

POSITION STATEMENT - SOCIAL CARE SAFEGUARDING AND HEALTH MARCH 2017

The purpose of this document is to provide both Members of the present Council Administration and the new incumbents, post - election, with something of a snapshot of the services referred to by the Cabinet Member responsible at the time, in order to assist and contribute towards continuity and direction for this very important area of responsibility with respect to all the constituents of Monmouthshire, especially the vulnerable ones.

Social Services in Monmouthshire, have been on quite a journey these last few years, as have other areas of activity within the Council, not least due to the dearth of funding under which we all have had to operate. We are generally a much leaner Council now, but with the combined efforts of everyone, colleague members of the Administration, supportive Select Scrutiny, Officers and Staff, we have all ensured with our individual contributions that front line services, whilst reconfigured in many areas, still remain active and effective. Well done all of you. This in my view is a massive achievement when we look out to the world at large and the challenges that many other Authorities still have to face, post Social Care and Wellbeing Act of last year, with those issues which we addressed months if not years ago; I am thinking about methodologies such as integrated working with Health as a good example of this.

There is much to do, there are many areas where we have made great strides and progress in Adults and Children's Services, others that have been stubbornly resistant to improvement, so there will be plenty of challenges to be getting on with when the new Member cohort arrives in May.

What follows is breakdown of my main areas of responsibility together with my own personal appraisal of where we are right now. There will be areas I have not been able to cover in this briefing, but the items I bring to your attention are in my view worthy of merit. I emphasise this as with anything being considered in life it will be influenced by perception so there will be others who will have countervailing views on degree of success, progress etc, by hey isn't that why we are here to debate such matters!

ADULT SOCIAL CARE

For some years now this Directorate has seen, in spite of increasing demographic demand, continuing effectiveness in service delivery, and indeed underspend primarily due to changed methodologies of care through inspirational Officer Leadership and committed Staff. This has brought about cultural change which has enabled priorities such as "putting the person at the centre of everything we do" and "keeping people at home" amongst their family and friends and treating residential care as something as a last resort. Collocated staff from Social Care and Health working together as the norm has enabled integrated activities such as Frailty and others to embed and make a difference. "My Day My Life" is a wonderful example of really focussing in on the aspirations of those members of our community that have the constant challenges of learning and disability and making what may seem to us as marginal and incremental changes, but in fact are profound and long lasting improvements to their own quality of life.

The future though has significant budgetary challenges, staffing pressures in domiciliary care for example will be taxing as we Health and the private sector all vie to employ the same people with these skill sets. The Raglan Project and now the larger Monmouthshire Project is evidencing the holistic future and improved quality of care that can be achieved, but it is dependent that suitable staff in sufficient numbers can be found and that is going to be a formidable task for us.

MARDY PARK

This highly valued and well-loved facility has both served us well in the past and is poised for a tremendous future. Its improved built in service delivery flexibility is going to ensure that as local community needs flex, in both numbers and complexity, the ability to bring together professionals, service users and volunteers is going to be a credit to all. The pilot project that was called Community Coordination set out to find ways of bringing those who were just becoming on the threshold of need and matching them up with others, community volunteers and who by interacting could both prevent Social Care intervention and effectively encourage the vulnerable individual back towards more independence. Mardy Park is the epicentre of this work for Abergavenny and is in my view set for a fantastic future.

DOMICILARY CARE

Providing care at home is a vital part of our service, whether it be for people with issues relating to physical frailty and/or with dementia. For some years now we as an Authority have been pursuing a cultural shift from time and task based actions to a more holistic approach exemplified by initially the "Raglan Project" and now enlarged and described as the "Monmouthshire Project" where 25% of our 800 or so residents in need, are looked after in this way. Collaboration with enlightened Private Providers through the project called "Turning the World Upside Down" is bringing us closer to ensuring that the other service users will see the benefit of care with perceptibly higher levels of accompanying dignity. There are still challenges as referred to earlier in being able to recruit sufficient staff, but well worthwhile in pursuing.

