

## **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REPORT**

Date Written	12 <sup>th</sup> August 2021
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Service Area	Social Services
Committee Date	7 <sup>th</sup> September 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.

## **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 Coronavirus (Covid-19) has had a devastating impact on many people's lives in the past 18 months, and it's had significant impact on Health and Social Care. 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. The focus for much of the work in the initial lockdowns was about 'keeping people safe' and dealing with safeguarding concerns. Some of the areas of transformation and improvement were delayed due to the need to refocus resources in other areas for a short period of time. Within the last six months we have been able to consider the recovery, transformation and improvement of the service, and review the plans we had put in place.

- 3.2 Prior to the outbreak of Covid-19 Merthyr Tydfil was working with the 'Improvement Board' to consider areas of Transformation and Improvement. Social Services already had plans in place to look at future service delivery and were in the process of drawing up plans to take the service forward. Some areas we have been able to progress, but others had been delayed due to the pandemic, which as we have moved out of restrictions, we have started to address. We are now focussing on recovery from the pandemic. We have been able to make positive progress in some areas with some projects being completed.
- 3.3 Over the past year to eighteen months 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.
- 3.4 It is important to highlight that the virus did not alter Social Services duties to vulnerable children or adults. Safeguarding has remained a priority throughout. 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.
- 3.5 Restrictions have been in place now for over eighteen 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 continue to be mindful of future additional pressures and demands that are expected due to changes in restrictions, and these areas are being considered within the Recovery Plan. One of the key areas is the increase in Mental Health issues across various age groups.

#### **4.0 RECOVERY, TRANSFORMATION AND IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

- 4.1 As outlined in previous scrutiny reports 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.
- 4.2 Covid-19 hasn't gone away and will continue to be part of our day-to-day work for some time and we need to continue being mindful of this as we move forward. The vaccination programme has had a huge success, and the majority of social care staff within Merthyr Tydfil have now been doubly vaccinated. As the guidance has now altered regards the requirement to isolate if you have received the double vaccine, this will have a positive impact on the availability of the workforce.

- 4.3 In relation to resilience in Social Services, overarching priorities will be to manage demand, performance and the 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. However, we are conscious that we are seeing more complex cases since the initial lockdown due to people being isolated for a period of time. Also, the Health Board have seen an increase in hospital admissions, not necessarily COVID related but for other medical reasons, which impacts on the flow of patients and puts more pressure on social care to find appropriate placements and care packages in a timely manner.

## **5.0 WHERE WE WERE**

- 5.1 Safeguarding has always remained a priority for Social Services. It is imperative that we protect the most vulnerable Adults and Children in our community.
- 5.2 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.
- 5.3 We had outlined improvement plans within the Corporate Plan, the Social Services Director's Annual Report and within the Council's Improvement Plan. However as outlined above, there are some areas of the Improvement Plan that we have been able to take forward, but others where there has been a delay due to the Pandemic.
- 5.4 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.
- 5.5 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.
- 5.6 There were high numbers of staff having to isolate or testing positive for Covid-19 in the first six months of the pandemic, which impacted greatly on service delivery and saw an increase in reliance on agency staff.

## **6.0 WHERE WE ARE NOW**

- 6.1 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, and also working with partners. Regional Working has recommenced and clear priorities set for children and adult services boards. There are close links being made with the Health Board, with the Chief Officer of Social Services being invited to the health

Integrated Local Group (ILG) for Merthyr Tydfil and Cynon areas, and a Health Summit being held involving Chief Executives and Directors across all 3 Local Authorities. Clear regional goals and priorities were set, which link with local recovery plans.

