

**INUTES OF A MEETING OF THE HEALTH AND CARE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD AT ON THURSDAY, 28 JANUARY 2021**

PRESENT

County Councillor A Jenner (Chair), J Gibson-Watt, S Hayes, S McNicholas, G Morgan, L Rijenbergh, K Roberts Jones, A Williams, J M Williams and R Williams

Cabinet Portfolio Holders in Attendance: R Powell and MC Alexander

Officers: Alison Bulman, Corporate Director, J Coles, Head of Children's Services, Michael Gray, Head of Adult Services, Dylan Owen, Head of Commissioning and Jacqueline Pugh, Finance Manager

1.	APOLOGIES
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There were no apologies for absence.

2.	DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST
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There were no declarations of interest.

3.	DISCLOSURE OF PARTY WHIPS
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There were no disclosures of party whips.

4.	DRAFT BUDGET 2021-22
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Documents:

- Report of the Portfolio Holder for Finance
- Medium Term Financial Strategy
- Finance Resource Model
- Cost Reductions
- Report and Register – Fees and Charges
- Capital Strategy and Treasury Management
- Reserves Policy
- Residents' Survey
- Children's Services Impact Assessments
- Adult Services Impact Assessments

Discussion:

- **Member's expressed dissatisfaction at the length of time available to undertake scrutiny of two significant budgets.**

Children's Services

- The pandemic has led to increased demand at the front door and a sharp rise in the number of Children Looked After (CLA). Whilst this number is starting to reduce, it is likely to rise again when lockdown finishes.

- The budget is projected to be £1.3M overspent at year end and this is directly attributable to an additional 20 CLA
- Cost reductions of £3M had been agreed and this remained one of the biggest challenges for the service
- The Service has over delivered on reducing high level interventions
- The ability to recruit has been hampered by the pandemic and there continues to be a reliance on agency staff
- The 'Grow Our Own' programme is going well but is not a 'quick fix'
- The Committee noted that a budget management reserve had been established to mitigate any risks within the budget. This is held corporately.
- The question of whether a pandemic or similar event should be included in the risk register was debated. This was a matter for consideration corporately.
- Prevention work continues alongside managing the current crisis. The effects of the pandemic are likely to continue for some time and ongoing discussions with health colleagues are in hand.
- The budget was double that of three to four years ago. There had been considerable investment in the service since the CIW Inspection and a vastly improved service was being provided. However, this level of budget was not considered to be sustainable and there appears to be no prospect of the budget subsiding to lower levels. There was concern that this level of budget was now the accepted level. Powys spends more pro rata than other authorities in Wales and it was considered that detailed explanations of this should be given.
- Proposed reductions in Leaving Care were considered to be risky
- If savings are not achieved this poses a risk to future budgets
- Significant improvements have been achieved within the service, and by doing the right thing at the right time, cost efficiencies will naturally ensue
- Legacy issues remain of bringing children and young people into placements closer to home but achieving the right mix of placements closer to home is a long-term strategy
- It was necessary to move forward to develop the service in the long term for the benefit of all. As Corporate Parents, Members had a significant role to play and carried the responsibility for this.
- The Portfolio Holder and Chair have discussed a number of issues where further scrutiny would be of benefit. A work programme will be developed as soon as the business returns to normal.
- Concern was expressed that further efficiencies were to be achieved despite the Committee having been informed of the pressures of additional CLA during the pandemic. The Head of Service believed the proposals to be realistic and reported savings had already been achieved due to lower levels of intervention arising from implementation of the closer to home strategy.
- A number of officers are training to be social workers through the 'Grow Our Own' programme. Two further officers are being sponsored to undertake a Masters qualification. There is a commitment from those officers to continue to work for the Authority for a specified period otherwise fees will need to be repaid.
- Members would welcome seeing the results of scenario planning to address the balance of demands on the service with efficiencies

- Performance data should also be provided to Members
- The Head of Service confirmed that the proposed efficiencies represented improved delivery rather than cuts to services
- It was also confirmed that there was no draw down of funds from the Welsh Government Hardship Fund in relation to increased numbers of CLA

Adult Services

- The Portfolio Holder reminded Members that cost efficiencies would arise through transformation of the service
- These proposals had been agreed as part of a rolling programme
- The service had been looking at more radical transformation, but the pandemic had curtailed plans and were limited to those which were sustainable and achievable at the current time
- Transformation will ensure services are delivered differently and more efficiently
- The Head of Service reiterated that the proposals continued to deliver the three-year programme which had been previously agreed which builds on a strengths-based approach to delivery and ensures continuity
- The Committee questioned whether the predicted savings had been achieved or were on target to be achieved by year end. It was predicted that 88% of savings would be achieved by year end – this represented over delivery in some areas such as strengths-based reviews, but only 30% savings had been achieved in moving from double handled care to single, and 70% in increasing Direct Payments to date. The Head of Service was confident that further savings could be achieved by year end. There had been significant cost avoidance and delivering the service ‘right first time’ had also resulted in savings.
- The Chair asked that the Committee be provided with quarterly updates on progress against cost reductions going forward.
- Welshpool Day Centre had been closed by Welshpool Town Council. Savings had accrued to the Authority but also additional costs in working with those clients affected by the closure. Members noted that there was no Impact Assessment in relation to the closure, but the Committee was informed that it had not been a Council service and therefore that responsibility lay with Welshpool Town Council.
- The pressure on unpaid carers was raised and the affect it might have on the service should those carers be unable to continue with their caring roles. It was suggested that this was a risk and should be included on the service risk register. There was the potential that this could impact upon the budget. The Corporate Director responded that the service identifies pressures and the service’s ability to mitigate pressures and meet residents’ needs as cost effectively as possible. The Service has worked and will continue to work creatively with unpaid carers to meet those needs. If any informal care arrangement breaks down the service will intervene.
- Monies have been reclaimed from the Welsh Government Hardship Fund wherever possible. Recurrent costs have been included within pressures.
- It was noted that the budget was increasing from £63M to £67M and the Head of Service was asked to identify where the additional funds would be spent. This included unfunded demographic changes, disabled

transitions, home care hours following a successful recruitment campaign and fee uplifts.

- The Chair questioned whether the increase in budget was attributable to the pandemic or pressures. The two were separate and the increased budget was due to pressures.
- An explanation was requested regarding a saving of £100K against innovative staffing models. There would not be wholesale change and stability was needed within the service. The service had many very skilled staff who were not qualified social workers. For example, quality assessments can be undertaken by staff who do not hold a social work qualification. The right skill mix in each team was key and decisions would be made on a case by case basis. The growth of business intelligence had also had an impact.

The Chair explained that some items relating to the budget were commercially or legally sensitive and would be considered in closed session:

- **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 categories 3 and 4 of The Local Authorities (Access to Information) (Variation) (Wales) Order 2007).**
- The Head of Service briefed Members on proposals and responded to questions.

Outcomes:

- **Any observations of recommendations discussed would be included in a composite scrutiny report for consideration by Cabinet.**
- **The Chair and Vice Chair, Portfolio Holders, Corporate Director and Heads of Service would consider potential work programme items for consideration by the Committee or Working Group at an appropriate time when pressures relating to the pandemic eased**
- **Quarterly updates regarding progress against cost efficiencies to be circulated**
- **Regular performance reports to be circulated**

4.1. Children's Services - Impact Assessments

4.2. Adult Services - Impact Assessments

5. MINUTES

Documents:

- Minutes of the last meeting held on 10 December 2020

Outcome:

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

County Councillor A Jenner (Chair)