

CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 13 March 2017 (P.M.)

- PRESENT:** Councillor R. Meirion Jones (Chair)
Councillor Gwilym O. Jones (Vice-Chair)
- Councillors Lewis Davies, Victor Hughes,
Llinos Medi Huws, Peter Rogers
- IN ATTENDANCE:** Assistant Chief Executive (Governance & Business Process Transformation) and Director of Social Services
Interim Head of Children's Services
Head of Strategic Services (Children) (LR)
Interim Scrutiny Manager (AGD)
Committee Officer (ATH)
- APOLOGIES:** Councillors Jim Evans, R. Llewelyn Jones, Mrs Anest Frazer (The Church in Wales)
- ALSO PRESENT:** Assistant Chief Executive (Partnerships, Community and Service Improvement), Head of Learning, 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 CSSIW: REPORT ON INSPECTION OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES NOVEMBER 2016 - ISLE OF ANGLESEY COUNTY COUNCIL

3.1 The report of the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) on the outcome of its inspection of services for children at the Isle of Anglesey County Council undertaken in November, 2016 was presented for the Committee's consideration and comment.

The Chair welcomed Ms Bobbie Jones Lead Inspector for the inspection and Mr Marc Roberts, a member of the CSSIW Regional Inspection team to the meeting and invited them to present their findings consequent to the inspection of Children's Services at the Council.

Ms Bobbie Jones, Lead Inspector reported that the inspection was undertaken as part of CSSIW's core programme of inspections and it focussed on the quality of outcomes achieved for children in need of help, care and support and/or protection. The inspection team looked closely at preventative services including arrangements for the provision of

information, advice and assistance services; individuals' pathway into care and support services specifically access to preventative and statutory services and the interface between the two and any safeguarding issues arising. The inspectors also evaluated how the Council assessed its own performance and the difference it was making for the individuals it was seeking to help, care and support and/or protect. They also looked at how the Council had begun to implement the requirements of the Social Services and Well-being Act 2014. While the principal focus of the inspection was the quality of provision, the inspectors did also examine elements that support delivery including the Council's arrangements with regard to leadership, management and governance within Children's services.

Methodology

The field work was undertaken over two weeks during November, 2016; it involved a review of case; interviews with staff, managers and professionals from partner agencies, with children and their families where appropriate and with elected members; observation of practice, review of staff survey, complaints and staff appraisal records.

Findings – Access and Safeguarding

Areas that were done well

- Access arrangements to services were established and offered bilingually. The inspectors did not see any examples where there was an immediate safeguarding issue that needed addressing or where a child had been put at risk.
- Children obviously at risk received prompt and responsive action
- Some examples of good social work practice were observed
- Social workers made persistent attempts to elicit the wishes and feelings of children

Areas where shortcomings were identified

- Preventative and information, advice and assistance services were under-developed;
- A high volume of referrals was noted as well as referrals that were of poor quality
- Eligibility thresholds for access to services were inconsistent, and not sufficiently shared with or understood by partners
- Staff capacity was limited
- The quality and timeliness of child protection enquiries were inconsistent
- There were delays in implementing strategy discussions and a lack of involvement by some partners
- Assessments did not always ensure an analysis of risk
- There was an insufficient range of services and resources
- There was insufficient management oversight of access arrangements

Findings – Leadership, Management and Governance

Areas that were done well

- There was a clear vision for improving safeguarding and for promoting services that support children and families to achieve resilience and to lead independent lifestyles.
- The workforce was committed to achieving good outcomes for children and families
- There was strong political support for Children's Services
- There is increased investment in Children's Services
- A culture of support and learning

- A clear recognition of the challenges facing Children's Services
- A commitment to improvement.

