

PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Performance Scrutiny Committee held in Conference Room 1a, County Hall, Ruthin on Thursday, 15 January 2015 at 9.30 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Meirick Davies, Richard Davies, Dewi Owens, Arwel Roberts (Vice-Chair), Gareth Sandilands and David Simmons (Chair)

Co-opted Members Gill Greenland, Dr Dawn Marjoram and Gareth Williams.

ALSO PRESENT

Chief Executive (MM), Head of Education (KE), Corporate Research and Intelligence Co-ordinator (DM), Head of Customers and Education Support (JW), Head of Communications, Marketing and Leisure (JG), Lead Officer, Libraries and Arts (AJ), Strategic Planning and Performance Officer (IMc), Corporate Improvement Officer (NK), Strategic Planning Team Manager (LG), Scrutiny Co-ordinator (RE) and Committee Administrator (SLW)

Councillor Huw LI Jones, Lead Member for Leisure, Youth, Tourism and Rural Development, attended at the Committee's request for Business Item 7.

Observer – Councillor Gwyneth Kensler

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Colin Hughes, Geraint Lloyd-Williams and Peter Owen and Co-opted Member Debra Houghton

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Councillors Meirick Lloyd Davies, Arwel Roberts, Gareth Sandilands and David Simmons declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 5 – Verification External Examinations and Teacher Assessments

Councillor David Simmons declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 6 – Not in Education or Employment or Training (NEET)

Co-optee Member, Gillian Greenland declared a personal interest in Agenda item 5 – Verification External Examinations and Teacher Assessments and item 6 – Not in Education or Employment or Training (NEET)

3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

No urgent matters were raised.

4 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of a meeting of the Performance Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday, 20 November 2014, were submitted.

Councillor Gareth Sandilands requested regular updates regarding the CCTV and Out of Hours Service (Item 5 – Page 8). The Chief Executive clarified that the Head of Planning and Public Protection had set up a Working Group and from which regular updates would be available.

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator also confirmed that the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group (SCVCG) had decided that the report on the exit strategy/alternative provision for the CCTV and Out of Hours Service, which Performance Scrutiny Committee had requested be presented to Scrutiny, would to be presented to Partnerships Scrutiny Committee in either May or June 2015. It would be presented to that committee at it was the Council's dedicated crime and disorder scrutiny committee.

***RESOLVED** that the minutes be received and approved as a correct record.*

5 VERIFIED EXTERNAL EXAMINATIONS AND TEACHER ASSESSMENTS

The Head of Education (H of E) presented the KS4 Examination report (previously circulated) to provide information regarding the performance of Denbighshire school teacher assessments and external examinations. She also tendered the apologies of GwE's, the Regional School Effectiveness Service, Managing Director for his unavoidable absence from the meeting. He was unable to attend as GwE was that week being inspected by both Estyn and the Wales Audit Office (WAO).

A report had previously been submitted for Performance Scrutiny Committees consideration in October 2014.

The Committee considered information on the verified performance of Denbighshire's schools external examination results at Key Stage 4 (KS4) and post 16, along with GwE, the Regional School Effectiveness Service's Annual Report on its work in Denbighshire.

The overall results were extremely satisfactory, with the Level 2 results being particularly pleasing. Whilst the Council had been achieving above the Welsh average at all KS4 indicators, it did not intend to be complacent and would continue to strive for excellence at all key stages in a bid to improve outcomes for all pupils and equip them with the necessary skills for the future.

Despite the improved performance in KS4 results, some individual schools' performance had declined and scrutiny had been encouraged to support those schools' improvement journeys.

