

SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1 - THURSDAY, 18 JANUARY 2018

**INUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1
HELD IN COUNCIL CHAMBER - CIVIC OFFICES ANGEL STREET BRIDGEND CF31 4WB
ON THURSDAY, 18 JANUARY 2018 AT 09:30**

Present

Councillor CA Webster – Chairperson

JPD Blundell	NA Burnett	RJ Collins	SK Dendy
DK Edwards	M Jones	B Sedgebeer	JH Tildesley MBE
LM Walters	A Williams	AJ Williams	

Apologies for Absence

J Gebbie and JC Radcliffe

Officers:

Susan Cooper	Corporate Director - Social Services & Wellbeing
Julie Ellams	Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Rachel Keepins	Democratic Services Officer - Scrutiny
Lauren North	Commissioning and Contract Management Officer
Natalie Silcox	Group Manager Childrens Regulated Services
Pete Tyson	Planning and Contract Management Officer

Invitees:

Cllr P White	Cabinet Member for Social Services and Early Help
Susan Cooper	Corporate Director - Social Services & Wellbeing
Lauren North	Commissioning and Contract Management Officer
Natalie Silcox	Manager Children's Regulated Services
Pete Tyson	Planning and Contract Management Officer

29. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

30. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Scrutiny Officer presented an update on the Forward Work Programme, the items prioritised by the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee, potential items for comment and prioritisation and further items for consideration.

Conclusions

1. Members requested that information on education be included in the report on "Budgetary Impacts on Parc Prison" and that representatives from education and from Parc Prison attend the meeting to explain the service that was provided and aspirations for the future.
2. The Committee considered the criteria form attached to the report and expressed concerns over the safeguarding between licensing and the Authority's school transport, particularly in relation to pupils with Additional Learning Needs. Members commented that current legislation meant it was up to the school transport company to inform

the Council of any criminal convictions of its drivers etc and as such the Council were not doing their own checks. With this in mind it was concluded that the Committee put forward an item on the larger subject of School Transport, due to related issues that had also arisen in discussions over the annual draft budget, and that the concerns regarding licensing and safeguarding checks be incorporated in this report.

3. The Committee also requested that more external experts and service users be considered as invitees on each item for Scrutiny in order to assist with deliberations and provide a wider perspective.

31. REMODELLING CHILDREN'S RESIDENTIAL SERVICES PROJECT

The Chairperson thanked the officers for the report and additional information requested at the previous meeting.

The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing introduced the Commissioning and Contract Management Officer and the Group Manager Children's Regulated Services to the committee to present the proposals and the Group Manager Commissioning to explain the financial aspects.

The officers provided an overview of Children's Remodelling, challenges with the existing model, the "No Wrong Door" model and how it could be redesigned to suit Bridgend. They provided a comparison of placement numbers including the proposed number of places that would exist within the service. They explained the five elements to the model including the Hub, the 4 bed medium term unit, transitional carers, supported living and supported lodging. They provided examples of how individuals would progress through the current service model and how the new proposals would change their journey.

The Group Manager Commissioning outlined occupancy levels throughout 2017, the average length of a placement, feedback following rota visits undertaken by elected members and care leaver data which demonstrated the need to maximise stable and sustainable accommodation options for young people leaving care. He explained the history of out of county residential placements and that current forecasts estimated that circa 4 out of county placements would still be required for risk and personal circumstances which suggested that a number could remain in-county if a more effective service model was in place.

The Residential managers were observing the meeting and had undertaken a full workforce planning exercise to inform staffing requirements for both residential units under the proposed model. The Group Manager –Commissioning referred to the Children's Commissioning Consortium Cymru (4C's) and systems and processes they were implementing which could be structured to support Bridgend's needs, the training programme and the financial implications.

A member asked for confirmation that the trade unions had been involved in discussions regarding changes to job descriptions and if staff supported the changes. He was advised that trade unions had been involved and staff were happy with the proposed changes.

A member raised concerns about staffing costs, JNC and pay for psychologists. The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing stressed that the new proposals

SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1 - THURSDAY, 18 JANUARY 2018

would not be possible without the work force and trade unions who were fully engaged. Details of the new structure were not yet available. Recruitment was always an issue but each position would be presented as an exciting opportunity.

A member recognised the significant amount of work that had been put into the proposals but asked why children were being taken into care. Bridgend were in the highest quartile in Wales and a specific report was required to explain the reasons and scenarios and to prevent the need for children to be taken into care. The authority needed to work corporately and to look “outside the box” and to start strategically planning for the future.

The Corporate Director explained that lots of authorities were seeing an increase in the numbers of looked after children. Figures at Bridgend had not increased although they continued to be high. It was crucial to provide help as early as possible. There had recently been a CSSIW inspection where both positive areas and areas for development were identified. The findings would shortly be presented to Cabinet. Issues were identified with intervention and the right type of service and the ability to act quickly when children were in care. There had been a culture shift in terms of social workers and their ability to work in risk. Further information would be presented to a scrutiny committee in April under the topic, Early Help and Intervention.

The Cabinet Member for Social Services and Early Help explained that in 2008 there were just over 400 looked after children and ten years later the figure was 387 and tended to fluctuate by only 1 or 2. Early intervention in this area was very complicated because of children with complex needs and he welcomed an open debate.

