

Minutes



Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

Date: 30 October 2020

Time: 10.00 am

Present: Councillors L Lacey (Chair), G Berry, P Hourahine, M Al-Nuaimi, Y Forsey, C Ferris, M Evans and C Evans

In Attendance: Rhys Cornwall (Head of People and Business Change), Tracy McKim (Partnership Policy & Involvement Manager), Rachael Davies (HR Manager), Mary Ryan (Corporate Safeguarding Manager), Chris Humphrey (Interim Strategic Director - People) and Sally Ann Jenkins (Head of Children & Young Peoples Services)

Apologies: None

1 Declarations of Interest

None.

2 Minutes of the previous meeting held on 24 September 2020

The minutes of the last meeting held on 24 September 2020 were accepted as a true and accurate record.

3 Strategic Equality Plan (SEP) Annual Report 2019/20

Invitees

- Cllr David Mayer – Cabinet Member for Community and Resources
- Rhys Cornwall – Head of People and Business Change
- Tracy McKim – Policy Partnership and Involvement Manager
- Rachael Davies – HR and OD Manager

The Head of People and Business Change gave an overview of the report. Under the Equality Act (2010) the Council is required to report annually on the progress it has made against the strategic equality objectives contained within its Strategic Equality Plan. The Equality Act also requires Local Authorities to publish staff equalities data, which this report also contains.

This report is the fourth and final Annual Report on progress set out in the Strategic Equality Plan 2016-2020 which was approved by Council in 2016. The council's new Strategic Equality Plan was received by Cabinet and agreed at our July meeting and is now published on our website.

Since implementing the previous Strategic Equality Plan back in 2016, we have built on our strong commitment to partnership working and have engaged with staff, consulted with

external stakeholders and increased our community engagement. The previous plan enabled us to form a basis of measures and objectives, and how these affected our citizens. The measures we put in place through the 9 Equality Objectives, were used to indicate our successes as well as identify where there was room for improvement. The changes made and the path ahead are encouraging; by reflecting on the learnings from this strategy, we move forward with purpose and with a clear direction of improving the lives of everyone in Newport.

Highlights from the past year include-

- The Apprenticeship Scheme was rolled out successfully and NCC were finalists in the ACT Training Employer of the Year award 2019
- 'EU Citizens Meeting' was established and we worked in partnership with third sector organisations as well as local EU communities to develop our work in this area
- The successful implementation of our B.A.M.E. Network, which we continue to build on and improve to ensure Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic voices are heard in decision making
- The 'Work Based Learning Academy' has created job clubs, training courses and bespoke 13-week training provisions to support young people seeking employment.
- Participation in Oxford University's 'Inclusive Cities Programme' – a knowledge exchange in relation to migrant communities
- The Lighthouse 55+ scheme for older people celebrated its first anniversary and supported over 250 people in the year (referrals to the floating support scheme, are now prioritised to ensure crisis/emergency referrals are dealt with as quickly and efficiently as possible)
- A further 9 families (40 people) have been resettled, under the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme
- Preparatory work in 2019-20 for the new supported housing scheme for 6 young homeless people, paved the way for the scheme to open in early 2020/21. This was only possible due to the excellent partnership working from our teams and partners such as Newport City Homes and Llamau.
- Our statutory consultation was completed on our Schools Accessibility Strategy, which aims to improve and upgrade the physical access to schools in Newport.
- Development in our work to promote the Welsh language within minority communities across Newport has increased, thanks to a dedicated Policy Officer and the recruitment of a Welsh Language Promotion Officer
- We have continued our commitment to developing Elected Member Champions, with leads for Race, LGBTQ+, Disability and Impairment, and Welsh Language, raising the profile of equality work throughout the year across the Council

The analysis of the data for our workforce has highlighted key areas for improvement, which will be addressed in our Strategic Equality Plan 2020-2024 alongside work continuing on our commitment to a representative workforce and the recruitment and retention of underrepresented groups.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, it has become even more apparent that equity of access to support services, as well as equity of opportunity for Newport citizens is paramount, and our work within adversely affected communities must continue at pace. Coupled with the impact of the Black Lives Matter movement in Newport we are now more than ever, acutely aware of the work ahead of us to provide a voice, platform and safe community for the people of Newport.

