



To:
Councillor Louise Gibbard
Cabinet Member for Care Services

and

Councillor Alyson Pugh
Cabinet Member for Wellbeing

Please ask for:
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Date
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02 October 2023

BY EMAIL

cc Cabinet Members

Summary: This is a letter from the Adult Services Scrutiny Performance Panel to the relevant Cabinet Members following the meeting of the Panel on 5 September 2023. It covers Performance Monitoring and Wales Audit Office Report.

Dear Cllr Gibbard and Cllr Pugh

The Panel met on 5 September 2023 to discuss the Performance Monitoring Report for July 2023 and Wales Audit Office (WAO) Report 'A Missed Opportunity' – Social Enterprises.

We would like to thank yourselves, Amy Hawkins and Lee Cambule for attending to present the items and answer the Panel's questions. We appreciate your engagement and input.

We are writing to you to reflect on what we learned from the discussion, share the views of the Panel, and, where necessary, raise any issues or recommendations for your consideration and response.

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY / TROSOLWG A CHRAFFU

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Performance Monitoring

We were pleased to hear from Cllr Gibbard that Bonymaen House received an excellent inspection in July 2023 and that all teams based at the Civic Centre have now moved over to the Guildhall helping to improve collaborative working.

We queried if the new location for the Common Access Point was fit for purpose as there are problems with acoustics, due to the Guildhall being an old building with high ceilings. We heard that staff are being issued with better sound proofing headsets to help with this. We suggested using sound boarding structures to help mitigate noise, officers confirmed these are not currently being used and they will look into it.

We asked about staffing and recruitment issues and heard it is a challenge for all five social work teams as there is a deficit of social workers across Wales. We were informed that there are not enough people coming through the system, so the Authority has workforce strategies for developing its own staff internally, including alternatively qualified staff, and working more with universities to host those students on courses locally.

We discussed mental health and wellbeing of staff and heard the Directorate supports staff wellbeing and that each team is having a wellbeing assessment and then individual action plans drawn up as different teams have different challenges.

In terms of external domiciliary care provision, we noted that in the next 12 months the Authority will be recommissioning services. We discussed the continued low occupancy at some homes creating financial instability for some providers. Officers stated that it is a changing picture which has not stabilised yet post pandemic to know what the future will look like but that it needs to be looked at. We heard the Authority has influence, but as the homes are independent, ultimately it is a business decision for them.

Regarding external care homes where there are escalated concerns, we felt this must be a worrying time for residents and their families and queried if it was an option for some residents to be transferred to other homes. We heard it is better for people's health and wellbeing not to be moved as it is their home but that the Authority has influence, as it is the commissioner, and will do what it can to keep external care homes stable.

We discussed how more third-party charges for external care provision are being picked up by the Authority. We feel the Authority should make representations to the Welsh Government to review these charges. Cllr Gibbard stated the Authority does not currently have a policy around this but is looking to develop one. However, it is difficult as they are private organisations, and the Authority cannot dictate what they can and cannot charge.

In terms of safeguarding, we noted the increasing number of referrals and asked for examples of what some of the issues have been. We heard the Directorate receives a breakdown of the type of referral and agreed this information be included in future performance monitoring reports. We also expressed concern about the high number of professional referrals and heard the Authority's safeguarding function is dealing with professional concerns in terms of care and support for all organisations.

We asked for information on Deprivation of Liberty including how many people have gone through the process in the last 12 months and the type of claimant. It was agreed this will be included in the report to the Panel in October on Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards.

We asked about legal support and how the Department is outsourcing part of it and the cost is increasing. We heard there had been a vacancy in legal which has now been filled but there is also increased demand and there are complex cases where external specialist support has been needed. We also heard that there is a grant for some of this but there has been increased demand and increased cost. We all agreed the need to keep an eye on this.

WAO Report 'A Missed Opportunity' – Social Enterprises

We queried the definition being used for 'Poverty' and were informed the definition currently being used is from the 2017 Tackling Poverty Strategy. This Strategy is currently being refreshed and the definition will be reviewed as part of this.

We requested a list of social enterprises be provided to the Panel. We heard that one of the first steps, as part of the action plan being developed, will be to carry out a mapping exercise to improve the data the Authority holds about social enterprises and micro enterprises. Once you have this, you can see what you should be doing and what the Authority's relationship should be with those organisations. We would like an update on progress to be brought to a future meeting when an action plan is in place and mapping exercise completed. We will add this as an item to the work plan for early 2024.

We sought clarification on a line in the report about one authority working with 60% of social enterprises. Officers clarified that it means, 60% of social enterprises do not work outside of their local area, a smaller percentage work regionally and some work nationally.

We noted that in the report it says there is a leadership vacuum with social enterprises and queried how performance is measured for the ones this Authority works with and gives grants to, and if they are audited to ensure they are performing. We heard that from an individual grant perspective, the Authority has ways of measuring outcomes and performance, however, this would be focused on the nature of the grant rather than performance as a social enterprise. We heard that you plan to pull together information that is already there and should be able to develop a performance framework for social enterprises going forward.

We discussed how the report mentions 'strategic intent and direction' and how several years ago the NHS in Wales produced a document with partners around this. We queried if this is the type of framework the Authority is looking to apply with partners across the range of care being talked about here. We were informed the direction the Department wants to go in, is to get everyone to commit to the same path and strategic line, in terms of all partners to be working towards the same priorities and actions.

Your Response

We hope you find this letter useful and informative. We would welcome your comments on any of the issues raised, however in this instance, a formal written response is not required.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "S. Jones." The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the text "Yours sincerely".

SUSAN JONES
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