

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE HEALTH AND CARE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD AT BY ZOOM ON FRIDAY, 20 SEPTEMBER 2024**

PRESENT

County Councillor A Jenner (Chair)

County Councillors G E Jones, C Robinson, L Brighthouse, D Edwards and S C Davies

Officers:

Nina Davies (Director of Social Services and Wellbeing), Sharon Powell (Head of Children's Services), Rachel Evans (Senior Strategic Commissioning Manager), Anne Phillips (Interim Head of Finance), Jacqueline Pugh (Finance Manager), James Langridge-Thomas (Deputy Head of Business Intelligence and Governance), Joanna Harris (Senior Strategic Commissioning Manager), Pamela Iyer (Senior Strategic Commissioning Manager), Ruth Cross (Child Exploitation Manager), Samuel Evans (Strategic Commissioning Manager).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors J Ewing, C Walsh, G Preston and A Williams

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Committee received the following Declarations of Interest from Members relating to items to be considered on the agenda:

Cllr Gareth E Jones declared an interest as a trustee to Builth Wells Community Support. This was a personal interest, not prejudicial interest in accordance with Paragraph 12(a) (ii) of the Members Code of Conduct 2016.

3. DISCLOSURE OF PARTY WHIPS

The Committee did not receive any disclosures of prohibited party whips which a Member had been given in relation to the meeting in accordance with Section 78(3) of the Local Government Measure 2011.

4. MINUTES

The minutes from the previous meetings held on the 11th of April 2024, 23rd May 2024, and the 5th of May 2024 were accepted by all Committee members present as an accurate and true account.

5. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL SERVICES
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Background:

The report...

- Was a requirement from the Director of Social Services from the Social Services and Wellbeing Act (2014).

- Had been presented to full Council in July 2024.
- Had been translated into Welsh and would be published soon. Copies would be shared with Welsh Ministers and Care Inspectorate Wales and be published on Powys County Council's website. It was noted that translation costs had been reduced by piloting an AI translation tool.
- Work had been aligned to the Council's vision; Stronger, Fairer, Greener and contributed to regional and national agendas of prevention, intervention and collaboration.
- Positive Feedback and recognition were received from external regulators, including the Joint Inspection of Child Protection Arrangements, which praised multi agency partnership working and safeguarding practise.
- The report noted a reduced reliance on agency workers and improved staff engagement and retention.

Challenges:

Challenges, post COVID included an increased:

- Demand on services,
- Complexity of care needs,
- Cost for commission.

Children's Services Performance:

- Children's Services had seen an improved position over the previous year. A revised and updated improvement plan continued to be implemented following self-evaluation.
- The number of Children on the Child Protection Register decreased by 15% from 309 at the end of March 2023 to 263 at the end of March 2024. This reflected improved decision making, risk management and increased use of alternative plans and interventions.
- The total 'Looked After Children' had increased by 11% from 213 to 236, mainly caused by an increased number of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children who arrived in Powys as part of the UK Government's resettlement scheme.
- The number of 'Children in Need' had decreased by 5%. This reflected the improved application of threshold criteria and the stepping up and stepping down processes.
- The service had enhanced its early help and prevention offer through the development of the Family Support Service and expansion of the Flying Start Programme.
- Timeliness of statutory assessments had increased from 79% to 84%, which exceeded the national average.
- The percentage of children with an up-to-date care and support plan had improved.
- The percentage of 'Looked After Children' who had three or more placements had increased, which was over the national average, this was mainly due to the increased number of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children. A placement sufficiency strategy and an action plan were being put into place to improve this.
- The percentage of 'Children Looked After' participating in reviews had improved to 91%, again above the national average.

Children's Services Priorities were to continue to:

- Embed and sustain improvements in safeguarding practice.
- Develop and implement early help and prevention.

- Improve the timeliness and quality of assessments, care plans and reviews.
- Improve placement stability and permanence for Looked After Children.
- Promote the participation and engagement of children and young people.

