

**Social Services, Housing and Community Safety Scrutiny Committee**  
**(Microsoft Teams / Hybrid Council Chamber)**

**Members Present:**

**9 March 2023**

**Chairperson:** Councillor C.Galsworthy

**Vice Chairperson:** Councillor H.C.Clarke

**Councillors:** O.S.Davies, J.Jones, A.R.Lockyer,  
P.D.Richards, M.Spooner, D.Thomas,  
S.Rahaman and A.R.Aubrey

**Officers In Attendance** R.Davies, J.Hodges, C.Howard, A.Jarrett,  
A.Thomas, K.Warren, T.Rees, C.Jones,  
R.Griffiths, T.Davies, N.Aleksanyan, C.Frey-  
Davies, A.Jarrett, E.O'Brien, D.Watts, L.Smith,  
S.Williams, S.McCarthy, H.Short, D.Harding,  
C.Owens, S.Wells-Jones, R.Hopkins and  
A.Thomas

**Cabinet Invitees:** Councillors S.Harris, A.Llewelyn, J.Hales

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1. **Chair's Announcements**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

The Chair advised that the committee would be scrutinising items 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 15, 16 and 17 from the Cabinet Board papers.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

Declarations were received from:

Cllr H.C.Clarke – Items 8 and 15 (Cabinet Board) – Personal, Non-Prejudicial.

### 3. **Minutes of Previous Meeting**

15<sup>th</sup> December 2022

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Members noted that Cllr A.Llewelyn was present not Cllr A. Lockyer.

Page 5 – Leasing Scheme Wales, Para. 3

To insert remove 'lawn' and insert 'loan'.

Resolved: To approve the minutes of the meetings held on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2022 and 26<sup>th</sup> January 2023 as a true and accurate record with above amendments.

### 4. **Adults and Children's Single Point of Contact**

Officers provided a presentation to the committee on the single point of contact (SPOC), which is also the first point of contact for many referrals that are received by Social Services.

Officers noted that the presentation would focus on the single point of contact in relation to adult services. Prior to outlining the detail of the services, officers outlined how the referral system currently works. There is one single phone number and email address which is used for both children and adult services. Following on from initial contact, there is an integrated referral form which is used regionally by partners when referring a case to social services. SPOC will undertake assessments in order to provide information, advice and assistance to those who make contact.

SPOC operate on a multi-disciplinary team structure. Officers went through the make-up of the adult SPOC team. Staff numbers have been increased due to the concerns that were raised last summer around response rates.

The new structure was introduced in summer 2022. It was recognised that the wider pressures in the adults social care team could be supported if the rate of referrals could be slowed down by responding to the needs of persons at the earliest opportunities with the outcomes focused model of practice.

Members were advised that the referred rates into adults SPOC has steadily increased over the last few years, with certain months being

busier than others. Members were provided with a breakdown of the referrals over a recent six month period, and information pertaining to how they were actioned.

Officers discussed the journey of the referrals at the point that they are received by SPOC and the impact of proportionate assessments on the wider service. Proportionate assessments deal with advice and assistance as per the Social Services and Well-Being Act. Assessments can also assist in uncovering some more complex needs that may lead to further assessment within the system.

Members were provided with information relating to call times, and it was recognised that the number of unanswered calls has decreased. Contact Officers receive an array of phone calls, relating to various aspects of adult and children's social care. Officers are constantly assessing how contact officers can be best supported.

Members raised concerns with regards to staff sickness and how they could be better understood. In addition, how can assistance be provided with regards to recruiting new staff. Officers confirmed that staff sickness was not in relation to stress or anxiety at work, but that it was mainly due to unpreventable illness that normally occurs.

Officers confirmed that they would be reporting on staff welfare and how this is supported in a report to be presented at a later date.

Members queried how customer satisfaction with the service was assessed. Officers confirmed that as a first point resolution only compliments seem to be received. However it was recognised that this does not mean that services users are not disgruntled. Officers noted the work that had previously been done with external consultants being engaged and capturing the views of service users and the feedback that they provided.

The Director advised that the expectation was that there should be no abandoned calls, especially when vulnerable people are telephoning a service that they require assistance from. There is an expectation that teams will have a look at the systems that are in place to make sure that they can be possible in the future.

Members noted the high demand on the service. Officers distinguished between the short term OT services and the long term OT services, where the waiting lists for assessments would be longer.

It was confirmed business support staff can assist with answering telephone calls, however it is recognised that they are not trained to deal with the complexities of the phone calls that are received. They would be able to provide an immediate answer to a call if required. The business support workers can deal with email referrals received in terms of putting them on the required system.

Following scrutiny, members noted the item for information.

5. **Early Intervention and Prevention Support within Children Services**

Officers presented the information as outlined with the report circulated with the agenda.

Officers noted that they currently offer a hybrid service in terms of the groups that are run. Support that is offered includes parenting classes, assistance with accessing grants, applying for benefits families are entitled to and support around housing issues. Support can be provided where there is parental mental health issues in the home or domestic violence.

Two new programmes have been developed – the Friendship support and the Aspire Group. Officers outlined the support offered by these groups.

Officers advised that they currently work with schools and do drop-ins. It is about making the engagement with social services to be seen as a positive, not a negative engagement.

Members were informed of the outreach work that was currently being undertaken in the community, including working with the Welsh Rugby Union. Christmas hampers were delivered locally. There are also going to be Easter hampers delivered.

Members thanked officers for the report and noted it for information.

