

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE HEALTH AND CARE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD AT TEAMS LIVE ON WEDNESDAY, 26 MAY 2021**

PRESENT

County Councillors A Jenner (Chair), J Gibson-Watt, S M Hayes, G Morgan, L Rijnenberg, L Roberts, K M Roberts-Jones, D Rowlands, A Williams, J M Williams and R Williams

Cabinet Portfolio Holders In Attendance: County Councillor R Powell

Officers: Jan Coles, Head of Children's Services and Joanna Harris, Health and Social Care Change Manager, Start Well

1. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from County Councillor S McNicholas.

2. ELECTION OF VICE CHAIR

County Councillor L Rijnenberg was elected Vice Chair for the ensuing year.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4. DISCLOSURE OF PARTY WHIPS

There were no disclosures of party whips.

5. MINUTES

Documents:

- Minutes of the last meeting held on 10 March 2021

Outcome:

- **The Chair was authorised to sign the minutes of the last meeting as a correct record**

6. MEASURES AND OBJECTIVES

Documents:

- Measures and Objectives at Q4

Discussion:

- The main area of concern was that 62% of statutory assessments had been completed on time against a target of 90%. There were mitigating circumstances and the Committee was assured that the service was being delivered and every child had been visited.
- Senior managers meet weekly
- There is considerable focus on data provided
- Demands have been random during the pandemic – during February 2021, 47 assessments were opened, in March 2021, 103 assessments were opened. The fluctuation in demand is creating a number of pressures
- An increase in referrals had been expected as lockdown eased and other agencies began to operate as usual, including schools
- Contacts at the Front Door had averaged between 400 and 500 – the most recent information reports that this has increased to 600.
- A decision is made on these referrals within 24 hours or they are referred through for assessment.
- The Committee were advised of significant issues with WCCIS – the online recording system for case files – and this was having a considerable, negative impact on work including the writing up and sign off of assessments. The Head of Service reiterated that every child is being seen and their needs met, but the administrative function is causing considerable difficulties.
- The pandemic has seen an increase in more complex issues. Additional resources have been sourced including one additional decision maker and two social workers in the assessment team.
- The issues raised are having an impact on the health and wellbeing of staff
- The Committee asked if the increase in demand was a trend or a short term issue. The Head of Service reported that performance against assessments had not improved over the last month. There was an increase in demand, in children being taken into care and being included on the Child Protection Register.
- The Portfolio Holder noted that prior to the pandemic, staff had support from other professionals which provided additional resilience. This had not been available during the pandemic.
- The Committee asked if there was sufficient management support in prioritizing issues to help alleviate the pressures on staff. The Head of Service noted the pressures in peoples lives in addition to work and that challenges were being addressed. A quarterly Road Show allowed all staff to ask questions of the Senior Management Team. A number of other wellbeing measures were also in place including mindfulness sessions and a virtual tea shop and choir. These have been welcomed by staff alongside other corporate support. There had been no increase in the levels of long term sickness absence. Management was addressing means by which staff could access offices and colleagues in a safe way to improve team resilience. Duty Social Workers were now operating from an office and Assessment Teams were working from an office one day a week in appropriate ‘bubbles’.
- Members requested a performance report in addition to the information they have been provided with
- A weekly return of demand is provided to the Welsh Government with national trends being monitored

- The Committee noted that statutory visits were not all completed within the time frame – many of these were one or two days outside the target. Visits can take place via Zoom, phone etc. Of 799 statutory visits to children on the Child Protection Register, 734 were completed within the time frame and 65 outside. Of the 65, 35 were one to two days over target.
- The Chair questioned whether the regulator would accept the mitigation given to demonstrate that a quality service was being delivered despite the administrative difficulties – the Head of Service confirmed that this was the case, and that the Authority could be proud of the service being delivered. The Portfolio Holder stated that quality was paramount and welcomed Members' recognition of the difficulties being encountered.

Outcomes:

- **The report was noted**
- **A performance report would be circulated to Members**

7. RISK REGISTER

Documents:

- Children's Services Risk Register

Discussion:

- The Committee was given a brief explanation of inherent and residual risks
- Budget – the pressures were well known and what is funded and what is needed to be done is clear. However, the risk is higher than anticipated due to the uncertainty of issues arising through the pandemic. New ways of working have been introduced which will provide benefits to the client and efficiencies in the longer term. However, the service continues to deal with legacy issues in the shorter term. The service is demand led, and identified needs must be met.
- WCCIS – this is the online system which manages all files and allows real time information to be shared, at an appropriate level, with those working with a particular child. The child will also have access to these records in later life. The system is vital to the running of the service and it is currently unreliable. The Corporate Director is pursuing a remedy at the highest level. WCCIS is a national system. Its unreliability is proving to be the biggest contributing factor to low staff morale.
- It was suggested that the service return to using the previous DRAIG system but this would not be practical. DRAIG was no longer supported or updated.
- In principle, WCCIS is a good system but it has been problematic since its first roll out. It allows information to be updated by a worker without delay and should provide seamless access to information about a client and allow decisions to be taken at any time. This is a serious risk to both Adult and Children's Services and has been escalated to the Strategic Risk Register.
- The Committee suggested that the regulator should be notified that the unreliability of the system is impacting on the delivery of the service.

There is the added risk of a serious incident occurring if information is not readily available.

- The Corporate Director would be asked for a progress report and what mitigation is being put in place
- As this is a national system, it was suggested that the WLGA could be asked for assistance

Outcomes:

- **The risk register was noted**
- **The Corporate Director would be asked for an update on WCCIS and clarification of the escalation process**

8.	ACCESS TO INFORMATION
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RESOLVED to exclude the public for the following item of business on the grounds that there would be disclosure to them of exempt information under category 3 of The Local Authorities (Access to Information) (Variation) (Wales) Order 2007).

9.	SHORT BREAKS REVIEW
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Documents:

- Report of the Portfolio Holder

Discussion:

- There was some concern that the issue had not been considered by scrutiny until now – this was due to the pandemic and the need to introduce new ways of working and respond to the needs of children. The report intended to formalize this work

Outcomes:

- **The report was noted**

10.	WORK PROGRAMME
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Documents:

- Work Programme

Discussion:

- Members would welcome the return of working groups – this would be subject to discussion with the Corporate Director as the service returned to business as usual
- The Chair invited Members to indicate by email which of the two groups they prefer
- Members suggested the following topics for future consideration:
 - The Warden Service – an update following transformation
 - Quality – how to measure quality
 - Reintroduction of Laming Visits

- Post 16 accommodation

Outcomes:

- **The Chair would write to the Corporate Director highlighting the Committee's concerns regarding WCCIS and suggested items for the forward work programme**

County Councillor A Jenner (Chair)