Adult Services Performance:

- 4.5% increase in contacts that came into the service from the previous year.
- Improvement of proportion of assessments completed within the 42 days from 84 to 88%, exceeding the national average.
- Adult services delivered significant savings through efficiency measures over the last year although the ongoing challenges of budgets and increased costs were noted.
- The service received positive feedback from service users and carers with 92% of annual survey respondents being ‘satisfied’ or ‘very satisfied’.
- There were ongoing challenges due to increased service demand and staff absences.
- Across children’s and adults’ services difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff remained, particularly in rural areas and specialist roles.

Priorities for Adult Services:

Priorities included to:

- Promote independence and wellbeing,
- Enable choice and control,
- Support carers,
- Improve outcomes for people with complex needs.
- Strengthen partnerships and collaborations.
- Strategic objectives would continue to be pursued.
- Digital and technological solutions were an ongoing priority.
- Improving data, intelligence, embedding co-production and engagement and support in development and well-being.

Issues Raised by Committee	Answers Given
<p>Would there be an increase of children and adults with additional needs in the future? And how would that impact the services in Powys?</p> <p>Was this something that needed to be considered for future budgets?</p>	<p>The Head of Children’s Services replied: children with additional needs were experiencing improved longevity and quality of life due to advances in science and medicine. This would naturally have an impact on Powys’s service delivery and introduce complexities regarding budget positioning.</p> <p>Cabinet Member and Portfolio Holder for Future Generations thanked the Committee for highlighting this topic and emphasised the importance of being financially prepared to support the children of Powys as a Corporate Parent.</p> <p>Assurance was given from the Director of Social Services and Wellbeing that Powys was supporting families appropriately.</p>

	<p>ACTION – Director of Social Services and Wellbeing to bring further information to the Committee in spring 2025.</p> <p>ACTION - Scrutiny officer to add this topic to the Scrutiny Action Tracker to be picked up during the budget setting process.</p>
The Committee requested an update on work that was being done to keep Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children in Powys.	ACTION – It was agreed this would be brought to the Committee in December 2024 along with other UASC papers.
It was requested that Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children be an indicator in the monthly performance reports.	ACTION – Director of Social Services and Wellbeing and the Head of Children’s Services to provide statistics. Further information to be brought to the Health & Care Scrutiny Committee in December 2024.

6. CORPORATE SAFEGUARDING BOARD ACTIVITY REPORT

Background:

- A follow up meeting was held on the 12th of September and the Health & Care Committee would receive that activity report shortly. The next Corporate Safeguarding Board meeting was planned for the 12th of December.

Review of Progress against Actions in the Safeguarding Regulatory Tracker:

- Excellent progress had been made with item 96, showing member compliance at 100% and staff compliance at 95.5%. Mandatory training had become an embedded item across the service in terms of performance monitoring. It was agreed that this item would be marked as closed and completed.
- Tracker item 97 was agreed to be closed and completed.
- Tracker item 99 would be kept open and reviewed at future board meetings.

Regional Safeguarding Board Update:

- Scrutiny members were welcomed to attend the 2024 Regional Safeguarding Board Conference hosted by Ceredigion Council on Thursday 14th November. The theme would be ‘right place, right time’.
- It was agreed that Child Practice Review and Adult Practice Review summaries be brought to future Board meetings as a standard agenda item to take on a summary of learning.
- Positives of National Safeguarding Week were noted.

Safeguarding in Housing, Including Young People (16/17-Year-Old) Housing:

- The Board discussed the Council’s use of Bed & Breakfasts and emphasised the importance of minimising time spent in these and other temporary accommodations, in line with the rapid rehousing approach.
- At the end of October 2023, 46 households were placed in Bed & Breakfasts, by the end of June 2024 this had reduced to 12 which resulted in £20,000 savings per week.

