

CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 10 April 2017

- PRESENT:** Councillor R. Meirion Jones (Chair)
Councillor Gwilym O. Jones (Vice-Chair)
- Councillors Jim Evans, Victor Hughes,
Llinos Medi Huws, R. Llewelyn Jones, Peter Rogers
- IN ATTENDANCE:** Chief Executive
Assistant Chief Executive (Partnerships, Community and Service Improvement)
Head of Function (Resources) and Section 151 Officer (for item 6)
Head of Strategic Services (Children) (LR)
Interim Scrutiny Manager (AGD)
Committee Officer (ATH)
- APOLOGIES:** Councillors Lewis Davies, Ann Griffith, Mr Keith Roberts (The Catholic Church), Councillor Ieuan Williams (Leader),
Councillor Aled M. Jones (Portfolio Member for Housing & Social Services), Councillor H. Eifion Jones (Portfolio Member for Finance),
Councillor Alwyn Rowlands (Portfolio Member for Council Business)
- ALSO PRESENT:** Head of Democratic Services
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1 APOLOGIES

The apologies for absence were noted as listed above.

2 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

No declaration of interest was received.

3 CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair reported that he had presented the conclusions and recommendations of this Committee along with the substance of its deliberations on the report of CSSIW with regard to the inspection of the Isle of Anglesey County Council's Children's Services to the meeting of the Executive on 20 March, 2017. He and the Vice-Chair had also met with CSSIW's Lead Inspector for North Wales, Vicky Poole and Mr Marc Roberts, CSSIW Inspector. The Chair said that new post inspection arrangements will entail a biannual visit to the Authority by the Lead Inspector in the spring and autumn to meet with the Portfolio Member for Housing and Social Services and the Chair of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee respectively.

The Chair on behalf of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee extended best wishes for a speedy recovery to the Assistant Chief Executive (Governance and Business Process Transformation) and Director of Social Services following an accident recently.

4 MINUTES OF THE 13TH MARCH, 2017 MEETINGS

The minutes of the previous meetings of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee held on the morning of 13 March, 2017 and on the afternoon of 13 March, 2017 were presented and confirmed as correct.

Arising on the minutes of the 13th March, 2017 morning meeting –

- The Committee noted that the Wales Audit Office's report on sickness absence was still awaited; the Committee noted the length of time it had taken to issue the report and it reiterated that it would appreciate if the report was to be published before the end of the current Council. This would enable a conclusion to this Committee's long standing work on sickness absence within the Authority in terms of offering insight both as to what the Authority is doing right and also with regard to improvements and good practice in relation to future ongoing management of sickness levels within the Authority.

The Assistant Chief Executive (Partnerships, Community and Service Improvement) reported that she had been in contact with the Wales Audit Office following the Committee's 13th March meeting and that the WAO had confirmed that the draft version of its sickness report was being finalised with the definitive report to be forwarded to the Authority as soon as possible thereafter.

The Chief Executive said that the field work and first draft had been completed; he understood from initial feedback from Wales Audit Office Officials that they would be recommending that the Authority continues to implement and embed its current processes and working practices for reducing and managing sickness absence levels i.e. by conducting Return to Work interviews and Attendance Review meetings; WAO Officials have also highlighted the need for renewed focus on sickness absence within the primary education sector. The Chief Executive said that both matters are currently receiving attention by the Authority.

The Committee noted the position, and indicated that it would as a matter of principle wish to see the publication of the report before the close of business of the current Council.

ACTION ENSUING: Assistant Chief Executive (Partnerships, Community and Service Improvement) to follow up with the Wales Audit Office the publication date of its final report on sickness within the Authority and whether it is feasible to expect that to be within the term of the current Council.

- The Chair confirmed that the matter of clarifying the respective roles of Scrutiny and the Transformation Management Boards in relation to performance monitoring and continuous improvement is being addressed by the Interim Scrutiny Manager in consultation with the Programme, Business Planning and Performance Manager and will be confirmed in new scrutiny arrangements to become effective from May, 2017.

5 CHILDREN'S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT PLAN PROGRESS REPORT

The report of the Interim Head of Children's Services outlining progress to date on the Children's Services Improvement Plan in response to the findings of CSSIW following its inspection of Children's Services at the Isle of Anglesey County Council was presented for the Committee's consideration.

