

Minutes



Performance Scrutiny Committee - Partnerships

Date: 7 December 2022

Time: 3.00 pm

Present: Councillors D Mayer (Chair), S Cocks, P Drewett, F Hussain, M Pimm, A Screen, E Stowell-Corten and K Whitehead

In Attendance: Councillors Dimitri Batrouni and Jason Hughes, Rhys Cornwall (Strategic Director - Transformation and Corporate Centre), Sally Ann Jenkins (Strategic Director - Social Services), Tracy McKim (Head of People, Policy and Transformation), Matt Lewis (Chief Operating Officer - Shared Resource Service), Mike Doverman (Assistant Director (Operations) Shared Resource Service), Sarah Stephens (Schools Lead - Shared Resource Service), Mark Bleazard (Digital Services Manager), Natalie Poyner (Head of Children Services), Finn Madell (Head of Corporate Safeguarding), Amy Thomas (VAWDASV Regional Lead Advisor), Neil Barnett (Scrutiny Adviser) and Felicity Collins

Apologies: Councillors J Jones

1 Declarations of Interest

None.

2 Shared Resource Service Monitoring Update

Attendees:

- Matt Lewis Chief Operating Officer - Shared Resource Service
- Kath Bevan-Seymour Deputy Chief Operating Officer - Shared Resource Service
- Mike Doverman - Assistant Director (Operations) Shared Resource Service
- Sarah Stephens – Schools Lead – Shared Resource Service
- Rhys Cornwall Strategic Director – Corporate and Transformation
- Tracy McKim - Head of People, Policy and Transformation
- Mark Bleazard - Digital Services Manager
- Councillor Dimitri Batrouni – Cabinet Member for Organisational Transformation

The Head of Service introduced the report and asked the Committee to reflect on last year's performance and to discuss the partnership. The Digital Services Manager gave a brief overview of the digital role classed within the organisation. The Chief Operating Officer provided the Committee with a presentation which summarised the annual budget and figures such as their number of customers. Members were informed of the framework and were assured that there is a lot of representation on their boards. It was shown that the partners reflect on what their customers want. It was highlighted that their budget is lower than last year, the Chief Operating Officer noted that this is an achievement and proves much of the business case, by working collaborative that the costs have reduced. The Members were informed of the case study in the report which shows why those costs are lower going forward.

The Committee asked the following:

- A Member made an observation that recruitment is difficult for the IT area and asked if the partners can see that improving in the near future.

The Chief Operating Officer (SRS) explained that the issues with employment are typically cyclical. It might be the case until 12-18 months later there may be a group of people ready for the roles. There are some examples of support work but the competition from the external market is hard to keep up with. The SRS team brings in apprentices and help internal staff to move through the organisation via training and development opportunities.

- The Member asked if SRS liaise with universities to recruit people.

The Chief Operating Officer advised that they have a team to train individuals in university and a new scheme to link in people from other areas. An example was used where they would offer someone a role, and up to a day before, they have had applicants decline the job offer as they would have been offered something with a small difference such as more leave but however the officer noted most are going for jobs in the private sector to be offered a job worth around 20k more per annum. The Head of Service felt it was important to note the entry point work is good from an equality point of view as they are offering opportunities that they may not have had before; which is an advantage for the approach.

- A Committee Member recognised there has been a lot of progress since 2016 and asked the partners to confirm their most significant item of progress.

The Chief Operating Officer stated that managing to get everyone in one place, such as the same Office 365 and infrastructure so the team can manage things in one way. That was the best benefit as it allowed them to move quickly into remote working. For neighbouring partners, the move to work from home from March 2020 was not so straight forward.

- A Member queried how the partnership is working with other organisations and councils.

The Deputy Chief Operating Officer confirmed that they partner with the One Resource SRS which is a client function. They represented SRS for Newport on a monthly basis, to help understand what the priorities are for planning and prioritisation. It is also to ensure the resources are being aligned as each partner contributes a different amount and how to work with what they have in a more efficient way.

The Chief Operating Officer added that they received positive feedback from a discovery audit undertaken by Wales Audit. Which was a consultant approach where they met with the boards. It was noted there are things they can improve on such as connectivity between the boards. Around 5-6 years ago SRS had a negative audit but that was when the service was coming together so was not quite there at the time.

