

CABINET COMMITTEE - EQUALITIES - 6 FEBRUARY 2012

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CABINET COMMITTEE - EQUALITIES HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOM 2/3, CIVIC OFFICES, ANGEL STREET, BRIDGEND, ON MONDAY, 6 FEBRUARY 2012 AT 10.00AM

Present: -

Councillor D Sage, Deputy Leader - Chairperson

Councillors

M E J Nott
H J David
A E Davies
L C Morgan
P J White

Invitees:-

Councillor N Clarke	Councillor R M James
Councillor C A Green	Councillor R D Jenkins
Councillor M Gregory	Councillor M Thomas
Councillor P A Hacking	Councillor J H Tildesley

B Neville - Equalities Officer UNISON

Officers:

D MacGregor	- Assistant Chief Executive - Performance
P Williams	- Business Partner, Human Resources
A Bracey	- Group Manager - Wellbeing
S Smith	- Team Manager - Contact Assessment and Review Team
J Jenkins	- Benefits Manager
M A Galvin	- Senior Democratic Services Officer - Committees

134 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from the following Members for the reasons so stated:-

Councillor P A Evans	- Work commitments
Councillor M C Wilkins	- Unwell

135 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

136 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS COMMITTEE MEETING

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet Committee - Equalities dated 5 December 2011 be approved as a true and accurate record, subject to Councillor P A Evans being added to the list of attendees.

137 ACCESSIBLE INFORMATION FOR ADULT SOCIAL CARE SERVICE USERS

The Team Leader - Contact Assessment and Review Team presented a report, which informed Committee of the information available to adult social care service users and citizens, about access to adult social care support and advice.

The Team Leader - Contact Assessment and Review Team explained that this service was an essential part of the Council's responsibility for promoting wellbeing, social inclusion and community safety that provided a range of enabling and support services based on needs of adults. This involved helping to prevent difficulties and provide support in the community, for people with the more serious enduring needs, managing the transition from children to adult services and supporting all members of a family.

The Contact Assessment and Review Team managed all contacts and referrals to Adult Social Care, with the contact centre responding to an average of 400 enquiries per week.

Paragraph 4.1 of the report outlined data regarding how the various contacts were processed and to whom, and then advised that the "Guide to Adult Social Care" outlined the community care assessment process, and included an overview of the types of support available across the County Borough.

In addition to this, explained the Team Leader - Contact Assessment and Review Team there was a suite of other detailed publications such as:-

- A *Bridgend Carers' Forum information pack* is provided to carers on request. It contains details of the support and resources available to carers from the NHS, Local Authority and the Independent sector.
- A Home Care information leaflet
- An Extra Care information leaflet

Information such as the above, was also where required adapted for language translation and in Braille to cater for various equality groups.

Partnership working was also evident the Team Leader - Contact Assessment and Review Team added, between the Council and external agencies in assisting the public for access to information and advice, such as through 'The Never To Old Action Team' (NTOAT). An example of this was the 'Be Smart Be Safe' handbook developed in partnership with the Community Safety Partnership and Welsh Government which supported community safety and preventative initiatives.

The Council's website was also an important access point for information, by providing direct e-mail links to the Customer Contact Centre and the Contact Assessment and Review Team, with there having been 8,000 hits to the Adult Social Care pages of the website last year.

The Team Leader - Contact Assessment and Review Team emphasised the importance of service users and carers being able to contribute to the development of services, and to provide feedback on the services they received. A service user and carer engagement framework had been developed to ensure a more systematic approach is followed to obtain and analyse information to inform service planning.

The Team Leader - Contact Assessment and Review Team confirmed that work was underway to develop an integrated public information strategy with partners in the NHS as part of the implementation of the Integrating Health and Safety Care Programme, with a communications hub workstation being part of the development of the strategy.

An invitee noted that there was no reference in the report to BSL regarding methods of contact, and enquired if this was being developed on the web site.

In terms of feedback from service users and carers as referred to in Paragraph 4.8 of the report, she asked the Officer to elaborate upon this.

The Team Leader - Contact Assessment and Review Team advised that work was ongoing to accommodate BSL as part of mainstream business, and plans to recruit Senior Practitioners for sensory impairment were being made, and to further develop BSL would be one of the elements of their work.

In terms of the survey, the Group Manager - Wellbeing confirmed it was part of the regulatory requirements to undertake a survey to ascertain if service users were satisfied with the quality of Home Care Services being provided. The results of this service she did not have with her, but would provide this to Members on request.

An Invitee asked if leaflets provided in Braille were prepared as a matter of course or on individual requests.

