



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Community Services Scrutiny Committee meeting held on
Monday, 24 October 2022 at 5.00 pm.

County Borough Councillors - Community Services Scrutiny Committee Members in attendance:-

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| Councillor J Bonetto (Chair) | Councillor G E Williams |
| Councillor R Davis | Councillor A J Ellis |
| Councillor D Evans | Councillor A Fox |
| Councillor N H Morgan | Councillor D Owen-Jones |
| Councillor D Parkin | Councillor A Roberts |
| Councillor G Stacey | Councillor T Williams |

Officers in attendance

Ms L Davies, Director, Public Health, Protection and Community Services
Mr C Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication
Mr P Mee, Group Director Community & Children's Services
Mr N Elliott, Director of Adult Services
Ms R Hope, Head of Service for Public Protection and Regulatory Services
Mrs N. Kingham, Business Manager, Cwm Taf Safeguarding Board
Ms J Parry, Trading Standards & Registrar Services Manager
Mr P Nicholls, Service Director, Legal Services
Mrs T Watson, Senior Democratic and Scrutiny Officer

9 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies of absence were received from County Borough Councillors H Gronow and S Bradwick, and from Cabinet Member for Public Health & Communities, County Borough Councillor B Harris.

10 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, there were no declarations made pertaining to the agenda.

11 MINUTES

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 5th October 2022 as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

12 CONSULTATION LINKS

Members acknowledged the information provided through the consultation links in respect of open consultations, Welsh Government consultations and those matters being consulted upon by the local authority.

13 LOCAL AUTHORITY ARRANGEMENTS TO SAFEGUARD CHILDREN AND

ADULTS AT RISK

The Group Director, Community and Children's Services provided members with an overview of the work that had been undertaken by the Council's Corporate Safeguarding Group during the past year. Members were advised that the group's aim is to ensure that the Council delivered its safeguarding responsibilities and commitments as set out in the corporate safeguarding policy. This responsibility sat within the wider context of the work of the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Regional Safeguarding Board, however, this report specifically concerns the Council's organisational commitments delivered under the five themes described in paragraph 5.1 of the report. Members were briefly taken through each one of the key themes in relation to safe practice, safe governance, safe recruitment, safe workforce and safe procurement. In conclusion, Members were advised that overall, there was a good level of assurance, around the Council's corporate safeguarding arrangements, but there were areas which could be improved, and it was intended to do so, particularly around some of the corporate systems and an enabling, supporting and monitoring of the training that was being delivered.

The Chair thanked the Group Director, Community and Children's Services for presenting the report, and sought questions from Members.

A Member acknowledged that the figures for renewals for DBS checks, looked good, but enquired what the timeframe was, and sought clarification around what the council was doing to monitor this.

The Group Director, Community and Children's Services acknowledged that the DBS checks figures were good, but could be better, with delays sometimes attributed to maternity leave and frontline officers not having digital access. Members were advised that re-registration requirements with Social Care Wales for the social care workforce often drove the DBS check requirements, because employees couldn't re-register with the Social Care Wales, and continue to practice, if they didn't have a current DBS check in place. In addition, the Regional Safeguarding Board Business Manager advised that the corporate safeguarding group had received a recent presentation from colleagues in HR, detailing the DBS processes follow up.

The Member noticed that there were no referrals to the DBS, for staff working in social care or schools during 2021-22 and enquired if the Council would expect to see some referrals and what process was in place to ensure those referrals were made, if necessary.

The Group Director, Community and Children's Services advised that it was broadly reassuring, in terms of the absence of those referrals into Social Care Wales, in that there hadn't been a necessity, and was a good reflection of the workforce.

A Member asked if responses to enquiries could come back quicker to Members, as she had experienced a delay in her enquiry.

The Group Director, Community and Children's Services advised that the service did it's very best to try and respond in a timely manner, and to do so in as full and a comprehensive way, whilst dealing with confidential issues where members were acting quite reasonably as a representative, but not necessarily with the consent of the individuals concerned to share sensitive information.

Members were reassured that if this was an area that needed to be improved, the Group Director, Community and Children's Services would take that back through his management team and emphasise the need for Officers to reply in a timely manner to members enquiries.

