

Minutes



Performance Scrutiny Committee - Partnerships

Date: 1 December 2021

Time: 4.00 pm

Present: Councillors J Clarke (Chair), Hussain, M Linton, S Marshall, R Mogford, M Spencer, T Suller and K Whitehead

In Attendance: Rhys Cornwall (Strategic Director - Transformation and Corporate Centre), Matt Lewis (Chief Officer, Shared Resource Service), Kath Beavan-Seymour (Assistant Director Shared Resource Service), Mike Doverman (User Support Manager Shared Resources Service), Mark Bleazard (Digital Services Manager), Dominic Gibbons (Digital Projects Manager), Mary Ryan (Head of Adult Services), Janine Dent (Regional VAWDASV Lead), Ann Hamlet (Head of Safeguarding Aneurin Bevan University Health Board), Neil Barnett (Scrutiny Adviser), Felicity Collins and Pamela Tasker (Governance Officers)

1 Declarations of Interest

None.

2 Minutes of the previous meeting held on 3 November 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 November 2021 were **approved** as a true and accurate record.

3 Shared Resource Services (SRS) Update

Invitees –

- Matt Lewis - Chief Officer, Shared Resource Service
- Kath Beavan-Seymour - Assistant Director Shared Resource Service
- Mike Doverman - User Support Manager, Shared Resource Service
- Rhys Cornwall - Strategic Director – Transformation and Corporate Centre
- Mark Bleazard - Digital Services Manager
- Dominic Gibbons - Digital Projects Manager

The Strategic Director provided the Committee with a brief introduction on the partnership with Shared Resource Service (SRS). They were advised that the partnership is coming up to five years and were reminded of their journey before the partnership. The Strategic Director expressed gratitude for the Digital Team and SRS for the vast amount of work done in a short period of time during the announcement of the first lockdown in March 2020. Members were advised they would not have been in the position they had been in, had Newport City Council not had the partnership with SRS.

The Chief Officer for SRS ran through the performance data from the report provided to explain how they operate with the six different partners. It was underlined that SRS staff performance remained relatively unaffected by the remote working position. The project and

core functions schedules were hugely impacted across Corporate and Education teams due to the significant shift in demand to enabling new ways of working, having to find new solutions to very different problems and having to continually pivot to meet new demands at short notice. EdTech was highlighted as successful and the dialogue with local schools were consistent through meetings for feedback.

The Committee asked the following-

- A Member noted how some companies' software licences can cost a lot of money and asked how often SRS review licences so the Council does not spend money on services they do not use.

The Chief Officer stated that at the governance and finance board mentioned in the report, has two steps. For instance, for the Office 365 licensing, it was noted that is complex with many options with different licenses needed for bundles/packs and changes on a frequent basis. The first strand of work for the team is bringing someone in to buy the tool, put it in use for three months and it would inform them if the user needs the specific license and if they require a more or less expensive one. Members were advised there is an upcoming meeting where it could tell them if a user uses O365 often and where they can remove people who leave straight away from the Microsoft database as they can incur a subscription charge if they still have the license to use that.

The second strand of work is the management of licensing, the team would look at checking on premises. This has been demonstrated and goes with an agent which catalogues all of the licenses and tells them which licenses are being used and if they are licensed for certain kits. Would be helpful for Newport to know if they are paying for things they do not need.

- The Member then queried if the officers look into getting best value hardware for the council. The Member went on to use an example; if chrome books would be better suited than a laptop.

In response, the Chief Officer noted chrome books would not suit the needs of organisations such as Newport City Council; this is because there are restrictions with them such as cannot download software locally or save many files. Functions need to work for the organisation. For procurement, SRS buy in bulk and advised the Committee that they get fantastic prices; better than some larger organisations and that their laptop price is incredibly low.

- The officers for their presentation and praised the Help Desk team of SRS with their speedy responses to issues. Members then asked when things go wrong and are repaired; if staff keep notes on how they are repaired for future reference.

The Chief Officer confirmed that there is a process with the major incident team and all of that is documented and saved in case things do happen. The Help Desk already has the knowledge base, so they will be able to solve the issue quicker second time around.

- Members queried how was the partnership from the start and if the partners swap ideas.

The Chief Officer confirmed that at the start, a few things did not work, such as the first strategy of using the same HR and pay system. Collaboration is not about being under the same systems with big businesses. With the strategy, they wish to do

different things but with the same infrastructure level. It is the first time in twelve years for SRS, that everyone will use the new infrastructure when they all move to use this. The Business and Collaboration Board are meeting Thursday 2 December where it gives them the chance to present what some of SRS are not involved in, so they can learn from other organisations also. They are in a much better place from when it started.

- The Chair queried if policies have had to change with COVID and if the partnership has changed? The officers were also asked to expand on the impact of not being able to meet in person and what future barriers the officers might foresee because of the pandemic.