The Chair informed the Committee that the Officer's report contained restricted information at Appendix 2 and as such he proposed that in accordance with the provisions of Section 100(A) (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the discussion of this item because it involves the disclosure of exempt information as defined in Schedule 12A of the said Act. The Committee was in agreement with the Chair's proposal and **it was duly resolved to exclude the press and public from the meeting for the duration of the discussion on this matter.**

The Head of Strategic Services (Children) reported on the actions set out in section 4 of the report and he confirmed that the Service Improvement Plan is progressing well with most of the actions listed either completed or on track to be completed by the date shown. However, there are many areas requiring improvement that will need to be embedded over time; work has already commenced on a number of these key areas. The Officer said that particular attention is being given to the following as areas of immediate priority –

- Developing a framework for the provision of preventative work with children and families. This is a substantial task which draws in a range of services and is being led by the Assistant Chief Executive (Governance and Business Process Transformation) and Director of Social Services.
- Establishing effective multi-agency quality assurance systems and training arrangements to ensure that thresholds for assessment for statutory children's services are understood by staff and partners and are applied consistently.
- Developing a workforce strategy to include short, medium and long term aims for the recruitment and retention of Children's Services social workers.
- Reviewing the arrangements for team managers and senior practitioners to ensure there is capacity to provide effective and consistent management oversight of decision making, challenge and direction for staff across the service.

The Officer said that aside from the priority actions above, there is a second tranche of issues that needs to be addressed over the course of the next twelve months and these are set out in paragraphs 8 to 14 of the report.

The Committee considered the information presented and made the following points –

- The Committee noted that whilst it accepted that the Authority does have policies and procedures in place and is developing others as required, it could not be assured that key policies are understood by the relevant members of staff. The Committee also noted that a system is needed to evidence that the right staff have been targeted, that they understand what the policies mean and that those policies are being implemented and are working.

The Chief Executive said that evaluating the success of the policies which the Authority has in place and is developing is not a task that can be achieved in a short space of time. There will be some aspects regarding which the Authority itself will be able to evaluate progress whilst other aspects will require external verification to provide the assurance that they are having the intended effect on the services for children and the desired outcomes. It is only by asking probing questions that the Authority can be sure it is taking the necessary steps to achieve the requirements set by CSSIW.

- The Committee noted that the desired outcomes will only be achieved if the Authority has in place the right staff in terms of the mix of skills, competencies and experience which in a context of limited resources presents a challenge.

The Chief Executive said that in the short term the Authority may have to recruit less experienced individuals with a view to developing them to take over from agency staff over time. Whilst this will take time the Authority recognises that a long term approach is required to develop a robust and skilled workforce which will want to remain with Children's Services at the Council. Less experienced staff will need more support and this may require investment in the short-term. The Authority will also be looking at strengthening its recruitment strategy to attract more Children's social work professionals to the Children's Services in Anglesey.

- The Committee noted that recruitment is one facet of the Workforce Strategy and that having recruited successfully the Authority then needs to ensure that individuals will want to stay within the service to help develop and create a stable and resilient workforce into the future. The Committee also noted that staff retention has at times been a challenge.

The Chief Executive said that an important element of being able to retain staff is the quality of the support and supervision provided for them especially within Children's Services where the pressure on staff can be significant. This will be addressed through the Improvement Plan.

- The Committee noted the expectations on Members in relation to being able to challenge performance and it sought clarification of the kind of training and information that they needed to be provided with in order to undertake this function effectively with regard to Children's Services.

The Chief Executive said that Members can develop expertise and confidence by continually asking searching questions and learning from that process.

- The Committee noted that in a context where the number of children entering the care system is increasing, the Authority has to seek to change the overall culture in order to reduce the number of children and young people in care. The Committee noted that to be able to achieve this objective it needs to ensure that a comprehensive support package is in place encompassing not only children's social care services but wider areas which have an impact on the lives of children and young people in the Authority's care. This includes education, health, housing provision and employment and training opportunities. The Committee noted that Scrutiny needs to be assured that the Authority is making a difference to the lives of the looked after population and that it is able to evidence how that is happening.

The Head of Strategic Services (Children) said that the Authority has to be clear that the prevention activity it puts in place is reaching those individuals that most require it and that it monitors this activity to ensure it is having the desired effect. The Authority knows that many of the children who are likely to escalate through the care system in this generation themselves come from disadvantaged circumstances inherited from their parents. The Authority is often aware early on in the process who is most vulnerable to escalation. However, it is a whole service challenge and is concerned with responding appropriately to the families who are likely to make this journey.

The Chief Executive said that the Action Plan at 4.4 identifies the development of a Corporate Prevention Strategy as a key area and that the Authority must provide a range and level of preventative services across Children and Adults' Services. Whilst this will not be achieved overnight, the Authority is committed to making it happen.

- The Committee noted that for the future it would appreciate more detailed information to illustrate the improvements being made.

The Chief Executive said that the Children's Panel will be putting in place a methodology for evaluating improvement and progress against the Action Plan and for reporting back thereon.