The Cabinet Member commented that the plan gives the fine details of what their manifesto was. There is a long way to go, but huge progress has been made. It was essential for this to be embedded throughout the authority.

Members asked the following

- The report states a lack of BAME in the workforce. Then they succeeded in getting a job interview. What measures are in place to overcome this? Members then offered a suggestion that names could be removed from application forms, or to just use initials.

The Head of Service was not aware of any specific issues within the Council recruitment process, however the service area has moved to an anonymous recruitment selection, so shortlisting is done without any unconscious bias. The HR and OD Manager further clarified this, adding that when electronic shortlisting is completed, manager simply see “candidate one, candidate two”, no names are included.

Members were pleased that this is now happening. It was then asked when collecting data from those who have applied for jobs, how is the data used? The Head of Service advised that the service area report on the information around applicants however nothing proactively has been done as part of the Equality Plan in terms of applications. It was added that the service area might need to consider potentially positive action if the evidence is there to suggest that is required and what the options could be, but that is something they would need to look at in the future.

- Members commented that it is difficult to look back over a long period of time and can appreciate why. Members voiced concerns about how things are reported. Example was given on page 27 of the report – Reducing poverty and the actions on how we are expecting to do this to ensure children have the best start in life, down to targeting work in our most deprived areas. The Council is good at providing examples of what we are doing as a result of this however there are no comparisons with other local authorities or looking at best practice. Events such as Jobs Fairs are being held, but what are the outcomes from these events?

The Head of Service took the Member’s point on board and advised the committee that the report is a complicated piece of work. Going forward, with reporting the service area can pull together more detail, but is difficult within the context of the Strategic Equality Plan to pull some of those things together. The Head of Service then suggested that there could be additional reporting around the actual poverty agenda and how Newport sits within the Welsh Index of multiple deprivation. This information and comparisons could be given the committee if they wished.

- We had started to look at closing the gap between NHS provision and Council provision for the First 1000 Days of Life Programme. Progress had been made but it seems to have slipped off the agenda. Are there any updates?

Members were advised that the lead officer for this is currently on secondment, however the service area have been working closely with health colleagues and partners around the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) agenda. Some details of the adverse childhood experiences are picked up in the report. There is also other preventative work taking place in schools and looking at the ACEs agenda in partnership. Members were also advised that we are looking to launch a report about triggers to exploitation, which is a related piece of work around poverty and how it affects young people.

- Members complimented the positive action with the work within the BAME community, and wished to seek assurances that the Council are working equally as enthusiastically with the LGBTQ community. Comment was also made that it would be good in the future reports to have figures on how we integrate people from Eastern Europe into our employment strategy, as they integrate and contribute incredibly well into our society.

The Head of Service advised that the Eastern Europe EU Exit has been picked up. There has been a specific work stream there about working with the Council's own workforce and providers, and also the wider population across Newport around the settle status issues. It was then advised that the Brexit Task and Finish group report is going to the Cabinet meeting on the 11th November 2020, which includes information around the work that has been completed with communities.

The Head of Service then added that the Council is one of the largest employers in the area, and as such it is important for the workforce to reflect the communities in which the Council serve. The Policy Partnership and Involvement Manager then advised the committee that there will be a much heavier influence in the new plan on LGBTQ, engagement has been held with the LGBTQ community and the team are in process of building a staff network. Members were also advised of additional work taking place, such as work being led by the Youth Council, along with partnership work with community groups and external support groups. Participatory budgeting work has also taken place to look at using funding to support those who have been affected. The committee were then advised that the Chair of this Scrutiny committee is the Champion for LGBTQ.

- Query was made about the Cross-Authority Gypsy and Traveller Project. Members enquired what this project does, is it currently active and if so, why do we keep on having unauthorised settlements?

