

PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Performance Scrutiny Committee held in Council Chamber, County Hall, Ruthin and by video conference on Thursday, 16 March 2023 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Ellie Chard, Jon Harland, Carol Holliday, Alan Hughes, Hugh Irving (Chair), Terry Mendies, Gareth Sandilands (Vice-Chair) and Andrea Tomlin

Lead Members – in attendance at the Committee’s invitation

Councillor Rhys Thomas, Lead Member for Housing and Communities in attendance for agenda items 5 and 6.

Councillor Emrys Wynne, Lead Member for Welsh Language, Culture and Heritage.

Observers: Councillor Huw Hilditch-Roberts

ALSO PRESENT

Corporate Director: Governance and Business (Monitoring Officer) (GW); Head of Communications and Customers Services (LG); Lead Officer; Community Housing (GD); Interim Head of Community Support (AL); Strategic Planning and Housing Manager (AL); Senior Officer Strategic Planning and Housing (JA); Principal Librarian (BH); Scrutiny Coordinator (RE and KE); Zoom Host (NH) and Committee Administrator (SJ)

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Chris Evans, Paul Keddie and Diane King.

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No interests of a personal or prejudicial nature were declared.

3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

No matters of an urgent nature had been raised with the Chair or the Scrutiny Co-ordinator prior to the commencement of the meeting.

4 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the Performance Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 26 January 2023 were submitted. It was:

Resolved: *that the minutes of the meeting held on 26 January 2023 be received and approved as a true and correct record of the proceedings.*

No matters relating to the accuracy of the minutes were raised. However, the Vice-Chair, who had chaired the above meeting, thanked all for attending and contributing to a constructive discussion.

All members who had participated in the Committee visit to the Cefndy workshop/factory on 1 March 2023 thanked all concerned for an enlightening experience. They urged all councillors to make arrangements to visit the facility at some point in the future as they felt they would benefit from seeing exactly how it was run and its benefits to the workforce, community and the Council.

Members requested that a message be sent on their behalf to the Manager and staff to thank them for permitting them to visit.

5 HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY

The Chair welcomed the Lead Member for Housing and Communities, Councillor Rhys Thomas along with officers to guide members through the agenda item.

The Lead Member guided members through the report (previously circulated), informing the Committee it provided information regarding the progress made in the delivery of the revised Housing & Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan approved by County Council on 8th December 2020. He informed members the Strategy had been put in place to continue to 2026. The Lead Member acknowledged the work of the previous Lead Members for the work completed in the last Council.

He informed members the delivery of the Action Plan was overseen by the Strategic Housing & Homelessness Group (SHHG), which was chaired by himself in his role as Lead Member for Housing & Communities. Membership of the Group comprised of Lead Members with responsibility for an area of housing or homelessness within their portfolios, relevant Heads of Service and the Strategic Planning & Housing Manager. The Group met every three months in order to monitor the strategy and share information. The document was a live one, regularly monitored and acted upon. Members heard the Strategy was accompanied by a 41-point Action Plan. It set out in more detail the responsibilities of the various relevant teams within the Council and how they worked with partners to help to realise the Council's vision for housing and homelessness. The Housing & Homelessness Strategy had a five-year lifespan (2021 – 2026) and would need to be reviewed by 2026.

In addition, the Strategic Planning and Housing Manager advised that a summary of the Strategy had been attached to the documents included in the agenda pack, a copy of the full strategy was available online to view. Accompanying the action plan was also a progress report on work for each separate action point. She stressed to members the Strategy was a key document for the authority, it was a corporate document that provided a framework for all work completed in relation to housing. The Strategy identified six "Themes" which were priority areas for action to be targeted:

- More homes to meet local need and demand;
- Creating a supply of affordable homes;
- Ensuring safe and healthy homes;

- Preventing & ending homelessness in Denbighshire
- Homes and support for vulnerable people;
- Promoting and supporting communities.

Included in the report were notes on the key areas of progress. It was stressed a lot of good work and progress had and continued to be made. Close working across different services was key to delivering against each action point.

The Chair thanked the Lead Member and officers for the detailed report and introduction.

