

PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Performance Scrutiny Committee held in Conference Room 1a, County Hall, Ruthin on Thursday, 16 March 2017 at 9.30 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Huw Hilditch-Roberts, Barry Mellor (Chair), Dewi Owens, Arwel Roberts, Gareth Sandilands and Joe Welch

Councillor Barbara Smith, Lead Member for Modernisation and Housing

ALSO PRESENT

Chief Executive (MM), Head of Customers, Communication and Marketing (LG), Interim Principal Manager, Support Services (MS), Statutory and Corporate Complaints Officer (BC), Head of Planning and Public Protection (GB), Programme Manager – Housing Development (MD), Strategic Planning and Housing Manager (AL), Strategic Planning and Housing Senior Officer (SL), Scrutiny Co-ordinator (RE) and Committee Administrator (SLW)

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Meirick Lloyd Davies, Colin Hughes and Geraint Lloyd-Williams and Lead Member for Customers and Libraries, Councillor Hugh Irving

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Councillor Huw Hilditch-Roberts declared a personal interest in Item 5, Library Service Standards and Performance.

3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

No urgent matters received.

4 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting of the Performance Scrutiny Committee held on 6 January 2017 and 26 January 2017 were submitted.

Matters Arising – 6 January 2017:

Item 5, Update on Options Appraisals for In-House Care Services - Councillor Huw Hilditch-Roberts requested clarity regarding Canolfan to which the Scrutiny Co-ordinator confirmed she would make enquiries.

RESOLVED that, subject to the above, the minutes of the Performance Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 6 January 2017 and 26 January 2017 be received and approved as a correct record.

5 LIBRARY SERVICE STANDARDS AND PERFORMANCE

The Head of Customers, Communications and Marketing, introduced the Principal Librarian's report (previously circulated) to provide Members with information about the new Framework of Library Standards (2017-2020), highlighting Denbighshire's most recent performance where applicable.

The Head of Service informed members that 17 out of the 18 core entitlements included in the 2014-17 Framework (5th Framework) had been met and the only one which had not been met had been the requirement for the Service to have a declaration publicly available of its Strategy and vision. This deficiency would be addressed during the first year of the new Framework, now that the Service had entered a period of stability under a new Head of Service. Of the 16 Quality Indicators contained within the 5th Framework, 7 had set targets. Denbighshire had met, or partially met, six of these seven indicators during 2015/16. The only one which it failed to partly meet was the indicator relating to its expenditure on books and resources for public use. The reason for this being that a decision had been taken as part of the Freedoms and Flexibilities budget setting process, not to strive to meet this target but instead to realise maximum benefits from expenditure by targeting the expenditure on specific types of books and resources based on library users' preferences.

Responding to Members' questions the Head of Service:

- Confirmed that the reduction in expenditure on public resources had not adversely affected the number of book loans to the public. The Service had taken a conscious decision to spend more of its budget on children's books during the period of austerity. This had been contrary to Welsh Government (WG) guidelines at the time, however the new Framework for 2017-2020 would reflect the Council's approach;
- Advised that Denbighshire was in the process of entering into a regional book purchasing arrangement with other local authorities in North Wales. This approach would be far more cost effective for the authority and would realise maximum value for money for the Council;
- Emphasised that whilst a number of local authorities across Wales had reduced their library opening hours, closed libraries in some areas or transferred their community library provision to town and community councils or the voluntary sector, Denbighshire had only had to reduce its services by a matter of hours across the county and in doing so had been able to keep all the libraries open throughout the county. By adopting an approach to develop all its libraries as 'community hubs', where a range of community services could be delivered, it had been able to invest in its libraries to modernise them, ensuring that they were accessible to all residents. This approach was very much in line with Quality Indicator 4 of the new Libraries Framework, which focussed on the Service's delivery of services which supported health and well-being. Rhuddlan Library had recently reopened following refurbishment and work was about to start to refurbish St. Asaph Library. An application had recently been submitted to the Welsh Government's (WG) Museums, Archives and Libraries Division (MALD) for a grant to refurbish Denbigh Library;