The Team Leader - Contact Assessment and Review Team confirmed that these were available on request and could be made and provided within a working week.

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the content of the report.

138 MENTAL HEALTH IN BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH

The Group Manager - Wellbeing presented a report, which provided Committee with the profile of mental health in Bridgend and sought to clarify some statistics presented in relation to mental health in Bridgend in the Welsh Health Survey 2011.

The Group Manager - Wellbeing confirmed that the survey was undertaken every two years by the Welsh Government, and one of the findings in the latest survey confirmed that Bridgend seemed to have a higher rate of people (i.e. by 3%) being treated for specific mental health conditions than in other areas of Wales. These results did not identify when the individual was receiving treatment. This she explained was not necessarily a bad statistic, as a slightly higher rate was often a result of early intervention in primary care or pre-primary care, and could be seen as a positive reflection of good mental health practice, and a reduced figure for levels of treatment in specialist secondary care.

She advised that there was a continuing need for a co-ordinated system of care approach, and staff from all care providers were integrated to ensure those receiving treatment were adequately supported dependent upon their condition. There was an emphasis on access and quality to ensure this was achieved.

The Group Manager - Wellbeing confirmed that national statistics reflected that 20% of the general population would at sometime during their life experience mental health problems. She added that stress or depressive related illness was one of the main reasons for sickness absence.

There had been a change recently however, in that historically young males had been seen as more susceptible to mental health problems, though now there seemed to be more females. Preventative measures were in place she confirmed, in the form of third sector or voluntary organisations, where people could initially seek help in the form of primary care support rather than receiving more public specialist secondary services should their state of health be more critical.

Problems associated with mental health were also increasing due to the recession and how this has impacted upon the economy and levels of employment.

Work was also ongoing through joint working with Health colleagues explained the Group Manager – Wellbeing, to develop services for older people with mental health problems, including those with dementia. The domiciliary care service had a specialist team that was carrying out work to ensure people are able to be cared for at home longer, rather than being placed in residential or hospital settings. Work ongoing as part of the Integration Agenda with the Local Health Board would concentrate on preventative measures in terms of mental health problems she added.

There were also plans to look at more specialist services such as Home Care facilities for enablement, as well as there being specialist places already in place, such as the ARC Centre, Glyn Cynffig and Caswell Clinic that offered effective support arrangements for different types of problems associated with mental health.

The Assistant Chief Executive - Performance advised that the report gave a good overview of the range of services available locally and the different types of people who are affected by mental health problems and their contrasting age groups.

He noted that as at 16 January 2012, there were 941 adults receiving specialist treatment for mental health issues, which equated to 1% of the adult population of the County Borough. 27% of people with mental health problems were less severe, and could be supported by their G.P., or other points of contact for primary care.

The Cabinet Member - Children and Young People had been informed that appointments at the ARC Centre for people referred there by their G.P. were often being cancelled. She enquired if there was a specific reason for this.

The Group Manager – Wellbeing was unaware of any such problem, though she gave an assurance that she would look into this and come back to the Cabinet Member - Children and Young People accordingly.

A Member asked if research showed that problems such as alcohol abuse and solvent abuse impacted in a detrimental way on the mental health of an individual.

The Group Manager - Wellbeing confirmed that statistics showed that abuse of this nature did affect the mental health of an individual, particularly if they were already suffering from an anxiety or depressive related illness, and did in fact result in cases

of extra admissions to a care based setting. This statistic applied across Wales and not just within Bridgend.

An Invitee raised concern over the impact of the economy and the lack of employment which was resulting in people unemployed or on low income incurring debt, which often resulted in mental health issues arising. He asked what avenues were available to them for support in cases of this nature.

The Group Manager - Wellbeing explained that the third sector had a part to play in terms of support for people with financial problems, an example being the Citizens Advice Bureau who could advise free of charge on issues such as debt management. There was also a possibility in the future of introducing surgeries in areas of the County Borough, for the purpose of giving financial advice.

The Deputy Leader advised that the local authority provided a very good and effective integrated service that supported mental health, with a number of support establishments for various categories of patient also included within the County Borough.

Anyone could be affected by mental health problems and it was an ongoing problem that was compounded by day to day pressures of life he added.

The Deputy Leader further added that there was evidence in the report that supported the fact that people experiencing these types of problems were able to seek help and support through a number of different avenues dependent upon the severity of their illness.

