

# MINUTES OF INFORMAL MEETING OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 7 July 2021  
(6:02 - 8:00 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 and Cllr Phil Waker

**Also Present:** Cllr Maureen Worby and Cllr Cameron Geddes

**Apologies:** Cllr Paul Robinson

## 7. Declaration of Members' Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

## 8. Minutes - To note the minutes of the meeting held on 9 June 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 June were noted.

## 9. Targeted Early Help Review

The Council's Strategic Director for Community Solutions (SD) and Commissioning Director for Care and Support (CD) introduced a report on the Targeted Early Help Review, which provided an evaluation of the Council's Early Help service and the journey to date. The report highlighted a number of improvements required, as detailed through an Independent Review commissioned in January 2021, and outlined corrective action both already undertaken and scheduled to take place over the next 12-18 months.

In response to questions from Members, the SD and CD stated that:

- The original 2015/16 Business Case outlined that Early Help would sit at the top end of Community Solutions' remit, in relation to challenging complexity of need. Local Authorities often faced a challenge in determining whether to place these 'top end', yet universal cases underneath, or within statutory services, and this placement differed between councils.
- 2015/16 council plans, although borne out of sensible drivers and motivations, required services to reduce their costs. Early Help demand also began to increase at this time, and action to mitigate these pressures should have been enacted sooner.
- Community Solutions was originally designed to work more generally with residents, earlier in the system. Nevertheless, following the OFSTED visit in February 2019 and the changing need in the Borough, it had been recognised that there needed to be a greater focus on the cusp of care. As the original design was not predicated on this, the Council had been working to move the service forward in this way through its Improvement Programme, which was agreed at its Early Help Summit in September 2019.
- A major aim of the Improvement Programme was to bring the disparate

elements that were sat in different places across Community Solutions, together into one comprehensive targeted early help offer. Within that, the Council brought in additional support to work towards the training and skilling of its staff. It was recognised that the skill and pay for these staff became less reflective of their new remit, and that the new Targeted Operating Model (TOM) should have been reached sooner; however, the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic redirected priorities. The Council was now working with the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) to develop the new TOM.

The Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health Integration (CM) stated that when Early Help was transferred over into Community Solutions, the Early Help service had already had 125 staff delivering this service. They therefore understood the job and had received training, albeit the Community Solutions remit was slightly different in that it covered universal casework. The SD stated that the 125 staff members referenced was also the base number of Early Help staff that started upon the establishment of Community Solutions. A number of these 125 staff had retired, taken redundancy or progressed into different roles, which along with savings made, made it difficult to account for these 125 staff members at present. It was acknowledged that some skills had been lost, and that the ask for staff now was dramatically different to that previously, which was the reason that training and skills had been a key element of the Improvement Programme.

In response to further questions, the SD and CD stated that:

- Whilst the Independent Review had suggested that reporting was inaccurate, the Council had since independently validated that this was not the case. Whilst the Council had shared approximately 85 performance measures with the Independent Reviewer, only two of these had been highlighted by the Review. Whilst it was acknowledged that the team should have acted more promptly based on reporting information, staff were working in difficult circumstances whilst the Independent Review was taking place, with the second wave of Covid-19 resulting in high staff absences at a time of increased demand and complexity. The SD had also been waiting for the outcome of the Independent Review to guide the service moving forward.
- The team had been in the process of trying to acquire more temporary support to manage the situation at the time. Reporting information that the team held was also circulated widely, and managers had worked with the team to review particular caseloads and manage risk.
- A very experienced Head of Early Help would shortly be commencing their role, to provide solid management oversight going forward. A plan for the future of Early Help was currently being designed; however, this may change in coming weeks to ensure that it would be as effective as possible. Commissioners would apply the same principles and processes as currently applied to Children's, Adults' and Disabilities' Care and Support, so that Early Help could be folded into the same performance management framework.
- A dedicated additional practice lead, who was also an experienced Assistant Director for Early Help, would be working with the Council in the short-term. They would focus on providing managers with the support that they needed to continue to develop their practice. The future TOM would

need to better consider the pressures on services to ensure that there was an appropriate ratio of managers to staff, with smaller ratios meaning that managers would have more time to concentrate on practice-based supervision that would translate into the highest quality casework and better quality assurance.

