

SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2 - THURSDAY, 20 JULY 2017

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2
HELD IN COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC OFFICES ANGEL STREET BRIDGEND CF31 4WB ON
THURSDAY, 20 JULY 2017 AT 3.30 PM**

Present

Councillor CA Green – Chairperson

TH Beedle	MC Clarke	T Giffard	MJ Kearn
JE Lewis	AA Pucella	KL Rowlands	SG Smith
SR Vidal	DBF White		

Apologies for Absence

J Gebbie and M Jones

Officers:

Susan Cooper	Corporate Director - Social Services & Wellbeing
Sarah Daniel	Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Gail Jewell	Democratic Services Officer - Scrutiny
Rachel Keepins	Democratic Services Officer - Scrutiny
Laura Kinsey	Head of Children's Social Care

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

2. CARE AND SOCIAL SERVICES INSPECTORATE WALES INSPECTION OF
CHILDREN'S SERVICES

The Corporate Director, Social Services and Wellbeing presented the report, highlighting that the inspection that took place earlier this year was part of a new framework for Local Authorities that fits in with the Social Services and Wellbeing Act. The main focus of the inspection as indicated in the report at para. 3.6 was on how families are empowered to access help, care and support services and on the quality of outcomes for those involved. She explained that there had been 2 weeks where inspectors had visited and met with staff, parents, children, Members, third sector and independent providers, considered 80 to 90 individual files and 212 separate documents of evidence. The inspectors had then gone away and written their report which the Corporate Director explained was attached at Appendix 1 with a corresponding Action Plan that the Directorate had produced in response, at Appendix 2.

The CSSIW Inspector thanked all of those who were involved with the inspection, mentioning that it was a difficult time just after the Christmas holidays and she was aware of the huge amount of work that had been done in preparation for the Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) coming in and the Information Advice and Assistance element. There had been a substantial amount of training undertaken by staff to get everybody ready and a change in culture at a time when a new information system was being introduced and staff were moving offices. The inspector expressed that she had initially had concerns over the high numbers of social workers who were newly qualified but found it really pleasing to hear of robust inductions and an embedding of the culture with them and commented that these social workers had voiced the support they had been given by senior management.

The CSSIW inspector went on to explain that there was a lot of emphasis now in Social Services on working together with the public instead of solely relying on social services to do it all. This, she believed was working in Bridgend because of excellent working relationships between Officers and the public as well as good working practices and preventative methods within the Council such as housing education. At a time when there was no new money but a need to look at how to deliver services in a new way the Authority and excellent examples coming through that will deliver results in the future. She explained to the Committee that none of the recommendations made in the report would have been new to the Corporate Director or Head of Service as they had already identified the shortfalls in preparation for the Act coming in. There were no risks identified, very robust safeguarding arrangements from the front door and a positive reaction from families in how they can work with the LA to move forward. There had been concern about the Early Help work being split between Directorates but the inspection had found there to be really positive processes of working together. Work on the action plan was now being undertaken and the CSSIW Inspector stated that she was looking forward to seeing how things are developing. She commented that it was a very thorough inspection; entirely transparent and she thanked the Corporate Directors for that.

The Committee questioned whether the Action Plan had been approved and accepted by the Inspectorate, to which the CSSIW Inspector responded stating that it had. A number of the recommendations, she pointed out were already being worked on and were on track; others will take a while to get on track but the action plan was approved straight away.

In response to a query on statutory responsibilities having a performance target of 80% and not 100% the Corporate Director explained that there were new Performance Indicators that had been set last year and very few therefore had benchmarks. The very nature of the business meant that there was a lot of factors behind every target and whilst ideally you would want to achieve 100%, the Head of Service explained, the complexity behind the PI has to be recognised. She explained that they always strove towards achieving higher and higher but the narrative behind the data was really important to explain, report and focus on the children that hadn't been seen within the timescale, why and how long over the time. The CSSIW Inspector added that she goes through the PIs and data and focus on the narrative as to why certain things aren't on target and what the Directorate has done to identify and address this.

The Committee questioned how the Directorate can maintain standards against a decreasing budget, which was having an impact on staff morale and increasing demands such as caseloads for social workers. The Corporate Director explained the decreasing budget was not making things easy but she wished to reassure them that the welfare of the child was paramount and they had had certain protection of the budget to ensure this. The Authority did have high numbers of Looked After Children compared with other LAs and there was a big piece of work being undertaken on early intervention to prevent children from coming into care and essentially decrease the cost. There was also work being undertaken to increase the numbers of in-house foster carers as there was a considerable difference in cost between independent Foster Carers and those in-house. Included in this was a need for more in-house mother and baby placements and then also work to develop some specialism locally to provide services that are currently being received out of county at a significantly high cost – sometimes £5000 a week. The Corporate Director stated that it was difficult to manage at times as there were often court decisions involved which meant they had no choice where to place some children. Caseloads were recognised as an important factor for social workers, to ensure standards as a lower caseload meant more intensive work can be carried out. The Head of Service also added that the management team were focusing on achieving savings by

delivering services in a different and better way with more control locally. She pointed out that they hadn't reduced the number of social workers and whilst 18 is an average caseload it is important to take account of the complexity of each case and the experience of the social worker. There was a project being undertaken to revisit all caseloads to determine whether they all need to remain open or can be 'stepped down' into preventative services for example as social workers only deal with acute or complex cases now so this then alleviates the pressure. She recognised that the culture change was still embedding in that those children that were 'In Need' would now sit under Early Help, which was in the Education and Wellbeing Directorate.

