



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Virtual meeting of the Community Services Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday, 16 October 2024 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 S Bradwick	Councillor A Fox
Councillor H Gronow	Councillor N H Morgan
Councillor W Owen	Councillor D Parkin
Councillor A Roberts	Councillor L A Tomkinson
Councillor T Williams	

Officers in attendance:-

Ms L Davies, Director of Public Health, Protection and Community Services
Mr N Elliott, Director of Social Services
Ms A Lloyd, Service Director, Children's Services
Mr P Nicholls, Service Director, Legal Services
Ms S Nowell, Director of Adult Services
Ms L Thomas, Strategic Programmes & Community Partnership Manager

10 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillor D Evans, D Parkin, G Stacey and D Owen-Jones.

11 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, County Borough Councillor S Bradwick declared a personal interest in respect of Item 4 DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL SERVICES ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24
"I previously worked for Adult Services before I was elected."

12 MINUTES

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 9th September 2024 as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

13 CONSULTATION LINKS

Information is provided in respect of relevant [consultations](#) for consideration by the Committee.

14 Early Years Transformation Programme final evaluation

The Strategic Programmes & Community Partnership Manager presented the report which provided Members with an update on the progress of the Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) Transformation of Early Years Services needs based approach and the independent evaluation report undertaken by ISOS.

The Strategic Programmes & Community Partnership Manager outlined the background and Members were informed that the development of the vision for Providing the right support, to the right people, at the right time, in the right place started as far back as July 2017, with the decision endorsed by the Councils Cabinet in July 2019 and the approval by the Welsh ministers to pilot changes granted in February 2020. The Strategic Programmes & Community Partnership Manager shared that there were some conditions applied as outlined in paragraph 3.4 mainly that the geographical nature of flying start ran parallel with the needs-based approach and that the whole change was externally evaluated.

The Strategic Programmes & Community Partnership Manager informed Members that alongside this, in 2019-20 Welsh Government National Early Years Transformation Programme (EYTP) was introduced, setting out the ambition to deliver as in 'Prosperity for ALL' to create a truly joined up, responsive system that puts the unique needs of each child at its heart. Developing an overarching set of regional priorities, the integration transformation fund followed in 20-21 managed by RCT on behalf of Cwm Taf Morgannwg (CTM) partners for the next three years. Members were informed that in December 2023 formal notification of this programme closure was advised which was to end in March 2024.

As part of this wider context of developing the EYTP, the external evaluation report, by Miller Research, as outlined in appendix 2 provides members with the progress that has been made in meeting the regional priorities listed in paragraph 3.6.

Members were informed that section 4 of the report provides the details of RCT Early Years Delivery Model and the Strategic Programmes & Community Partnership Manager highlighted some key points to Members as outlined below:

- All four strands of Flying Start (Parenting, Childcare, Enhanced Health Visiting and Early Language and Communication) are now available on needs basis which has seen a shift away from historically resulting in a postcode lottery for children and families living in RCT.
- The Council's Resilient Family Service (RFS) acting as a front door, providing support built around the needs of the family.
- Parenting support that results in universal for all access to information, advice, and guidance, tailoring bespoke interventions that acknowledge the individual experiences of families. It was pointed out to Members that this bespoke support in 2023-24 reached 895 families.
- Childcare through Flying Start, and the expansion, has provided in 2023-24 1,506 children in RCT to be offered a funded childcare place ensuring that the most vulnerable children are receiving childcare regardless of where they live in RCT.
- The Communities Working Together for Children's Health (CWTC)H

Programme provides all families in RCT with an enhanced level of Health Visiting contact as set out in the Health Child Wales Programme, regardless of geographical location, by providing an additional antenatal visit and a 20-month Schedule of Growing Skills (SOGs) assessment. This provides extra opportunities for identifying early developmental needs.

- For Early Language and Communication, the service area provides both universal and targeted ELC interventions, through its Talk and Play team. Demand for these interventions continues to increase, referrals being received are over 62% of those identified following the 20-month Schedule of Growing Skills (SOGs) Assessments.

The Strategic Programmes & Community Partnership Manager shared that significant work has been undertaken to develop the systems and processes that have delivered this pilot and each stage has been evaluated to ensure that it delivers against the vision that was set out.

It was highlighted to Members that section 5 of the report provides the ISOS Partnership evaluation judgements providing detail of the relationships and professional partnerships that have developed through the maturity of this pilot and the successful delivery of early identification of needs, not based on geographical areas but ensures support in providing outcomes for all families in RCT.

Members were informed that the ISOS evaluation report focusses on the progressive and integrated journey that the service area have been working towards and highlights those areas to continue to improve, it provides specific comments/case studies from a wide range of staff and families about the impact that the service has had on improving resilience and outcomes.

