

Minutes



Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

Date: 9 July 2021

Time: 10.00 am

Present: Councillors G Berry, P Hourahine, M Al-Nuaimi, Y Forsey, C Ferris, M Evans, Hussain and J Hughes

In Attendance: Mark Bleazard (Digital Services Manager), Felicity Collins, Neil Barnett (Scrutiny Adviser), Connor Hall (Scrutiny Adviser) and Samantha Schanzer

Apologies: Councillors L Lacey, C Evans and P Cockeram

1 **Declarations of Interest**

None.

2 **Minutes of the previous meeting held on 11 June 2021**

It was flagged up that the apologies were not recorded for Councillor M Evans. The Democratic Services team advised that this would be amended retrospectively to reflect this.

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 June 2021 were **accepted** as a true and accurate record.

3 **Annual Corporate Safeguarding 2020/21**

Invitees:

Sally Ann Jenkins – Head of Children and Young People Services

Mary Ryan – Head of Corporate Safeguarding

The Head of Corporate Safeguarding provided a brief overview of the report to the committee and explained that the service area had taken up the Welsh Audit amendments that were suggested for 2021. It was stressed that it has been an unusual year which has had an impact on all service areas with challenges but the department remained committed to the work plan of 2021 despite it being an odd time in terms of remote working.

The e-learning for safeguarding was launched in May 2020, it was anticipated to be launched in March 2020 but the pandemic delayed this. The team hoped for 90% of staff and volunteers to complete the course but noted that this was not attainable due to COVID, however the e-learning still had a good uptake and good feedback from those who attended.

The officer explained that some of the challenges were due to the reduced face to face training, it was explained that the safeguarding team would use such training to ensure the council remained compliant. Back in September 2020, they hoped to put that back in place but this that did not happen due to more things being delayed against of the backdrop of the

pandemic. Despite this, the officer assured the committee that there was a lot in place to ensure that staff are aware of their safeguarding responsibilities.

The Volunteer and Chaperone Register was created following a recommendation by the Welsh Audit Office. The lead officer advised that this put them in a better position now and that it is going fine despite not having as many volunteers purely because of the way of the services being delivered. The committee were advised that this would eventually pick up and the team would review the volunteering policy with registration completed and the relevant updates.

The Committee was advised that all the Newport.Gov website legacy records had all been removed and were correct. This was mainly to assist citizens as the safeguarding partners across the region were accordingly updated and decimated within the council through different communication means such as the newsletter and readily available information on the internet. From this, the officer highlighted that the motive was to ensure that access for citizens to safeguarding information was much easier to locate.

It was mentioned to the Members that there had been the abolition of reasonable punishment, known as the smacking ban. The members were referred to the end of the report should they wish to read the briefing which will be in the director's report in terms with compliance.

The Head of Corporate Safeguarding noted that the team launched the Newport Council Safeguarding Self-Assessment Audit Talk. This brought reassurance to the service areas of the council on where they are in terms of safeguarding and gave lots of support to the departments.

Part of the annual plan was designed to support certain sections within their plans amongst the service areas. The officer advised that it was reassuring that a lot of people were interested in terms of policy perspective as it made service areas think about different things that could affect their safeguarding. It was beneficial as it helped members of the public and staff on where to go with their concerns on having more accessible information in the public domain and were advised that they will be well ahead of this when the council services all reopen for the new normal.

The council worked with partners prior to lockdown in March 2020. In particular, Barnardo's worked on their child protection processes and procedures in Newport, and examined how they felt about working in assault and child protection, and examined what improvements could be made. It was noted that this approach has been really helpful to the staff as they ensured inclusion across all of the children's services looking at those processes. Management took on valuable recommendations and embedded them in Social Services processes.

The Head of Safeguarding stated that the main highlight was that the safeguarding hub was accepted as the way to go, and was especially good for Newport as a positive model for safeguarding with the city's key partners. The Central Police Protection Unit, which was formerly based in the centre region had changed its way of providing services and now does so from East and West. This encouraged more contact as the police are now based by the hub and centre. This created better communication for both the Young Adult Services and Children's Services. This allowed the services to start safeguarding as soon as necessary, so can be seen as a win for Newport as the team tried it as a pilot but it is now firmly embedded within region. As a result of this, the hub will be part of the director's report.

The Chair thanked the Head of Safeguarding for their time and opened up questions from the committee.

The Committee asked the following:

- The Committee welcomed a streamlined approach in the document however noted their concerns on the constantly changing performance indicators. It was acknowledged that the same would not be published until June 2022, so the Scrutiny Committee commented that they would not be able to advise without knowing how they can help to improve the current safeguarding issues. Therefore, the committee asked;
A) For assurance that those who need help are being prioritised and if the team have any concerns on the direction of the way things are going.
B) If the structure of Newport safeguarding team is appropriate to meet the safeguarding matters.

In response, the Head of Safeguarding explained that there is a constant issue in how much detail they can divulge and to also keep the assurance at a high level for the council. They work closely with adults and children so when the team have issues they are addressed both formally and very quickly. Immediate safeguarding has been attended to for the children apart from April 2020 when referrals reduced while everyone adjusted to working remotely.