The Chief Officer confirmed that prior to the lockdown announcement in 2020, there was 18 months planning of work. Designing together where they work in the same Office 365 environment, in order to prepare work on how to migrate mail and users with log in changes. The timing of the pandemic matched up for the team with the time of remoteness. Newport City Council had already been migrated in mail, other Local Authorities such as Blaenau Gwent had not been. From being prepared, the team looked like they flipped the switch which is a testament to the work done prior to that.

Members were advised it has been difficult on the service delivery, notably with schools who experienced a difficult time during the pandemic. During their migration period, it was not helpful for the school staff for SRS to be switching things on and off so they worked their way around that. Despite the challenges, they managed to maintain SLAs to deliver and Covid accelerated non-technical people on where they need to go with their queries. SRS would like to get out of their data centre and move work into the cloud moving forward.

The Digital Services Manager echoed the Chief Officer in the focus on the technological pieces which has been an advantage to everyone. The system side of things was challenging and from the digital services team in Newport, they work collaboratively to help them think where they can do things differently. It was stressed that the team take on board what SRS has in mind for them in meetings. A lot of preparation was undertaken by SRS on the email system and the scheduling for teams migration was ready to go by 2020. It was recognised that there are things that the team could improve but acknowledged the positives that have come out from the situation.

- How much money do the Council save, and do any savings go into other areas of the Council?

The Chief Officer replied by stating this would be more of a question for the Digital Services Manager, but it would be difficult to answer as there are so many differently calculated savings. The Digital Services Manager confirmed that would be difficult to quantify, as a lot has been reinvested. If they usually save on a system; that would enable them to save and buy something else that they would not have been able to purchase for the council before. It was explained as a complex position and SRS has achieved it by the size of the organisation.

The Chief Officer reiterated that on the scale of things; there are now thousands more devices in schools since they first came in and have not sized up on their organisation with staff levels.

- The Chair queried with regard to savings and with the costs increasing globally; for purchasing, if the officers have any fears that the costs are going to rise for them.

The Chief Officer confirmed that they have a risk register that they take to the finance board quarterly and the global supply chain is included every 3 months too. It was confirmed that it can take longer to get hold of things and that they are costing more. The Committee were assured that as the team bulk buy, the costs are not increasing as much for them so they do not have to chase suppliers. However, it was mentioned that SRS has had to buy alternative equipment where needed over the last 18 months. In all there is concern but however this is starting to alleviate for the team but stressed that the waiting times are more of a concern than the cost at the moment.

The Committee thanked the officers for their time and everyone involved in the work. It was agreed that the digital staff and SRS team are often the unsung heroes so asked the officers to pass on their thanks to all of the staff.

Conclusions

The Committee **noted** the update on the Shared Resource Service's arrangements for IT service delivery and wished to make the following comments:

- The Committee wished to thank the officers for attending and requested that their thanks and gratitude was sent to all members of staff for their continued hard work throughout the pandemic, allowing the Council to be ahead of the game by adapting.
- Committee were pleased to hear that Newport were ahead of the game in comparison to other areas like Blaenau Gwent and were able to adapt very quickly rather than being rushed like they were in other areas. Members were also impressed with how the partnership were able to administer more devices compared to how they started without taking on any additional staff. Members recognise that the workload was managed extremely well.
- The Committee recommended that SRS should promote themselves more on how well they work with Newport City Council, this could be through means such as Newport Matters.
- The Committee wished to confirm if there are health checks between the Council and SRS. It was also queried what challenges do the partnership face and how they undertake these challenges for the future.

4 Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV)

Invitees -

- Mary Ryan - Head of Corporate Safeguarding/Head of Adult Services
- Janice Dent - Regional VAWDASV Lead
- Ann Hamlet - Head of Safeguarding Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB)

The Head of Corporate Safeguarding introduced the Regional VAWDASV Lead and the Chair of the Strategic Delivery Board/Head of Safeguarding for the Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB). The Act places a duty on the Local Authorities to report on progress made each financial year. The Head of Safeguarding (ABUHB) gave the Committee a brief overview on the Strategic Delivery Group and progress made on the work plan. Members were informed that the partners worked well together with good attendance despite the pandemic.

The Regional Lead discussed the three stages of the National Training Framework which has been developed by the Welsh Government, which includes the Ask and Act project. Many individuals in different organisations as front facing employees are planned to have training to ask specific questions to suspected victims in order to help them. This work was first used prior to the pandemic but unfortunately it was suspended due to the situation and it moved to e-learning. 2020-21 was an unprecedented year due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, this resulted in reduced ability of victims and perpetrators to seek support and necessitated a change in practice for all partner organisations. The Head of Corporate Safeguarding advised this is why it is so important to get back to face to face sessions to raise awareness of domestic violence.

