



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Minutes of the Virtual meeting of the Community Services Scrutiny Committee held on Monday, 25
September 2023 at 5.00 pm

This meeting was recorded, details of which can be accessed [here](#)

**County Borough Councillors – The following Community Services Scrutiny Committee
Councillors were present:-**

Councillor J Bonetto (Chair)

Councillor R Davis	Councillor A J Ellis
Councillor D Evans	Councillor A Fox
Councillor D Owen-Jones	Councillor D Parkin
Councillor A Roberts	Councillor T Williams

Officers in attendance:-

Mr N Elliott, Director of Social Services
Ms A Lloyd, Director, Children's Services
Ms S Nowell, Interim Service Director, Care and Support Delivery, Transformation and Integration
Mrs C Tyler, Service Development Officer, Children's Services
Ms C Limbrick, Head of Early Help - Interim

County Borough Councillors in attendance:-

Councillor G Caple

9 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from the following County Borough Councillors S Bradwick, H Gronow, G Jones, G Stacey and N Morgan.

10 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, the following declarations of interest were made:

Item 6 'CHILDREN'S SERVICES STRATEGY' County Borough Councillor R Davis declared a personal interest:

"I work for the Open University but have no involvement in student recruitment or in the delivery, design or administration of the social work course."

Item 6 'CHILDREN'S SERVICES STRATEGY' County Borough Councillor D Parkin declared a personal interest:

"I work for Children's Services as a foster carer in Rhondda Cynon Taf."

11 MINUTES

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 10th July 2023 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 DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL SERVICES ANNUAL REPORT 2022/23

The Director of Social Services presented the report to Members outlining the purpose of the report to present the Community Services Scrutiny Committee with a draft copy of the Director of Social Services Annual Report for 2022/23 in accordance with Part 8 of the Code of Practice of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014.

The Director outlined the detail of the report which summarised the assessment of the key developments and challenges in Children's and Adults services, how this links to the Council's Corporate plan and provides examples of how the service area has worked to promote and improve the wellbeing of those in need of support.

The Director highlighted the impact the Covid-19 pandemic continues to have on the Service areas and acknowledged the contribution staff, commissioned providers and foster carers make to the service areas in being able to continue to provide support to service users given the challenges faced.

Members acknowledged the detail of information contained in the report covering all key areas and thanked all staff for their efforts.

One Member recognised the improvement in the ACE waiting list but also stated that people are waiting over 12 months for aids and adaptations to enable independent living and asked if data was available to show performance. The Director explained that this information wasn't to hand but explained that ACE assessments were based on assessed need and risk and outlined the process in place to categorise individuals. The Interim Service Director also confirmed that the waiting list for aids and adaptations had gone down significantly over past year, but demand was still high. Additional information regarding waiting times would be provided to the Committee when available.

Another Member asked about the support available for Carers across the borough referencing financial pressures faced by many following changes to carers allowance payments. The Director of Social Services advised that any changes to carers allowance related to Central Government decisions not Social Services but confirmed to Members that there are a range of support services available through Social Services for carers. The Interim Service Director highlighted to Members the detail in the report regarding the Carer's Support Project which provides advice and information.

A Member referenced the Children's Services Participation Strategy detailed in the report and noted the response rate in relation to the 'Get Involved' survey and asked whether there were plans in place to look to increase this to empower young people through utilising different survey methods. The Director of Children's Services acknowledged there is work to be done to ensure the important voices of young people are heard and to understand their experiences of the service. The Director of Children's Services informed Members this is a

service priority and a steering group, led by the head of participation, has been set up and work has been undertaken with care experienced young people to ensure a variety of methods are used to ensure opportunities to provide their voice. Whilst this is a service priority, Members were informed that there is still work to be done which will take time.

A Member noted that there are still challenges faced by vulnerable people in need of support and referenced the role of elected Members in advocating on their behalf. The Director of Social Services confirmed to Members that where there are concerns for individuals these should be raised and assured Members that advice and information is available from Officers when required.

Following consideration by the Committee it was **RESOLVED** to note the draft Rhondda Cynon Taf Director of Social Services Annual Report 2022/23.

14 SOCIAL SERVICES REPRESENTATIONS, COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS PROCEDURES ANNUAL REPORT

The Director of Social Services presented the report to Members which provides an overview of the operation and effectiveness of the Council's statutory Social Services complaints procedure between 1st April 2022 and 31st March 2023. The Director summarised the content of the report including information on the background of the Social Services statutory complaints procedure, information on lessons learnt from complaints and performance data for Adults and Children's Social Services, together with achievements for 2022/23 and future developments.

The Director of Social Services took Members through the high-level detail of stage 1 and 2 complaints as set out in the report and highlighted to Members that although an important process, the number of complaints received in relation to the number of individuals supported by the service remain relatively low. The Director also pointed out for Members that during the period there were no Ombudsman investigations with all complaints being closed or directed back to the council for resolution.

