



TASK AND FINISH GROUP – TACKLING POTENTIAL MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES POST PANDEMIC

MINUTES OF THE DIGITAL MEETING HELD VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON WEDNESDAY 15TH DECEMBER AT 2.00 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor C. Bezzina - Chair

Councillors:

D. Cushing, K. Etheridge

Also Present:

J. Burns (Director, Mental Health Foundation) and J. Lawton (Director, Caerphilly Borough MIND).

Together with:

M. Jacques (Scrutiny Officer) and K. Morris (Service Manager).

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C. Bishop, M. Evans and Mrs M. Jones (Parent Network).

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chair declared a personal interest that she was a trustee of Caerphilly Borough MIND. This was noted by the Scrutiny Officer.

3. TO APPROVE AND SIGN THE FOLLOWING MINUTES: - TACKLING POTENTIAL MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES POST PANDEMIC MEETING HELD ON 3RD NOVEMBER 2021

The Scrutiny Officer advised that no comments had been received from Group Members in relation to these Minutes.

4. EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSION WITH THE MENTAL HEALTH FOUNDATION AND CAERPHILLY BOROUGH MIND.

The Chair welcomed Jenny Burns, Associate Director (Wales) of the Mental Health Foundation and Jill Lawton, Director of Caerphilly Borough MIND. Jenny outlined how the Mental Health Foundation focussed predominantly on prevention and worked with organisations to improve their provision. Members heard how the charity had recently worked with South Wales Police on their Mental Health Strategy. Jenny advised that the Foundation operated on a national basis and had been in existence since 1949. Jenny highlighted the Foundation's longitudinal study of mental health during the pandemic. It found that the mental health of people with inequalities, such as those from ethnically diverse backgrounds, single parents and people with long-term conditions, had worsened during the pandemic. Jenny also highlighted a report on the impact of the pandemic on the elderly. It found that the impact was largely minimal but that those with long-term conditions had been impacted due to factors such as increased isolation. Another study by the Mental Health Foundation focussed on resilience across the UK during the pandemic. This showed that the majority (64%) coped well with the stress of the pandemic but of those that did experience stress 9 in 10 used at least one coping strategy. Some of these strategies were positive such as the use of green spaces and staying connected with others, but negative strategies such as increased alcohol consumption, substance misuse and overeating were also identified. The report recommended that whilst every nation had made mental health literacy resources available, greater policy and investment could be targeted at those that lacked resilience.

Members heard from Jenny about a study of young people across Wales using the Mental Wellbeing Impact Assessment tool. It looked at approaches to coping with the pandemic. Those surveyed were asked to rank factors such as sense of control, self-help, and opportunities for expressing views. Factors specifically on resilience such as emotional wellbeing and social relationships were also ranked. Results showed that generally young people knew how to access help, but parents identified difficulties with working whilst home schooling their children. Some social skills had been lost during lockdown and others identified the loss of a valued role in school. Jenny also highlighted an article in *The Lancet* which showed that 75% of respondents to a secondary schools' survey knew how to access help in their school, but that only 28% responded that they would do so. The conclusion was that counselling services should receive wider consultation prior to implementation. Jenny welcomed the creation of the Melo website by the ABUHB but was unsure of any patient involvement in the development stages.

The Chair thanked Jenny Burns and invited questions. One Member asked about the importance of joined up working amongst agencies, the referrals process, the benefits of services such as the Buddy Scheme, and the importance of including youth groups when developing an Action Plan. The Chair asked about the availability of the report once published, whether or not there was a gender breakdown of those surveyed, if domestic abuse was a factor for poor take-up of counselling services, and if special provision had been made for children with additional learning needs. On partnership working Jenny outlined the work being done through the Resilience Project which covered Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan. Members heard how it predominantly bridged the gap between primary mental health and schools. An example of education and health working together. Jenny advised that the Mental Health Foundation was not involved in administering referrals. On the issue of participation Jenny outlined how it was key to involve stakeholders including youth groups in the design of services, but that there were challenges around resources at the beginning of the process. On the specific question of working with Youth Services, Jenny advised that national organisations such as Children in Wales did a lot of good work in terms of consultation. Sports Agencies and faith communities were also highlighted as potential partners for future youth related activity. The Service Manager highlighted the importance of joined up working within organisations. An

example of this practice at Caerphilly County Borough Council was the Caerphilly Cares initiative which linked service areas such as Social Services in order to aid community access to services. Members heard how similar processes were also developing within the Health Board in order to better signpost the services available. Jenny advised that one of the key outcomes of the Resilience Project mentioned earlier was measuring the health of partnerships.

The Chair then welcomed contribution from Jill Lawton, Director of Caerphilly Borough MIND. Jill outlined concerns at the start of the pandemic in terms of carrying out their role within the community but highlighted how flexible working had allowed the charity to remove barriers and successfully operate throughout the periods of lockdown. Members heard how some of the new ways of working in terms of providing counselling had been welcomed and even preferred by those seeking help. Some of the projects such as Supporting People were outlined, and Members heard how MIND in the Caerphilly region was providing a counselling service for the primary mental health teams. Jill highlighted how MIND's Active Monitoring programme had been successfully modified during the pandemic so that the service could be delivered by telephone rather than at GP surgeries. Members heard how this programme had been rolled out across Wales after investment from the Welsh Government and in 18 months there had been 605 participants who had benefitted from weekly telephone calls with a counsellor. It was aimed at people with mild to moderate mental health issues. Members heard about challenges around future funding of programmes such as Active Monitoring but were advised that the My Whole Life project had secured funding from the National Lottery. This project started in April, runs for three years and had received 197 participants thus far. Members heard how this project offered 1 to 1 counselling with well-being practitioners rather than group-based activities. It was also based on self-referrals so that participants could feel a sense of ownership about the whole process. Jill highlighted the importance of ensuring that services signposted on websites such as Melo are still active. Members heard about the frustration experienced when people tried to access services that have been closed. Some support previously provided by Dewis Cymru was given as an example by Jill. Jill also reiterated that the biggest challenge facing the Third Sector was funding. Members also heard that Caerphilly Borough MIND was delivering Connect 5 training and was taking the lead on the Public Health Wales funded suicide prevention training.

The Chair thanked both contributors. The Scrutiny Officer highlighted that the review's key question centred on determining if Caerphilly County Borough Council and partners were prepared for a potential peak in demand for mental health services post-pandemic. He asked both contributors if there was one thing that should be done alongside partners to ensure that all parties were as prepared as possible, what would it be? Jenny Burns advised that it should be engagement with public groups to determine what is needed. Jenny accepted that this approach had challenges based on resources. Jill Lawton expressed the view that it should be the realisation that any post-pandemic recovery work would be a long-term process. Jill also highlighted the lack of specific bereavement counselling across the borough as an issue. One Member agreed and asked why general counsellors were unable to provide bereavement counselling as part of the package of care they provided. Jill advised that Caerphilly Borough MIND offered mental health counsellors and that specific advice on dealing with bereavement was a specialism. It was outlined that MIND counsellors in the borough could offer help, but they were not specialists in this particular field. The Chair praised the work of Cruse Bereavement Support and also suggested that losing a loved one during a time when lockdown restrictions were in force would have been especially traumatic. In response to a question on the time it takes between referral and an appointment, Jill advised that it was within 2 working days.

In thanking Members and Officers for their contributions, the Chair closed the meeting at 14:55 pm.

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 16th February 2022, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR