

PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Performance Scrutiny Committee held in Council Chamber, Russell House, Rhyl on Monday, 22 June 2015 at 9.30 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Meirick Davies, Richard Davies, Huw Hilditch-Roberts, Geraint Lloyd-Williams, Merfyn Parry, Gareth Sandilands and David Simmons (Chair)

ALSO PRESENT

Councillor Bobby Feeley - Lead Member for Social Care (Adults and Children Services) Chief Executive (MM); Corporate Director: Communities (NS); Head of Community Support Services (PG); Service Manager: Specialist Services (AP) and Scrutiny Co-ordinator (RhE)

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Colin Hughes, Dewi Owens and Arwel Roberts.

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No members declared any personal or prejudicial interests in any business identified to be considered at the meeting.

3 ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

Nominations were sought for a member to serve as the Committee's Vice-Chair for the 2015/16 municipal year. Councillor Richard Davies was nominated and seconded. No other nominations were received and it was therefore:

Resolved: - that Councillor Richard Davies be appointed as the Committee's Vice-Chair for the 2015/16 municipal year.

4 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

No matters were raised which in the opinion of the Chair, should be considered at the meeting as a matter of urgency pursuant to Section 100B(4) of the Local Government Act, 1972.

5 FUTURE PROVISION FOR SERVICE USERS FROM ABERWHEELER NURSERIES

The Head of Community Support Services introduced his report, a copy of which had been circulated ahead of the meeting. He outlined the background to the decision taken in December 2014 to decommission the work opportunities services

currently provided by an agency at Aberwheeler Nurseries, and to seek alternative services for service-users elsewhere in the county.

Details of the membership of the work opportunities task and finish group tasked with examining the work opportunities service provided by the Council for people with learning disabilities, the Welsh Government's (WG) vision for modern social care services, and budgetary pressures were contained within the report.

There were currently 27 individuals attending Aberwheeler Nurseries, the majority of whom attended other work opportunities services on certain days of the week. Of these 27 individuals 21 had either agreed to increase the number of days they attended their other placement(s) or found alternative placements, whilst six were currently attending taster sessions at alternative services before they decided on what best met their needs. There was only one service-user who was not engaging with the process at present. That service-user had not attended Aberwheeler Nurseries on a regular basis.

In response to members' questions the Lead Member and officers advised that:

- Six service-users were due to be transferred to the Woodland Skills Centre at Bodfari, a number of these individuals had indicated their preference to stay together and work alongside each other. This preference had been respected;
- The present garden control service, which provided work opportunities for 7 individuals would be transferred to the Botanical Gardens in Rhyl. Transferring to the Botanical Gardens would also cut down on travel arrangements for the majority of these service-users;
- Support staff at all the alternative work opportunities locations would be employed staff and not volunteers. They would also be Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checked;
- Illustrative costs per head for the alternative services were set out in the report and these were considerably lower than the costs of the services currently procured from the staffing agency at Aberwheeler Nurseries;
- The solutions arranged for individual service-users were considered as medium to long-term arrangements, subject to their needs not changing and the provider's compliance with contract requirements e.g. quality, performance and costs. However, there could not be a cast iron guarantee that things would not change in the long-term due to budget constraints or future government policies;
- If, at any time, the service-user or their family/carers were unhappy with the service provided they could ask to move to an alternative work opportunities facility;
- The service at Aberwheeler was a commissioned service, it was not run by the Council itself. Consequently, the power to terminate the contract with the provider and source alternative services elsewhere for the service-user was delegated to the Head of Community Support Services as per the Council's Scheme of Delegation to Officers;
- Once the decision had been taken and communicated to the agency concerned the Social Services Department's Complex Needs Team had, at the earliest available opportunity, started working with service-users, families

and carers to find alternative suitable services for them. The main focus of this work was to secure the best possible outcomes for the service-users and ensure that they were happy in their new environment;

- Cynnig, the agency operating Aberwheeler Nurseries, had been informed of the Council's intention to terminate the contract with effect from 30 June 2015 in early January 2015. It was the agency's responsibility to inform its staff of the changes from thereon;
- With respect to the impact from the closure of Aberwheeler Nurseries on service-users, a negative impact had only been assessed in two cases. The Complex Needs Team were working with these individuals, families and carers with a view to mitigating the negative impact;
- It was confirmed that no individual should suffer financial hardship due to the change in provision;
- Care packages for all individuals were monitored, evaluated and reviewed on a regular basis – this was a statutory requirement. Nevertheless, in the case of former Aberwheeler Nurseries service-users, monitoring visits to them in their new placements would take place every other month to ensure that they were settling down and that the placement met their individual needs;
- Service-users utilising Learning Disabilities work opportunities did sometimes change their placements by individual choice;
- It was confirmed that suitably qualified professionals from within the Complex Needs Team had undertaken the impact assessments on each individual service-user affected by the decommissioning of services at Aberwheeler;
- Members identified the need to improve communication, particularly with local members, as that would help quell anxieties amongst service-users and families and dispel unfounded rumours in communities in relation to service changes such as this particular one;
- To facilitate the relocation of the garden control service to the Botanical Gardens in Rhyl the Council had invested money in installing electrical equipment at the site, on the basis that it was seen as at least a medium term investment. Nevertheless, no absolute guarantee could be given in the current public services financial climate that changes would not happen in the future;
- Whilst the cost of the care and experiences provided to service-users was important, the quality of the service provided and their associated outcomes for the service-user were the overriding determinants of the service's value for money. The main determinant being each individual's quality of life;
- Each individual service-user's review had not been undertaken in isolation. As well as the service-user's input being considered the views of the service provider, service-user's family and carers had been considered when determining the most suitable alternative work opportunity placement for the service-user. Each service-user had been given an opportunity to try a range of alternative placements before they were asked to choose their preference(s). In some cases an external advocate had been engaged with a view to ensuring an independent assessment;
- Those individuals with complex needs requiring one to one support at Aberwheeler Nurseries would continue to receive that at their new placement if required;