The members were advised that the safeguarding team receive referrals through a range of avenues and the issues they had were due to mainly schools being closed as the access to schools is a big safeguarding benchmark.

The team worked with education regarding vulnerable children and young people were better protected through keeping the services going. The team was mindful of what was going on outside of schools. It was noted that there was an influx of referrals because currently there are more eyes on vulnerable people.

The officer stressed that the report will be different as the pressures that the safeguarding team are facing currently, are very different to the ones from March in 2020, however despite this, the members were informed that this was very well managed.

The Head of Service stressed that they shared the committee's frustration regarding the details of the data. Welsh Government changes to the guidelines were frustrating for performance management however the officer remains optimistic as new guidelines provided a clear picture of what was expected of the team and the requirements for submitting to the regional safeguarding board in future. Members were advised that the team will be finally approaching clarity from that.

In terms of assurance, from February 2020 onwards there was an immediate risk to any sort of vulnerability as it is an outward facing service, there was not a drop off in service as social workers were still out working. Staff were provided with PPE and were vaccinated early within the programme.

The lead officer then advised members that within the children services department, they have a young workforce who are confident in IT and have a lower risk from COVID so they were lucky enough to not completely halt services. It was stressed that the pressure on their staff had been substantial. Whilst the staff held the fort really well, the team had an assurance check from Care Inspectorate Wales with no concerns raised in terms of direct practice. Despite this, it is important to acknowledge that the staff are tired and due to the pandemic it is more than just the numbers of referrals.

Members were informed that the referrals are much more complex and challenging for the staff in terms of knowledge base and skills with referrals they would not usually see. For instance, for children as nobody had sight of them during lockdown periods i.e. health visitor checking in at schools. Referrals are also coming through much later

with children coming out from longer periods of neglect. The committee was advised that this has a profound impact on the children in terms of development in physical and mental well-being therefore the department will be dealing with more complex issues for a while.

For both services, the team delivered throughout the pandemic. The staff responded extremely well to the issues in terms of transparency and decision making, and the officer thanked Cllr Cockeram for his help. The whole team worked collaboratively but acknowledged that they are heading into a more difficult period with the knock on effects of the pandemic and could do with a circuit break but they cannot stop servicing those in need.

- The Committee thanked the safeguarding team for their huge efforts over the last 18 months which must have been incredible tough, their work behind the scenes and honest appraisals were fully appreciated. Members queried whether the team had any recommendations to Cabinet that might be helpful to them for the future issues.

The Head of Service confirmed that their main issue is one of resourcing, but that they had voiced these issues already and that Cabinet are aware. They appreciated the thanks and said they would pass it on to their team.

- Members enquired whether the resource discussion is an underlying issue for the team and how the same is affecting staff training, they acknowledged that the younger staff were mentioned earlier for help.

The Head of Service responded by stating that the youth of their staff was a help as the nature of social care tends to be a young workforce. Therefore, the turnover is reasonable with low rates of agency staff, noting that the area has one agency worker. The lead officer explained that both they and the Head of Safeguarding proudly sponsor a student who just recently got a first in their degree and who will be staying with the team. It was highlighted that they are able to support students through social work training and it is just as important to help them stay. The service area does have vacancies, not as many as other authorities however they argued that they are in a good position compared to a larger authority and have permanent staff which is more beneficial for many reasons.

It was explained that social workers have to undertake ongoing training in order to maintain registration so much of this was done online but however some could not be done virtually such as residential staff and elements of first aid training.

The Head of Service pointed out a positive of the team running an event from early in June for early year children conference with 150 in attendance. It was encouraging to have individuals embracing looking at new developments and mentioned that work with the children protection team and staff supported the changed and continued to develop and adapt.

Members were informed that the staff are concerned about the lack of resources and given the weight of referrals, it has impacted training but the lead officer assured that they are trying to address that in the coming year, workload-wise and how to balance it.

Another element of this issue is trying to ensure that resources are in the right place, there is a long discussion in place about who else the team could bring in to undertake assessments and use resources appropriately. The other national issue is with social work, this occupation has been challenged across the United Kingdom as they continually have to work hard to retain their staff.

- The Committee referred to page 15 of the report and mentioned from the increase in referrals that seem consistent throughout the year of 2021, it does not look like there would be any likelihood of it easing off. Members acknowledged that during the time of school closures, there was a suppression of referrals so voiced their concerns that cases of neglect are being picked up later than they would have been. From this increase in difficulties, the committee queried what aspect of the pandemic is causing this.

In response, the Head of Safeguarding explained that it seems to be from a combination of financial issues/stress/community support/job losses. They have not had the same amount of eyes in the community i.e. health visitors, immunisations for young children; and families became less visible with the severe neglect cases that the council did not know about a year ago. Issues which have gone unreported for the past year are more difficult to deal with, as the cases are more entrenched when caught at a later date.

The officer mentioned that we have all experienced loss in a way, due to illness or loss of opportunities and the team acknowledged that the most vulnerable of our society have experienced this the most. The restrictions put in place to keep people safe have taken a heavy toll on families and the support for them.

