

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, 12 June 2025 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Ellie Chard, James Elson, Bobby Feeley, Martyn Hogg, Carol Holliday, Alan Hughes, Terry Mendies (Chair), Will Price and Andrea Tomlin

Lead Member for Corporate Strategy, Policy, Equalities and Strategic Assets Councillor Julie Matthews attended at the Committee's invitation for business item 6.

Observer – Councillor Jeanette Chamberlain Jones.

ALSO PRESENT

Corporate Director: Governance and Business (GW), Head of Corporate Support Service: Performance, Digital and Assets (HVE), Insight, Strategy and Delivery Manager (RL) Strategic Planning and Performance Officer (EH), Scrutiny Co-ordinator (RhE), Senior Committee Administrator (Host) (KJ), Committee Administrator (RhTJ)

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Gareth Sandilands.

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No members declared any interests of a personal, or a personal and prejudicial nature, in any of the business items listed for discussion.

3 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR

Nominations were sought for the office of Vice-Chair of Performance Scrutiny Committee for the 2025/26 municipal year. Councillor Carol Holliday nominated Councillor Gareth Sandilands for the role of Vice-Chair, Councillor Ellie Chard seconded the nomination. No other nominations were received, therefore the Committee:

Resolved: that Councillor Gareth Sandilands be appointed as Vice-Chair of Performance Scrutiny Committee for the 2025/26 municipal year.

As Councillor Sandilands had tendered his apologies for the meeting Councillor Holliday advised she had discussed with him her intention to nominate him for the role. He had given his assent for his name to put forward.

4 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

No items of an urgent nature had been raised with the Chair or the Scrutiny Coordinator prior to the commencement of the meeting.

5 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the Performance Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 6 May 2025 were submitted:

Accuracy: page 8, second paragraph the word 'how' should be amended to read 'have'

page 11, penultimate paragraph the word 'needed' should be amended to read 'need'.

The Committee:

Resolved: subject to the above amendments that the minutes of the Performance Scrutiny Committee meeting held on the 6 May 2025 be approved as a true and accurate record of the meeting's proceedings.

Matters arising: Page 8, Minutes of the previous meeting – Councillor Andrea Tomlin informed the Committee that the Task and Finish Group established to 'Review the Roll-out of the New Waste and Recycling Service' had held its inaugural meeting the previous week. It had decided to take the unusual step of appointing co-chairs, one from the north of the county and the other from the south, in order to share the workload. The first meeting had been a productive 'brainstorming' session to gather together all relevant themes that would need to be examined as part of the review. No date had yet been set for the Group's next meeting, but it would be announced in the near future.

6 COUNCIL PERFORMANCE SELF-ASSESSMENT 2024 TO 2025 AND PERFORMANCE UPDATE REPORT OCTOBER 2024 TO MARCH 2025

The Lead Member for Corporate Strategy, Policy, Equalities and Strategic Assets alongside the Head of Corporate Support Service: Performance, Digital and Assets (HVE), the Insight, Strategy and Delivery Manager (RL) and the Strategic Planning and Performance Officer (EH) presented the Council Performance Self-Assessment 2024 to 2025 and Performance Update Report October 2024 to March 2025 (previously circulated) to the Committee. They explained that the report presented the Council's Performance Self-Assessment for 2024 to 2025, providing an end of year analysis of achievements and challenges with the Council's key performance objectives (the Corporate Plan themes), together with the Authority's October 2024 to March 2025 Performance Update.

The Committee was guided through the report which consisted of an Executive Summary (Appendix I) highlighting performance against objectives and the seven governance areas; the Performance Update Report October 2024 to March 2025 (Appendix II); details of the improvement activities identified through discussions to date, along with the new Citizen Voice report (Appendix III).

The Lead Member reflected that the Council should be proud of what had been achieved in difficult circumstances over the past twelve months, with clear evidence of delivering to high standards. She highlighted the five key achievements over this period and the four key challenges and areas for improvement as detailed in Appendix I.

The Head of Corporate Support Service: Performance, Digital, and Assets thanked the Strategic Planning Team for producing the documentation and the Governance and Audit Committee for their suggestions and comments following their debate.

The Strategic Planning and Improvement Officer provided further context, advising that 20% (16) of corporate plan indicators had been categorised “red” and the team would be working to pre-empt indicators in the future to prevent deterioration and undertake further work to make reports more user-friendly and easier to navigate. She elaborated on several areas of excellent performance - “greens,” performance trends against various other performance indicators, together with “red” areas where challenges were faced.