- The Board reiterated that there was zero-tolerance around 16–17-year-olds being placed in bed & breakfasts. The Housing Service agreed that was the goal.
- Assurance was requested from the board that if a 16 - 17-year-old in education had to be placed into temporary accommodation, everything would be done not to affect their learning. It was confirmed that wherever possible, the wider needs of the household would be taken into consideration and the best would be done to keep people local.

Mandatory Safeguarding Training, Including VAWDASV:

- The Board noted that mandatory safeguarding training in schools had dropped. It was confirmed that priority was given to the completion of mandatory training and networks had been set up to support governors that had safeguarding responsibilities to help ensure compliance was achieved.
- Powys sat second in completion of ‘ask and act training’. It was felt that an e-learning module like Ceredigion Council’s would not be appropriate to replicate but other options were being explored.

Adult Social Care Safeguarding Performance, including Deprivation of liberty Safeguarding Update:

- The Board picked up on a delay in DBS checks and certificates from Dyfed Powys Police. Work was being done with Dyfed Powys Police to understand these delays.

Annual Private Fostering Report:

- The Annual Private Fostering Report was presented to the Board and would be added to the Governor’s Newsletter.
- Information sharing with Powys Teaching Health Board was confirmed to be ongoing.
- The Children Missing Education Pilot that Powys County Council were undertaking with Welsh Government had suggested an annual exchange.

JICPA:

- Confirmation was received that the JICPA Action Plan was being monitored by PLOG (Powys Local Organisation Group) and a six-monthly update against the Action Plan would be provided at a future Committee meeting.

Safeguarding in Education, including Elective Home Education and Fixed Term Exclusions:

- It was noted that comparative data would be provided in future meetings.
- The Board asked whether poor behaviour exclusions were being reviewed following medical diagnosis. It was confirmed this was being worked on and support was being provided to schools around ALN.

Over the summer of 2024, Audit Wales conducted a follow up inspection focussed on the Corporate Safeguarding Arrangements, the draft report for this was expected at the end of September 2024 and would be presented to a future scrutiny meeting and Corporate Safeguarding Board meeting.

Issues Raised by Committee	Answers Given
The Committee questioned whether the percentages given on section 2.4 were correct.	ACTION – The Director of Social Services and Wellbeing would provide an answer at a future

	meeting.
Regarding home education and exclusions, the Committee asked whether live data could be embedded in the Corporate Safeguarding Board Activity Report so that emerging trends could be seen.	ACTION – It was agreed that this could be done with future Corporate Safeguarding Board Activity Reports.
Committee requested that all ‘spotlight’ reports be available in a bank to access in future and signposted for members and the public to access for information.	ACTION – This had been done and all previous spotlight information had been published on the Powys County Council website, but it was agreed that more would be done to publicise this.

7.	CHILD EXPLOITATION STRATEGY AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN REPORT
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Background:

- Child Exploitation Manager presented the report and noted that the Child Exploitation team ran Parent and Community Internet Safety Sessions through schools in North and South Powys. Promoted by schools, all parents and community members could attend, and the sessions would be running next in October 2024.
- In June 2021 the first *Powys Child Exploitation Strategy* and three-year *Multi Agency Implementation Plan* was implemented with the aim of creating harsher communities for perpetrators and safer non-blaming communities for children. This would be achieved through strong leadership and multi-agency collaboration under three sections; prevent, protect and support.
- In 2022 the exploitation strategy was utilised to develop the Regional Exploitation Strategy and the new implementation plan presented today aligned with that document.

Prevent:

- A collaborative learning approach was embedded to support practise and development through the multi-agency community of practise learning sessions.
- Seventeen learning sessions had been facilitated with consistent good attendance and positive feedback.
- On average between fifty and eighty professionals across various agencies attended those sessions.
- The sessions explored:
 - Increasing awareness of different forms of exploitation and how these interlink.
 - Understanding thresholds, supporting parents and young people as partners within assessments,
 - Interventions and measuring change
 - Supporting a greater understanding of disruption tactics and responsibility (e.g. national referral mechanism).
- Data recognised increased disruption tactics followed on from those community practises such as a Slavery and Risk Trafficking Order which had been issued in the county.