- 6.2 The Hardship funding continued for Quarter 1 of this financial year and there has been regular dialogue with Welsh Government about market stability within the care home sector. Advice from Welsh Government is that the Hardship fund will continue until March 2022, but that funding will be tapered off from September. There are a number of care homes within Merthyr Tydfil who have voids at present, and we are working with health colleagues to ensure timely assessments of patients who need placements are completed, so we can place in the appropriate setting.
- 6.3 New guidance was issued in August 2021 around the expectations for future requirements to isolate if contact has been made with someone COVID positive. We had already started to see numbers of staff having to isolate reducing. This new guidance will have a further impact on this as if you have received both vaccines then you don't need to isolate unless you have symptoms, but there is a requirement to test yourself within the week of the contact on two occasions. Within the care home setting this would need to be risk assessed due to the vulnerability of the people being cared for. In reality people will continue to work from home where they can, wear appropriate PPE at all times and regularly test themselves.
- 6.4 In recent weeks two of the care homes in Merthyr Tydfil were in red status, due to staff testing positive or awaiting test results. If someone tests positive then they are routinely tested again via a PCR test as there have been some cases of false positive results. Twice weekly testing continues across the service, including social work teams to continue to offer safe care and support to people when they need it.
- 6.5 We continue to see demand increasing at the 'front door'. Referrals across Adult's and Children's Services have increased with pre covid levels being seen. 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. Within Children's Services the referrals being received are of a more complex nature, although numbers are consistent with pre Covid levels.
- 6.6 In respect of the improvement plan the following table gives you an overview of the summary updates of each project line:

<b>Project</b>	<b>Original deadline</b>	<b>New deadline</b>	<b>Reasons / Comments</b>
Review, reset or renew all service models across Social Services (LCJ)	March 2021	March 2022	Impact of Covid delayed progress. Additionally, the recovery from Covid could lead to changes in service delivery which will not be evident yet.  There is regular dialogue with teams around future plans and the

			recovery element of the plan. NB. This project also links to new ways of working linked to the corporate project around agile and digital working. Deadlines for this element will be aligned to the corporate deadlines.
Review existing programmes for impact of pandemic and risk mitigation <b>(LCJ)</b>	March 2021	March 2023	<p>We know we need to think about future working in Social Services and about where the demands are. There are high level complex cases that need to be resourced, but also lower level support cases where we need to ensure we align our prevention services to have the best impact for the people we work with.</p> <p>Review of governance across the Region (since Bridgend joined) has led to new regional priorities.</p> <p>Regional priority areas identified for Children's Services over 3 years:</p> <p>Priority 1: Integrated approach to accommodation and care and support for those with complex needs. Priority 2: Integrated approach to promote emotional and physical resilience.</p> <p>Regional priority areas identified for Adult Services over 3 years:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Care Homes</li> <li>- Community Services Model review</li> <li>- Mental Health</li> <li>- Learning Disabilities</li> <li>- Carers</li> </ul>
Develop Advocacy Services <b>(AE)</b>	March 2021	May 2021	The focus has very much been around Adult Services to develop advocacy for this area. Within Children Services we commission an advocacy service. As part of the RTI plan funding has been provided to take this forward and the Advocacy plan was signed off by

			Council.
Continue to work with Housing colleagues to develop an additional extra care facility for adults <b>(AE)</b>	March 2025	No change	In progress.  Meetings continue with colleagues to develop this proposal. We know this is an area that will grow in the future. Funding was agreed at Council in recent months to consider this approach.
Launch the new service to support people with dementia in collaboration with Meaningful Care Matters <b>(AE)</b>	March 2021	March 2022	The Project had been severely hampered by Covid 19. Day Services closed for a number of months during 2020 and once reopened they were located in an unsuitable environment to undertake the project. This was due to a delay in moving a different service to a new location (also caused by Covid) which would have freed up a suitable site to undertake this work.  However, although there is still further work to do in this area. The new dementia day services at Kier Hardie opened in August 2021 (albeit with fewer numbers at present due to social distancing). The official launch will be later this year. The facility has made great improvements for our service users and will have a major impact on service delivery in the future.
Increase the number of foster carers in Merthyr Tydfil and implement the Placement Commissioning Strategy Action Plan <b>(TS)</b>	March 2021	No change	This project is complete. We will continue to strive to recruit more local carers but we have achieved all the actions in our plan.
Analyse and understand our children looked after cohort (CLA) and continue implementation of the CLA strategy and closer to home project <b>(TS)</b>	March 2021	No change	This project is complete. We understand the data around our CLA and work hard to achieve the goals we set for the closer to home project and the CLA strategy.
Implement the action plan for the Care	March 2021	No change	All actions have been completed so the project is complete.

