

COMMUNITY & ADULT SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

3 FEBRUARY 2021

Present: Councillor Jenkins(Chairperson)
Councillors Ahmed, Carter, Philippa Hill-John, Lent, Lister and
McGarry

113 : APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRPERSON AND MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEE

The Committee noted that Council on 26 November 2020, appointed the following membership:

Councillor Shaun Jenkins (Chairperson), Ahmed, Carter, Gibson, Hill-John, Lent, Lister, Mackie and McGarry.

114 : TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Committee noted its terms of reference as follows:

To scrutinise, measure and actively promote improvement in the Council's performance in the provision of services and compliance with Council policies, aims and objectives in the area of community and adult services, including:

- Public and Private Housing
- Disabled Facilities Grants
- Community Safety
- Neighbourhood Renewal and Communities Next
- Advice & Benefit
- Consumer Protection
- Older Persons Strategy
- Adult Social Care
- Community Care Services
- Mental Health & Physical Disabilities
- Commissioning Strategy
- Health Partnership

To assess the impact of partnerships with and resources and services provided by external organisations including the Welsh Government, joint local government services, Welsh Government Sponsored Public Bodies and quasi-departmental non-governmental bodies and health services on the effectiveness of Council service delivery.

To report to an appropriate Cabinet or Council meeting on its findings and to make recommendations on measures which may enhance Council performance and service delivery in this area.

To be the Council's Crime and Disorder Committee as required by the Police and Justice Act 2006 and any re-enactment or modification thereof; and as full delegate of the Council to exercise all the powers and functions permitted under that Act.

115 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Gibson and Sarah McGill.

116 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following declarations of interest were received.

Cllr Mackie	Item 6	Personal	Member of British Red Cross
Cllr Hill-Jones	Item 6	Personal	Age Connect are member same of networking organisation
Cllr Lent	Item 7	Personal	Carer for an adult in receipt of services
Cllr Lister	Item 6	Personal	Works for a Member of Welsh Government

117 : MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 December 2020 were approved by the Committee as a correct record.

118 : ADDRESSING SOCIAL ISOLATION & LONELINESS FACED BY CARDIFF RESIDENTS FOLLOWING THE OUTBREAK OF COVID-19

The Committee received a report providing an overview of how the Council is addressing social isolation and loneliness for Cardiff's adult population following the outbreak of Covid-19. The Committee had previously agreed to undertake scrutiny of this issue during consideration of its work programme, with particular focus on:

- The Council's role in addressing and mitigating social isolation and loneliness following the outbreak of covid-19.
- How the covid-19 pandemic has heightened social isolation for all demographics of Cardiff citizens aged 18 plus.
- To understand and assess how the Council is working with partners, such as the Welsh Government, charities and religious communities to understand and address this issue.
- To discuss local issues and challenges and consider measures in place to both mitigate and address loneliness and social isolation brought forward by the pandemic.

Representatives from a number of organisations were invited to the meeting to share their knowledge, views and perspectives on the impact of Covid-19 on social isolation including Welsh Government, British Red Cross, Project Hope, Age Connects Cardiff and Vale and representatives from the Church in Wales and Roman Catholic Churches.

Members were advised that the impact of social isolation and loneliness has been exacerbated during the pandemic across all demographics following the introduction of lockdown and shielding measures. Research undertaken by the British Red Cross highlighted that those particularly at risk included people who lived alone and were

shielding, younger people, people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds, people with long-term physical and mental health conditions and people who were financially insecure.

Digital technology can be used to tackle isolation and loneliness but digital exclusion was also a challenge for certain groups. Appendix A to the report set out how Council services have adapted their digital offer to combat social isolation.

Following statements from the Cabinet Member for Social Care, Health and Wellbeing and the Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities, the Committee received a presentation on **the** authority's projects and initiatives aimed at reducing social isolation during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Chairperson thanked the officers for their presentation. Members were invited to comment, seek clarification or raise questions on the information received. Those discussions are summarised as follows:

