

SOCIAL & HEALTH CARE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
9 FEBRUARY 2024

Minutes of the Special Social & Health Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held as a hybrid meeting on Friday 9 February 2024

PRESENT: Councillor Arnold Woolley (Chair)

Councillors: Mel Buckley, Tina Claydon, Carol Ellis, Gladys Healey, Dave Mackie, Hilary McGuill, Debbie Owen and Linda Thomas

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors Dave Hughes and Paul Johnson

SUBSTITUTION: Councillor Jason Shallcross (for Councillor Marion Bateman)

CONTRIBUTORS:

Councillor Christine Jones (Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Social Services and Wellbeing);
Chief Executive, Chief Officer (Social Services);
Senior Manager – Children’s Services
Senior Manager - Safeguarding and Commissioning;
Senior Manager Children and Workforce and Commissioning Manager
Strategic Finance Manager and Principal Accountant for Social Services

IN ATTENDANCE: Social Care & Environment Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator and Democratic Services Officers

42. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

None.

43. COUNCIL FUND BUDGET 2024/25

The Strategic Finance Manager introduced the report which provided an overview of the progress so far and reflected on the disappointing funding which was received from Welsh Government (WG). She provided an outline on the impacts on the portfolios of the Council and the proposals for Social Services which were being presented today.

The Chief Officer (Social Services) commented that the portfolio had done its part to enable the Council to obtain a balanced budget.

The Senior Manager for Children’s Services referred to the proposed efficiency proposals for Children Services which included an update on the Council’s 5 residential care properties, information on the service review of Adult and Children’s Services and the use of grant funding opportunities.

The Senior Manager for Integrated Services and Lead Adults referred to the work which had been undertaken looking at a number of areas whilst not impacting frontline services. Information was provided on the review of Adult Services, effective

in-house services keeping people out of hospital and the difficulties with regard to recruitment. An update was provided regarding Marleyfield and the approach by Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB) to increase the funding that they provided for this service. An overview of the review which had taken place with NEWCIS around the stores items purchased was given together with information on how grant funding was targeted and used differently.

The Senior Manager for Safeguarding and Commissioning provided information on how the vacancy management and recruitment challenges within frontline roles were protected. Information was provided on the reduction in the regional contribution and the work undertaken by the Regional Partnership Board and Regional collaboration team. She then referred to the Appointee and Deputyship Service charges, the work undertaken looking for efficiency savings within contracts with the third sector and young adults who attend residential college. An update was also given on Older People's Commissioning and Care Commissioning.

The Chief Officer (Social Services) explained that point 1.07 in the report provided a list of ongoing risks for the portfolio which was adversely impacted by the difficulties with recruitment and retention of social workers. He referred to the in-year Government grants and the growth in service demand for Adult and Children's Social Care.

Councillor Dave Mackie thanked officers for all the work carried out and the additional work done to address budget reductions. He referred to the section within the report around all Portfolios being asked to revisit their cost base to look again at potential ways of reducing budgets or removing cost pressures to contribute more to meeting the remaining gap, and asked if the Social Services Portfolio had set a target for further reducing budget?

In relation to the proposed charge for appointee services, Councillor Mackie asked how much would the cost be per individual and also in relation to the proposed Disability services charging for college placements, how much would the charges be?

The Senior Manager for Safeguarding and Commissioning explained that in relation to the proposed charge for appointee services, the Council had been looking at what other Local Authorities were doing across England and Wales and the proposal would be around £10/£20 per week. This was being investigated at the moment, and officers appreciated it was a sensitive topic so would require consultation with those affected and their families to make sure the charge was fair and equitable. In relation to charging for college placements, the Senior Manager advised that, from initial early work carried out, it was anticipated that this would potentially affect less than 5 people per year and would be for those new to the process and not those with existing college placements. Any proposed charges would be shared with families as part of the decision-making process.

Councillor Carol Ellis asked what the affect would be of the proposed reduction in Commissioning Care Fees? Also, in relation to Domiciliary care, what affect would officers anticipate the reduction in budget having on hospital discharges? Councillor Ellis also raised concerns around the proposed Deferral of Children's residential budget pressures and the impact this could have on the Out of County Placements budget which currently did not meet demand.

The Chief Officer (Social Services) said that, in relation to the Care Commissioning budget, the Council had a proud record in supporting its care sector partners, with the Council last year providing the highest increase of care rates across North Wales. There would be an increase, but it would not be in the order it was last year. Negotiations were sensitive and on-going.

The Senior Manager for Children's Services understood the concern around Out of County Placements but advised that the budget proposal did not mean that the Council was stopping its expansion of children's in-house residential provision. Due to challenges around recruitment, the home planned for 2024/25 would not be operational at the start of the year and therefore there would be a budget reduction for 2024/25 but this would be required as part of the 2025/26 budget. The Council continued to invest in services which would enable children to not need out of county provision in the first place, including working on a significant grant application to expand services to ensure children were safely supported without the need for out of county placements.

The Senior Manager for Integrated Services and Lead Adults said that the Council had an excellent reputation in relation to the hospital discharge service, but demand continued to increase. It was explained that by changing ways of working, speaking to patients earlier and working differently it was possible to maintain standards and reduce the budget. Having earlier referrals enabled a thorough discharge plan to be put in place with the Reablement teams involved.

In response to a question from Councillor Ellis around the increased contribution from BCUHB to Marleyfield Older People's Residential Care Home, the Senior Manager for Integrated Services and Lead Adults confirmed that this was their suggestion and therefore she was confident that this funding would be provided.