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

- there were 316 households in emergency and temporary accommodation in the county. This was broken down to 184 households in emergency accommodation and 132 in temporary accommodation. During the last 12 months the service had supported 324 households into tenancies through the homelessness services. The number of households in emergency accommodation had tended to remain fairly static since the start of the Covid Pandemic. It had been observed the majority of households presenting as homeless were in the North of the County, a large proportion of households were accommodated in Rhyl.
- Following completion of a housing development in Prestatyn, 14 apartments would be available for older residents/households in the community. These would be allocated to people currently on the Single Access Route to Housing (SARTH) register.
- Under occupancy had not been included in the action plan currently, officers agreed it would be a positive addition to include in the action plan. Being able to have under occupied properties available to let to families by housing current occupants in appropriately sized accommodation would help realise the availability of family size homes. However, this was a complex and sensitive area which could not be resolved overnight.
- There was currently 3 known rough sleepers within the county. They each had various complex needs and had refused support from the service. Officers maintained a high level of daily communication with each individual. Officers were very proactive and supportive of individuals presenting as a rough sleeper.
- Households that resided in holiday homes/caravans were not included in homelessness statistics, as those households living in holiday accommodation also had a permanent home address.
- The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) restructure would take effect from the 1st April. Following the restructure the details of appointments or changes to posts would be made to the document. The Housing Development Programme would form part of the Head of Communications and Customers Services role as of the 1st April 2023.
- A number of factors including the Covid Pandemic, had delayed the completion of projects within the Housing Development Programme. Members heard a number of housing projects were due to be completed in the near future.

- there had been a delay in the delivery of the Local Development Plan due to a number of issues. Work to develop and adopt a new Plan continued and was progressing well.
- they were aware of a number of households becoming homeless due to landlords deciding to sell properties. Members heard the Authority did provide advice about the private sector leasing scheme. Communication with the landlords encouraging them to join that scheme did take place. The target was to have 80 landlords on the scheme within the next 5 years. It was stressed this target would be a challenge to achieve.
- The private sector leasing scheme was a Welsh Government scheme that guaranteed landlords rent at the local housing allowance rate with a small management fee on top. That would be covered over a 5-20 year lease. There was a guarantee the property would be returned in the same condition as it was first leased at. Funding was received from Welsh Government to manage that scheme. Marketing of this scheme was hoped to take place over social media and communications with landlords.
- Statutory duty started at 56 days before households were made homeless. Prevention and early intervention was seen as a priority to support individuals and be a better service.
- Officers also provided tenants with ongoing support to maintain tenancy in rented accommodation. Members heard about an early intervention and prevention contract run through Shelter and Clwyd Alyn called My Home Denbighshire. This contract also had a responsibility to reduce the risk of homelessness.

The Lead Member and Officers outlined their ambitions for delivering the Strategy, these included: maintaining Denbighshire's position as being the highest performing authority for affordable housing per head of population, acquiring resources to complete projects and schemes, continue the partnership working to deliver against the action plan, progress in implementing the Local Development Plan, a reduction in the number of individuals entering the homelessness service by 15% year on year over the next five years and ensuring more affordable housing being available.

Members thanked the officers for the detailed debate and answers to comments and questions.

At the conclusion of an in-depth discussion the Committee:

Resolved: subject to the above observations

- (i) to receive and confirm the progress made to date in delivering the revised Housing and Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan; and***
- (ii) agree to continue to monitor the delivery of the Housing and Homelessness Strategy Action Plan on a six-monthly basis.***

6 MOULD & CONDENSATION IN DENBIGHSHIRE'S COUNCIL HOUSING STOCK

The Lead Member for Housing and Communities, Councillor Rhys Thomas introduced the report to the Committee (previously circulated). He introduced the report author Geoff Davies, Lead Officer: Community Housing and Liz Grieve, Head

of Communities and Customers Services to respond to the Committee's questions and comments.

The report was in response to Welsh Government's request for assurance on how landlords were responding following the tragic death that had occurred in Rochdale 2022. Welsh Government asked for feedback from organisations on how they would scrutinise the concern within their own governance structures. The Lead Member stressed the importance of the Housing and Property Services being fully scrutinised on this issue, to ensure support was provided to households in Council homes to prevent and tackle mould and condensation.

