



SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 16TH MARCH 2021

SUBJECT: SOCIAL SERVICES COVID-19 POSITION STATEMENT

REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR – SOCIAL SERVICES & HOUSING

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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 On 1st December 2020, Scrutiny Committee received an overview of the Directorate's response to the coronavirus pandemic. The report provided information on the approach taken to identify, mitigate and manage the risks that emerged during the first phase of the pandemic and identified issues that were likely to continue to challenge us towards 2021. The report presented at the meeting on 1st December is attached as Appendix 1.
- 1.2 At the meeting, it was agreed that Members would use the report to identify further areas for "deep dives" on areas of interest or in relation to issues that emerged as the pandemic continued into 2021.
- 1.3 This report provides more detail on some of the issues raised in the December report and subsequent questions raised by Committee Members. This report also brings forward further service issues that have emerged during the ongoing pandemic.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 The ongoing pandemic has meant that over the past 12 months the Directorate has had to look at the way it delivers services and deploys its resources very differently. From early on, some services have had to be paused, staff redeployed into new areas of work and resources redirected to deal with priorities that often emerged overnight.
- 2.2 Staff have had to work alongside our partners in the Aneurin Bevan University Health Board, Education, Housing, the independent sector and the third sector.
- 2.3 Hopefully we are beginning to see us moving towards the recovery pathway and whilst this is obviously welcomed, there is little doubt that the impact in terms of the way we deliver services will be felt for years to come. There has been significant learning from the pandemic, both positive and negative and as we move forward, we will need to be mindful of alternative ways of delivering services required as people come to terms with the outcome of the pandemic.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 Members are asked to note the content of the report

4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 To provide a more in-depth analysis of actions taken and issues dealt with by the Directorate in response to the Coronavirus pandemic, provide a response to specific questions and also to flag up some of the challenges that may emerge as restrictions ease and we come out of the pandemic.

5. THE REPORT

- 5.1 The December 2020 Scrutiny Report provides a significant degree of detail in terms of the Directorate's response to the pandemic. It is not intended to repeat this but to identify several key issues which may be of interest to Committee Members.

Staffing Related Issues

- 5.2 As a result of the initial lockdown guidance, day centres had to be closed and day centre staff were redeployed to care homes for older people or supported living homes. This was part of our contingency plan should we lose high numbers of staff to the pandemic in key front line services. Early redeployment enabled those staff to understand the service area and build relationships with people.
- 5.3 Staff were also redeployed to Track /Trace /Protect and the Buddy Scheme if they were unable to undertake their normal duties.
- 5.4 Support for staff has been vital during this period. The Council has invested in IT to enable staff to work from home, actively encouraged staff to work flexibly and on a weekly basis sends information to staff regarding wellbeing support services available to them. Use of annual leave has been reinforced to ensure staff have a break and focus on their emotional well-being.

Support to the Independent Sector

- 5.5 The previous report to Scrutiny referenced some of the initial issues that emerged in terms of the provision of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). It is a great relief that throughout the pandemic, the supply has remained strong and to give Members an illustration of the scale of the task, the authority has now issued just over 10 million items of PPE across the sector.
- 5.6 At the start of the pandemic, the Directorate took the decision to pay all independent sector providers 2 months in advance as a contingency payment should there be any issues with the financial payroll systems. For domiciliary care providers this was paid on planned activity.
- 5.7 Throughout the pandemic the commitment of staff from within the Directorate and from our independent and third sector partners has been exceptional. We have previously referenced the £500 recognition payment funded by Welsh Government and this was paid out very quickly by colleagues in Finance. We have now been as proactive in processing payment requests for staff in the independent sector who are

having to isolate in line with guidance to ensure they are not financially disadvantaged.

