
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REPORT

Date Written	26 th February 2021
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Service Area	Social Services
Committee Date	16 th March 2021

To: Chair, Ladies and Gentlemen

Social Services Recovery, Transformation and Improvement Plan Update

1.0 SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

1.1 Scrutiny members have requested the Chief Officer of Social Services provide a position statement on the Social Services Recovery, Transformation and Improvement Plan along with any details of issues/barriers experienced and how these have been overcome. The report is also to identify the key areas for development and improvement for 2021/22.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION

2.1 That the scrutiny committee discusses and comments on the issues set out in the report.

3.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

3.1 The last year has had a significant impact on Health and Social Care. The Coronavirus (Covid-19) has had a devastating impact on many people's lives. The need to lockdown for periods of time, self-isolation and shielding have had a serious impact on well-being and quality of life in local communities.

3.2 In the past year we have worked hard to ensure that the public still receive a service when required. Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, along with partners from other public bodies, and third and independent sectors, have continued to provide targeted front-line responses to the constantly changing situation that the Coronavirus pandemic has presented. We have worked within the guidance

provided by Welsh Government and the Council has continued to deliver core services with a shared commitment to work in partnership. Where required we have worked in different ways to meet emerging and existing needs.

- 3.3 The virus did not alter Social Services duties to vulnerable children or adults. Safeguarding has remained a priority throughout the past year. Managers and staff have worked closely together to ensure that we have discharged our duties to the public, whilst promoting both public and staff safety.
- 3.4 Restrictions have been in place now for twelve months and services have had to adapt to these changes in guidance and legislation. It is fair to say that the pandemic has put Social Care provision under strain in the past months. We are also mindful of future additional pressures and demands once lockdown restrictions start to lift. This is something we need to plan for now.

4.0 WHERE WE WERE

- 4.1 It is safe to say that Safeguarding has always been a priority for Social Services. It is imperative that we protect the most vulnerable Adults and Children in our community.
- 4.2 Prior to the Pandemic in March 2020, Social Services was embarking on a journey of change and improvement. The introduction of the Social Services and Wellbeing Act (Wales) 2014 had been embedded into the way we were working, ensuring that Social Care were being more inclusive with the people they serve and ensuring that we were improving outcomes for each individual we worked with.
- 4.3 We had outlined improvement plans within the Corporate Plan, the Social Services Annual Report and within the Council's Improvement Plan.

5.0 WHERE WE ARE NOW

- 5.1 This year has seen Social Services having to react to situations as they arise. There are some areas of the Improvement Plan that we have been able to take forward, but others where there has been delay due to the Pandemic. (I will outline the plan below).
- 5.2 Regional working ceased for a significant period and recommenced prior to Christmas 2020, and there was significant delay in some of the transformation and regional work as a result of the Pandemic.
- 5.3 Welsh Government supported Local Authorities with hardship funding, which has greatly assisted our care homes and allowed us to continue to offer a good service to all, with no financial penalty. It is important to note that whilst it is positive that Local Authorities have been able to access support of this nature, there have been costs incurred within Social Services that cannot be recuperated via hardship funding.
- 5.4 Numbers of staff having to isolate or testing positive for Covid-19 has reduced in recent weeks, although twice weekly testing is being introduced across the service to continue to offer safe care and support to people when they need it.

- 5.5 Referrals across Adult's and Children's Services have started to increase. Adult Services are supporting individuals to be discharged from hospital in a timely manner with packages of support or being placed in a care home setting if required. Children's Services has started to see pre-Pandemic levels of referrals being received, which are primarily complex child protection concerns. As schools return full-time in the coming weeks we expect to see further increases, it is also reasonable to assume that increases in partner agencies delivering services via face-to-face means will influence an increase in referrals. It is anticipated that due to the impact of restrictions on individual's mental health and wellbeing, in conjunction with changes in preventative services delivery, that referral rates are likely to exceed pre-Covid-19 levels.
- 5.6 Planning is now being focussed on recovery and how we deal with extra demand in Social Care in the future. This will require a whole Council approach.

6.0 WHERE WE WANT TO BE

- 6.1 We want to provide an excellent service to the public of Merthyr Tydfil.
- 6.2 We wish to be resilient in future and ensure we are in a stable position financially to continue to provide the service that people need, when they need it.
- 6.3 We wish to continue to improve our services and change and adapt when required. We are aware that prevention work continues to need to be addressed longer term in both Adult's and Children's Services.
- 6.4 Partnership working is important, so we need to build on the positive partnership working that has taken place over the past 12 months.

