

# Minutes



## Performance Scrutiny Committee - People

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Date: 19 November 2019

Time: 10.00 am

Present: Councillors D Williams (Chair), J Cleverly, H Thomas, T Watkins, J Richards and S Marshall

In Attendance: D Cooke (Scrutiny Adviser), C Humphrey (Head of Adult & Community Services) and S A Jenkins (Head of Children & Young Peoples Services)

Apologies: Councillors M Linton and J Watkins

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### 1 **Declarations of Interest**

None.

### 2. **Mid-Year Service Plan Reports - Social Services**

#### **Children and Young Peoples Services**

Attendees:

- Councillor P Cockeram, Cabinet Member for Social Services
- Sally Jenkins, Head of Children & Young People Services

The Head of Children & Young People Services introduced the report and highlighted that the Service provided a range of specialist services to families and children in need including specialist provision for those most vulnerable and at risk of social exclusion, such as those at risk of significant harm, disabled children, children looked after and unaccompanied (separated) children and young people. The Children and Young People Service aim was to promote and safeguard the wellbeing of children and young people within their families and where this was not possible, to provide good quality alternative care.

To achieve this aim, the service worked closely with both families and a wide range of agencies to meet the stated outcomes and offer the best possible services.

To support the delivery of the Corporate Plan 2017-22, the 2019/20 Service Plan identified 4 objectives that were focussed on:

Objective 1 – Deliver effective services to support children to remain safely with their families.

Objective 2 – Improve outcomes for children in car and care leavers including a focus on safe reunification.

Objective 3 – Ensure a range of placements are available for looked after children.

Objective 4 – Prevent offending and re-offending by children and young people.

The Head of Children & Young People Services highlighted the positive position the Service was currently in with regards to continuity and stability in the workforce and the positive contribution made from the Intermediate Care Fund which had enabled the Service to instigate new pieces of work such as the Family Group Conferencing and Baby and Me initiative which targeted and identified high risk individuals at the earliest stage and enabled intensive support from the outset of pregnancy.

This positive position was tempered by the current overspend of £2 million which was almost all due to placement costs where the Council was struggling in relation to provision of in-house foster care services and competing with higher payments by independent fostering agencies.

Members asked the following:

- A member asked about payments made to the independent fostering agencies and why we use them. The Head of Children & Young People Services explained that if we were unable to place a child with one of our own foster carers or another Local Authority carer then we had to go to an agency to find a suitable placement. We then effectively purchased this place from them and paid them their required fee. We had no choice as we were bound to find suitable accommodation. The Cabinet Member for Social Services explained that you could apply to be a foster carer for the Local Authority or a private agency and that unless we increased our payment rates then we would keep losing our foster carers to the private agencies.
- Members of the Committee raised the issue of who monitored these agencies and the need for them to be properly controlled. They also questioned the difference in the success rates between our own foster care services and the independent ones. The Head of Children & Young People Services confirmed that that whilst we monitored the care of the children themselves, the agencies were monitored by the Care Agency for Wales. We were also able to provide excellent support for our in-house carers by use of networking groups, the corporate parenting forum, 24 hour support for link workers etc.
- Members of the Committee expressed the view that the agencies appeared to have the upper hand as they were able to charge what they liked, knowing that if the need arose then we would have no other option other than to use their services. A member commented that if there were harmonisation of rates then foster carers would prefer to stay working for the Council as we were seen as a good employer. The Head of Children & Young People Services and Cabinet Member agreed that was a real challenge and that besides losing staff to agencies, we had even lost some of our foster carers to neighbouring authorities who currently paid more than Newport did. They stated that a significant amount of work had been done with Welsh Government to look at the charging policies but this was not something that we could enforce.
- The Chair stated his wish to support the service in attempting to resolve this issue and commented that the work being done in striving to keep families together would hopefully reduce the need for looked after children. He stated that our foster carers needed a proper pay rate to encourage them to stay with Newport Council. The Head of Children & Young People Services confirmed the current challenges we faced and that although we had increased our in-house residential facilities, it was not cost effective to keep children long term in these residential homes. There was currently a campaign to try to increase foster care numbers. The current number had decreased slightly to 161 carers and we were also trying to recruit younger people on our register of carers.
- The Committee asked why there had been an increase of 5.7% in the number of looked after children who had 3 or more placements. The Head of Children & Young

People Services gave the example of a late night overnight referral and settled placement the following day would be classed as a placement. Similarly sibling groups who may have been temporarily separated before a placement back together would also be classed as a 'move'. The Cabinet Member explained that whilst this was a useful indicator, it always needed an explanation as to how the figure was arrived at.

- Members queried the % of looked after children returned home from care. The Head of Children & Young People Services said that certainly we could not return children home if it was unsafe to do so. It was unlikely that this measure would remain next year and we would need to ensure a new measure that was more robust with clarity about what the measure entailed. The Head of Children & Young People Services stated that while there were currently between 44 and 45 active cases in the Court arena there were still hundreds of other day-to-day cases ongoing where work was being done working with children within the home and also initiatives such as 'Baby and Me' which offered family support. It was acknowledged that this was a challenge to maintain whilst trying to make savings.
- A member queried the impact of County Lines within the City. The Head of Children & Young People Services responded that although there appeared to be an increase in the number of youth gangs, there was minimal activity with county lines. Similarly the incidents of knife related injuries in Newport were minimal. This was due in part to the positive work from all agencies such as the Council, Police, Education Services all working together and the degrees of trust built up within these working partnerships. Although there were challenges, the current management of risk was working effectively.

The Chair thanked the officers for attending.

