

Social Services, Housing and Community Safety Scrutiny Committee
(Multi-Location Meeting - Council Chamber, Port Talbot & Microsoft Teams)

Members Present:

25 January 2024

Vice Chairperson: Councillor H.C.Clarke

Councillors: H.Davies, O.S.Davies, J.Jones, S.Rahaman, P.D.Richards and D.Whitelock

Officers In Attendance A.Thomas, C.Howard, A.Jarrett, K.Warren, G.Hargest, H.Short, V.Smith, I.Guy, P. Cotgais, B McGillian, S.Jones, N.Jones and A.Thomas

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors J.Hale, S.Harris and A.Llewelyn

1. **Chair's Announcements**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

It was confirmed that the committee would be scrutinising items 7, 8, 9, 10 and 15 from the Cabinet Board Agenda.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest received.

3. **Minutes of Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 16th November 2023 and 4th January 2024 were approved as true and accurate records.

4. **Hospital Admission and Discharge Processes**

The Head of Adult Services gave a brief summary of the report contained within the agenda pack.

Members queried what input do patients have into the Discharge to Recover Assess process?

The Head of Adult Services confirmed that medically fit for discharge patients are assigned a pathway and social work assessment is undertaken with the individual and their family. It was noted that it is more beneficial to assess a patients needs from their own home rather than at hospital.

Members considered the report as circulated within the agenda pack.

Following scrutiny, the report was noted.

5. **Pre-Decision Scrutiny**

Directors Annual Report 2022-23

The Director of Social Services, Health & Housing confirmed the annual report was related to 2022/2023 and was not a reflection of the current position.

Members referred to page 45 of the report and asked for more information regarding testing targets in relation to substance misuse.

The Head of Housing and Communities confirmed that testing was carried out where there was a higher risk of blood borne viruses such as hepatitis and HIV. The target is in relation to offering people in contact with services, blood testing to test their wider health.

Members referred to page 35 of the report and asked if there was a progress update in relation to unpaid carers.

The Head of Adult Services advised members that one of the key themes in the current strategy is to provide more resource and support to unpaid carers. Grant money has enabled three Carer Champions to work within the network and work is ongoing to locate and support unpaid carers. It was noted that the quoted figure of 20k unpaid carers may be under reported.

Members considered the report as circulated within the agenda pack.

Following scrutiny, the recommendation was supported to Cabinet Board.

In relation to the following three agenda items, the Director of Social Services Health and Housing advised members that a previous undertaking had been given to report back to this committee the detail of the strategic intent for the next four to five years. The plans are in different stages of development. It has been necessary to report some aspects of the reports in private due to market sensitive information.

Housing and Homelessness Strategic Plan

The Head of Housing and Communities provided an overview of the Housing and Homelessness Strategic Plan as contained within the agenda pack.

Members referred to Page 80 of the report and commented that working strategically with private landlords would be challenging in the current climate and questioned what is the strategy going forward in relation to working with private landlords?

The Head of Housing and Communities advised members that a Private Rental Sector Landlord forum, was taking place shortly. This forum will help to understand the challenges private landlords are facing, raise awareness of schemes that can support them in providing affordable rents and try to stimulate more affording housing in the private sector.

Members expressed concern in relation to difficulties experienced between developers and planning applications and stated further discussions were needed between Social Services and planning. There is a need to look closely at registered social landlords in relation to shared ownership.

The Head of Housing and Communities confirmed that the purpose of the action was to ensure that there is more joined up work. There is a need to consider communities as a whole and how the council can ensure developments and actions offer the most benefits.

Members were pleased to that Active Travel was contained in the strategy and commented that some residents are hesitant to move to valley communities due to transport issues.

Members commented on the ambitious nature of the plan and asked how much confidence was held that the plan can be achieved in the current economic climate.

The Head of Housing and Communities advised members that the costs of homelessness were rising and a significant amount of the council's budget is spent on bed and breakfast accommodation. There is a business case behind the plan. In the long term it will be more cost effective to invest in the plans as costs will continue to increase significantly, if no investment is made. It was noted that the housing support grant has been reduced.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Community Safety thanked scrutiny members for their relevant questions. Members were advised of a forthcoming seminar which would help to pick up on some of the concerns raised regarding engaging with developers and meeting needs across different communities.

Members commented that the recent announcement to close Tata Steel has affected residents who have purchased from private developers.

The Director of Social Services, Health and Housing thanked members for the question relating to affordability, and acknowledged that although it is a significant investment from the council this is necessary in the long term. The Director asked the committee to consider, given the costs involved, how they would wish to receive assurance and have oversight as time progresses that the work is being effective and implemented in a timely way.

The Vice Chair of the committee agreed that progress updates would be appropriate and requested these could be provided at the same time as Key Performance Indicator (KPI) updates.

Members raised concerns relating to substandard private rental properties and questioned whether the plan addressed how the council could enforce landlords to raise the quality of certain properties.

The Head of Housing and Communities agreed with the importance of raising standards but advised members enforcement was not contained in the plan as this was a statutory responsibility of Planning

and Environmental Health. Members agreed to discuss this with officers outside of the meeting.

Members considered the report as circulated within the agenda pack.

Following scrutiny, the recommendation was supported to Cabinet Board.

Neath Port Talbot Children & Young People Social Care Strategic Plan 2023 – 2026

The Head of Children and Young People Services advised members that the plan was developed in collaboration with families, children, the community and stakeholders over a period of 10 years.

Members referred to page 163 and asked what media and forums were used to promote the consultation. Due to the low number of responses received, members questioned if anything could have been carried out differently.

The Head of Children and Young People Services confirmed that the consultation was held over the internet and discussions have taken place regarding widening this in future to cover other areas.

Officers confirmed that there is a dedicated officer that continuously works with young people around consultation and participation.

The Director of Social Services Health and Housing re-iterated to Scrutiny Committee Members that the main pillars of the strategy is around addressing placement sufficiency. Children have been placed in residential care because the right foster care is unavailable; it is important that placement sufficiency is properly balanced, with the creation of professional foster care positions with appropriate remuneration. It was noted that this approach has been tried previously but current conditions are more favourable.

Members mentioned the forthcoming Foster Care Launch in the Gwyn Hall, Neath on 19th February and asked what more could be done to promote this important event.

Officers confirmed that they are open to hearing Members suggestions on how the event can be more widely promoted. It was confirmed that a Working Group has been set up to promote the

event with the assistance of a Marketing Officer and the wider support of the Corporate Communications Team. Information relating to the event will be circulated for onward dissemination within Wards.

Members considered the report as circulated within the agenda pack.

Following scrutiny, the recommendation was supported to Cabinet Board.

Neath Port Talbot Adult Social Care Strategy 2023 – 2026#

The Head of Adult Services provided members with an overview of some of the ambitious programmes of work within the strategy. Detailed reports of all the strands of the strategy will be brought back to this committee over the coming months.

Members considered the report as circulated within the agenda pack.

Following scrutiny, the recommendation was supported to Cabinet Board.

6. **Committee Action Log**

Members noted the Committee Action Log.

7. **Forward Work Programme 2023/24**

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**

Business Case for Establishing an in-house Adult Family Placement Service

Members considered the report as circulated within the private agenda pack.

Following scrutiny, the recommendation was supported to Cabinet Board.

CHAIRPERSON