

CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 4 September 2017

- PRESENT:** Councillor Aled M. Jones (Chair)
Councillor Dylan Rees (Vice-Chair)
- Councillors Richard Griffiths, Trefor Lloyd Hughes, MBE
Alun Roberts, J. Arwel Roberts, Nicola Roberts, Shaun Redmond.
- IN ATTENDANCE:** Chief Executive
Assistant Chief Executive (Governance and Business Process Transformation/ Statutory Director of Social Services)
Head of Function (Resources) and Section 151 Officer
Interim Head of Children's Services
Programme, Business Planning and Performance Manager (for item 3)
Head of Adults' Services (for item 3)
Head of Housing Services (for item 3)
Housing Technical Services Manager (DR) (for item 3)
Scrutiny Manager (AGD)
Committee Officer (ATH)
- APOLOGIES:** Councillors Carwyn Jones, Richard O. Jones, Mr Keith Roberts (Co-opted Member)
- ALSO PRESENT:** Councillor Llinos Medi Huws (Leader & Portfolio Member for Social Services), Councillor Dafydd Rhys Thomas (Portfolio Member for Corporate Services), Councillor John Griffith (Portfolio Member for Finance), Assistant Chief Executive (Partnerships, Community & Service Improvement), Head of Democratic Services.

The Chair welcomed all the Members and Officers present at the meeting. He extended a particular welcome to Councillor Trefor Lloyd Hughes, MBE after a period of ill health.

The Chair congratulated Mrs Anwen Davies on her appointment as Scrutiny Manager.

1 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

No declaration of interest was received.

2 MINUTES OF THE 26TH JUNE, 2017 MEETING

The minutes of the previous meetings of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee held on the dates noted below were presented and were confirmed as correct –

- 26th June, 2017
- 11th July, 2017 (extraordinary meeting)

3 PERFORMANCE MONITORING - CORPORATE SCORECARD Q1 2017/18

The Committee considered the information presented with regard to performance at the end of Quarter 1 of the new 2017/18 financial year and it made the following points –

- The Committee noted that one new indicator within the Housing Service – PAM/015: the average number of calendar days taken to deliver a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) is showing as Red on the scorecard for Q1 having performed at 221.7 days against a target of 200. The Committee sought an explanation for the underperformance; it queried whether the target of 200 days was realistic and whether it was locally or nationally derived and it sought clarification of the Service's performance compared with that of other local authorities in this area.

The Housing Officers said that the Disabled Facilities Grant application and delivery process can be complex involving as it does input by a number of other parties which can cause delay in the time taken from the initial contact with the Council until such time as the work has been signed off as complete. Both Housing and Social Services acknowledge that the DFG process requires review with the aim of reducing the time taken to deliver the grant. There is no single common factor in the application process that explains the delays; rather it is a combination of factors which has at its root the complexity of the process. The position with regard to other local authorities' performance will become clear once the national data is published.

- The Committee noted that there had been a marked decline in the percentage of Return to Work interviews held within timescale in Quarter 1 (67% against a target of 80%) and that the total RTW interviews held was low at 85% compared to a target of 95%. The Committee sought assurance that the underperformance represents a temporary reversal and does not signify the start of a downward trend.

The Chief Executive said that the performance with regard to RTW interviews at Quarter 1 was disappointing and could not be satisfactorily explained. This performance will be challenged by the Senior Leadership Team and by the performance challenge panels to ensure improvement by Quarter 2. However, whilst the downturn in the performance of RTW interviews is concerning, conversely the significant improvement in performance with regard to Attendance Review Meetings (ARM) – up from 57% in Quarter 4 2016/17 to 78% in Quarter 1 2017/18 as well as in the quality of the ARMs conducted by services – is reassuring given that Attendance Review Meetings are a significant component of the sickness absence management process.

- The Committee noted with regard to financial management for Quarter 1 that whilst the budget was £33m, the forecasted actual expenditure was £34m with a forecasted variance of minus 29.64% at this stage. The Committee sought clarification of whether any measures were being considered to bring the position back into line.