Areas where shortcomings were identified

- The strategic direction for Children's Services had not been translated into a service delivery strategy that had been disseminated to the workforce or shared with key partners
- The voices of children and families were not sufficiently captured or used to shape service development
- There was insufficient understanding of practice and performance
- Commissioning arrangements were not being used effectively to promote the most positive impact on outcomes for children and families
- The pace of change and improvement was slow
- There were impediments to the recruitment and retention of a skilled, competent, suitably qualified and experienced workforce
- Staff supervision was insufficiently frequent and often of poor quality

The Lead Inspector said that at no time did the inspection team feel there was lack of commitment or enthusiasm to improve on the part of the Council; the inspectors felt their contributions were welcomed and this gave them hope that the incipient improvements within Children's Services can be sustained in the long term. The Lead Inspector outlined the priority actions for the Council for the immediate future and the steps to be taken thereafter over the next 12 to 18 months. Immediate priorities include putting in place a robust framework for preventative services; strengthening multi-agency working around thresholds and quality assurance; ensuring that child protection enquiries are addressed swiftly and involve partner agencies, and developing a workforce strategy to address recruitment, retention and staff supervision issues. The next step would therefore be for the Authority to publish its improvement plan in response to the inspection. She confirmed that Mr Marc Roberts would be meeting with representatives of the Council over the course of the next 12 months to monitor progress on implementing the Council's Improvement Plan. CSSIW would be undertaking a follow up inspection in 12 to 18 months' time.

The Committee and other Members present considered the information presented by way of the written report by CSSIW and the presentation given by the Lead Inspector and they raised the following matters –

- **The Committee noted that the report by CSSIW refers to the need for a significant improvement journey within Children's Services within a short timescale. Based on the information available to the CSSIW, the Committee questioned how achievable this is.**

The Lead Inspector said that implementing the priority recommendations is key to achieving improvement. Managing the volume of referrals and ensuring the staff capacity to do it are critical. The Council does have the wherewithal in terms of the skills, knowledge and enthusiasm to improve and it has a vision of what a good service might look like. The concerns are in relation to the capacity of the workforce to be able to make changes as rapidly as required. The advice would be to clearly prioritise what is currently a substantial Improvement Plan and to also ensure that it is outward focussed which means engaging with partner organisations and holding them accountable for delivering what they are responsible for delivering. When Children's Services are re-inspected with 12 to 18 months, the CSSIW would expect to see sufficient progress to provide assurance that ongoing improvement is achievable.

- **The Committee noted that the CSSIW intends to re-visit the Authority in 12 to 18 months. The Committee sought clarification as to whether this would entail a full**

inspection and report or whether it would concentrate on specific aspects of the service. The Committee also sought clarification of how the CSSIW proposed to monitor the Authority's Improvement Plan.

The Lead Inspector said that the form the re-visit would take depends on the speed of progress, this will be assessed by Marc Roberts via the ongoing performance review, monitoring and engagement process. The CSSIW would not expect to return before 12 months unless Mr Marc Roberts identified an element of practice that required examination; should this be the case it would be addressed by a short focussed inspection, followed by a published report. The Inspectors' view is that the Council now has to be allowed to get on with implementing its Improvement Plan without the distraction that a too early re-inspection would provide.

- **The Committee noted that the Regulators' report refers to shortcomings within partner organisations; these shortcomings have a significant impact on the ability of the Service to perform well. The Committee questioned whether CSSIW intends to formally discuss these shortcomings directly with partners.**

The Lead Inspector confirmed that the findings with regard to partner agencies have and would be discussed directly with the relevant organisations. The shortcomings identified are multi-agency shortcomings. While Social Services are the lead agency with regard to delivering children's services and in particular child protection and safeguarding arrangements they are nevertheless multi-agency responsibilities. It is therefore important that all partner organisations contribute, and they should hold each other to account for their practice. There are arrangements in place via the Regional Safeguarding Children's Board to help improve those partnership arrangements. The Council, North Wales Police and BCUHB can all make improvements with regard to delivering services for children on Anglesey.