- The needs assessment process for a person with learning disabilities was a statutory process which the Council was legally obliged to follow. Denbighshire was currently participating in a WG pilot to develop an effective method for measuring outcomes;
- additional assurances on the quality of the alternative placements were available in the form of the regulator, the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales', reports on those services;
- the Council had made every effort in recent years to make Aberwheeler a viable entity, but this had proved extremely difficult;
- parents/carers were given the opportunity to visit work opportunities establishments to see for themselves the work, care and supervision available. However, not all parents/carers accepted the invitations;
- only one complaint had been received from a service-user/service-user's family/carer with respect to the changes to the service provision. That particular complaint had been dealt with and resolved to the service-user and family/carer's satisfaction. The majority of the other complaints received with respect to the closure of Aberwheeler Nurseries had been submitted by Nurseries staff or members of the public;
- the Council was currently assisting with clearing up the former Nurseries site to ensure that it was handed back to the owner in a clean and tidy state to ensure that it did not become an 'eyesore site'

The Chair permitted members of the public in attendance to ask questions. In response to these questions the Lead Member for Social Care and officers:

- confirmed that the Council had not consulted directly with employees at Aberwheeler regarding its proposals to decommission the service as the staff were not County Council staff, they were employed by Cynnig and any consultations with the employees would have been the responsibility of Cynnig;
- advised that they were not aware of any safety concerns relating to the Woodlands Skills Centre, as all alternative services for Aberwheeler service-users had been risk assessed. The Woodland Skills Centre was also used by Education and therefore would be subject to regular risk and DBS assessments by that Service. The Corporate Director: Communities undertook to check again in relation to this matter;
- advised that a service-user centred approach had been adopted for undertaking the assessment of Aberwheeler service-users' future needs. This had involved the parent(s)/carer(s) and had been extended to assess their wider social care needs. Each individual service user, family/carer had been made aware of the availability of the independent advocacy service and to their right to utilise it;
- confirmed that there were national rules which governed commissioned services – Aberwheeler Nurseries was a commissioned service – and as such decisions with respect to the commissioning/de-commissioning of such services were required to be taken by a suitably qualified professional;
- confirmed that the Learning Disabilities Forum had been kept informed of developments with respect to Aberwheeler Nurseries throughout the process. Representatives from the Forum served on the Work Opportunities

Task and Finish Group which had undertaken the review of Aberwheeler Nurseries as part of the wider review of Work Opportunities for people with learning difficulties across the county. Mencap, who served on the Forum, had initiated and facilitated the 'World Café' event at which future delivery of work opportunities services had been discussed with a wide range of stakeholders.

Officers acknowledged points made by members of the public present that sometimes families or carers were reticent of complaining about services provided to vulnerable people, as they were afraid that the service-users may receive an even worse level of service, or have the service withdrawn, as a result. It was on this basis that the 'Save Aberwheeler' Facebook site had been established in a bid to get the less vocal voices heard, as families and carers were often exhausted and did not feel able to complain. Social media was an effective and accessible tool for members of the public to voice their concerns or air their complaints.

Officers emphasised that all complaints were dealt with on a confidential basis. If complaints were not forthcoming it would fetter the Council's ability to know about the problems in order to try and address them and improve services. There were a number of ways in which complaints or concerns could be raised i.e. either directly with the Council, via the Complex Needs Team's Carers Champions or through independent organisations such as the North East Wales Carers Information Service (NEWCIS). Each individual complaint would be dealt with and a response would be sent to the complainant

At the conclusion of the discussion members acknowledged that there were lessons to be learnt from the process of decommissioning services at Aberwheeler Nurseries. Communication was key to all aspects of the Council's work. Effective and timely communication with local members and stakeholders could alleviate concerns and dispel myths. The articulation of concerns based on facts was very important as concerns raised based on hearsay or half facts had the potential to create false perceptions and exacerbate anxieties, particularly amongst vulnerable residents. It was important that the right messages were communicated to the right people at the right time, particularly when they involved emotive issues. Consequently it was:

Resolved: - *subject to the information provided and the above observations –*

- (a) to note the generally positive outcomes for the individuals involved;*
- (b) that a report be presented to the Committee in the autumn of 2015 detailing the conclusions of the review into former Aberwheeler Nurseries service-user's satisfaction with their new work opportunities' placement(s), the outcomes for them and their families/carers;*
- (c) that the report detail the lessons learned by the Council during and after the decommissioning work; and*
- (d) that the findings of the most recent CSSIW inspection reports on those work opportunities establishments also be included in the report (if recent*

regulator's reports were not yet available for those establishments then an indication of when they are expected to be available be included)

Meeting concluded at 11:10am