

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE HEALTH AND CARE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD AT BY ZOOM ON THURSDAY, 19 DECEMBER 2024**

PRESENT

Committee Members: County Councillors:

Cllr Amanda Jenner – Chair

Gareth E Jones,

Ange Williams,

Deb Edwards,

Benjamin Breeze,

Carol Robinson,

Chris Walsh,

Little Brighthouse.

Cabinet Members: County Councillors,

Sian Cox (Cabinet Member for a Caring Powys),

Sandra Davies (Cabinet Member for Future Generations),

Richard Church (Cabinet Member for a Safer Powys).

Officers:

Sharon Powell (Head of Children’s Services),

Sharon Frewin (Head of Adult’s Services),

Gavin Williams (Senior Manager – Care & Support),

Holly Gordon (Senior Manager – Safeguarding and Quality Assurance),

Joanna Harris (Senior Strategic Commissioning Manager).

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| 1. APOLOGIES |
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Apologies for absence were shared by Committee Member County Councillor Alwyn Evans and Officer Nina Davies (Director of Social Services & Wellbeing).

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| 2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST |
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There were no Declarations of Interest from Members relating to items to be considered on the agenda.

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| 3. DISCLOSURE OF PARTY WHIPS |
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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.

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| 4. JICPA UPDATE |
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Background:

- The Cabinet Member for Future Generations presented an introduction to the item from point 2.1 – 2.3 of the JICPA Report.
- The Senior Manager for Safeguarding and Quality Assurance presented the background of the report from point 2.4 – 2.21 of the report.
- The Head of Children’s Services added that JICPA was a welcomed opportunity to check service practice, standards, processes and procedures through a multiagency lens.

- The inspection helped to inform the action plan and how to work more effectively, which fed into the Powys Local Operational Group, a local group which connected to the Regional Safeguarding Board.

| Issues Raised by the Committee: | Responses Received: |
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| The Committee asked how the 6 case files were chosen. | Cases were always selected by the inspectorate. |
| Queried the costs and benefits of undertaking the audit. | There was no additional cost to the service, but the value of the process was shown in the feedback and learning provided. |
| Was there a financial cost of implementing improvements? | There was no additional cost in terms of the action plan. The service used its own resources for implementing improvements in collaboration with the regional approach. |
| Had an improvement between Children Services and other agencies/ services been observed? | A strong inter-agency relationship already existed, which the JICPA enhanced via joint investigation training. |
| How was the review through joint agency different? Did it show value for money and had new learning been achieved? | The inspection was different as previous inspections had been performed in silos. The workload felt similar, but outcomes were better. This inspection had increased the collaboration between Powys County Council and the Police. |
| What was different in the integrated training package? | |
| Was there any consideration for the use of AI in improving efficiencies? What work was done to ensure information protocols were working? | There was no focus given to AI in the inspection, but IT systems were considered. Many initiatives linked to AI in social care had taken off over the previous 6 months following the inspection. |
| What had been put in place to support staff? | The 'Grow Our Own' initiative had increased the number of Social Workers working at Powys County Council and had reduced reliance on agency staff. An in-house psychologist had developed systems and frameworks to support staff including the introduction of Critical Debrief Sessions and Schwarts Rounds. Surveys and sense-checks were routinely performed to understand staff wellbeing and the service had been nominated last year as part of the Social Care Wales accolades for staff well-being. |
| How would unannounced visits be | A new paperwork system had been |

monitored in future and would that data feed into performance reports?

put into place where social workers ticked whether the visit was announced or unannounced. A thematic audit had recently been undertaken and would continue to be done to map progress. The data was not currently in the monthly reports, but other data sense checks were performed around plans and visits.