GWENT FRAILTY

It has been my privilege to have chaired the Frailty Joint Committee for the past six years and which is still a unique example of Social Care and Health coming together with a pooled budget and delivering re-ablement and Hospital avoidance to a large number of people. Great steps have been made but Challenges still remain. Persistent underspending has been a constant issue, this is not due to lower than expected service need but the difficulty in recruiting to right people in sufficient numbers, combined with inhibiting HR employment practices. The other task is that more can still be achieved in bringing together best practice from around the Region to provide a more homogenous service, modelled very much on the Monmouthshire Integrated Service model but this takes time as it involves cultural shift and that takes not weeks or months, but years. The other regions of South East Wales are also very different to ours, geographically, economically, demographically etc.

DEMENTIA CARE AWARENESS

I am delighted to have contributed together with the Enabler Phil Diamond in bringing Dementia Awareness training to this Council. This of course will be a continual process of informing Staff and hope that it forms part of the induction period for new Members. Understanding the plight of those managing the challenge of Dementia is a valuable skill set that helps us in our daily lives when we encounter it and for me upholding someone's dignity when they really need it just contributes to our common humanity.

DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT

Not many aspects of our work enjoy as much complete political agreement as does this subject. I am mindful that to some it may suggest that more funding should have come this way sooner, but that reflects the dilemma of the decision making process when funds are very scarce. We have had to make many difficult choices on what to prioritise on and there have been indeed other services we have delivered on that have directly contributed to keeping frail people at home, disabled or otherwise. I am just pleased that this financial year has seen an injection of funding to assist the large number of small grant applications and that in the next financial year there will be a thorough piece of work that will inform how this important service can be delivered even more effectively. I am sure that the 300k Capital uplift that will be added will start to make a very positive impact in this regard to some very deserving individuals and their families.

CARERS

I am pleased to see the continuing progress that is being made in supporting our Carers in Monmouthshire. We have been very proactive through close partnership working with Health and the Voluntary Sector to reach out to those people who in many cases do not even realise they are a Carer. Our organised events unlike in other Authorities are always fabulously well attended; certainly the Health and Wellbeing Act and the redefining of the importance of the Carer in the needs assessment of the service user in making them an equal partner in decision making has given us extra focus to do even better.

CHILDRENS SOCIAL CARE

It would be fair to say that this side of our business has presented its fair share of challenges in recent times! If ever there was a sector that has tested our ability to manage and provide all that is required for vulnerable children it is here. The pressure of increasing demand again both in numbers and complexity exacerbated by high levels of statutory responsibility as dictated by the Courts has been a tough one. My thanks go out to all the Officers, Foster Parents and indeed Cabinet Colleagues who have seen deeper resource cuts than would have been necessary in order that these services for vulnerable youngsters could be preserved. I want though to save and offer my most effusive gratitude for the staff themselves in Children's Services both at the sharp end of service delivery and the background administration. They probably hear a great deal about the progress that has been made through proactive engagement in Adult Services and wonder when it will be their turn when they will have the enjoyment of breathing space to develop change practice! A great deal of effort though this last 18 months has seen an embedding of improved practice change and we are becoming a more proactive service and this is starting to bear fruit with respect to the budget. I am confident that this direction of travel can be maintained, but it won't be easy as the environment itself that our Staff have to manage in can and will continue to be very volatile.

CORPORATE PARENTING

The Corporate Parenting Panel which I Chair was set up at the beginning of this administration to facilitate greater awareness of the responsibilities of Corporate Parenting for those who are deemed as such. Good progress has been made in my view but still much more to be done. There should be something in Member Induction that covers this aspect of their role. The main driver for our work however has been in creating better links with our Looked after Children and certainly and this has been improved greatly by our Care leavers Apprentices Rhiannon and Nicole. One aspect though that has been doggedly slow to make progress in and that is in the forming of work experience and Apprenticeships for Care leavers within the Council. Whilst I am disappointed that this has not progressed much to date, I am confident that we have much more awareness of the barriers that are holding us back, and this will become a success story for the next Administration. I am pleased to report though that we will be arranging work experience for those care leavers who are interested by site visits to the Caldicot Comprehensive School site, and with COSTAIN to have a tour of the A465 road Gilwern to Blaenavon construction project.

