



SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 1ST DECEMBER 2020

SUBJECT: SOCIAL SERVICES RESPONSE TO THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR – SOCIAL SERVICES & HOUSING

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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide Members of Scrutiny Committee with an overview of the Directorate's response to the coronavirus pandemic to date.
- 1.2 To provide Scrutiny with an overview of 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 us as we move towards the end of 2020.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 The emergence of Coronavirus at the beginning of 2020 have made unprecedented demands on public services and required Members, Officers and the people who rely on our services to accept the delivery of services in a different way to the manner they would normally be delivered.
- 2.2 This report outlines the principle challenges faced and explains how the Directorate has responded to these challenges.
- 2.3 Clearly the Directorate has not responded to the virus in isolation and many of our actions have been as part of the Council's overarching response to the Pandemic. To that end this report should be read in conjunction with the report submitted to the meeting of Council on the 10 September 2020.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 Members are asked to note the Directorate's response to the emergence of Coronavirus in early 2020 and to note the ongoing challenges / pressures that are likely to be with us for some months.

4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 To provide a summary of the actions taken by the Directorate in response to the Coronavirus pandemic.

5. THE REPORT

- 5.1 The impact of Covid-19 on Social Care across the UK has been significant and that has certainly been the case within Caerphilly CBC. Staff have had to balance their response to the pandemic with ensuring that our most vulnerable residents continued to get the care and support they require, both in their own homes and registered settings.
- 5.2 In relation to provider services, it became clear very early on that we had to concentrate our efforts on maintaining safe services in domiciliary care which includes supported living and our registered residential care homes for adults and children. To this end, it was decided to close our day services and redeploy staff. One adult respite home remained open to provide support to up to 2 individuals at a time to support families. This has been vital to prevent carer breakdown.
- 5.3 The Ty Hapus children's respite facility worked with Trinity Fields remaining open and support provided to those children with the highest levels of needs. We have redeployed staff here to assist.
- 5.4 We successfully redeployed staff from day centres to our care homes to provide cover when staff become sick or more residents required 1:1 support due to isolation. During the first wave of the pandemic we saw a reduction in the care families required from domiciliary care agencies. This was principally driven by family members providing care while they were off work. Understandably we have seen demand increase as more family members returned to work.
- 5.5 Issues around care homes across the UK have been much publicised in the media. In Caerphilly CBC we own and run 6 care homes for older people and commission services with a further 21 privately owned homes. Unfortunately, consistent and accurate information around the levels of outbreaks were initially difficult to obtain. This situation has now improved significantly with the latest situation reports being received daily.
- 5.6 Working in collaboration with the four other Gwent Local Authorities, the Heads of Service agreed Gwent wide Operational Protocols to ensure there was consistency across service areas across the region. These Protocols were reviewed as Welsh Government and Public Health Wales guidance was amended.
- 5.6 The Information, Assistance & Advice service has been maintained. Referral rates initially dropped off significantly but began to pick up again as the first wave of the virus began to reduce.
- 5.7 In terms of our Assessment Care Management Services provision the main issues / changes have been;
 - 5.7.1 Priorities for home visits to families/individuals by social workers centred around safeguarding investigations for adults and children, children on the Child Protection Register, Children Looked After and those at immediate 'risk of care'. All cases were risk rated by Team Managers and these decisions reviewed by Service Managers.
 - 5.7.2 Prior to any visits, we adopted the triage approach to contacting families/individuals to check if they were self-isolating and by observing public health advice in relation to social distancing and hygiene as were Child Protection Conferences, Core Groups and Reviews.