The Head of Function (Resources) and Section 151 Officer said that the actual forecast variance is an overspend 3.47% at this stage. The profiled budget is the Service's assessment of how the budget is likely to be spent during the year and income collected. Whilst the profiled budget works well in relation to fixed costs such as salaries for example as these can be accurately predicted, it can be skewed by some larger payments and by grants and their timing. In terms of budget monitoring, the significant outcome figure is that for the year end; the Scorecard shows that for a budget of £126m, the forecasted end of year revenue outturn is for an overspend of £2.16m or 1.71% of the net budget. Whilst the first quarter figures can provide an early indication of the possible direction of travel, the timing differences make the comparison less than perfect. The quarter 1 position represents 3 months of actual expenditure and 9 months of projected expenditure in which

time many things can happen. Projections tend to be conservative; greater clarity will come with the Quarter 2 results when some projections will be strengthened by certainty. Additionally there are seasonal factors to consider with the winter months more likely to have an impact on costs particularly in relation to Highway and Social Care services and these feed into projections. The overspend is an outcome that is predicted in a context where there is no longer any safety net within individual service budgets following years of budget reductions. The issue is especially pertinent in demand led budgets such as Children's, Education and Adults' services where the financial pressures can be acute.

- The Committee sought clarification of how much reliance is placed on the sale of assets in meeting the budget. The Head of Function (Resources) and Section 151 Officer said that capital receipts from the sale of assets do not feed into the revenue budget; rather they are used to fund capital projects and are factored into the capital programme or to generate cash balances which enable the Council to reduce its borrowing commitments and/or indebtedness.
- The Committee sought clarification of how the 2017/18 Quarter 1 financial position compared with the same period for 2016/17 as a potential indicator of the scale of the financial challenge facing the Council in the current financial year. The Head of Function (Resources) and Section 151 Officer said that the 2016/17 Quarter 1 position showed an overspend of £560k against the profiled budget and the projected year end overspend was less than that for the current year. In the event, the projected overspend became an actual underspend at the end of 2016/17 due to the emergence in the year of certain one-off saving items. The current position therefore is less favourable than at the same time last year.

**The Committee, having noted the general picture of the Council's performance against its operational objectives for Quarter 1 2017/18 as portrayed by the Q1 Corporate Scorecard, and having noted also the underperforming areas identified and the mitigating actions proposed,
RESOLVED to –**

- **Note and to support the areas which the Senior Leadership Team is managing to secure improvements into the future as conveyed in paragraphs 1.3.1. to 1.3.4 of the report.**
- **Note and to accept the mitigation measures outlined in relation to the areas set out in the aforementioned paragraphs.**

NO ADDITIONAL ACTION WAS PROPOSED

4 COUNCIL PLAN 2017-2022

The report of the Head of Corporate Transformation incorporating the draft Council Plan for the period from 2017 to 2022 was presented for the Committee's consideration and comment.

The Portfolio Member for Corporate Services reported that the Council Plan is a key strategic document which sets out the aims and objectives of the Isle of Anglesey County Council for the next five year period. The document will be the major driver behind the Council's decisions during this period including how it shapes its budget, how it develops its strategies and how it plans its services.

The Chief Executive said that the document outlines the Council's priorities for the coming five years; the Plan will be an integral tool in managing and in evaluating the Council's performance including ensuring that the Council remains accountable for the work that it

does. The Committee might wish to consider whether the Plan gives a clear direction to the Council's work for the period it covers; whether it is sufficiently specific in the priorities it puts forward and whether it provides a clear and strong framework for reviewing the Council's performance over the course of the five years. In developing the Council Plan, consideration was given to the cost implications of realising the Council's priorities and in ensuring that they are aligned to the development of the Medium Term Financial Plan. The Senior Leadership Team has also set out specific objectives over three years which will help achieve the overall Plan.

The Committee considered and accepted the Plan with the proviso that it be monitored to ensure it remains on course; it was proposed and seconded that it be re-presented to the Scrutiny Committee for review within a year. An amendment was proposed and seconded that the Council Plan be reviewed within 6 months especially from a financial perspective and on the basis that to wait 12 months might mean a missed opportunity to identify and to rectify any potential slippage.

The Chief Executive said that a review after 12 months is likely to afford a clearer, more composite picture of how the Plan's implementation is evolving. From a financial point of view it is not thought that there are any significant budget implications to the Plan at this point in time.

The Head of Function (Resources) and Section 151 Officer said that the Plan is made up of a combination of projects which are to be funded from existing revenue budgets. Should it transpire as implementation of the Plan progresses that additional revenue funding is required, then that will be built into the annual budget or if mid-year will be addressed via the usual democratic process requiring the Executive's approval. In the case of any capital projects feeding into the capital programme, then the capital programme is also subject to regular quarterly monitoring via the Executive. With regard to HRA related projects there is a HRA business plan which is monitored by the Housing Services Board; the HRA budget is also monitored by the Executive. So there are well established financial monitoring processes that will help ensure the Plan stays on track financially. Additionally, as the Council Plan is a five year plan it is unlikely that significant progress will have been made by the end of 6 months in terms of actual expenditure; part of this initial period is likely to be taken up by planning arrangements. This does not mean that the Plan is not being delivered but that expenditure necessarily follows on from other actions. It was his professional opinion that in the Plan's first year, a review at 12 months would prove more advantageous than one at 6 months.