The Lead Officer: Community Housing confirmed included in the pack was the documentation that had been submitted to Welsh Government earlier in the year. He informed members the data included in the papers was up to date. In his opinion the report demonstrated well the work in response to mould and condensation in Denbighshire Council's housing stock. It was proposed a survey would be conducted for tenants who reported condensation in order to receive feedback on the support they received. It was stressed that not all mould and condensation in properties was due to a building defect it could be a number of reasons. Members heard that black mould was often caused from breath and air that collecting on house walls and wall paper. He also stressed drying clothes on radiators in rooms was bad for health. Council officers were quick to respond to reports of mould and condensation to ascertain any issues or risks. Over recent years a large amount of information had been made available to residents to provide guidance and information to reduce the risk of mould. The recent leaflet that had been issued was attached to the papers as appendix 4.

He informed members once a report of mould had been received, a property inspector would attend the property to inspect the property to determine if there were any issues with the building. Advanced equipment had been acquired for inspections to aid the officers in determining a cause of the mould or condensation. Members heard the importance of removing any black mould found straight away as the risk to the health and safety of tenants was paramount for the authority.

Targeted work on properties with the lowest energy ratings had taken place, in theory they were the properties most liable to develop condensation. Officers had contacted nearly 200 of these properties to provide information and support. Officers had been in touch with tenants that had not taken advantage of the energy help funds. Members also heard that officers refused to disconnect the gas supply to properties but offered extra support and help.

It was noted that of the 11,000 repair reports received during 2022 only 168 had been in relation to mould and condensation this equated to 1.5% of all repair requests and 5% within the whole housing stock in Denbighshire. There was no pattern of type of dwelling that was more susceptible to mould or condensation problems. Officers made reference to the increase in reporting of concerns, it was stressed this was due to the increase in resources and an improvement in reporting. Hard to heat properties had been identified, these properties had received some extra resources and modifications to systems to aid heating the dwelling.

Officers thanked the Committee for the opportunity to scrutinise this service and demonstrate the work of the team in this area.

Members were made aware that when concerns were received regarding the state of the property all necessary work was conducted to ensure that property was safe and repaired to a standard.

The Chair thanked the officers and Lead Member for the detailed introduction to the report. During the discussion the following points were debated in greater detail:

- The checklist, attached at Appendix 3, provided officers with details of the responsibilities of the Authority as the landlord to advise and support tenants where possible. There was responsibility on both the landlord and the tenants to ensure the property was properly maintained and managed.
- Annual visits to properties took place. These annual visits were used to provide guidance and prevent potential issues such as mould and condensation occurring. One challenge officers faced was not gaining permission to visit properties. The only time officers could enforce a visit was to conduct a gas inspection.
- An asset management plan provided information on the condition of the Council's housing stock. A full property condition survey was conducted of the outside of each property. Where it was difficult to gain permission to enter to conduct internal condition surveys these were undertaken at the same time as gas inspections.
- Officers were reliant on tenants reporting any concerns to officers. Good property management was important.
- Officers wanted to ensure there was a clear pathway for tenants to contact officers with any concerns. It was hoped this would embed a cooperative, collaborative relationship with tenants. Denbighshire had responsibility to ensure properties were maintained to a good standard. The Head of Communications and Customers Service stressed her concern with parties offering a no win no fee operation. She encouraged residents to communicate with officers and asked Committee members to reiterate to tenants the Council's complaints procedure and Public Ombudsman than a third party operative.
- It was stressed properties were residents' homes. Officers did not want to impose on individuals but wanted them to welcome officers support and help where needed. Members heard, notice was provided to tenants before attending properties.
- It was intended going forward to have a more holistic approach when visiting properties to assess more than one aspect of its maintenance and make every visit count.

Members expressed their thanks to the officers and praised the Head of Service being proactive in bringing the topic forward for debate.

Following detailed discussion, the Committee:

Resolved:

- (i) to receive and endorse the information provided;***

- (ii) subject to the above comments, to confirm that it was satisfied that the Council's systems and processes were robust and appropriate to ensure that damp and mould issues are dealt with promptly and effectively; and*
- (iii) requested that an Information Report be circulated to Committee members in 12 months' time detailing the effectiveness of the processes established to deal with damp and mould issues. The report should also focus on the effectiveness of wider Council Housing stock management practices, including responding to service requests, complaints and the provision of advice to all tenants, including those who are harder to engage with or reach.*

**AT THIS JUNCTURE (11.45 A.M.) THERE WAS A 20 MINUTE BREAK.
THE MEETING RECONVENED AT 12.05 P.M.**

7 LIBRARY SERVICE STANDARDS AND PERFORMANCE

The Chair welcomed Councillor Emrys Wynne, Lead Member for Welsh Language, Culture and Heritage along with Liz Grieve Head of Communities and Customer Services and Bethan Hughes, Principal Librarian.