- Members asked whether there were any ongoing costs associated with the gifting of broadband enabled tablet devices and whether those costs were sustainable in the longer term. The Assistant Director Housing and Communities advised that whilst the devices are enabled there is a data allowance and that allowance is limited. The Assistant Director agreed to provide further information regarding costs should the Committee require that.
- Members asked whether officers were looking ahead and responding to emerging challenges. The Assistant Director confirmed that officers are constantly looking for and responding to new challenges as the impact of the pandemic has affected a broad range of people. There has been an increase in problems associated with increased levels of anxiety and the authority is seeking to establish partnerships with self-help groups.
- Officers were asked whether they could provide a figure for the total number of people classified as vulnerable or isolated in **the** City. Officers stated that whilst there were figures for the number of people supported by Adult Services and Independent Living Services and there was a broad number of people not accessing support who are potentially isolated.
- A Member asked how the new services would continue to be provided as lockdown measure and Covid-19 restrictions are lifted, as staff members that have been brought in to assist in this area will be returning to their substantive roles. The Assistant Director considered that some of the online events would continue. Some services users have expressed a preference for online engagement, for example, those engaging with the domestic abuse service. There would also be a role in co-ordinating and supporting volunteer groups and volunteers.
- Officers advised that it was not possible to estimate the proportion of services users engaging with online events as many of these were open access forums and therefore there may be repeat visits by some service users.

The Chairperson invited the external witnesses to make their representations, following which the Chairperson opened the debate on this item. Those discussions are summarised as follows:

Alastair Davey, Welsh Government

- Members noted the work undertaken by Welsh Government on its 'Resilient Communities' agenda. Members asked whether Covid-19 has highlighted a need to focus further on resilient families and resilient individuals. Alistair Davey from Welsh Government agreed that building resilience and supporting families was key as many families that had not previously engaged with services were now doing so and it was families that make up communities.
- Members asked whether Welsh Government has considered using television campaigns to identify centrally those people who need to engage with services. The information could then be passed on to the relevant local authority. Alistair Davey confirmed that television campaigns and online campaigns have provided contact details for those who want to access services. A key issue was signposting as many people are unaware of the services that are available locally; and also to enable services users to access them.
- Members asked whether emerging issues associated with Covid-19 were at the forefront of the Welsh Government's medium and long-term planning. Mr Davey stated that there were a number of issues to consider. For example, there were societal changes such as an increase in homeworking or people moving out of cities; people who have had their employment affected; people who have had their education affected, longer term psychological and emotion impact, etc.
- It was confirmed that a number of the 80 commitments set out in the Welsh Government's Connecting Communities strategy have been revised or postponed. Welsh Government have repurposed the funding available, particularly to increase support volunteers and volunteering. Mr Davey considered that the strategy will need to be refreshed to reflect the lessons learned during the pandemic.

Kate Griffiths, British Red Cross

- Members asked whether it was possible that issues such as financial hardship result in loneliness and whether there was a role for the Council and other public sector bodies to identify the root cause of social isolation. Kate Griffiths considered that this was absolutely the case and interventions such as 'social prescribing' can help identify the core issues. The local authority role would be around investing in and promoting social prescribing type services.
- Members sought clarification of what would be regarded as a 'meaningful conversation' and whether someone engaging with an online service would count as a meaningful conversation. Members were advised that a meaningful conversation will vary depending on the individual concerned and whether they considered that they were able to convey concerns, talk through support opportunities or simply discuss their shopping for the week. Ultimately a 'meaningful conversation' comes down to the individual's experience and whether

they have had an opportunity to express what they need to express at a given time. This represented a key challenge.

- Kate Griffiths agreed to provide the Committee with further details on the numbers of cases represented by percentages in their report.
- Members asked how the recommendations put forward by British Red Cross were received and whether any of the recommendations have been implemented. Members were **advised** that British Red Cross are currently engaging with local authority's, health boards and Welsh Government about the report's findings and sharing their key priorities and recommendations. British Red Cross are working with partners and sharing ideas at a conversational level. A number of initiatives have responded to the recommendations.
- Responding to a question regarding whether British Red Cross have been invited to contribute to the authority's Covid-19 recovery plans, Kate Griffiths advised that British Red Cross has been engaged at a Welsh Government level.
- Members asked how the authority can best identify those most at risk from loneliness and social isolation, with particular reference to younger people. Members were advised that British Red Cross has a tool that has been shared with all local authority partners called the Vulnerability Index which allows hotspot areas to be identified, such as younger age groups or those in more deprived areas.