In April 2020, the officer explained that there was a dip in referrals but they have since increased. The team usually dread weeks after the school holidays or just before the pupils go on summer holiday.

Members were advised that there were two issues that the safeguarding team deal with, the loss and the emotional wellbeing and impact it has had on the adult services and also the emotional wellbeing and ill health in children. The stresses have been seen throughout on children in this area and the toll it has also taken with adults, for example they have seen increased episodes of hoarding and Obsessive Compulsive Disorder.

The Lead Officer indicated that they have seen a sharp increase in domestic abuse reports. All of these things compounded, and there has been an increase in children in families as victims of domestic abuse.

It was added that there had been an increase in sibling abuse also due to the stress of elder children being locked inside and also with relatively young adults living with parents, there has been a rise in domestic abuse of older children on their parents.

The Head of Service noted that we can see across the country, in reports of the press that the weakest have suffered the most from this and the ones with the least resources are hit first and the hardest.

The Committee gave their thanks to the officers for the report and their presentations and agreed to accept the report.

4 **Annual Information Risk Report**

Invitees:

Rhys Cornwall – Head of People and Business Change

Mark Bleazard – Digital Services Manager

Tariq Slaoui – Information Manager

The Head of Business and People Change provided the committee with a brief overview of the report and stated that it is the ninth annual Information Risk Report, which is not a statutory report but is done every year as a best practice approach to information

management and security, fundamental for transparency. The report provided an overview of arrangements and highlights importance of information governance.

The Digital Services Manager acknowledged that the context of said report is at an unprecedented time where risk management is mainly from working from home which presents different challenges. For instance, the blurring of work and personal lives could increase the risk of staff being targeted by cyber criminals due to the unique circumstances that people find themselves in.

The officer went through specific highlights of the report and what they are required to deal with in terms of certain elements of compliance. The Public Services Network enables them to connect the network to manage their information and security appropriately, managed by the cabinet office. It was indicated that they had made two submissions that have been unsuccessful which was a challenge and has been escalated with SRS.

The GDPR Data Protection Regulation is guidance for the council on how to handle the data. Members were advised that the council are comfortable that they are managing this information as an organisation should, it was mentioned that there are clear privacy notices on the website detailing how the council holds its data for openness and transparency.

A further element of compliance was the payment card facility, the council are compliant but they had some challenges a few years back. In order to resolve this, the team are working through a procurement exercise to work with experts and are confident that they are doing things well in terms of progress but will do things slightly differently over the next couple of months, this is an ongoing process which has been delayed due to a bereavement but the members were assured that the team are back and working on the project.

With regard to the data standards, the officer assured the committee that the Council is well tried and tested in terms of arrangements within the staff, for example, Head of Law and Regulation is the Senior Information Risk Owner, Head of People and Business Change is the operational head of team, an information governance group that they meet up with and the Digital Services Manager is the Protection Data Officer.

The officer explained that for 2021, they undertook a staff survey on GDPR and the results included within the report provided, noted that there is more work to follow up on and actions that will be taken from that.

The committee was advised of a positive mention that the digital team had a two years of service level agreement with local primary schools which was very beneficial for them and a great step as it encouraged lots of queries from them in terms of communication and awareness being raised.

It was explained to the members that the staff were identified as the weakest link for the security risks, therefore the council has a liability to get their staff well informed and educated as much as they possibly can. It was mentioned that they do regular sessions, mostly on teams, when they were in person they would be organised within the Civic Centre. The team will commence proper courses again, the officer told that the e-learning course on GDPR has been excellent as a large number of staff have brushed up their knowledge.

The officer acknowledged that with the staff survey that they need to do more analysis on what is important and communication will be a big part of that. Members were advised that the next risk management issue would be situations where important paperwork goes astray, confidential emails being sent to the wrong recipient. The committee was informed that the team has an action plan for such situations.

The Digital Services Manager reported that they share responsibility with data controllers as part of the Track and Trace Service, designated joint resource with Public Health Wales. The committee was informed that the amount of data is minimal but due to the issue that was

reported to the information commissioner's office which was publicised, the Public Health Wales team were transparent by releasing a statement to ensure the public were aware of risks.

In terms of technology solutions, the committee was informed that they are quite well placed with people working remotely but are changing their solutions with secure email systems such as egress for an example. It was explained that when the report was written they were in a process of moving to a different solution which has now been resolved.

The IT Partnership with Shared Resources Services proposed a security operation centre and a security information management system. Such systems would log activity and concerns about the network with individuals to support. Members were advised that they are now at a place to agree a budget for this plan to enhance the Council's current security arrangements which will change the remote working situation and bring about security benefits for VPN. Ransomware was mentioned as a huge threat in both public and private sectors but the team are well aware of this and they are working on the solution to mitigate the risk of remote working and cyber risk.

Members of the Committee were then informed that the team had a great response to providing information on Freedom of Interest requests, as they exceeded their target this year.

