

PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Performance Scrutiny Committee held in Council Chamber, County Hall, Ruthin on Thursday, 28 June 2012 at 9.30 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Ian Armstrong, Richard Davies, Huw Hilditch-Roberts, Colin Hughes (Chair), Geraint Lloyd-Williams, Peter Owen, Arwel Roberts and Gareth Sandilandsands and Co-opted Members D. Houghton, Dr D. Marjoram and J. Saxon.

Councillors G.M. Kensler, M.L. Holland, H.C. Irving, W.N. Tasker, E.W. Williams attended as Observers.

ALSO PRESENT

Head of Customers and Education Support (JW), Head of Education (KE), Head of Business, Planning and Performance (AS), Head of Internal Audit (IB), Education Finance Manager (CW), Section Manager: Network Management (TT), Service Manager: Quality and Systems Development (CM), Principal Housing Officer (GR) Customer Care Project Officer (SG), Scrutiny Coordinator (RE) and Administrative Officer (CIW).

The Chair informed the Committee that this would be the last meeting Mr John Saxon would attending as a Co-opted Member Representative. He thanked Mr Saxon for his valued contribution and hard work and wished him well in the future. Members of the Committee endorsed the sentiments expressed by the Chair.

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ms C. Burgess, William Cowie, Mrs. G. Greenland and Allan Pennington

2 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR

In accordance with the Council's Constitution CVs/statements had been requested from interested parties for the office of Committee Vice-Chair. No CVs had been received. However, Councillor A. Roberts was proposed and seconded for the office of Vice-Chair. No other nominations were received and the Committee therefore:-

RESOLVED – *that the Councillor A. Roberts be appointed Vice Chair of the Performance Scrutiny Committee for the ensuing year.*

3 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No personal or prejudicial interest were declared

4 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.

5 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The Minutes of a meeting of the Performance Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday, 5th April, 2012 were submitted.

RESOLVED – *that the Minutes be received and approved as a true and correct record.*

6 ESTYN ACTION PLAN

A copy of a joint report by the Head of Education, Head of Customers and Education Support, Partnerships and Communities Manager and Planning and Performance Officer: Business Planning and Performance, had been circulated with the papers for the meeting.

The report presented the action plan drawn-up in response to the recommendations of the recent inspection on the quality of the Council's education services for people and young people. It also sought Members' views on the appropriateness of the actions and timescales in the action plan report by the Head of Education. It was explained that effective monitoring of implementation of the Action Plan would ensure that any weaknesses identified would be addressed and provide for a better quality service and better outcomes for pupils.

Estyn had aimed to answer three key questions through an analysis of self-evaluation, performance data, lesson observations and meetings with stakeholders. Judgment on all three questions had been good. All other aspects had also been judged to be good, except for Leadership which had been judged as excellent.

Denbighshire had made education services for children and young people a high priority, with a clear vision and high aspirations for the Authority.

The reorganisation of the scrutiny arrangements had resulted in Scrutiny Committee Members having a better overview across the whole Council and a wider range of Members understanding education issues.

To ensure continued improvement, Estyn had recommended that Denbighshire would need to:-

- (i) Improve the accuracy of teacher assessments at end of key stage 3; and
- (ii) Identify all services for children and young people in Denbighshire and establish an effective system to measure their impact to help the authority and its partners know whether these services offered good value for money.

Denbighshire had produced an Action Plan indicating how it would address the two recommendations, and it was confirmed that recommendation 1 was on track. The

Plan, currently in draft, had been completed within the required 50 working days and would be implemented pending being approved by the pastoral HM Inspector.

Dr D. Marjoram referred to partnership working arrangements across North Wales and explained that there was a need to identify and clarify special needs levels within the County, and to include flexibility in the system to meet demand with Denbighshire leading other Authorities if necessary. It was explained that there were 6 Authorities in the consortium and agreement on working practices would have to be sought from all the respective schools in North Wales to ensure a consistent approach. Dr Marjoram referred to the good partnership work arrangements adopted at Ysgol Plas Brondyffryn, Denbigh.

