

SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2 - MONDAY, 14 DECEMBER 2020

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2 HELD IN REMOTELY VIA SKYPE FOR BUSINESS ON MONDAY, 14 DECEMBER 2020 AT 09:30

Present

Councillor CA Green – Chairperson

MC Clarke	PA Davies	SK Dendy	J Gebbie
A Hussain	M Jones	MJ Kearns	AA Pucella
G Thomas	CA Webster	DBF White	

Apologies for Absence

T Thomas, PJ White, J Davies, P Tyson

Officers:

Rachel Pick	Scrutiny Officer
Andrew Rees	Democratic Services Manager
Tracy Watson	Scrutiny Officer

Invitees:

Cllr Nicole Burnett	Cabinet Member Social Services and Early Help
Cllr Dhanisha Patel	Cabinet Member Wellbeing and Future Generations
Claire Marchant	Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing
Laura Kinsey	Head of Children's Social Care
Andrew Thomas	Group Manager Sports & Physical Activity

126. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor D White declared a personal interest in agenda Item 4 because his wife was a Business Support Officer in the Social Services & Wellbeing Directorate. He also declared a personal interest, as he was a shielder.

Councillor C Webster declared a personal interest in agenda item 4, as her son had just been accepted into Social Services as a part of the transition service, Disabled Children's Team.

127. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of a meeting of Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2 dated 11 November 2020, be approved as a true and accurate record.

128. VERBAL UPDATE FROM THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR - SOCIAL SERVICES AND WELLBEING

The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing, Head of Children's Social Care and Group Manager – Sports and Physical Activity presented on the impact of Covid-19 on the Directorate and the response.

Members asked the following:

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A Member asked whether contact with Looked After Children (LAC) and their parents would be Covid-19 Tier-level appropriate, noting the possible change to Tier 4 soon by Welsh Government (WG). He also asked if risk assessments were a live document and whether checks were being undertaken with parents and foster carers to ensure children were safe and there were no symptoms of Covid-19.

The Head of Children's Social Care explained that it had been a difficult decision to stop all face-to-face contact in favour of remote contact. Once face-to-face contact was permitted to resume, priority was given to groups such as new-born children and parents separated, children rehabilitated to their birthparents and siblings with close relationships. All contacts had been resumed. The Directorate followed WG guidance on the two-stage assessment whereby every situation was assessed to ascertain necessity and the degree of risk. It was the Directorate's policy that all children had contact in the first instance and, if deemed a necessity, the two-stage assessment was undertaken. Contact could occur outdoors but this was difficult during winter. Venues were now being used and, in partnership with Corporate Landlords, Health and Safety and Environmental Health, deep cleans after every contact session were being undertaken. Staff wore PPE and children and their families were supported to ensure all guidance was followed. Risk assessments were reviewed continually so that in the event of further restrictions/change in guidance, local arrangements were reviewed by practitioners and managers accordingly, e.g. an addendum was developed when Bridgend had its Covid-19 fire breaker restrictions imposed in October.

A Member asked whether there were any safety measures in place for the swapping of gifts between families and whether these would be subject to a 72-hour quarantine period.

The Head of Children's Social Care explained that this posed a challenge and discussions were ongoing. It was understandable that parents would wish to provide gifts. If children moved to physical contact, these situations would need to be managed and risk assessed.

It was a Member's understanding that Bridgend was slower than other local authorities in rearranging contact for children and she asked what the reason was for this delay. Secondly, she asked if Bridgend would consider adding children with special needs to their priority groups for face-to-face contact because online contact was unsuitable for engagement. She asked how children were identified as a priority when those attending special schools did not have a Social Worker. Thirdly, the Member asked how many adult care homes had allowed indoor visits. The Member gave her compliments to the Commissioning Manager, who had received very good reports from managers of care homes in Bridgend on his hard work during Covid-19, and to the local authority for its swift payments process. Aside from the organisations that had provided wellbeing support, she also wished to mention individuals who had contributed to the wellbeing of others, with particular mention to the Bus Stop Library in Porthcawl.

The Head of Children's Social Care said she would take back the point about LAC/children with disabilities and communication needs being included as a priority group for face-to-face contact. The principle was that all LAC would have face-to-face contact. Secondly, it was difficult to comment on the situation with other local authorities. All Heads of Service had been in discussions throughout Covid-19 and WG was in regular contact with regional Heads of Service groups. It had not been flagged by WG that Bridgend were experiencing delays compared with other local authorities. Some families had raised their concerns and frustrations in not having contact resumed, and these issues were addressed. Thirdly, the Head of Children's Social Care explained that a transitional model with one site manager was underway. If children were receiving

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support from the Disabilities Team, an assessment was undertaken and, if support was required into adulthood, further assessment would be undertaken. She would be happy to pass on any queries concerning individual cases to the appropriate manager. The Member confirmed her query was not regarding individual cases and welcomed the opportunity to speak with the Head of Children's Social Care following the meeting.

In relation to adult care home visits, the Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing explained that risk assessments were undertaken at a regional level and considered by the Management Team. Care homes needed to undertake their own risk assessments. One challenge was if staff/residents tested positive, the standard procedure was for the care home to go into lockdown for two incubations of the virus (28 days). This was currently being reviewed by WG. It was Public Health Wales' policy that face-to-face visits could not be facilitated if a care home went into lockdown due to Covid-19. As at 9 December, nine homes were in that situation, with one potentially (awaiting confirmation), and one taking the decision not to facilitate visits. Six homes were facilitating visits, while two were part of a pilot for rapid testing. This was a moving position because any care home had the potential to move from asymptomatic to positive Covid-19 cases.