- Whilst Innovate CYP, an OFSTED-recognised improvement partner, had been commissioned for six months to create the capacity needed to cope with pressure and complexity in the system, and to help staff develop, they were a temporary solution. The new model devised by the Council would negate the need for Innovate CYP to work alongside the Council in the longer term. Nevertheless, the Council could decide to commission Innovate CYP for longer if necessary, and would ensure that there would not be a gap between Innovate CYP leaving and the launch of the new model. The new model would also reflect the increased demand in the last 12 months.
- The Independent Review had highlighted that the Early Help service required more investment than previously allocated and this was being reviewed. The CM also noted that the required savings for the service had been approved as part of a block for Community Solutions and that the Council would need to scrutinise this method more in future.
- The Council was undertaking a detailed review of open cases within the Early Help system and about half had been reviewed so far. The caseloads had been stratified based on potential risk and certain characteristics, and had been reviewed according to potential highest to lowest risk. Innovate CYP was assisting in providing capacity to achieve this task and the Council was able to respond to any risk found through additional intervention, or through moving the case into statutory Children's Care and Support services.
- The CD and SD would be very happy to bring periodic progress updates to the Committee as requested.

The Chair emphasised the need to listen to staff, acknowledge any faults and learn from these to ensure a greater service going forward. The Committee also **resolved** to recommend that the necessary funding was provided to ensure that the Council could develop a robust TOM and to ensure a more effective future service. The CM stated that she would do all in her power to ensure that the new model developed was correct and that the Borough's most vulnerable were protected.

#### **10. General progress update regarding working with residents affected by capital works**

The Council's Strategic Director for My Place (MP), Assistant Construction Director (ACD) for Be First and Head of Major Works (MW) at BDTP presented a general progress update regarding working with residents affected by capital works, based on feedback previously received from the Committee at its 2 December 2020 meeting (minute 30 refers). Report authors had acknowledged this feedback and reviewed how the Council's stock investment programme was delivered and how customer satisfaction data was collected and assessed, to ensure that a proper improvement programme was in place.

The Council's One Borough Voice system was to be employed to ensure that

customer satisfaction data was collected and assessed via the Council, and not through contracted companies. The teams were also working with residents and contractors to understand any concerns that they may have had around Covid-19 and putting in means to alleviate these, such as through using the same operatives to deliver all works in any particular property. When sub-contractors were appointed, their experience of working during the Covid-19 pandemic was now also essential, to ensure that they understood all precautions needed.

Updates were also provided on the work and projects undertaken, and it was noted that whilst good progress had been made in relation to work undertaken by the teams, Covid-19 had impacted on the ability to deliver all works envisioned.

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

- My Place needed to take more ownership and responsibility for managing customer satisfaction, as this was a major priority for the service. The new digital customer satisfaction surveys would be a better way of achieving this, instead of relying on the contractor to collect this data. Through the new digital surveys, residents who had work completed on their properties would likely feel more able to provide honest feedback, rather than under pressure to provide good feedback to the contractors who undertook the work.
- My Place would aim to receive an 85 percent satisfaction rate for works completed, which was a good rate to receive when looking across the board at other local authorities and areas. Once an 85 percent satisfaction rate was achieved, the service would aim to get higher percentage scores.
- The Council had a very large spending power and this came with a lot of scrutiny to ensure that procurement was undertaken properly. With every contract procured, My Place had to undertake extensive checks on aspects such as an organisation's insurance, liability and working practices, and could not just employ any company to undertake their works.
- Where costs were high, My Place scrutinised these. The MP also regularly spoke to the Council's Head of Property Management to discuss how the Council could achieve greater value for money from these contracts, such as through social value through contracts that would generate apprenticeships and more jobs for local residents. The Council also looked for good quality work at industry-standard prices, employing extensive checks and scrutiny. Regardless of which organisation the Council used, there would always be an industry-standard payment, a mechanism for paying, and a separate cost for each known as a 'schedule of rates' to be paid in each instance. The scale of works procured by the Council, and the amount of work it had that could fluctuate up and down by trade, meant that there was always going to be an element of risk and that whilst some areas were high cost, the Council was able to get better costs for others.

The Committee recommended that residents also receive the opportunity to provide feedback in the three to four weeks following works undertaken to their properties through the new digital surveys, as opposed to this coming through Councillor casework. This would ensure that customer feedback was better understood by the services, who could then more quickly respond to these residents. The Committee also emphasised the need for residents to be able to provide any feedback via paper questionnaire if they wished, as not all residents had access to the Internet.

## **11. Draft Work Programme 2021/22**

The Chair asked that the Committee provide any feedback in relation to the Draft Work Programme 2021/22 via email, for further consideration.