

SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2 - MONDAY, 18 SEPTEMBER 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 MONDAY, 18 SEPTEMBER 2017 AT 9.30AM**

Present

Councillor CA Green – Chairperson

TH Beedle
JE Lewis

MC Clarke
AA Pucella

SK Dendy
KL Rowlands

T Giffard
SR Vidal

Apologies for Absence:

None.

Officers:

Susan Cooper	Corporate Director - Social Services & Wellbeing
Nicola Echanis	Head of Education & Family Support
Mark Galvin	Senior Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Lindsay Harvey	Corporate Director Education and Family Support
Gail Jewell	Democratic Services Officer - Scrutiny
Laura Kinsey	Head of Children's Social Care
Mark Lewis	Group Manager - Integrated Working
Natalie Silcox	Group Manager Childrens Regulated Services

7. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor TH Beedle declared a personal interest in Agenda item 4 due to his grandchild being a Looked After Child.

8. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of a meeting of the Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2 meeting dated 20 July 2017 be approved as a true and accurate record.

9. EARLY HELP AND SOCIAL CARE

The Scrutiny Officer presented a report on the above topic, which updated Members on how the Early Help and Children's Social Care teams are working together within the Authority to improve outcomes for looked after children, and to share with Members the analysis of the looked after children population which informs the approach being taken.

The Chairperson welcomed the Invitees to the meeting, and following a brief introduction of the report by the Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing, a joint power point Presentation was given by the Head of Children's Social Care and the Group Manager Integrated Working and Family Support, entitled Early Help and Children's Social Care update.

During the course of and following the conclusion of the Presentation, Members asked a number of questions of the Invitees as follows.

A Member asked what agencies were involved in the support of Early Help and Social Services, and what level of compliance there was from a non-statutory perspective, that was not under regulation.

The Group Manager Integrated Working and Family Support, advised that Early Help was a consent based approach rather than a statutory type model. He confirmed that the team supporting families in this area of work, could involve a number of different agencies and these could be internal based, ie from the Social Services and Wellbeing and Education and Family Support Directorates, or external providers including an element of commissioned services. All these different categories and areas of support, usually emanated from meetings being held involving the various different bodies and partners, arising from which individual Support Plans were established and put in place, and each of these varied, dependent upon the type and level of support that was required for each young person. This category of support was recognised as the 'Team Around Family Support.'

A Member recognised the very positive approach being taken by 'Team Around Families' and the One Model Assessment. He asked what the key drivers were in knowing when early help was required for an individual. He was conscious of the fact that children changed as they developed and became older, and that they often started to change around the age of 10-11 where they could become more challenging due to starting to confront different things in their lives. He was also aware that children then experienced a different set of challenges from this, as they were entering early adulthood. He asked what approach was taken by the Responsible Authorities in recognising problems that young people and their families may be experiencing, and when they needed to intervene in an attempt to resolve these.

The Group Manager Integrated Working and Family Support, advised that the work of the Early Help Unit involved carrying out Family Assessments in order to prevent or intervene in children and family problems arising. Each case would be subject to an appropriate referral where children and/or families were signposted to the appropriate type of support that was required for them, with this based on the type of problems they were experiencing. There was a single point (front door system) of contact here at the Civic Offices he explained. The type of support required for the child and/or family, could be single or multi-agency support he added. As soon as the appropriate category of support was established, a Support Plan was put in place for the child and/or family stated the Group Manager Integrated Working and Family Support. If the problems were family based then Parenting Programmes could be put in place, for example. Other possible interventions could also be looked at he further added.

A Member noted that the initial pathway of support was decided at the Civic Offices, but he asked at what stage of proceedings was an Exit Plan usually established.

The Group Manager Integrated Working and Family Support advised that there were normally reviews of the Support Plan in place after 1, 3 and 6 months. The outcome of each individual case was eventually decided upon by a Practitioner.

A Member asked how long it took from the date of the first review until a child/family got support assistance.