The Digital Services Manager went on to highlight that staff did experience issues with subject access requests which were personal data queries, indicating that they missed the target on that. This was primarily due to the issue of physical access to the records as a result of workers being remotely working. The committee was assured that this will improve going forward into the next half of the year.

The Committee asked the following:

- A Member expressed concern on making the information more readily available to everybody on the website in terms of Freedom of Interest requests. With regard to subject access requests, the member further queried the main reason for why members of the public request them. The Member further noted the website outage issue and asked if that could happen again.

The Head of People and Business Change explained that many for Freedom of Interest requests are from companies when looking for commercial opportunities and the council try to put them on the website in an allocated FAQ area to prevent staff from going through the same lengthy curation process when the work has already been undertaken to answer it.

With regard to the website outage, the Head of Service replied that generally the IT structure is very stable, at 99.4% of the time, but the outages are for a variety reasons, mostly out of the council's control. The officer could not give a guarantee that it would not happen again but reassured members that measures with the capital refresh plan with Shared Resources Services on the infrastructure will alleviate the systems. This has been agreed by Cabinet in October to move the date to roadmap for high resilience in place to mitigate such situations.

With regard to the subject access requests, the Information Manager responded by pointing out they are requests under a certain legislation data protection act as from 2018 it become a statutory requirement to respond to such requests within one month. This goes for private sector also, not just public sector. In terms of the reason why, they get a multitude of reasons but the most common reasons mentioned were social services records for a child they need information on, education records, and

history of payments of council tax. The department receives various ad-hoc requests in addition to these. Information services then pass this request to the relevant service area to collate and respond accordingly within the law.

- A Member enquired if possible for more transparency around Freedom of Information requests and reiterated that the substantial website outage caused problems across the council.

The Information Manager responded by referring to the Transparency page which is on the council website as it entails commonly asked FOI's. For example, pupil numbers in a school and in past cases, and business rates but due to a court case they do not do that now. The officer explained that they cannot put every single individual request online but it is something that they review as they need to consider the consequences that could arise from it and the resources it would realistically take. Members were advised that the team update these quarterly depending on what data it is set on.

The Digital Services Manager directed the member to the newport.gov Transparency page and echoed the Head of People and Business Change's comments that the website outage issue was unusual and they recognised that it had a big impact. The data structure was old which may have caused issues but explained that new equipment has been bought and the team undertake capital refreshes which help with reducing issues.

The officer went on to explain that the overall resilience would be the move to the cloud however the officers could not guarantee that there will not be any down time but however such providers are well equipped for providing solutions.

- A Member commented on how the stakes are high with fines if an organisation discloses information by breaching data rules, and asked if the council would be fined £20 million if the same happened to them.

The Head of People and Business Change responded with confirming the figure but clarified with the committee that the figure mentioned was the highest fine that has ever been charged, which was against British Airways for a notable data breach. This was more than £20 million with euros based on turnover. The original proposed fine was actually significantly higher than that but it was reduced to 20 million due to the pandemic's impact on the sector and noted that this fine highlighted the risk involved with breaches.

- A Member expressed concern that the organisation would have to pay that price by upping their costs and passing it on to their paying customers. The member enquired whether the same could happen with the council, and if it did, would they apply higher rates to the public if ever fined with a breach?

The Digital Services Manager confirmed that the council is a Local Authority Body which does not profit and realistically, councils would not be looking at that scale of fine. The council is at the stage of prevention and does not treat data vigilantly just because of a financial penalty, it is because they are handling very sensitive data of their local residents.

The officer stressed that the reason they are there is to service residents and it would be a matter for Council to debate if incorporating a data breach fine needed to be repaid via taxpayers.

In contrast, if the council committed a large breach, they would not be looking at a fine large enough to make the council do anything drastic and there are arrangements in place to ensure that they do not end up in such a situation.

- A Member commented on the fact that the weak link of this is human error, which is down to the staff. They queried whether in dire straits, would a disgruntled member of staff release information, seemingly by accident?

The Head of People and Business Change acknowledged that both staff and members alike make error in judgement and that it will always be the most difficult in process of procedures to resolve. The committee was advised that the council has measures in place to ensure that a breach would not happen.

The officer pointed out that £300,000 is the highest that a corporation has had to pay and the fine should not be the factor that drives vigilance.

- The committee referred to the report and outlined the fact that the council does not know how much sensitive data they are holding. The members queried whether there was a method in place to sift through what the council does hold and what it does not hold?

The Digital Services Manager commented that the team has a good idea of what information they hold, they have more breadth of services as they have an asset data system.

The council holds details of what data is held within the council whether it is health data or sensitive personal data. The officer stressed that they are looking to expand that further not just with the primary systems but some of the smaller data systems which would mitigate a risk of a potential breach.

- A Member noted the stock take mentioned within the report. The committee asked how the council does a stock take and asked the officers to confirm what a good score would entail.

In response, the Digital Services Manager asserted that a cyber-stock take is done across Wales and the local authorities and takes the form of self-assessment. The Council is provided with a score on those particular areas.

The team highlighted previous concerns about ransomware and as a result of the stock-take the Council's resilience to ransomware was boosted.

