11 February 2013

Dear Mr House

The Cardiff Partnership Board (CPB) Scrutiny Panel held its third official scrutiny meeting on Tuesday January. At this meeting, the Panel focused on the theme of Addressing Geographical Inequality. The What Matters strategy clearly demonstrates the divide between north and south Cardiff in terms of life expectancy, health, education wealth and a number of other factors. The joint strategic needs assessment also demonstrates the outcome inequalities within geographical areas of Cardiff. What Matters recognises these issues and aims to target the Partnership’s work and resources to the areas which are in most need in order to address these inequalities. The Panel therefore wished to scrutinise the effectiveness of the CPB in generating positive outcomes via the Priority Programmes and Neighbourhood Management (NM) areas.

As the work of the CPB is so wide the Panel focused their scrutiny on the Families and Young People Programme, and on two NM areas (Cardiff South East and Cardiff North). As part of their investigations the Panel wanted to focus on three main areas of questioning:

1. How is the work addressing geographical inequalities?
2. How effective is the partnership working for each of the areas?
3. How are the Priority Workstreams and Neighbourhood Management areas working together?

Firstly, I would like to thank the witnesses who attended the meeting and provided briefing papers and presentations to inform the Panel. The briefings, reports and evidence they provided were insightful. They helped the Panel reach a clear understanding of how each of the workstream activities and neighbourhood management areas were targeting their resources to the areas of most need.
Families and Young People

The Panel were particularly encouraged by the recent changes to the Attendance work, with Education Welfare Officers and behaviour workstreams being targeted by evidence of need derived from school attendance data, areas of disadvantage and the numbers of pupils in the most difficult circumstances in order to generate improved outcomes.

The Panel consider that greater understanding of ‘what works’ could be gained via a mechanism which enabled the impacts of intervention to be isolated and attributed, particularly when there may be multiple interventions taking place in one area. In addition further work seems to be required to provide a cost benefit analysis of workstreams and interventions both in terms of the cost of the intervention or workstream and the potential for savings in ‘negative expenditure’ which they generate. The Panel feel this is particularly important in these times of cuts and budget pressures and consider it worth exploring avenues that would enable such monitoring and evaluation to be undertaken in order to help prove the value of a particular intervention / activity.

Furthermore, the Panel heard that different projects and workstreams often used different monitoring and evaluating methods and there was not a framework which enabled continual monitoring of outcomes through an individual child’s development. The Panel feel that there should be a framework in place which could be used by all partners to help monitor a child’s development over time. The Panel feel that this is an area that the Board could explore, as this would provide a much more effective picture of the impact of interventions and also try to reduce the large amounts of varied monitoring and evaluation that can often take place.

In relation to partnership working, the Panel were encouraged to see the number of different partners involved with each of the workstreams and how the different service providers are working closely together to achieve the desired outcomes. The Panel felt that each of the team representatives present appeared to be making an impact in their individual areas, and we will obviously remain interested in how these emerging partnerships are contributing to improving outcomes for service users in the medium term.

It was clear that each workstream represented a particular timeline in a child’s life, starting with Flying Start, moving on to early intervention, and then the attendance and behaviour workstreams. The Panel feel that there is a clear link between each of these workstreams, and also heard how work undertaken by Flying Start and early years intervention can have a dramatic impact on children’s attendance and behaviour in later life. This was not only due to the work the workstreams conducted with children but also because they tried to involve the parents. The Panel felt this was very positive and an area that needs to be continued wherever possible.

Although there was evidence presented to the Panel of effective working with external partners within their own ‘timeline’ the Panel consider that further
improvement could be generated by an emphasis on strategic leadership and joined up thinking across the whole Programme. Panel Members were concerned that whilst a child / family may receive an excellent service from one particular service / workstream, once they became too old for that intervention there was a risk of ‘dropping off the radar’ and not being moved on to another supporting intervention, in which case problems could return.

The Panel would therefore like to see evidence of an overarching strategy, identifying how each of the Family and Young People Programme’s workstreams interact to ensure that children do not drop off the radar and have clear lines of intervention and communication between each of the workstream activities. The Panel hope that this would be addressed with the new Early Years Intervention Strategy and Families First commissioning process, and would also like to see evidence of this at a future Scrutiny Panel meeting.

