

PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Performance Scrutiny Committee held in Conference Room 1a, County Hall, Ruthin on Thursday, 19 September 2013 at 9.30 am.

PRESENT

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

ALSO PRESENT

Councillor Hugh Irving, Lead Member for Customers and Communities;
Councillor Barbara Smith, Lead Member for Modernising and Performance;
Councillor Eryl Williams, Lead Member for Education

Co-optees:

Debra Houghton, Nicola Lewis and Dr. Dawn Marjoram.

Corporate Director: Economic and Community Ambition (RM), Corporate Improvement Team Manager (TW), Audit Manager (BS), Head of Customers and Education Support (JW), Head of Business Planning and Performance (AS), Head of Education (KE), Corporate Complaints Officer (CO'G),

Scrutiny Co-ordinator (RE), Democratic Services Officer (KAE) and Committee Administrator (SLW)

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs Gill Greenland (Co-opted Member)

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Councillor Geraint Lloyd Williams declared a personal and prejudicial interest regarding Item 5.

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 20 June 2013 were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 20 June 2013 be received and approved as a correct record.

At this juncture, the Chair allowed Councillor Bill Cowie to raise an issue due to the fact Councillor Cowie had to leave the meeting early for a prior engagement.

Councillor Cowie, together with the Strategic Highways Manager and the Section Manager: Network Management had met recently regarding the Council's Policy into dropped kerbs. A report was to be submitted to the Performance Scrutiny Committee meeting on 24 October 2013. Both the Head of Environment and the Strategic Highways Manager were to attend to present the report.

The Service Manager: Quality and Systems Development had been in discussion with the Highways Department regarding Disabled Facility Grants (DFGs) to fund dropped kerb installations. The current Corporate Improvement Team Manager would be starting a new post the following week as the new Service Manager: Quality and Systems Development. He confirmed that once in post, he would check the feasibility of utilising DFGs to fund dropped kerbs and to check that the Council liaises with utility companies when undertaking work on highways and pavements etc., whether dropped kerbs could be installed at the same time if required.

The Corporate Director: Economic and Community Ambition confirmed she would contact both Highways and Social Services' Heads of Service to ensure that discussions took place appropriately to facilitate the provision of dropped kerbs where required. The matter would also be raised with all Heads of Service to ensure that a corporate approach would be taken to the provision of dropped kerbs once a strategy/policy had been adopted.

5 PROVISIONAL EXTERNAL EXAMINATIONS AND TEACHER ASSESSMENTS

The Lead Member for Education, Councillor Eryl Williams, presented a report (previously circulated), to provide information regarding the performance of schools at all key stages and provisional external examinations results at Key Stage 4 and Post 16. A detailed analysis of results would be provided for Committee Members following the publication of the verified and benchmarked information, which would be available in December 2013.

To reduce any risks to school support and challenge in Denbighshire schools, Education Officers within the Authority were monitoring and assessing the quality of regional support from GwE (The Regional School Effectiveness and Improvement Service).

There had been concern expressed regarding the nature and purpose of tests. Some children had been affected emotionally due to the stress of taking the tests. The concern had been reported by the Head of Education to the Welsh Government (WG).

A further concern had been raised due to the fact that most teachers stated they had not received adequate training regarding the tests.

The issue of the decline in Level 2 results at Prestatyn High School had been anticipated and additional measures had therefore been put in place to try and mitigate the risk of the decline. A question was asked whether the large size of the school could be a contributory factor. This was dismissed due to the fact that if

school structures were effective then large schools performed well. Denbighshire County Council was working closely with Prestatyn High School and officers were due to meet the Head Teacher to discuss an improvement strategy and the types of assistance available from the local education authority and from GwE.

During the discussion on St. Brigid's School Councillor Geraint Lloyd Williams declared a personal and prejudicial interest as he was a parent Governor at St. Brigid's. Councillor Williams left the meeting room at this point.

Discussions were due to take place with the Interim Head Teacher of St. Brigid's School as there had been an issue at the school pertaining to attainment in Mathematics. An improvement strategy would be discussed. The Head of Education stated that the results for St. Brigid's appeared to be adequate but there was room for improvement. However, St. Brigid's circumstances were unique.