The officer recognised that they need more staff awareness training to make them aware of their obligations such as through online courses as there is always more that they can do to mitigate such risks.

- The committee asked that when the council undertakes the self-assessment if we are scored by a third-party.

The Digital Services Manager confirmed this and that this is done for Wales centrally. The team provide responses and they analyse and compare different organisations and are able to advise on different departments with governance arrangements. With cyber security, there are lots that organisations do but when those risks increase, organisations need to do more so it is best to have them assessed centrally and hear what they perceive to be best practice on those areas.

- A Member of the committee asked the officer what did the council score on the self-assessment.

The Digital Services Manager could not recall the exact score but was confident that it was above average across the authorities.

- The committee then referred to page 67 for the table including the number of incidents. Members enquired if that was part of the process.

The Digital Services Manager replied by stating it was not, as they do a self-assessment on particular areas by asking about their procedures. Not about the activity or how many incidents/breaches have been reported.

- The Committee commented on the uniqueness of agile working and queried whether over the last 12 – 15 months of staff working remotely and relying on their own Wi-Fi, would cause any concern in terms of cyber-attacks?

The Digital Services Manager explained that theoretically it would be a higher risk to an extent. However it was explained that the council had people working from home previously prior to the pandemic so the technical solution remains that when emails are sent, the data is encrypted from end to end. The data is scrambled and cannot be intercepted, just the same as in the office so in reality there is not an increased risk.

Head of People and Business Change added to this by explaining that there are certain risks with staff working in remote locations but not necessarily the IT side of it was the risk. The council discourage paper records and are more focused on IT provisions. The officer highlighted that it is safer than an individual leaving confidential paper records somewhere, as if somebody left their work laptop elsewhere the multi-authentication log in procedure would mean that nobody can access the records on the drive. One requires a technical solution while the other requires awareness and vigilance training.

The Digital Services Manager noted the recent central government breach of a staff member leaving critical government information at a bus stop. This ultimately reiterated the point that human error is where mistakes are made, where the challenges lie.

- A Member of the committee referred to the payment card industry and noticed that in the report it mentions that our compliance has lapsed. The committee asked if they could have more information on what that means and what potential risks come with that. The committee also noted that it states in the report that the projects should be completed by Summer but the action plan stipulates that it will not be ready until Autumn.

The Digital Services Manager noted he would resolve which of those would be a more appropriate date and will report this accordingly. In terms of PCI standards, they are not mandated by law but it is seen as best practice. The officer noted the bigger risk is in human error such as staff writing down card numbers.

Members were advised that the risks are small because the processes and technical solutions are in place however the officer mentioned that there will be gaps such as issues of segregation of card traffic on the wider network.

- The Committee queried for a wider Public Relations perspective as the public want more reassurance that when making a payment online, it will be safe. Due to more services being paid online such as council tax bills, it would be good practice that the council could get this arranged in August as the report states and not wait until October time.

The Head of People and Business Change reiterated that with card payments to providers, the council go through PCI compliance. There would be a negligible risk associated with it and it is best practice to operate on the most secure practice models for data security. The officer explained that the timescales have changed because as the Digital Services Manager said earlier in the meeting, that once the council gets through the procurement exercise they will be able to get external support to get over the line with some technical issues.

The lead officer mentioned that there was a bereavement within the task force which resulted in time losses and the Digital Services Manager agreed that this impacted on the timeline but this is also due to ensuring best practice to get expert advice.

- The committee asked with regard to the GDPR Survey. What was the percentage of staff who responded to the survey and how did the team determine the staff to sample?

The Digital Services Manager gave an approximate figure of 15% of staff that had responded. They are looking at trends but overall they have received a better response this time around.

Members were advised that the survey was published to all staff through bulletins on the intranet and therefore did not sample as such with the usual practice of making it voluntary for people to complete the survey.

- Members queried whether the team could take a more focused management approach to this to determine who the key people are that would have access to these records.

In response, the Digital Services Manager clarified that this is complimentary to the work. For instance, Head of People and Business Change has operational responsibility for this area, Head of Law and Regulation has the senior information risk owner side of it and there is an information governance group which looks at these issues strategically and meets quarterly. The team review major incidents and look at training programmes.

The GDPR staff survey was to get more of a grassroots staff opinion on how the digital team are doing and what their perceived issues were. It is designed to complement all of the existing kind of people and processes that could have an impact on GDPR.

The officer stressed they want to ensure they inform the organisation accordingly with regular messages sent out.

- A member of the committee queried whether there has been any work on the legacy records being sorted and catalogued.

The Digital Services Manager confirmed that they have a facility within the Civic building with modern records, where archived records are stored with around 5000 boxes worth of files are in there. Members were informed that there is a smaller amount of storage that needs to be resolved and the digital team are in a process of

trying to organise this. Until recently, the digital staff did not have the capacity to store some records due to the retention policy but were able to destroy a few records in order to have room to store what is currently needed to be kept.

- The Committee recognised that some of the data does not expire such as personal historic information and asked if it would be a reasonable request to keep these as they could be passed on to future generations? Members appreciated the enormity of the problem of storing this much information.