The officers provided the following responses to questions from Members:-

- It was explained that reading and writing standards had improved in the County, however, in comparison with other authorities Denbighshire had not improved enough. This problem had been recognised in relation to the free school meal (FSM) indicator with standards in Key Stage 2 and 4 being very good, but assessment standards implemented at the end of Key Stage 3 seemed to have been too harsh. Councillor E.W. Williams explained that the Welsh Government (WG) Minister had, in view of the marked improvement in stage 2 level results, questioned the reliability of the Key Stage 3 assessment process.

- The Head of Customers and Education Support highlighted the importance of aligning budgets and prioritising resources to meet priorities. She explained that this could be attained through focusing and thinking creatively to achieve the best for the children and ensuring a sustainable infrastructure within the schools.

- In reply to issues raised regarding liaison and interaction between primary and secondary schools, the Head of Customers and Education Support confirmed that there was a clear transitional relationship between the schools. She referred to the cluster arrangements which had been adopted and the robust structures in place to ensure positive interaction.

In response to a question from the Chair, the Head of Education provided an outline of the MCA database in respect of partnership working, together with, confirmation that work was being undertaken with the Partnerships Team to ensure that the systems utilised were synchronised. She highlighted the importance of regularising the data collection systems and agreeing service provision with regard to the subsequent impact on standards achieved. Following further discussion, it was:-

RESOLVED:-

- (a) *to receive the report, and note the appropriateness of actions and timescales in the post inspection action plan in response to the recommendations from the Estyn inspection (Appendix 1); and*
- (b) *that a progress report on the implementation and delivery of the Action Plan be presented to the Committee in six months time.*

7 BUILDING CAPACITY IN SCHOOLS

A copy of a report by the Education Finance Manager, which detailed the outcomes achieved following the implementation of the Building Capacity in Schools Project, had been circulated with the papers for the meeting.

The Education Finance Manager introduced the report and informed the Committee of the project's impact on schools and the planned future developments to build on and develop this resource further. A summary of the background to the Building Capacity in Schools Project model, developed in 2011, had been included in the report. It had been recognised that there was not a one size fits all approach across each cluster and so the model was adapted where appropriate to meet the differential needs. The report outlined the final model adopted across each Cluster. The School Budget Forum had approved a revision to the funding formula for schools and the report outlined the final funded model adopted in April, 2012. In response to a question regarding Business and Finance Manager numbers in secondary schools in comparison with the number of feeder schools, the Education Finance Manager explained that all the schools in question received equal funding and adopted their preferred project model to suit the requirements of their cluster.

The implementation of Finance Managers had significantly improved the financial position of schools with 2012-13 figures suggesting that the number of schools in financial difficulty having reduced from 8 to 2. The adopted model had been recognised as best practice by Estyn and by other local authorities in Wales. The project had developed significantly with GAIA Technologies now adopting the model for the Schools ICT support, and Corporate HR was working with schools to develop a similar model for HR support.

All Business and Finance Managers meet monthly to discuss and develop specific areas across schools including with the forward work programme focusing on key areas including Financial management, Procurement, Training & Development, Health & Safety, Commissioning, HR. The Group would be pivotal in transforming the way support services in schools work in the future.

The following responses were provided in respect of questions from Members:-

- Sickness absenteeism cover support was provided by the network of School Finance Managers, with additional support available centrally from the Council if required.
- The Authority had the ability to access, monitor and scrutinise school finance systems at any given time and this mitigated the risk of any possible fraudulent activity. Internal Audit's active role in monitoring financial activity was also highlighted.
- Details of the reporting process to School Governing Bodies were outlined for Members. Each school was responsible for their reporting process with Finance Officers attending School Governor meetings if required.
- An outline of cluster arrangements with respect to primary schools in Denbighshire which were feeder schools for out of county secondary schools was provided e.g Ysgol y Castell, Rhuddlan being a feeder school for Ysgol Emrys ap Iwan, Abergele.

- The Education Finance Manager confirmed that she would be meeting with the respective Headteachers to discuss the Business Manager vacancy in Prestatyn in the near future.

In reply to a question, the Head of Customers and Education Support summarised the role of a Headteacher which required both managerial and teaching skills. She confirmed that training was provided with regard to procurement to assist with the business and budget management aspect of the role, and specific reference was made to the request to increase the delegation rate of funds to schools.