The Director highlighted to Members how valuable the complaints process is in providing the service areas with information to further shape and deliver services as referenced in section 7 of the report.

The Director also took Members through the high-level detail of the compliments received and recognised these are important to demonstrate the high-quality work and level of service provided by staff within the Council despite the challenges faced.

The Director thanked the Customer Feedback, Engagement and Complaints Manager, and her team, for maintaining robust procedures and ensuring that the voice of service users was heard.

A Member noted the increase in the number of complaints received for Children's Services and asked whether there have been opportunities to learn as a result of these whilst also noting that people feeling empowered to make a complaint can be a positive action. The Service Director Children's Services acknowledged the rise but shared it was partly anticipated and the service area is actively aiming to improve regarding the complaints process. The Service

Director Children's Services outlined how the service area is working with the Customer Feedback, Engagement and Complaints Manager as part of their quality assurance process and identified 3 areas for improvement around communication, working with fathers and families with neurodiverse needs.

A Member requested further detail be provided in relation to the nature of the complaints that are submitted directly to the Ombudsman to allow understanding and to identify any trends in this data. The Director Social Services acknowledged the request and outlined how some complaints are made directly to the Ombudsman and are referred back to the Local Authority procedure and therefore are captured in the content of the report.

Following consideration by the Committee it was **RESOLVED** to note the work undertaken by the Social Services Complaints Team, contained within the annual report and to request a further report providing information of the process and resolution of complaints submitted to the Ombudsman and how these fit within the wider complaints process in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

15 CHILDREN'S SERVICES STRATEGY

The Director of Children's Services outlined the purpose of the report to provide Scrutiny Committee with an update on information and current progress regarding Rhondda Cynon Taf's Children's Services Strategy.

The Director of Children's Services highlighted that the background to the strategy and emphasised that the Rhondda Cynon Taf Children's Services Strategy is rooted in the service's values, purpose and vision and referenced the infographic attached as Appendix 1 to the report which sets out these values. Members were directed to section 4 of the report which provides an update on each of the 5 transformation areas of the strategy.

A Member referenced the data set out in the report in 4.3 and 4.8 and commented that the presentation of this can be relatively confusing given the document is also available to members of the public. The Director of Children's Services welcomed the feedback and confirmed the data demonstrates a reducing trajectory in terms of the numbers of looked after Children. The Director of Children's Services acknowledged this will be considered for future reports and presentation of data to ensure it is easily accessible and clear to understand for all.

Another Member queried comments made during the presentation relating to a short supply of staff experience and asked the Director of Children's Services whether the service is fully staffed or working under pressure with insufficient staff numbers citing safeguarding as a concern in this area.

The Director of Children's Services confirmed there is a 21% vacancy rate across the service although in some teams individually this is higher. They highlighted a national shortage of experienced social workers but emphasised to Members that as part of the Workforce strategy the Service has identified a number of strands of work that are being looked into around recruitment and retention. The Director of Children's Services referenced lessons learnt from the first year of the workforce strategy which pointed the area to focus greatly on these areas as well as looking at increasing capacity to make sure social workers are supported well. They also commented on staff wellbeing and the

importance of the surveys that are being carried out to ensure there are sufficient practitioner voices being heard and shared with Members details of the development of psychology led reflective spaces which have received extremely positive feedback and will be used as a unique selling point in upcoming attraction campaigns. The Director of Children's Services acknowledged that the process will be mid-long term but of particular importance is the scheme to 'Grow our own' and detailed how this year there have been 11 newly qualified social workers appointed. The Director of Children's Services assured Members that to date there are no unallocated child protection or looked after cases and highlighted how managers are doing a great job at supporting workforce.

Following on from this, a Member referenced the detail in the report relating to the expansion of the number of Children's Services staff able to be sponsored to access the Open University Social Work Degree programme with a guaranteed Social Work role on completion of registration and asked what support is provided to ensure successful completion of the course whilst undertaking challenging work roles. The Organisational Change and Transformation manager confirmed that whilst on placement staff are not working full time and are supported as much as possible regarding the demanding requirements of course and training. Team managers are responsible for managing and facilitating this. The Organisational Change and Transformation manager acknowledged the work is demanding but recognise this is important to prepare staff in readiness for the role.

Following discussion Members **RESOLVED** to note the information contained within the report.

16 PATHWAYS TO CARE DELAYS

The Interim Service Director outlined to Members the purpose of the report to provide Scrutiny with an update on the regional hospital discharge arrangements. Members were reminded that in November 2022, Scrutiny were updated on the pressures across health and social care and the continued efforts to support safe and timely discharges for residents with eligible needs in Rhondda Cynon Taf. At that time Members asked that a further report be prepared in the autumn of 2023 to provide an update on developments. Members were advised that there is anticipation of a winter of similar demand challenges this year and whilst there has been some improvement in capacity through the year this remains fragile.