The Digital Services Manager responded and stated that there are different retention timelines on different types of records. Social services records can be held for up to 99 years. The officer agreed that is a bigger challenge and previous quotes to scan the whole room would cost hundreds of thousands of pounds but it is something the team would have to consider for the future use of the building.

Members were then advised that they do need to maintain some records and this equates to around 3000 boxes worth. Due to the usage of electronic storage of the last 7-8 years, the amount of paper stored has been reducing slowly but they have a bulk of social care and historical records that are vital to be kept.

The Chair and Committee thanked the officers for their comprehensive introduction and answers.

5 Annual Digital Report

Invitees:

Rhys Cornwall – Head of People and Business Change

Mark Bleazard – Digital Services Manager

The Head of People and Business Change gave a brief overview and stipulated that this was the first digital report to come into scrutiny as the previous one came through during lockdown period of the pandemic. It complements the risk report information so it may duplicate some of the information discussed on the previous item. It is something critically important over the last 18 months for us as an organisation.

The purpose of the report is for views on the digital response and how it comes together to work, the officer then reminded the committee that this is not for performance data from Shared Resources Services. That is reviewed by the Partnership Committee and asked the members to steer away any questions from the performance review of SRS staff as it would be unfair due to them not being in the meeting today.

The Digital Services Manager noted the number of similarities with the risk report against the backdrop of a pandemic, technology has been of great importance to organisations as it highlights the importance of security and technology in the democratic process by keeping it going.

Members were advised that in hindsight, in order to facilitate more flexible and remote working, the council had laptops in the facility for long period of time. Admittedly they did have to scale up a bit to log in remotely in council – with previous logged issues with heavy snow so less people could log in at the time, but the digital services team were able to put things in place to facilitate working remotely quite seamlessly from past experiences.

The Committee was informed that the digital team are strategic in forward thinking and Sam Ali and the Digital Services team lead on this. They have internal engagement with Heads of Service of what their problems may be and as previously discussed, the website outage being minimised as much as possible so in all looking to increase their resilience in the strategy.

There will be external stakeholders working with Sam Ali in the Digital Team which is linked with other areas such as Shared Resource Services and how the council secures its data and the processes with keeping it secure and mobile with accessing systems from remote locations and handheld devices.

The Officer stated that in terms of governance, the partnership with Shared Resource Services is key to delivering service as the digital team require the SRS staff to undertake technical work for us. The SRS team are vital to the delivery of the service and additional funding has been provided for the digital team. Last year it was reported that this funding assisted the team with the replacement of equipment, such as the new laptop replacements for staff and now there is money allocated for migration to the cloud. Additional posts have made a difference to the team as their newcomer has been making positive contributions to the team.

The key performance measures were discussed by the Digital Services Manager. Members were shown that the delivery against the service level agreement was well above target. The team needed to work with other areas so were able to work collectively to reflect the way that Shared Resource Services attempt to do their work, for example they understandably now receive a much higher number of calls a day.

The officer elaborated on the funding arrangements to the committee to outline how it works. It was pointed out that Shared Resource Services is funded by partner organisations and does not have funding from somewhere else, it comes from contributions. Such conversations about the matter would take place but the officer asked the members to keep it in their understanding that the money that they spend on Newport effectively comes from Newport itself as it needs to be a collaborative arrangement. The council has contract systems and budgets for other systems within Newport where this gives the digital team some sort of control on spending on some areas.

Members were informed that for 2021 to 2022, the digital team have another £250,000 that has been allocated to the budget and that they have initial plans of what to spend this on. As the officer previously mentioned in the Risk Report, security operations centre and an event security management system has been suggested to enhance the council's online security with a budget to improve this and it is likely that the council could add more of the data systems to the cloud. Specifically in relation to local schools, the officer explained that the council has contributed significant amounts of money into schools and mentioned that the Assistant Head of Education and Digital Projects Manager did a lot of good work with the team to make a difference in IT provision in schools. The officer gave credit to the Welsh Government for signing the funding into that.

The officer informed the committee that they worked in cross sections and got involved in lots of projects with technology pieces for example the test trace and protect service. This was critically important and still is in the fight against the pandemic where some of the solutions they manage incidents by using some of the council's local systems. They also used email system and chat facilities and the postal systems via the mail room of the civic centre. The officer also mentioned that there was a HR and payroll project to make most of the system online in order to maximise their investment in that solution.

Another positive contribution mentioned by the Digital Services Manager was the work put into the live streaming of services for the Gwent Crematoriums. This infrastructure was not present before the pandemic, much of it was a joint effort of Shared Resources Service and Digital Services.

The officer also mentioned that the equipment in committee rooms of the civic centre have been enhanced to improve connectivity with the option of touch screens and webcams installed, as a result there are now more 'new normal' facilities to dial in remotely.

The Head of People and Business Change added to this that pre pandemic that this equipment was proved invaluable to social services as it was utilised for meetings and interviews. It was there from the Government and Local Elections Act but not just the pandemic.