Leavers Strategy including Pathway to Work <b>(TS)</b>			
Work with partners in the council and the Third Sector to finalise revised transition arrangements <b>(TS)</b>	March 2021	No change	All actions completed so the project is complete.
Develop further support for carers <b>(AE)</b>	March 2022	No change	In progress.  We have successfully recruited to the carers post and this is having a good impact on the service area. Also, funding has been agreed as part of the RTI plan to assist in this area.
Develop a cultural change programme across Social Services that fits with the wider council transformation <b>(LCJ)</b>	March 2022	Need to align timescales to corporate project - JB	This project is linked to the corporate project around agile and digital working. Deadlines for this element will be aligned to the corporate deadlines.
Work with the Third Sector and social enterprise organisations to improve the range of community-based support available <b>(AE)</b>	March 2022	No change	In progress.  We meet regularly now with the CEO of VAMT to discuss these issues. There is also a piece of work underway with Lloyds bringing all partners together to consider support in this area.
Agree with partners how we need to commission accommodation services in the future that reflects the needs of the people living here <b>(AE)</b>	March 2023	No change	In progress.  There is regional work being undertaken in this area, we are looking to commission a provider to carry out a market stability exercise to help scope future need.
Strengthen MTCBC's contribution to, and benefits from, working within the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Regional Partnership <b>(AE)</b>	March 2023	No change	In progress.  Relationships within the partnership are much stronger than they have been. The cabinet member for social services in Merthyr Tydfil sits on the RPB. I chair the children's board. Both Heads of service chair

6.7 As outlined above four of these projects have now been completed - details of which were shared at last scrutiny meeting:

- Increase the number of foster carers in Merthyr Tydfil and implement the Placement Commissioning Strategy Action Plan.
- Analyse and understand our children looked after cohort (CLA) and continue implementation of the CLA strategy and closer to home project.
- Work with partners in the council and the Third Sector to finalise revised transition arrangements.
- Implement the action plan for the Care Leavers Strategy including Pathway to Work.

## **7.0 WHERE WE WANT TO BE**

7.1 We want to provide an excellent service to the public of Merthyr Tydfil.

7.2 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.

7.3 We wish to continue to improve our services and change and adapt when required. We need to learn from the past year and focus resources on recovery for social care.

7.4 Partnership working is important, so we need to build on the positive partnership working that has taken place over the past 18 months.

## **8.0 WHAT WE NEED TO DO NEXT**

8.1 As we continue to recover from the Pandemic then we need to address all aspects of the Recovery, Transformation and Improvement Plan. We are back on track with all areas of the plan and need to continue on the improvement journey.

8.2 Continue to work with our partners across Cwm Taf Morgannwg. Regional working has been re-established since December 2020 with clear priorities being set for Children and Adult Services.

8.3 Ensure we support staff in recovering from the pandemic. Staff are tired and it's been a tough year/18 months, we need to ensure they receive support. Regular testing for Covid-19 is available across the service, vaccines have been rolled out and there has been excellent take up of this. HR and Care First have offered support around Counselling for staff.

8.4 The additional resources identified from the capacity exercise have now been put in place and posts recruited to. Council agreed in July extra resources through the RTI plan for an extra team manager, which is currently out to advert for Family Support Team and a Quality Assurance post. We are just finalising the Job Description for the latter post.



8.5 We continue to promote the need for Early Help and Prevent work needs to be a key focus in future and not just within social care but across the whole Council, along with the third sector and Health colleagues.

## 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.

**LISA CURTIS JONES**  
**CHIEF OFFICER (SOCIAL SERVICES)**

**COUNCILLOR TONY ROGERS**  
**CABINET MEMBER FOR**  
**SOCIAL SERVICES**

<b>BACKGROUND PAPERS</b>		
<b>Title of Document(s)</b>	<b>Document(s) Date</b>	<b>Document Location</b>
<b>Does the report contain any issue that may impact the Council's Constitution?</b>		No