The Group Manager Integrated Working and Family Support advised that this was dependent upon the outcomes of the Screening Assessment. This Assessment had to be carried out though however, within a period of 7 working days, though a JAFF Assessment took longer (up to 15 working days) by such time which, a suitable Support Plan based upon the child or families level of support required, needed to be agreed upon and put in place. Assessments were made as part of the process, in respect of both the child and their family in the broader sense, he also confirmed.

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The Chairperson asked what steps were taken if a child was considered to be in imminent danger, and due to this, urgent preventative and intervention plans were required to ensure their safety.

The Group Manager Integrated Working and Family Support advised that urgent action was taken in cases such as this, in accordance with the appropriate legislative requirements, dependent upon the situation being faced. Each individual case had to be judged on its own merits. Safeguarding referrals would follow a different process and be submitted to the Safeguarding Assessment team.

A Member asked how the Authority measured its success and proficiency in terms of its performance in the support it offered and provided with regard to Early Help and Social Care.

The Head of Children's Social Care advised that the Business Plan would outline details of the different programmes that the Authority provided in respect of the above, and work ongoing would be measurable through performance indicators that would monitor the various aims and objectives of this. Each project that comprised the Business Plan would also be project managed she added, and would clarify the desired outcomes of each of the projects contained therein.

The Member asked a follow-up question, namely if Officers were satisfied with progress made to date in respect of Early Help and Social Care initiatives.

The Head of Children's Social Care replied that generally they were, though some progress had been blunted as a result of accommodation difficulties relating to MASH, which was not enabling the project to as of yet go live.

A Member asked if these problems were due to internal issues, ie within the Authority, to which she replied no, and that the problems were multi-agency in their nature.

A Member referred to the Fostering Marketing Recruitment Policy and how this was progressing.

The Head of Children's Social Care confirmed that the Authority had adopted a very proactive stance in respect of the recruitment of Foster Carers, particularly with regard to the appointment of Carers who had a specialism, for example in looking after challenging children who resided in placements for longer due to their condition. Though there was a challenge in respect of the recruitment and retention of Foster Carers, this was even more difficult in relation to those Carers who were equipped to support challenging children as well as Transitional Carers who supported young people as they became older and moved from Children's into Adult Care. Recruitment in these two areas had therefore been specifically targeted. Mother and baby placements had also been concentrated upon she added.

A Member asked what expertise was required in order to successfully carry out the role of a Specialist Transitional Carer.

The Head of Children's Social Care confirmed that this was currently being developed, and until such time the work had been completed, a therapist would work in-house with Foster Carers to provide any required support of a more specialist nature.

A Member asked if the therapy would also include psychometric emotional testing, as this was not listed as a requisite in the report.

The Head of Children's Social Care reiterated that an appropriate Module was under development, and that this would form part of a further report to the Committee in November. Part of the Module would include matching children to households in terms of caring support requirements under a matching pro-forma arrangement, in order to try and ensure that there is a good chance of successful outcomes for the child in question who had been placed in care.

The Chairperson asked the Invitees if there was sufficient awareness being shared, regarding the signs to watch out for early identification of young children showing signs of having problems, ie through liaison with Schools, Nursery classes and Playgroups etc, in order for prevention and/or early intervention to take place with such troubled children at a young age.

The Group Manager Integrated Working and Family Support confirmed that there was an Early Years and Child Care Manager employed in the Early Help team, who ensured that there was sufficient liaison with bodies and organisations that supported children from a young age, in order to ensure that the early signs of a child in possible distress were picked up early and acted upon. There was lots of signposting he added, and evidence available that supported this.

A Member followed-up, by asking how Schools interacted with the Early Help and Social Care teams, if they noticed that a child was showing any signs of behavioural problems at a young age, ie how was this initially tackled.

