Services and Well Being Act 2014, to provide care to individuals, including the use of buildings in the community.

The guest speaker wished to note that current circumstances that allowed leisure centres and libraries to reopen should also apply to day centres and thanked the Committee for the opportunity to speak at the meeting on behalf of all the carers and users that he represented.

The Committee thanked the guest speaker and noted their appreciation for all the information he had shared to the members, on behalf of those he represented.

A member sought clarification on a statement included in the report by the Acting Chief Executive, 'we are confident that Social Services will be able to respond quickly and proportionately to any changes that need to be put into operation'. The member also queried the effect this would have on the pressure on staff, risk assessments, prioritisation of work and the backlog of work for occupational therapists. In addition, confirmation was sought on the timescale for the independent review of day services, and when they can be fully re-opened, including the use of Lateral Flow Tests.

Members were advised of staffing issues for domiciliary care and the continued reduction in staff numbers and were referred to the recruitment process. Members were advised that an independent review was being sought and would be undertaken as soon as possible. Members were also advised that lateral flow tests are currently done by all day care staff, as required.

The Chair wished to note her thanks to all social care staff, and on a personal level, those staff that had recently dealt with a member of her family. Members also noted thanks to social care staff during pre-covid times and currently.

A member sought clarification on the review of pay and conditions of social care staff during these difficult times. Members were advised that the new job descriptions would be subject to a full job evaluation as requested by the trade unions. If Job evaluations confirms grade 5, this will impact on 10 staff members, they will be afforded 18 months protection and can remain in day services. Members were advised that all other provider services staff were grade 5 and those services are 24/7.

The Acting Chief Executive wished to note a response to the member's comments regarding social services staff and noted that staff had faced and dealt with many challenges in the past 18 months, most of which he has not experienced in 40 years in social care.

The Social Services Scrutiny Committee noted the content of the report and the ongoing operational pressures experienced by Social Services as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

8. BUDGET-MONITORING REPORT (MONTH 5).

The Cabinet member introduced the report which informed members of the projected revenue expenditure for the Social Services Directorate and the financial impact of the Covid 19 pandemic upon the Directorate for the 2021/22 financial year. Members were referred to the projected underspend of £671k for Social Services in 2021/22, inclusive of transport costs, and also referred to the funding made available to Social Services during the 2021/22 financial year through the Welsh Government Covid 19 Hardship Fund.

Members were asked to note that the projected underspend of £671k against the Social Services budget for 2021/22 (inclusive of transport costs) includes a number of non-recurring underspends attributable to the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic which mask an underlying increase in demand for social care along with significant inflationary pressures within the social care market.

The Financial Services Manager advised members that additional Social Care Recovery funding from Welsh Government was announced as the budget-monitoring report was being finalised, but it had been assumed that this additional funding would be matched by additional

expenditure over the remaining part of the financial year. Members were informed that it was anticipated that this additional funding would be used for the services that had not already been provided and would not have any impact on the net financial positions, so the original report was not amended. Members were advised that Welsh Government had subsequently changed the conditions of the funding to allow it to be used to fund additional expenditure that had occurred since April 2021, to support service users, care providers and the social care workforce. This meant that the overspend on supported living services could be funded from the Social Care Recovery fund which could increase the reported underspend by as much as £800k.

Members were advised that Welsh Government had recently increased the grant funding to just over £4 million, to include unpaid carers and children's services. Members were also advised that this could be used to fund the £1.2 million overspend identified in the report, in respect of children's residential placements which would increase the overall directorate underspend by £1.2 million. Members were informed that this was a one-off payment for 2021 and noted that the overspend in children's residential placements was a recurring amount.

The Social Services Scrutiny Committee noted that the projected underspend of £671k against the Social Services budget for 2021/22 (inclusive of transport costs) includes a number of non-recurring underspends attributable to the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic which mask an underlying increase in demand for social care along with significant inflationary pressures within the social care market.

9. ANNUAL CORPORATE SAFEGUARDING REPORT 2020 – 2021.

The Cabinet member introduced the report which included the completed Action Plan in response to the Wales Audit Office follow-up review in 2019 that were both approved by the Council's Corporate Safeguarding Board on 13th September 2021. Members were asked to note the content of the Annual Corporate Safeguarding Board Report and the progress made in implementing the Action Plan.

The Assistant Director for Children's Services noted that this was a review of the corporate governance of safeguarding arrangements and did not consider operational safeguarding practice and procedures for children which is the responsibility of Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW). Members were referred to the Action Plan included with the report, and in particular the information provided in relation to staff training. Members were also advised that based on the Board's approval, the Action Plan to be closed down and replaced with a Forward Work Programme for 2021/22.

The Social Services Scrutiny Committee noted the content of the Annual Corporate Safeguarding Board Report and the progress made in implementing the Action Plan.

The meeting closed at 7.36 pm.

Approved as a correct record, subject to any amendments agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on the 23rd November 2021.

CHAIR