Councillor E.W. Williams referred to the proposal by some AMs that the entire Education Budget be hypothecated. He questioned whether schools would want such action in respect of delegation, and suggested that elected Members should be questioning the introduction of such measures and seeking clarification in respect of hypothecation from the Welsh Government (WG). The Education Finance Manager confirmed that a substantial amount of work had been undertaken nationally in respect of delegation, and explained that the targets for delegation for every Authority in Wales would be 85% by 2014/15. Following further discussion, it was:-

RESOLVED – to:-

- (a) *receive the report, and*
- (b) *note the outcomes to date and the ability of schools going forward to improve standards through the use of this resource.*

8 CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT: QUARTER 4

A copy of a report by the Corporate Improvement Manager, which enabled the Council to evaluate progress across key areas of performance, had been circulated with the papers for the meeting.

It was explained that it would be normal practice to present the report to Scrutiny to include comments prior to being submitted to Cabinet, however on this occasion due to timescales this had not been possible. The Head of Business Planning and Performance explained that the report enabled the Council to evaluate progress and pick up trends across key areas of performance. The main report presented a summary of exceptions for each performance area. The Annex, Summary Exceptions Report, was supported by individual chapters which provide a more detailed summary of performance in each particular area.

Members were informed that Denbighshire was a high performing Council and that the Summary Exceptions Report should be considered in the overall context of the Council activities. The report provided information on key areas of performance for the Council, enabling the Performance Scrutiny Committee to carry out its performance management function. It presented the position at the end of Quarter 4 2011-12, which was the end of the period for the Corporate Plan 2009-12. A more comprehensive report to evaluate the Council's performance in 2011-12 would be published in October, 2012. The report would also place the Council's performance within the context of national performance where possible.

Details of the Council's overall performance across the key areas and the significant progress being made had been included in the report. A key consideration had been how to present performance. The Council had aligned the performance reporting of "indicators" and "performance measures" with the four Red, Orange Yellow and Green (ROYG) system used by Internal Audit Services for Risk Management, and this method had been applied retrospectively to the indicators and performance measures in the Corporate Plan 2009-12. The performance reporting of improvement activity, projects and actions, currently remained with the five RAG system used by the Corporate Project Management Methodology, which was currently under review and on completion would align with the four ROYG system. At present the reporting of improvement activity would continue with the current project management method. In response to questions from the Chair, the Head of Business Planning and Performance provided a summary of the new ROYG system and agreed that the areas in the current report which were still shown as 'amber' would be amended to 'orange' for consistency and ease of reference. It was confirmed that indicators were a mixture of the Authority's own requirements and national indicators.

Councillor H. Hilditch-Roberts explained that there was no indication of the experience and perception of service users in relation to the measurement of service delivery. The Section Manager: Network Management referred to the public perception that footways within the County had not improved. However, statistics proved otherwise and he felt that this could apply to a number of services and should be the subject of debate. The Service Manager: Quality and Systems Development felt that indicators should be accompanied with explanations, and he provided examples where indicators had been red but the Service in question had been performing well. Members agreed that the provision of a short explanation accompanying indicators would be beneficial.

The Head of Customers and Education Support explained that a range of measures were being developed to assess the level of service provided from a customer perspective. The Head of Business Planning and Performance explained that the indicators presently utilised attempted to demonstrate that the actions taken had been effective. In reply to questions details of the criteria for identifying indicators were outlined, and it was agreed that in future reference would be included as to whether indicators were national or local indicators.

In reply to a question from the Chair, the Head of Business, Planning and Performance provided details of the position in respect of Outcome Agreements with the Welsh Government.

Members supported the recommendation of the predecessor committee to establish a Working Group, consisting of four Members of the Committee, to meet with the Head of Internal Audit and Corporate Improvement Team personnel for the purposes of monitoring performance against the agreed indicators and agreements. The Committee agreed that Councillors R.J. Davies, C. Hughes, H. Hilditch-Roberts and A. Roberts be appointed to the Working Group.