- 5.7.3 All Court attendances were virtual using telephone or video conference, for both adults and children's team, but contested Hearings and Final Hearings were postponed.
- 5.7.4 We supported a number of extremely challenging children and individuals throughout the period and prevented a number of placement breakdowns. Where breakdowns occurred a lack of foster placements meant we had to rely on residential placements. Access to placements in adult services short or long term was significantly impacted upon by the need to have a negative covid test result.
- 5.7.5 Our 16 Plus Team have had challenges in relation to young people refusing to observe social distancing and having to transport young people so we have provided the team with a minibus.
- 5.8 As I am sure Members would have seen, there has been significant attention paid nationally to the supply of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and the access to timely testing of carers and service users. As far as Caerphilly CBC is concerned the issues were as follows;
- 5.8.1 Initial difficulties around the supply of PPE were encountered with supplies forwarded from the Welsh Government (WG) Pandemic store. For the 5 Local Authorities (LAs) in the former Gwent area, deliveries were made to the integrated community equipment store in Newport for onward delivery to individual LAs. These deliveries were for both local authority and independent sector staff. At the height of the first wave we were only ever holding adequate supplies for around 48 hours.
- 5.8.2 Following representation at all levels, the situation with regards to PPE improved and we saw significant progress on a number of fronts, including:-
- Confirmed deliveries from WG every Tuesday with top up delivery on Friday.
 - A PPE calculator completed for WG to identify potential demand.
 - Participation in a Ministry Of Defence (MoD) review of end to end process for PPE.
 - Internally we continued to source our own PPE to reduce demand on WG stock. We have had some success thanks to colleagues in procurement and co-operation from local suppliers / manufacturers.
- 5.8.3 The position around PPE was made more complex by changing guidance from WG and still a level of misunderstanding amongst staff around the actual PPE they require. It is pleasing to note that the position around PPE has continued to improve and we move into the winter months in a much stronger position than we were at the start of the pandemic.
- 5.9 Testing of staff exhibiting Covid-19 symptoms has been particularly problematic. At the commencement of the outbreak testing was very difficult to access due to prioritisation of NHS colleagues. When testing of social care staff did become available, we were limited to 15 places per LA per day with the only testing facilities available to staff being at the Cardiff City Stadium and Rodney Parade, Newport.

5.9.1 Thankfully the position has improved greatly. As the number of testing stations has increased across the Borough it has become much more straightforward for staff to access tests. Likewise Welsh Government took a decision for all residents in care homes to be tested weekly over a four week period and for testing of staff in care homes to continue when a positive case was determined.

5.9.2 Whereas the availability of testing has improved significantly there remain issues in terms of the turnaround time for test results. The position is inconsistent at present with some results being available in 24 hours whilst others can take the best part of a week to arrive. These issues are raised regularly at the Gwent Resilience Forum Strategic Coordinating Group.

5.10 On a more positive note, there's little doubt that the Covid-19 outbreak has made the general public more appreciative of the work of our carers in social care. Initiatives such as the weekly 'clap for carers' and the carers card to give staff priority access to supermarkets, helped raise the profile of our care workers and their invaluable role at this time of national emergency. Adding to this I would like to take the opportunity to thank all the front line care staff and their supervisors / managers who have, and continue to, pull out all the stops to ensure services are maintained to support the vulnerable people in our communities.

5.11 In order to recognise the work undertaken by carers, Welsh Government also made funding available for all carers across Wales to receive a £500 "recognition payment". This was to be paid to all carers whether they were employed by local authorities or independent sector partners. Staff in the Directorates commissioning team, alongside colleagues from finance, were able to process these payments so that carers received the money in October 2020. The same staff are now undertaking work to establish the Statutory Sick Pay enhancement scheme that has recently been announced.

5.12 **Conclusion**

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 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 pressures that we traditionally see over the winter period.

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 on 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.
- Prevention – The action 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 Inevitably our response to the pandemic has meant we have incurred additional costs. The Budget monitoring report for Month 5, considered by the Social Services Scrutiny Committee on the 20 October 2020 (see attached – paragraphs 5.5.1 to 5.5.7), provided detail of additional costs incurred and how this had been at least partially covered off by additional funding from Welsh Government.

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 1 Budget Monitoring Report (Month 5) Social Services Scrutiny Committee 20th October 2020