

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Social Care, Health and Housing Cabinet Board

20 October, 2016

Joint Report of the Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning and the Director of Social Services, Health and Housing

Matter for Decision

Wards Affected: (All Wards)

Information, Advice and Assistance Service

Purpose of the Report

1. To propose that the existing Family Information System be developed to help meet the new statutory duty on Social Services to establish an Information, Advice and Assistance Service.
2. To agree the plan of work necessary to comply with duties under the Act to establish the Information element of the Information, Advice and Assistance Service.

Executive Summary

3. S 17 of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014, places a new duty upon the local authority to establish an information, advice and assistance service.
4. There are a range of systems in use which collect similar, and sometimes the same information about services available in the community. Most are accessible through the Internet. Additionally, the Health Board is developing a similar database of health care services

available across the ABMU Health Board area. Governance arrangements, contractual arrangements and funding arrangements vary.

5. The preferred option is to settle on one database that becomes the “trusted source”. The system that seems most suited to develop to meet this requirement of a “trusted source” is the existing ***Family Information Service***. The application has been developed in-house by the Council’s ICT Service so there is considerable flexibility available as to how the service can be developed moving forwards, without the complications of contractual arrangements with third party suppliers. There is a team of staff in place who administer the system with recurring revenue budget in place to support their work. There will be a requirement to extend the administrative capacity of the team to develop the system in the way proposed in this paper, however, officers believe that this would offer good value for money.
6. As well as providing accessible information using on-line channels, the statutory guidance also requires information, advice and assistance to be accessible through social media, telephone, face to face, outreach, posters and publications. Furthermore, information should be tailored to meet the needs of different groups, including Welsh, easy read, child friendly versions etc. Existing mechanisms can be developed to meet these purposes.
7. The proposed development of the Family Information Service can be done in a manner that dovetails with changes to social work practice thus ensuring the Council can fully meet the new statutory duties.

Background

8. The Western Bay Partnership provides the professional strategic leadership for work necessary to implement the provisions of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014. A task and finish group to explore how the Information, Advice and Assistance Service could be developed has been chaired by the Head of Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services, with members drawn from NPT Council for Voluntary Services; the Family Information Services (which is managed through the ELLL directorate); the integrated community services team (Community Care); the AMBU Health Board; and the Low Income Families’ Group. The Group has also liaised with the Lead Officer identified for Information, Advice and

Assistance services for the Western Bay Partnership and has attended a number of events that have been arranged by Welsh Government.

9. The Group has established that the following arrangements are already operational:

Information Systems

10. There are a range of systems in use which collect similar, and sometimes the same information about services available in the community. Most are accessible through the Internet. Additionally, the Health Board is developing a similar database of health care services available across the ABMU Health Board area. Governance arrangements, contractual arrangements and funding arrangements vary.
11. The preferred option is to settle on one database that becomes the “trusted source”. The system that seems most suited to develop to meet this requirement of a “trusted source” is the existing Family Information Service. The application has been developed in-house by the Council’s ICT Service so there is considerable flexibility available as to how the service can be developed moving forwards, without the complications of contractual arrangements with third party suppliers. There is a team of staff in place who administer the system with recurring revenue budget in place to support their work. There will be a requirement to extend the administrative capacity of the team to develop the system in the way proposed in this paper, however, officers believe that this would offer good value for money.
12. Info-engine - The Western Bay Partnership has commissioned the third sector to develop a database of voluntary sector community services using a third party system “info-engine”. Funding has been identified for two years and the population of the database is almost complete. Given that financial resources have already been contractually committed and the database is nearing completion, it would not seem to make sense to abandon this initiative. Accordingly, it is accepted that the work should be completed as commissioned, but that plans are made to migrate the data to the Family Information Service by the end of the contract period and that no extension to the arrangement beyond two years is funded by the Council. Further, a mechanism is established to enable people seeking to access

Information, Advice and Assistance services to be able to search on both “info-engine” and “Family Information Service”. This is technologically achievable.

