

Minutes



Performance Scrutiny Committee - People

Date: 2 March 2021

Time: 10.00 am

Present: Councillors J Watkins (Chair), H Thomas, J Richards, S Marshall, T Watkins, C Townsend, J Cleverly, W Routley, Y Forsey and L Lacey

In Attendance: Sally Ann Jenkins (Head of Children & Young Peoples Services), Caroline Ryan-Phillips (Service Manager - Integrated Family Support), Neil Barnett (Scrutiny Adviser) and Louise A Thomas (Governance Officer)

1 Apologies

None.

2 Declarations of Interest

None.

3 Minutes of the Previous Meeting held on 19 January 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on 9th January 2021 were approved as a true and accurate record. A query was raised regarding the extra IT equipment mentioned in the minutes. The Scrutiny Officer agreed to check if it had been delivered yet and would report back.

4 Youth Justice Service - Covid-19 Report

Attendees:

Sally Jenkins – Head of Children and Young Peoples Services

Caroline Ryan-Phillips - Service Manager Integrated Family Support

The Head of Children and Young Peoples Services introduced the report on the Youth Justice Service and how they had been operating during the pandemic period. The Recovery Plan Report detailed the approach adopted by the Youth Justice Service from the start of the pandemic, including information on how all the key areas of the service had continued to be delivered throughout. It had been a difficult and challenging year and the staff had gone to great lengths to provide continuity and also develop the service and move things forward.

Members asked the following:

- What actions had been taken in the area of restorative justice?

The Head of Children and Young Peoples Service responded that unfortunately a lot of the activities pursued a year ago had been unable to continue during the

pandemic. However, the old days of punitive measures such as litter picking were not used by Newport City Council. Any activity was meaningful and had an educational element to it. An example was given of a youth convicted of a case of arson and part of her reparation work was utilising her art skills to make a poster highlighting the dangers. The ideal was to educate the young offenders so that they learnt from their term of restorative justice.

- A member commented that the report highlighted how adjustments made during the pandemic had appeared to work so effectively that they were intended to continue post pandemic. She also queried what the negative effect was due to the various partners using different IT systems.

The Service Manager- Integrated Family Support responded that there had initially been issues caused by the use of different IT systems but they had been resolved to a certain degree. The virtual platform used by the Police service we now had the ability to access. In an ideal world we would all be on compatible systems but we had managed to overcome most obstacles in a timely manner. We had all benefited from virtual meetings. Post-court orders now had more attendance at the virtual meetings than previously and going forward we would continue to have some form of virtual meeting. It was clear that blended meetings were going to be the way forward in the future.

- A member asked why we had not yet embraced face to face contact with young people and their families. He expressed concern that using only virtual engagement methods it was difficult to fully assess a family dynamic and there could well be safeguarding issues.

The Head of Children and Young Peoples Services clarified that we had continued to carry out face to face visits during the pandemic. All visits were pre planned and risk assessed beforehand to ensure staff had the necessary PPE and able to manage any risks involved. We were in the same position as neighbouring authorities and used a shared approach and continued to attend face to face visits when it was safe to do so. We had to be mindful to ensure that whilst restrictions were in place we worked to the letter of the law.

- Members asked what were the benefits of the team moving to the Civic Centre

The Service Manager- Integrated Family Support responded that the move, which was pre-arranged had taken place right at the start of the pandemic. There was real merit in having staff from different areas of Children's Services being in close proximity in the same building. Communication was much improved.

- A member queried the current position with Partnership working and how this affected the outcomes for young people.

The Head of Children and Young Peoples Services stated that partnership working was very positive. We were a multi-agency service and operationally our work and collaboration with the Police in particular had improved. When the Courts had initially closed, we paid close attention to young adults to ensure they would not slip through the net and be tried as adults. We ensured that no child would get lost in the system. We maintained good links with our child protection teams to bring everything together with free flow of information to ensure the best outcomes. The aim was to identify issues at the earliest opportunity and intervene before they reached the point of arrest and charge. Over half of our existing caseload was at the preventative level.

- The member followed up with a question on the challenges moving forward.

The Head of Children and Young Peoples Services stated that as with every service, there was considerable concern post Covid on the effects on children and their mental health. From very young children through to teenagers, all had been affected through the disruption to their learning and life experiences. The challenges going forward would be how to address this in the future. We had begun to think about this and had started to meet with our partner agencies to think about how we were going to repair this. There were also issues to consider regarding our workforce who have also had to deal with these challenges themselves. Whilst we had things in place to support staff, it would still be an issue and pose difficulty post recovery.

- In response to a question, it was confirmed that the Youth Courts both in Newport and Cwmbran were both currently open.
- Members asked if there has been an increase in the numbers within the Youth Justice Service and what impact this had on staff within the Service.

The Service Manager - Integrated Family Support responded that numbers had slowly increased but that was due to the service engaging and collaborating and these were now prevention cases that had been identified much earlier in the process. This was a good indicator that we were successful in trying to prevent young people reaching the youth justice system. The reoffending rate post court was 25% although the numbers this represented were very small, only 2 cases. All staff had access to supervisors for advice and support and there were also Corporate wellbeing avenues such as Care First etc. Staff appeared to feel more valued as they could see they were having a more effective role in the assistance of children and preventative measure having better outcomes for children. Morale appeared to quite high as the staff were passionate and engaged.

- A Member asked if we envisaged a large increase in the amount of court proceedings due to a backlog and if we would need more staff to deal with these.

The Head of Children and Young Peoples Services stated that she did not anticipate an increase in court cases as the preventative measures the Service were introducing would offset the need for court cases.

The Chair thanked the Head of Children and Young Peoples Services and the Service Manager- Integrated Family Support for their attendance and the meeting and asked that the thanks of the Committee be conveyed to their staff for their work during the pandemic.

5 **Conclusions of Committee Reports**

- The Committee commended the amount of information about the service area's staff and their way of working. They noted the number of positive changes coming from the new way of working. Comment was raised that there was not much information about the children and the number of children and young adults currently in the system and the various stages they were at. It is hoped that more information could be included in future reports.

- The Committee were pleased to hear that the service area know what the majority of the challenges are and how they are working through them. The Committee also praised the strength of the relationship amongst the teams and the upward direction of travel their work is following.
- The Committee raised concerns regarding ongoing IT issues with partners, especially with the Police. It was hoped that this would soon be resolved.

6 **Forward Work Programme Update**

Attendees:

- Neil Barnett (Scrutiny Adviser)

a) Forward Work Programme Update

The Scrutiny Adviser presented the Forward Work Programme, and informed the Committee of the topics due to be discussed at the next committee meeting:

Tuesday 8 June 2021 at 10am

2020/21 Service Plan End of Year Review

- Children and Young People Services
- Adult and Community Services

Tuesday 22 June 2021 at 10am

2020/21 Service Plan End of Year Review

- Education

Members asked the following:

- Query was raised about the Bridge Achievement Centre (BAC). It was asked if the Committee could receive an update on how the BAC has been operating and the wider recovery aims. The Scrutiny Adviser told the Committee that this request would be passed onto the Education Team for information to be passed to Members.

The meeting terminated at 11.22 am