The Digital Services Manager went on to state that the information risk report was agreed by cabinet last October. It was approved for us to move to a new data centre to improve the council's resilience and part of that will be a shared facility with our partnerships, this will bring about benefits for the collective infrastructure alongside the cloud coming in with two further data systems migrated into it from 2020 to 2021.

The Committee was informed that a new financial system is planned for October 2022 on current plans to go live, the cloud hosted this system. With the direction of travel, with the addition of funding support the digital team will be able to be more proactive with this and able to maintain technical solutions.

The officer explained that they have already replaced audio visual rooms within the civic however mentioned that the council chambers are a bit more complicated to work with. It was confirmed however, that the council was successful in its funding bid to Welsh Government for the Digital Democracy Fund which was around £52,000 in order to facilitate and upgrade software for that from existing suppliers with a number of enhancements for equipment for council chambers, such as the projectors and sound system facilities.

Members were reminded that the council has civic Wi-Fi around the centre in both public buildings and buses. Despite the significant saving target for 2021, this has been raised to 2022 to reduce public Wi-Fi usage but given the situation, they realise with the savings that the digital team will now take a different approach based on impact of pandemic.

Digital inclusion is important, and the team are currently looking to make savings with minimal impact on the public Wi-Fi but will not look to remove this service as they previously intended to.

The officer recognised impact of the pandemic has had on all aspects of life and explained that the Head of People and Business Change is working with the new normal group and working through democratic services at the moment. To conclude, going forward, the team will continue to work in a different way from pre-pandemic. Members will have their view on which end of the spectrum that this will be but technology will need to still support the new normal.

Questions were welcomed from the committee.

The Committee asked the following:

- A Member of the committee showed their appreciation for how far the council has come in terms of digital equipment and working methods. With regard to the Track, Trace and Protect Project in the report, the member queried if we have a separate one in Wales, or is it part of the national system? If so, the Member asked the officer to confirm how much the council is involved with that and asked if possible to expand on that considering the logistics of the project, whether it is a reliable system or not.

The Digital Services Manager replied that the report is primarily around support for the service rather than for the service for itself.

The Head of People and Business Change asserted that the report was a brief overview not within the scope of such projects, but the Track Trace and Project is delivered as a regional board through Local Authorities and Public Health Wales. The

council recruited and redeployed a lot of staff which was a fundamental part of the Environmental Health section with mutual aid with the support of Shared Resource Services with the technical equipment to ensure the staff could operate. In hindsight, it was all set up in a very short period of time during June 2020 as part of the national approach but locally, it was a very significant project which relied on local resources and organisational support.

- The Committee then enquired whether it was funded for by the regional board and in terms of cost to the authority, could they quantify their commitment to the project.

In response, the Head of People and Business Change confirmed it was a funded service with a budget from Welsh Government to service all aspects of it. However, there are parts that we cannot quantify, which is time. We cannot quantify the Digital Team's time, the several of digital staff were redeployed into the covid response work, how to manage the stock and setting up equipment and organisational priority to ensure that it operated properly without resource strain but on the whole it was responding to a global pandemic so it was an unprecedented time.

- The Committee asked if the council are prepared for the next annual cycle.

The Head of People and Business Change replied that a piece of work is underway, from a February Meeting that came to Cabinet in June on what the approach would be. From a technological point of view, the council digital team has been discussing a range of methods and have been on that enhancement journey for a few years now. The Council had thousands of people working remotely within 3 days of the announcement of a national lockdown in March 2020. This was due to the IT department, the Digital Services team. Members have laptops and iPads, and office 365 which is cloud based.

The Lead Officer stressed that not every local authority was lucky enough to be in that position due to the journey that the digital team has been on for years and it paid dividends at that moment in time. The pandemic helped us learn also about key points on how to get work going with provisions in place such as a lockdown.

The committee was advised that the team continued to move to the cloud system to improve their resilience and from an IT perspective, the equipment has gone into the committee rooms for hybrid meetings, where a fair few were already in place and the officer stated that the council is well on the road for more developments within the digital strategy.

- A Member commented on the fact that 2000 people working from home was astounding and the foundation laying has certainly paid off and was definitely worthwhile.

The Member asked with regard to the council website;

Who is responsible for the functionality and design? And is there any opportunity to discuss the design in order of finding things more easily?

It was noted that the transparency page previously mentioned was not found before this meeting, even in the pre-meeting we were unable to find the page.

The member then asked if it would be worth having a report on how much usage of the reporting app has increased over the past two years through that platform.

The Head of People and Business Change replied that they would do their best to review and develop the council's web presence. With the current website, its functionality does a lot of things as the system is integrated. With regard to the system, there are 60,000 household accounts. It was explained that they can get information from the relevant customer services group on that data for account numbers and usage.

With regard to the technical support, the officer clarified that the service provision and integration is not really within IT's remit. It involves more of the Shared Resource Services team, Strategic Communication and Marketing on how the council interface and also through the customer services channels via City Services. In short, the council all own a part of it but assured members that work is currently in training to pick that up and create a more improved web presence to look better and work better.