### **Conclusion - Comments to the Cabinet**

The Committee noted the Mid-Year Service Plan Report and agreed to forward the minutes to the Cabinet as a summary of the issues raised.

The Committee wished to make the following comments to the Cabinet:

1. The Committee recognised the challenges faced by Children and Young Peoples Service but commented that there was not enough information provided about progress being made on transition of young people out of the service and into independent living.
2. The Committee recognised the recruitment of foster carers in Newport was vital. They raised concern about the levels of remuneration we provided for their services in comparison to agencies and stressed the need for continued support for our in-house carers.

### **Adult and Community Services**

Attendees:

- Councillor P Cockeram- Cabinet Member for Social Services
- Chris Humphrey, Head of Adult and Community Services

The Head of Adult and Community Services introduced the report outlining the 5 main objectives identified in the 2019/20 Service Plan currently being worked upon:-

- Objective 1 – Early Intervention and Prevention
- Objective 2 – Integrated working across health and social care
- Objective 3 – Commissioning
- Objective 4 - Carers
- Objective 5 – Safeguarding

The Head of Adult and Community Services continued by saying that whilst there was currently an overspend, this month's budget figures showed that this overspend had significantly reduced. Similar to other authorities in Wales, Newport had seen an increase in the number of older and vulnerable people who required care plans and support from the Council and whilst we were good at supporting people in their homes, this caused extra costs due to growing complexities of peoples' needs. The care sector as a whole was struggling with recruitment and retention of staff and yet Newport were generally successful in this aspect as we were recognised as a good employer.

The Head of Adult and Community Services highlighted positive improvements such as the introduction of the Telecare service, shared with Monmouth and Caerphilly councils and the Home First initiative where front line staff were based at both the Royal Gwent and Neville Hall hospitals so that up to 30-40 people each week were provided with help and advice to enable discharge without the need for admission to hospital.

Members asked the following:

- The Committee welcomed the fact that the budget deficit had reduced but queried the longer term trends. The Head of Adult and Community Services stated that the winter season always brought extra pressures on the Service and the numbers of elderly were increasing as life expectancy increased. It was also highlighted that ongoing support was regularly needed for those children who moved into adulthood who still have profound difficulties and significant needs. They tended to come out of residential care and into the adult services and required significant ongoing support. Whilst they were looked after very well in their residential homes, they very often lacked independent living skills. The Service recognised this problem and had successfully recruited a specialist Occupational Therapist for the purpose of helping these young adults to transition and become more independent.
- A member queried the operation and cost of the Telecare Service. The Head of Adult and Community Services confirmed that the cost was £4.00 per week which was the same as our partners in the scheme, Monmouth and Caerphilly councils. This was comparable across Wales. The arrangement provided Newport with a member of staff from Monmouthshire Careline to undertake equipment installations and a telecare officer based in Newport 1 day per week. This arrangement had proved very successful.
- Following a question regarding scam telephone calls and the vulnerable, the Head of Adult and Community Services confirmed that staff had been trained to liaise with safeguarding teams if large amounts of money were involved. As they were in the same building as the Safeguarding Hub, they could also immediately make the Police aware.
- A member queried the current care package and what services were included and by whom. The Head of Adult and Community Services confirmed that it would depend on an individual's assessed needs and that a request could be made for a review if it were felt to be inadequate. The Cabinet Member for Social Services stated that all agencies providing this service must be registered and licenced. He confirmed that in relation to a current investigation into irregularities at a local nursing home, police investigations

were ongoing but that we were continuing to work closely with the staff to ensure care was delivered to the residents and support given to the families.

- A member queried the monitoring of commissioned services and what mitigation services were in place should something go wrong as in the recent issues with Caerleon Nursing Home. The Cabinet Member for Social Services mentioned the amount of assistance that Newport had provided to this particular nursing home over the last 18 months and that that we had helped to keep it open and the residents safe and secure. The Head of Adult and Community Services confirmed that we worked closely with other service providers and partners and were able to convene a multi-agency group to provide support and stabilise any situation that should arise. In response to a suggestion that the Council purchase Caerleon Nursing home for our own use, the Cabinet Member for Social Services explained that as it was classed as a nursing home and not a residential home we would be unable to do so.
- The Committee queried how working with Third Sector partners affected our targets and was there a consequence for the Council if our targets were missed through no fault of our own. The Head of Adult and Community Services stated that Welsh Government was pushing for collaborative working/regional partnerships and this added layers of complexities so actions and decisions sometimes took longer. We were constantly reviewing how this approach had been working and investigating if we could change anything to make any further improvements.
- The Committee asked if the ultimate aim was for the whole of Gwent to work collaboratively. The Head of Adult and Community Services responded that was very much on an opportunistic basis- seeing who had the right skill sets, the best infrastructure in place etc. and investigating what would work best, the Telecare shared system being a prime example.
- A member asked if the targets set were considered challenging enough? The Head of Adult and Community Services stated that all targets were being looked at in detail and at mid-year point we were still awaiting confirmation of the new set of WG performance measures due to be implemented from April 2020. It was envisaged that some would stay but the wording may change slightly. The full set of measures would be phased in over a 2 or 3 year period

The Chair thanked the officers for attending.

### **Conclusion - Comments to the Cabinet**

The Committee noted the Mid-Year Service Plan report for Social Services (Adult and Community Services) and agreed to forward the minutes to the Cabinet as a summary of the issues raised.

The Committee wished to make the following comments to the Cabinet:

1. The Committee were pleased to hear that the budget deficit had reduced but recognised that ongoing work needed to be done to maintain this trend. They requested that they receive a monthly budget report so that they could be alerted of any significant overspends in a timely manner.

The meeting terminated at 1.00 pm