The Head of Children's Social Care confirmed that all schools within the County Borough had a teacher that specialised in Child Protection issues, and that if or when the above signs were noted as being evident in any child, then the Council were approached in order to ascertain the extent of the problem, and establish if a Referral was required to be made through the appropriate channels. Safeguarding training was also made available in Schools she added.

The Chairperson asked if BCBC and partnership agencies in Health, Education and the third sector could obtain more accessibility to information sharing of a nature that was common to all these statutory bodies, through a compatible database system, without breaching the laws of data protection. Such a system would also then reduce enquiries, such as for example, if a child was on the Child Protection Register.

The Interim Corporate Director Education and Family Support advised that Welsh Government were looking at an application called MyApp, which was an information sharing application that could be used by Schools and related agencies without breaking data protection rules and regulations.

The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing advised that there was a system recognised as the Wales Community Care Information System that allowed for compatible sharing of information between Social Services and Health, but at present this did not extend to the Education Department. A number of local authorities had signed up to this system and this was looking to be expanded further in the future to include the ABMU. She added that when MASH was fully up and running, this would allow for an improvement to the way information was shared between organisations such as the South Wales Police and Social Services. She wished to stress to Members that though there was still more work to be done, large strides had been made within the last few years with regard to information sharing between relevant bodies processing work through collaborative or joint working arrangements.

The Chairperson advised that she was aware that Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) County Borough Council and the Mid Glamorgan Health Board had for some considerable time

shared a network, and she asked if there was any intention in the future for BCBC to work collaboratively with RCT, which would assist in expanding such joint working practices.

The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing confirmed that discussions regarding any proposed joint working arrangements were in a very early stage with RCT, though some scoping work had been completed. Though they had a MASH, the one in BCBC was designed differently under the auspices of the Social Services and Wellbeing Act.

A Member asked how many children were home schooled, and how were these children monitored in terms of their health and wellbeing.

The Head of Education and Early Help confirmed that there was a post occupied in the Integrated Working and Family Support team that monitored children educated at home, in terms of whether or not they needed safeguarding or other related support. Though there were 91 children that were being educated at home in the County Borough, this was only the amount that had been registered as such, and Officers were aware that the accurate total was higher than this.

A Member referred to paragraph 4.24 of the report and where reference was made to a number of changes having been made to certain work practices as a result of the introduction of Early Help Hubs in different areas of the County Borough. The first section of this paragraph referred to the benefits this had brought about, as well as work there was still to do in terms of managing the impact the changes had had on the service. He noted that as a result of some of the changes, there had been an 180% increase in the number of family referrals to early help in the last 3 years, as well as a 200% increase in the number of completed family assessments for the same period. He recognised that these increases were dramatic, and he asked how they were being managed, coupled with the fact that support services were being reduced across the Council as a whole including within the Children's and Education Directorate. There were also ongoing concerns with elements of grant funding he further noted from the report.

The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing advised that there were some concerns in respect of grant funding for different areas and Departments of the County Borough Council, and CMB were conducting an exercise at present that was looking at this, and how such funding was supporting the main 4 different service areas of BCBC and the manner in which it was being allocated, based on need and certain other specific grant requirements. The Chief Executive was trying to ensure that all the different categories of grants were being targeted appropriately.

The Group Manager Integrated Working and Family Support confirmed that in terms of Early Help and Social Care initiatives, the Authority would be unable to rise to the challenges that lie ahead without adequate resource to do so, particularly in respect of working to meet the increased number of safeguarding step-down cases, and the increased demand for early help services. He added that currently a total of £6.5m of grant monies was being received, and if any of this was reduced, then further development of progress made to date would inevitably be compromised.

A Member felt that there was not enough information in the report in respect of the challenges that lie ahead and the suggested solutions to these.

The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing advised that every Corporate Director within the Authority faced significant challenges and these as of yet were not showing any sign of reducing. Cabinet/CMB were constantly having discussions over

these and ways that they could be addressed as part of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). Social Services and Early Help were demand led services, and in view of the ongoing budget restraints, collaborative/joint working with partners in order to tackle work demands together and providing services in a different and more innovative way had to continue to be explored.

