

# Minutes



## Performance Scrutiny Committee - People

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Date: 26 March 2024

Time: 10.00 am

Present: Councillors W Routley (Chair), J Cleverly, C Townsend, P Drewett, D Jenkins, R Howells and D Mayer

In Attendance: Samantha Schanzer (Scrutiny Adviser), Sally Ann Jenkins (Strategic Director - Social Services), Mary Ryan (Head of Adults Services), Caroline Ryan-Phillips (Head of Prevention and Inclusion) and Luke Butcher (Senior HD and OD Business Partner)

Cllrs D Harvey (Cabinet Member for Community Wellbeing), S Marshall (Cabinet Member for Social Services – Children Services) and J Hughes (Cabinet Member for Social Services – Adult Services)

Apologies: Councillors P Bright and B Davies

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### 1 Apologies

Cllrs Bright and B Davies

### 2 Declarations of Interest

None.

### 3 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on the **16<sup>th</sup> January 2024** were **agreed as a true and accurate record.**

### 4 Recruitment and Retention Report

Invitees:

**Sally Ann-Jenkins (Strategic Director for Social Services)**  
**Luke Butcher (Senior HR & OD Business Partner),**  
**Caroline Ryan-Phillips (Head of Prevention and Inclusion),**  
**Mary Ryan (Head of Adult Services),**  
**Cllr Jason Hughes (Cabinet Member for Social Services (Adult Services)),**  
**Cllr Stephen Marshall (Cabinet Member for Social Services (Children Services)),**  
**Cllr Debbie Harvey (Cabinet Member for Community Wellbeing)**

The Strategic Director for Social Services presented the report.

**The Committee discussed the following:**

- The Committee asked for the percentage of vacant posts. The Strategic Director informed Committee that the current annual turnover was 11.7% and agreed to provide the information requested.
- The Committee queried what impact vacancies had on service provision. The Strategic Director informed Committee that some areas of the service had a stable workforce, and the challenge was in specific areas including residential care, the Child Protection Team and the Youth Service. They noted that the largest impact was pressure increasing for staff and noted the challenge in recruiting and retaining staff with the required knowledge and skills.
- The Committee noted the implicit dangers of relying on agency staff and asked what alternatives had been tried. The Strategic Director informed Committee that ensuring a permanent workforce was the aim, and that the main use of agency staff was within residential care. They informed Committee that cover was encouraged within existing teams where appropriate before using agency. They informed Committee that discussions to build a regional bank of relief staff for children's residential care were ongoing, but it was a challenging area. They highlighted that work had been done to manage agency payments across all Welsh local authorities to ensure payments were kept down to disincentivise staff leaving for agency work.
- The Committee enquired whether there had been any collaboration with the NHS regarding the bank system. The Strategic Director informed Committee that they were not working with the NHS as more tailored system would be required.
- The Committee enquired whether deterring agency work could impact internal training. The Strategic Director informed the Committee that the 11.7% turnover was not being covered entirely with agency staff and the use of agency staff was not substantial. They informed that there were constant reviews of pay scales and that pay in Newport was high regionally. They noted the promotion of benefits when working for the local authority including training and pension.
- The Committee queried whether agencies were taking money out of the service. The Head of Adult Services informed Committee that staff work across the 3 residential sites to provide stability and familiarity. They highlighted that some agency staff had been recruited by NCC and have had previous staff return after leaving for agency work.
- The Committee enquired what collaborative work was done with other local authorities. The Strategic Director informed Committee that not having shared pay scales was a challenge. The Head of Adult Services informed Committee that Newport host Home First and staff across neighbouring local authorities can opt to do additional work over weekends. The Senior HR & OD Business Partner informed Committee that they will always exhaust all in-house options before using agency staff.
- The Committee enquired whether any work was being undertaken nationally to assist. The Strategic Director informed Committee that it had been a national piece of work carried out with legal advice and done with the position of how to work with agencies rather than against them. They agreed that agency workers were necessary but it was about managing their use.