A Member referred to the early closure of the Early Years Integration Transformation Programme by Welsh Government and noted the largely positive impact the pilot has had as detailed in the stage 3 evaluation and queried whether it is the intention for RCT to continue with the current approach as piloted. The Strategic Programmes & Community Partnership Manager confirmed that the decision for the change of approach was agreed by RCT prior to the Early Years Transformation programme being in place. The pilot was to test out the needs-based model which is believed to be appropriate for RCT. Plans to continue this in its current format subject to looking at some of the outcomes from the evaluation looking at some systems and processes and make sure to continue to identify needs and have capacity to continue. The programme therefore wasn't dependent on funding from WG to continue.

A Member also referred to the recommendations as outlined from the evaluation report and queried the progress on implementation of the recommendations and requested further information on the monitoring of these for impact. The Strategic Programmes & Community Partnership Manager confirmed that even though the Early Years Transformation Board has been stood down in its governance role, there is a continuation of the programme board going forward being led by Cwm Taf Morgannwg. There is a continuation planned in terms of taking forward the recommendations and keeping the informal nature of the boards going forward to continue working regionally and picking up the recommendations.

A Member referred to data contained within the ISOS evaluation report which

suggested that professionals within the service do not feel that the service 'reset' has clarified roles and responsibilities and queried whether this is envisaged as being a big issue for the service. The Strategic Programmes & Community Partnership Manager acknowledged the feedback and shared that as the changes are embedded there will always be lessons to be learnt around communication and working together to ensure needs are being met.

Members discussed the positives that are to be gained from a needs based flying start approach and shared experiences of differing opportunities based on geographical locations. Members felt this was a positive move to continue shaping the future of the service.

Following consideration, Members **RESOLVED** to note the findings of the Stage 3 external evaluation of the new delivery model in RCT.

15 DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL SERVICES ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24

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 2023/24 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 works to promote and improve the wellbeing of those in need of support. The Director pointed out to Members that the report also sets out service improvement priorities for 2024/25.

Members were informed that 2023/24 was a challenging and rewarding year for Social Services and Adults and Childrens services continue to feel the pressure related to capacity, demand, and complexity of need. The Director referenced the difficult financial position across all public sector, and highlighted how the Council is having to balance service pressures and look to make cost savings. The Director informed Members that Adult and Children's Services remain a priority for the Council. Notwithstanding significant challenges, Adults and Childrens services have continued to deliver and develop services working in partnership where possible to identify opportunities to tackle issues and maximise resources to ensure continue to meet statutory obligations.

The Director thanked the Directors of Adults and Childrens services and their teams for their hard work ensuring that RCT residents receive the care and support needed.

A Member referenced the Compliments that are presented in the report and queried whether compliments are fed back to staff as part of the process. The Director acknowledged the importance of sharing praise when it is received and confirmed to Members that all compliments are shared with the relevant staff.

Another Member queried the staffing levels in Social Services and in particular Children's Services noting the heavy workloads of staff in this area. The Director confirmed there is a large workforce and also an equal number of services are commissioned. The Director of Children's Services confirmed there are around 600 posts in this area. Seen around 30% increase in demand over the last 4

years. The Director of Social Services added that Adult Services is approximately double the staff of Children's Services and again highlighted the increased demand and complexity of needs across all services.

Discussion was held around the Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) Quality of Care Inspection Reports 2023/24 in relation to Children's Services as outlined in the report. A Member noted the priority action notices in relation to one home and requested further information on this. The Director of Children's Services confirmed to Members that the priority action notices were to do with the fabric of the building rather than quality of care but were still concerning to the service. The home is being refurbished currently to meet the appropriate standards of care for CIW and the quality of environment that children looked after should receive. Members were informed there are currently no children living at this home.

Further discussion was held around the outcomes of the November 2023 CIW foster care inspection and a Member requested an update on the progress of the implementation of the requirements as identified as a result of the inspection. Members were informed that the service area were pleased with the outcome of the report and the forward action plans and implementation plan have been presented to the Council's Corporate Parenting Board and a number of the actions have already been completed. Members were also informed that in relation to Fostering there has started to be a steady stream of new enquiries of people interested in being a local authority foster carer.

A Member referenced the Children Looked After Residential Transformation Strategy 2022-2027 which has led to the expansion in number of children homes and noted the information in the report which highlights that the service area is on target to open seven new homes by 2025 and asked the Director whether it is felt that this number is addressing the demand. The Director of Children's Services acknowledged that currently the supply is not sufficient but that in terms of the strategy, phase one is complete which has seen a number of excellent homes be opened. The level of complexity of needs of looked after young people was also referenced by the Director and there was reference made to a number of sites which have different statements of purpose to address their needs. Phase two is on track to complete in the new year and phase 3 needs to look more broadly at sufficiency. Such a large project needed to break it down into 3 phases. Members will receive a more detailed overview of the journey at the next scheduled Scrutiny meeting. Members commented on the quality of the new homes that have been opened by the service area.