5. INTEGRATED DISABILITY SERVICE DEVELOPMENT PLAN UPDATE

Background:

- The Cabinet Member for Future Generations introduced the topic, reading point 1.1 of the report.
- The Senior Manager for Care & Support in Children's Services presented the background of the report.
- There had been lots of development in the Integrated Disability Service (IDS) over the past year alongside a development plan.
- The early help process for the IDS had been reviewed, amended, and aligned with the Children's Services generic early help team. This had improved paperwork and closure procedures. Additionally, extensive resource sharing had been integrated across early help cases, both within the generic early help framework and the specific disability aspect.
- A key development had been the implementation of a more robust closure process, significantly enhancing communication and ensuring a clear rationale for closing a child's case file.
- A swap audit and the implementation of an IDS funding panel had taken place. Crucial in ensuring that the needs of young people across Powys were identified and met, while also providing the best value for these young people and their families.
- The IDS funding panel was overseen by the Senior Manager for Care & Support in Children's Services and team managers and met fortnightly. Practitioners who had conducted assessments presented information on the identified needs of each child. Discussions focused on the most robust and cost-effective ways to meet needs, ensuring the child remained at the centre of the decision-making process.
- Previously, a presentation on the transition between children's and adult services for disabilities had been jointly presented, establishing a well-recognised process. However, it was noted that the transition process needed improvement for those who did not fall within the disability service.
- A process had been established within children's services for transitioning to adult services and was used as a temporary measure while a review was undertaken to determine future needs.
- The service reviewed the disability register to allow online access for families across Powys, aiming to gather comprehensive information for future service planning.
- The website for IDS had been updated.
- Strong relationships had been established between the IDS team and specialist schools, fostering support for children requiring transition assistance.

- The Incredible Years Autism programme had been developed, with the IDS team working closely with health colleagues, particularly learning disability nurses, to train practitioners. This programme provided early intervention and group settings for families, offering both peer and professional support.
- The IDS service had undertaken and run independence workshops for young people with complex profound disabilities, which was a positive initiative.
- Future steps included:
 - Reviews of in-house residential options to address gaps in childcare services for children over 12.
 - Collaboration with the Family Information Service and commissioning colleagues to develop and enhance services across Powys.
 - Budget considerations included the impact of wage changes related to the real living wage and how these changes would affect the short breaks budget for the following year.
 - One area potentially lacking within Powys was short breaks foster care, which enables a child to remain within a family. This need was being incorporated into the business case and the developments around the fostering framework to explore further development opportunities.

| Issues Raised by the Committee: | Responses Received: |
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| <p>More information around early help teams, sharing of resources and training was requested.</p> | <p>Early help consisted of two aspects: generic early help children’s services and an early help team within the IDS service. The early help workers as part of the IDS team, benefitted from easy access to specialist knowledge around disabilities.</p> <p>Efforts were made to align intervention thresholds and share resources. Sometimes family challenges were unrelated to the child’s disability and support was tailored to the identified need, including specific programs like the Incredible Years, which had a version focused on ASD. This program was offered to children and families in both generic early help and disability services, recognising that not every child with autism required disability services. The two teams worked fluidly, with ongoing conversations to determine the best way to meet each child’s needs.</p> |
| <p>Could families challenge the process if a care package was denied?</p> | <p>Yes, the service undertook regular reviews of care plans with families, conducted under the care and support process. The voices of parents and children were extremely important and were included in all assessments. If</p> |