In-depth discussion took place and in response to members' questions, officers advised that:

- Prestatyn High School had been receiving substantial support to facilitate improvement from both the county and GwE. The impact of GwE's support to the school would be evaluated in the near future
- Education Department and GwE officials met on a fortnightly basis to discuss their work plans and to ensure that the schools receiving support were proceeding with their improvement
- Support had been provided to Ysgol Brynhyfryd's management team following the secondment of their Headteacher to GwE. The impact of the support would be continually monitored in view of the fact that the school's performance in some areas had declined
- Discussions were taking place with business leaders at the North Wales Economic Ambition Board, as to how local authority education departments could best equip pupils with the relevant skills and qualifications to improve the local economy within the constraints of the national curriculum. Part of this work would include the establishment of an Education Employers' Forum
- Within the Welsh Government's secondary categorisation, Denbighshire were collectively ranked 4th in Wales out of 22 education authorities. Whilst Denbighshire did not have any individual schools in Category 4, the lowest category, there were two schools in category 3. The County's aspiration would be to have all schools in either category 1 or 2. In order to achieve this, further work and support would be required for three schools. It had been suggested during the meeting that scrutiny may have a role to play in securing this improvement
- A long term strategy was in place to address the variance in performance between schools with respect to level 2 attainment, including language and maths. This strategy included the identification of struggling pupils at Key Stages 1 and 2 and providing them with the required support to enable them to realise their potential later on at Key Stages 3 and 4. This work would complement the aims of the national numeracy and literacy strategy
- At the County Youth Forum, pupils views had been sought on educational matters e.g. subject matter and teaching methods
- Whilst it had been acknowledged that the ethos of individual schools had some impact on the educational attainment, all schools and their staff were well aware of what standards of performance were expected of them, both locally and nationally. It was also widely acknowledged that there was a correlation between good teaching and inspired pupils
- The educational achievements of the County's special schools and its Looked After Children (LAC) were highlighted. However, both officers and members registered their continued disappointment that the Welsh Government did not report the educational achievements of special schools. It had, therefore, been decided that a letter be sent to the Head of Education at Welsh Government conveying the Committee's views that it takes steps to report annually in a valid and appropriate way on the achievements and educational attainment of pupils in special schools
- Officers had similar concerns to members with respect to the extent of the recognition given by the higher education sector to the Welsh Baccalaureate qualification. Officers had highlighted this concern to the WG, but it was suggested that scrutiny may also want to look into the problem and its impact on the County's pupils

- There was a need to improve the wider points score with respect to level 3 results with a view to improving the County's ranking in Wales (currently 20th) and support pupils to realise their full potential and follow their chosen educational/career path
- The issue surrounding the fabric of school buildings and their suitability for modern teaching were being addressed through the Modernising Education Programme. However, this was dependent on central government funding as well as local government funding and could potentially be severely affected in the long-term by the public sector financial cuts. Issues regarding the suitability of certain buildings at Ysgol Plas Brondyffryn for a special school were raised
- It was confirmed that the original Service Level Agreement (SLA) between all North Wales Local Authorities and GwE was a generic SLA aimed at targeting support for underperforming schools. As the majority of Denbighshire's schools did not fall into this category, it had only partly realised limited benefits from its investment in the service. Nevertheless, the schools which had worked closely with GwE had nothing but praise for the service and support they had received. Under the revised SLA for the current (2014/15) academic year a specific amount of money had been set aside for intervention in Denbighshire. The plan was that some of this money could be used to intervene to support good schools to progress to become excellent schools
- It was emphasised that funding for school improvement services from the Welsh Government had been protected against the budget cuts, this should ensure that the level of service provided by GwE should be sustained and be of consistent good quality.

Following the detailed discussion, the Committee congratulated education staff and schools on their performance.

RESOLVED that, subject to the above observations:

- (i) to endorse the performance of schools against previous performance and the external benchmarks currently available
- (ii) that a letter be sent to the Head of Education at the Welsh Government conveying the Committee's views that steps should be taken nationally to report annually, in a valid and appropriate way, on the achievements and educational attainment of pupils in special schools.
- (iii) that the Committee considers including in its Forward Work Programme, work in relation to:
 - a. increasing the number of pupils achieving A* and A grades at Level 2 (GCSE) and Level 3 (A Level and Vocational Equivalent), including increasing the wider points score, through Local Education Authority and GwE support
 - b. examining and monitoring the effectiveness of the support given to both Rhyl secondary schools to improve their Level 2 attainment levels and to continually sustain improvement at those schools
 - c. examining and monitoring the effectiveness of the support provided to Prestatyn High School to improve its Level 2 and Level 3 attainment levels and to continually sustain improvement at that school