The officers mentioned the help of Safeguarding champions who amalgamated the role to take on board that work so individuals in service area know that if they see something they are uncomfortable with; there is an open dialogue to ensure that staff are available to have these conversations.

The Committee asked the following:

- Members thanked the officers for their comprehensive report. It was recognised that working from home in that service area must have been challenging. Concerns were expressed with domestic violence cases on the time from the point of contact, to escalations to have outcomes. Do the team have any figures on positive outcomes? With regard to schools, the team did not gain as much access to the pupils to inform them of domestic violence issues due to the pandemic. Members asked if the pupils will be given presentations in school about domestic violence. The Chair of the Committee added to this string of questions by asking the officers to confirm if the Councillors can do anything to assist.

The Head of Safeguarding assured the Council that they have been running the operation and compass project where if Police are called to a house for domestic abuse reports; they obtain the children's school details and will send very brief details but will be aware that something happened that night. From the first lockdown the team explained they were concerned on how they would be able to operate that and from a welfare perspective, but they got picked up very quickly as they still have the communication – they know that domestic abuse happened but they do not know fully about it. The ones reported to the police that have the full attention, the team did deal with those. The VAWDASV Lead noted the White Ribbon Campaign which is most specifically for men to stand up against violence against women. For 2021, they did a challenge to raise awareness and used the operation and compass in 30. This was due to the vast amount of children impacted by Covid isolation; reducing the access to safe adults.

The VAWDASV Lead also noted that they have developed a presentation to share throughout the period with children and young people in local schools to get them involved. Committee was informed that Wales is concentrating on spectrum and on coercive control. Local schools have been given presentations on this and spectrum has been funded by the Welsh Government to fund sessions in schools to discuss healthy relationships. There are year 9 ambassadors for the White Ribbon Campaign alongside Gwent Police. It was stressed that the importance of everyone standing up together against violence and men challenging other men is a big focus to raise awareness. To stop the violence; the team noted it is about them challenging and changing the culture. The VAWSASV Lead also noted Baroness Wilcox raising questions about White Ribbon Campaign, naming Police South Wales and the Council when asking Home Office if that is something they could support rolling across all national police forces.

- A Member raised four points;
 - a) Queried if Councillors could be trained via the online system as staff were;
 - b) Mentioned that they would appreciate to see a list of partners that the service team work with;
 - c) Expressed concern that during the pandemic, women cannot ring in confidence as the perpetrator could be living in the same house;
 - d) Lastly asked what challenges have been left by the impact of Covid and how have the partners dealt with the situation to help victims safely report a concern.

In response, Head of Safeguarding confirmed that the e-learning modules are mandatory and accessible for all even if a Member. It was agreed the officer will follow that up to ensure the Member has log in details. There has been a plethora of ideas such as materials from phones, secret lip balms to make contact and different websites to contact via email and text through various channels.

The VAWDASV Lead referred to the report that not long after lockdown, there was a huge increased number of calls to the England helpline. They did not see that in Wales, they saw a drop in referrals to police and local services which showed lack of availability but they worked with the Welsh Government to push messages to the public so they could access support. The Welsh Government clarified that if individuals are a victim of domestic abuse; they were allowed to leave the house during isolation. Local chemists, GPs, superstores were trained with messages on receipts to avoid phone calls in a way to get messages to the police. It was noted they saw the referrals rise as a result.

The officer reassured Members they are working with communities as much as possible. They have recently started a campaign with hair and beauty salons in Gwent where work is being done to help those seek support. Posters will be used and online training to ensure it's a safe place for victims to get support.

The Head of Safeguarding (ABUHB) noted the IRIS project which is similar to the Ask and Act work but supported within the practices to provide people with opportunities to talk. GPs are busy but they have the time to identify something so the onsite referral system has had positive feedback as they've been able to pick up on things going on by asking a few questions. The team want passionate ambassadors to raise the profile so people are often thinking about it. It embeds in with these people and some people do not even recognise they are victims of Domestic Abuse. The Head of Safeguarding (NCC) noted they undertake work with the perpetrators also; their work is not just recognising the victims of abuse but also working with the pre-dominantly make perpetrators so they can change and stop them causing the abuse.

- A Member asked if training could be provided to school governors so they can be aware of the terminology used.

The Head of Safeguarding (NCC) confirmed that all school governors have safeguarding training and when schools are to be compass schools. If an incident occurred in the night, the school would be made aware of that briefly. The officer ensured they make sure that happens with speaking with Nicole from their service team.

- A Committee Member queried if television media has been used to raise awareness of domestic abuse against women.

