

Minutes



Performance Scrutiny Committee - People

Date: 3 November 2020

Time: 10.00 am

Present: Councillors J Watkins (Chair), H Thomas, J Richards, S Marshall, T Watkins, C Townsend, J Cleverly and W Routley

In Attendance: Chris Humphrey (Interim Strategic Director - People), Sally Ann Jenkins (Head of Children & Young Peoples Services) and Neil Barnett (Scrutiny Adviser)

1 Apologies

None.

2 Declarations of Interest

None.

3 Minutes of previous meeting held on 8 September 2020

The minutes of the meeting held on 8th September 2020 were approved as a true and accurate record.

Cllr Marshall reported he had received a response from Education and would disseminate to other members for information.

4 2020/21 Service Plan Mid-Year Reviews

Adult and Community Services

Attendees:

- Councillor Paul Cockeram - Cabinet Member for Social Services
- Chris Humphrey - Head of Adult and Community Services

The Head of Adult and Community Services reported that this year had brought unprecedented challenges to adult services and whilst the Covid 19 crisis continued, uncertainty would remain about how the medium to long term impact of the virus pandemic would affect the community and service delivery.

The pandemic had resulted in delays to work plans as focus had concentrated on adapting service provision and supporting partners to ensure service continuity.

In terms of the budget, the Service Area had started the year with a projected overspend but was now in an improved position, even with significant increased demands, partly supported by additional funding due to the pandemic.

The Head of Adult and Community Services reassured members that the Service Area had continued to support care homes and care providers, were heavily involved in the distribution of PPE and had standing operations to deal with hospital discharges. They had dealt with a

significant number of calls from the public and provided support and advice for adults who were shielding in practical terms such as delivering food and medicines as well as providing guidance and reassurance.

Members asked the following:

- Given the existing pressures on Adult and Community Services, what was being done to mitigate pressures on the service and what was the current situation regarding safeguarding?

The Head of Adult and Community Services responded that existing close working partnerships between Commissioning Teams, Environmental Health, Public Health Wales and ABUHB meant we were able to work in an integrated way in order to provide support and guidance, ensuring service continuity. Our 2 neighbourhood care hubs meant close working with local GPs and district nurses and provided support for people in their homes and communities. The opening of the Grange Hospital, planned for November 17th had been a huge challenge for all involved and our services were aligned to coincide with this. The Home First initiative would be situated there and the Service was supporting these changes.

In regards to Safeguarding, the 90% target for dealing with safeguarding enquiries continued to be exceeded with a recorded figure of 98.4% at the mid-year point. This represented very strong performance given the additional demands that Covid placed on the service. The Head of Adult and Community Services stated that there would be 6 police officers based in the Civic Centre who would have instant access to police databases and this would boost the Safeguarding Hub. The Cabinet Member for Social Services commented that as Newport had been the pilot for this initiative, we were well ahead for this exercise in best practice for Safeguarding.

- Members queried the support given to staff working in the Care Home setting and all staff throughout Head of Adult and Community Services.

The Head of Adult and Community Services stated that at the beginning of the financial year Newport was badly affected by the virus and the impact on care home settings was significant and devastating for the families of those affected and the staff. The ongoing work with care homes included the continued distribution of PPE and the allocation of additional funding from Welsh Government. Twice weekly multi agency meetings were held to continually monitor the situation in care homes with support being given to ensure they were now as safe as they could possibly be. All Carers were contacted in April to ensure they had up to date information about how to access services and support in an emergency and provided with a Carers emergency handbook.

As with all staff throughout the Service Area, safeguards were in place to provide support to staff with access to Occupational Health and counselling service advice to provide support if needed. Risk Assessments were completed if required and fast track Covid testing was also available. All staff also had access to a full range of PPE.

- A member asked how the service has had to change and adapt to the current situation and how would future requirements need to change?

The Head of Adult and Community Services confirmed that many of the services had continued as usual. Staff in assessment teams mainly worked from home but went

into the office when required. Day services had to change as caution was needed in bringing people in these groups together indoors so new ways of working in the community were introduced. Going forward into Winter this would be more difficult as outdoor activities would be unable to continue. The Head of Adult and Community Services reported that going into the winter period, it was difficult to accurately predict the ongoing impact on service provision but a huge amount of work had been completed and all protective measures were in place. Staff were familiar with remote ways of working and lines of communication with providers and statutory partners continued to operate effectively. The longer term demand for services from citizens was difficult to accurately predict. They were aware of the increased need for support with mental health issues and of the ongoing reluctance of some people to re-engage with services. Intention was to build on what had been learnt during this time with emphasis on being more flexible in how to support staff in doing their jobs in the best way whilst minimising impact on the workforce. The Cabinet Member stated that we had to be mindful that our carers needed as much support as we could provide as with an aging population, many of the carers were now also elderly themselves.

- Members asked the current position regarding the budget and performance measures.

The Head of Adult and Community Services confirmed that the projection was close to being a balanced budget. This was due to careful monitoring and targeting funds towards what was needed rather than on the 'nice to haves'. The service had to meet needs immediately as required. If the best outcomes were found at the first stage then this could prevent problems further down the line, thereby avoiding spending much more on long term care packages. Developing and sharing intelligence to catch risks at the earliest opportunity also assisted in these measures.