The Member further noted the new and various facilities for contact that had been reported in the news and whether Bridgend would be facilitating, for example, marquees as some reassurance to families.

The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing noted that situations where families were unable to see each other had been the most challenging and difficult. There had been innovations through digital platforms but this had not been as optimal as face-to-face contact. WG were investing in a pod in one care home. Some care homes were better able to facilitate face-to-face contact than others. This was why risk assessments were so important. Through the Commissioning Team, the Directorate continued to work in partnership to promote good and safe practice.

The Member noted the disadvantage to those people who did not use IT. She had received one piece of information through her door and asked if any further paper information would be distributed.

The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing explained that digital sessions with carers had been conducted and that some were more comfortable with IT than others. She stated that the distribution of information needed to be looked at again, perhaps complementing with newsletters and correspondence.

The Cabinet Member Social Services and Early Help agreed that the local authority needed to reach out to those who were not as well connected digitally. Evergreen Hall was working with physical magazines and with RSLs and Social Services to try and distribute information and advice on wellbeing. She asked Members to consider any individuals they knew who required information in paper form.

Another Member suggested that it was worth contacting the Carers' Centre to identify individuals requiring paper information.

A Member asked that, as a corporate parent, was it possible to listen to our children, and was the local authority able to ensure that all children and young adults were placed safely and in Bridgend.

The Head of Children's Social Care assured the Committee that the Directorate was committed to listening to children and young adults and ensuring their safety. They had endeavoured to do this throughout the pandemic by staying in touch remotely and face-

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to-face as much as possible. There had been positive feedback received from LAC and care leavers on the new ways of working through modern technology, and these methods would continue. In terms of children's safety, Social Workers were particularly concerned about not seeing children face-to-face and worked closely with partners to obtain feedback on their observations. Children on the Child Protection Register attended the hub provision, particularly the most vulnerable and LAC. Bridgend's performance for the number of LAC being placed within the borough was positive compared with other local authorities. The majority of LAC were placed within Bridgend and prioritised to stay in the borough, with plans in place for additional carers to support this. In cases where LAC were placed outside of Bridgend, this was due to living with relatives.

The Member asked how the Directorate stayed in touch with LAC who were living outside of the borough.

The Head of Children's Social Care explained that the Directorate stayed in touch with LAC living outside of the borough via remote contact and, within Covid-19 guidance, statutory visits.

A Member asked about the change in operating models for Day Services and the impact this would have on carers for whom this provision was their only respite.

The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing noted that Day Services was a challenging area but the Directorate had tried to mitigate the risk by continuing to operate services. It had looked at the maximum number of people it could support in safe, socially distanced ways. This meant fewer numbers each day and fewer days available. The Directorate also looked at other support available, e.g. outreach support with carers. The day provision in Bridgend continued to operate compared with some areas.

The Member was glad to hear the continuation of service provision as she was aware of how vital the day services were.

A Member asked that the Committee note the following. One issue that had emerged among residents during the pandemic was the confusing and difficult language to explain how people could access PAs and the support provision for their own family's wellbeing, especially for those with language difficulties. Should Bridgend enter a different Covid-19 Tier in the future, the Member asked if easier language could be used to explain the rules more clearly and could they be sent out to people so they knew whether they had their PA to help them.

The Cabinet Member Social Services and Early Help noted that this was her first Scrutiny Committee as Cabinet Member. She wished to thank the Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing, Group Manager – Sports and Physical Activity, Head of Children's Social Care, Head of Adult Social Care and their respective teams for their commitment and dedication. She could not stress enough how focused the Directorate was during extremely challenging and stressful times. She wished to assure Members that she had the same concerns and asked questions regularly to ensure residents were considered and staff were supported.

The Committee thanked the Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing and her team for their work during Covid-19.

129. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

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The Scrutiny Officer presented the report. She advised that Members would recall that the Council had been advised that the Local Government Financial Settlement from Welsh Government would be later than expected, and therefore the scrutiny of the Medium Term Financial Strategy would be considered by Scrutiny Committees after Cabinet considered the draft proposals on 19 January, instead of the December cycle of meetings, as originally planned.

As set out in the table in paragraph 4.1 of the report, and following approval at November Council the dates for Scrutiny meetings had been moved to:

20 Jan at 10am – Draft MTFS for Education & Family Support and Communities Directorate.

21st Jan at 10am – Draft MTFS for Social Services and Wellbeing and the Chief Executives Directorate.

In paragraph 4.5 the Committee was reminded of the Criteria form which Members could use to propose further items for the FWP which the Committee could then consider for prioritisation at a future meeting. The Criteria Form emphasised the need to consider issues such as impact, risk, performance, budget and community perception when identifying topics for investigation and to ensure a strategic responsibility for Scrutiny and maximizes the opportunity for impact.

There were no further items identified for consideration on the Forward Work Programme for the remainder of the municipal calendar of meetings using the agreed form, and this could be revisited at the next meeting.

RESOLVED: That the Committee note the next item for the Committee's Forward Work Programme set out in paragraphs 4.1 of the report.

130. **URGENT ITEMS**

None.

The meeting closed at 11:00