RESOLVED – that:-

- (a) *the Performance Scrutiny Committee notes the exceptions associated with achieving the outcomes in the report, and that any performance related issues be pursued with the appropriate Head of Service and/or Lead Member, and*
- (b) *a Working Group be established consisting of Councillors R.J. Davies, C. Hughes, H. Hilditch-Roberts and A. Roberts to meet on a regular basis with the Head of Internal Audit and Corporate Improvement Team personnel for the purposes of monitoring performance against the agreed indicators and agreements.*

9 PERFORMANCE STANDARDS REVEALED THROUGH THE COMPLAINTS PROCESS

A copy of a report by the Head of Customers and Education Support, which provided information regarding performance issues identified via the 'Your Voice', customer feedback policy, and which made recommendations to address the policy and process accordingly, had been circulated with the papers for the meeting.

The Head of Customers and Education Support explained that the report presented an analysis of the feedback received through the Denbighshire County Council's customer feedback policy 'Your Voice' during Quarters 3 and 4 of 2011/12 and highlighted areas for improvement. She referred to the need to change the perception of complaints in terms of how they were reported, the process for dealing with them and the action taken by the Authority with regard to the information gained. There was a need to change the culture of the perception of complaints as being negative to it being a way to bring about positive improvements. There was also a need to encourage customers to put forward and submit complaints as this would be important in enabling the Authority to address processes which were not being undertaken to the satisfaction of the customer. Reference was made to the introduction of a pre-complaint process, where problems could be addressed prior to developing into a complaint, with information received being utilised to shape the services provided to the customer.

The Customer Care Project Officer provided a detailed summary of the report which included a summary of performance, information on the volume of complaints, complaint response times, categories of complaints and the outcomes of complaints. The data provided in the report included complaints recorded on the central CRM system, nevertheless not all complaints had been recorded for reasons indicated in the report. Further work was therefore required to ensure all complaints were recorded centrally.

There was an opportunity and need, to review 'Your Voice' to ensure the complaints process supported the Council's own ambitions and delivered the WG's aim. Details of areas for inclusion in the review had been outlined in the report. In response to a question from the Chair, the Head of Customers and Education Support anticipated that the outcome of the review would be reported to the Committee in September or October, 2012. Members of the Committee agreed that the Working Group, to be convened to monitor performance, also include within its remit consideration of the complaints process review. Members agreed that the Working Group be convened prior to the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor H. Hilditch-Roberts referred to the complaint reporting process and highlighted the importance of ensuring consistency throughout all services when monitoring and addressing complaints. He also referred to the need to monitor and track the progress of each complaint received.

In reply to a question regarding the importance of strong communication links between the County and the Town and Community Councils, the Head of Customers and Education Support outlined the initiatives introduced to strengthen links with Town and Community Councils.

The Chair referred to complaints relating to Housing Services, page 87 of the report, complaints rising from 11 to 17, and also page 91 where only 4 out of 23 complaints in Q3 and 1 out of 21 in Q4 were responded to within the required timescale. A similar situation had also arisen with respect to social services complaints in both quarters on page 91. The Principal Housing Officer outlined the measures introduced by Housing Services to address and record complaints received and amend the follow up process. He confirmed that officers would receive training in respect of the complaints process and work would be undertaken with the public to improve customer services and relations. The Customer Care Project Officer informed Members that the complaints process in Housing Services had in some instances been misused as a request to expedite maintenance work, and he explained that a more accurate method of recording would be required to identify this type of complaint.

In reply to a question from the Chair regarding the number of 'Red' status showing in regards volumes of complaints in the Regeneration, Planning and Public Protection Service, the Customer Care Project Officer advised that volumes could fluctuate between periods. Where only a small number were received by a service area any change could show as a high percentage and due to the tolerance used they could therefore be flagged as 'Red'. He explained that this was the case with this service and advised that these be reviewed drawing attention to the end column of the table, Recommendation, which would provide a better impression of the need for action.