The Lead Member thanked the Committee for extending an invitation to scrutinise the Library Service Standards and Performance and introduced the report to members (previously circulated). The purpose of the report was for the Committee to scrutinise 2021-22 performance and standards of libraries in Denbighshire. He also guided members through Appendix 2 which related to information on the current performance for 2022-23.

Members heard information on the progress made to develop libraries as welfare hubs. The statutory duty placed on every library in Wales was to have a library service to provide a comprehensive and efficient service to residents. The Welsh Government measured and assessed how each local authority fulfilled that duty. Following the Covid pandemic the requirements for reporting for 2021-22 had been changed to recognise the restrictions on the service. Members heard the narrative report was significantly delayed and was due for publication in March 2023. It was therefore not possible to include it in full with this report. The service had received an early draft and selected comments were included in the papers.

This report reflected on the data submitted by Denbighshire in relation to 2021-22, on performance against 12 Core Entitlement and 6 Quality indicators, with some commentary on the performance by the Welsh Government Culture Division assessors. It was highlighted to the Committee Denbighshire continued to meet all 12 Core Entitlements.

The library provision contributed to a number of the Corporate themes including; Healthier Denbighshire, a County that grows and improves, a well-connected County, a fair and more equal County, a County of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language and a well-run, high performing council.

The Lead Member highlighted the successful completion of the Summer Reading Challenge across Denbighshire Libraries. It illustrated a significant increase in the use of the service. Members were made aware that each library in Denbighshire had improved digital services for local residents to make use of. Services including the One Stop Shops which were operating from libraries across the County.

The Head of Communities and Customer Services added that the Welsh Library Standards were a great opportunity for the Library Service to attend scrutiny to present the performance of the service for debate. She was pleased to say libraries had recovered well following the closures through the Covid Pandemic. She offered her thanks to library staff for the dedication they all portrayed during the pandemic to continue to offer a professional and supportive role to residents.

The Principal Librarian concluded by informing the Committee the framework enabled the service to measure and show the effect the service had on residents in the community. The framework was currently being revised and was likely to be more aspirational in the coming years. She encouraged members to attend their local library to observe what had taken place.

The Chair thanked the Lead Member and officers for the detailed introduction and the papers that had been provided to accompany the report.

Members congratulated the service for what they offer to residents. The services provided offered support and guidance to residents and libraries became more community hubs.

In response to members' comments and questions the Lead Member along with the officers expanded on the following:

- There was no target set for predicted growth in active members, however all advertising and marketing was in partnership with a range of partners and services. Part of that partnership was for those groups to encourage individuals to join the library.
- The service offered a digital service for individuals who were unable to access the library during some opening time. Members heard a number of libraries offered Saturday opening times.
- It was anticipated that the digital offer would continue to increase during forthcoming years.
- The digital service was on an all Wales with members able to access the shared national pool of resources. A lot of regional working across North Wales was seen, especially with the shared catalogue of books. This resulted in a wider range of stock being offered to users.
- As part of the Service's income generation efforts a number of spaces were rented to third parties. This offered an additional service to residents such as banking needs, areas to hold educational events, community welfare events such as Dementia Clubs etc.
- A programme of marketing was currently in place to promote the Service and its offer. A monthly press release demonstrating new aspects of the service had been observed during this year. Social media was used extensively to promote libraries and what was on offer to communities.

- Particular partnerships with some City, Town and Community Councils were in place in certain areas of the authority. Financial contributions were made towards the running of the local library. These allowed groups to meet and hold regular meetings in the community.
- There was a statutory requirement to offer a library service, and although there was no directive on what that service entailed, the Welsh Public Library Standards offer a means of interpreting the statutory requirement.
- The removal of the fines in libraries had taken place in 2022. An increase in library use and visitors had been observed although there was no evidence to link that to the removal of fines.

