

PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Performance Scrutiny Committee held by video conference on Thursday, 15 July 2021 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Ellie Chard, Martyn Holland, Hugh Irving (Vice Chair), Bob Murray, Paul Penlington, Arwel Roberts (Chair), Pete Prendergast, Peter Scott and Andrew Thomas

Cabinet Members – Councillors Bobby Feeley (Lead Member for Well-being and Independence) and Huw Hilditch-Roberts, (Lead Member for Education, Children's Services and Public Engagement) attended for agenda item 5

Observer – Councillor Meirick Davies

ALSO PRESENT

Corporate Director Communities (NS); Head of Finance and Property (SG); Principal Manager, Community Support Services (AL), Principal Manager, Education and Children's Services (JW), Scrutiny Coordinator (RE) and Committee Officers (KEJ & SLW [Webcaster])

1 APOLOGIES

Councillors Geraint Lloyd-Williams and David Williams

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

The following members declared a personal interest in agenda item 5 –

Councillor Arwel Roberts – Chair of the Rhuddlan Dementia Group

Councillor Paul Penlington – Trustee and Volunteer for Young Carer's Charity and wife worked for Young Carer's Charity which provided services to the Council

3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

No urgent matters had been raised.

4 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the Performance Scrutiny Committee held on 10 June 2021 were submitted.

Matters Arising –

Item 7 – Additional Learning needs Transformation Update (page 10, fourth bullet point) – it was confirmed that the issue of fewer resources available to undertake assessments through the medium of Welsh was a national issue which was raised

regularly with the Welsh Government and had also been referenced in the next Welsh in Education Strategic Plan for consultation in the next few months

Item 8 – Annual Performance Review 2020 to 2021 (page 13, second bullet point) – Councillor Paul Penlington confirmed that he had been provided with the relevant links to access the information he requested at the last meeting regarding cost breakdowns relating to Highways, Facilities and Environmental Services and Education and Children’s Services.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 10 June 2021 be received and approved as a correct record.

5 DRAFT DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL SERVICES ANNUAL REPORTS 2019 - 2020 & 2020 - 2021

The Chair welcomed the Corporate Director Communities and Councillors Bobby Feeley, Lead Member for Well-being and Independence and Huw Hilditch-Roberts, Lead Member for Education, Children’s Services and Public Engagement.

Councillor Bobby Feeley introduced the report (previously circulated) which presented the draft annual reports for 2019 – 2020 and 2020 – 21 to the Committee for scrutiny prior to their submission to the Care Inspectorate Wales. The reasoning behind the presentation of both reports was explained given that the Welsh Government had suspended the requirement to produce an annual report in March 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Councillor Feeley reported upon the leading role undertaken by the Corporate Director during the pandemic at a local, regional and national level whilst continuing with business as usual to a large extent against a backdrop of financial pressures. The reports demonstrated much had been achieved in extremely difficult circumstances with progression and improvement in many areas. Although Councillor Feeley’s main responsibility was Community Support Services she was aware that the blended Education and Children’s Services had also achieved the same good quality services for vulnerable children. She had been pleased to step in for the launch of the new innovative children’s centre Bwthyn y Ddol. The annual reports reflected well on the teams working across social care in Denbighshire and tribute was paid to the excellent and dedicated staff working tirelessly to deliver the best possible services. In closing Councillor Feeley stated she was confident that Denbighshire’s Social Services would continue to adapt and improve and provide the care necessary for residents.