- d. *examining and monitoring the effectiveness of the support provided to Ysgol Brynhyfryd with a view to it regaining its previous Level 2 and Level 3 attainment levels and further improving towards being an excellent school*
- e. *examine and monitor the Level 3 educational achievements of Rhyl Sixth students to determine whether their educational outcomes are being met to a satisfactory standard which supports them on their chosen educational/career paths*
- f. *examining ways of how the Council can work with the Welsh Government in a bid to widen the recognition given by higher education establishments to the Welsh Baccalaureate qualification.*

6 NOT IN EDUCATION OR EMPLOYMENT OR TRAINING (NEET)

The Head of Education (H of E) presented the NEETS (young people “not in education, employment or training”) report (previously circulated) to provide information regarding the measures being taken to proactively support those young people in danger of becoming NEET in order to improve performance against this measure. Also to ensure that none of the County’s young people fall in to this category, and are fully equipped with the necessary skills to contribute to the development of the local economy.

During consideration of the report, members were advised that the numbers in this category had been reducing every year since 2008. The only year numbers had risen, had been in 2013. However, the latest data indicated that the trend had been addressed and the number was again reducing.

In addition to the information contained in the report, officers outlined the work underway with the North Wales Economic Ambition Board, through its education steering group, which was looking at matching students’ qualifications and skills with the skills and needs of local employers.

Responding to members’ questions, officers advised that the Chair of the North Wales Economic Ambition Board also served on GwE’s Joint Committee. This appointment had been aimed at ensuring connectivity between the field of education and employment.

Responding to questions on the effect of a high transient population on educational attainment and NEET’s figures along the County’s coastal areas, members were advised that schools in those particular areas had well embedded measures in place to deal with the impact of a transient population on their schools. These measures were robust and worked well.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the Committee:

RESOLVED *that, subject to the above observations, it was satisfied with the measures being taken to address and reduce the number of NEET individuals in the county and to ensure that every student in the county was supported to realise his or her potential.*

7 PERFORMANCE IN RELATION TO MEETING THE NEW LIBRARY PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

The Lead Member for Leisure, Youth, Tourism and Rural Development presented the report, on "Meeting the New Framework of Welsh Public Library Standards 2014-17" (previously circulated). The Lead Member and officers also requested members' observations on the future vision for the County's libraries as community hubs

The report had been requested by the Performance Scrutiny Committee following the Information Report circulated to Members in May 2014.

During the presentation of the report, it was emphasised that despite the fact that Denbighshire did not meet three out of the eight national standards set by the regulator – CyMAL, the Library was an extremely popular service with users. The standards which had not been met related to staffing numbers, building condition surveys and Wifi availability. As the latter was in the process of being met, a conscious decision had been taken with regards to not striving to meet the other two on the grounds of budget constraints and the fact that all buildings were of a satisfactory quality and the survey was a superfluous administrative exercise. The Council had consistently, for the past 12 years or more, ranked in the top quartile in Wales for the number of library visits, numbers of books issued and customer satisfaction - recently it had been judged joint first in Wales for customer satisfaction amongst under 16 year olds. CyMAL did acknowledge that the County's library service was a popular and valuable service - visitor figures had actually increased during 2013/14. Going forward and, with a view to continuing with the delivery of a popular service in the face of financial cuts, an innovative method for delivering library services alongside other community and local authority services was being proposed, by the establishment of Community Hubs. Each community hub, located in existing library buildings, would be tailored to deliver the key services required in those individual communities. Whilst those proposals were not aimed at achieving all of CyMAL's new framework indicators, they were in-keeping with the WG's vision for community based services and community hubs designed to deliver services in a holistic way. Officers had met with CyMAL officials to discuss the proposed future vision for the county's libraries and they understood the rationale behind the proposals and were broadly supportive of them.