- 5.8 Staff from the Contract and Commissioning Team have proactively called providers on a weekly basis to offer support in terms of ensuring they understand the ever changing guidance issued by Public Health Wales, CIW and Welsh Government. They have worked with the Health Board to produce weekly situation reports, assisting homes where required to recruit agency staff and sharing good practice under take Infection Prevention Control (IPC) audits.
- 5.9 We have worked hard with the sector and the Health Board to implement the testing regime across closed settings, providing staff to deliver and collect the swabs to ensure we continue to protect staff, vulnerable residents and where appropriate, children.
- 5.10 Both residents and staff in all Older People's Care Homes in the Borough, who have consented to the vaccination, have received their first dose with some having already received or having appointments to receive the second dose. It is anticipated that all homes will have received the second dose by the end of April 2021. There is a mop up system in place for any staff or residents who haven't been vaccinated.
- 5.11 We have worked with the Health Board to identify and vaccinate all front line care staff in line with the JVCI guidance in relation to Priority Group 1, to enable them to continue providing vital services to vulnerable people.

Resilience of Services

- 5.12 Like all businesses across the private sector, independent social care providers have faced significant financial pressures during the pandemic. As well as additional staffing costs, homes have been impacted significantly by a reduction in the number of residents being admitted to homes with a significant loss of income.
- 5.13 To assist providers with these challenges Welsh Government have made payments from a "Hardship Fund" of £50 per place per week in care homes and an extra £1 per hour for domiciliary care providers. Whilst this funding will continue for the remainder of this financial year, it is of significant concern that there is no clarity about 2021/22.
- 5.14 It is unclear at this point with regard to the impact the pandemic will have on demand for certain services. We are aware that a number of people who have been supported in the community, as opposed to going to day centres, have expressed a wish that this continues in the future. Likewise, we are unable to predict future demand for residential and nursing care. This position will need to be monitored carefully but there will clearly be opportunities to reshape our services to meet likely future demand. Obviously, any reshaping proposals will be brought before Scrutiny as part of the decision making process.

Social Work Services

- 5.15 The pandemic required us to rethink how our social work services were delivered. Working with colleagues across the Gwent region, the five Local Authorities agreed Regional Operational Guidance for both Children's and Adult Services.
- 5.16 In Children's Services, all referrals were prioritised on the basis of safeguarding concerns and investigations, children on the Child Protection Register, Children Looked After and children at immediate 'risk of care'. All cases were risk rated using

a Red/Amber/Green (RAG) system authorised by Team Managers and these decisions have been routinely reviewed by Service Managers.

- 5.17 Within Adult Services, priorities were safeguarding concerns and investigations, carer breakdown and adults at immediate risk.
- 5.18 Across the whole Service, prior to any visits, we have adopted a triage approach to contacting families and service users to check if anyone in the household has Covid or is self-isolating, planning how to manage the visit and ensuring we observe Public Health advice in relation to social distancing and PPE.
- 5.19 Where feasible, virtual meetings / discussions have taken place and within Children's Services, all Court attendances were virtual using telephone or video conference with some contested hearings having to be postponed. Public Law work is now back on track using virtual methods. All adult court cases have been virtual in respect of Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards and applications for Deputyship.
- 5.20 It was noticeable in Children's Services that referrals dipped for first 2-3 weeks of the initial lockdown but quickly returned to normal (year on year) levels. We also saw a spike in referrals in September, when schools started to return and are expecting to see the same again as restrictions begin to ease.
- 5.21 It is important to acknowledge that during the various lockdowns, the Directorate has been able to maintain Family Time (contact) between children in care and their parents. This has, at times, had to be restricted to children under 2 year olds and any child subject of court order but all families are having some form of contact. Wherever possible we support contact outdoors and where not, we provide it indoors ensuring social distancing and PPE as appropriate.

Support to Carers

- 5.22 At the start of the pandemic, the Directorate made a decision to keep two respite properties open, one for adults and one for children with the primary purpose of supporting carers to prevent crisis situations. Latterly we have re-opened the second adult respite property to meet increasing demand. All respite services have been able to offer bespoke solutions to crises.
- 5.23 The children's respite service worked closely with Trinity Fields Hub to provide support to families with children with the most complex needs. Significant positive feedback has been received in respect of the positive impact this had on families.
- 5.24 The adult respite properties have worked with the Social Work Teams to identify those people at highest risk of carer breakdown to support them with overnight respite, again excellent feedback has been received.
- 5.25 The Carers Team made proactive calls to everyone on their mailing list to check they were ok, regularly communicated with them promoting their services and put lots of activities on line. They offered small grants and engaged with third sector organisations regarding other services available to give a couple of examples. Specific activities were developed for young carers such as outdoor team building, assisting with provision of access to IT and carried out on line sessions such as 'meet and munch'.
- 5.26 We have commenced provision of community sessional opportunities for individuals who previously attended day centres. We are currently providing 620 hours per week

sessional support for 138 individuals. Feedback has been very good in relation to these new opportunities which we plan to continue to provide going forward.

