

PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Performance Scrutiny Committee held in Conference Room 1a, County Hall, Ruthin on Thursday, 20 February 2014 at 9.30 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Meirick Davies, Richard Davies, Colin Hughes, Geraint Lloyd-Williams, Peter Owen, Dewi Owens, Arwel Roberts, Gareth Sandilands and David Simmons (Chair).

Lead Member attendance requested by the Committee:- Councillors Hugh Irving and Eryl Williams.

Co-optees:- Mrs G. Greenland, Ms D. Houghton and Mr G. Williams.

ALSO PRESENT

Corporate Director: Economic and Community Ambition (RM), Head of Customers and Education Support (JW), Scrutiny Co-ordinator (RE) and Administrative Officer (CIW).

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bill Cowie, Nicola Lewis and Dr. D. Marjoram

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

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

3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

No items 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.

4 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The Minutes of a meeting of the Performance Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday, 16th January, 2014 were submitted.

Matters arising:-

9. Scrutiny Work Programme - In reply to a question from Councillor A. Roberts, the Scrutiny Coordinator explained that work being undertaken by the Head of Internal Audit on Arms Length Organisations would form the basis of a comprehensive report to the Corporate Governance Committee, with an information report being presented to the Performance Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED – that, subject to the above, the Minutes be received and approved as a correct record.

5 MODERNISING EDUCATION - PROGRESS REPORT

A copy of a report by the Head of Customers and Education Support (HCES), which detailed the findings of the Gateway Review of Denbighshire's Modernising Education Programme (MEP) and provided an overall update on the current progress of the individual projects, had been circulated with the papers for the meeting.

The HCES introduced the report which provided details of the progress against the key Council Priority. As part of the delivery of the Corporate Plan the workstream for the priority of improving performance in education and the quality of school buildings had been developed into a clear programme of work. The current projects, which formed part of the workstream, included the major capital projects and the school organisation proposals. Discussions with the WG identified the benefits of undertaking a Gateway Review on the workstream to provide a degree of assurance regarding the measures in place to manage the programme. In response to a question from Councillor M.LII. Davies, the HCES explained that if available a Welsh version of the OGC Gateway Review document would be circulated to Members.

A formal Gateway Review had been undertaken of Denbighshire's MEP in September. An independent Gateway Review team had interviewed personnel involved in the MEP. The review system provided five categories of judgment ranging from Green, Amber/Green, Amber, Amber/Red and Red. The overall delivery confidence assessment from the review had been Amber/Green - Successful delivery appeared probable, however, constant attention would be required to ensure risks did not materialise into major issues which threatened delivery.

The report referred to the findings and recommendations from the review, which were incorporated in Appendix 1.

Concerns had been expressed regarding the uncertainty of future funding with the Denbighshire Schools Programme being affected by decisions on the amount, timing and nature of WG financial support. Denbighshire had considered how it might mitigate the effect of any reduced funding on its school investment programme.

It was explained that although policy objectives for the Programme had been set, an overall vision statement setting out what the future would look like would be useful. The area reviews had provided a sound basis for the Programme. However, there was as yet no clear articulation of how the findings from the individual areas, and the vision derived from that work would be reflected at Programme level. While hard and soft benefits had been identified at project level, work to bring these together at Programme level was still being developed. A need

to capture indicators of the Programme's contribution to educational outcomes in the County had been identified.

The four main recommendations made by the review had been included in the report. Overall the findings of the review indicated that the Programme was in a strong position to deliver its intended outcomes, and an updated Programme level risk register had been presented to the Modernising Education Programme Board (MEPB). The Programme Manager would be tasked with leading on the remaining pieces of work and progress against them would be reported to the MEPB in March. Details of the Membership of the MEPB were provided by the HCES and she agreed to pursue the suggestion that Scrutiny Members could attend and potentially be members of the Board.

