

SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1 - MONDAY, 16 APRIL 2018

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1
HELD IN COUNCIL CHAMBER - CIVIC OFFICES ANGEL STREET BRIDGEND CF31 4WB
ON MONDAY, 16 APRIL 2018 AT 09:30**

Present

Councillor CA Webster – Chairperson

JPD Blundell
J Gebbie
LM Walters

NA Burnett
M Jones
AJ Williams

SK Dendy
JC Radcliffe

DK Edwards
B Sedgebeer

Apologies for Absence

JH Tildesley MBE

Registered Representatives

William Bond

Special School Sector

Officers:

Sarah Daniel
Rachel Keepins

Democratic Services Officer - Scrutiny
Democratic Services Officer - Scrutiny

Invitees:

Susan Cooper
Nicola Echanis
Lindsay Harvey
Laura Kinsey

Corporate Director - Social Services & Wellbeing
Head of Education & Family Support
Corporate Director Education and Family Support
Head of Children's Social Care

16. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Declarations of personal interest were received from Cllr JC Radcliffe and Cllr C Webster on agenda item 5.

17. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED: The minutes of 08.02.2018 were approved as a true and accurate record of the meeting

18. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Corporate Director Operational and Partnership Services submitted a report to Committee on the Overview and Scrutiny Forward Work programme.

A member asked that the following further information be requested for the Community Services report: What grant funding from Welsh Government has been reduced and what does this equate to.

RESOLVED:

Members approved the feedback from the previous meetings of the Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 and noted the list of responses.

19. EARLY HELP AND CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE

The Interim Corporate Director Education and Family Support and The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing submitted a report on Early Help and Childrens Social Care to provide members with information that they had previously requested on joint working between Directorates.

The Group Manager Integrated Working and Family Support expanded on the main points within the report including how the Directorates are working closely together with each other and also a number of external agencies.

A member referred to 4.11 of the report where it stated the increase in referrals was up 80%. He asked how this has impacted case workers and how this has impacted the Local Authority financially.

He also asked how the referrals into the ACE project were managed previously.

The Group Manager Integrated Services and Family Support stated that they look at thresholds within early help like connecting families. Referrals are screened within 24 hours and once an assessment has been completed the family are assigned a support worker or may go to intervention worker, depending on the complexity of the case. He added that referrals from schools accounted for 10% of all referrals into the service and that a joint approach with safeguarding colleagues is helping them to early identify risks and challenges. He added that there were no significant waiting lists but this is constantly monitored.

A Member stated that it would have been useful to receive the historical data regarding Looked After Children so they were able to compare data and look at the trends. Officers stated that whilst they didn't have the data with them they would share this with members after the meeting.

A member asked what relationships the Authority have with Welsh Government and third sector organisations regarding support for Early Help and Social services.

The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing acknowledged that there were pressures on the service and they had seen an increase in referrals but stated that BCBC were not alone. She stated that the service continually reviews how it works and the Directorates are continuing to work together. She added that a number of projects such as MASH and the reflect project were still in their early stages so the full impact of these were yet to be realised. Officers were also looking at models and successes in other Local Authorities that are working well, with officers from BCBC going to visit Newport, NPT and Carmarthenshire in the coming weeks.

Members were concerned about resources and grant funding allocation and what the potential risks to the service were and what impact this could have on the Authority if funding was not received.

The Interim Corporate Director Education and Family Support stated that whilst this was a risk they are looking at different ways of working including sharing resources with other Local Authorities, working more closely with schools to ensure early intervention is managed more locally and also working with a number of other groups who work with those with additional learning needs and provide support vulnerable learners.

A Member asked if officers and Cabinet members were communicating with Welsh Government over project funding that is at risk.

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The Cabinet Member Social Services and Wellbeing stated that they were constantly being proactive where funding was concerned and that this was not a reactive nature. He added that they were constantly working with the Minister for Childrens Services.

A Member asked for clarification in the numbers of Looked After Children that had been 'stepped down' into the Early Help Service and how were they ensuring that step up and step down were integrated together.

The Officer stated that a quality assurance audit was in place for children and families that were either stepped up or down. He added that they looked at process, difficulties and challenges and fed back any areas of improvement that were identified.

A Member referred to para 4.20 of the report where it stated that 51 children had been returned home. He asked if there was any information available on the ongoing support that the children were receiving and if they were still being monitored. The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing stated that she would send this information to members after the meeting.

A Member commented that BCBC appear on the opposite trend analysis to other local Authorities in respect of reducing the numbers of looked after children. He stated that Neath Port Talbot have successfully reduced the number of LAC, however BCBC is has gone up. He asked officers if we are learning anything from other local authorities and if we are sharing best practice. He was concerned that figures for BCBC on LAC were now up to 389 and this appeared to be a national trend and not just local to Bridgend and he thought maybe the Committee should contact Welsh Government for support and answers

The Head of Childrens Social Care stated that officers meet regularly with other authorities in the Western Bay partnership. She stated that Neath Port Talbot had undertaken a lot of targeted activity to reduce their LAC and they have discussed as to how they have approached that. She added that officers had also talked with Swansea Council who gave a presentation on their panels/processes for agreeing to children being looked after. Whilst BCBC were waiting for confirmed figures she stated that the number of LAC had plateaued while the trend year end 2016/17 showed that many other authorities were increasing. Colleagues in several other local authorities are continuing to report this issue. She added that Swansea will be conducting more in depth research into trends locally which they will be sharing with Neath Port Talbot and Bridgend.