The Interim Service Director outlined the detail in section 5 of the report highlighting the growing area of focus for Welsh Government, Health Board and Local Authority is preventing the need for people to attend at a hospital. The Cwm Taf Morgannwg Regional Partnership Board had identified this shift in emphasis previously and have agreed a model of integrated community services for implementation. The Interim Service Director outlined the details of the model to Members.

The Interim Service Director also pointed Members to section 6 of the report and the video links contained detailing the pathways associated with Discharge to Recover and then Assess (D2RA) which supports effective and timely discharge from hospital for people who no longer require an acute hospital bed underpinned by a 'home first' principle of moving assessment for ongoing care, rehabilitation and support needs.

The Interim Service Director referenced how Social Care staff work closely with colleagues in Health throughout the year to facilitate D2RA and provided an overview of development activity including the use of electronic white boards. Members were provided with information around the purpose of the white boards and set out the future position of Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) staff having remote access to the white board data so that RCT staff can track patient details and progress directly and share social care information seamlessly with the ward. Members were informed the use of this data is intended to have a big impact on delays to pathways to care.

The Interim Service Director outline the next developments in relation to hospital discharge is the introduction of Pathway of Care Delays (PoCD) performance reporting. Members were informed that the Cwm Taf Morgannwg region engaged with the pilot project from Welsh Government and have been submitting data since November 2022 and a new process was developed to collate and validate data. From April 2023 the pilot has become the formal reporting process for PoCDs and is reported to Welsh Government to illustrate the regional performance on a monthly basis. Data is taken one day a month, each month by hospital staff and the Local Authority validates this. Members were provided with an overview of the data provided in the report relating to the Pathway of care delay reports.

The Interim Service Director finished the presentation of the report by emphasising to Members this is an area of concern for health and social care and where efforts are focused to work together and find solutions together to facilitate.

A Member queried the process of assessing patients prior to discharge and whether the responsibility remains with the health board or social services.

The Interim Service Director outlined the process for Members acknowledging the challenges faced by individuals who have life changing experiences resulting in hospital admissions and the impact this has on their housing and daily life going forward. They also acknowledged the difficulty in assessing patients in a hospital ward noting that recovery often takes place at home but also highlighted to Members that often-temporary measures have to be put in place whilst ascertaining what long term their needs will be.

A Member also discussed pressures on Home Care staff and requested clarification on working hours.

The Interim Service Director reassured Members that it is not common practice to ask staff to work 10-12 hours recognising that the job role is physically and emotionally challenging. They outlined some exceptions, such as adverse weather and extreme pressures, where staff are required to undertake additional hours but reiterated this is not a regular shift pattern.

Another Member highlighted the presentation of data and felt this was unclear in the report and requested comparative data in the future in relation to other LA's to support scrutinising data.

The Interim Service Director acknowledged this request and confirmed Members this would be taken on board for future reports.

A Member referenced the Integrated discharge board and the priorities listed in the report and requested more information relating to disputes.

The Interim Service Director detailed for Members the number of areas where disputes can occur in individual cases. Members were informed that disputes do not create a number of delays but that it is an area that could streamline more simply which is the reason it is included as a priority.

Members raised questions regarding the data sharing aspect in relation to the use of white board information in hospital and with Rhondda Cynon Taf staff and queried the level of consent required by patients for data to be shared.

The Interim Service Director confirmed for Members there is an element of consent but also legitimate interest continuing to explain that Rhondda Cynon Taf staff would only access data of individuals requiring social care. They assured Members that full information governance has been completed by Health colleagues requiring privacy statement and clear guidance of information sharing. The Interim Service Director acknowledged Members concerns and the Director of Social Services confirmed to Members that additional information will be provided to Scrutiny Committee in respect of this area following discussions with Health.

A Member also requested further information on the urgent pathway of care final recommendation of design and implementation as expected in the Autumn. The Director Social Services acknowledged this request and confirmed to Members information will be provided to the Scrutiny Committee at a future meeting.

A Member requested clarification on the timeline for the implementation of data sharing with Rhondda Cynon Taf staff as referenced in the report.

The Interim Service Director informed Members that the access is imminent but IT issues have meant there has been a delay. Members were informed that access will be available to a limited number of staff in Social Care related to hospital discharge and single point of access teams and this is hoped to be introduced prior to November.

Following consideration, it was **RESOLVED** to acknowledge the content of the report and to receive additional information for scrutiny in relation to the data sharing and consent of patient information in hospitals with Rhondda Cynon Taf staff and the urgent pathway of care final recommendation of design and implementation.

17 CHAIR'S REVIEW AND CLOSE

The Chair thanked Members and Officers for attending the meeting and engaging with in depth debate regarding the reports provided and welcomed further discussions on key issues raised in the meeting.

This meeting closed at 7.00 pm

**Councillor J Bonetto
Chair.**