

MINUTES OF INFORMAL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 2 February 2022
(7:00 - 9:30 pm)

Present: Cllr Jane Jones (Chair), Cllr Dorothy Akwaboah (Deputy Chair), Cllr Toni Bankole, Cllr Donna Lumsden, Cllr Olawale Martins, Cllr Fatuma Nalule, Cllr Simon Perry, Cllr Ingrid Robinson, Cllr Paul Robinson and Cllr Phil Waker; Glenda Spencer and Sarfraz Akram

Also Present: Cllr Maureen Worby

45. Declaration of Members' Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

46. Minutes - To note the minutes of the meeting held on 5 January 2022

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 January were noted.

47. Update: Early Help Improvement Programme and Early Help Target Operating Model

The Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health Integration (CMSC) presented an update on the Early Help Improvement Programme and Early Help Target Operating Model (TOM), emphasising that this related to the Targeted Early Help provision and not to the Universal Early Help provision that still sat within the Community Solutions service. The presentation detailed the immediate actions undertaken since the Independent Early Help review in July 2021, the short-to-medium term actions currently underway, and future work, priorities and governance arrangements.

Whilst praising the work undertaken to date, the Chair highlighted the Committee's need for reassurance that the Improvement Programme was being developed and delivered as planned. As such, she requested that an informal meeting take place in either May or June 2021, between the newly appointed Chair of the Committee and report authors, to discuss progress. This would take place between the local elections and the beginning of the new municipal year. She also requested that the item be formally discussed at the first Committee meeting of the new municipal year.

In response to questions from Members, the CMSC and the Commissioning Director, Care and Support (CDCS) stated that:

- The Council needed an effective Early Help service that would be able to provide much needed support to vulnerable families within the Borough. The Council was also receiving increasingly high levels of demand within its casework. Providing an effective Early Help service would help to support families at an earlier stage and this would also prove more cost-effective for the Council, as cases would not decline, thus escalating into more expensive statutory social care services.

- The Council was now working under a vastly different set of circumstances, in comparison to previous Early Help Improvement work. It now knew some of the causal factors that had resulted in its previous position and had taken great care to eliminate these. It also now had a leadership hierarchy that was very experienced in running effective Early Help services, from the Director of Children's Services through to the new Head of Early Help. In designing the new Early Help TOM, the Council had worked alongside the industry experts- Social Care Institute for Excellence- as well as in collaboration with staff, schools and partners, to try to capture what was wrong, and correct this. The Council now had better levels of investment within the Early Help service, as well as was making sure that it had the right mixture of skills and capability at each level of the service. It now also had partners actively involved in the design of the Early Help service, who were understanding and committing to doing what was needed as part of the wider system.
- The Performance Management Framework and quality assurance model used for Early Help now mirrored that used for other parts of the care and support system, which had been routinely tested and commended by Ofsted, and internal audit colleagues had also been invited to undertake an internal audit of the new processes. The Performance Management Framework was also able to offer a breadth of information that the service could use to better understand its performance, as well as to pinpoint where staff may need increased training. 48 training sessions for all Early Help staff had been delivered by Innovate, and training needs would be continuously identified.
- Quality assurance was now being undertaken at a multi-agency level, rather than a single-agency level. When the Council was auditing cases, it now had partners who were involved in those cases, in these discussions. This meant that the Council was evaluating the quality of its partners' practice and their contribution to Early Help, as well as that of itself. Whilst partnership working in this way was still in the early stages, it was a very positive step, with the right individuals engaging.
- If services went over budget, the Council would never scale back vital children's safeguarding services; it would instead work to balance budgets across care and support, look into methods to contain costs, and look into accessing external grants to keep services running.
- Targeted and Universal Early Help services (with the latter picking up the lowest level of need) did not mean that families would not continue within the system. These helped families to have intervention at the first point and diminished the longer-term impact of their support needs, as well as acting as a step up/step down point in providing support. The Council would measure success in a number of different ways; for example, a decline in the number of Early Help cases escalating into Children's Social Care, as support would be provided earlier, as well as a decline in repeat referrals, as cases could be stepped down from Children's Social Care, into additional Early Help support.
- When the Targeted Early Help service transferred over from Community Solutions, 125 staff also transferred with this. The service did not receive all of these staff, as some posts were deleted, and some staff went on to assist the Universal Early Help service and its associated programmes.
- Whilst Early Help performance was monitored by the Community Solutions management when the service sat within this area, there was not originally

a Cabinet Member who was responsible for Early Help. This was no longer the case, with the Cabinet Member for Community Leadership and Engagement responsible for all of Community Solutions except for employment, which sat with the Cabinet Member for Employment, Skills and Aspiration.