He was interested to note the findings of the Joseph Roundtree Foundation (paragraph 4.12 of the report referred), which highlighted five main issues they felt required further policy attention. These were outlined in that part of the report. He urged individuals suffering in silence with mental health problems to seek appropriate help and not be afraid to do this due to the stigma some associated with the illness.

The Cabinet Member - Wellbeing confirmed that there were three locality teams within the County Borough. Presently discussions were ongoing with the Local Health Board to introduce Community Psychiatric nurses in each of these teams, to support people with mental health problems. Though this was a long term aspiration, it would be a positive step when this was introduced.

The third sector organisations were also invaluable in terms of support the Cabinet Member - Wellbeing added. Though people experiencing problems often contacted the Samaritans when their condition became critical, this organisation were also there purely for people to talk about their problems, and seek guidance as to how they could be alleviated. The Samaritans included professional people such as lawyers, who could give sound advice on problems such as debt or property advice.

An Invitee asked Officers to expand upon bullet point 4 of Paragraph 4.12 of the report, i.e. 'the need to address the 'unhealthy' coping strategies adopted by some young unemployed men', and asked what this statement had meant.

The Group Manager - Wellbeing felt that it could mean that they were becoming dependent upon alcohol or substance misuse, though she would confirm this was the case and advise the Invitee accordingly.

An Invitee asked what the plans were in terms of the Glan yr Afon Resource Centre.

The Cabinet Member - Wellbeing confirmed that it was proposed to convert this Home, with support from the Local Health Board, into a 30 bed Home for people suffering with dementia and similar conditions.

RESOLVED: That the Committee considered and noted the information contained within the report.

139 WELFARE REFORM BILL 2011

The purpose of the above report, of the Assistant Chief Executive – Performance advised, was to provide the Committee with an update on current developments in relation to the Welfare Reform Bill.

In giving the background to the report, he confirmed that the Welfare Reform Bill if passed by central government, would see the biggest change to the welfare system in the past 60 years.

The main objectives of the Bill were outlined in bullet point format on page 1 of the report, whilst paragraph 3.2 explained that the Bill would legislate for the abolition of Housing Benefit.

Further changes would be:-

- Implementation of Universal Credit;
- A localised Council Tax Rebate scheme to replace Council Tax Benefit; and
- A single integrated fraud investigation service.

The Assistant Chief Executive - Performance referred those present to Appendix 1 of the report, a Community Resources and Improvement Overview and Scrutiny Committee report considered by this Committee previously. The proposals outlined in the Appendix remained largely unchanged, so the covering report he explained, concentrated upon developments since the date the Appendix was considered by Scrutiny.

In terms of Local Housing Allowance (LHA) changes there had been no real further development in this area he confirmed.

A new Homelessness Grant would be introduced and would be used by local authorities to assist cases of homelessness, in light of changes proposed to the housing benefit system, and in conjunction with this, the Local Authority had acquired the services of Caer Las a registered charity experienced in housing and preventing homelessness, personal development and advice, and advocacy.

The Council would be able under the Bill, to also pay discretionary amounts to top up Housing and Council Tax Benefits statutory schemes, in order to assist the most

vulnerable with the changes. This was recognised as Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) and a grant would be made available for this purpose.

Paragraph 4.5. of the report explained courses of action that have been taken in terms of engaging with these that were going to be affected by the changes he explained, and to raise awareness of some of the more important anticipated changes, though responses received from the public who received various forms of benefit had been up to now been fairly poor.

The Assistant Chief Executive - Performance explained that proposals regarding Universal Credit had not yet been firmly disclosed, whilst issues in relation to Council Tax Rebates were also ongoing, with the likely development of a pan-Wales model for the scheme being put in place, that would be steered by Project Teams of the WLGA Benefits Advisors Group.

The remainder of the report outlined issues regarding the Single Integrated Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS), and attached to the report were various options and evaluation criteria in terms of future proposals for the service adopted by the Department for Works and Pensions (DWP). The report explained that Option 1 was currently preferred, i.e. for local authority staff to remain employed by local authorities, but to operate under SFIS powers, policies, processes and priorities. This was likely to be agreed as an interim option only until Universal Credit was fully rolled out he added.

An Invitee noted that in terms of LHA allowance, families would have removed their £15 weekly excess provision. He asked that if they were placed in rented accommodation that was smaller than they were entitled to due to the size of their family, would this allow them to keep the £15 weekly excess provision.

The Benefits Manager explained that this weekly excess provision was abolished in April 2011, but was protected for those who were entitled to receive it for a period of nine months. She added that with market rates rising slightly, their loss would not be as great as that they may have initially experienced.