- **The Committee questioned whether the Inspectorate considers the Improvement Plan addresses partner relationships and collaboration particularly with regard to the Police.**

The Lead Inspector said that the volume of referrals from the Police is not likely to reduce in the coming 12 months. As it is not possible to forecast how rapidly multi-agency improvement can be made, the Improvement Plan needs to look at what kind of triage arrangement can be put in place within the Duty Access Team to manage the volume of referrals in a risk focussed way. The Director of Social Services informed the Committee that constructive discussions have been held with North Wales Police and the BCUHB with a view to collaborating at a strategic level. Partners have committed to working together more closely in order to improve processes and practices.

- **The Committee noted that while CSSIW's report refers to the good level of political support for the Council's strategic direction for Children's Services and to the positive work of the cross party panel of Members, it recommends also that the ability of Elected Members to challenge performance needs to be strengthened by improved information about the quality of services and the experiences of children and families receiving them. The Committee questioned whether the Inspectorate has a view about best practice in other authorities with regard to performance management of Children's Service by Elected Members.**

The Lead Inspector said that Scrutiny could usefully hear about access arrangements and about the issues involved in managing the volume of referrals. Having a dialogue with other authorities in a similar situation would also be helpful. It is the story behind the data that Elected Members need to hear.

- **The Committee noted that the inspection had evaluated what the local authority knew about its own performance and the difference it is making for individuals it is seeking to help, care and support and/or protect. The Committee questioned whether the Inspectorate had any plans to undertake further inspections in children’s services over the next 24 months.**

The Lead Inspector said that the current inspection framework would suggest that the next phase of inspections would have a different focus; this is however subject to confirmation and the outcome of a pause and review of the inspection framework.

- **The Inspectors’ confirmed that Children’s Services on Anglesey were last inspected in 2012 and were part of a broader thematic inspection in 2014. The latter was more positive in its conclusions than the 2012 inspection and resulted in a far less significant improvement plan. The Committee in noting this information sought clarification of why the most recent 2016 inspection was therefore so disappointing.**

Mr Marc Roberts said that Children’s Services on Anglesey experienced a period of improvement that was then followed by a period of fragility which was referred to in the Inspectorate’s 2014/15 Performance Evaluation report. Many factors have contributed towards the current situation.

3.2 The report of the Interim Head of Children’s Services incorporating the Children’s Services Improvement Plan was presented for the Committee’s consideration.

The Assistant Chief Executive (Governance & Business Process Transformation) and Director of Social Services said that the Authority welcomes the work undertaken by CSSIW and accepts the Inspectorate’s findings in full. She reported that over the last few months, Children’s Services have been working on a revised Service Improvement Plan to meet the requirements of the CSSIW Inspection report. The main priorities for the new Service Improvement Plan are set out in section 5.2 of the report; these focus on areas that require significant progress during the next 12 to 18 months. The CSSIW has welcomed the commitment to improvement expressed by the Senior Officers and representatives of the Council and their constructive approach to the inspection. Children’s Services staff have been consulted and are aware of the work required. Key partners agree with the need to strengthen operational plans to support effective co-ordination of services. Work has already commenced on a number of key areas. Monitoring Progress and the implementation of the Service Improvement Plan will occur through the Senior Leadership Team, the Members’ Panel and through regular meetings with CSSIW.

The Committee considered the report and accompanying Improvement Plan and sought assurance with regard to the following matters –

- **The Committee noted that the CSSIW report sets out a challenging timescale to deliver significant improvement in children’s services. The Committee questioned whether the service was confident it could deliver sustainable improvements over the next 12 to 18 months.**

The Director of Social Services said that the Improvement Programme is challenging; however, those actions deemed critical to achieving improvement will be prioritised. The Officer said that she was confident that Children’s Services would be in a better position in a year’s time than they are at present. The Authority is committed to making the necessary improvements and has in place a clear programme to achieve its objectives. The Authority aims to deliver good and robust services for children on Anglesey; it is also seeking to

make changes that are sustainable and to continue to improve into the future beyond the improvement time frame set out by the CSSIW report.