The Chair thanked the lead member and officers for the thorough report prior to Members discussing the following points further –

- Some members felt that the complexity of the content made the report difficult to read and recommended that the documents be made more user and reader friendly. Members also suggested that graphs and tables could be included in the report to ensure that the data was easier to track and would provide a clearer illustration of performance trends. Officers responded, clarifying that all documents needed to comply with accessibility requirements, so graphs and tables would not meet the required standards. However, they would investigate the matter further to see if they could be incorporated in some way in future reports.
- The Committee sought clarification on whether stakeholders invited to participate in the stakeholder survey included staff members. As per our statutory duties, the groups invited to take part in the survey included: Denbighshire residents; Council staff (although separate staff survey in place); County Councillors; Town, City and Community Councils; Local businesses; Trade Unions; and any other stakeholders the Council works with, such as third sector or charity/voluntary organisations. Members had concerns that residents/stakeholders would find the information within the report difficult to navigate and follow. Officers highlighted that the main headlines and findings in the report were found in the executive summary, which was not too onerous to read.
- The Citizen’s Voice Survey and the responses received was discussed. Officers stated that they were satisfied with the responses received. Although the response rate was not high it had met the meaningful response rate threshold. Nevertheless, more work was required going forward to ensure there was no imbalance or bias with the feedback received. Members were informed about self-selection bias (also known as volunteer bias) the bias which can occur when individuals can choose whether they want to participate in a research study. The views of those who choose to participate can often differ from non-participants. Therefore, this has the potential to

significantly impact on the research's overall findings and lead to a biased sample. Research work was currently underway in a bid to find a more reliable methodology to undertake this type of public satisfaction/perception research in future.

- Members suggested that actual number for each year be shown in the summary reports in addition to percentages as this would make changes from year to year easier to follow. Members referred to collated data and suggested using as many methods of collation as possible to compare the data. This would give a broader view of the situation and could possibly alleviate concerns and issues with biases.
- Officers thanked members for their suggestions on making the documents easier to navigate and more user and resident friendly. They agreed to explore the feasibility of adding hyperlinks and other methods. The Head of Service advised members that the data within the report could be used to populate the forward work programmes of future scrutiny meetings, especially on areas where members had concerns.
- Some Committee members felt that the report did not fully highlight the downward trend of specific elements within the Council's work, as they and their residents were of the view that some areas were progressively getting worse. With the funding gap forecast not to improve in the near future, a business transformation programme being developed, and other projects recently failing or experiencing severe problems during their introduction, this was causing major problems for the Council, and the public image of the Council was being tarnished. Officers confirmed that they understood some members' frustrations with certain aspects of the report and with some projects and agreed that improvement was needed in some areas, such as communication to members and the public regarding the large ongoing projects. However, these issues were being examined thoroughly via many different channels, and lessons were always and would always be learned.
- The Committee commented on the expectation that Scrutiny should engage more frequently with residents with a view that better decisions would be taken. This was something Audit Wales was keen for Scrutiny to do. How could Scrutiny do this and add value to the report under discussion? Officers stated that they would welcome anything the scrutiny committee could do to assist with their work, such as potential work to increase engagement. For example, the Committee could choose specific performance issues highlighted within the report to examine in detail with the relevant Lead Members and officers at future meetings. Committee members could highlight these matters to their residents via their own communication channels, social media etc. and invite residents to get involved and participate with scrutinising the matters that way. Other potential engagement routes could be explored e.g. roadshows etc. However, as formal meetings required to be held as hybrid meetings, the only venue which could be used for broadcasting them on the website was County Hall's Council Chamber. Officers undertook to raise the matter with the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group and explore the possibilities of including an article on Scrutiny in a future edition of the re-launched 'County Voice'.
- Members highlighted that, at a glance, the numerous red indicators within the report seemed to portray a pessimistic outlook. However, there were different 'shades' of red, some worse than others and it was important to

focus on the trends within each measure. The public needed to know that everything was not negative.