The Head of Education confirmed Rhyl Sixth Form College data would be collated when the information was provided by the College, the final results would be available in January 2014 along with the validated results for the county.

RESOLVED that subject to the above, members noted and accepted the report.

At this juncture (10.15 a.m.) there was a 15 minute break
Councillor Geraint Lloyd Williams re-joined the Committee.

Meeting reconvened at 10.30 a.m.

6 YOUR VOICE COMPLAINTS PERFORMANCE

The Lead Member for Customers and Communities, Councillor Hugh Irving, presented a report (previously circulated) providing the Committee with information regarding the Council's performance in dealing and responding to customer complaints. The report provided an overview of the complaints received by Denbighshire County Council under the council's Customer Feedback Policy "Your Voice", during Q1, 2013/14.

The Head of Customers and Education Support confirmed that the report was brought before the Performance Scrutiny Committee on a quarterly basis. It had been agreed previously that the Performance Scrutiny Committee would monitor the time scales complaints were dealt with. Trends of complaints were being scrutinised and services were looking to eradicate complaints in the future. The Head of Customers and Education Support wished to draw to Committee's attention that Social Services had a different complaints procedure but she was attempting to bring the information management in line. Social Services would always be one month behind in their data. Currently 93% of their complaints were dealt with within the required timescales.

It was confirmed there was a large amount of work yet to be carried out within Customer Services. One action yet to be taken was the inclusion of the name of

the officer dealing with the complaint to be recorded on the CRM system and to appear on the response to the county councillor.

Also an App was being developed to enable members to be kept informed of activities within the community. The Head of Customers and Education Support gave a brief outline of how the App would work and explained it would be rolled out over the next month.

A workshop event was to take place in October to which members had been invited where an update on customer services would be given with an opportunity to discuss matters in more detail.

The restructuring of the Housing and Community Development Service had been raised as a potential issue which may increase the number of complaints received, as housing officers were now responsible for over 1000 cases each. The workload capacity would likely cause stress levels to rise. The Head of Customers & Education Support confirmed that the CRM system recorded all calls received. The system would highlight areas where responses were not being sent within the designated time. A monthly report would be produced for members informing them of the total number of questions lodged and the number of responses.

Following members' visits to the Council's housing stock, members questioned if a protocol/standard practice had been in existence for Housing Officers to report back to members on progress made in addressing issues identified during visits. The Corporate Director: Economic and Community Ambition confirmed she would check and report back to the Committee.

RESOLVED that subject to the above the members note and accept the report.

7 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REVIEW REPORT 2012/13

The Lead Member for Modernising and Performance, Councillor Barbara Smith, presented a report (previously circulated) which enabled members to scrutinise the draft report, prior to a final draft being presented to Council on 8 October 2013.

The council was required to publish an annual report of its performance by 31 October each year. The report presented before Committee showed the Council's draft Annual Performance Review for 2012/13.

Within the draft report were significant gaps. One reason for this was that the deadline for responses to the residents survey was not until Friday 20 September. Overall, the report showed Denbighshire had had another positive year for 2012/13 and again was the best performing Council in North Wales. The report had been the first year of a five year Corporate Plan. A number of the "red" items reasons were shown within the Corporate Plan.

The 5 year Corporate Plan had been developed and agreed during 2012. The Plan included the new Economic Ambition priority. As this priority was a new one, careful scoping and defining had been required with a view to measuring success in

this field. It was far too early to expect to see success in this area as the economic ambition priority was a long term one.

One indicator which was of concern was the decline in the performance of the Planning Department which seemed currently to be failing to deal with planning applications within the 8 week time frame. Members requested comparison figures of applications received in 2011/12 and 2012/13 and also the number of staff in employment within the Planning Department covering those two years. It was agreed the question should be asked of the Head of Planning and Public Protection, at the next Service Challenge, as to why the Service's performance against this indicator was lower in 2012/13 than in 2011/12.

Members requested that the date of the Annual Performance Review report be added to the front cover for ease of reference. Also, consideration to be given to using less colour (or shading on front cover) to save ink. Members also requested officers to validate the statistic relating to the average number of business miles claimed per Council employee prior to submission of the report to County Council for approval, as the total miles claimed seemed excessive.