- Informed members that Wi-Fi was now available in all of the county's libraries. To further the modernisation agenda and support agile working for the Council's employees the Authority's corporate Wi-Fi was in the process of being rolled out to libraries across the county;
- Community use of the county's libraries for initiatives such as 'Talking Points' was increasing;
- Regular customer satisfaction surveys with service-users were conducted with a view to continually improve, and potentially increase further the types of services available at libraries;
- Advised that the One Stop Shops (OSS) available in a number of the county's libraries had been extensively involved with the recent 'County Conversation' exercise to seek the views of the public on what the new Council's priorities should include;
- Confirmed that the initial problems encountered at the new OSS at Rhyl had now been resolved. Since Christmas more staff had been allocated to the service in Rhyl which had resulted in two people manning the front desk at all times. The Police periodically had a member of staff on hand there and discussions were underway with a view to enabling Police Community Support Officers (PSCOs) to utilise the corporate Wi-Fi for the purpose of updating their records;
- Advised that the Service was currently exploring potential options for extending volunteering opportunities within libraries, at present such opportunities were confined to Duke of Edinburgh Award work and summer reading clubs;
- Advised that whilst volunteers could be used to enable some libraries to remain open during lunch hours, this would need sensitive consideration. Volunteers were used in this capacity in some areas of the country, and even the running of entire libraries had been transferred to voluntary organisations in some areas. Denbighshire had no plans at present to adopt this approach as it saw a professional library service as a vital foundation for developing libraries as community hubs across the county.
- Confirmed that the Service was constantly striving to improve its services to residents and visitors. Amongst the initiatives currently under consideration for future improvements were the roll-out of a self-service book return facility and the possibility of extending libraries' contribution to destination management (e.g. staff becoming Tourism Ambassadors);
- Advised that there was some concern in relation to the accuracy of the system used to count the number of visitors to the county's libraries. With a view to improving the accuracy of the data collected, officers had recently visited Flintshire to examine their data collection system;
- Confirmed that the Service worked closely with local schools and colleges to support and supplement pupils and students' learning facilities and experiences;
- Undertook to explore the potential of working closer with the Economic and Business Development (EBD) Team to enable residents to meet and/or contact relevant officers for business advice;
- Informed members that the IT facilities in the county's libraries were on the programme of renewal as the computers available for community use were very well used;

- Advised that the age profile of library users varied in different parts of the county. In the coastal towns the user age profile seemed to be much younger than in the central and southern part of the county. Now that the Service formed part of the Customers, Communication and Marketing Service there was an opportunity for it draw on the Communication and Marketing teams assistance to produce a communication and marketing strategy in a bid to increase user numbers. Such a strategy could be targeted at different age groups in a bid to entice them to use library services. Qualified data was available which demonstrated that individuals who had used libraries as children achieved better outcomes in later life;
- Confirmed that at present the Service supported approximately 30 reading groups across the county;
- Advised that whilst the Council was keen for communities to make more use of library buildings for community events, facilitating events outside of the libraries' normal operating hours was proving difficult due to a shortage of people willing to be 'key holders' and as such being available to open and lock up the buildings;
- Advised that discussions were taking place with the Youth Service in relation to what services young people would like to see being delivered from libraries and the opening hours which would be most useful to them. Whilst all libraries were open late one night a week it would prove difficult to extend opening hours further due to staffing constraints;
- Informed members that there was an all-Wales Library Marketing Group which led on marketing library services. In addition, the Head of Service had requested the Council's Destination, Marketing and Communication Lead Officer to draw up a marketing strategy for Denbighshire's libraries focussing on their development as community hubs in addition to delivering 'traditional' library services;
- Confirmed that all of Denbighshire's libraries delivered their services bilingually, they also delivered an e-book lending service. The introduction of the corporate Wi-Fi to all libraries would in due course enable more and more services to be delivered closer to residents' homes.

In welcoming the roll-out of the corporate Wi-Fi system to libraries the Committee asked that every effort be made to ensure that the corporate Wi-Fi system was flexible enough to support access to the worldwide web, as some members had been denied access to some legitimate websites when attempting to access them via the corporate Wi-Fi. This seemed to suggest that some of the security settings were set too high. The Chief Executive acknowledged that there were minimum security settings which local authorities were compelled to apply, however it was reasonable for the Committee to challenge whether the Council's current settings were actually excessive and therefore detrimental to the delivery of its corporate priorities. The Lead Member for Modernisation and Housing undertook to raise this matter with the Head of Business Improvement and Modernisation during a forthcoming meeting.