The Corporate Director Communities thanked all councillors for their ongoing support for Children and Adult Social Care. Although the Welsh Government had waived the requirement to produce a report for 2019 – 20 it was felt appropriate to catch up and produce that report and also to show what had been achieved during a most difficult and unprecedented time. The Corporate Director paid tribute to the workforce including informal carers, foster carers and those that provided services on the Council’s behalf in the independent and voluntary sectors, and to all who had stepped in to assist. Not everyone could be redeployed onto the front line but people from across the authority and communities had taken opportunities to assist in other ways and stepped forward into roles to deliver for the most vulnerable. The Corporate Director was pleased to present the reports to members highlighting how

much had been achieved over the last two years and provided assurances that those areas of work which had not progressed as expected would be taken forward. It was prudent to note that staff were currently dealing with increased cases and transmission of Covid-19 both in communities and care settings. The Corporate Director welcomed members' scrutiny of the reports and advised that Principal Managers Ann Lloyd and James Wood were also present to answer questions.

During a lengthy debate the Committee paid tribute to the commitment and dedication of all those involved within social care who had worked tirelessly during extremely difficult circumstances and also to those who continued to do so, going above and beyond what was expected in order to provide for those most in need. The Committee took the opportunity to raise questions and discuss various aspects of the reports with the Corporate Director, Lead Members and officers present.

Main discussion points focused on the following –

- the report followed the format suggested by the Welsh Government and whilst it was accepted that the report did not provide a high level of detail there were a vast number of services across Children and Adult Social Care and a balance was needed on the level of information contained to ensure the document was accessible to the public – the Corporate Director welcomed any specific topics arising from the report put forward by members for future scrutiny
- Wrexham, Conwy and Denbighshire local authorities commissioned a support service from Credu – WCD Young Carers which provided the largest element of support and also included holiday activities, trips and events; whilst Covid-19 had affected those excursions they would be resumed when possible and regular meetings had been maintained via virtual means. Reference was also made to the Children and Family Support Gateway and outreach work undertaken with schools to identify young carers who might not have been referred by other agencies/families for support. Officers agreed to provide further detail on that topic to Councillor Paul Penlington outside of the meeting
- the onset of Covid-19 had accelerated plans on the use of digital solutions to support new ways of working and delivering services which had secured some real improvements. The use of technology had provided positive benefits for some people which aligned more to their needs. Examples of those new ways of working for both Adult and Children's Services had been included in the report and it was an area which would continue to be developed. Whilst the new ways of working had, in the main, been received positively, it was understood and recognised that those digital interfaces did not suit everyone
- some background was provided regarding the early years pathway which was a Welsh Government initiative together with the steps taken in Denbighshire to integrate elements within the local authority remit internally during the merger of Education and Children's Services to ensure a smoother transition for families receiving support, including Flying Start. Further work was ongoing with Conwy County Borough Council in that regard and work was also ongoing regionally to share information and best practice. Councillor Ellie Chard referred to the Flying Start Programme and suggested that parents be invited into schools to spend time with their children to help them learn through play and further develop language, literacy and social skills. The Chair commended that suggestion

- officers agreed with Councillor Martyn's Holland suggestion to include within the report a glossary/index of the terms used for various projects/tools etc.
- whilst there was always a small element of re-registration of children on the child protection register it was difficult to determine whether or not the increase on the previous year had been Covid-19 related with a need to look at the individual family circumstances to ascertain the cause. In terms of safeguarding referrals Denbighshire had not seen the level of referrals increase in line with other local authorities which had been due to the work undertaken at the start of the pandemic to identify vulnerable children and devise plans to support them which had been facilitated as a result of the merged Education and Children's service
- the Mind of My Own app was explained as one of the methods used as a communication tool for capturing the views of young people on their care and support which was used by approximately 130 young people on a regular basis. Work was undertaken to identify children who might have issues accessing digital technology and funding had also been made available for that purpose
- due to the pandemic the Council became aware of carers not previously known to them with individuals coming forward for support, and work continued with partners to encourage more carers to come forward to access support and engage in services. However some individuals did not consider themselves to be carers and there was likely to be a hidden population of carers in Denbighshire who had not come forward. Work with carers had continued during the pandemic and had been one of the areas progress had been made over the last eighteen months
- social care had been under increased financial pressure as had all local government services but there was a requirement for the Council to deliver a balanced budget and make difficult decisions regarding priorities. Extra funding had been ring fenced for social care services over recent years but more could be achieved with more funding. Every department had been required to make efficiencies and in Adult and Children Social Care those efficiencies had been appropriate and offset by additional investment in sustainable services and new ways of working which it was hoped over time would bring further efficiencies. There was also a heavy reliance on grant monies and partnership funding via the Regional Partnership Board, and a challenge where funding was time limited with a need to devise exit strategies and identify how core funding could support those initiatives going forward
- reference had been made in the report to staff being stretched to breaking point and the Corporate Director elaborated upon the incredible pressure Covid-19 had placed on staff, the impact on sickness levels and support provision in place for those affected, and pointed to colleagues and residents lost during that time
- there were four Community Resources Teams (CRT) based in Prestatyn, Rhyl, Denbigh and Ruthin to align with GP clusters and health services and whilst based in those four areas their outreach covered the whole of the county. The CRT comprised both local authority and health board staff in order to provide seamless health and social care support in communities across the county
- Education and Children's Services had worked together to ensure children and young people had access to IT equipment however there was a delay in supply due to high demand and even currently there remained orders outstanding. The circumstances of families were carefully considered as part of that process and there had been a small number of cases where equipment had not been provided given the risks identified and other means of support provided.