The Digital Services Manager wished to mention from a Newport perspective, for context, it has not always been positive as it was a big change for Newport and SRS. Blaenau Gwent joined the year before Newport and a lot of this reflects that these things do not happen quickly and working together in past situations has helped improve the performance and maturity is a big part of that. The Chair noted from a board perspective since he left, that it has

matured and that it works very well with the partners understanding how each other works.

The Cabinet Member for Organisational Transformation wished to add his comments to pick up on the earlier comments regarding the wage competition. The skillsets are in great demand and niche – to add to a Member's query, the relationship is adolescence and will have to change to meet the demands and ongoing pressures but the benefit of hard work from the partners and Leadership is at a stage where connected working is helping but they need to capture that to work on to deliver more complicated services which will be demanded. It was noted that it takes a while to get it working effectively but the Cabinet Member stressed he is aware of the discussions needed with regard to the pay model and was grateful for the committee's views on their options.

The Chief Operating Officer also added that as salaries can decrease/deflate, the market would mean that more people would come in for employment and clarified that point. It could be a positive outcome for them and the collaborative work shows they are ready for what the organisations want to throw at the service. The Officer then advised that their data centre in Celtic Springs is the biggest data centre in Europe. Which is sound for them to store everything there as a shared cloud source.

- A Committee Member asked how the partners foresee the future of the Shared Resource Services in terms of the number of partners to the partnership.

The Chief Operating Officer stated that his aspiration was for the service to be a separate entity, as a better way of delivering services in which the model could be used anywhere across Wales. The partners recognised there may not be a uniform delivery model for all but there could be a regional model. An example was used if 10 local authorities were in that deal where they do all of the technical and data services and explained that the partners are looking to work together on those services.

- A Member commented that when looking at the cost advantages, he could not see why there could not be an all Wales service and asked if that is a technical or a political issue.

The Chief Operating Officer confirmed that it is not a technical issue and mentioned national service examples such as national network and networks for schools. It was acknowledged that there has been issues over the years but it is a national service and everyone benefits from it but the problem is if there's a failure on the national service then everyone experiences that issue. With that comes considerable pressure but as the service is resilient they would be ok in the face of those challenges. The officer supported the all Wales body but accepted some may think not.

The Committee acknowledged that other regional authorities are not on the board when partnership is beneficial, which is why the Welsh Government want authorities to work with partners. It was acknowledged that the National Health Service is quite disjointed with their records also and it was acknowledged that the councils have not solved it all yet.

- A Committee Member noted how the report mentions evaluation and that was from people getting together in meetings and asked how the partners become aware of those opinions on the other end of the service.

The Assistant Director (Operations – SRS) noted they have a new service task in which they push self-service with the portal. They have also introduced a simplified service with the smiley face rating function much like IKEA's feedback function. With the negative feedback, the SRS team call or ask them what they disliked about the service.

- The Committee Member then queried what happens with that data after it has been collected.

The Assistant Director for Operations explained that they put it all in a snapshot and look at the amount of people responding to the surveys. If they would not receive many responses, they assessed the survey; which led them to use the IKEA base model of smiley face rating. The SRS team also collect data for KPI monitoring to see if they hit their target and track how many people they phone back and the reasons for those calls. If there is an interaction, the service would not sit on it. In the sit in service desk the new recruits sit with a qualified person to learn how to take those calls and capture information and how they pass it on and monitor how long that takes. The Partner advised Members with the first point contact on the SRS desk, they try hard to get the issue resolved at the first point, efficiently. It was noted that surveys go out to all of the councils they work with to assess how they deal with their calls.

The School Lead (SRS) added that for the curriculum side of things, there is an annual drop in session whereby anyone within the school can drop in to discuss anything good or bad and to review what may be working well or not. Those sessions are designed to develop the support. They had to scale these back to twice year because the SLA is running very well as they tend to have good feedback. It was highlighted that the partners being able to scale back demonstrates the work they do in addition to the services they offer to the schools as they work very closely with Education in Newport to facilitate the support.