From a performance monitoring perspective, a new national reporting framework was originally planned for implementation from April 2020. This work had now been delayed. The Performance Team had worked extensively to ensure the performance measures were meaningful and relevant. Putting systems in place to extract the relevant information and make it comparable across 22 authorities had been a massive undertaking in readiness for the full implementation of the reporting framework in 2021.

The Chair thanked the Head of Adult and Community Services for her report and information provided to the Committee and all members gave their sincere thanks to all staff across the entire Service Area for their hard work and dedication during the Covid crisis.

Children and Young People Services

Attendees:

- Councillor Paul Cockeram - Cabinet Member for Social Services
- Sally Ann Jenkins - Head of Children and Young People Services

The Head of Children and Young Peoples Services reported that whilst the first six months of the year had inevitably been dominated by the pandemic, Children's Services had continued to operate throughout, providing safeguarding and support for the most vulnerable children, young people and families in Newport. Whilst pressures on Children's Services should not be understated, the Service had risen to the challenge and coped well.

Children's Services staff in all areas of service had sustained provision and responded positively to the challenges of working differently and with rapid shifts in guidance.

Members asked the following:-

- What measures were being taken to ensure better outcomes for looked after children?

The Head of Children and Young Peoples Services stated that Newport struggled with the provider market in this area, as was the case nationwide. We had taken strides in providing our own care homes for looked after children meaning we could focus more on the nature of care provided in these settings and then provide better outcomes for the children placed there. Plans were for Rosedale children's home to open before Christmas and work would commence on Windmill Farm in the New Year.

The Head of Children and Young Peoples Services reported that over the coming six months, plans were to support the roll out of MYST (My Support Team) as a service to increase the support available to children in placement particularly those children placed away from Newport

- Members asked for an update on safeguarding and numbers on the child protection register

The Head of Children and Young Peoples Services reported that despite increasing numbers of referrals to Children's Services, the number of looked after children had remained stable and thankfully there had been no overall increase in the number of children on the child protection register. The pressure on families over the past seven months had been immense, however social workers had continued to visit throughout and all safeguarding work had been undertaken in line with statutory responsibilities. We had provided increased support as vulnerable families felt the pressures of lockdown both physically, financially and mentally. The initiative to have 6 police officers based in the Civic Centre who would have instant access to police databases was welcomed and this would boost the Safeguarding Hub and improve child safeguarding issues. The Cabinet Member for Social Services commented that the long term effect of the pandemic on children's well being and mental health could not be overestimated and this would be a future concern to be borne in mind.

- A Member queried the adoption and fostering position and also the cost implications of historical claims against the Council.

The Head of Children's Services commented that guidance issued back in March for working safely was agreed and adoption services adapted and continued during this period. Children had continued to be matched and placed successfully. Robust safeguards and measures put in place to be able to continue work in this area such as self isolation prior to matching meetings made this possible. The service had put in substantial additional help for our foster carers during Covid. The period of lockdown was a challenging time for this sector but surprisingly, some said they found it a positive time as they were able to bond more fully with the children in their care. There had also been an increase in the number of requests and foster carers during this period and work continued in this area, vetting, placing and signing off.

In relation to historical claims, the Head of Childrens Services commented that it was impossible to foresee what may arise. Whilst requests from the police following FOI request asking us to look at our historic records were still received, not all these resulted in claims against the authority. It was, however, always a possibility and so remained a risk that a claim may be lodged for which there could be a financial penalty.

- A member asked how the Service Area engaged with vulnerable young people during lockdown?

The Head of Childrens Services commented that there had been issues in some areas and had been a challenging time but they had tried to run some schemes for vulnerable children in particular, with focussed activities to preoccupy and keep children engaged. The implications of lockdown on children's mental health were a concern as the effects were currently unknown with the full effects maybe being felt 2 years down the line. It was noted that the Service would need to keep this in mind and be ready for future issues in this area.

The Chair thanked the Head of Childrens Services for her report and information provided to the Committee and all members gave their sincere thanks to all staff across the entire Service Area for their hard work and dedication during the Covid crisis.

Conclusion

The Committee noted the Mid-Year Service Plan Report and agreed to forward the minutes to the Cabinet as a summary of the issues raised.

The Committee wished to make the following comments:

1. The Committee recognised the challenges faced by both Adult and Community Services and the Children and Young Peoples Service during the pandemic and applauded the continuity of service during this challenging period. The Committee recognised the recruitment of foster carers in Newport was vital and stressed the need for continued support for our in-house carers. They also welcomed the provision of our own care homes and stressed that support for the staff working in these settings was vital.
2. The committee wished to investigate further the Youth Offending Service and learn how they have been operating during the pandemic period in particular.

5 Forward Work Programme Update

The Adviser presented the Forward Work Programme, and informed the Committee of the topics due to be discussed at the next committee meeting:

17th November 2020
Education Mid Year Service Review

12th January 2021/22
Draft Budget Proposals

The meeting terminated at 11.30 am