

HEALTHY LIVING AND SOCIAL CARE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Remote meeting held on 9th November 2021.

The Committee agenda is available [here](#).

The meeting recording is available [here](#).

Present: Councillor S.J. Griffiths (Chair); Councillor N.C. Thomas (Vice-Chair); Councillors J. Aviet, J.E. Charles, T.H. Jarvie, R. Nugent-Finn and J.W. Thomas.

Also present: Councillor B.T. Gray (Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health).

522 ANNOUNCEMENT –

Prior to the commencement of the business of the Committee, the Chair read the following statement: “May I remind everyone present that the meeting will be live streamed as well as recorded via the internet and this recording archived for future viewing”.

523 APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE –

This was received from Councillor O. Griffiths.

524 MINUTES –

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 12th October 2021 be approved as a correct record.

525 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

No declarations were received.

526 VALE, VALLEYS AND CARDIFF REGIONAL ADOPTION COLLABORATIVE ANNUAL REPORT 2020-21 (DSS) –

The Regional Adoption Manager presented the report, the purpose of which was to provide Committee with the Annual Report and review of the Collaborative that was hosted by the Vale of Glamorgan Council.

The Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Adoption Collaborative (VVC) was one of five regional Collaboratives that formed part of the National Adoption Service (NAS) and provided an adoption service on behalf of the Vale of Glamorgan Council, Cardiff Council, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council and Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council.

The Officer apprised members on the following matters as set out in the Annual report:

- Information in respect of the governance and scrutiny of the regional arrangements at a local level,
- Staff changes and areas of service development,
- Key performance information relating to the placement of children for adoption,
- Recruitment and assessment of adopters,
- The provision of adoption support services,
- The impact of COVID 19 on service delivery and how the service had adapted to respond to said challenges and reduced delay, and
- Key challenges and future priorities for the service in terms of maintaining core business but also embracing changes being brought about at a national level with the implementation of Good Practice Guides and the two-stage model of adopter assessment.
- Activity in respect of the new grant funded posts.

The appendices to the report provided data in respect of key performance measures in respect of children, marketing activity, adopter recruitment, adoption support and the Adoption Panel and this information was broken down by Local Authority.

Following the Officer's presentation and subsequent member questions, the Officer added that:

- In relation to post-adoption support, families had felt increased pressures as a result of the national pandemic and the Collaborative had experienced an increase in referrals when children returned to school which mirrored the demand experienced by Children's Services creating a backlog of cases.
- The period of 6 months from the 'should be placed for adoption' decision to 'approval to match' is set out in statutory guidance and was therefore not a target set by the Collaborative.
- The numbers for children who had waited longer than six months to be matched were set out on Page 7 of the report and officers acknowledged that further consideration should be given to an alternative description for the 'other' category. The category of other had been used for children with no identifiable reason why they had not been matched and/or a suitable match had not been identified.

RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T the Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Adoption Collaborative Annual Report 2020-21 and the work of the Collaborative undertaken to date be noted.

(2) T H A T Committee continues to receive annual reports in line with the requirements of the Legal Agreement which underpins the Collaborative.

Reasons for recommendations

- (1) Having regard to the contents of the report in order to exercise scrutiny of the key statutory function.
- (2) To ensure that Committee maintains close scrutiny of the regional service on a regular basis.

527 CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SERVICES ANNUAL PLACEMENT REVIEW (DSS) –

The report outlined the actions taken within Children and Young People Services during 2020/21 with regard to placement provision for Children Looked After (CLA) and the priority actions for 2021/22 such as:

- To provide and commission a flexible and affordable mix of high-quality placements that met the diverse range of children's needs, and
- To develop effective plans in partnership with children and their families which remained focused on achieving care and support plans, prevented drift, enabled them to be reunited with family and friends where possible, to have stable placements and to exit the care system positively.

The Head of Children and Young People Services advised that within the Division, the major issue was the continuing pressure on placements for children looked after. This was the Division's most volatile budget and the one most dependent upon levels of service demand which were not within the Council's direct control. During the COVID-19 pandemic demand across all service areas had increased significantly.