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| | <p>there were challenges, an escalation process was in place, allowing concerns to be addressed by the team manager and higher levels if necessary. Advocacy was a key focus, ensuring that the voices of children, parents, and carers were heard. The service actively supported referrals and helped families understand the role of an advocate, regardless of their satisfaction with the service.</p> |
| <p>Point 3.2 of the report mentioned the pressure from the budget for direct payments. Had that gone in as a growth bid and if it so, which part of the growth bid had it gone in?</p> | <p>There was no growth in the integrated disability service budget. The Senior Manager for Care and Support was tasked with making savings for the current year's financial position, particularly around short break provision. The savings target was met without causing challenges or escalations with families, emphasising co-production with children and families to determine the best support. Therefore, future plans for the 2025-26 budget included the more imaginative use of Powys residential homes to maximise the space and opportunities for children.</p> |
| <p>Would the 2025-26 budget include ongoing cost efficiencies for this service?</p> | <p>No, from the review undertaken this year, there would not be any cost efficiencies going forward for next year.</p> |
| <p>Did the service reach out to satellite provision such as Cross Gates?</p> | <p>Confirmation was given that the service was linked with satellite schools which were overseen by the same head teachers. A weekly triage was held with Powys Teaching Health Board colleagues to discuss upcoming needs.</p> |
| <p>What processes were in place to audit the use of direct payments and what flexibility did families have in spending resources?</p> | <p>This was a challenge. A recent SWAP audit had highlighted gaps within processes, which were being plugged and a follow up internal audit would be taking place soon. The IDS funding panel undertook regular six-monthly reviews of care packages. Further to this, care and support meetings were held regularly, where practitioners were advised to clearly assess whether the identified needs remained the same and were being met.</p> |

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| <p>Was rurality a limiting factor in families in receipt of direct payments receiving services?</p> | <p>Assurance was given that there were no children with an identified need which had not been met. But it was acknowledged that there could be a gap between a package of care being supported and the identification of a personal assistant. Teaching Assistants could often fill the gap. Especially over holiday periods. If a need was not met by the process and no solution was found, it would be reconsidered for other creative options.</p> |
| <p>Were teaching assistants given the opportunity to upskill and move into the disability service?</p> | <p>Assurance was given that there was collaborative working between education and disability services. Staff had been supported to work and move across the two services.</p> |
| <p>It was requested that the Head of Children’s Services raised awareness of the opportunity for teaching assistants to transfer into the disability service. ACTION</p> | |

6. MONTHLY PERFORMANCE REPORTS ADULTS & CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Background:

Item was introduced by the Chair.

| <p>Issues Raised by the Committee:</p> | <p>Responses Received:</p> |
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| <p>The committee requested an explanation of how Heads of Service and Portfolio Holders used the monthly performance reports.</p> | <p>Head of Children’s Services: Primarily look at the statistics and trend around:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessments, • The Child Protection Register, • Children Looked After, • Monthly cost of placements, • Staff sickness rates <p>This would then be benchmarked against the regional and national picture.</p> <p>Cabinet Member for Future Generations: Use the traffic light system, first looking at data highlighted as red and anything that has changed. Then ask questions on amber statistics and monitor these to understand progress.</p> <p>Adult’s Services: Currently reviewing report in line with the Integrated Business Plan to reflect current pressures and concerns. Looking to build in a level of assessment</p> |

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| | <p>detail. Used to monitor:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demand And Response. • Priority Around Community Capacity • Ability To Respond To Need. • Direct Payments, • Hours Of Support, • Hospital Flow, • Home Returners, • Understanding Blockages. <p>Several dashboards sat behind the performance reports offered opportunity to drill down to areas of concern.</p> <p>It was a priority of the service to use the reports to inform assessments as well as reviews.</p> <p>The reports were used on a daily basis through hospital flow meetings and assistant performance monthly. Senior management team meet with relevant portfolio holders regularly prior to performance meetings.</p> <p>Portfolio Holder for a Caring Powys:</p> <p>Read all of the report. Staring with the bar charts and then the relevant narrative. If something is missing will speak to Head of Service.</p> <p>Particular care given to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Front Door, • Referrals to community connectors, • Prescription of technology enabled care, • Hospital pages, due to timely flow from hospitals being so important. • Discharge to recover and assessed pathways. • Long term care look at the average age of admissions. Holding stable despite increased demand. • Staff Wellbeing. <p>Would like to see data around how many people were waiting for resources and how many people with learning disabilities and supported living needs were living inside Powys.</p> |
| <p>What was being done to monitor and ensure the front door had capacity for the 2025-26 budget?</p> | <p>The front door was a pressure point. There was no opportunity for growth in the current budget. Some posts were grant funded which was not good for stability.</p> <p>This year research had been undertaken on this which could be shared with the committee in the new year.</p> |