The Digital Services Manager clarified from the Newport client side work in the partnership, they try hard with the delivery groups to see if there is anything they could do to improve. It was mentioned that they are the representation from the council and their role is to hold them to account in a professional and positive way. The service has matured in collective efforts and the representatives sit on the internal groups such as the digital city board and information governance boards for security.

The Committee thanked the Shared Resource Service team for their contribution and efforts and also for their time and presentation.

Conclusions

Members **noted** the update in the report, and wished to make the following comments and recommendations:

- The Committee thanked the partners for their attendance and praised the comprehensive information that was provided in the presentation. The Committee felt they gained a greater understanding of how the partnership work and commented that this was one of the well-presented reports that they have currently received. Members also wished to comment that they have found the SRS to be extremely helpful when reporting problems.

- The Committee were pleased to hear that the SRS team consider other ways to recruit through apprenticeships and developing their front line staff.
- The Committee wished to commend the service on reflecting and changing the method of receiving feedback in a time effective way and appreciated that the service works closely with the different partner areas on the way that they can receive as much feedback as they can.
- The Committee Members noted that they would like to have sight of the positive Audit Wales Report that was mentioned by the SRS Chief Operating Officer in the discussion.

3 **Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) 2021/22**

Invitees:

- Natalie Poyner - Head of Children Services
- Finn Madell - Head of Corporate Safeguarding
- Amy Thomas - VAWDASV Regional Lead Advisor
- Sally Ann Jenkins – Strategic Director – Social Services

The VAWDASV Lead Advisor provided committee with an overview of Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) which seeks to protect women from all forms of abuse. Newport hosts the regional VAWDASV team under the 2015 Act. Members were informed of the directives mentioned in the report such as domestic abuse in older people being a barrier and also modern day slavery and male suicide prevention, spectrum project with schools and projects that have been rolled out to Gwent.

It was highlighted that their achievement has been survivor engagement as they have developed a strong network of survivors who engage with the team and work with them to drive ways forward and also agencies have been key to the partnership.

Members were informed that 2021-2022 was a positive year considering the recovering challenges from the pandemic. The success was enabled by the commitment of the workforce, by sharing best practice despite facing challenges and pressure.

Committee raised the following points:

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- A Member wished to confirm if their work concerns men who face domestic abuse.

The VAWDASV Lead asserted that it includes all genders but as it came from the home office, the heading and overarching title remains but it is inclusive of all genders. The VAWDASV Lead then agreed to provide more data on the examples of male cases in Gwent. As there is an average of 2 males considered high risk for domestic abuse and require an agency response.

- A Member expressed his thanks for the presentation and wanted to know what the partner's most significant piece of progress is from the last few years.

The Strategic Director responded by stating if they look back in time, since 2015 legislation, people's understanding and awareness has increased on other forms of abuse such as coercive control. In 2015, professionals and the public understanding of emotional abuse was far weaker back then. In addition, the awareness and understanding of domestic abuse impact on children. The Director felt it was important to highlight these as it contributes to the increasing refusal to tolerate violence and the impact it causes.

- The Chair made the suggestion of Newport City Council organising an all Member session on raising awareness and understanding on such topics.

The VAWDASV Lead explained that a training package has been developed for Members and Senior Officers of the Local Authority. They are currently discussing with Democratic Services to set up a training session in the New Year. This could be offered in terms of training for the helpline and signposting constituents for access to services.

- A Member appreciated that measuring evaluation of the work is difficult and asked if there are any measures that they could possibly use to measure improvements.

In response, the VAWDASV Lead acknowledged that it is very difficult to measure as the work takes many different forms. It was mentioned that they measure the commission services; where they fund the service providers with quarterly measures which are collated and reported back to the Welsh Government. They would look at the strategy which is under review and write the new strategy for the New Year. For the police support, the Police Crime Commissioner has support work in place. When the team look at their objectives, they can cross reference that to see what impact they are having. It was recognised that it does not cover all areas in VAWDASV but provides them with an idea of how they are performing.

- A Member noted that in the BAME communities, women may not be open about their suffering with abuse and asked if they have any kind of special training for staff with women's aid on how they can help these women speak openly.