When questioned over what the average caseload should be for Local Authorities, the Inspector advised that it was too difficult to say as the complexities and levels of need are so varied. She stated that she had seen some very positive development in the work being done with social workers during her time in Bridgend, both young and experienced ones. The Authority was not unique in its difficulties to retain social workers and Bridgend's '1st year in practice' for developing new social workers was commendable. Unfortunately the location of the Authority, being on the M4 corridor, she believed, was an issue and it meant that social workers could move between LAs very easily.

The Corporate Director added that retention had been an issue in Bridgend and they recognised that they had lots of newly qualified, inexperienced social workers (90%). They made sure these social workers had a protective caseload and continued their training as part of a huge development programme the Authority had introduced. There was not necessarily an issue with recruiting social workers as they did not have long term vacancies and they had reduced the number of agency staff however it was key to attract experienced social workers and to try and retain the experience for the future. She stated that we were now beginning to see improvement and retention levels getting better and it was an area of ongoing development. The Corporate Director also stated that there was a need to look at social workers moving across teams, from Childrens to Adults as part of a whole management programme to support social workers; make them feel valued, protected and listened to and to try and prevent the 'burn out' aspect.

The Inspector supported these comments stating that there was a lot of work being undertaken to explore the current situation with social workers in Wales as there were many coming through as qualified or experienced social workers who then for some reason were leaving the profession. Investigation work was being carried out to try to find out where these individuals were going.

When questioned on the work being undertaken in the Education and Wellbeing Directorate in preventative services the Corporate Director – Education and Family Support stated that they were working very closely with social services, schools, nurseries and families to put in the best services for the right people at the right time. They had an Early help team, Educational Psychologist and a specialist team for those with medical needs. Key to the work was getting the information very quickly so that a prompt response can be provided.

Members asked for a brief update on the situation of the new Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub and its impact on providing Information Advice and Assistance (IAA). The Corporate Director responded explaining that this was a joint hub between the Authority and South Wales police which was experiencing a small delay due to the location. She explained that they had already set up a virtual team based on the requirements of the Act and the Head of Service added that they recognised further work was needed to ensure people were directed properly to the right service. She reported that this was already starting to be addressed since the inspection with the number of referrals and assessments safely and gradually starting to go down. The inspector commented that she was very much

aware that the Authority was being inspected within months of the Act coming in and it was a big transition in the ways of working. With having an inspection at this time it was recognised that there would be teething problems however the positive was that there were plans in place to identify and address issues during the transitional period.

Member questioned what steps were being taken to monitor underlying staff satisfaction, to which the Corporate Director advised that in Children's Services there had been a survey for all staff as part of the inspection. They had also recently introduced a supervision policy which strived towards a supervision culture that was much more than just an appraisal. Senior management meet with the staff regularly and walk the floor to ensure that staff see they are visible. There is a strong absence management process and the Directorate was concentrating on providing regular access to Occupational Health. The Head of Service continued, stating that staff and client wellbeing was such an important thing which inspectorates monitor very carefully. She reported that they had introduced wellbeing and pastoral care as an item in every monthly meeting to ensure that any issues, such as sometimes lone working, are dealt with.

In response to a question regarding contract issues with the voluntary driver scheme identified in the report the Head of Service stated this referred to volunteer drivers who helped transport Looked After Children to schools, to contact with their parents, sometimes involving different placements for a group of siblings. The issue was that there was a HRMC implication around tax and how many miles the company claimed. The threshold for claiming was 10,000 miles however with fewer drivers they were covering more miles and going over the threshold. She reported that Officers were meeting with drivers over their concerns. This was however at times leading to social workers having to transport which was having an impact on their capacity. When asked whether foster carers could double up as volunteer drivers the Head of Service confirmed that wherever possible Foster Carers did transport children and this was considered when identifying carers as far as possible, however sometimes circumstances required other drivers.

Conclusions:

Following the Committee's consideration of the report, Members wished to make the following comments and recommendations:

- a) The Committee recognised the positives within the Inspection of Children's Services report and were reassured by the encouraging words of the Inspector in attendance from CSSIW.
- b) Members have requested that they receive an update on the progress of the action plan at an appropriate time, to enable the Committee to monitor whether the actions have addressed the issues raised by the Inspectorate.
- c) With reference to the issues raised in the CSSIW report regarding staff morale, the Committee recommend that steps be put in place to monitor staff and their job satisfaction by means of a Corporate employee survey.

3. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Scrutiny Officer presented the report which detailed a list of potential items for comment and prioritisation for the Scrutiny forward Work Programme. The Committee were asked to prioritise up to six items to present to the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee for formal prioritisation and designation to each Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Conclusions:

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Subsequent to the Committee's discussion, Members determined the following in relation to the Overview and Scrutiny Forward Work Programme:

The following items and additional detail were highlighted by the Committee as priorities for the first set of meetings to be presented to the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny for formal prioritisation:

- Early Help and Safeguarding
- Waste - How the 3 months expected disruption time was accepted by the Council?
- CAMHS – to include data on what services are being offered and provided by schools.
- Residential Remodelling – Children's Services

The following items were deemed important for prioritisation later in the forward work programme:

- Dementia Care - data on the rolling out of dementia awareness training that was carried out in Maesteg in working towards making the Bridgend dementia friendly.

4. CORPORATE PARENTING CHAMPION NOMINATION REPORT

The Scrutiny Officer presented a report to the Committee and asked for them to nominate one Member as its Corporate Parenting Champion to represent the Committee as an invitee to meetings of the Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee.

RESOLVED: That Councillor David White be nominated as the Corporate Parenting Champion.

5. NOMINATION TO THE PUBLIC SERVICE BOARD OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

The Scrutiny Officer presented a report to the Committee that asked them to nominate one Member to sit on the Public Service Board Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

RESOLVED: That Councillor Tom Beedle be nominated to sit on the Public Service Board Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

6. URGENT ITEMS

None

The meeting closed at 5.30 pm