Following the Officers presentation and subsequent member questions, the Officer added that:

- Externally purchased foster care placements were having the greatest impact on the external placement budget given their increasing number. The Council's aim is to reduce external placements, where possible and within the best interests of the child and continue to build upon its in-house resources.
- The quality of staff within the Service was excellent and despite being tired due to dealing with the ongoing pressures of the pandemic, staff morale was good, and the workforce remain fully committed.
- In terms of staff vacancies, pressures remained in the Intake and Family Support Team as well as the Care Planning and Proceedings Team. The Council was taking various steps to mitigate the shortfall however, the scarcity of Social Workers was presenting a significant challenge for recruitment.
- Despite social restrictions put in place as a result of the national pandemic, staff had continued to be where they needed to be offering face-to-face support to families where necessary throughout the various stages of lockdown.
- Families had been very resilient throughout the pandemic. The move towards virtual contact had increased the levels of engagement in many areas.

Therefore, the Council would continue to capitalise on the advantages of working virtually as well as face-to-face going forward.

In conclusion, the Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health advised that the Council continued to provide a service that prioritised a child's needs over budget savings and the budget continued to fluctuate in response to changes in service demand. Members were proud of the staff providing an invaluable service to families across the Vale of Glamorgan.

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the contents of the Children and Young People Services Annual Placements Review Report, as attached at Appendix 1 to the report, be noted.
- (2) T H A T Scrutiny Committee receives a further Annual Placement Review report in October 2022.
- (3) T H A T the report be referred to the Learning and Culture Scrutiny Committee.

Reason for recommendations

(1-3) Having regard to the contents of the report to provide Members with an opportunity to exercise oversight of the key statutory function.

528 DEPRIVATION OF LIBERTY SAFEGUARDS (DSS) –

The Head of Service presented the report, the purpose of which was to provide an overview and summary of the activity within the DoLS team as well as highlight the resource and capacity issues that had resulted in the area of work being included on the Council's corporate risk register.

The Liberty Protection Safeguards (LPS) were due to replace the DoLS in England and Wales, in April 2022 and represented a significant overhaul to the law concerning the care and treatment of people over 16 who lacked capacity to consent to care or treatment that deprived them of their liberty. Workers across the adult social care system would need to prepare for the LPS: the changes would affect direct work with adults, and in some cases young people, carried out by multi-agency practitioners and would require new systems and ways of working at all levels across these organisations.

Following the Officers presentation and subsequent member questions, the Officer added that it was anticipated that the LPS framework would be implemented in April 2022, and that there would be a 12-month transition period where the previous DoLS processes would work alongside the new LPS. However, the Council was yet to receive the relevant Codes of Practice from Welsh Government in order to make the necessary operational and strategic changes that may be required.

In conclusion, the Committee congratulated officers on the successful bid for additional funding from Welsh Government to address the backlog of DoLs applications and the significant progress made in reducing the number of applications awaiting consideration from 322 to 98.

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the continued implications of the Cheshire West judgement in respect of arrangements for Safeguarding adults who were unable to consent to their care and accommodation needs be noted.
- (2) T H A T the report be referred to the Governance and Audit Committee for consideration.
- (3) T H A T a letter be sent to the relevant contact within Welsh Government on behalf of the Committee, signed by the Committee Chair, requesting the timely receipt of the Liberty Protection Safeguards Codes of Practice.

Reasons for Recommendations

- (1) Having regard to the contents of the report which set out the continued implications of the Cheshire West judgement in respect of arrangements for Safeguarding adults who were unable to consent to their accommodation and care and support arrangements and the risk to the Council of legal challenge where statutory timescales were not met.
- (2) To update Members of the Governance and Audit Committee on the progress made with the backlog of applications and the expected legislative changes.
- (3) To provide the Council with as much time as possible to make the necessary operational and strategic changes, especially those relating to essential staff training and budget implications, to align with the Local Protection Safeguards framework to be implemented in April 2022.