- Communication concerns were raised, and the potential impact on staff when only negative stories were reported in the press. The Committee believed that clear, concise, and easily understood communication with residents could mitigate the risk of negative press and media reporting on the Council and its activities. Members also queried whether anything could be done to tackle misinformation/disinformation by people regarding Council work. Officers advised that dealing with the misinformation was difficult as it was resource intensive. It would be far better if the Council could be one-step ahead and communicate effectively with residents as situations developed, a proactive approach was always better than a reactive one. Nevertheless, a balance needed to be struck between sharing valuable information and being accused of distributing propaganda.
- With respect of addressing climate change the matter had always been regarded as an improvement priority. Whilst progress was being made it was pleasing to see that the Council was being transparent and acknowledging the fact that it would struggle to reach the target it had set itself for 2030. However, it continued to be ambitious in this aspect of its work, which was commendable.
- Members had concerns regarding the progress achieved to date in delivering the transformation agenda. Officers advised that this was a complex area of work as it combined ways of saving money with developing new business models for delivering better services. A number of projects were under development e.g. in-house foster care, domiciliary care, digitalisation etc. Additional resources had been set-aside to support the development of business transformation projects and these projects would be presented to Scrutiny when sufficiently developed.
- It was confirmed that the findings of the Working Group established to measure the impact of the reduction in Library/One Stop Shop (OSS) opening hours on residents, communities, and the authority and to explore alternative proposals or solutions for enhancing and/or expanding service delivery in the future were due to be reported to the Committee at its meeting on 17 July 2025.

Following an in-depth discussion, Members:

Resolved: subject to the above observations -

- (i) that consideration be given to suggestions made by the Committee with respect of the improvement actions required to respond to performance issues highlighted within the reports presented, and on the presentation of performance update reports in the future.***
- (ii) to confirm the contents of the Executive Summary: Self-Assessment of Performance 2024 to 2025, the Corporate Plan Performance Update: October 2024 to March 2025, and the Citizen Voice Report for submission to County Council for approval in July 2025; and***
- (iii) that in formulating the above recommendations detailed consideration was given to the key messages arising from the Self-Assessment and***

***the October 2024 to March 2025 Performance Update Report,
particularly to the identified Improvement Actions.***

7 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Coordinator introduced the report and appendices (previously circulated) seeking members to review the Committee's forward work programme (Appendix 1 to the report).

During her introduction she drew members' attention to the paragraph within the covering report which informed members that the report on the Planning Software System, originally scheduled for presentation to the Committee at the current meeting had with the Vice-Chair's consent, in the absence of a Committee Chair, been deferred until November's meeting following a request from officers. The basis of the request to defer was the complex nature of the information which required to be collated and presented in a comprehensive and meaningful report to the Committee.

Some Committee members registered their disappointment with the delay in producing the report as originally intended and with the process of informing the Committee of its deferral. They felt that not having the opportunity to scrutinise the matter at the original designated time would put members' off in future from proposing items for Scrutiny. The Scrutiny Coordinator assured the Committee that the report's deferral had been agreed following the well-established process for agreeing a deferral. This was confirmed by the Monitoring Officer who also read a statement from the Development Manager, Public Protection and Countryside Services which provided some background to the new Planning software system's introduction and the rationale for seeking the report's deferral, including the importance of incorporating the findings of a recent Internal Audit review into the transitioning to the new IT system into the final report. Once the findings of the review were received improvement actions would be identified and progressed by a proposed task and finish group. All of this information would then form the basis of a comprehensive report to the Committee in November 2025. Members were assured by the Monitoring Officer that Scrutiny was and should always be member-led. Officers advised that by rescheduling a report on the forward work programme, with the Chair or Vice-Chair's approval, it ensured that an item would not be 'lost' but would be examined at the most appropriate time to add value to the scrutiny process when the Committee was in possession of all the required data and facts. The Chair requested that the report when presented include details on whether the software supplier had been paid in full, and if the contract contained any financial penalty clauses.

Some members felt that the member who proposed the item for examination by Scrutiny should, in addition to the Chair, be consulted on any requests received for an item to be deferred until a future meeting. The Monitoring Officer agreed to raise this suggestion with the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group (SCVCG).

The next SCVCG meeting was due to be held on 30 June 2025 and members were encouraged to complete the proposal form (Appendix 2) if they had any items which in their view merited detailed scrutiny.

Appendix 3 to the report contained Cabinet's forward work programme for members' information and Appendix 4 outlined the progress to date with the recommendations made by the Committee at its last meeting.

At the conclusion of the discussion the Committee:

Resolved: *subject to the above, to confirm the Committee's forward work programme as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report.*

8 FEEDBACK FROM COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES

None.

Meeting concluded at 12.25pm.