**Neighbourhood Management**

The Panel also heard how Neighbourhood Management areas (NM) prioritise their resources and activities, and were encouraged by the plans’ ambition for the areas they covered. This was particularly true of the South East NM area, which had an extensive action plan, covering a wide range of aims and objectives which were all underpinned by a focus on improving health.

The Panel heard how NM areas have the opportunity to share information through the NM programme board and how this arena also gives opportunity for NM areas to learn about the work of the priority workstreams and how they may be able to work closer together. The Panel felt this was a positive structure which provided a good space for information sharing between the two delivery mechanisms of the CPB.

Despite these positive aspects the Panel would like to provide some constructive critique regarding NM areas. Whilst the Panel are impressed with the ambition and level of detail of the NM action plans, they would wish to ensure that these action plans were not too ambitious or unachievable, particularly at a time of reducing public finances. We are particularly concerned that potential budget cuts experienced by partner organisations may impact negatively on the capacity of NM areas to deliver their action plans, particularly as they rely on the involvement and input of various partner organisations, each of whom may experience growing financial challenges over the medium term.

The Panel therefore feels that it would be useful for NM Action Plans to be prioritised to indicate what they feel is most important to their work, and also have some contingency plans for any potential impacts that cuts in other services may have on their work.

As a final point, a Panel Member made a well-received point that the diversity of NM areas – while presenting some operational challenges – is a real strength that should
be accentuated, along with other positive aspects of local neighbourhoods, demonstrating the unique nature of those communities, and helping to engage the public further by building on the positive work already taking place.

Moving the Scrutiny of the Partnership Board Forward

At the end of the meeting the Panel had a discussion about the Panel’s future and how best their work can be taken forward. It was shared how the Panel has a key role in implementing the ESTYN Post-Inspection Action Plan, and has been cited by Welsh Government as being at the cutting edge of collaborative scrutiny in Wales.

We clearly understand the need to avoid duplication between the CPB Board, Cardiff Leadership Group and the Scrutiny Panel in working to ensure robust outputs and outcomes, and we want our future scrutiny to be as effective and helpful as possible. Panel Members also wish to target more of their scrutiny at the work of the Board itself, and to discuss with the Board how this may best be achieved.

At our next meeting, therefore, the Panel would like to hear from Board members themselves about what they feel has been positive from the work of the Panel this year, and how we can improve our work in the future. The Panel would like to invite the Chair of the Board and any other Board members who may wish to attend to give their perspective on the Panel’s work to date, and how we can best move forward in the future. This will enable us to plan an effective work programme for next year’s scrutiny.

Recommendations

**Recommendation 1**
That the Board explore an overarching monitoring framework that could monitor a child and family’s development throughout their life and could be used to measure the impact and cost benefit of interventions and used by all partners involved in similar activity. This could also be used by areas which had not received interventions to help prove the impact that interventions were having in an area compared to those which had not received the intervention.

**Recommendation 2**
That evidence is provided of the links between different workstreams from the beginning of a child’s life to when they leave school. This should map the provisions which are available to families and children and importantly highlight how they can link with each other so that a child / family does not ‘drop off the radar’ once one intervention has been completed.

**Recommendation 3**
That NM areas prioritise their ambitious workloads so that workers and communities can see what their highest priorities are in an extensive action plan and can also identify the outcomes of each major workstream / activity.

**Recommendation 4**
That evidence be provided (beyond the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment carried out as part of *What Matters*) of how communities and citizens are shaping the future and delivery of the NM action plans and priorities and how outcomes are fed back to them.

**Recommendation 5**
That the NM areas prepare contingency plans to demonstrate how they will be able to continue in the event of significant impacts from public sector cuts.

**Recommendation 6**
That the Chair of the CPB and as many Board members as possible attend the next meeting of the CPB Scrutiny Panel to feedback on what they have found effective from the work of the Panel and how they can best move forward in their future scrutiny.

Yours sincerely

pp Mark Brace – Panel Vice Chair