- The team increased visibility of their work by facilitating 12 awareness raising sessions in collaboration with the Youth Service, PCSO teams, college licensing and Bernardo's Counter Trafficking Service, mostly around internet safety.
- Participated in 8 multi-agency outreach sessions that focussed on spaces and places and raised awareness within areas that young people congregated and spent time together across Powys.
- Awareness raising videos had been created for children, parents and carers through collaboration with the Youth Service. These videos were re-utilised throughout the year for Child Exploitation Week in March and Safeguarding Week in November.
- Funding was secured for an Arad Goch production called 'Crossing the Line' which was rolled out across all high school sites.
- In 2022 online and in-person parent and community learning sessions were implemented. Further sessions would take place in Machynlleth and Ystradgynlais in October 2024.
- The team attended a Pan Powys Sixth Form Pupils Voice Group where sixth form students considered a Child Ambassador Programme and feedback was used to develop the programme. This had been piloted at two high school sites with the aim of implementation across all high school sites in Powys.

Under the 'Protect' element of the paper the team...

- Embedded the Exploitation Safeguarding Strategy meeting process, which was held weekly and attended by agencies.
- Invited Parents to Safeguarding Strategy Meetings as partners.
- Created a consistently attended Strategic MACE and implemented cross-partnership data collection which had allowed the development of understanding of the scale and nature of exploitation in Powys.
- Collected data on a quarterly basis and supported the monitoring of the effectiveness of responses to children, young people and their outcomes.
- Developed a greater awareness of contextual safeguarding within MACE.
- Piloted a toolkit which focussed on space and supporting safe change collaboratively with other agencies.

Under the 'Support' element of the paper the team...

- Undertook direct intervention via three Child Exploitation Intervention Workers.
- Continued to build knowledge as a trauma informed and strength-based service, supported by monthly meetings with an in-house psychologist.
- The sessions had been consistently well received by the team and examples include, developing children's formulations, developing confidence in utilising CBT approaches, mindfulness, emotional wellbeing and positive affirmation resources, and drafting therapeutic ending letters.
- Engaged with the Independent Child Trafficking Guardianship Service which was Bernardo's led and were both regular attenders at the Safeguarding Strategy Meetings.
- Mapped out post-18 support services to aid transition and recognised that as a process as opposed to an event.
- Piloted the Post-18 Exiting Prostitution Toolkit.

The New Implementation Plan:

- Continued to build upon areas that had worked well within Powys including the Prevent, Protect and Support structure of work.

The Prevent Element continued to:

- Build upon collaborative awareness raising.
- Embed ambassador programme in schools.
- Community of Practices.
- Build upon the cross-partnership data set to develop other actions as required, such as thematic audit and identifying specific training needs.
- Ensure the Safeguarding Strategy Meeting process remained in place and used a targeted focus, e.g. introducing the Philomena Protocol for missing children.
- Develop practise guidance to support peer on peer harm.

The Support Element continued to:

- Utilise feedback from intervention work to ensure the exploitation team continued to learn and develop.
- Ensure that the service continued to use data to support transitional safeguarding for young adults.

The Head of Children’s Services added that the Child Exploitation Strategy was an updated strategy which had an action plan attached. Recognition and observation of children’s lived experiences of exploitation in Powys was increasing and the challenge of keeping up with changing methods of child exploitation was noted.