Naomi Lea and Nirushan Sudarsan, Project Hope

- Members asked whether a broader piece of work was required to embed medium and longer term aspirations into university life, such as being part of the community. Naomi Lea considered that the students engaging with Project Hope were not stereotypical students and were **they are** already engaged with their communities at a grassroots level, such as joining volunteering groups. However, there was room to build upon this.
- Naomi Lea considered that students would be willing to participate in initiatives such as 'Love My Street' if those events were promoted with students in mind. As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, there were students in the City living next door to each other who have never met and anything that builds bridges within a community would be welcomed. Members were advised that whilst there are services available to students and other young people in the city there was a clear gap in awareness that those services are available, particularly in the 18-25 year old bracket. Nirushan Sudarsan considered that communication was key not only to signposting young people to the services available but also to overcome the stigma associated with loneliness and getting them to open up and express their feelings. This was one of the reasons Project Hope was established. It was considered that the authority could **do** more to break down those barriers and get young people to access the services available.
- The universities provide many services to students also but generally there was a lack of co-ordination between the universities and the Council, particularly in

terms of social care.

- Members agreed that communication could be improved. For instance, when students arrive in the City there ‘welcome pack’ could also include information on the range of services available and the local groups they can join. The representatives from Project Hope supported this view, more so in the next academic year because as a result of the pandemic there will be first year and second year students who have never been to Cardiff before.

Jeff Hawkins, Age Connects Cardiff and Vale

- Members noted the view that some older people may choose to be isolated. The Committee asked whether during the lockdown it was easier or more difficult to identify those who choose to be more isolated but who aren’t necessarily lonely and those who are feeling isolated and lonely. Jeff Hawkins considered that has been easier to identity because people are being encouraged to open up and talk about their issues.
- Members asked for further details on the approach taken by the Vale of Glamorgan Council. Jeff Hawkins stated that at the early stages of the pandemic the Vale Council contacted Age Connects and set up a working group of volunteers who worked through the practicalities of assisting vulnerable groups. Age Connects received many enquiries from potential volunteers and there were difficulties in dealing with the sheer number of enquiries being received. Vale Council assisted with the calls and put a fast track recruitment process in place.
- Members asked whether Age Connects has regular meetings with Council to discuss strategy. Jeff Hawkins stated that whilst Age Connects works alongside the Council they was insufficient resource available to them to become involved in strategic discussions.

Patricia Arlotte, Roman Catholic Arch-Diocese

Carol Cobert, Church in Wales

- Members asked whether the churches supported the view that the more disadvantaged sections of the community were disproportionately impacted upon by effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and the lockdown. Patricia Arlotte strongly supported this view and indicated that their interactions with people in the community evidenced this, particularly with regard to the effects of anxiety and stress. Whilst family are resilient and are able to provide support to each other, they still need access to support services.
- Members asked the faith representatives to comment on the rise **in** the numbers of suicides. Carol Cobert stated that she was aware that the number of suicides has increased and the this affected mainly affecting young men. Some have pre-existing mental health issues.
- Member noted that there were a number of different faith groups who would provide support within the community. Carol Cobert stated that churches have been encouraging their members to donate to foodbanks.

- Members asked how the relationship between faith groups and the Council could be improved to enable faith groups to add more value and do more work within their communities. Carol Cobert considered that communication could be improved as there were many people within the community who did not know where to go to access services.

Cabinet Executive Members

- The Cabinet Member for Social Care, Health and Well-being stated that she was cognisant that the Council needs to do more work to support all sections of the community.
- The Assistant Director Housing and Communities accepted that communication was an issue and could be improved. A number of new communication channels have been tried but there was clearly more work to do in this area. Members suggested more could be done to work in partnership with faith groups and the universities.
- The Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities gave an undertaking the review the publication of an annual newsletter, aimed particularly at older people, that signposted service users to the services available.

AGREED: that the Chairperson, on behalf of the Committee, writes to the Cabinet Members conveying the observations of the Committee when discussing the way forward.

119 : COMMITTEE BUSINESS

The Principal Scrutiny Officer presented the draft Scrutiny Inquiry report entitled 'Closer to Home Project: Out of County Placements for Adults with a Learning Disability'. Members were asked to comment on the report.

A Member proposed a number of amendments to the Scrutiny Inquiry report. It was agreed that those amendments be circulated to the Committee on email, prior to final approval of the report to Cabinet.

The Committee also requested that a minor rewording of key finding 4.

AGREED – That the final draft of the report be agreed by the Committee via email.

120 : URGENT ITEMS (IF ANY)

No urgent items were received.

121 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Budget Scrutiny – 22 February 2021 at 1.30pm

The meeting terminated at 6.50 pm