

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

**Members Present:**

**16 November 2023**

**Chairperson:** Councillor C.Galsworthy

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

**Councillors:** O.S.Davies, S.E.Freeguard, J.Jones, A.Lodwig, P.D.Richards and D.Whitelock

**Officers In Attendance** R.Davies, J.Hodges, C.Howard, A.Thomas, K.Warren, S.Waite, N.Aleksanyan, A.Davies, C.Frey-Davies, D.Harding, S.Jenkins, C.Matthews, N.Jones, E.O'Brien, T.Owen, G. Powell, M.Selby, H.Short, S.Jones, C.Crocker, A.Evans, M.Weaver and P.Chivers

**Cabinet Invitees:** Councillors J.Hale and S.Harris

**Observers** Councillor Suzanne Paddison  
Julie Heal – Care Inspectorate Wales

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1. **Chair's Announcements**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest received.

3. **Minutes of Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 21<sup>st</sup> September 2023 were approved as a true and accurate record.

4. **Adult Services Prevention, Early Intervention and Community Services Progress Update Report**

The Principal Officer for Community Support Services and Early Intervention provided an overview of the work undertaken by the team as contained in the report.

The Chair extended a thank you to the team and commented that in addition to the positive feedback it would also be useful to receive examples of difficulties faced by the service.

Members noted the report.

5. **Pre-Decision Scrutiny**

It was confirmed that the committee would be scrutinising items 7, 8, 10, 11, 14, 15 and 16 from the Cabinet Board Agenda.

Permission to provide information on the 'The Transformation Programme - The Alliance Outline Business Case' (Pages 11 - 76)

The Head of Housing and Communities provided an overview of the report contained in the agenda pack.

Members complimented officers on the report and referred to page 14 - Valleys Community Impacts. Members asked for an update on the provision of substance treatment support; the report states this provision requires improvement. Members also referred to pages 19 and 22 of the report and questioned why there was a three year gap between the agreement for a joint approach with Public Health and the start of the programme.

The Head of Housing and Communities responded that the Western Bay Area Planning Board for Substance Misuse (APB) and the Public Service Board (PSB) had made a commitment to reduce drug related deaths and harms but delays had occurred due to the pandemic. A new staff member has been appointed and this work can now be prioritised.

The Substance Use Transformation Programme Manager confirmed that despite a number of delays, there has also been positive work undertaken in progressing some of the intended outcomes of the

programme. The Programme Managers remit is to bring together a range of collaborative services to deliver the objectives at pace as there is continuing harm across communities.

Following scrutiny, members supported the recommendations to Cabinet Board.

Neath Port Talbot Youth Justice and Early Intervention Draft Youth Justice Plan 2023-2024 (Pages 77 - 156)

Officers provided an overview of the report contained within the agenda pack.

Members referred to page 91 and questioned how the £82 a week Health Authority contribution is set.

Officers confirmed that the Health Authority determined the contribution but were under no obligation to contribute. As well as the financial contribution the Health Authority provide access to Speech and Language Therapists and CAHMS Nurse.

Members referred to Page 143 of the report; and asked for further explanation in relation to items 9.1 & 10.1.

Officers confirmed items 9.1 and 10.1 related to an outdated plan which has since been addressed and updated.

The Cabinet Member for Children and Family Services thanked staff for their work in helping young people to turn their lives around and commented on the range of activities provided by the service. It is helpful for young people to hear of real life crimes which can help them to reflect on their own lives.

The Chair thanked staff for hosting a recent visit for scrutiny committee members to Base 15; the committee would like to arrange future visits to view activities. The Chair questioned if staff and agency partners received training by Outside or from any other providers on neuro-diverse conditions.

Officers confirmed that the workforce is a trauma informed workforce and training is available to all staff. Staff working with young people with neuro-divergent difficulties will have undertaken appropriate training. It was noted that all young people entering the service,

receive a Speech and Language screening assessment and interventions and resource are available.

Members questioned the low number of referrals received from schools compared to social services and police, considering the high number of school exclusions reported.

Officers' confirmed that an Education Training and Employment worker had been employed to fill a vacant post. Joint work is being carried out with schools and teams work closely in relation to risk management. It was noted that work is also needed alongside Childrens Services. Strategies are being developed to reduce exclusions, which will include providing alternative provision where children can work on a reduced timetable and avoid exclusion.

Members referenced the amount of young people between the ages of 13-15 waiting for diagnosis for neuro-diverse conditions, and questioned if waiting times were an issue.

Officers confirmed that there were issues with waiting times for the diagnosis of ASD and neuro-diverse conditions. The speech and language assessments are identifying communication difficulties which may not have previously been identified by schools; this is being highlighted as a concern going forward.

Members referred to page 120 of the report and questioned if, given the backlog in the justice system, re-offending rates were accurate.

Officers confirmed the re-offending rates were calculated by the Youth Justice Board, via the police and are calculated on a 12 month figure but are 18 month behind in order to capture any re-offending data. It was noted that the Director of Social Services Housing and Community Safety has raised concern with the courts regarding the lengthy time young people have been held on remand before trial. This situation has lessened since the Covid pandemic ended but concerns remain about CPS charge timescales. Concern is held that young people may receive trial as an adult and not as a young person.