The Member followed-up by stating that there was not always clear criteria on what local authorities and other organisations could actually spend grant funding on, and that certain types of grant funding could only be used for a specific purpose, rather than providing what you wished or needed to provide by way of priority. He felt that the terms and conditions associated with some categories of funding were sometimes too stringent.

The Interim Corporate Director Education and Family Support reiterated that funding streams and maximising the benefits of these across the Authority and for the residents of the Bridgend County Borough were being looked at, as well as the nature and volatility of the different types of grants the Council received.

A Member asked why the LAC population in the Bridgend County Borough was so high, as he did not think that this was necessarily linked to areas of deprivation. He asked if this could be due to the fact that assessments we undertook were more rigorous than those carried out in other neighbouring authorities. He also noted that only 12 weeks were allowed after a child was placed in the Care System for the child to be fully rehabilitated, and this was not a long enough period for rehabilitation to be completed. He also asked if the restructuring of services, transitional arrangements and changes to the referral system contributed to the high number of Early Out's.

The Head of Children's Social Care advised that BCBC currently had the 4th highest population of LAC on an all Wales basis when compared to other welsh local authorities, but she agreed that this could partly be as a result of the Council being very effective at recognising risk. She did add however, that numbers in Bridgend had plateaued recently while certain other Authorities had increased. The assessments undertaken and subsequent decisions taken with regard to Children being Looked After, were made by the Safeguarding and Early Help Board, and in light of the comments made by the Member, she felt that the admissions process may need to be looked at further, with a view to some possible revision.

In all cases where it was deemed necessary that a child was required to be placed in alternative care for adequate safeguarding, it was also important the Head of Children's Social Care added, that every effort was made for them to return to their natural family environment after rehabilitation. The Family Support team were working closely with affected families in order to achieve this.

The Group Manager Integrated Working and Family Support added that improved methods of integration and support outcomes for children, were resulting in an increased number of referrals, so in a way the Authority had become a victim of its own success. This was why it was important that the level of grant funding along the lines of that which was currently being provided, continued in the future.

The Group Manager Integrated Working and Family Support further explained that there were currently 50 unborn babies who were at risk of becoming looked after when born. A Member then highlighted the ongoing development work with parents between pregnancies where children have been removed from their care, referenced on page 21 of the report, be escalated

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The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing advised that as the Joint Early Help and Permanence Action Plan was regularly monitored, this was something that could be looked at in the next monitoring round.

The Chairperson suggested that the Council should liaise with neighbouring local authorities with a similar geographical and rural area to that of Bridgend where LAC numbers were lower, to see if there was any 'best practice' procedures and processes that could be adopted with a view to reducing the number in Bridgend, for example with Wrexham CBC.

The Head of Children's Social Care advised that this was being pursued with Newport CBC who were similar in size to Bridgend, but who consistently had LAC numbers that were less than other Authorities in Wales.

The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing added that the trend currently was that numbers of LAC were generally increasing across Wales, and whilst all local authorities were looking to reduce these in number, this had to be done safely.

As this concluded the debate upon this item, the Chairperson thanked the Invitees for attending and responding to questions, following which they left the meeting.

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

- a) Members recommend that the feasibility of an online information sharing database be explored. The Committee proposed that the database should be accessible between Local Authorities, Health Boards, Police and schools – each having relevant restrictions to information to ensure compliance with the Data Protection Act. Members stated that the database would also lessen the burden on our resources from enquires being made to the Directorate as to whether a child was on the Child Protection Register.
- b) Members expressed concerns in relation to Early Help being predominately supported by annual grant funding and given that the Council has a statutory placement for prevention, the Committee recommend that Cabinet/CMB actively pursue grant flexibility from Welsh Government.
- c) With reference to the statistics provided in relation to the numbers of unborn babies that will become a Looked After Child when born, Members recommend that the work being progressed to identify services to work with parents between pregnancies be accelerated.
- d) The Committee raised concerns in relation to the numbers of Looked After Children within the County Borough and recommend that a review be undertaken into the reasons why our Local Authority ranks so high when compared to other local authorities with similar levels of deprivation.