SAFEGUARDING AWARENESS

Those of us who have been here a while will remember that in another age long gone, Safeguarding reports were but a minor periodic item on the CYP Select Agenda. A lot has happened since then, primarily as a consequence of the Estyn report back in 2012, the impact of this was to remind us that Safeguarding responsibility is for the whole Authority and beyond. A great deal of work in the interim has ensured us that awareness of the issues and safeguarding training generally will be an ongoing fact of life for everyone. Recent events demonstrate that staff in such a complex Organisation such as ours must not be taken for granted in presuming they are getting the message about this subject. Delivering cultural change is never a straightforward process and some people frankly get it easier than do others. Again please ensure that this features in the New Member induction process. Much is still to be done in our influencing of external organisations with whom we commission work, so in simple term a continuing agenda item.

FOSTER CARING

This is a vital service for those children that have through circumstances beyond their control have to live in a family environment other than their own. It is universally understood that for many reasons being a Foster Carer is very challenging as equally it is for the youngsters placed in their charge. We need to redouble our efforts in recruiting more "in-house" Foster Carers who are suited to this work, collaborate more with our existing FC's to develop their skill sets still further, which in return will reduce our dependence on Private Fostering Placements. Progress is being made here with the New MCC Staff investments in this service but we must do more.

YOUNG CARERS

It is a poignant fact of life that young people whether either incrementally or a consequence of a tragic event become Carers for siblings or parents. It is in my view one of our most vital issues in this field of our service delivery to ensure that we have contact with as many youngsters affected, as possible, to help them not only in their caring role and support their education, but also to get them the respite time they need to be for what they do best, being able to be children and young adults.

I am delighted that the new Young Carers Policy document is in the consultation phase at the moment, much of the background work to it has been informed by workshops with Young Carers themselves, so that it can be as relevant as possible. In my introduction to this piece I allude to what it must be like to be a young Carer. I saw on TV recently a very young carer who looks after her mother, being interviewed. She was asked what she wanted to be when she grew up and she replied that she wanted to be an actress, and indeed she was already having lessons. She was also asked what is it like to be a Carer and she said that it is like being an Actress in a role, but with proper actresses they get to stop acting, but this role just goes on for ever and ever.....

I have been the MCC Carers Champion for this last six years, and wish the new incumbent well in a very satisfying aspect of their work.

MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS

We continue to have highly qualified mental health social workers embedded in four teams integrated with Health colleagues across the County, based in Maindiff Court in the North and Chepstow Hospital and Hywel Da in the South. We are the only Authority across Gwent that maintains an integrated multidisciplinary approach, which is valued especially by our Health colleagues. Our qualified staff are to the level where they are described Approved Mental Health Practitioners under the Mental Health Act which means they are qualified to a standard where they can decide upon sectioning themselves. The challenges we face are increasing numbers of people presenting with Dementia diagnoses generally and the specific work demands that DILS will place on us. Deprivation of Liberty is the extra Legal pressure that has been brought about that mandates us to make careful assessments of all of those who are in residential care and suffering with dementia to ensure that their rights to liberty have not been impacted by decisions made on their behalf, given that they do not have the cognisance to make such decisions for themselves.

FINAL OVERVIEW

It has been a very interesting thirteen years! When I reflect back on the early times especially when we used to lament not getting as good an increase in the RSG as other Authorities and how would we keep the services going! How little we could have imagined the subsequent challenges with funding declining in real terms. Monmouthshire County Council has done itself considerable credit that in spite of huge pressures has found the resolve to ensure that Libraries and Leisure centres remain open as well as pretty much all our front line services even though reconfigured in many cases. All these aspects of our service delivery continue to contribute to the health and wellbeing of the residents of Monmouthshire.

I wish everyone well who is standing in the Election in May. Best of luck to those who find themselves in Administration. No matter what problems you face, there will be a solution, if together you look hard enough. For those in Opposition, the critical friend role that comes with decision making Scrutiny is a very valuable part of the process, use it. It is a shame there aren't more in the Whitehouse right now that could be defined as Critical Friends! When you start on May 5th you will have 1,827 days until your next Election to make a difference. Make each and every one of them count!

County Councillor Geoff Burrows,
Cabinet Member for Social Care, Safeguarding and Health
Older persons Champion
Carers Champion