The current progress against the Programme had been assessed both through internal challenge processes such as the Quarterly Performance Reports and the MEPB. The HCES provided a summary of Appendix 2, Modernising Education Programme Update, which outlined the current scope and progress of the projects being undertaken throughout the County.

Councillor E.W. Williams referred to the lack of understanding of the Modernising Education Programme and particular reference was made to poor attendance by elected members at meetings, events and sessions relating to education matters. The HCES explained that the views of both Elected and Coopted Members would be welcomed and valued. She emphasised the need to continue to communicate and highlight the aims and objectives of the Modernising Education Programme to stakeholders and citizens with a view of having a greater understanding of the programme and its benefits for all residents. The Programme included primary, secondary and special schools and its successful delivery would contribute towards the regeneration of the County.

The importance of the level of capital investment by Denbighshire was highlighted by Councillor E.W. Williams in relation to securing grant funding for future projects. He made reference to the Authority's Capital Plan and the significance of the Corporate Plan.

In response to concerns raised it was explained that it would be important to continue to work with schools and stakeholders to reconfigure school buildings to enable community groups to use them out of school time, and to promote the vision of having modern schools which as well as being educational establishments were also community assets for residents' use, without having a detrimental effect on other local community amenities. Officers also gave assurances that every possible effort was made to ensure that school buildings were safe from vandalism, this was done through close partnership working with other organisations, such as the Police and Fire and Rescue Service.

In reply to issues raised by Councillor R.J. Davies, it was agreed to investigate the alleged 'pillar' in the centre of a Physical Education hall at Ysgol Plas Brondyffryn, and also the arrangements in place to enable equitable access for pupils at the school to the sports facilities at the neighbouring Denbigh High School site.

During the ensuing discussion, the Committee congratulated the staff involved with the Modernising Education Programme for their diligent work, and it was:-

RESOLVED – *that subject to the above observations, to note the findings of the Gateway Review on the overall progress against this key Council priority.*

6 YOUR VOICE COMPLAINTS PERFORMANCE: QUARTER 3

A copy of a report by the Head of Customers and Education Support (HCES), which provided an overview of the feedback received via Denbighshire's customer feedback policy 'Your Voice' for Quarter 3 of 2013/14, had been circulated with the papers for the meeting.

Councillor H.C. Irving introduced the report which provided information regarding performance issues. The HCES explained that the headlines for Quarter 3 had been included in the report and its appendices. She then expanded on these points for members.

The following responses were provided to questions and issues raised by Members:-

- It was explained by the HCES that the 95% of the targets had been set in line with the national complaints policy which had been adopted by Denbighshire. She felt it would be beneficial to examine the basis of any complaints received, and informed the Committee that Lead Members had been provided with an audit check list sheet which could be utilised, when conferring with the respective Heads of Service, to ascertain the nature of complaints and how information was managed to address complaints. The HCES referred to the introduction of service standards to the Authority, and the significance of the Council's feedback policy in dealing with and responding to complaints.

- Councillor G.LI. Williams referred to the importance of noting and providing details of positive feedback received from service users.

- The significance and importance of differentiating between a service request and a complaint was emphasised by Councillor H.C. Irving. The HCES provided a definition between a service request and a complaint.

- The Committee was informed that the Policy did allow for extended timescales in respect of complaints received, on one occasion only, where circumstances necessitated.

- It was confirmed by the HCES that complaints received in Welsh were forwarded to the respective service departments in Welsh.

- The HCES explained that the colour coding utilised were factual and utilised accordingly.

- In response to questions from Members regarding the inclusion of positive feedback from service users, it was suggested that work be undertaken with the Council's services to enable detailed analysis of performance in dealing with complaints and the nature of complaints as this would help identify any weaknesses within services. The HCES explained that incorporating the feedback in the regular complaints report would be a huge piece of work for services. However, a one-off report could be presented to Committee in the autumn.