RESOLVED – that the:-

- (a) Corporate Complaints Officer review the current customer feedback policy in the context of the Authority's performance in complaints handling, and work with the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) to improve performance. The review to include, but not exclusively focus on, the issues identified in the report.
- (b) Working Group, established to monitor Services' performance, include within its remit consideration of the Customer Complaints Process Review, and that the Working Group be convened prior to the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee; and
- (c) Committee receive a further report in the autumn detailing the changes proposed to the policy following the above review

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. Various appendices were attached to the report, references to which were included in the report.

The Scrutiny Coordinator referred to the draft Forward Work Programme (FWP) for future meetings as detailed in Appendix 1, which had been inherited from the former Committee. She referred to paragraph 4 of the report which set out the terms of reference and functions of the Committee, and highlighted the importance of the role of the Performance Scrutiny committee within the scrutiny process. Members agreed with the suggestion that a Workshop be convened to assist in identifying and clarifying the role of the Performance Scrutiny Committee with regard to performance management within the Authority and the role of the Corporate Governance Committee.

The Committee considered the draft FWP and it was agreed that the Workshop could also be utilised to examine the FWP. The Scrutiny Coordinator explained she had received a verbal request to defer the item on Planning Enforcement, currently scheduled for the July, 2012 meeting, and made reference to the excessive number of 10 items schedule for consideration at the September, 2012 meeting. Members agreed that the Planning Enforcement item be deferred and that a workshop on performance management, and the Committee's FWP, be held prior to its business meeting on the 26th July, 2012. The Workshop to commence at 9.30 a.m. and the public meeting to start at 11.15 a.m.

The Committee considered the appointment of Committee Representatives on the following Council Groups and Boards:-

Service Performance Challenge Groups – all Scrutiny Committees had been invited to appoint a representative to each Group to act as the Committee's contact for each service. An overview of the process had been included at Appendix 5 to the report. It was emphasised that the service leads appointed by the Performance Scrutiny Committee had an important and defined role to play in supporting and challenging services to deliver against their performance targets, business and efficiencies plans. The following Members were appointed:-

Housing & Community Development – Councillor C.L. Hughes
Children and family Services – Councillor A. Roberts
Adult & Business Services – Councillor C. Hughes
Environmental Services – Councillor R.J. Davies
Legal & Democratic Services and Business – Councillor W.L. Cowie
Business Planning and Performance – C.L. Hughes
Education and Customers & Education Support – Councillor A. Roberts
Communications, Marketing & Leisure – Councillor G.Lloyd-Williams
Finance & Assets – Councillor I.W. Armstrong
Regeneration – Councillor G. Sandilands
Highways & Infrastructure – Councillor P.W. Owen
Planning & Public Protection – Councillor M.LI. Davies
Strategic Human Resources – Councillor H. Hilditch-Roberts

Strategic Investment Group - Members appointed Councillor G. Sandilands to serve on the Strategic Investment Group, which would meet on a monthly basis to consider the Council's future capital requirements and bids for capital funding and external grants. The terms of reference of the Group had been included as Appendix 6 to the report.

Conwy and Denbighshire Collaboration Programme Board - The report outlined the membership and role of the Board and a copy of the Board's terms of reference had been included at Appendix 7 to the report. The Committee agreed that Councillor A. Roberts be appointed to serve as its representative on the Board and Councillor C. Hughes as the Committee's substitute representative on the Group in the event of Councillor Roberts being unable to attend. Following further discussion, it was:-

RESOLVED – that:-

- (a) *the Planning Enforcement item be deferred until the autumn of 2012.*
- (b) *a Workshop be convened on the 26th July, 2012 at 9.30 a.m., with the business meeting commencing at 11.15 a.m.*
- (c) *the Members listed above be appointed to serve on each of the Service Performance Challenge Groups.*
- (d) *Councillor G. Sandilands be nominated to serve on the Council's Strategic Investment Group, and*
- (e) *Councillor A. Roberts to nominated serve on the Conwy and Denbighshire Collaboration Programme Board, with Councillor C. Hughes as the substitute representative.*

11 FEEDBACK FROM COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES

The Chair provided a brief summary of his attendance at three of the Performance Challenge meetings. Members were informed that an amended scheduled of the pending Performance Challenge meetings, including times and dates, had been circulated.

Meeting ended at 13.20 p.m.