It was resolved that the Corporate Scrutiny Committee is satisfied that the evidence presented to date provides the Executive with high level assurance that the Children's Services' improvement journey is on schedule hitherto and is progressing as planned.

NO FURTHER ACTION ENSUING

The Committee at this point returned to open session.

6 FINANCE SCRUTINY PANEL

The report of the Interim Scrutiny Manager setting out the scope and remit of the proposed Finance Scrutiny Panel was presented for the Committee's consideration.

The Interim Scrutiny Manager reported on the benefits of establishing a finance sub-group as a sub-panel of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee; these include developing a model of working based on a smaller group that will enable Members to engage in more in-depth scrutiny of finance matters thereby developing a level of expertise and ownership to lead financial discussions in the Corporate Scrutiny Committee. This would also allow the Corporate Scrutiny Committee the time and scope to focus on scrutiny of transformational and strategic matters.

The Committee noted the report and whilst it was amenable to the proposed establishment of a Scrutiny Finance Panel it suggested that the panel be reviewed for effectiveness after a year of operation to ensure that it meets the purpose for which it was established.

The Head of Function (Resources) and Section 151 Officer said that it would be useful initially to see how well the proposed panel fits in with and contributes to the 2018/19 Budget setting process and to review it in the light of that process.

It was resolved to:

- **Note the progress made thus far in establishing robust scrutiny arrangements for financial matters.**
- **Accept the scope and remit of the new finance panel as proposed.**
- **Note that the next step will be to complete the practical arrangements in order to establish the finance panel after the Local Government Election by the Scrutiny Manager in consultation with the Head of Service (Resources) and Section 151 Officer.**

NO FURTHER ACTION ENSUING

7 CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY PANEL

The report of the Interim Scrutiny Manager setting out the scope and remit of the proposed Children's Scrutiny Panel was presented for the Committee's consideration.

The Interim Scrutiny Manager reported that the establishment of a Children's Panel is driven by one of the 14 recommendations made by the CSSIW following its inspection of Children's Services on Anglesey. The recommendation focusses on the importance of

continuing with strong political and corporate support for children's services in order to ensure that the service improvements needed are prioritised and the pace of improvement is accelerated and sustained. The Officer referred to the existing cross party panel of members which has been looking at the requirements of the new Social Services and Wellbeing Act (Wales) 2014 and overseeing the delivery of the first Children's Services Improvement Plan. She said that the report seeks to build on the foundation already provided by the cross-party panel by holding the Executive and Senior Management to account via Scrutiny to provide assurance both to the Authority and CSSIW that the improvement process is robust and sustainable.

The Officer reported on the proposed scope of the Children's Panel along with its aims and objectives as summarised in paragraph 5 of the report. In considering membership of the Panel, particular reference was made to the importance of endeavouring to ensure a degree of continuity of membership as being a key guiding principle.

The Committee noted the report and it made the following points:

- The Committee was supportive of the proposals with the proviso that the Portfolio and Shadow Portfolio Members for Education be included as part of the Panel's core membership.
- The Committee sought clarification of how the Panel's deliberations would be recorded to evidence improvement within Children's Services. The Interim Scrutiny Manager said that the Panel's meetings would be conducted as business meetings and would provide a list of action points following each meeting.

It was resolved to –

- **Note the progress made thus far in establishing robust scrutiny arrangements for children's services.**
- **Accept the scope and remit of the new Children's Panel subject to the inclusion of the Portfolio and Shadow Portfolio Members for Education as part of the Panel's core membership and ensuring a degree of continuity of membership as a key guiding principle in considering membership of the panel.**
- **Note that the next step will be to complete the practical arrangements in order to establish the Children's Panel after the Local Government Election by the Scrutiny Manager in consultation with the Assistant Chief Executive (Governance and Business Process Transformation).**

NO FURTHER ACTION ENSUING

8 OUTLINE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2017/18

The report of the Interim Scrutiny Manager incorporating an initial draft Work Programme for the Corporate Scrutiny Committee for 2017/18 was presented for the Committee's consideration.

The Interim Scrutiny Manager said that discussions will be held with the new Scrutiny Committee in May, 2017 to establish the priorities for 2017/18 in consultation with the Executive and SLT.

It was resolved to accept and to note the draft Work Programme as a starting point for planning the Committee's business in 2017/18.

NO FURTHER ACTION ENSUING

In concluding the business of the meeting, the Chair thanked Councillors Jim Evans and Victor Hughes who were retiring as Elected Members at the forthcoming May election, for their contributions during their membership of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee.

**Councillor R. Meirion Jones
Chair**