7.0 WHAT WE NEED TO DO NEXT

- 7.1 As we look to recover from the Pandemic then we need to address all aspects of the Recovery, Transformation and Improvement Plan. We need to revisit timescales and ensure we get back on track addressing all areas of the Plan.
- 7.2 There will also be specific projects to look at the rising demand of cases we expect in coming weeks. Task and Finish groups are being set up to look at this corporately and with our partners to ensure we can meet the growing demand.
- 7.3 We are recruiting an extra Social Worker into the Adult Mental Health Team to help with the rise in cases within this area.
- 7.4 A new Principal Officer in Adult Services is being recruited to also assist in the capacity of this area. The Pandemic has highlighted the need for extra resources in Adult Services.
- 7.5 The Head of Children Services, in January 2021, has taken responsibility for Families First and is now looking to improve the area of preventative work, working closely with Education colleagues.

8.0 RECOVERY, TRANSFORMATION AND IMPROVEMENT PLAN

- 8.1 The Social Services element of the RTI plan is focussed on improving resilience. This will be the focus of the areas for development and improvement in 2021/22. It is broken down into three areas:
- Recovery;
 - Resources and Service Improvement; and
 - Resilience and Sustainability.
- 8.2 On reviewing the plan recently in light of the Pandemic and looking to make progress, I would like to highlight the following:

Recovery

- Business Continuity plans in place.
- Report presented to Scrutiny in September 2020 detailing the changes in services and how contact and safeguarding would be maintained due to the Pandemic. Good plans in place.
- Plans developed during the first lockdown have ensured continuity of approach.
- Strong Regional working around the Pandemic.
- All service areas have been reviewed. Some new/temporary working practices in place eg. Day Services.
- Redeployment of staff where needed.

Resources and Service Improvement

- This area includes cultural change and service specific improvements. All projects underway: eg. Advocacy, support for Carers, Extra Care Housing, services for people with Dementia, Foster Care recruitment, Children Looked After numbers and strategy, Care Leavers strategy, Transition.
- Good cross directorate working where relevant.
- Work is underway with corporate colleagues to ensure the culture in Social Services aligns to the corporate ways of working, eg. agile working practices, digital applications and systems.

Resilience and sustainability

- Approval to expand capacity in key areas:
 - Permanent appointment to Head of Children's Services.
 - Recruitment underway for additional Principal Officer in Adult Services.
 - Additional capacity in adult safeguarding (MASH).
 - Increase in resources related to legislative changes to Additional Learning needs (jointly with the Learning Directorate).
 - Families First function moved into the Social Services Directorate (from the Learning Directorate) which ensures preventative and statutory services work together.
- Business Cases in development to explore:
 - Capacity in Mental Health Services (extra social worker).

- Possible change to the model of IRO contracted provision.
- Possible remodelling of Children’s residential provision.
- Regular meetings established with the Third Sector to improve the range of community-based support available.
- Regional groups were re-established following the first lockdown. However, progress has been hampered in this area as Regional work is concentrated on managing priorities relating to the Pandemic, eg. mass testing, vaccinations, service procedures etc.
- We have recruited an additional Senior Social Work Practitioner to strengthen the capacity for safeguarding at the front door.

8.3 In relation to resilience in Social Services, overarching priorities will be to manage demand, performance and budget. We will continue to monitor and review Children Looked After figures as this has had a huge impact on the budget previously. We will also monitor and review the high demands on Adult Services eg. discharges from hospital and an increase in Learning Disability Placements breaking down.

8.4 Covid-19 will be a big part of our day-to-day work for some time and we need to continue being mindful of this as we move forward.

9.0 CONTRIBUTION TO WELLBEING OBJECTIVES

9.1 This report specifically links to the Living Well objective within the Council’s Corporate Wellbeing Plan: People are empowered to live independently within their communities, where they are safe and enjoy good physical and mental health.

9.2 Through the continued provision of services through the Pandemic we will also be able to demonstrate the team’s contribution to support progress against other wellbeing objectives set down by the Council in focus in the Corporate Wellbeing Plan. That is:

- Best Start in Life – children and young people get the best start to life and are equipped with the skills they need to be successful learners and confident individuals.

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COUNCILLOR CHRIS DAVIES
CABINET MEMBER FOR
SOCIAL SERVICES

BACKGROUND PAPERS		
Title of Document(s)	Document(s) Date	Document Location
Does the report contain any issue that may impact the Council’s Constitution?		No