

**SOCIAL & HEALTH CARE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**  
**5 OCTOBER 2017**

Minutes of the meeting of the Social & Health Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held in the Delyn Committee Room, County Hall, Mold on Thursday, 5 October 2017

**PRESENT: Councillor Carol Ellis (Chair)**

Councillors: Mike Allport, Marion Bateman, Gladys Healey, Kevin Hughes, Rita Johnson, Mike Lowe, Dave Mackie, Hilary McGill, Ian Smith and David Wisinger

**SUBSTITUTES:** Councillors: David Healey (for Andy Dunbobbin) and Mike Reece (for Martin White)

**APOLOGIES:** Councillors Cindy Hinds and Andrew Holgate, and Councillor Aaron Shotton, Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance

**CONTRIBUTORS:** Councillor Christine Jones, Cabinet Member for Social Services; Chief Officer (Social Services); Senior Manager, Children and Workforce; Senior Manager, Integrated Services, Lead Adults; Senior Manager, Safeguarding and Commissioning; and Service Manager, Resources

Councillor Bernie Attridge, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing; Chief Executive; Finance Manager; and Finance Manager, Corporate Accounting & Systems (for minute number 20)

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Social & Health Care Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator and Democratic Services Officer

**18. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**19. MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting on 20 July 2017 were received.

**Matters Arising**

Minute number 10: Improvement Plan 2016/17 Outturn report - the Chief Officer referred to discussion on care homes and confirmed that the target had been reduced.

Minute number 11: Council (Improvement) Plan 2017-23 - the Senior Manager for Children & Workforce agreed to circulate the video on Adverse Childhood Experiences.

**RESOLVED:**

That the minutes be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

**20. FINANCIAL FORECAST AND STAGE ONE OF THE BUDGET 2018/19**

The Chief Executive introduced the report to set out the current financial forecast position for 2018/19 and seek views on Stage 1 of the Council Fund revenue budget proposals for the Social Services portfolio. Proposals for other portfolios would be considered by the respective Overview & Scrutiny Committees prior to submission to Cabinet in November/December. As part of the staged approach to the budget, Members had been advised that the £11.7m gap (currently projected) did not include any modelling for levels of Council Tax.

The Chief Executive did not wish to speculate on the national picture until the forthcoming announcement on the Provisional Local Government Settlement. It was not known whether any cash reduction to funding would include any reductions in specific grants, and whether additional funding for social care would apply. It was important to keep under review financial pressures for the portfolio. Members were encouraged to scrutinise the resilience statements which showed the current state of risk with services.

The Chief Officer (Social Services) gave an overview of the resilience statements. A number of service areas had been risk-assessed as 'Amber' and pressures in the care sector were affecting demand on services. Increased referrals for safeguarding, and pressures on frontline teams, had never been greater.

The Finance Manager provided information on actions taken to reduce the specific portfolio pressures along with the impact of changes in legislation and eligibility criteria. Efficiency options for the portfolio totalled £0.450m and included an increase in the domiciliary care charging cap which had been agreed annually with Welsh Government (WG).

In response to a question from the Chair, the Finance Manager advised that emerging pressures reported to Cabinet did not include social care pressures such as out of county placements (approximately £0.700m) which were subject to ongoing review.

Councillor Hilary McGuill questioned the accuracy of projected increases in inflation and was informed that these were based on the latest national intelligence.

In advising the budget timeline for 2018/19, the Finance Manager (Corporate Accounting & Systems) said that detailed analysis of the outcomes from the provisional settlement would determine outcomes linked to the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

The Chief Executive spoke about the need for forward planning to achieve many of the efficiency options. On specific pressures, although the

commitment by WG to protect the Supporting People grant was welcomed, a £0.387m pressure still remained for core services that were not eligible for grant support. Three areas for negotiation were a strong case to be made for the increase in independent sector fees to be met nationally; revenue from the Intermediate Care Fund to be ring-fenced; and an exemption from the staged increase to domiciliary care charges to maximise income in 2018/19.

The Chief Officer reported that over £8m of savings had been achieved in the portfolio over the past five years - which equated to 13% of the budget - and that this impact was reflected in the risk ratings of those services.

The Chair questioned whether resilience levels for Older People's Services should be ranked as Red to reflect risks from the predicted rise in the older population and higher demand for social care residential placements. She felt that this change would also strengthen the case for additional funding. The Chief Executive said that the resilience statements were an assessment of the current position and were subject to change. He suggested that the level could be changed to Amber to acknowledge that the service was able to meet demand at present, but could be exposed to greater risk the following year. The Chief Officer was in agreement and that this should be monitored over six months.

Councillor Bernie Attridge gave a reminder of the commitment by Cabinet to protect the three care homes owned by the Council and to look at extending one of those facilities to meet demand.

