

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

Members Present:

13 July 2023

Chairperson: Councillor C.Galsworthy

Vice Chairperson: Councillor H.C.Clarke

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

Officers In Attendance R Davies, J.Hodges, C.Howard, A.Jarrett, A.J.Thomas, K.Warren, A.Bradshaw, S.Bradshaw, L.Morris, E.O'Brien, S.Waite, C.Jones, C.Frey-Davies, Ms.S.Jenkins, N.Maund, N.Jones, H.Short, V.Smith, M.Weaver, E.Gibbs, E.Bennett, S.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 and 10 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 8th June 2023 were approved as a true and accurate record.

4. **Pre-Decision Scrutiny**

Neath Port Talbot Adult Social Care Strategy 2023 - 2026

The Head of Adult Services delivered a presentation outlining the pressures faced by the directorate and highlighted why and how Neath Port Talbot will need to work differently going forward.

Members welcomed the content of the presentation but commented that transport could present an issue when promoting social networks and self-management; members questioned if community transport was being considered as part of the future plans? Officers responded that the plans are only achievable if they are part of a council wide approach. When discussing the preventative agenda, solutions need to be broader than just through the Social Services directorate.

With reference to the mention of sensory adaptations in the report, members felt that in order to reach more people the sensory adaptation service needed further promotion to GPs; members questioned if there are there are any plans to work more closely with Health Care services to promote this service? Officers responded that the three staff in the Sensory Team are attached to the Community Occupational Therapy Team, working with hearing and visual impairments. The experienced team work closely with health services, but further work can be undertaken to improve on this. Officers advised there is a Welsh Government initiative working alongside Health Board services to improve sensory impairment services.

Members asked how the service will measure results and report back to the committee going forward. Officers responded that costed business cases have been developed for every scheme and these will be presented to committee when appropriate. Results will be measured as the schemes progress and any required information will be provided, as requested.

Members queried the timeline for community hubs and raised concern that any potential suitable empty buildings may fall into disrepair if the timeline was too great. Officers confirmed that this issue has been raised with Cabinet and Corporate Directors; there is presently regional and council capital money available and any plans need to progress quickly to take advantage of this funding. Work will be carried out over the summer with decisions starting to be made in late August/ early September. Some plans need to progress

imminently but other potential schemes such as the Older Person Village and Gelligron may need to be discussed over a longer timeframe.

Following scrutiny, the recommendation was supported to Cabinet Board.

Draft Housing and Homelessness Strategic Plan 2023-26

The Head of Housing and Communities delivered a presentation on the draft Housing and Homelessness Strategic Plan 2023-2026, reiterating that there is currently a high degree of pressure on the housing system and the scale of change required cannot be underestimated.

Members thanked the officer for the interesting presentation and queried if consideration had been given to a model where the council purchased houses where adaptations were not possible and re-homing residents in adapted social housing as a means of increasing the council housing stock. The officer advised that this approach had not been considered but could be discussed further outside of the meeting to explore the feasibility.

Members queried the scheme enabling the authority to purchase empty properties to bring them back into use. The officer confirmed that previously the authority had bought a number of empty properties, as mentioned in the plan, and this opportunity will be explored further going forward. Currently, the Environmental Health team are mapping the location of empty properties; certain funding streams are available through the Welsh Government to eradicate homelessness and this is one work stream that Neath Port Talbot are investigating.

Members asked if Neath Port Talbot had links with private developers. The officer confirmed that currently the relationship with private developers is not the same as the relationship with registered social landlords but it is hoped that this may be developed in the future. The officer advised a meeting with planning had recently been held to establish how links to the planning process could be developed, to investigate how the level of affordable housing could be increased when proposals for new developments are submitted. There is also work ongoing to look at private landlord forums to help

stimulate the market and give developers more information so they are aware of local needs

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Community Safety thanked the officer for the presentation and scrutiny committee members for their attention to the report. It was noted that this is the first Housing and Homelessness Strategic plan of its kind for Neath Port Talbot and comes at a time of unprecedented pressures. The Cabinet Member expressed appreciation for the hard work of the housing teams and for coming together in a committed way. He outlined that the housing crisis is presenting a number key challenges for officers, staff, elected members and housing association partners. Developing the housing plan will require a whole council approach and this new strategy will give a framework to address the challenges.