RESOLVED that, subject to the above, the draft 2012/13 Annual Performance Review be submitted to County Council for approval.

The Committee wished Tony Ward well in his new post as Service Manager: Quality and Systems Development and sent their best wishes for the future to Craig MacLeod in his new role at Flintshire County Council and thanked him for his services to Denbighshire.

8 FUTURE OF PERFORMANCE REPORTING

The Lead Member for Modernising and Performance, Councillor Barbara Smith, presented a report (previously circulated) to consult with members about future arrangements for reporting performance against the Corporate Plan.

The Corporate Improvement Team Manager would be leaving his post on 20 September 2013 due to an internal promotion. Therefore due to efficiency savings the decision had been taken to delete the Corporate Improvement Team Manager's post and to develop a new way of delivering the core business of the Service. There were different teams reporting performance against the Corporate Plan and the BIG Plan, but the two tasks were to be brought together under a single function as both plans used the same performance management framework. Rather than reporting quarterly and taking up members and officers' time, it had been suggested that in future the Corporate Plan Monitoring Report and the report on the Corporate Risk Register be combined and report to Performance Scrutiny Committee on a twice yearly basis at the end of Q2 and Q4. The draft Annual Performance Review Report would be presented to the Committee at its October meeting on an annual basis.

It was agreed that the report would be presented bi-annually and on the relevant agenda, the report would be timetabled for one hour. Due to this arrangement,

there would be a reduction of agenda items from 4 to 3 to allow time for detailed discussion.

RESOLVED that the Committee support the proposals:

- (i) To reduce the number of in-year Corporate Plan Performance Reports from four to two per year. In addition to this, the Committee would continue to receive an Annual Performance Report.
- (ii) To reduce the scale of the in-year reports so that they only focus on exceptions in relation to performance measures and activities (i.e. the things they could positively influence).
- (iii) To align the bi-annual reviews of the Corporate Risk Register so that they are considered by the Performance Scrutiny Committee at the same time as the proposed bi-annual Corporate Plan Performance Reports.

9 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

A report by the Scrutiny Co-ordinator was submitted (previously circulated) seeking Members' review of the Forward Work Programme (FWP):

- (i) In-house Provider Visits to be included on the March 2014 FWP, and thereafter on an annual basis.
- (ii) Joint Corporate Plan and Corporate Risk Register to be added to March 2014. Risk register to be moved from January 14 to March 14.
- (iii) Meeting between Scrutiny Chairs & Vice Chairs and the Cabinet Members took place recently. Lead Members to attend the Scrutiny Committee when the report on the Agenda requires it. Agreed Councillor David Smith to attend on 24 October 2013.
- (iv) Discussion took place regarding the Parking item which was scheduled on the FWP. It was currently split into 2 sections – one section to be discussed by Performance Scrutiny and the other to be discussed by Communities Scrutiny. CET and SLT would prefer it to be one item. The Corporate Director: Economic and Community Ambition stated that in her opinion it was a policy discussion for Communities Scrutiny. It had been agreed and seconded that the item should go to Communities for discussion. Vote took place. 3 in favour and 4 against. It was then agreed to defer the item being scheduled on Performance Scrutiny FWP until it had been discussed at Communities Scrutiny. Agreed to defer the item from October's Forward Work Programme pending Communities Scrutiny Committee's discussion in November on the impact of the Council's parking enforcement strategy on the Council's delivery of its corporate priority and ambition with respect to economic development
- (v) Risks of Grade 2 Listed Building to be added to the December 2013 meeting FWP.
- (vi) an information report be circulated on the level of the Council's use of supply teaching staff and the Authority's expectations of them. This request was made in light of a recent national report on the use of supply teachers by local education authorities and the impact on pupils' educational standards.

RESOLVED that subject to the above amendments/ additions and agreements, the Future Work Programme be approved.

10 FEEDBACK FROM COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES

Councillor Richard Davies gave a verbal report on a recent quarterly meeting he had had with the Human Resources Service. The main points were that sickness absence rates were currently lower than at the same time last year. All Services had been reminded of the importance of ensuring that CRB checks were up to date and on the requirement of complying with this policy and on the policy relating to obtaining references before confirming appointments.

Meeting concluded at 12.30pm