Hospital Discharge

- 5.27 Very early on in the pandemic, it was clear that there was going to be a need to create capacity in hospitals across Gwent to cope with an influx of people with Covid-19. To facilitate this, significant numbers of people needed to be discharged from hospital into community settings. As the pandemic progressed, the position was made much more difficult by the fact that many of the residential and nursing homes in the region were unable to take admissions as they had existing residents or staff who had tested positive.
- 5.28 Subsequently, we have developed a Service Operating Procedure and Discharge Passport with the Health Board to enable people to be safely discharged from hospital and admitted to a care home.
- 5.29 These challenges placed huge pressure on domiciliary care services. Both the in-house provision and our independent sector colleagues responded magnificently to the challenge and we continue to discharge large numbers of people from hospital with re-ablement or care packages. We have increased our commissioning of domiciliary care by 11%.
- 5.30 Through the pandemic we have focused on supporting people at home to prevent unnecessary admissions to hospital. Emergency Care at Home (EC@H) staff have worked with the rapid responses nurses and doctors in the CRT to provide 'hospital at home' facilities.

Conclusion

- 5.31 The emergence of the Coronavirus pandemic has and continues to pose unprecedented challenges for the Social Services Directorate within Caerphilly County Borough Council. It is to the great credit of all our staff, together with our partners in the independent and third sectors that we have been able to respond as effectively as we have. The next few months are going to be unquestionably challenging as we have to balance continuing to respond to the pandemic with the focus on recovery and learning the lessons from the pandemic.

6. ASSUMPTIONS

- 6.1 There were no assumptions made in relation to this report however, the impact of the current wave of Coronavirus on the Directorate and the demand for our services over the next few months cannot be gauged at this time.

7. LINKS TO RELEVANT COUNCIL POLICIES

- 7.1 The content of this report supports the Council's Corporate Plan 2018-23 in terms of the following objectives;

- 7.2 **Corporate Plan 2018-2023.**

Objective 3 - Address the availability, condition and sustainability of homes throughout the county borough and provide advice, assistance or support to help

improve people's well-being

Objective 6 - Support citizens to remain independent and improve their well-being
The Corporate Plan can be found on the intranet on the Policy portal, within the

8. WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS

8.1 This report contributes to the following Well-being Goals:-

- A resilient Wales
- A healthier Wales
- A more equal Wales
- A Wales of cohesive communities

8.2 The report is consistent with the five ways of working as defined within the sustainable development principle in the Act:

- Long Term – The report explains how our response to the epidemic is impacting on service delivery, a position that is likely to remain in place for as long as the epidemic is with us and probably beyond.
- Prevention – The actions taken were and continue to be to minimise the impact of the virus on the well-being of people using social care services in the Borough.
- Integration – Good quality social care services play a fundamental part in ensuring the well-being, not just to the recipients of the service, but also to their immediate families and the general community.
- Collaboration – Partnerships are now a cornerstone of delivering our services. In the context of the Pandemic regional co-operation has been key with the
- Involvement – Involving citizens in the planning and delivery of services is a key part of the Social Services & Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. Co-production of services is now a basic requirement of social work services.

9. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

9.1 An equality impact assessment has not been carried out in connection with the recommendations set out in this report as the contents do not require a policy or service change.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 As part of the regular budget monitoring reports, Members have received details of the costs to the Directorate of responding to the pandemic as well as the specific funding allocated to the Directorate.

10.2 There have been no changes made to the charging policy during this period.

11. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There are no direct Personnel implications arising from this report.

12. CONSULTATIONS

12.1 There are no consultation responses that have not been reflected in this report.

13. STATUTORY POWER

13.1 Social Services provision is delivered in accordance with the requirements of the Social Services & Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014.

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Appendices:

Appendix Report to Social Services Scrutiny Committee – 1st December 2020