Future work

The Committee requested that the subject of Early Help and Social Care be revisited by Scrutiny in the future and that the report includes the following information:

- Up to date figures presenting the numbers of Looked After Children by Local Authority;
- A breakdown of referral figures, to include statistics from local pre-school nurseries;
- Outcome from the review undertaken by Institute of Public Care;

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- What services are being provided post 16, given that research indicates shows that children who have been looked after, have the increased probability that their children will also end up in the care system;
- Outcomes from the following Residential Remodelling project work streams:
 - For moving out-of-county residential placements to in-county
 - Upskilling of three internal foster carers to provide intensive, therapeutic step down placements.
 - Review of the foster carer marketing and recruitment strategy

10. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME (FWP) UPDATE

The Corporate Director Operational and Partnership Services submitted a report, that:

- a) Presented the items prioritised by the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee including the next item delegated to this Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- b) Presented a list of responses to comments, recommendations and requests for additional information from the previous meeting of the Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2.
- c) Present the Committee with a list of further potential items for comment and prioritisation.
- d) Asked the Committee to identify any further items for consideration using the pre-determined criteria form.

Attached to the report at Appendix A was the overall FWP which included the topics prioritised by the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee (COSC) for the next set of Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee's in Table 1, as well as a list of topics that were deemed important for future prioritisation at Table 2.

The Scrutiny Officer advised that the Committee were being firstly asked to consider the next topic they have been allocated by the COSC in Table 1, and determine what further detail they would like the report to contain, what questions they wish officers to address, and if there are any further Invitees they wish to attend for this meeting, in order to assist Members in their investigation.

The Committee were also being asked to then prioritise up to six items from the list in Table 2 to present to the COSC for formal prioritisation and designation to each Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the next set of meetings. As part of this, Members were asked to consider the feedback and responses from their previous Committee meeting attached at Appendix B to the report, and determine whether they were satisfied with the outcome and what to propose to the COSC on the item.

The report also alluded to Overview and Scrutiny Members roles in terms of Corporate Parenting, and whether any further items Members wished to identify for the FWP.

Following consideration of the report by Members, it was resolved:

1. Subsequent to the Committee's discussion Members determined the following in relation to the Overview and Scrutiny Forward Work Programme:
 - 1.1 Following the responses received from Officers in relation to the item 'Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) Inspection of Children's Services' on Members have requested that they receive an information report at a future meeting in response to the comments made below:

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- Members have requested that they receive an update on the progress of the plan at an appropriate time, to enable the Committee to monitor whether the actions have addressed the issues raised by the Inspectorate.
 - 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.
- 1.2 In relation to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) report scheduled for 9 October 2017, Members have requested that we look to invite representation from relevant external agencies and also an Education Psychologist to ensure any recommendations made by the Committee are based on a wide range of views and presentations.

The items below have been highlighted by the Committee as priorities for the first set of meetings to be presented to the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny for formal prioritisation:

Economic Prosperity of Bridgend County Borough - Members have requested that the report detail how we, as a Council, are proactively ensuring that we will benefit from the City Deal. Members have also requested that a representative from Monmouthshire County Council be invited for the item, to provide an insight on how the City Deal will affect them, as a Council that is also on the periphery of Cardiff Capital Region. Members have identified this item for webcasting.

Town Centre Regeneration – Due to public interest in the item, Members have identified this item for webcasting.

It was also agreed that the following items were important and needed to be prioritised for later in the Forward Work Programme:

- (i) Advocacy Services for Children and Adults

Residential Remodelling – Extra Care Housing Schemes

11. URGENT ITEMS

None.

The meeting closed at 12.40 pm