A Member sought clarification about the provision and monitoring of safeguarding training provided to individuals and organisations, in a number of settings e.g., private care homes, youth centres, etc.

The Group Director, Community and Children's Services acknowledged there was a huge range of individuals and organisations and commissioned providers, who provided care, and those organisations would be expected to have safeguarding procedures, policies and processes in place, in accordance with the Wales Safeguarding Procedures. The Council provided a range of training opportunities for practitioners across the region through the Social Care Wales funded workforce development team, so comprehensive arrangements were in place to ensure that training was available and partner organisations were held to account for their safeguarding responsibilities through the Regional Safeguarding Board. These independent providers were also regulated through the Care Inspectorate Wales.

A Member sought clarification with regards to whistleblowing, as part of safeguarding training, and whether it was known if staff knew what whistleblowing procedures were, and where they could get support, if required, in the light of the recent publication of the independent inquiry into child sexual abuse, and which the Member also sought clarification on, in terms of work taking place going forward.

The Group Director, Community and Children's Services advised that he occasionally received notifications through the Council's whistleblowing arrangements, not specifically safeguarding referrals as such, and it provided a route for employees to report matters in a confidential way and in a protected way. In addition, the Regional Safeguarding Board Business Manager advised that with regards to whistleblowing, it was mentioned in the corporate safeguarding policy, under roles and responsibilities, and there was a requirement for managers to ensure that all employees and volunteers were aware of the policy. She advised that this was something that could be added to the delivery plan going forward, with some facts and figures sought around whether there were reports via the policy, with an action to raise awareness to make staff aware that it was something they could use.

The Group Director, Community and Children's Services advised that in terms of practice, the safeguarding board and the corporate safeguarding group, would reflect on the learning and recommendations from the independent inquiry into child sexual abuse, which would feed through into governance arrangements and then into practice, advising of the need to update the corporate safeguarding policy in accordance with that.

Following consideration by the Committee it was **RESOLVED** to acknowledge the progress made on the Delivery Plan to support Corporate Safeguarding requirements and agree that a further update will be provided to a future meeting of the Committee.

Members initially heard from the Director of Public Health, Protection & Community Services, who explained that this was a timely report, given the current pressures on people's financial budgets and the vulnerabilities, at this time, before she handed over to the Trading Standards and Registrar Service Manager who explained that she had identified a number of areas, where Trading Standards, currently worked to protect the vulnerable, which was even more important, at this time, with the cost of living crises. Starting at section 3, of the report, the Trading Standards and Registrar Service Manager highlighted a number of key points to Members including in relation to the pandemic, the focus on net-zero and the cost-of-living crisis, before highlighting a number of key points to Members in relation to safeguarding and scams, vapes and illegal tobacco, anti-counterfeiting and supporting businesses, with RCT.

The Chair thanked the Trading Standards and Registrar Service Manager for presenting the report and sought questions from Members.

A Member acknowledged there was a worrying aspect with regards to children vaping and asked what could be done to crack down on this.

The Trading Standards and Registrar Service Manager acknowledged the Members concern and advised that it had been recommended to all suppliers and traders within RCT, that best practice was not to supply to anyone under the age of 18, whether vapes had nicotine in or not, in addition to factoring in any intelligence and complaints, as part of any underage sales operations which, were done throughout the year. Members were advised that there was a lot of work being done nationally with this, to target an all-Wales response and if anyone had any information or intelligence of local businesses which are supplying, the service would be happy to receive that intelligence.

A Member acknowledged that scamming was a growing problem, noting the figures in relation to the phone blockers, recognising they obviously worked well, and enquired if there were any plans to increase the use of these.

The Trading Standards and Registrar Service Manager advised Members that this was something currently being discussed, whilst recognising current budget constraints. Members were advised from the initial call blockers purchased, there was still a little surplus and following national safeguarding week in November, a review would take place with senior management, to see whether it was in the best interest to purchase some more for installation.

A Member enquired what sort of partnership work took place with other local authorities, with regards to this area.

The Trading Standards and Registrar Service Manager advised Members that quite a wide range of partnership working took place and provided Members with some examples whilst acknowledging that trading standards was dealing with a much higher level of risk, than it had done, for a number of years.

A Member noted the figures at 4.1.4 of the report, acknowledged they were quite specific and enquired how the figures were calculated.