6. **Pre-Decision Scrutiny**

West Glamorgan Safeguarding Annual Report

Officers provided a brief outline to the report. The West Glamorgan Safeguarding Board is a regional board. It brings organisations together to look at safeguard and also brings organisations to account. They do both children and adult practice reviews. The report outlines the first part of the safeguarding plan. The prime objective of the Board is to protect children and adults, and the second objective is to prevent harm in relation to children and adults.

The report sets out the structure of the group and each organisation involved with take on elements of the work. The board ensures a consistent approach and response across the region.

Members noted that the report outlines a high number of male overdoses and suspected suicides. Members queried if a reason for this could be identified. Officers advised that it reflects the trends identified in the 2008 financial crisis. All suicides and significant attempts at suicides are referred to the service. Data is being gathered, working the Public Health Wales, to identify the services that the individuals and their families access and see if anything can be done differently to prevent those suicides.

Following scrutiny, Members noted the report for information.

### Housing Support Grant Annual Report 2022

Officers provided a brief overview to the report circulated. The grant is the main source of funding for homelessness services, including the Council's own Housing Options Team and Community Independence Service. It also funds a full range of commissioned services, for example domestic violence refuges. Officers noted that the amount of funding awarded has been the same for the financial year 21-22, 22-23 and 23-24. Members were asked to note the pressures on the services with increased demand and costs over those years.

The grant is key to delivering the Rapid Rehousing Plan and preventing homelessness by offering a range of targeted support to people in their homes and also building based support services. Officers advised that a key piece of work will be carried out over the next couple of years to optimise the grant to ensure that it supports the Rapid Rehousing Plan.

Members noted the report.

### Quarter 3 Performance Indicators

Officers suggested that the scrutiny committee may wish to focus their attention on indicators that they consider key. Officers could carry out a piece of work to focus the indicators on what the scrutiny committee requires.

Member queried, in terms of the average delay to delivering disabled grants, what is the average waiting time for the service user? Officers confirmed that there has been some substantial delays during the pandemic due to the demands in the private market with construction works. Generally shower works have been carried out quite quickly, but the extension work was taking between 6-9 months. However, it is starting to improve as the private market slows down.

Members queried the partially upheld complaint against a social worker that is outlined in the report and the lessons learned from this. Members queried if the lessons learned were forwarded to the social worker's new employer so that the same mistakes were not repeated. Officers advised that they would take advice from HR as appropriate. Generally system wide errors would be considered and the wider lessons learned from the complaint and how this can be improved upon.

Members noted that the number of looked after children and those on the child protection register has fallen over the last 10 years. However, since the first quarter of 2021, the numbers are quite significantly declining. Member queried if there was a specific reason for this rapid decline. In terms of looked after children, members advised that children and families have been worked with to allow children to return home safely. During the pandemic, this process slowed down and youngsters stayed within foster care longer. However, these numbers will now continue to go in a downward trajectory. Officers advised that there are no target numbers for looked after children and children on the child protection register. It was also noted that from time to time large sibling groups come off the child protection register which can sometimes explain the rapid decline in figures.

It was noted that sometimes targets appear to be in the red, however this does not always correctly reflect the position. At this current time there is a central corporate system which asks that targets and objectives are set. However sometimes this is counter-productive as

the figures need a much more nuanced explanation around the outcome.

Members queried the rise in care home admissions and the concerns about the availability of beds. Officers outlined that although there are vacant beds, the care homes can't get the care staff to look after those beds. More often than not people are admitted into a care home on discharge from hospital when awaiting care in the community or when there is no care available in the community to look after people so they are admitted to the care home.

Following scrutiny, members noted the report.

### Substance Misuse Action Fund: Grant Agreements

Officers provided an overview of the report circulated with the agenda. The increase in funding will support the objectives to prevent drug related deaths, reduce drug related harm and ensure that those that require support can get timely access to the services they require when they need it.

It was acknowledged that whilst drug related deaths across the region are increasing, the number of death in Neath Port Talbot has decreased during the last year.

Following scrutiny, members were supportive of the recommendation to go to Cabinet Board.

### Participation in Welsh Governments Empty Homes Scheme

Officers provided an overview of the report circulated with the agenda.

Members queried the reasoning for signing a service agreement with RCT and the benefits that this would bring. Officers confirmed that the scheme outlined copies the Valleys Task Force scheme that was administered by RCT Council. RCT are the Welsh Government's appointed lead authority for the scheme going forward. RCT will deal with the legal and financial side of the scheme. The local authorities will deal with the surveys.

Following scrutiny, members were supportive of the recommendation to be considered Cabinet Board.

7. **Forward Work Programme 2022/23**

Members noted the Forward Work Programme.

8. **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

9. **Access to meetings**

Resolved: to exclude the public for the following item(s) pursuant to Section 100A(4) and (5) of the Local Government Act 1972 and the relevant exempt paragraphs of Part 4 of Schedule 12A to the above Act.

10. **Pre-Decision Scrutiny of Private Item/s**

**Contractual Arrangements for a Range of Services Funded Through the Housing Support Grant 2023/24**

Members considered the report as set out within the documents circulated.

Following scrutiny, the committee noted the report.

**Extension to the provision of a Welcome Centre in respect of Ukrainians fleeing the conflict**

Members considered the report as set out within the documents circulated.

Following scrutiny, the committee were supportive of the recommendations to be considered by Cabinet.

**CHAIRPERSON**