At the conclusion of the discussion members emphasised the need to promote and market the county's libraries as community assets available for community use.

The Committee extended their very best wishes to the Principal Librarian who was due to retire in the autumn, thanking him for his commitment and dedication to the Council and the Library Service. It was:

RESOLVED that subject to the above observations:

- (i) to receive the report on the Council's performance in delivering the 5th performance framework of Library Standards and the requirements of the forthcoming 6th performance framework ; and
- (ii) requested that a further progress report be presented to the Committee in 12 months' time on the Council's performance in delivering the 6th performance framework and the development of libraries as community hubs.

At this juncture (10.25 a.m.) there was a 10 minute break.

The meeting reconvened at 10.35 a.m.

6 YOUR VOICE REPORT - Q3 2016/2017

The Interim Principal Manager, Support Services and the Statutory and Corporate Complaints Officer, introduced the report (previously circulated) to provide an overview of compliments, suggestions and complaints received by Denbighshire County Council under the council's Customer Feedback Policy "Your Voice" during Q3 2016/17. The report also included Social Services complaints procedure.

During their introduction they advised that the report included information on the number of complaints received in relation to commissioned services as well as services delivered directly by the Council itself. Of the number of complaints received in relation to the Planning and Public Protection Service, 50% were in respect of services delivered on its behalf by Kingdom Security. Members acknowledged that the types of services delivered by Kingdom Security, which were enforcement services on the Council's behalf, were by their very nature likely to generate a greater number of complaints. Footage from the Enforcement Officer's body camera was useful evidence when determining complaints against Kingdom.

Responding to members' questions officers advised that:

- at present the customer feedback process had no mechanism built into it to record the severity of complaints. However, the progression of a complaint to the Stage 2 process could sometimes indicate either the complexity or severity of the complaint;
- the customer feedback policy did not record if any compensation payments had been made to complainants. The Statutory and Corporate Complaints Officer undertook to establish whether data on annual compensation payments were reported to any specific committee or published in a specific location;
- they would follow-up the Committee's concerns with respect to Children and Family Services performance in dealing with Stage 1 complaints within the set timescales. Whilst the Committee acknowledged that this Service dealt with extremely sensitive and complex matters, they were concerned that they

had consistently underperformed against the set target throughout the 2016/17 year;

- with respect to councillor attendance at meetings, the Head of Legal, HR and Democratic Services had been tasked to draw up some proposals for Group Leaders' consideration on what the Council expected from members, including member attendance at meetings. It was suggested that Performance Scrutiny Committee may in future want to monitor member attendance at Council meetings;
- as officers they would like to revisit the reporting framework relating to complaints with a view to including more valuable data i.e. the number of complaints upheld or partially upheld and the grounds which led to the determinations. They felt that this approach would be beneficial to the authority by aiding services to learn from complaints; and
- the 'Excellence Denbighshire Awards' would have a new award category this year, for a resident whose complaint had resulted in service improvements.

Attached as Appendix 2 to the report was a supplementary report on the 'Customer Effort Dashboard'. The Head of Customers, Communication and Marketing introduced this report which outlined how customer feedback collated by the Council was fed into a Customer Effort Dashboard in order to provide real time information about the customer experience for the purpose of improving future service provision. She advised that the results received from the company administering the dashboard service was extremely encouraging, as it was illustrating that the Council was performing well in comparison to other public sector service providers. It was extremely pleasing to report that customers who had contacted Denbighshire Customer Services Centre were willing to respond with additional written comments on the service they had received, rather than confine themselves to the score requested for each question. Officers were of the view that the data received to date from Ember, the company that operated the Dashboard facility, was so useful that it would be worthwhile to approach the Modernisation Board with a request for funding for a further 12 months.