The Cabinet Member - Communities felt that the changes proposed were likely to lead to an increase in evictions. He stressed the need in view of this, to look at the Commons Allocation Policy for housing with Registered Social Landlords, to discuss the changes. He asked if Officers were aware of the timescales associated with the changes proposed in the Bill.

The Benefits Manager advised that this was difficult to gauge, as it was still being considered by Parliament. She did consider that the timescale for the Universal Credit Proposals would go to plan, though the full implications regarding changes to the role the Local Authority would play in the future were as yet unknown.

The Council had engaged with certain families she added, for example advising those currently in five bedroom properties that if the Welfare Reform Bill was passed, they would then only be entitled to a four bedroom allowance, as well as the changes proposed for persons under 35. The response though as the report indicated had to date not been favourable.

Assistance would also be sought from the Council's debt advisors Caer Las in terms of support for people getting allowances, in terms of income and accommodation changes the Benefits Manager explained. The Council were also looking at those that would be exempted from the changes.

The Deputy Leader asked what changes were anticipated under SFIS, and how this would impact upon the role of the Council.

The Benefits Manager explained that this would result in local authorities losing power to investigate and prosecute cases of fraud, and the introduction of Universal Credit would mean that there would then be no local authority investigations conducted. This role would be taken over by the DWP.

The Cabinet Member - Resources advised that the development of the Social Fund would impact in a detrimental way upon those receiving the minimum benefit entitlements. Though these people required careful assessment, under the new regime the Local Authority may not have access to these individuals records. He was concerned that the changes proposed would mean extra support to the Social Fund that the Council would need to resource. He added that the nationalising of benefits and localising cuts would hit hard not only upon people receiving benefits, but also on the Council's workforce. He asked if the Committee could be apprised of the number of staff the changes were likely to affect in terms of their future employment, and the role that the local authority were now set to play beyond Fraud Investigations.

The Benefits Manager explained that the Social Fund was being devolved to the Welsh Government and the outcome of this was as yet unknown. The DWP considered that local governments could deliver this in a more cost effective way in the future. Though there were 40 plus staff in her section at present, the number who would be affected by the changes were dependant upon the outcome of proposals regarding the future of the Council Tax Rebate situation. 16,000 customers would be affected in terms of transferring to Universal Credit she added. The DWP would look at these cases on an Authority by Authority basis, and by the year 2017, all cases would have been transferred from them to local authorities.

An Invitee asked the Officer if she could explain the full implications and affect of the Single Integrated Fraud Investigation Services (SFIS).

The Benefits Manager advised that currently the DWP and local authorities had no powers to prosecute tax credit offences, which covered a small population, for example self employed people with no children. Areas such as this would hopefully be addressed under the SFIS she explained. There was still some uncertainty however she added, on who would be responsible for Council Tax Rebate cases when the Welfare Reform proposals were fully implemented.

RESOLVED: That the Committee considered and noted the report, as well as further noting the present lack of detailed information available from the UK Government on the implementation of the proposals.

The Human Resources Business Partner presented a report, that provided Members with an update on the work being undertaken to develop the Authorities Strategic Equality Plan and equality objectives.

The report outlined certain background information, and confirmed that in June 2011, the Welsh Government published "The essential guide to the public sector equality duty: An overview for listed public authorities in Wales", which provided an overview of all the specific duties that applied to listed public authorities in Wales. The remaining seven parts were published in July 2011, giving further information on specific elements of the duties.

Paragraph 4.2 of the report then advised, that in order to ensure compliance with requirements, an outline plan was prepared which set out some key stages and set out responsibilities and a timetable for the completion of certain elements of the Plan. Work was then undertaken, which in turn, assisted in identifying a number of possible themes on which to base the Authority's equality objectives.

The Human Resources Business Partner reminded Members that at the last meeting of the Committee, a draft Strategic Equality Plan was presented to Members, along with a draft supporting Action Plan.

Paragraph 4.5 of the report confirmed that the following equality objectives had been drafted for inclusion in the Plan:-

- Transportation issues
- Fostering Good Relations (to tackle school bullying, hate crime and domestic abuse, etc)
- The Council's role as an employer (to promote diversity and equality in the workforce)
- Equal Pay
- Consultation, engagement and communication (for those who share a protected characteristic)
- Mental Health (to take forward partnership working initiatives)
- Leisure (to promote fair and equal access to participate in sport and recreation and services)
- Benefits (to introduce measures to mitigate the effects of the National Benefits Review on BCB residents)
- Developing Data (for individuals who have a protected characteristic who use Council services)

The Human Resources Business Partner gave a resume of each of the above elements, and confirmed that the draft equality objectives formed the basis for a consultation exercise which began on 9 January 2012 and would close on Wednesday, 8 February 2012. Following this, he confirmed that an Initial Analysis exercise would be completed from which would emerge the final objectives of the Plan which would be shared with Cabinet at its meeting in March, with the Strategic Equality Plan then being launched hopefully by September 2012.