There was further discussion around the Welsh Government ambition of eliminating profit from children's care, and a Member questioned what the impact to the local authority could be. The Director of Children's Services acknowledged that this will be a significant challenge for Children's Services over the next few years and how there has been examples being shared through Planning Committee of Children's homes being developed where it is possible that businesses who have not previously provided children's homes will now develop these. Members were informed that the standards around the quality of the provision sits with CIW and the Director also shared that conversations have been held with CIW where she has outlined her concerns around the impact of this ambition on the community. Members were also informed that the service is still waiting for the announcement of whether the period of transition will be extended. Members were assured that the Director of Children's Services has close communications with planning officers who alert of any applications and

that CIW have now agreed that there will be an expectation that new providers as part of their location assessment will contact the local authority about their business intention and this will allow the Director to have a critical friend conversation with these providers based on what the service knows about what RCT looked after children need.

A Member referenced an ongoing incident in relation to the building at Princess of Wales hospital in Bridgend. The Member made reference to the impact of this on the community and requested further information in relation to this issue. The Director of Social Services acknowledged the critical incident at the Princess of Wales hospital. Whilst further details were not available to the Director due to the hospital being in a different health board area, Members were informed that the service area has worked closely with the local authority and health board around how RCT are able to support the permanent patients within the hospital to be transferred to other facilities to continue with their medical needs. Members were advised that further information would be shared around the longer-term plans and priorities for the health board when this is available.

Following consideration Members **RESOLVED** to authorise the Service Director Democratic Services and Communications to provide the comments and observations of the Committee to Cabinet, prior to their consideration of this matter at its meeting on the 25th November 2024.

16 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 2023 and 31st March 2024. 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 2023/24 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 how the details and levels of complaints highlight the complexity and the nature of the work across Social Services. The Director acknowledged a small increase in complaints and shared with Members this is due to increased service pressure and service changes.

The Director 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.

Members were informed that of the Stage 1 complaints that were received across both service areas 43.54% (64) were closed within the statutory 15 working day period. This is a small decrease from the previously reported figures in 2022/23 although the Director shared that it is felt that it is attributable to increases in case and complexity capacity and the need to balance service risk and priorities. Members were assured that the service area is working closely with Customer Feedback and Engagement and Complaints team to consider how to support individual service areas more to improve response times.

The Director concluded the presentation by sharing with Members that it is felt the annual report provides reassurance that despite the continued pressures and increasing complexities in social care the Council has maintained a good quality of service in Adult's and Children's services, which is also highlighted in the number of compliments which are referenced in the report.

A Member referred to the data contained within the report in relation to the summary of the nature of the complaints received and highlighted the apparent consistent theme of a lack of communication / engagement across both Adult's and Children's Services. The Member queried whether this is to be expected due to the nature of the cases being dealt with by the service or if there have been any areas of improvement identified. The Director acknowledged that decisions that are taken by the service area are often difficult, and this can lead to misunderstanding. However, these can be resolved with conversations which is reflected in the report. It was also acknowledged that there were opportunities to improve the provision of information and guidance which was not provided in the way the service area may have wanted. Members were informed that as a result, guidance has been updated and there have also been improvements to the service area's website. The service area are continually working to improve communication and ensure things are clear from the beginning in relation to processes which it is hoped can improve the experience of service users.

A Member provided feedback from a resident having a positive experience of submitting a complaint to Social Services.

Another Member referred to the decrease in the target for responding to complaints in relation to the previous year and requested further clarification on any reasons for this. The Director confirmed there had been a drop albeit a small drop and a lot of the reasons are down to the complexity of cases and the difficulty to try and turn around in 15 days. Members were informed that complaints being received now are complex and take longer. The Director confirmed to Members that no real theme had been identified by the Customer Feedback and Engagement and Complaints in terms of recommendations for improving but the service area has identified some opportunities to try different things before the stage 1 process starts in terms of trying to deal with concerns earlier. Members were also informed that when the service area are aware a case will take longer than 15 days, they try to inform people right away and whilst this doesn't change the performance against indicator it is found to help by keeping everyone informed in terms of timescales.

Following consideration by the Committee it was **RESOLVED** to note the work undertaken by the Social Services Complaints Team, contained within the annual report.

17 CHAIR'S REVIEW AND CLOSE

The Chair thanked Officers for their presentation of the reports covering such complex issues and shared it is pleasing to see the ongoing work within the service areas. The Chair also thanked Officers and all staff within the service areas for their ongoing hard work in challenging times.

Members were reminded of the upcoming joint meeting with the Council's Corporate Parenting Board which will scrutinise in greater depth the Children's Residential Transformation Strategy and the issues raised in tonight's meeting.

18 URGENT BUSINESS

None.

This meeting closed at 5.50 pm

**Councillor J Bonetto
Chair.**