The Member has seen case studies and worked previously in interpreting for a freedom programme with Bawso, and found that a lot of the training would not sink in with the victims as they would return to the perpetrators. Therefore the Member asked what training is available to staff to overcome that.

The VAWDASV Lead noted that they have comprehensive training and funding in terms of training staff. It focuses on principles with children being informed and how to get ready to flee. Staff have the resources normally DVV (Destitute Domestic Violence) to give more confidence to those victims. They all have training on that and citizens advice are trained to going to conversations with both women and men to ensure they are confident there is a resource so that victims will not feel like nothing will happen from it.

The funded specialist BAME workers are experts within the communities which add a layer of consideration to religious beliefs. On a strategic level, there is a subgroup which focuses on all points raised by the Member. They share best practice and look at any gaps if in need of commissioning; they meet on a quarterly basis and is rolled out to various strands. Practitioner led for example working with other providers and helpline manager has been brought in to help the team in tightening up the protocol for women/men fleeing. It was recognised that there is nothing set in stone at the beginning of each year as funding money is on an annual basis and they do not know how much they are going to get. So they commission what they can and the subgroup reviews that.

- A Member noted how Covid was a huge issue as it made it difficult for services to operate. As a result there was a significant fall in referrals due to

children not being in schools and women confined to their homes. The Member felt that there was not much in the report to unpack the impact of that and appreciated that must have been hard to deal with.

The Head of Service advised that from safe-guarding they are in the process of evaluating the impact of the pandemic which will take longer than a few months. The Strategic Director added that she is mindful in ensuring her platform of evidence is correct but there has been an increasing number of referrals of children and women since Covid. Things were under the radar during the pandemic as they were not seen by health visitors, not seen about in public and now they are seeing the consequences of that. Noted that it may be sobering for what happens over the next 12-18 months.

The Director added that with her optimistic perception that the services like these worked really well during Covid. For instance the Police and Health staff worked together to ensure services were delivered. It was noted that attempts were made despite restrictions but informed Members that they may still be 36 months away where the fall-out from Covid will be with the Council for its impact on both adults and children. The VAWDASV Lead felt it might be too early to measure the impact just yet as Wales was still in lockdown at the start of 2021 due to the Christmas firebreak local authority lockdowns. The training elements were all on teams with business as usual but it was very intense and chaotic in delivering services. The Lead agreed that they will not be at a point yet to see the full effect of Covid on individuals.

The Strategic Director mentioned the other significant challenge that the service area will face having come through the pandemic; the cost of the living crisis which will impact families. A combination of post-Covid and the cost of living crisis is not to be underestimated. The VAWDASV Lead added that as they come out of Covid, they may see the numbers increase as the referrals are just coming through. And with families who may not have had a history of abuse but because of added financial related pressures causing stress; this could lead to violence/abuse against individuals.

The Committee Members wished to thank the officers and partners for their work, their time and for their comprehensive presentation.

Conclusions

The Committee **noted** the VAWDASV Progress Report, the Implementation Plan and the key strategic priority work plans for VAWDASV within the corporate arrangements for the whole Council, and wished to make the following comments and recommendations:

- The Committee thanked Officers for their attendance and praised the comprehensive information that was provided. The Committee felt they gained a greater understanding of how the partnership work and again wish to comment that this was one of the well-presented reports that they have currently received during their time in the committee.
- The Committee request that an All Member seminar be set up to allow all Councillors to be informed about how VAWDASV work. Members were pleased to hear that training courses have been developed for Councillors and Senior Officers.

- Members noted the legacy of Covid and the high demand of services. Members wished to note their concerns that the partners will eventually be going to meeting these demands with less resources.

4 **Scrutiny Adviser Reports**

Invitee:

- Neil Barnett (Scrutiny Adviser)

The Scrutiny Adviser advised the Committee of the agenda items for the upcoming two meetings, which are:

Wednesday 8 February

EAS - Business Plan

One Newport Wellbeing Plan Q2 Performance Update

Wednesday 8 March

Safer Newport Update – Community Safety Partnership

The meeting terminated at 4.52 pm