Councillor Huw Hilditch-Roberts reported upon innovative ways of ensuring digital access to google classroom through an X-box and PlayStation and added that digital access had been provided to every child/home who had asked for it. There had been regular and ongoing contact with children identified as vulnerable and that approach had resulted in a lower number of safeguarding referrals against an increase experienced in other local authority areas

- the Single Point of Access (SPOA) had worked extremely well during the pandemic and was to be commended and the work of staff in undertaking volunteering roles and numerous volunteer groups was also praised
- the problems in recruitment and retaining care staff was a national issue and Denbighshire continued to undertake recruitment drives to attract new staff. Issues remained regarding fair pay, terms and conditions and reference was made to regional and national initiatives to address the issue with Denbighshire involved in the development of the National Workforce Strategy for social care and long running campaign by Social Care Wales. The Corporate Director was also part of the Ministerial Fair Care Working Group working with the Welsh Government, unions and employer representatives on fair equity for social care. Further details were provided of the redeployment process undertaken during Covid-19 moving staff into frontline care positions and other roles and at times managers who had social care experience also undertook frontline roles in care homes when there had been a shortage. All of that work had been undertaken on goodwill and the ability of staff to step in to support the most vulnerable when needed had been tremendous
- elaborated on the development of Bwthyn y Ddol in partnership with Conwy County Borough Council and Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board providing short term residential support for children and young people locally. A multi-disciplinary team offered bespoke intervention led by a clinical formulation to complex high risk cases, enhancing the preventative work in the region. Reference was also made to the potential administration of the firm contracted to build the facility and work was ongoing with legal and procurement colleagues as to how best to take the project forward. Councillor Meirick Davies felt members should have been made aware of the situation at an earlier stage and Councillor Huw Hilditch-Roberts explained the legalities surrounding the issue but provided assurances that when further information became available and the situation was known the detail would be shared with all members
- the pandemic had been particularly difficult for adults with disabilities with some of the council's services having to cease due to Covid-19 related rules and restrictions which also included most work opportunity schemes. The Complex Disabilities Team ensured that those service users in need of support continued to receive it and contact had continued throughout. With regard to work opportunities a small team 'Job Finders' looked to find work placements and employment for people with disabilities together with opportunities within the council. Some discussions had taken place with Denbighshire Leisure Limited around opportunities to offer paid work placements and work was also ongoing with Working Denbighshire. Work was also ongoing to reopen some of the work opportunities as the Covid-19 situation allowed. Reference was made to the work opportunities review which included Meifod (Wood Products) in Denbigh which would soon be subject to a consultation process. A briefing note was being prepared thereon which would be circulated shortly in order to clarify the situation in that regard and support for service users. In terms of

accommodation for adults with disabilities, some accommodation was purpose built but adaptations were also made to properties individuals resided in

- there was an increased prevalence of mental health issues particularly within rural communities and the farming community across Wales which had been the focus of various projects and work carried out throughout the region and across all mental health services within the public sector, third sector and other organisations. A Welsh and English booklet had been specifically produced for people working in the farming community and living in rural areas around mental health support and advice and provided signposting to services. The Corporate Director agreed to provide a copy of that booklet to Councillor Meirick Davies.