In response to members' questions, officers:

- outlined the capital and revenue costs of installing and maintaining Wifi in libraries and the various funding sources which had been utilised to fund the installation
- confirmed that plans were underway to install Wifi at the two remaining libraries during 2015
- detailed the types of services, both public and voluntary, which could be housed within the proposed community hubs
- confirmed that the school library service would cease in March 2015, but as the majority of schools contacted the mainstream library service with enquires and requests, the cessation of the service should not have a detrimental affect
- the transfer of management responsibility for the library service to the Customers and Education Support Service would provide the ideal opportunity

for enhancing the working relationship between the education and libraries services. It would also facilitate the delivery of certain education services i.e. digital and literary skills courses within community hubs in future

- confirmed that it was a statutory requirement for each local authority to provide a library service, the method for delivering that service was at the discretion of each individual Council
- advised that the Service purchased books via the All-Wales consortia which realised considerable financial savings for the Council
- stated that the areas freed within libraries, once art based exhibitions had been phased out, would be used to deliver community based services. However, this did not mean that art service staff would not be available to assist arts group to organise/set-up exhibitions at other centres within the community
- confirmed that the art service would be willing to work with community groups etc., to seek and apply for external funding for community focused services
- confirmed that the Service, despite the cuts it faced, should have sufficient capacity in future to undertake its own customer satisfaction surveys rather than pay an outside provider to undertake them.

Members also enquired about the possibility of all libraries/community hubs located in areas where fibre optic broadband was available providing those services, and for future plans for a permanent exhibition for the late Philip Jones-Griffiths being housed at Rhuddlan Library.

Members congratulated officers and staff on providing such a popular and valued service despite not meeting all the Regulator's requirements, and for also being willing to meet the Regulator and explain why indicators were not met and explaining the Authority's vision and rationale. The Committee:

Resolved :

- (i) subject to the above observations on the requirements of the Fifth Framework of Library Standard to receive the Library Service's estimated performance for 2014-17;*
- (ii) to schedule into its forward work programme for October 2015 CyMAL's Annual Assessment based on the Library Service's 2014-15 performance; and*
- (iii) that the report in October 2015 also include a progress report on the development of libraries into community hubs.*

At this juncture (11.35 a.m.) there was a 10 minute break.

Meeting resumed at 11.45 a.m.

8 STREET NAMING POLICY

The Corporate Research and Intelligence Co-ordinator presented the Street Naming and Numbering Policy Report (previously circulated) for Members to consider the progress made with the implementation of the new Policy.

The Corporate Research and Intelligence Co-ordinator advised during the presentation of this report that following receipt of the first street name change

request from a member of the public, the policy had been applied and the due consultation process followed. Problems which had come to light during the consultation process on this first request would be worked through with a view to easing the process for future requests and consultation exercises. At the conclusion of this first consultation process the Head of Service, in line with the powers delegated to him, had approved the name change and discussions were currently underway with the relevant community council with regards to seeking its agreement to sponsor the name change. If agreement would not be forthcoming the County Council would sponsor the change. If the latter was the case all relevant signage may not be able to be ordered until the new financial year.

Responding to members questions officers:

- detailed the process followed to allocate street names on new developments and to request a name change of an existing street, including the different financial responsibilities in each case
- explained the different legislation, both past and present, which governed the naming and numbering of streets;
- undertook to clarify which clause(s) of the 1972 Act superseded clause 65 of the Town Improvement Clauses Act 1847 in relation to street numbering and naming;
- offered to look further into the naming of Tan yr Eglwys Road in Rhuddlan, and the lack of official names for the two roads which formed the boundary of the Cae Shon triangle area in the community of Trefnant, both of which join Allt Goch at separate junctions (known locally as Ffordd y Sipsiwn (or Ffordd y Romani) and Ffordd y Graig)

It was:

Resolved :

- (i) subject to clarification on the above points to receive and note the progress with the implementation of the policy; and*
- (ii) subject to the availability of resources to promote the street naming and numbering policy*

9 CORPORATE PLAN (Q1 AND Q2) 2014/2015

The Corporate Improvement Officer (CIO) presented the Corporate Plan Q1 and Q2) 2014/2015 report (previously circulated) which detailed the progress made with the delivery of the Corporate Plan and outcome agreements as at the end of Quarter 2 in the 2014/15 financial year. Regular reporting was an essential monitoring requirement of the Corporate Plan to ensure that the Council exercised its duty to improve.