Responding to members' questions the Head of Service advised:

- the Council could explore the potential of delivering a similar Dashboard service to that provided by Ember, however that service would not have the benefits of providing comparable data across both the public and private sectors;
- that the surveys were conducted bilingually; and
- the call handling times for callers who requested to speak to a Welsh speaker were on a par with those who opted for an English language service.

At the conclusion of the discussion the Committee:

RESOLVED that subject to the above observations:

- (i) *to receive the report on the Council's performance in dealing with customer feedback in line with its 'Your Voice' policy and that future quarterly reports include information on complaints which are upheld and partially upheld along with the lessons learnt in those cases; and*

(ii) to receive the information on the Customer Effort Dashboard and request that a further performance report in relation to the Dashboard data be presented to members in twelve months' time.

7 PROGRESS ON DELIVERING DENBIGHSHIRE'S HOUSING STRATEGY

The Lead Member for Modernising and Housing, Councillor Barbara Smith, introduced the report (previously circulated) to update Scrutiny Committee on the progress made to date in delivering the key outcomes and actions identified in Denbighshire's Housing Strategy.

In her introduction the Lead Member emphasised that the Strategy, approved by the County Council on 1 December 2015, brought various housing functions together in one action plan. As various Council services were responsible for different housing functions the delivery of housing objectives had been somewhat disparate until they had been brought together under one Strategy. During the Strategy's development, and since its adoption, all Council services had brought into the Strategy's delivery and it was hoped that the new Council, post May's local authority elections, would be as enthusiastic as the current Council to see the Strategy delivered and evolve to meet future needs.

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

- Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) must be zoned with Welsh Government (WG) to be able to access grant funding for housing projects (including Social Housing Grant). The Council and Cartrefi Conwy had worked closely together to develop a business case which had been approved by WG in May 2016. This enabled Cartrefi Conwy to access funding and bring forward projects in Denbighshire;
- A number of services worked in close partnership with other public sector organisations i.e. Health and Fire and Rescue Service to ensure that homeless accommodation and other vulnerable residents' homes provided a safe and healthy environment for people to live. Partnership working included working with Public Protection officers for joint inspections of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO);
- The draft Empty Homes Delivery Plan and associated action plan had recently been discussed at the Housing Strategy Monitoring Group and would be approved via the Delegated Decision process in the near future. Responsibility for Empty Homes lay within the Planning and Public Protection Service and formed part of another post. The number of identified empty homes in the county remained around the 800 homes figure despite efforts to bring homes back into use, with around 100 brought back into use each year. Nevertheless these houses would not be the same 800 houses as would have been the case a number of years ago. However, as one home was filled another one was likely to become empty. It was emphasised that bringing long-term empty homes back into occupancy could be a prolonged and complex process. Periodic publicity campaigns were run to highlight the Council's objective in relation to empty homes with a view to drawing the public's attention to the help that was available to them if they had an empty home on their hands. Previously the Council was compelled to report upon a national Strategic Indicator, relating to the number of empty homes within the

county brought back into use through direct action by the Council – on which the Council was regularly the second or third best performing authority in Wales ;

- Local Social Housing Plans were currently in the process of being developed due to the rising demand for social housing. Nevertheless, the Council was of the opinion that building brand new ‘council houses’ was not the only solution to meet this growing demand. A range of options would be contained within the action plans, including buying back former council housing sold under the ‘right to buy’ scheme in the past, the development of shared ownership properties, extra care accommodation for older people, and the release of current ‘sheltered housing’ complexes which were built before current accessibility standards for people without specific mobility needs had been introduced. Over 50 affordable units had been provided during 2015/16 and during the term of the current Council it was envisaged that approximately 250 units would have been developed (208 had already been provided up until the end of the 2015/16 financial year);
- there was a shortage of 1 and 2 bedroomed properties across the county ;
- When the Council ‘bought itself out’ of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) scheme it released funds to undertake housing related projects. A 30 year plan had been compiled for the former HRA monies;
- The Council expected to be notified by the WG by the end of May if its application to suspend the ‘Right to Buy’ scheme in Denbighshire had been successful;
- As the Council did not have a significant ‘land bank’ at its disposal it had to identify potential sites, including those within its ownerships which had been used for other purposes in the past, as sites for potential housing developments. Plans were currently underway in the Rhyl area on potential sites which officers hoped could begin to be developed for affordable housing during the autumn of 2017 with a view to the first homes being available in late spring 2018;
- Another option which had come to light recently was the potential to maximise the benefits of housing development planning applications, by keeping the affordable housing provision element in the development when approving the applications and then maximising the provision through the Council offering to buy a specified number of houses (over and above the affordable housing element required by the planning permission) on the development from the developer once they were built. Officers were currently working to identify development sites across the county where this approach could potentially be applied; and
- Work could be undertaken as part of the Local Development Plan (LDP) to explore potential options, particularly in rural areas, to widen access to affordable housing and cater for people’s future needs.