The Head of Service advised that due to the Covid pandemic and restrictions we are placed in, have led to some of the issues we have had this year. The Policy Partnership and Involvement Manager advised the committee that we have funding for community cohesion work for Newport and Monmouth. There is a range of cohesion work for issues across the border. It was explained that there is a lot of engagement work with these communities and we also advise other bodies and talk to the Police and colleagues within the Council about the rights of the Gypsy Roman Traveller (GRT) community.

It was advised that there is a specific challenge around Covid. However, the encampment and challenging is something that the service area cannot pick up as part of the Equality's agenda.

Members appreciated that Covid makes a difference, but commented that the issue is respecting the rights of travellers. If the Council could do liaison work with those who are using unauthorised sites, to create a more harmonious relationship and perhaps get to leave the site in the condition they found it but taking away their rubbish. The Head of Service responded that the heart of the work undertaken is around trying to ensure that communities work with each other. The Policy Partnership and Involvement Manager advised the committee that as of next year there we have no guarantee of funding for cohesion work which will be a challenge. However, by working with partners and other areas of Gwent we will spread the resource as far as we can and take collective learning.

- Members queried Objective 4 of the plan: Tackling Poverty. They discussed Communities First and praised their work operating on a ward level, however has since stopped. Is this service still operating in some wards or clusters?

The Head of Service commented that this is one of the difficulties reporting back on the last year of a five year plan. At the time, Communities First was still active, but since then those programmes have now changed. Regeneration, Investment and Housing service area tried to bring together the current existing programme that was designed to tackle poverty to bring into a more cohesive set of programmes in a community hub model. This is still progressing. The service area can provide information on this if the committee would like.

Members commented that some people would like to do volunteer work, the Council could support people in doing this. The Cabinet Member is a fan of the concept, but not the practice. He advised that the Council has recently introduced the Ringland hub model for all hubs to use, however the Covid pandemic started as it just opened. Once Covid has ended, the service area will learn lessons that have arisen from this and make the model much better. It was also advised that community groups will be linked in some way through the four community hubs.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member and officers for attending.

Conclusion on report

- Members wished to see more details on what liaison work with other authorities have taken in regards to avoiding unauthorised traveller encampments.
- Members commented that the report is very in-depth and loaded with detail. Most private sector reports start off with an executive report, where as our reports start off with detail, then go further on with detail without coming to any highlights. Are executive reports able to be produced in the future?
- Members wished to acknowledge the hard work that the churches have undertaken through the pandemic for the homeless and rough sleepers.
- The committee would like to promote the direct interaction between the Youth Council and Newport City Council.
- Comment was made about data collection, Members would like to know whether Humanist could be added on the Religious beliefs question.

- Members hope to receive information regarding comparisons with other local authorities from the UK and how we can potentially look at targets and best practice about reducing child poverty.

4 Annual Corporate Safeguarding 2019/20

Invitees

- Sally Jenkins – Head of Children and Young People Services
- Chris Humphreys – Head of Adult and Community Services
- Mary Ryan – Head of Corporate Safeguarding

The Head of Corporate Safeguarding gave an overview of the report. This report was due to be presented to scrutiny in March 2020, due to Covid measures in place this was not possible.

Assurance to the council that all areas of concern have been reviewed from March. The areas of priority have changed a little due to a change in legislative amendments due in Oct 2020, realigned to March 2022 for the Deprivation of Liberty work. Progress within all council areas will be reported within the 20/21 report

The Head of Corporate Safeguarding advised the report is a combination of scrutiny requests for reporting to reduce and the WAO directive on what needs to be shared with Scrutiny. Going forward, the service area is completing a self- assessment toolkit for all the council service areas to complete and this will provide the basis of future reports to scrutiny. NCC officers continue to be active members at all levels of the Gwent safeguarding Board, both children and adults and also continue to host the VAWDASV regional team and attend the VAWDASV partnership Board. During 2019/20 the Council held 2 local safeguarding network events that were attended by statutory, specialist services, volunteers and Members who work within Newport City.

The ADULTS AT RISK internal audit reported a good service with one weakness noted, the delay in Strategy meetings with police. This is now progressed with the development of the SAGEGUARDING hub based in Civic Centre.