- The Committee enquired how NCC maternity pay compared with other Local Authorities. The Senior HR & OD Business Partner informed Committee that it was comparable and employee benefits would be reviewed when the People Plan launched. They informed Committee more options could be explored regarding employee benefits but acknowledged there were limitations. The Strategic Director noted that they were proactive in offering flexibility to staff returning from maternity leave.
- The Committee felt that the report needed more comparative data, noting the sickness levels data. The Strategic Director clarified that emotional illness constituted 40% of the total sickness, not 40% of staff. They informed Committee that the position in Children's Services had significantly improved and morale was high despite the effect of the pandemic. They informed Committee that feedback from staff had been positive and that staff enjoyed the challenging but interesting work Newport provided. They informed Committee of the significant reduction in sickness in Children's Services which exceeded the target. They noted that Adult Services struggled with sickness levels, but it was difficult to compare to other Local Authorities as data was no longer publicly available. However, the non-publicly available benchmarking data the service area receives shows that Newport is in the top third of Welsh local authorities and is performing relatively well.
- The Committee enquired about the New Normal and stated that more data comparison was required to show the impact on staff recruitment and wellbeing. The Strategic Director noted the areas of Social Services that had and continued to work face-to-face. They informed Committee that a large proportion of staff work on a hybrid basis and valued it. They also informed Committee national and regional meetings taking place online allowed for a higher attendance and less time lost.
- The Committee enquired whether data was collected to ensure time was utilized appropriately. The Strategic Director informed Committee that no data was collected but work completed, diaries and availability were monitored. The Committee were concerned about staff wellbeing with diary overcrowding. The Strategic Director recognised the challenges of back-to-back meetings but felt a hybrid approach was helpful to providing balance. The Senior HR & OD Business Partner informed Committee that staff survey feedback agreed that hybrid working was beneficial for most staff and that there were office spaces available for those who wished to work from the office.
- The Committee were concerned about the impact of Brexit on staffing and recruitment. The Strategic Director informed Committee that this was a national issue across adult social care.
- The Committee enquired what was being done to address gender imbalance in social care/work. The Strategic Director informed Committee this was a wider issue than just NCC. They informed Committee that there were male staff within Newport social services and it was important that their voices were heard. They highlighted that work was being done to address issues raised such as male staff working with and supporting dads and male foster carers but that men often became managers quickly. The Head of Adult Services informed Committee that service user feedback was important, and work was done to ensure that the right care package was provided but there had been no issues with this system to date. The Senior HR & OD Business Partner informed Committee that the People Plan highlighted representation transformation which, while not specific to social services, worked to ensure the workforce was representative of Newport's diversity. The Cabinet Member for Social Services (Adult Services) informed Committee that engagement with careers fairs and schools was vital. They highlighted that social work was not a singular occupation and that work was incredibly rewarding which needed to be

communicated more strongly. They noted difficult periods during Covid with social work being targeted in the media. They informed Committee that when staff leave roles, they don't necessarily leave the profession but move within the umbrella of social work and it was important to show that it is a worthwhile career path.

- The Committee were pleased with advertising the role of social workers and enquired how this was being done. The Strategic Director informed Committee of national work being carried out with We Care Wales on positive recruitment campaigns, which Newport staff had taken part in. They noted that the service area worked closely with colleges and social care providers. They informed Committee that there had been a significant decrease in recruitment as there were reduced numbers of people entering training nationally. They noted the focus on encouraging staff to upskill, as staff who had completed training tended to be retained.
- The Committee asked about succession planning. The Strategic Director noted there were several programmes for development with external organisations and networking opportunities. They highlighted a range of supported qualifications staff undertake. They informed the Committee recruitment was good at a management level. The Head of Prevention and Inclusion informed Committee that they actively encouraged those with play/youth qualifications to engage in training for social work. The Cabinet Member for Community Wellbeing felt that it was a vocation, and staff went above and beyond for the service.
- The Committee felt that engagement was needed within schools to encourage social work as a career. The Cabinet Member for Social Services (Children Services) informed Committee that the nature of specialisation helped to enable staff to be supported in these roles. They noted the intergenerational work taking place to remove barriers and improve understanding which was reflected in care work being seen as a profession. They encouraged Committee to promote Social Care week.

#### **Conclusions / Recommendations:**

- The Committee requested the current number of vacancies within Social Services.
- The Committee recommend:
  - That the report returns to Committee for review in one year which includes benchmarking data and considers the Committee's recommendations.
  - The continuation of work to encourage a more gender balanced workforce.
  - Engagement with schools to encourage social care/work field as a career.
  - The continuation of work with other local authorities toward a relief pool of workers.

## **5 Scrutiny Adviser Reports**

### **a. Forward Work Programme Update**

The Scrutiny Advisor informed the Committee that this is the final meeting of the year, and the next meeting is scheduled for the 11<sup>th</sup> June 2024.

### **b. Actions Arising**

The Scrutiny Advisor informed the Committee that there are a few outstanding items that will be carried into the next year.

**c. Information Reports**

The Scrutiny Advisor informed the Committee that there have been a few information reports circulated but no comments from the Committee.

**6 Meeting Recording**

The meeting recording can be watched [here](#).

The meeting terminated at 11.18 am