The Trading Standards and Registrar Service Manager briefly explained to Members the approach taken and agreed to circulate additional information to Members, on how the figures were circulated.

Following consideration by the Committee it was **RESOLVED** to acknowledge the report.

15 **AUDIT WALES - DIRECT PAYMENTS FOR ADULT SOCIAL CARE**

The Service Director Democratic Services and Communications explained that before handing over to the Director of Adult Services, he would advise Members, that in line with the Council's broader governance arrangements, Auditor General reports on any subject, were considered by the Audit and Governance committee and, in this case, those matters are referred through, as part of the model of good governance, for scrutiny to consider those recommendations.

The Director of Adult Services, began by explaining that the report provided Members with an opportunity to examine the Council's response to the recommendations raised by the Audit Wales National Study of Direct Payments for Adult Social Care, published in April 2022, and a copy of the feasibility study was attached at Appendix A. Members were advised, that Direct Payments were an alternative to local authority arranged care or support, and could help to meet an individual's or carer's need. Direct Payments aimed to give people more choice, greater flexibility and more control over the support they received, with the study looking at how Direct Payments helped sustain people's wellbeing and whether they were actually improving quality of life for an individual. Audit Wales also looked at how local authorities managed and encouraged the take up of Direct Payments. The current number of adults in receipt of a Direct Payment had increased to 421 as of 30th September 2022, continuing an upward trend over the past 4 years as shown at paragraph 4.6 of the report.

Members were advised that having considered the findings of the National Study, an action plan, has been produced, and included at Appendix B, outlining the progress to date and the actions to be taken to address the recommendations made, with these actions included in the Adult Services delivery plan for action this year.

The Director of Adult Services then advised Members that a revised Policy will be in place by December 2022, and this will be accompanied by new and improved public information, staff guidance and training which will promote direct payments locally as a more attractive and accessible alternative to commissioned care.

The Director also explained that people using Direct Payments are reliant on an ability to recruit and retain personal assistants and the Council's commissioned support provider Dewis CIL had improved the way help is provided to people to find personal assistants. Dewis CIL are also supported by the Regional Workforce Development Team to deliver training and support opportunities for Personal Assistants. Members were also advised that Adult Services were developing opportunities for local people to set up microenterprises in their communities that can offer a wider variety of care and support options available for purchase with a Direct Payment.

The Director also advised Members that whilst performance management were currently systems in place, a Welsh Government steer, was awaited, regarding the development of a direct payment evaluation system and new performance measures, so there was consistency with other local authorities across Wales.

A Member sought clarification around the Personal Independence Payment, and access to a Carers Allowance, noting that this was a very low benefit.

The Director of Adult Services advised that the Member was talking about something, that was outside of the Direct Payments policy, but he confirmed that he would speak to colleagues in the local authority, who would have more knowledge around this, and other central government departments, who also dealt with these benefits, and would provide a response back.

A Member noted the barriers to family members, regarding Direct Payments, and sought clarification regarding this, acknowledging, there was a massive shortage in social care, and was something that could ease the burden on everybody.

The Director of Adult Services acknowledged the Members comments, around the workforce issue and explained that as part of the feedback from users of direct payments, what had been done, was to create more flexibility within the new policy, in terms of family members. although he advised there was still some restrictions in relation to approval of husbands and wives, i.e., a relative living in same household and in each such case is dealt with on an exception basis, within the new policy.

The Member felt, that in relation to husbands and wives, this was something that needed to be looked at sooner, rather than later.

The Director of Adult Services provided the Member with reassurance that under the new policy, rather than a blanket approach, individual cases would be looked at on their merits, and that the employment of a husband and wife, is determined to be most effective way of promoting and delivering a person's wellbeing outcomes.

Following consideration by the Committee it was **RESOLVED** to acknowledge the Council's response to the Auditor General for Wales's report arising from its national study of Direct Payments for Adult Social Care.

16 CHAIR'S REVIEW AND CLOSE

The Chair advised Members that the meeting had been very interesting and informative and thanked Members for their questions and attendance and Officers for their input and reminded Members that the next meeting of this Committee would be held on Monday 28 November 2022, at 5pm.

17 URGENT BUSINESS

None.

This meeting closed at 6.06 pm

Cllr J Bonetto