- **The Committee noted that workforce capacity issues are highlighted in the CSSIW inspection report. The Committee questioned whether the service is able to provide assurance that it can access sufficient staffing and other resources to deliver the substantial improvement programme in Children's Services.**

The Head of Strategic Services (Children) said that the service is focussing on 3 or 4 key areas. It is seeking to develop a model that places much greater emphasis on the preventative agenda; this will be a focus for one of the Service Manager posts and will be supported by personnel whose role will be to concentrate on that group of children/young people whose needs if not addressed early are such that they might have to be escalated through the system. Preventative interventions need to be directed to the right individuals at an earlier stage. Secondly, a workforce strategy needs to be developed to address staff recruitment, retention and development issues. The service is also proposing a restructure both in terms of the way its supervision is delivered and also the ratio of supervisors to caseworkers; supervisors in the past have been spread too widely. It is intended therefore to move to a model of smaller practice groups with greater focus on professional practice rather than on the management of activity. The changes have been consulted upon with staff with implementation being the next step.

- **The Committee noted that any additional resources required in order to respond to the improvement programme need to be adequately prioritised. The Committee asked the Portfolio Member for Housing and Social Service how the Executive proposes to ensure this, and also how does the Executive intend to ensure that the improvement of children's services is accorded high-level priority.**

The Portfolio Member for Housing and Social Services said that each time Children's Services have required funding to meet and manage additional demand, the Executive has been able to respond with appropriate and considered investment. The Executive will continue to take this approach.

- **The Committee noted that the CSSIW's report is a significant document. The Committee therefore sought clarification regarding the arrangements for making available to it, robust and regular monitoring information to enable it to effectively scrutinise progress.**

The Director of Social Services said that the cross party panel of members has hitherto worked well. This arrangement now needs to be formalised so that the panel takes on the status of a sub-panel of the Scrutiny Committee with a brief to monitor progress against the improvement plan. A work programme for the sub-panel needs to be developed and agreed that sets out proposed activity for the coming year with the objective of focussing on specific elements of the work; this will better enable the sub-panel to investigate areas in greater depth and detail. While it would be a matter for the Scrutiny Committee and the sub-panel to decide on how the relationship between the two will work, it is considered that the sub-panel should report briefly but regularly on progress to the Scrutiny Committee.

- **The Committee noted that in order to strengthen its understanding and challenge of service performance, it needs to be provided with the right information. The Committee questioned what arrangements would be introduced by Children's Services to improve the quality and analysis of performance data and other relevant information. The Committee further sought clarification of how the Service proposes to improve the information available to it with regard to service quality and the experience of individuals receiving support.**

The Director of Social Services said that the Social Services and Well-being Act (Wales) 2014 introduces a new Performance Framework that places more emphasis on qualitative data. Consideration is being given on a national level to what this will entail. Greater attention needs to be given to listening to the voice of service users which is an approach that is supported by the Children's Commissioner for Wales. There also needs to be a better understanding of what the data indicates and to this end the Service's Data and Quality Assessment Unit will be strengthened so that it is able to devote more time to thematic reports and to draw out the trends and messages behind the statistics. Work needs to be done to develop and improve systems to enable the service to gather the necessary information from service users. There is a challenge also in seeking to obtain the views and feedback of service users who might not always wish to engage with the Authority.

Having considered the information presented by the CSSIW's Inspectors and the response of the Director of Social Services and the Interim Head of Children's Services both written and orally, the Committee came to the following conclusions –

That the Corporate Scrutiny Committee resolves to recommend that –

- **The Executive accepts the response of the Interim Head of Children's Services as the basis for significant improvement in Children's Services over the next 12-18 months.**
- **As part of the Authority's Scrutiny improvement programme, a training and development plan is put in place from May, 2017 to fully support Members to monitor and scrutinise progress and the distance travelled. The plan to also include training on performance monitoring of Children's Services and in particular the quality of services and the experience of individuals receiving support and/or services.**
- **The remit and role of the current cross-party member panel be further developed to as a sub-panel of this Committee monitor and scrutinise progress and distance travelled regarding the service improvement plan. This work-stream to include benchmarking against a best practice site.**
- **That monitoring of progress in Children's Services is a standing item on the agenda of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee.**
- **That the Executive prioritises a sufficient resource for the implementation of the improvement programme.**