The VAWS DAV Lead Officer confirmed that they do not pay for adverts but the Welsh Government and Central Government pay for those and run numerous campaigns via the media. The VAWS DAV Lead mentioned two main campaigns because of the amount of media coverage over the pandemic has been good in one way and not so good in another. They received a lot of funding for communities/services but with Women's Aid, working with journalists as well on how they report things and the style of language that they use. It was noted the storylines of soap operas which have been mainstream about stalking, harassment and abuse.

- A Committee Member referred to the nature and culture of sports teams mentioned in the report and queried if there are partnerships with those.

The Head of Safeguarding (NCC) noted that there is a wider recourse in safeguarding and the Safeguarding Board briefs third party sector partners of what they do. The VAWS DAV Lead meet with sporting organisations to discuss what they can do to help. The Lead noted that they have carried out awareness raising work, such as with Caerphilly sport coaches and attended Sports Wales Regional Meeting last recently. It was noted there is a big focus on safeguarding but not on the domestic abuse, so looking to work with coaches to build into the programme.

- A Member noted how important it is for organisations such as Wales Rugby Union to raise awareness. Comment was made that rugby clubs etc. could put up literature in the buildings. As domestic abuse is learned behaviour, it could help challenge it.

The Head of Safeguarding (NCC) agreed and stated that early discussions with children are helpful as they need to know that domestic abuse is not and should not be the norm. It is more about prevention and having a safe space they can go to.

- The Chair asked officers how training had been affected by the pandemic and if it has had to be done differently as a result. The Chair also queried if the support for the teams has been affected as they were working right through the pandemic.

The VAWS DAV Lead confirmed that the training changed from face to face to online learning. The difficult was on disclosure of what happened at the incident. It was not so simple to move work online due to safety concerns of victims living with the perpetrator. However it was noted there has been much more engagement since online and they have become more text savvy.

Members were informed that the staff work with partners early on to deal with vicarious trauma and they look at well-being plans which are funded by Welsh Government with counselling for staff members. They have also recently rolled out vicarious trauma training. It was also noted that there was a concern in Covid for individuals working at home while being talked to aggressively as part of the job but would not want that happening in their home so the partners ensured that there would be space for people to work in offices to focus there.

The VAWS DAV Lead mentioned there is a crisis across all of the agencies and for the first time ever this year they have received more funding from the Government. Due to the crisis, staff members are working more hours. The Head of Safeguarding (NCC) added that no one can do the work of raising awareness on their own and that they need to work proactively as partners i.e. council and third sector parties.

The Committee expressed their sincere thanks to the officers for their work and for taking the time to present to the Committee. The Chair reassured the partners that they were welcome to contact the Committee direct if there is anything they can help with.

Conclusions

The Committee **noted** the executive report and the progress of the key strategic priority work plans for VAWDASV within the corporate arrangements for the whole Council. The Committee wished make the following comments:

- The Committee wished to applaud the team and officers on their fantastic work and perseverance for maintaining decorum as it must be a huge challenge working in that field of work. The Chair of the Committee advised that the team can have Member's direct email addresses in the case that the partnership would like for Members to champion anything that the partnership are doing.
- The Committee commented that they would be keen to circulate any literature in offices, sports clubs and social media in order to raise awareness. The Scrutiny Adviser can arrange with the Regional VAWDASV Lead to acquire the materials. The Committee would also like for a delivery of White Ribbons if possible.
- The Committee discussed the current work programmes taking place with universities via Barnardos and the Phoenix Project. Members suggested that it should be considered to be rolled out to sports clubs and schools. Once the partners have the results from the research of these programmes, please could they be shared with the Committee
- If the partnership has not already, the Committee suggested that we could link in with GAVO as a local third party sector as an organisational hub for training, as they have a wide outreach.
- The Committee also requested for the Scrutiny Adviser to liaise with the Head of Safeguarding to obtain the log in details for the online mandatory training for Members. This would help them promote it to their colleagues.
- Members made comment about the inclusion of cases studies in the Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children report in last month's committee meeting, and said it interesting to read about the different situations and issues why children had to leave where they are from, as well as building build a bigger picture to scrutinise. Members then wondered if it would be possible in next year's report could include some case studies so the Committee can see how the partners supported these people.

5 Scrutiny Adviser Reports

Invitee:

- Neil Barnett – Scrutiny Adviser

a) Forward Work Programme Update

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

Thursday 20th January 2022 at 5pm, the agenda item;

- Gwent Local Assessment of Well-being Consultation

Wednesday 2nd February 2021 at 5pm, the agenda items;

- One Newport Wellbeing Plan 2021-22 Q2 Performance
- Education Achievement Services (EAS) Business Plan 2022-23

b) Actions Sheet

The Scrutiny Adviser informed Members that the Committee's comments for the Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children agenda item have been forwarded to the Strategic Director – Social Services and Service Manager – Childrens Teams to action.

The meeting terminated at 5.55 pm