Prior to the conclusion of the discussion the Committee agreed that it would be useful for all County Councillors, post the local authority elections, to be briefed on the Strategy, its objectives and proposed development over time. The Committee was also of the view that the Local Housing Strategy’s Action Plan should be submitted to the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group (SCVCG) on a regular basis for it to prioritise which actions contained within it merited closer examination. It was:

RESOLVED that subject to the above observations:

- (i) To receive the report and commend the progress achieved to date in delivering the Local Housing Strategy action plan;*
- (ii) That a briefing be held for all county councillors, as part of the forthcoming Member Development Programme, on the objectives of the Local Housing Strategy, its delivery programme and proposed future development; and*
- (iii) That the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group (SCVCG) be requested to periodically monitor the delivery of the Strategy's action plan with a view to identifying areas for closer examination and scrutiny*

8 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator submitted a report (previously circulated) seeking Members' review of the Committee's work programme and providing an update on relevant issues.

A copy of the "Member's proposal form" had been included in Appendix 2. The Scrutiny Co-ordinator requested that any proposals be submitted to herself. The Cabinet Forward Work Programme had been included as Appendix 3, the table summarising recent Committee resolutions, advising on progress with their implementation, had been attached as Appendix 4 and the "Cutting our Cloth Task & Finish Group" Final Report had been attached as Appendix 5.

The Committee considered its draft Forward Work Programme for future meetings, Appendix 1, and the following additions were agreed:-

March 2018 –

- Library Service Standards 2016/17
- Customer Effort Dashboard

The Chair of the Cutting Our Cloth Task & Finish Group presented the Group's final report. It was agreed that going forward it would be prudent to adopt the approach of utilising Task and Finish Groups for specific pieces of work as Scrutiny Committees were limited timewise to be able to discuss all matters in detail. Task & Finish Groups were able to focus their time on detailed examination of specific areas. They could be used to ensure that the requirements of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (Wales) Act 2015 were being met.

Councillor Dewi Owens raised the fact that, in his opinion, a planning report had been badly written and the matter should be raised at Scrutiny Chairs & Vice-Chairs Group.

The Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group had not forwarded any items to the Performance Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED that -

- (i) *that, subject to the above observations and amendments, the Forward Work Programme be approved; and*
- (ii) *to receive and endorse the findings and the final report of the Cutting Our Cloth Task and Finish Group (Appendix 5) and requests that the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group (SCVCG) determines whether other budget savings, which formed part of the Freedom and Flexibilities process, merit detailed examination of their impact on residents and if so which scrutiny committee(s) should undertake that work.*

9 FEEDBACK FROM COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES

The Chair, Councillor Barry Mellor informed Committee Members he had recently become a Governor for Ysgol Blessed Edward Jones. He had attended a meeting recently in Rhyl Town Hall to discuss the future of the school which had been very well attended and proved to be extremely positive.

Councillor Arwel Roberts informed Committee Members he had attended meetings of the School Standards Monitoring Group (SSMG) focussing on Ysgol Glan Clwyd. It had been an extremely positive meeting and although the building work was yet to be completed the remodelling had been well received and the Headteacher had a positive, aspirational vision for the school's future. In contrast, during another SSMG meeting some concerns were expressed in relation to the sustainability of the position of one Welsh medium primary school in the county due to the condition of the building and work pressures on staff.

At this juncture, the Chief Executive thanked Members of the Committee and Officers for all the constructive work which had been carried out on behalf of the Committee.

The meeting concluded at 12.30 p.m.