At the end of debate the Chair thanked all in attendance for their valuable contributions in the comprehensive scrutiny of the annual reports. On behalf of the Committee the Chair thanked the Corporate Director Communities and staff for all the work they had undertaken during extremely difficult circumstances going above and beyond what was expected of them. The Corporate Director Communities thanked members for their continued support and appreciation of all the hard work involved and agreed to pass on the Committee's gratitude directly to staff.

RESOLVED that, subject to the above observations and the provision of the requested information, to confirm that the reports provided a clear account of performance in 2019 – 2020 and 2020 – 21.

At this juncture (11.40 am) the committee adjourned for a refreshment break.

6 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Coordinator submitted a report (previously circulated) seeking members' review of the committee's work programme and providing an update on relevant issues.

Discussion focused on the following –

- reports scheduled relating to Provisional External Examinations and Teachers Assessments (September) and Verified External Examinations (January) would not be forthcoming given the lack of comparative and benchmarking data. In response to questions Councillor Huw Hilditch-Roberts confirmed that Denbighshire's provisional examination data could be circulated to members but there was no comparative data from other local authorities due to Welsh Government edict. However there were a number of education related matters forthcoming which would benefit from scrutiny later in the year
- it was agreed that the September meeting proceed with the item relating to Cefndy Healthcare and if possible to bring forward the report on the Customer Relationship Manager (CRM) System to that meeting which had been scheduled for November. Councillor Huw Hilditch-Roberts felt it would also be useful for members if the report illustrated how each individual service fed into the CRM system and the importance and benefits for each individual and service to follow the correct procedures. It was agreed that the Scrutiny Coordinator ascertain whether the service was in a position to bring the report forward to September and also to include the issues raised by Councillor Hilditch-Roberts

- members were asked to submit any proposal forms regarding topics for scrutiny (including any topics arising from the Director of Social Services Annual Reports considered earlier in the meeting) prior to the next scheduled meeting of the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs Group on 9 September.

RESOLVED that, subject to the amendments agreed above, the Committee's forward work programme as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report be approved.

7 FEEDBACK FROM COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES

Councillor Hugh Irving advised members he was the Committee's representative at the following groups/forums –

- Communities and Customers Services (Service Challenge) – unfortunately he had been unable to attend the service challenge meeting held on 14 June
- Business Improvement and Modernisation Services (Service Challenge) – the meeting held on 30 June involved much discussion on Covid-19 and recovery and it was agreed that the minutes of that meeting be circulated to members
- Queen's Building Project Board – the Board was currently meeting every two weeks in order to keep the project under close review and much discussion was confidential and could not be shared in a public meeting. Whilst the project was not without its challenges assurances were provided that everyone was working to bring the project to a successful conclusion. In considering the best way forward and how to appropriately report back to members it was suggested that the project could be a topic for future scrutiny and that the Scrutiny Coordinator take up the issue and timescales for scrutiny if considered appropriate.

Councillor Peter Scott reminded members that a special meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Committee would be held on 26 July to consider the Task and Finish Group's work on the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment.

Councillor Ellie Chard confirmed she would be representing the Committee at the Service Challenge for Education and Children's Services on 19 July and the Chair confirmed he would be representing the Committee at the Service Challenge for Community Support Services on 19 July.

RESOLVED that the verbal reports be received and noted.

At the close of the meeting the Chair thanked all present for their attendance and contributions to debate.

The meeting concluded at 12.05 pm.