The Cabinet Member Social Services and Early Help advised members that other Local Authorities were showing upwards trends. He stated that Cardiff figures showed that the number of LAC had increased from 555 to 834 over the last 4 years alone

Members welcomed the independent review of the decision making along the looked after children pathway by the institute of public care and asked for a copy of the report when this was available.

The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing stated that IPC were commissioned to undertake a review following the CSSIW (now CIW) inspection into Children's Services in January 2017 The CIW inspection was a significant piece of work and Inspectors had been sent a significant amount of reports before they were on site, they were in the Authority for two weeks and met with a number of Officers, Cabinet members, Scrutiny chairs and families. IPC were then commissioned to look at leadership and and review the referral pathway between early help and children's social care.

A Member asked if it was possible for members to receive a briefing on the pathway of a referral of child at risk, through to the decision to take them into care to help them better understand the whole process and the impact this has on the family, the child, the Authority and budget. He suggested that the recommendations from the IPC could also be included too. Another member also suggested that the briefing should give members a background to the figures of LAC

The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing stated that the decision to take a child into care was first and foremost to consider the safety of the child and family and if the Authority are doing the right thing by bringing them into care and providing support for them. She stated that the Authority does want to keep LAC down but members need to understand the importance of doing this safely. She added that the IPC review had concluded that when a child was brought into care it was the right decision however they also questioned whether if an intervention had happened sooner would this have prevented them being taken into care.

A Member asked about the Baby In Mind placements and asked what the outcomes for these cases were. He stated that the placements were very high cost placements and questioned if the Authority were looking at alternative solutions such as support in the community.

The Head of Children's Social Care stated that the motivation behind the placements is always to fund the most suitable care plan for the child and parent and it may be that the best action for the family is to find them a parent and child placement. The Baby in Mind project focusses on earlier intervention to be in a position to plan more effectively and prevent children becoming looked after.

A member asked if the Authority were doing enough in schools through PSE and also the Health Services.

The Corporate Director Education and Family Support advised that PSE is an important part of education and whilst there was no compulsory module a more coordinated approach is taken and they are working cross directorates more closely, he added that teenage pregnancies in the Borough had dropped.

The Head of Education and Family Support added that intervention work had previously been undertaken on this to keep mums in school and keep their babies with them but stated that they won't all be young mums and that some were in their 30s that needed support to so that they can live a normal family life.

A Member referred to page 46 of the report where it detailed the number of referrals and asked if any of those could they be duplicate referrals where they've been referred to safeguarding and early help teams at the same time. He also asked if Social Services would meet with children and families to discuss best support package available for them.

The Group Manager Integrated Working and Family Support advised there would be examples where a referral will come into safeguarding that doesn't hit threshold so would then be referred on to early help as a referral from Social Services so this would show as a duplication. He added that when a referral comes in a number of screening arrangements are carried out first as it may be necessary to refer the matter to another agency

A member asked about the process of Flying Start and asked how the Authority would handle a situation where the family would not engage with them.

The Head of Education and family Support advised that officers would make a judgement whether they would need to refer individuals into statutory services but added

that the Authority experiences very little non-engagement on this. She further added that as yet they had not seen any reduction in funding for the programme from Welsh Government but they may in the future. She reassured if this did happen they would look at other ways to target the service differently so the support could still be delivered.

The Cabinet Member Social Services and Wellbeing stated that he was encouraged and enthused by report and the work undertaken in this area is enormous, he stated that the work across two directorates proves the Authority are being proactive and thanked all officers involved in this area for their continuous efforts during challenging times.

Conclusions

- The Committee requested that they receive a briefing on the process for Children coming into care to help illustrate to Members how the process works from a referral being received to a decision being made and how ongoing support is established, as well as any associated costs. The Committee requested that this include information on what monitoring process is in place, how is risk regularly monitored, and what monitoring process is there where the pathway is to try and get the child back to their own family?
- Members also asked for a similar briefing in relation to Early Help, or to combine it with the Looked After Children one; detailing the process for referral; how the step down or step up process works and is monitored; how, if individuals need support from more than one service, such as IFSS and Baby in Mind at the same time, the services would work together to provide this; and who guides them through the services and their pathway, or takes a lead in their support to ensure they are receiving the services they need – would this be a social worker?

Additional Information

- The Committee requested that future reports on LAC or Early Help etc include the following:
 - More historical data so that Members can determine whether there has been progression, increase or decrease in numbers and performance;
 - More clearer evidence of outcomes contained within the main report;
 - A breakdown of the destination of LAC, ie. foster care, residential care etc, to give an indication of where the business pressures are;
 - More background and information behind the data presented in graphs and tables;
 - More examples of case studies to assist the committee in its understanding of processes, challenges and outcomes achieved.
- Members requested that they receive step-up data as well as the step down data between Early Help services and Children's Social Care.
- Members asked to receive follow up information regarding the 51 children who were returned home as a result of the Connecting Families project.
- The Committee wished to take up the offer to receive the full IPC Review report from the Directorate for information purposes.
- The Committee requested that they receive detail of the outcomes for the 23 parent and baby placements.

Further points

- The Committee expressed concerns regarding the freedom that schools have in the framework for teaching Personal and Social Education and preparing youngsters with Life Skills. Members requested that they explore a possible item on the forward work programme regarding Children and Young People and how they are taught Life Skills, involving such areas and projects as Personal and Social Education in schools, Flying Start and what work the third sector undertake on this subject. It was agreed that criteria forms would be sent to Members to further scope out the item.

The Committee requested that a letter be drafted from the committee to Welsh Government highlighting their concerns over the growing National Issue of rising numbers of LAC as well as the uncertainty surrounding future funding for Early Help provision due to it being reliant on grants.

20. URGENT ITEMS

None

The meeting closed at 12:05