The CIO informed members that the Quarter 2 2014/15 report was a far more positive report than the end of year report for 2013/14, particularly in relation to performance with respect to the corporate priority of developing the local economy. Whilst it was anticipated that Denbighshire would not qualify for the entire amount of outcome agreement money from the WG (£1,413,636) for 2013/14 on the basis that only 83% of the outcome agreements had been delivered, it should receive

circa £1,166,249. Confirmation on the final amount awarded should be available by the end of January 2015.

Responding to members' questions officers confirmed that:

- the Service was in discussion with the manufacturers of the Symology technology to ascertain whether there was any problem that was causing inaccurate reporting of work which had been completed
- despite the fact that Denbighshire were considered to be excellent for the overall condition of principal (A), non-principal (B) and (C) roads (THS012) in its family group, the authority had been worst performing in its family group for 2013-14 for the percentage of non-principal (B) roads in overall poor condition. With budgets reducing year on year, the County's position would be unlikely to improve in the foreseeable future;
- it was anticipated that the improved performance with respect to developing the local economy could be improved even further following the restructure of services aligned to the economic and community ambition work;
- improvement had also been seen with respect to the outcomes within the Outcome Agreement, which included access to good quality housing and ensuring that students achieved their potential. This should ensure that the Council achieved a full payment of the outcome agreements monies for the 2014/15 year.

At the conclusion of the discussion the Committee:

Resolved that subject to the above observations, to receive the report, and that information on the Welsh Government's decision with respect to the awarding of the Outcome Agreements for 2013/14 be circulated to Committee members when available.

10 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

A copy of a report by the Scrutiny Co-ordinator, which requested the Committee to review and agree its Forward Work Programme and which provided an update on relevant issues, had been circulated with the papers for the meeting. A Member Proposal Form for Scrutiny Forward Work Programme had been included as Appendix 2. The Cabinet Forward Work Programme had been included as Appendix 3 and a table summarising recent Committee resolutions, and advising on progress with their implementation, had been attached at Appendix 4 to the report.

The Committee considered its draft Forward Work Programme for future meetings as detailed in Appendix 1.

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator explained that in future years the Welsh Government together with the Wales Audit Office had highlighted the need to strengthen scrutiny's role across local government and public services in Wales, including utilising scrutiny as a means of engaging with residents and service-users. Going forward, scrutiny would be expected to engage better and more frequently with the public with a view to securing better decisions which ultimately lead to better outcomes for citizens. In future, the Wales Audit Office would measure scrutiny's effectiveness in fulfilling those expectations.

Having regard to the national vision for scrutiny, whilst at the same time focussing on local priorities, the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group (SCVCG) recently recommended that the Council's scrutiny committees should, when deciding on their work programmes, focus on the following key areas:

- Budget savings
- Achievement of the Corporate Plan Objectives (with particular emphasis on the deliverability during a period of financial austerity)
- Any other items agreed by the Scrutiny Committee (or the SCVCG) as high priority
- Urgent, unforeseen or high priority issues.

To assist the process of prioritising reports, a proposal form would be required on the requested topic. The proposal form would clarify the purpose, importance and potential outcomes of suggested subjects.

For the purpose of the scheduled report on the 'Your Voice' Complaints Procedure Performance Report scheduled for The Committee's February meeting a list of current complaints which had been put forward by Members but had not received a satisfactory response was to be drawn up and the Scrutiny Co-ordinator would forward the list to the Head of Customers and Education Support for a detailed response at the next meeting. Examination of this evidence may help the Committee identify any trends in dealing with complaints and suggest improvements to the complaints policy and procedures.

A number of education items were suggested to be added to the Forward Work Programme, following discussion during the meeting, as stated under Item 5 a - f.

The Scrutiny co-ordinator requested expressions of interest to attend the Task & Finish Group to look into the impact of the budget cuts. Two members from each Scrutiny Committee were required together with substitutes. Members would be recruited on a political and geographical balance. Expressions of interest were requested as soon as possible.

***Resolved** subject to the above to approve the Committee's forward work programme as set out in Appendix 1*

11 FEEDBACK FROM COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES

None.

The meeting concluded at 12.45 p.m.