- The Committee mentioned that they would like to see more support for people to use these apps more and stated that an improvement in communication would be good for efficiency savings for instance by reducing the waiting time for the customer services line. The Committee understands there is a telephone line for reporting issues, but they asked if it would be better to be able to have an email address to email IT queries through to?

In response, the Digital Services Manager confirmed that they do not have a generic email address for the desk as there is a log system through the Self Service Portal which is managed a lot better through the structure but however appreciates the easiness of an email address option.

The Head of People and Business Change acknowledged that it would be an ease of use point but mentioned that Sam Ali a member of the team, is leading on the development of the digital strategy and is working with the WLGA from a digital point of view on how they need to work to make people's lives better. There seems to be a digital divide, exposed by the pandemic where people cannot access certain things some of us take for granted.

The lead officer explained that savings were previously to be made from removal of public Wi-Fi but now cannot remove that cost as Newport communities now require access more than ever. It was noted that the council will still have individuals who need extra support with technology, but the team are improving on how they can give them their tailored support to free up the resource by improving the channel of reporting generic usual needs that need to be dealt with and resolved quickly.

- The Committee asked how the Shared Resource Service KPIs are determined and if there is a conflict with the services such as police/ambulance services? If so, how are such conflicts resolved?

The Digital Services Manager replied that there is a service level agreement which is the same across all partners and is agreed by SRS periodically. Some may need a review to reflect on how they are sorting more calls at the first point of contact but in terms of general principles of performance, they highlighted that their team has a role in working between the council and SRS. For escalations and priorities, the team undertakes a lot of work with Shared Resource Services such as regular forums, strategic boards and the financing board. The Delivery Board was mentioned as they discuss about strategic issues and issues on the day.

Since the pandemic, regular meetings with SRS colleagues have been beneficial to discuss pressing issues and now there are much less issues than there were in the early days of the pandemic, for instance with the crematorium live streaming but the council are now in a much better position. This regular dialogue with the partnership with the SRS team is for all of the team's benefit.

The Committee thanked the officers for their time.

Conclusions

Following the completion of the Committee reports, the Committee will be asked to formalise its conclusions, recommendations and

comments on previous items for actioning.

The Committee noted the Annual Corporate Safeguarding 2020/21, the Annual Information Risk Report and the Annual Digital Report and wished to make the following comments to the Cabinet:

Annual Corporate Safeguarding 2020/2021

- The Committee wished to recommend more monitoring the resources for the safeguarding team as they appreciated the increased need for it due to the 10% increase of referrals.
- The Committee expressed their gratitude for the difficult job that the service area do. It was mentioned that the report itself was more of the operational side and did not give much insight into the underlying difficulties that they face and the issue of the report of the performance measures will not be published until June 2022.

The Committee requested that the Corporate Safeguarding provide more details on frequent problems, avoiding the confidentiality risk of certain details being shared.

- The Committee also recommended that they remove the option for the scrutiny committee to comment on the Safeguarding staff structure and if it is fit for purpose. The members felt it would not be for them to comment on such an important structure that they do not have a good understanding of.

Annual Information Risk Report

- The Committee acknowledged that it was the first time the report came to Scrutiny so the format was more detailed than usual presentations. Members appreciated that the last two presentations were comprehensive.
- The Committee therefore requested that in future, the presentations could be more of a brief overview so they can open up questioning from the scrutiny committee sooner.
- The Committee also recommended for the officers to slim down the reports but were reminded by the Scrutiny Adviser that they have reduced the number of agenda items hence why there is an extra meeting date to ensure the meetings are shorter.
- Discussion ensued and the Committee requested that the reports could be more slimmed down and the executive summary could be detailed with the main points included to help with questioning.

Annual Digital Report

- The Committee wished to make the recommendation that FOI requests be kept up to date on the transparency page of the Council website.
- The Committee acknowledged that it would take a large forum for the design of the website to be discussed but wished to recommend that the council considers improving its web presence by making the channels on the website easier to find in order to be more functional and easily accessed, this could also free up officer time with reduced queries.

6 Scrutiny Adviser Reports

Invitees:

Connor Hall – Scrutiny Adviser

The Scrutiny Adviser presented the Forward Work Programme, and informed the Committee of the topics to be discussed at the next committee meetings.

The officer advised the committee that they will be adding the City Centre PSPO to the meeting on 30 July 2021 for the Parks PSPO with the possibility for a further meeting on 23 September to further discuss the City Centre PSPO.

The officer queried who the members would like to invite any certain bodies in particular for this, committee explained they were reluctant to invite just one isolated group of people.

The officer then asserted that with recommendations, it would go through and then further queries for the police would make it go through the police consultation for the council to possibly revisit on 23 September 2021.

Discussion ensued and the officer reminded the committee that due to the length of meetings, an additional date was added and proposed 23 September reason being that the PSPO runs out on 23 August and would like to bring it to the committee before that.

The Committee came to an agreement to do both Parks and City Centre PSPOs on the 30 July 2021 meeting.

The Scrutiny Adviser thanked the members of the committee for their attendance.

Meeting terminated at 12:51pm

The meeting terminated at 12.51 pm