Wales Audit Office reported that the council consider Safeguarding to be an important area of its corporate activities and its ethics is that Safeguarding. involves us all

CIW: 1.Focussed adult services- positive

2. Focussed information advice and assistance- for child and adults.. noted clear processed for citizens and co-location of police and DA services very positive.

JICPA: 1ST JOINT INSPECTION OF ALL INSPECTORATES IN Wales, piloted in Newport within children services in Dec 2019. Positive report, effective joint working arrangements and the development of the risk assessment tool for child criminal exploitation an area of evidence of strong partnership working.

The Head of Corporate Safeguarding then advised the committee of the latest developments

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1.The safeguarding champions was launched in January 2020, and continued throughout lock down via virtual means to support each service area within the council.

2.Mandatory Elearning for all new staff, volunteers and members was delayed due to covid requirements an issues, but launched in August 2020 and all staff and service areas encouraged to complete. This performance will form part of reporting to scrutiny.

3.Development of tiered training with reference to safeguarding for all staff, volunteers and Members is continuing and update will be provided in 20/21 report.

4. Newport Safeguarding Hub was established during 2019/20 and is no longer a pilot but part of established practice. Further developments during 20/21 will expand the co- location with partners.

5. Adults at risk – a 2% rise in referrals, performance evidences an improvement in process and assessment

6. Operation Encompass, Police and education pilot to notify schools when a domestic issue within the home the previous night is working towards direct referral from police to school. This started in Newport and now rolled out across the region.
7. DBS in education, scoping exercise completed and requirements for the council to consider DBS for all educational establishments every 3 years to be considered.

Members asked the following –

- A comment in the report states that work on the children’s website would start in May 2020. Has that started?

Members were advised that there is general work going on in that area however unfortunately work has been stalled.

- Comment was made about safeguarding in schools, approximately 90% of schools have a current safeguarding audit in place. What has been done, or what are we doing, to capture the other 10%?

Members were advised that now 100% of schools have had a safeguarding audit.

- Members were happy to see that the report now has explanations on the graphs but again there are no comparisons with other local authorities, which would be helpful in future reports. Comment was also made about the feedback from the Audit Office to give a more detailed report, as a Member fed back that there is already a lot of information included for a lay person.
- Members commented that the committee have been asked to consider whether the structure of the Newport Safeguarding Unit structures and individual teams key priority plans are appropriate to meet the Council’s responsibilities and safeguarding matters, but Members felt this was an operational matter and do not feel qualified to comment on. Members then asked the officers for reassurance that they are happy with the structures.

The Head of Children and Young Peoples Services advised that they are happy, and what is particularly good is that the steps that being taken going forward in terms of increased provision is they’ll have an increased police presence, which is welcome not only for Social Services, but for the whole of the Council as it gives a resilience to our corporate safeguarding. It is also welcome that there will be a more localised approach rather than a centralised protection unit.

- Feedback was given on the online Safeguarding training courses, which Members felt was difficult to operate due to the number of passwords required to use it and the layout. It was suggested that the Council follow a more simplified system that other organisations use.

The committee were advised that this will be looked into.

- Members queried DBS checks. How much of a risk is there if the Council do not go ahead with a 3 yearly check? Members advised that the £50 per person is a small price to pay.

The Head of Safeguarding advised the committee that the team have a very good working relationship with the local Police, who advise whether there are any recent

arrests or issues, and if they are aware of any employees, chaperones or anyone working in a capacity within the Council that they have concerns about.

- Members queried the last paragraph on page 81, Section 11- Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards to Liberty Protection Safeguards- implementation October 2020, expecting to be fully implemented by 2021. Does the council begin with the specific knowledge?

Members were reassured that there are enough experienced and dedicated staff who have been fully briefed and trained in the Mental Capacity Act so they are able to carry out best interest assessors assessments on individuals. The Council are also part of a regional consortium in terms of this piece of work. It was important to ensure that there are enough staff trained in understanding the change in legislation. It is now expected to be fully implemented by 2022.

Members then asked if this applies for all ages? The Head of Safeguarding advised the committee that it would be for all ages, but the majority is for over 18 years of age. It was also advised that it would be a slightly different system for children, where the social worker would make the recommendation and go to court for an inherent jurisdiction and the judge would make a decision.