Following comments from Councillor Dave Mackie, the Chief Executive said that Amber risk ratings reflected services that were currently deliverable. However, if the areas of national budget negotiation did not lead to change and any of these budgets had to be re-reviewed then the assessed risk levels for a number of service areas could change to Red.

Councillor McGuill cited Mental Health, Early Years and Re-ablement Services as areas where investment would provide future savings in other sectors. She asked whether the proposed expansion of Marleyfield care home was at the expense of an extra care facility in Buckley. Councillor Attridge said that this was not the case as Buckley had been recognised as the location for the next extra care facility.

In response to further comments on supporting older people, the Chief Officer referred to work with providers and voluntary organisations as part of the Ageing Well agenda and Councillor Christine Jones spoke about work under the Wellbeing Strategy. She agreed to pass on the suggestion for the Older Person's Day event to be held in other parts of the county.

On the cost of care per week in Flintshire County Council homes, extra care and independent sector care homes, the Senior Manager advised that the costs were currently:-

- Independent Sector £653
- Flintshire County Council homes £641
- Extra Care £430

When asked by Councillor Kevin Hughes about the impact of budget pressures, the Chief Officer said that high standards of care were maintained and he referred to the 'Progress for Providers' training initiative and 'Escalating Concerns' process to address specific concerns about care provision. He spoke about the need for WG to recognise that support was needed to enable the Council to be fair with care providers.

During discussion on extra care provision, the Chief Executive spoke about changes to funding subsidies which had resulted in a budget pressure for the Council.

To benefit newer Council Members, it was agreed that a future meeting of the Committee would be held in one of the County's extra care facilities.

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) That the portfolio budget options be noted, with resilience levels for the Older People's Services to be changed from Green to Amber; and
- (b) That the portfolio financial pressures be noted.

**21. NATIONAL ADOPTION SERVICE AND NORTH WALES ADOPTION SERVICE ANNUAL REPORTS 2016-2017**

The Service Manager (Resources) presented the reports on national and regional adoption activities in 2016-17 along with future objectives for 2017-18. As the Council's lead officer on adoption, he highlighted the lifelong impact on all of those involved in the adoption process.

A number of key challenges and actions had been taken from the reports including the need for extensive post-adoption support to adopters of children with complex needs. The findings of the regional report indicated a low number of disrupted placements which reflected the proactive approach being taken in Flintshire.

Councillor Hilary McGuill asked if focus on the child's life pre-adoption could potentially have a detrimental impact on that individual and their adopters. The Service Manager said that evidence demonstrated that generally it was more important for children to understand their life history and that the service was committed to working with adopters to help them relate to that experience as the child matured. On the issue of adopted children wanting contact with siblings, this was a sensitive matter made more challenging by social media.

Councillor Kevin Hughes felt that the photographs used in the national report could have included a wider representation of ethnic backgrounds. The

Service Manager spoke about the progressive approach taken by the service in recognising the needs of adopted children.

In response to questions from Councillor Gladys Healey, the Service Manager explained that although there were no age restrictions on potential adopters, a number of factors were taken into consideration to meet the needs of all involved. He advised that many adopters were expressing a preference for female children under 3 years old and would provide details of children currently on the waiting list.

Councillor Marion Bateman asked about the medical history of the birth family of the child and was told that this was taken into consideration as part of the adoption process to assist with any future issues.

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) That the annual report for the National Adoption Service be noted; and
- (b) That the annual report for the North Wales Adoption Service be noted.

**22. CORPORATE PARENTING STRATEGY**

The Senior Manager (Children & Workforce) presented the report on the development of a new Corporate Parenting Strategy within the context of the Social Services & Wellbeing Act and national developments on corporate parenting.

He highlighted a Member workshop on safeguarding and corporate parenting to be held the following month and advised that there were currently 220 looked after children in Flintshire. Information generated from regional and national corporate parenting activities had been collated with feedback by looked after children and care leavers to identify six themes with underlying commitments supported by an action plan. The development of the Corporate Parenting Strategy was linked to a review of existing participation forums and the appointment of a new Participation Officer to ensure that the voices of the county's looked after children were heard.

Councillor Dave Mackie commented that the Children's Services Forum had become more child-friendly over time but felt that more engagement was needed between looked after children and elected Members. The Senior Manager explained that the review would identify the best opportunities to engage with young people and that the Council had responsibility for care leavers up to age 25. On the assessment process for kinship carers, it was noted that challenging timescales were set by the court but that one individual from each side of the child's family was considered to determine who was the most suitable in those cases. The launch of the Family Friendly Employer initiative for Flintshire County Council employees had helped to generate interest from prospective foster carers.

Following remarks by Councillor Hilary McGuill, it was explained that fostering allowances were available to meet the needs of foster children and that feedback from reviews indicated that foster carers were fulfilling their duty of care by helping with lifts to social/sporting events etc.