Councillor Hilary McGuill thanked officers for working on identifying budget reductions which she hoped would not affect front line services. In relation to proposed efficiencies to planned contracts with the third sector, she asked when would these be carried out and which third sector organisation would be affected? She also commented that MST and Mockingbird had saved the Council thousands and was pleased to see that this was now beginning to have a knock-on effect financially for the Council but sought reassurance on whether the Council would be able to reap back financial contributions next year?

Councillor McGuill said that she felt more assured around the proposed reduction in Commissioning Care Fees, having listened to the response from the Chief Officer that the Council would remain on par with neighbouring Local Authorities. Similarly with the proposed Disability Services charging for college placements, she felt that the charge would be on par with what other parents contributed when their children go away to college, but the introduction of this charge needed to be managed sensitively.

Councillor McGuill also commented that whilst the increased contribution from BCUHB was welcomed, this was a significantly small amount in comparison to the money the Council was saving BCUHB on an annual basis.

The Senior Manager for Safeguarding and Commissioning advised that as part of commissioning, the Council undertook a review of efficiencies of contracts and how well they were utilised. The efficiencies identified were small but by re-engineering the way services were commissioned it enabled the ones with great value to those that access them to continue. In relation to the proposal to charge for college placements, the Senior Manager advised that all placements would be financially assessed to ensure that the costs families faced were evenly distributed and that the costs were not detrimental to those most in need.

The Senior Manager for Children's Services referred to the continued positive impact of MST and Mockingbird and explained how the benefits were being seen in Education and Schools with an increase in children and young people presenting with complex and challenging behaviour and needs. The success of the MST service had seen 91% of children continue to remain at home. The service was seen as cost avoidance rather than a saving but was really important. Information was also provided on the 3 Mockingbird hubs which had been inspected by CRW fostering services which had identified the positive impact that this had on children in fostering care.

Councillor Gladys Healey thanked officers for the report. She said that mental health issues in children was increasing and said that she would not like to see reductions to funding for mental health services for children. She also agreed with increasing in-house support to children who need out of county placement and again would not like to see further budget reductions in out of county placements.

Councillor Healey referred to Domiciliary Care and asked had the Council looked at pay in Wrexham which was higher than in Flintshire.

The Senior Manager for Children's Services explained how the early intensive timely support for children and parents/families with mental health problems was very important. He spoke about the Council's continued investment in its own services in relation to reducing the budget pressure around out of county placements.

The Chief Officer advised that there was no national agreement with regard to care worker pay, which was why pay differed across Counties.

Councillor McGuill referred to the Register of children who were not in education and asked if this was shared with Social Services. The Senior Manager for Children's Services commented that some children were at home because of parental choice and that some had lost their school placements. The service was committed to working together collaboratively to understand behaviours and trigger points to keep pupils in schools with CAMHS support. There were a growing number of exclusions which meant that this was more important. Education was a strong indicator and appropriate information and intelligence was shared with regard to a family.

Councillor Healey asked if the portfolio worked with the home-schooling officer. The Senior Manager said that he was not aware of this joint working but explained that this was reported to the joint meeting with Education Youth & Culture Overview & Scrutiny Committee. The Committee wrote to WG raising concerns around the increased number of children who were electing home education. The Authority had to work within the legislative powers it had.

The recommendation within the report was moved and seconded by Councillors Dave Mackie and Gladys Healey.

RESOLVED:

That the Social Services portfolio's options to reduce budgets be noted.

44. STATUTORY AND NON-STATUTORY SERVICES - SOCIAL SERVICES

Introducing the report the Chief Officer (Social Services) explained the purpose was to identify which services were statutory and non-statutory as there was no national agreement in place. Point 1.01 of the report outlined the various legislations in place for Social Services with the Social Services & Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 being the primary legislation for the portfolio. Point 1.04 of the report highlighted that the vast majority of the services provided were statutory with the Learning Disabilities Transformation Fund, Flying Start and Vacancy Management the three which were non-statutory.

The recommendation within the report were moved and seconded by Councillors Dave Mackie and Councillor Gladys Healey.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee note the provision of the listed statutory and non-statutory services included

45. CORPORATE PARENTING CHARTER: A PROMISE FOR WALES

In presenting the report the Senior Manager for Children's Services referenced the launch by Welsh Government (WG) of the Corporate Parenting Charter: A Promise for Wales in September 2023. Information was provided on the 11 principles and 9 promises which were contained within the Charter and formed part of an ambitious vision for transforming Children's Services in Wales. It was explained how the Young Ambassadors who had attended the Care Leavers Summit and met Welsh Government Ministers had developed the shared vision for the future, these included young people from Flintshire. It was explained that if Flintshire signed the Charter and Promises it must ensure that the promises and ambitions were heard within the council with young voices involved. Work had been undertaken to deliver this to ensure that it was successful and once the Council had signed up it was proposed to report back annually on the progress and difference that it was making.

In response to a question from Councillor Carol Ellis, the Cabinet Member for Social Services confirmed that this would be presented to Cabinet and full Council to enable every member to be part of the process.

Councillor Hilary McGuill was delighted that this was here for all Councillors to sign and referred to the work undertaken by the children on the Childrens Services Forum who were an asset to the Council. They had assisted with processes around the interview process and housing and their contributions had been invaluable.

The first recommendation was moved and seconded by Councillors Hilary McGuill and Carol Ellis

The second recommendation was moved and seconded by Councillors Gladys Healey and Mel Buckley.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That that committee recommends that Flintshire County Council adopts 'the pledge' and adopts the Corporate Parenting Charter: 'A Promise for Wales.'
- (b) That the Children's Services Forum take a lead in measuring organisational success and commitment to the Corporate Parenting Charter.

46. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

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

(The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 11.25)

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Chair