- The committee were advised that the service area are hoping to train existing staff with the additional safeguarding skills rather than recruit additional staff. It was also advised that the social workers are used to working with legislation, which is a part of their standard training.
- Members advised it was important to highlight the positive things in the report, such as on page 7 of the report, where the inspection highlights that the Children Services Managers communicate effectively in a supportive, open non-blame culture and practitioners feel safe in sharing their decisions. Query was then made about the Domestic Violence graphs on page 11, which show the highest level of incidents and questions whether the Covid restrictions will lead to an increase of domestic violence. What is being done to prepare for this?

The committee were advised that the Council host the VAS Regional Team and also the Independent Domestic Violence Advocates, so there is there is a high risk of abuse, a Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference would be arranged, so all agencies would come together to arrange a safety plan. The service hasn't stopped throughout the lockdown. Newport hasn't seen a huge rise in referrals, although there has been a slight increase. Lots of information on how to get support has been advertised for both employees and citizens. Members were advised of the upcoming National Safeguarding Week and also 16 Days of Action, which is a Welsh Government initiative, which is about working specifically on the issues that have been raised through the Covid pandemic.

The Head of Children and Young Peoples Services added that in relation to children and domestic abuse through the Covid pandemic, we did see an increase in referrals where domestic abuse was an issue for families. However, we were fortunate in being able to extend work that the Council were doing with the Home Office, also funding which particularly looked at support for children who were in households where there was domestic abuse. This has been carried out by the Family Support partnership. It was advised that it was difficult to continue, especially in April when having to work in a more restricted way, but still gave extra support to those children.

- Members discussed Appendices 1 and 2 from the report. It was then asked how are these two appendices are to be incorporated into the working practices of the Social Services departments, and what is the stance on independent solicitors being needed to possibly challenge the assessments that have been made?

Members were advised that every time a Deprivation of Liberty assessment is carried out, there has to be an independent advocate identified who has to agree to do that. If the person does not have any family or can carry it out independently, then the Council pays to ensure that the person is represented.

Members then queried what provisions are there in place if referrals are received in emergencies, and at times where staffing is low such as on Bank Holidays. Members were advised that it would depend on the circumstances. There are urgent orders, that can happen within seven days but there are not very many of them received.

- Members discussed the increase in the number and the complexity of Subject Access Requests. Why have there been such an increase? Also, with the potentially large amount of paper work for social workers which could cause additional problems such as missing details, is there anything the Scrutiny committee could recommend?

Members were advised that some of the documents that have been quote in the report were to do with historical allegations, these had to be looked at through Gwent Archives to try and get the information together, some of may end up in very serious criminal convictions. It is a duty on the Council to be able to provide the information. The Head of Children and Young Peoples Services reiterated that the weight of the documentation is because of the historical nature, thankfully more recent enquiries would be dealt with electronically. In relation to Police requests for information, from a South East Wales perspective, the local Family Justice Board are now liaising with Gwent Police and South East Wales Police in relation to these requests to try and look how we can get better timing in place. There has also been work done by His Honour Richard Williams which looks at how we work more effectively with the Crown Court.

The Chair commended the officers and their staff on the continued work through the pandemic, and thanked them for attending.

Conclusion on report

- Members appreciated the hard work that had been completed over this period, and advised the report was very comprehensive.
- Members expressed the importance of the department having the expertise to be able to make recommendations, and approaching with issues such as depriving individuals of their liberty, professionally and sensitively as wrong decisions could leave the Council open to legal challenges. Processes need to be water tight.
- Members voiced concerns of the potential risks if the Council do not go ahead with a 3 yearly check, as well as making sure that Subject Access Requests are completed without breaching any time scales and risking fines.

Invitees;

- Gareth Price – Head of Law and Regulation

The Head of Law and Regulation informed the Committee of the topics due to be discussed at the next committee meeting:

29 January 2021, the agenda items;

- 2021-22 Budget and Medium Term Financial Projections

The meeting terminated at 11.50 am