At the conclusion of the discussion the Committee thanked the Principal Librarian and all Library Service staff in Denbighshire for the excellent range and quality of services they provided for residents, and:

Resolved: subject to the above observations to –

- (i) receive the report and congratulate the county's Library Service on its performance in delivering against the 6th Framework of Welsh Public Library Standards during 2021/22; and***
- (ii) request that a further report on the Service's performance against the Standards during 2022/23, and outlining its progress in developing libraries as places of individual and community well-being and resilience in line with the Council's corporate themes and with a view to supporting the delivery of the Corporate Plan be presented to the Committee at its meeting in January 2024.***

8 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Coordinator introduced the report (previously circulated).

The next meeting was scheduled for the 27 April 2023 members heard the six monthly review of the Corporate Risk Register was due to be presented to members. Members were reminded of previous discussions on the issue of broadband in the county. She informed members she had made some enquiries on the issue and it was apparent that Broadband provision was a very complex issue. Members were made aware the Vice Chair Councillor Gareth Sandilands and the Scrutiny Coordinator had attended a meeting with BT Open Reach on the roll out of full fibre to Denbighshire. Following that meeting it was decided that a workshop giving an overview of Broadband provision and Upgrade Plans in Denbighshire would be beneficial for members, prior to determining which aspects would benefit from detailed scrutiny. It was proposed at the next meeting, to hold a workshop following the committee business.

The Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs Group (SCVCG) had recently met. At that a meeting a request received from the Governance and Audit Committee on staff recruitment, retention and work force planning had been reviewed. The Governance and Audit Committee had previously received a report and proposed Scrutiny debated the subject in greater depth. A report was included on the SCVCG's forward work programme for information on the same issue. It was therefore

proposed that a formal report be presented to Performance Scrutiny Committee at the meeting scheduled for the 8th June 2023 instead of to the SCVCG.

Appendix 2 contained a copy of the Member Proposal form, members were informed the SCVCG were due to meet again on 27 April. Members were encouraged to complete the form with any items they thought merited consideration.

Appendix 3 to the report was the Cabinet's forward work.

Appendix 4 – informed members of the recommendations made at the previous Scrutiny meeting and the progress made with their implementation.

Following the earlier discussion members requested the Housing Strategy and Homelessness Strategy return with an update in six months. Also a request for a follow up report on the Council's Housing and work with tenants be included. The Scrutiny Coordinator informed members she had spoken to the officers and it was proposed that an information report be included on the forward work programme (FWP) in 12 months' time.

It was also noted a further report on Library Service Standards and Performance be added to the proposed agenda for the Committee meeting in January 2024.

Appendix 5 to the report was the expressions of interest received to serve as committee representatives on the Service Challenge groups. Members heard the Service Challenge groups would meet virtually once a year. Attached was a list of the expressions received to date. Members heard Councillor Terry Mendies along with Councillor Carol Holliday had indicated an interest to represent the Committee on the Highways and Environmental Service Challenge Group. Members were in agreement for Councillor Mendies to attend Highways and Environmental Service Challenge meetings. It was noted a small number of services still required meeting arrangements to be made, these were dependent on the outcome of the SLT restructure which was imminent. An up to date list would be provided when arrangements had been made. The Corporate Director: Governance and Business encouraged members to participate in service challenge meetings to understand the services in more depth.

The Chair guided members through the suggested list and asked the Committee to confirm its representatives. The Scrutiny Coordinator confirmed she would present an updated list to the Committee when further details were available. It was:

Resolved:

(i) subject to the inclusion of the reports requested during the course of the meeting along with the additions and amendments outlined above, to confirm the Committee's Forward Work Programme as set out in Appendix 1; and

(ii) to appoint the members named below to serve as the Committee's representatives on the following Service Challenge Groups:

Highways and Environmental Services – Councillor Terry Mendies;

***Planning, Public Protection and Countryside Service – Councillor Gareth Sandilands;
Finance and Audit – Councillor Hugh Irving;
Community Support Services – Councillor Carol Holliday; and
Education and Children’s Services – Councillor Ellie Chard.***

9 FEEDBACK FROM COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES

The Chair, as Scrutiny’s representative on the Queen’s Building Project Board, informed members that the Board continued to meet on a monthly basis. Construction work on the new building was well underway and the process for seeking expressions of interest for an operator for the facility had commenced.

Meeting concluded at 12.45pm.