- Predictive modelling was essential in helping the Council to plan for future population growth and increased demand, and the Council needed to fully utilise this in planning its Early Help service; however, due to the predictive nature of this and variables involved, such as the changing cost pressures of purchasing services, predictive modelling could never be exact. Whilst it could result in difficult conversations about funding, predictive modelling provided an evidence base and the best chance for securing necessary finances.
- The team had asked for an initial £3 million investment for the service; however, as the Early Help model developed and delivery needs were identified, the team would ask for the necessary additional funding. The model would also need to be tested before implementation, to ensure that both the Council and its partners could deliver an effective service.
- There were a number of processes in place to support staff through this cultural change, such as the CDCS having a weekly open-door slot for all Early Help staff to discuss any issues or ideas. Principal Social Workers currently promoted practice, quality and training for social workers at the Council, as well as advocated on their behalf, and the CDCS and Head of Early Help were looking into creating a similar arrangement for the Council's Targeted Early Help Practitioners. The CDCS and Head of Early Help had been liaising with Early Help staff throughout the transition process, and there was currently a formal consultation to discuss their thoughts. Whilst staff had been anxious of the changes, many had been very positively engaged so far.

48. Social Infrastructure Update and Plans

The Director of Community Participation and Prevention (DCPP) introduced an update on the Social Infrastructure in the Borough. He provided some context as to the invaluable work of BDCAN and volunteers throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, providing support to residents in relation to food, welfare and self-isolation, as well as to the vaccination response. The Council had continued to build on this support over the past few months, collectively working alongside its social sector partners to further build on the relationships, values and approaches that underpinned the work of BDCAN, to grow the social infrastructure capacity within the Borough and to enable residents to have their say, influence and lead action on issues that mattered to them within their neighbourhoods.

The Head of Community Participation and Engagement (HCPE) and the Community Engagement Manager (CEM) detailed some of the achievements since the last presentation to the Committee on 4 November 2020 (minute 24 refers), the principles underpinning the Social Infrastructure within the Borough and the progress made since 2016, with increased participation from residents, relationships based on trust and increased sector capacity. They discussed next steps and projects, how the team was building on its volunteer offer and encouraging increased participation, and how it was looking to sustain interest in the work established so far. The next priority related to ensuring that the Citizens'

Alliance Network was as impactful as it could be for the Borough's residents, as a platform to enable residents to set the agenda around local issues that mattered to them and co-ordinate action. The HCPE detailed the next steps to be undertaken to achieve this, as well as to build a more relational Council, that promoted meaningful engagement.

In response to questions from Members, the DCPD stated that:

- The Council was already working alongside lots of its community partners in terms of the support and offers that were provided for volunteers, and was keen to continue this work. Whilst there was more that could be done, the team had spoken directly to its volunteers to ask them about the types of recognition that they might like to receive from the Council and its partners, introducing a 'Volunteer of the Month' as part of this. The Council had also increased the breadth of training programmes and opportunities that volunteers could access, with a key priority of the Council being to help more volunteers into employment, increasing their skills and income.
- The Council was also working alongside volunteers and community organisations, to improve the experience for volunteers who might express an interest in wanting to offer their time and expertise, but who in the past found registering their interest to be a rather arduous process. The Council and partners now had a great digital platform to improve this process, and whilst there was more to be done, a key priority was to reach out and hear from volunteers directly, so that the experience could be tailored to them.
- Recognition was a key part of the offer for volunteers, especially for longer serving volunteers, and the community sector was very keen to pursue this.
- The Council had 50 Engagement Champions, who were full-time members of staff with existing roles across different departments. These were staff who had been identified by service leadership, with a critical part of their role being working alongside residents. The Engagement Champions brought together good practice, and helped to build on connections across the Council and drive forward a more relational way of working.
- As the Citizens' Alliance Network was launched throughout the Community Hubs across the Borough, there would be more opportunities for residents to connect, where previously there may have been some digital or community barriers. The Council was also going to be working with some of its faith communities around topics such as Covid vaccinations, ensuring that it was capturing more of its communities and that it was targeting those that may not have been reached in the first instance.

The Committee widely praised the work of BDCAN. One Member noted that there was initially some confusion around the offer of the network, with some of the community believing that this was only to be accessed by those who were elderly, or self-isolating, when it could in fact be accessed by all within the Borough. She highlighted the importance of continuing to advertise the offer, as well as the ongoing work to connect BDCAN into local spaces such as schools and children's centres. The DCPD, HCPE and CEM welcomed ongoing feedback from the Committee, as well as other Members, as to how to continue to evolve the Citizens' Alliance Network, and how to tailor this for different areas of the Borough.

49. Work Programme

Whilst the Committee was shortly due to receive an email update on Reside, a Member's Briefing on this subject had been cancelled. The Chair would discuss any further information that the Committee needed for assurance, and next steps, with the Committee clerk who would liaise with the relevant officers to obtain this information.

The Work Programme was noted.