Issues Raised by Committee	Answers Given
Members requested links and information regarding the Parent and Community Internet Safety Sessions.	ACTION - The Head of Children’s Services agreed to share this information with members.
The Committee asked what a Slavery and Risk Trafficking Order was.	It was a disruption tactic used by Dyfed Powys Police to prevent wider risk to children and young people across the county.
Had child exploitation increased due to children having access to the internet and mobile phones?	Awareness and understanding of what exploitation looked like online had increased. During COVID an increase in online worries for children and young people had been noted.
Were the connections made which led to exploitation mostly created using mobile devices and the internet?	These were noted as contributing factors but were not being seen more than any other method used by perpetrators.
Did the Child Exploitation Team use social media channels other than Facebook?	No, but awareness training was planned to keep the team abreast of emerging social media apps and platforms and the team worked closely with the Youth Service who had an Instagram account where information could be shared. It was noted that the Child Ambassador Programme being rolled out in high schools would provide information regarding how children and young people were accessing information which would then be utilised by the team.
How did the team receive referrals? Could a	All referrals came through the front door and

<p>member of the community raise a concern directly?</p>	<p>could come from a community member.</p>
<p>Was the team fully funded by Powys?</p>	<p>The Child Exploitation Team was fully funded by Powys County Council within the Children's Service's budget.</p>
<p>Could all members receive a members development session from the Child Exploitation Team?</p>	<p>ACTION - The Head of Children's Services agreed that the Child Exploitation Team's work would be added to the Members Development Session in November 2024.</p> <p>The Child Exploitation Manager added that the team would be present for information at a Members' Day in County Hall in October 2024.</p>
<p>Were there any other ways of measuring impact?</p>	<p>The Child Exploitation Manager would gain feedback from children, young people and families following interventions from the team.</p> <p>Data sets would include what disruption tactics were used.</p> <p>Within the strategy meetings triangulation was a routine theme and risks were consistently measured and evaluated.</p> <p>Data would present outcomes and potential re-referrals.</p>
<p>Could the number of children identified as 'at risk' and the data surrounding this be presented in the monthly performance reports to the Committee?</p>	<p>The team measured this on a quarterly basis and produced annual reports.</p> <p>ACTION - The Head of Children's Services suggested that the annual report be brought to the Committee for information.</p>
<p>Had the team identified certain areas where 'children at risk' were more likely to be located? If so, did the team provide targeted support to those areas?</p>	<p>Spaces and places were identified as part of contextual safeguarding element of the plan. If a space or place was identified, tools could be utilised such as the <i>Contextual Safeguarding Neighbourhood Assessment Toolkit</i>.</p> <p>This work would be done collaboratively with other agencies such as PCSOs and the Youth Service.</p> <p>Referrals would then be monitored, and the work evaluated to understand results.</p> <p>The Head of Children's Services added that lots of prevention work occurred, and that in areas where 'children at risk' were more likely to be located, more focus would be given to prevention and disruption techniques.</p> <p>If a hotspot had been identified with multiple children and perpetrators in one area, specific</p>

	processes would occur.
During member development sessions, could information be split into prevention and reaction work?	The Head of Children’s Services agreed that this could be done and if there were any current hotspots the session could be used to share information with the goal of prevention.

8. MONTHLY PERFORMANCE REPORTS - ADULT SOCIAL CARE AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES

The monthly performance reports would be a standard agenda item going forward.

The Chair explained that the Committee received monthly performance reports retrospectively. Going forward, councillors would review these reports for ongoing themes and questions would be sent from Scrutiny Officers to the relevant Directors and Heads of Service, who would present answers at the next available scrutiny meeting. This would ensure consistent scrutiny of performance.

9. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Forward Work Programme was updated prior to the meeting.

10. EXEMPT ITEM

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).

The Monitoring Officer has determined that category 3 of the Access to Information Procedure Rules applies to the following item. His view on the public interest test (having taken account of the provisions of Rule 14.8 of the Council's Access to Information Rules) was that to make this information public would disclose information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

These factors in his view outweigh the public interest in disclosing this information. Members are asked to consider these factors when determining the public interest test, which they must decide when considering excluding the public from this part of the meeting. Proposed by Cllr C Robinson and seconded by Cllr D Edwards with all Committee Members in agreement.

11. DIRECT PAYMENTS REVIEW UPDATE

The Senior Strategic Commissioning Manager and the Strategic Commissioning Manager presented an update on the Direct Payments Review including the progress, outcomes and next steps.

County Councillor G Jones (Vice-Chair)