



SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE DIGITAL MEETING HELD VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON TUESDAY 20TH OCTOBER 2020 AT 5.30 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor L. Binding - Chair
Councillor C. Bezzina - Vice Chair

Councillors:

D. Cushing, K. Etheridge, M. Evans, A. Gair, J. Gale, V. James, L. Jeremiah and C. Thomas.

Cabinet Member: S. Cook (Social Care).

Together with:

Officers: D. Street (Corporate Director - Social Services and Housing), J. Williams (Assistant Director - Adult Services), G. Jenkins (Assistant Director - Children's Services, M. Jones (Interim Financial Services Manager), S. Richards (Head of Education Planning and Strategy Finance), T. McMahon (Community Regeneration Manager), S. Isaacs (Rents Manager), C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Manager) and A. Dredge (Committee Services Officer).

Also in attendance:

A. Rowling (Care Inspectorate Wales).

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors A. Angel, J. Bevan D. Harse, S. Skivens and W. Williams and Mrs M. Jones and C. Luke (Co-opted Members).

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. MINUTES – 24TH SEPTEMBER 2020

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Social Services Scrutiny Committee held on 24th September 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 Officer introduced the report that informed the Committee of its Forward Work Programme planned for the period October to December 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.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that subject to the following amendments, 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 and discussed at the meeting:

- i. an overview report in respect of the impact that Covid-19 has had across the Social Services Directorate be brought to the next meeting scheduled on the 1st December 2020;
- ii. the Social Services Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme be published on the Council's website.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

6. CARE INSPECTORATE WALES PERFORMANCE REVIEW - APRIL 2019 - MARCH 2020

The report summarised the Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) Local Authority Performance Review of Caerphilly County Borough Council in carrying out its Social Services functions from April 2019 to March 2020. The report also lays out the CIW Performance Review Plan for 2020-21, albeit this is subject to amendment due to the impact of the ongoing pandemic.

As with all other Local Authority's in Wales, the Social Services Departments' activities are overseen and regulated by CIW. They undertake an annual programme of visits to reassure themselves, the authority and the public that services are of the appropriate standard and being delivered in accordance with the requirements and principles of the Social Services & Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014.

A. Rowling (CIW – Local Authority Inspection Team) presented the report and summarised the strengths and areas for improvement under four main headings, namely, Well-being, People, Prevention and Partnerships. The letter attached to the report sets out the evaluation activity undertaken by the Inspectorate, during the course of the year. Members were pleased to note that one of Caerphilly's biggest strengths is the stability and experience of the senior management team in both Children's and Adults Services. They are proactive in their roles and provide their staff with support and the confidence to undertake their work within a safe working culture. Ms Rowling advised that there are no issues in any area relating to safeguarding within Children's or Adult Services and that all principles within the Act are followed. The people in receipt of services provided by Caerphilly are at the heart of the service provision and their voices are heard. Lots of development has been seen around corporate parenting and how Caerphilly look after the young people in their care and the engagement that continues with care leavers. Prevention is high on the Council's agenda and it was explained how early intervention benefits in the long term. It was also explained that partnership working has always been good in Caerphilly. This has provided a good foundation, and in particular during the last 6 months in the community with adult services,

community connectors, GP services and hospital discharge. A key priority has been the implementation of the safe reduction strategy in respect of children who have become looked after working with teams such as the MyST service.

Members were assured that the senior management team are willing to adapt and change and are always looking for ways to improve with a solution focussed approach. CIW consider Caerphilly in high regard with no risks or concerns.

Members questioned if engagement events could be held in the future with young people from the age range of 13 plus so that their voices could be heard. Officers explained the sensitive difficulties around this and confirmed that creative methods have been introduced since this issue was identified with the use of social media platforms and user-friendly documentation. Officers referred to the 'Caerphilly Shout out Group' who are an older group of looked after children who were able to advise and assist officers in finding alternative ways of meeting face to face with their Social Workers/Independent Reviewing Officers. The Group revised the consultation document which is available on-line and sent electronically so that children can respond and raise any issues they have via text message as well as other means.

Members sought clarification in respect of the Community Connectors, how they were established, how the need was identified and where they work. The committee were advised that there are six community connectors. The service need was identified by the health board as it was recognised that many people attend GP surgeries but often do not have medical needs, such as isolation. Funding was provided through Compassionate Communities Project for the North of the county borough and was due to end in March 2021. However, this has now been extended up until March 2022 and will now cover the whole county borough. Members were advised that people are identified for this service by GP referral or other professionals but can also make a self-referral.