13. **111** – Clear links are made between the development of the Information, Advice and Assistance Service and the development of the 111 Service by the Health Board. Initial discussions have taken place between relevant officers but these arrangements need to be formalised to ensure there is increasing coherence about access arrangements to Information, Advice and Assistance Services moving forwards.
14. **Gateway** – the team had established a basic spreadsheet to capture information about available community services to meet immediate operational needs. While this was useful within the Gateway Service, it was not an optimum way of ensuring wider public access to Information, Advice and Assistance Services. There was also some duplication with Family Information Service data. Information held by the Gateway team has been migrated to the Family Information Service and relevant Community Care staff are fully involved in the development of the Family Information Service moving forward.
15. **Dewis** - a product “Dewis”- which was originally commissioned by North Wales authorities - has been promoted by Welsh Government as a mechanism to meet the requirements of the Act. At various events, it has been pointed out that the product duplicates and overlaps to some extent with existing arrangements. The task and finish group has examined the features of the product and compared it with the potential of the in-house system that supports the Family Information Service. On balance the task and finish group has concluded that the loss of functionality and local control over development that would be given up in migrating at this point to the Dewis product outweighs the benefits. Furthermore, there is no reason why the existing Family Information Service could not be technologically linked to the Dewis application if that were considered to be important moving forward. It is therefore recommended that the existing Family Information Service system is retained and developed, but that the development of the Dewis product continues to be monitored.

16. **Low Income Families** – the Group established to mitigate the impact of welfare benefits reform by the former Local Service Board has also identified the need to hold comprehensive information that is easy to access about support services that can prevent people with low incomes to maintain their wellbeing and to avoid the need for services. The Group had already identified the potential to make use of the existing Family Information Service to fulfil this need. It is therefore recommended that the Low Income Families Group use the Family Information Service to develop information and advice on services of interest to this particular group.
17. **Welsh Government Review of Advice Service** - the Welsh Government has been conducting a comprehensive review of advice service provision across Wales. The work has included extensive gathering of information from advice providers very similar in nature to the information already contained within the Family Information Service. The Welsh Government is holding this information in a bespoke database and intends to maintain that information over time. However, discussions with officials indicate that the database will be made publicly available, most probably through a Dewis portal. This approach is consistent with the approach that has been advocated for our local database.
18. It can be seen from the above that there are already a range of information systems available purporting to fulfil very similar requirements. Not only does this landscape make for a confusing position for members of the public and those volunteers and paid staff who work with people in need of information, advice and assistance, it is also not a good use of public funds. Consequently, it is considered essential that arrangements are put in place to bring greater coherence to local arrangements. The proposal that the Family Information Service becomes the trusted source would provide a clear mechanism for rationalising system provision locally and ensuring that we reduce the significant duplication of effort currently expended by service providers and system administrators in gathering the same information, multiple times. It will free up scarce capacity to focus on what counts, which is delivering the right information, advice and support, at the right time and in the right way to promote people's wellbeing and to prevent/delay the point at which people need statutory services.

Other Channels for Accessing Information, Advice and Assistance

19. As well as providing accessible information using on-line channels, the statutory guidance also requires information, advice and assistance to be accessible through social media, telephone, face to face, outreach, posters and publications. Furthermore, information should be tailored to meet the needs of different groups, including Welsh, easy read, child friendly versions etc. These requirements can be achieved by building on mechanisms that already exist:
- a) On-line** – the development of the Family Information Service recommended above would enable the requirement for information to be available through the medium of Welsh and in child friendly formats to be catered for. The proposal is also consistent with the Council’s Digital by Choice Strategy and will be linked with the “Switch” brand;
 - b) Social Media** – the Council is currently reviewing its corporate usage of social media. Signposting people to the Family Information Service is easily achievable from a range of social media platforms in use by the Council. Additionally, it is likely that partners would be prepared to also use their social media activities to promote the availability of the Family Information Service;
 - c) Telephone** - there are already two single points of contact in place for Children’s Social Services and Community Care services respectively. The Family Information Service is already accessible to these teams. Initial awareness raising and training can be focused upon team members to ensure that they are fully familiar with the system and can also contribute to the system developments. More broadly, the Council’s Corporate Contact Centre team can be trained in the use of the system and to signpost as appropriate to the system;
 - d) Face to Face** – staff and volunteers who are working directly with service users and carers will need to be trained/briefed in the purpose of the system. Additionally, the Council’s buildings which are open to the public will need to be provided with relevant public information materials that promote the system. These building will include the civic centres, as well as other public buildings such as libraries. Partner agencies will also be encouraged to promote the system;