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| | <p>Welsh Government were indicating that the grant would continue. The future of grants to be raised in 2025-26 budget discussions. ACTION</p> <p>The Portfolio Holder for Future Generations added that concern with dependency of grants was regularly raised in WLGA meetings.</p> |
| <p>Could the Portfolio Holder for Future Generations receive a separate report with relevant data?</p> | <p>Staff and members did not receive separate reports.</p> |
| <p>Referencing the graph on point 38a of the October Children's Performance Report, the committee asked whether the most expensive placement listed in September 2024 was the same as the least expensive placement listed in February 2024.</p> | <p>These were different placements.</p> |

7. WORK PROGRAMME & OPEN ACTIONS

The Chair moved that this item would be picked up at the end of the meeting.

8. UNACCOMPANIED ASYLUM-SEEKING CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER BY POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL

Background:

- It was agreed that the introduction and background of this item would be held in public session and the discussion would be held in confidential session.
- The Portfolio Holder for a Caring Powys introduced the purpose of the report, from points 1.1-1.2.
- The Senior Strategic Commissioning Manager introduced the background of the report:
 - The report aimed to update Health and Care Scrutiny Committee on the numbers of UASChildren in Powys and how children's services were enabled to meet their needs and the associated costs.
 - The handling of UASChildren in Powys was governed by a robust policy framework that complied with national and international laws.
 - The National Transfer scheme (NTS) was a mandatory scheme which supported Local Authorities across the UK by providing specific payment arrangements. Over the last 18 months Powys had received 33 UASChildren referrals.
 - 17 UASChildren had been placed within 5 days and earned the Local Authority additional one-off funding, which had reached £15,000 per child but had now reverted to the original £5k per child.
 - As of the 31st of October 2024, Powys was responsible for 17 under 18-year-olds and 13 over 18-year-olds.

- Individuals were placed both within and outside Wales. The strategy shifted from urban placements to in-county placements in Powys.
- Placing within Powys reduced travel time for social workers and aligned with the Welsh Government’s agenda to eliminate profit from care.
- Powys Children’s Services developed properties for looked-after children and care leavers, aiding their transition to independent living.
- External providers were engaged to develop placements within the county.
- The regional group across mid and West Wales coordinated responses to referrals for UASChildren.
- Training opportunities from the Home Office were shared to upskill the workforce.
- Collaboration with education colleagues ensured comprehensive education and integration programs, including language support.
- Challenges included resource constraints, legal complexities, and cultural barriers.

| Issues Raised by the Committee: | Responses Received: |
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| The committee requested information on the financial shortfall between the funds provided for UASChildren care and the actual costs incurred. | The data would be provided following the meeting. - ACTION |
| Were there channels to communicate financial shortfalls to the Home Office? | No, there was no flexibility in the arrangements. This had been challenged by Powys County Council and Pembrokeshire County Council who had written to the UK Government. Prior to that the Head of Children’s Services had been raising this issue at a national level with the All-Wales Heads of Children’s Services through the ADSS Cymru through to the WLGA into Welsh Government. There were no solutions to bridge the gap, so it became an immediate pressure for Children’s Services. |
| The committee requested to be notified when a response had been received from UK Government regarding this. | Yes, this was agreed. ACTION. |
| Section 4 gave a list of UASChildren in Powys. Were these the total number of UASChildren in Powys, or the number of children received in the previous 18 months? | This would be the total number of children in the authority as of the 31 st of October 2024, and there had been 3 further referrals since. |

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| 9. | EXEMPT ITEM |
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The committee agreed to move into confidential 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 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 G E Jones and seconded by Cllr L Brighouse with all Committee Members in agreement.

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| 10. | UNACCOMPANIED ASYLUM-SEEKING CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER BY POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL |
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The Committee discussed further details on this item.

County Councillor A Jenner (Chair)