The scrutiny committee sought further information on the issue identified in the review with multi-agency partners struggling with the 'Strength Based Approach' in family meetings. Members were advised that this referred to meetings between partner professionals, which had changed its approach. Formerly the meeting had a traditional approach, consideration of the issues and then strengths. The new approach firstly considers the strengths of a family before moving on to any issues. This has changed the focus of these meetings and the approach is being monitored through the local safeguarding network meetings.

In concluding, Ms Rowling emphasised that this is a very positive report from CIW.

Members placed on record their appreciation to all staff within Social Services for their hard work during this year and asked that this be relayed to the whole of the Directorate and for the letter from CIW to be shared. The Chair also thanked A. Rowling for presenting her report and responding to questions raised.

RESOLVED that for the reason's contained in the Officer's report, the contents of the letter be noted.

7. CAERPHELLY CARES

The report sought Committee approval to develop the existing Buddy Scheme and Community Regeneration Legacy into the Caerphilly Cares service, prior to its consideration and determination at Cabinet.

Officers delivered a presentation that summarised the detail set out in the report.

The purpose is to ensure people receive the right support, in the right place, at the right time and using a single point of contact through a triage system. By establishing a universal gateway model that provides a central coordination and response team that understands the different needs of individuals at risk or suffering from disadvantage. In addition, providing advice, support and signposting through strength-based assessments to internal and external support services. This will enable them to become more resilient and live as independently as possible through a strength based, community centred model. Also, to incorporate it into the Caerphilly Cares provision as part of a phased approach to developing an integrated end to end journey through internal and external services for 'at risk' customers.

The intention is to create the conditions for community assets to thrive and create a balance between service and community support by removing any barriers and for our services to work alongside communities in ways that are empowering, engaging and meaningful. To stimulate collaborative working within the Council and with partners and, above all, put communities at the heart of what we do. The 'Pandemic recovery is a complex and long running process that will involve many agencies and participants. The way processes are undertaken is critical to their success. Recovery is best achieved when the affected community is able to exercise a high degree of self-determination.' Recovering from Emergencies; UK Government 2010.

As cited in 'the front door' to adult social care, auditor general for wales' report, often authorities do not know where gaps in provision lie which has resulted in an inconsistent distribution and provision of services. Even where effective services exist, poor co-ordination between services and organisations can also limit their effectiveness.

As a result of the pandemic our communities will suffer from economic, health and other social challenges. Well-being issues and inequalities existed in our communities before the pandemic, which has only served to exacerbate these and the coming months could prove particularly difficult after furlough ends. However, conversely, the lockdown also resulted in strengthening of resilience both individually and at community level. Local activities are vital to supporting wellbeing, with new and existing local groups picking up the mantle. Support for these groups is crucial moving forward and should be seen, very much, as part of the offer of support. The current crisis has provided the Council with an opportunity to harness, support and expand the community resilience demonstrated in many communities across the borough. It provides opportunities for meaningful dialogue with vulnerable people, to assess service and support needs and coproduce services designed to promote long term independence.

Members were advised that this proposed service although a new initiative is something that has long been an ambition of the authority to implement. The learning achieved through the Buddy Scheme has allowed this to be accelerated into the current expanded proposal. Examples were provided of the targeted work already carried out by the council housing staff for council tenants to help them maximise their incomes and the links established with the Community Connectors. The aim of this service is to expand and extend this type of support for all county borough residents.

The scrutiny committee asked if the funding is for one year and what would happen if additional Welsh Government funding does not come through. It was confirmed that the funding is for one year, but the council will continue to press Welsh Government on this subject. The service will be evaluated during the year and if additional funding isn't made available, it may need to be put forward as a corporate cost pressure. The evaluation will consider that this is a preventative service aiming to reduce pressures on council services. The savings may be through cost avoidance and it is hoped that the benefits can be demonstrated. Members sought clarity on what success for this service would look like. They were provided with examples such as increased finances for residents of the county borough or making residents aware of where they can make savings through discounted water rates.

The service will aim to explore underlying issues that residents may have by not only dealing with the matter that they make contact about but having a wider conversation to see if they have other concerns.