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 Services gave a presentation on the NPT Children and Young People Social Care Strategic Plan 2023 – 2026.

Members expressed concern over the waiting times for children with traits of neuro diverse conditions who are waiting for CAMHS and NDD Pathway appointments, the current waiting time for a CAMHS appointment is 3-6 weeks whilst the NDD pathway waiting list is 28 months. Members' questioned if children services and education were working with children affected by this issue, especially those who are on reduced timetables or facing exclusion. Members acknowledged that this is an issue across Wales and delays may affect children negatively as they transition into adulthood. The Head of Service acknowledged the concern and commented that this is a feature in many young people's history and is a nationwide issue. An ongoing meeting led by education has commenced to look at pastoral support plans and support specifically targeted for children and young people in this area. It was acknowledged that this is an issue across the council and numbers have increased; there is still development work to do in this area.

Following scrutiny, the recommendation was supported to Cabinet Board.

The Director gave a summary of the 3 presentations, Heads of Service were asked to be candid regarding the challenges faced by their services. Challenges have included; the ability to staff particular services, the increase in the amount of people who need services and the complexity of issues. Challenges are related to a Covid legacy, and it was noted that the recovery for Social Services and Housing would take some time. The Director stated that Welsh Government policies on insourcing, not for profit, new housing laws, although well placed needed appropriate funding. The next stage is for plans to be costed and brought to scrutiny and cabinet, it was noted that all directorates are facing pressures which will need to be looked at as a whole and prioritised going forward. Discussions will be needed on how statutory services will be funded going forward. The Director complimented the Heads of Service proactive approach.

The Chair thanked the Director and directorate staff for their hard work and innovative ideas in planning how to overcome challenges.

Children & Young People Services, Adult Services and Housing & Community Safety - 4th Quarter (April 2022- March 2023)
Performance Report

Members questioned the percentage of re-registrations for children on the child protection register and asked how could the service be confident that children are not being de-registered too quickly? Members also requested an explanation of the system where referrals are made which don't meet the child protection threshold.

The Head of Childrens Services responded that much work has been carried out on the child protection data, and regular strategic and operational meetings are held with team managers, social workers and partners. It was noted that the numbers are low but when they are presented in a percentage format the figures appears higher. The Head of Service advised there is rigour in the system. Referrals of previously registered cases are considered within 24 hours and a decision would be made by the team manager in conjunction with partners. The decision to re-register a child is a multi-agency decision and the opportunity is used to understand why they have come back on the register and the learning is fed back into the system. The Head of Service was confident that the right mechanisms and systems are in place to monitor and learn from cases. Work on re-

registration has been presented to members previously and it was agreed that this work would be re-circulated.

Members questioned the figures for safeguarding on page 262 of the report, of the 1392 reported allegations of abuse, only 271 were necessary of enquiry and members asked for an explanation on how these decisions are made. Officers confirmed that the referral format is set up to receive early intervention referrals through to safeguarding. In the first 24 hours following a referral, enquiries are undertaken with other professionals, families and significant others to build a fuller picture and following these enquiries a decision is made on how to proceed. This may be under section 47 (children) or section 126 (adults) where the referral requires more investigation to understand the information presented. It was clarified that although not all cases warrant safeguarding procedures, there are other strands of work that may take place following referrals such as intervention prevention, Team around the Family (TAF) or Care and Support.

Following scrutiny, the report was noted.

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

This item was noted.

6. **Urgent Items**

There were none.

7. **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.

8. **Asylum Dispersal and Refugee Settlement**

Following scrutiny, the report was noted.

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

There were no items scrutinised.

CHAIRPERSON