The Committee commended the Council's performance in dealing with complaints, particular reference being made to the improvement achieved by the Highways and Infrastructure Service in responding to complaints. The Committee thanked the HCES and her team for their hard work in driving forward the improvement in performance with respect to dealing with complaints and ultimately in delivering better services for residents.

RESOLVED – *that the Performance Scrutiny Committee:-*

- (a) note the performance of services in responding to complaints, and*
- (b) recommends that work be undertaken with the Council's services to enable a report to be presented to Members in the autumn on the Council's performance in dealing with complaints and the nature of complaints received.*

7 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

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

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

20th March, 2014:-

- Report on the Agricultural Estate to be provided. The report to include details of progress to date with the rationalisation of the Estate, tenancy agreements, farms sold by the Authority and the staffing structure of the Department.
- Report in respect of the service provision following closure of the Community Agency. Members requested that the report detail the alternative service provision which would be available to residents following the closure of community agencies in the County and the cessation of funding for the New Work Connections programme.

In reply to a question from the Chair regarding the provision of information relating to Clwydfro, the Scrutiny Coordinator explained that the Head of Internal Audit was preparing a report relating to Arms Length Organisations which had been included in the forward work programme for June, 2014.

Councillor D. Owens referred to Appendix 1 of the Information Brief document which noted that Valuation and Estates had over 200 business units across the County. Councillor Owens explained that Clwydfro also possessed business units in Ruthin.

Councillor R.J. Davies agreed to present a report to a future meeting of the Committee in respect of issues raised in relation to Ysgol Plas Brondyffryn, Denbigh.

Members agreed that the views of the Chairs and Vice Chairs Group be sought regarding consideration, by the relevant Scrutiny Committee, of the Street Naming Policy prior to its presentation to Cabinet.

RESOLVED – *that subject to the above amendments and agreements, the Work Programme as set out in Appendix 1 to the report be approved.*

8 FEEDBACK FROM COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES

Members of the Committee supported the views expressed by Councillor A. Roberts that a proposal be submitted to the Chairs and Vice Chairs Group, that the Scrutiny Committees representation on the Schools Standards Monitoring Group (SSMG) be increased from one to two Members, with both Members being informed of the time and date of future meetings of the Group.

Councillor D. Owens informed the Committee that he and Councillor P.W. Owen had recently visited Leisure Services establishments and the Revenues and Benefits Department in Rhyl. He explained that a report on the visit would be provided and highlighted the good work undertaken by the staff and the excellent leisure facilities available for service users. The CD:ECA agreed to provide information regarding a report to a Council Committee of an Ombudsman's report on writing off Council Tax debts.

In response to concerns raised by Councillor G. Sandilands, the CD:ECA explained that the Council was fully aware of the impact that Clwyd Leisure facility closures were having on service users and on the Council's reputation. She provided details of the process adopted and the progress made with the Options Appraisal in respect of Clwyd Leisure. An outline was provided of the timescales involved and it was confirmed that a report would be presented to Cabinet in March, 2014 in respect of this matter. Members asked that their appreciation of the Head of Communication, Marketing and Leisure's efforts in relation to this matter be noted.

Councillor R.J. Davies provided details of the main issues considered at the Human Resources Department's Service Challenge meeting held on the 20th January, 2014, which included the development of the HR structure, comparative costs of the service, improvements, leadership, training and morale within the department. The CD:ECA informed the Committee that the Head of Human Resources was currently undertaking work regarding the structure of HR, and she would be meeting with the Heads of Service to ascertain the demands of the respective services. HR staff were also working with middle managers with a view to setting priorities for the team, and the outcomes would be considered by SLT in May, 2014.

Councillor G.LI. Williams informed Members of his proposed future involvement in meetings with Rally GB. He referred to the success of the competition and the

importance of Denbighshire's early involvement in future events. The success of cycling events, such as Etape Cymru, were also highlighted by Councillor Williams.

RESOLVED – *that the reports be received and the contents noted.*

Meeting ended at 11.50 a.m.