The scrutiny committee explored the model and the one stop shop approach. Members asked about the staffing model, and it was explained that the team will be made up of existing council staff and some new staff. It is important that those working in this team have a good understanding of what services are available both inside and outside the council. Members stated that it is important to have good communication, engagement, monitoring, staff training, and support will also be vital to ensure the success of this service. Feedback from residents and follow up were highlighted by Members and it was agreed that it is important for the council to be flexible and respond to changing needs. It is difficult to predict how many demands will be made upon the council going forward, but it is likely to be challenging.

The scrutiny committee sought reassurance regarding the views of Unison and if there are likely to be any redundancies as a result. Members were assured that there will be no redundancies and some of the staff are already doing similar work. Members asked if consideration had been given to developing a regional model with neighbouring local authorities and were advised that it is important to get this working in Caerphilly first. There may be opportunities further down the line if the service works.

Members sought clarification on how any overspends are dealt with and were advised that when departments have underspends 50% is then retained by the service area as a service reserve. Then in subsequent years any overspends are in the first instance met from those service reserves. Corporate reserves would only be called upon if there were no service reserves. Alternatively, the service would seek to make spend savings during the financial year.

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 contents of the report be noted;
- ii. the establishment of a Caerphilly Cares service be endorsed;
- iii. the intended allocation of £130k of funding as outlined in the financial implication in paragraph 10.1 to develop a Caerphilly Cares Central Team, be noted;
- iv. the intended allocation of £155k of funding to enhance the Caerphilly Housing Tenancy Support Team to provide financial advice to all residents, be noted.

8. BUDGET MONITORING REPORT (MONTH 5)

The report provided Members with the projected revenue expenditure for the Social Services Directorate for the 2020/21 financial year.

The report identifies the reasons behind a projected overspend of £860k for Social Services in 2020/21, inclusive of transport costs and the potential additional costs that could be incurred within Social Services during the 2020/21 financial year. This is as a result of the

Covid-19 pandemic along with the funding made available by Welsh Government to cover these costs.

There is a projected overspend within Children's Services of £1, 386K, which is largely due to a significant increase in residential placements with a lack of other options due to the Covid-19 restrictions. The projected underspend in Adult Services is £375K however, within this figure there is a significant increase in demand for home care and supported living which may have been impacted upon by the Covid-19 restrictions. The overspends are offset within in-house services largely due to the temporary closure of day care facilities and the ability to redeploy day care staff to other settings. Savings have been made in that casual staff have not been required to cover sickness absences, training and holiday cover.

The Scrutiny Committee were referred to paragraph 5.5 in the report which sets out the additional costs incurred as a result of the Covid-19 Pandemic. There were issues relating to minor claims in the first quarter of the year where Welsh Government (WG) refused to fund. However, WG introduced Phase 2 of the Adult Social Care funding in July. This is focused on top-up payments to support independent service providers and in-house provision. It was explained that a recent claim was submitted for July costs which identified £172K of what is termed as 'exceptional items' and WG confirmed this week that his claim has been paid in full. This amount and any further claims for exceptional items will go some way to reducing the current overspend.

Members discussed the report and asked if any innovative alternatives have been considered in the community settings during the Pandemic. The Officer explained that staff are providing over 100 people with community support options. Officers have written to all people in receipt of day care to see if they are struggling and to consider the options available to them. Funding has also been made available for gardening projects such as Windy Ridge. It was also noted that several people do not want to take up any opportunities offered during the Pandemic. If any person using the services has any issues then they should contact their social worker for advice/assistance. Clarification was provided in respect of risk assessments being carried out for vulnerable people. Many reviews have been undertaken and telephone support has been provided. There has also been an increase in the demand for sitting services. One respite property remained open during the lockdown period and another has recently opened for people with learning difficulties.

A Member referred to the funding received from WG and Officers explained the process of how this is received and allocated. It was noted that the announcement made by WG a couple of months ago in that a one off £500 payment would be made to all care workers in Wales has now been received and administered by the Interim Financial Services Manager and his team. These payments have also been made to all eligible staff within the independent private sector as well as those working for the local authority. Officers were thanked for their hard work in processing these payments and obtaining the grant funding through what has been a difficult time.

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 reason's contained in the Officer's report:

- i. the budget virements undertaken within the Social Services budget during the current financial year, be noted;
- ii. the projected overspend of £860k against the Social Services budget for 2020/21, inclusive of transport costs, be noted;
- iii. the financial impact of the Covid-19 pandemic upon Social Services, be noted.

The meeting closed at 7.00pm.

Approved as a correct record, subject to any amendments agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on the 1st December 2020.

CHAIR