4 CHILDREN'S SERVICES PERFORMANCE

The report of the Interim Head of Children's Services on the performance of Children's Services was presented for the Committee's consideration. The report focussed on the service's performance against the following specific indicators –

- SCC/025 – The percentage of statutory visits to looked after children due in the year that took place in accordance with regulation.
- PM24 – The percentage of assessments completed for children within statutory timescales (42 working days)
- PM32 – The percentage of looked after children who experienced (one) or more changes of school during a period or periods of being looked after, which were not due to transitional arrangements in the year to 31 March.
- PM33 – The percentage of looked after children on 3 March who have had three or more placements during the year.

The Committee noted that it had requested a report on the performance of Children's Services as a result of its consideration of the Corporate Scorecard for Quarter 1 2016/17. While it had accepted the mitigation measures presented at the time, and had not

requested Officers to give account for performance as Q1 was considered too premature in the year to do so, the Committee had identified Children's Services as an area requiring close monitoring. It had therefore invited the Head of Children's Services to present a report by the end of the Quarter 2 reporting period. This report was however deferred because of the CSSIW inspection of Children's Services that took place in November, 2016.

The Interim Head of Children's Services elaborated on the service performance against each of the four indicators and he highlighted where the performance was currently on target (PM32 and PM33); where the target was on course to be missed (SCC/025 and PM24) he reported on the factors affecting performance and the remedial measures being taken.

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

- The Committee noted a marked decline in performance against Indicator PM24 from 100% in Quarter 1 to 81.62% in Quarter 3 and it sought an explanation for the dip. The Interim Head of Children's Services said that workforce issues, in particular high staff turnover were influencing factors with regard to under-performance against the indicator. There are currently five vacancies for Social Worker posts which are being covered by agency staff. The recruitment of suitably experienced staff remains a challenge. The service was given permission to recruit an additional staff resource on a temporary basis but lost the resource to a permanent post. This has affected performance in the third quarter. It is unlikely that the Authority will be able to recruit qualified staff on a temporary basis; cover can be provided either by agency staff or by commissioning specific pieces of work on a consultancy basis.
- The Committee noted that it would have expected to see an improvement in performance against all the indicators by the end of Quarter 3 or at least for performance to remain stable at Quarter 1 levels. The Committee noted its disappointment that this was not the case and that the data reflected a worsening of the situation with regard to two of the indicators. The Director of Social Services said with regard to indicator SCC/025 that Quarter 4 data is likely to confirm the downward trend in performance against this indicator. In mitigation it is sometimes the case that a statutory visit has taken place but has not been formally written up so is recorded as late; attempts to carry out a visit may have been made but the visit has not been undertaken in the approved way. Staff need to better understand that working practices and the way certain aspects of work are carried out have an impact on performance indicators.
- The Committee noted that workforce issues and specifically staff capacity were cited as reasons for underperformance when the performance of Children's Services against indicator SCC/025 was challenged last year. The Committee noted further that it has been understanding of the challenges facing the service in this respect but is now concerned about the prospects for the delivery of improvement against this indicator. The Director of Social Services said that Performance Indicators focus on certain aspects of performance and do not reflect the range of provision. There are areas of service provision for which there are no formal performance indicators so improvements and good practice are not necessarily reported upon within the formal performance framework. Additionally, the main aim of the Corporate Scorecard is to highlight underperforming areas; once those areas improve and are brought on target they are displaced by other indicators on the Scorecard.

It was resolved to –

- **Note the report.**

- **Refer the matter to the Children's Panel for it to determine the type of information data that needs to be presented paying particular attention to the quality of services and the voice of children and their families.**
- **Move forward without delay to establish a clear remit and objectives for the Children's Panel to be operational under the new administration in May, 2017.**

**Councillor R. Meirion Jones
Chair**