As a former foster carer, Councillor Kevin Hughes felt that there had not been enough support available to him at that time. The Senior Manager said that the importance of support for young people and their carers was recognised and that the Repatriation and Prevention Service (RAP) had been developed to strengthen arrangements.

Councillor Mike Allport queried the average length of time in care and was told that this was variable, depending on a number of factors. There were many routes from care and the 'When I Am Ready' initiative gave the opportunity to remain in care after 18 years of age.

Councillor Dave Wisinger asked about actions to attend to the social and economic wellbeing of looked after children. It was explained that pathway plans incorporated a range of support to help prepare the young person for the transition to adulthood, for example guidance on financial matters and allocated personal advisors.

In response to comments from the Chair, assurance was given that accommodation for care leavers was amongst the priorities however if the individual chose to leave Flintshire, they would lose that priority status.

Officers responded to a question from Councillor Mike Lowe on provisions for disabled children in care such as property adaptations and respite support at Arosfa.

When asked by Councillor Rita Johnson about criteria for selecting adopters, it was explained that many factors were considered to identify the right match.

**RESOLVED:**

That the proposed actions to develop a new Corporate Parenting Strategy be endorsed.

**23. CARE SECTOR UPDATE TO INCLUDE TOP-UP FEES AND INVEST TO SAVE CARE SECTOR SUPPORT**

The Chief Officer (Social Services) introduced a report on changes taking place within the care sector in Wales and England, and the challenges faced by the Council including the increase in third party top-up fees charged by independent sector providers. The report conveyed the importance of working with partners and influencing Welsh Government (WG) to identify solutions to stabilise the fragile care sector.

The Senior Manager (Safeguarding and Commissioning) provided background to the increase in third party top-up fees arising from a range of financial pressures for the independent care home sector. Whilst the three Council-owned care homes did not charge top-up fees, it was estimated that the majority of independent care home providers in Flintshire were applying a weekly charge of between £16.50-£60. A number of short, medium and longer term objectives had been identified to develop solutions and maximise funding opportunities to support the care sector. The findings of a review of the sustainability of 18 of the county's independent care homes was also shared.

Councillor Hilary McGuill asked about the contribution by the Welsh NHS towards individual care costs and was told this was a pre-agreed rate of £147.50. She proposed that the Committee make written representations to the Assembly Members to which the Chair agreed.

Following questions from Councillors Ian Smith and Gladys Healey, the Senior Manager detailed the application process for cases where families demonstrating they were unable to meet care costs could seek support from the Council.

The Chair referred to the predicted rise in the shortfall of residential elderly mentally infirm (EMI) beds and asked how many individuals were currently on the waiting list including those out of county, and how many people were waiting for residential care placements. The Senior Manager (Integrated Services, Lead Adults) explained that this data changed daily and that a weekly bed mapping exercise helped to capture information at that point in time. As of the day before, capacity was available in all care categories (around 3-4 placements for each) but with no flexibility on preferred location.

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) That the Committee accepts the report and recognise the immediate and longer-term challenges faced in Flintshire;
- (b) That the Committee supports the short, medium and long-term initiatives to support the care sector in Flintshire;
- (c) That the Committee supports the need for national reform in the funding of the social care sector in Wales, and endorses the position to continue to engage with Welsh Government to develop solutions as a matter of urgency; and
- (d) That the Facilitator prepare a letter to be signed by the Chair on behalf of the Committee to make representations to Assembly Members for a fairer contribution from the Welsh NHS towards care costs.

**24. ROTA VISITS**

The Facilitator advised that following the recent training sessions, all new Council Members had now been trained on rota visits.

Councillors Marion Bateman and Rita Johnson gave positive feedback on their visit to Llys Gwenffrwd and gave particular mention to Jeff Horskill and Norman who they wished to invite for a visit to County Hall. Officers noted this request and suggestions to improve car parking facilities, signage and traffic calming measures to assist vehicles accessing the care home.

Councillor Kevin Hughes said that his visit to Growing Places in Shotton had exceeded his expectations.

**RESOLVED:**

That the information be noted.

**25. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME**

In presenting the Forward Work Programme, the Facilitator advised that the next meeting would be preceded by a corporate safeguarding session. She also gave notice that the December meeting with Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB) was likely to be moved to 13 December and would notify the Committee once this had been confirmed.

In response to a query, the Chief Officer provided a brief update on the expected timescales for Flint Health Centre (where handover was anticipated to be early June 2018) and agreed to circulate the latest information to the Committee.

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme be updated accordingly; and
- (b) That the Facilitator, in consultation with the Chair of the Committee, be authorised to vary the Forward Work Programme between meetings, as the need arises.

**26. MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS IN ATTENDANCE**

There were no members of the press or public in attendance.

(The meeting started at 10am and ended at 12.20pm)

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**Chair**