In terms of Paragraph 4.5 of the report, an Invitee asked if the equalities data could be compared with similar data held by other local authorities in Wales, in order to compare levels of performance.

The Human Resources Business Partner confirmed that the data would be compared with other neighbouring authorities.

An Invitee asked how Officers intended to interact more effectively with individuals who were blind/visually impaired or deaf/impaired hearing on issues of public transport.

The Human Resources Business Partner explained that there had been interaction with various groups and associations in relation to the above.

He had approached the Action for Hearing Loss Association and the Bridgend Deaf Club, and in terms of the latter, he would be visiting them tomorrow to discuss issues regarding the consultation exercise and obtaining their views on this.

With regard to the Bridgend Visually Impaired Society, they had been briefed on the Plan prior to the consultation period commencing. There was also a Browse Aloud facility on the Council's website he added. The Human Resources Business Partner further added, that 'talking buses', i.e. advising people of bus stops along routes covered by public transport companies would be discussed with transport providers, as part of the transportation objectives of the Plan.

The Assistant Chief Executive - Performance added that this was one of the bigger initiatives of the Plan, and was an action that could be introduced without the commitment of significant finance. Similar negotiations to the above would take place with local taxi companies, he added.

The Cabinet Member - Children and Young People asked if a body was to be established to deal with complaints regarding issues of equality from the public.

The Human Resources Business Partner confirmed that matters such as this would be managed through the Steering Group of the Equalities Forum.

As this concluded debate on this item, the Deputy Leader placed on record his thanks to the Human Resources Business Partner and his team for the excellent work they had committed to the Strategic Equality Plan.

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the progress made on the Strategic Equality Plan.

142 HALF-YEARLY PROGRESS REPORT - IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COUNCIL'S WELSH LANGUAGE SCHEME AND 2011-12 ACTION PLAN

The Assistant Chief Executive - Performance submitted a report which updated Committee on progress made regarding implanting the Council's Welsh Language Scheme and related 2011-12 Action Plan.

The report gave some background information, and then outlined progress that was being made in relation to the Action Plan for 2011-12, as confirmed in Appendix 1 to the report.

The Human Resources Business Partner expanded upon the areas where progress was being made, for example in the area of Web development where around 20% of the Council's website now shared bilingual information.

A Committee Invitee asked if there was any information available that would confirm who had been visiting areas of the Web that were bilingual.

The Assistant Chief Executive - Performance advised that a report would be shared with the Committee on these website hits on a twice annual basis, as had been done previously.

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted progress being made in implementing the Welsh Language Scheme Action Plan.

143 REVISED WELSH LANGUAGE SCHEME 2012-2015

The Assistant Chief Executive - Performance submitted a report, the purpose of which, was to seek approval of the Authority's revised Welsh Language Scheme (2012-2015) as a basis for discussion with the Welsh Language Board.

The Scheme when fully approved would be considered by Council, in a bilingual format.

The report confirmed that the Authority last approved a Welsh Language Scheme in 2008, and working with the Welsh Language Board, Officers had now developed a revised Scheme at Appendix 1 to the report.

Paragraph 3.2 outlined areas where the Welsh Language Board felt that the Authority could demonstrate some improvement. These were:-

- The production of a bilingual website;
- Bilingual job advertising;
- Staff development (i.e. training to support available of Welsh speaking staff in key positions);
- Performance monitoring.

The Scheme also outlined how the Authority could make improvements in a practical, manageable and cost effective manner over the course of the next three years.

The draft revised Scheme included some key commitments and these were itemised in Paragraph 4.1 of the report.

The Customer Service Centre at the main Civic Officers was a key element in enabling Welsh speaking customers to access services.

Finally, the report advised that the proposed 2012-15 Scheme would supersede that which existed, i.e. the 2008-11 Scheme.

RESOLVED: That the Cabinet Committee - Equalities:-

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- (1) Approved the draft revised Welsh Language Scheme 2012-2015, as a basis for discussion with the Welsh Language Board;
- (2) Awaited the outcome of those discussions and the development of the action plan;
- (3) Received a follow-up report on the above prior to the draft scheme and action plan being referred to Council for approval

The meeting closed at 12.10pm