Members enquired whether the reports on reduced timetables come to this committee or to the Education Skills and Wellbeing Cabinet Board.

Officers confirmed that the reduced timetables figures are part of the reports brought to Social Services Housing and Community Safety Cabinet Board and are also scrutinised by the management board. The report is in a prescribed format to ensure consistency across the board. Officers can provide figures for members.

Members questioned why young people were not being diagnosed through the education system.

Officers responded that there are a combination of factors within health and education and joint work is ongoing. Issues include a lack of speech and language assessments, and lengthy waiting times for seeking medical expertise around ASD. It was noted that evidence was presented to the Senedd earlier this year and Neath Port Talbot was recognised as an example of good practice in terms of speech and language provision within youth justice.

The Chair advised members that the Neuro-diverse Strategy Plan will be coming to committee shortly and a request will be made for ASD leads from Education to attend.

Following scrutiny, members supported the recommendations to Cabinet Board.

#### Social Services Children and Young Peoples Single Point of Contact (SPOC) (Pages 167 - 174)

Officers outlined the details of the report and the current pressures faced by the SPOC team and how the pressures are managed.

Members enquired on the average wait time for incoming calls to SPOC.

Officers advised members that calls are answered by contact centre staff within Adult Services, and figures are not available presently. A plan is in place to take phone calls within children's services, but an implementation date has not been agreed. Further data can be provided at the next scrutiny committee meeting. It was noted that recruitment difficulties relate to Social Workers and not staff within the contact centre.

Members questioned the average wait time for social worker visits following a referral.

Officers confirmed that responses were made on a case by case basis but in all cases an initial contact was made within 24 hours. Safeguarding referrals are dealt with on the same day and early intervention/prevention support is dependent on availability. No case will take longer than a week but initial contact takes place within 24 hours in all cases.

Members' questioned what was in place for senior experienced staff to recognise when staff were under pressure and asked if social workers worked longer hours whilst working from home in order to meet targets.

The Head of Children and Young Peoples Services confirmed that initially during the pandemic, front line children's social workers were able to achieve a work life balance, but this has changed as time progressed. Lessons have tried to be learnt from the pandemic to achieve the right work/life balance.

Officers confirmed that although staff faced pressures and there had been some recruitment difficulties the directorate was performing well in terms of the present market. General staff feedback is positive. Supervision is carried out every 4 weeks and a focus is made on staff wellbeing. Management operate an open door policy to support staff and noted that work pressures peak and trough.

The Cabinet Member for Children and Family Services commended the staff for their level of professionalism in this period of high pressure.

Following scrutiny, members noted the report.

Children & Young People, Adult Services and Housing & Community Safety - 2nd Quarter (April 2023 - September 2023) Performance Report (Pages 175 - 238)

Members asked for clarification relating to the procedure for residents at risk of immediate homelessness, and questioned if the system was adding to peoples anxiety. Members also asked why there was no central housing register.

The Head of Housing and Communities confirmed that a common housing register or common allocation policy was not in place across

all the registered social landlords in Neath Port Talbot. The current system was established when the housing stock was transferred to registered social landlords but work is ongoing to establish a common process so that there is one application process, this will require agreement from all registered social landlords. The Welsh Government have produced a white paper which suggests that authorities should have a common housing register.

Officers clarified the three stages to an eviction process and stated it is the applicant's choice at what point they enter temporary accommodation.

Members asked if specialised support was in place for disabled people or those on long term sick who are being made homeless as they may have specific needs.

The Head Housing and Communities advised there were a number of services that can provide support. Disabilities can be wide ranging; there are specialist services to support mental health conditions but no specific services to support those with a physical disability. However it was noted that the support offered is person centred so would focus on individual needs.

Members referred to page 184 of the agenda pack and asked when the detailed report on the LAC Review would be available.

Officers confirmed that the draft report was awaiting further clarification of some points but would be available to members shortly.

Members referred to page 219; long term sickness and staff vacancies and questioned how the long term sickness was covered.

The Head of Children and Young Peoples Services, confirmed that all statutory responsibilities are covered. For front door functions, agency staff may be used, otherwise work is covered within the team. Cover is reviewed on a weekly basis to ensure the service can meet statutory responsibilities.

Members asked if extra workloads were impacting on work in other teams.

The Head of Children and Young Peoples Service responded that staffing is not impacting on the performance of the service. The bar

has been set high and although the service is within the top three in Wales in terms of meeting statutory timeframes the team strives to improve. The nature of the work is difficult, but caseloads are within the bottom three of lowest caseloads in the country for children's services. It was noted that the quality of visits takes time, and whilst staff are flexible, without the current staffing levels staff work/life balance could be affected.

Following scrutiny, members noted the report.

6. **Committee Action Log**

Members noted the 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**

**Contractual Arrangements for the Prevention and Wellbeing Service (Pages 245 - 286)**

Following scrutiny, the recommendations were supported to Cabinet Board.

**Hillside Redesign Report (Pages 287 - 324)**



Following scrutiny, the recommendations were supported to Cabinet Board.

**The Regulated Service (Service Providers and Responsible Individuals) (Wales) Regulations 2017 and Hillside Secure Children's Home Update (Pages 325 - 348)**

Following scrutiny, the report was noted.

**Cllr. C Galsworthy  
CHAIRPERSON**

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