- e) **Outreach** - Local Area Co-ordinators, Communities First workers and others involved in community development and support work will be trained/briefed in the purpose of the system and encouraged to use it in their day to day work within communities and to promote awareness of the system within their own networks. In particular, the Council will work with its eight strategic third sector partners to promote awareness of the system within the communities of the county borough; and
- f) **Posters and Publications** – the Council has a range of communications materials that it publishes on a routine and ad hoc basis. Opportunities will be taken to advertise and promote the system through the relevant channels.

Management Information

- 20. Both Info-engine and the Family Information System enable basic management information reports to be drawn from the system. There are no national indicators proposed for the information element of the service at the time of writing this report, however, there is an extensive range of data that can be made available which will be invaluable in determining how the service will develop over time.

Governance

- 21. It will be seen from the above, that the creation of an information resource that describes the range of services and support available across the communities of Neath Port Talbot has an application beyond the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014. There are already robust arrangements in place to manage the Family Information Services. Should the proposals in this paper be acceptable then the arrangements to govern the development of the Family Information Service will need to be adjusted to ensure that all relevant stakeholders are able to contribute to the development of the Family Information Service and that the information gathered about use informs service development and commissioning arrangements.

Financial Impact

- 22. The redevelopment of the Family Information Service system will be undertaken in-house at no additional financial cost.

23. Briefings and training will be delivered by the Council's Training team at no additional financial cost.
24. There will be a modest cost in producing posters and other materials to support the work but this can be contained within existing budgets.
25. Depending on the procedures adopted for managing the information resource, there may be a requirement for additional administrative support for the Family Information Service team and this is will be examined as part of the action plan.

Equality Impact Assessment

26. The Act requires the design and delivery of the Information, Advice and Assistance Service to cater for people with protected characteristics and consequently these proposals will have a positive impact on the people with protected characteristics.

Workforce Impacts

27. There is a need to equip the existing workforce within Social Services, the wider Council workforce and external partners with knowledge of the system and the skills to use it to greatest effect. The work needed to achieve this is set out in the proposed action plan.

Legal Powers

28. The proposals discharge duties placed upon the Council under s17 of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014.

Risk Management

29. There is a risk of adverse inspection outcomes and of challenge by citizens if the Council does not plan to meet the requirements within the Act to establish an Information, Advice and Assistance Service.
30. There is a risk of duplication and inefficient use of public resources if the design of the Information, Advice and Assistance Service does not take account of the current landscape of similar systems.
31. There is a risk that citizens and front line staff will find it difficult to access the information they require to promote the well-being of people who need care and support, carers and to prevent people

from needing care and support if the existing system landscape is incoherent.

32. There is a risk that inadequate resource will be in place to maintain the information assets once they are created and therefore it will be important to assess the ongoing support capacity needed as part of implementation.

Consultation

33. There is no requirement under the Constitution for external consultation on this item.

Recommendations

34. That the Family Information Service system is developed to help meet the requirement to establish an Information, Advice and Assistance Service under s17 of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014.
35. That subject to agreement to 19 above, the Cabinet Board endorses the Action Plan at Appendix 1.

Reasons for Proposed Decision

36. To authorise officers to develop the existing Family Information Service system to meet the requirements of s17 of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 and to authorise officers to take a range of other actions identified as necessary to comply with the statutory code of practice published by Welsh Government to aid implementation of the Act.

Implementation of Decision

37. After the three day call in period.

Appendices

38. Action Plan to establish the Family Information Service system as the basis of the Council's Information, Advice and Assistance Service.

List of Background Papers

39. Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014
40. Welsh Government, Part 2 – Code of Practice and guidance on the exercise of social services functions and partnership arrangements in relation to part 2 (General Functions) of the Social Service and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014

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