A member raised concerns about the number of placements outside the county and savings identified in the report. No allowances had been made for court placements identifying a location where there was no capacity and the cost of accommodating these children. The member was advised that there were emergency beds for these circumstances. The new model gave more flexibility and options for different placements. It was impossible to dictate what happened in court however the proposed model would be presented to the judges so they would be aware of what was available.

A member thanked the officers for the case studies which gave a clear explanation of the issues and problems that staff faced.

A member recognised the number of cases with complex needs and asked if costs had been built in to account for some failures and interventions continuing to adulthood. The Group Manager – Commissioning explained that there would be no detrimental impact on the number of beds just more options. There were on average 10 high cost out of county placements and it had been factored in that some might need to remain out of county.

A member raised concerns about reducing the age of children in Newbridge House, children unable to go into alternative care because of their age and leaving no capacity for any other children entering the system with comparative needs.

The Group Manager – Children’s Regulated Services explained that the reason for reducing the age was so that assessments could be carried out in the same unit. It was hoped that significant numbers could be transitioned back home. These pressures were the same across Wales. The CSSIW were carrying out a themed inspection across Wales and it was hoped that the information that came out would put the authority in a stronger position. There were high numbers but the actual costs were coming down because of the strategy of keeping children local.

SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1 - THURSDAY, 18 JANUARY 2018

A member asked if the out of county option would still exist if all the beds were full. The member was advised that the right placement would be sought for the child no matter where.

A member asked if out of county placements might still be required then wasn't an estimate of zero optimistic. He was advised that a cost differential for four individuals had been included but not for all and other options would also be available.

A member referred to savings of £17,000 for therapeutic services at a time when academics were suggesting that a wholesale culture change was required with significant investment. The member was advised that there was £53,000 set aside for the training programme. Significant amounts were spent on therapeutic intervention so investing in staff training could be achieved and savings made with flexibility in the budget if support was required.

A member asked for further information regarding the transitional carers and the assumption that two out of six carers would be without placements at any one time. Further information was also requested regarding the employment position of carers and if they were employees of BCBC and included in the pension scheme. The Group Manager, Children's Regulated Services explained that these beds would be available for emergency cases and respite. They would not be employees and didn't expect this to change. They were looking at the possibility of an enhancement in the retainer but work was still being done and a paper was due to be presented in April.

A member repeated concerns about capacity and the need to keep two empty to complete the plan. The Group Manager, Children's Regulated Services explained that they would not be used for long term transitional placements. The plans would be reviewed as they went along but it was recognised that they were dealing with real people and families and all the parts had to interlink for it to work.

A member asked if the 3 carers identified as suitable for up-skilling had been notified about the plans. The Group Manager, Children's Regulated Services explained that no one would be approached until the proposals had been agreed. The positions were open to any foster carer to apply for and a bespoke campaign would be launched at the appropriate time.

A member asked for further information on how the intensive training sessions impacted on employment rights. The Group Manager, Children's Regulated Services explained that under foster regulations, all foster carers required training and BCBC would be offering training in addition to the mandatory sessions. This would be available to a specific type of foster carer.

A member asked for assurances that officers knew how many LAC there were at any moment and where they were placed. The Corporate director – Social Services and Wellbeing explained that she received this information regularly and every six weeks there was a board meeting where the position was considered and reviewed. The Cabinet Member for Social Services and Early Help explained that he could ring and have access to that information at any time.

A member asked why assumptions about inflation and current expenditure were not included in the figures. The Group Manager – Commissioning explained that any inflation or increases would be met corporately and he had tried to allow like for like comparison. Both figures could be increased by 3%. A member suggested that a note to that effect be included in reports in future.

A member referred to the recommendations made at the previous meeting

and stressed the importance of collaboration including national and multi-agency training.

Remodelling Children's Residential Services Project

Members commended the report for its detail and focus.

Recommendations

1. The Committee recommend that the Authority look towards providing joint regional training with other Local Authorities and that consideration be given to looking within these LAs for experts to provide this. This joint training would not only assist in hopefully reducing the cost of training but would also help build relationships between staff, residential staff and foster carers regionally not just within our own LA.
2. The Committee recommend that the Authority incorporate a clause within Foster Carer contracts where they are receiving specialist training, in order to maintain them in house and not potentially lose very qualified Foster Carers to IFAs.
3. The Committee recommend that a proper evaluation of career development be considered for specialist foster carers to use as an incentive when recruiting.
4. The Committee highlighted the budgetary assumptions that were being made in relation to future need for Residential care and the potential risk of still requiring Out of County placements. With this in mind the Committee recommend that evidence of contingency plans, both budgetary and staffing, be incorporated into the project and any future reports.

The Committee requested that the item be followed up by Scrutiny in the future for monitoring purposes, incorporating evidence of outcomes.

Further comments

The Committee requested that as part of the future Early Help and Social Services item, the report include detailed analysis of the causes and demands on Children's Social Services. Members commented that if this is not known and understood then the Authority cannot effectively plan for the future and Members cannot be assured that changes that are being introduced are fit for purpose.

The Committee requested that the outcome of the CSSIW investigation into Looked After Children be provided to Scrutiny for information when it becomes available.

32. URGENT ITEMS

None

The meeting closed at 12:05