Having considered the Officers' opinion, and after further discussion, the Committee voted to accept the Council Plan, and that its implementation be reviewed by the Committee after 12 months being mindful also that if necessary the review could always be brought forward. (The Chair abstained from voting).

It was RESOLVED to accept the Council Plan as presented to be forwarded to the Executive for formal recommendation to the Council, and that its implementation be reviewed by the Scrutiny Committee after 12 months.

ADDITIONAL ACTION: Review of the Council Plan to be scheduled at the end of 12 months.

5 PROGRESS OF IMPROVEMENTS IN CHILDREN'S SERVICES

5.1 The report of the Interim Head of Children's Services setting out the progress to date against the revised Children's Services Improvement Plan which incorporated the

recommendations of the CSSIW Inspection report was presented for the Committee's consideration and comment.

The Portfolio Member for Social Services reported that the recommendations made by CSSIW are in the process of being implemented with staffing matters currently the focus of the work including restructuring the practice teams, launching a new supervision policy and putting a Workforce Strategy into effect. This is intended to reinforce staff recruitment and retention arrangements. The Children's Services Improvement Panel has met on two occasions and has given consideration to establishing a programme of work over the coming months.

The Assistant Chief Executive (Governance and Business Process Transformation) said that ensuring workforce stability is essential if the service is to deliver both on its legislative obligations and on the recommendations of the CSSIW inspection given that an unstable workforce in recent years has been identified as a weakness in the service. Addressing this is a key element of the Service Improvement Plan and the report describes the elements which have been the focus of attention in recent months. These encompass restructuring; supervision, staff recruitment and retention and developing and implementing the Workforce Strategy. As part of the restructuring, new Service Managers and Practice Leads have been appointed and are due to commence in their new roles in early September. Recruitment is however ongoing with the aim of reducing the service's dependence on agency staff. Other changes in relation to working with partners, quality assurance and services for children, young people and families are also being put into effect.

The Interim Head of Children's Services elaborated on the new staff structure involving smaller Practice Groups across early intervention and intensive intervention headed by a Practice Leader responsible for three or four Social Workers and a much reduced caseload.

5.2 A progress report by the Scrutiny Manager on the work of the Children's Services Improvement Panel to date was presented for the Committee's consideration.

Councillor Richard Griffiths, the Committee's representative on the Children's Services Improvement Panel and the Children in Care Champion updated the Committee on the issues discussed by the Panel at its initial two meetings in July and August, 2017 as summarised in section 3.2 of the report. He confirmed that all work streams pertaining to the Service Improvement Plan appear to be on target thus far and that there are no matters at this point that need to be escalated by the Panel for consideration by the Scrutiny Committee.

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

- In light of the re-structuring and the commitment made to reduce reliance on agency staff, the Committee sought clarification of the current position with regard to the deployment of agency staff in Children's Services, the ratio to permanent staff and the costs involved. The Interim Head of Children's Services said that there were 11 agency staff within the service at present; he explained that the service is implementing a programme to reduce the number of agency staff over time. However, there are agency staff whose experience and expertise the service would wish to retain as permanent staff via the normal recruitment process.

The Assistant Chief Executive (Governance and Business Process Transformation) said that the service is seeking to ensure that the restructuring occurs within the current staff budget. The majority of agency staff cover existing posts that are vacant so an element of the costs falls within existing budgets. However there are additional costs linked to agency

staff. The service is endeavouring to recruit to the permanent vacant posts and that will take time. Until that process is complete there will be utilisation of agency staff. The service has already recruited five newly qualified social workers who will become registered in a few months' time whose caseloads will initially be lighter to allow them to familiarise themselves with the service. Agency staff will provide additional cover during this period which will entail additional costs. The Officer said that a substantial element of the costs in Children's Service derives from looked after children and young people whose needs are such they can only be met through residential care placements. There has been a significant increase in the number of children and young people who are looked after in recent years. Within that population, there is a small kernel of young people whose needs are complex and acute. Meeting the needs of this cohort is both challenging and costly. Added to that is a shortage of local foster carers meaning that the service has to have recourse to the independent foster care sector where the costs are higher.

- The Committee noted that the retention of staff has posed a challenge to the Service in the past. The Committee sought clarification of the measures being taken to retain staff.

The Assistant Chief Executive (Governance and Business Process Transformation) said that whilst the service is seeking to create the conditions wherein staff will want to stay at the Council it can be a challenge, and therefore an element of "churn" is to be expected. The practice teams restructure; the launch of a new supervision policy and the implementation of a comprehensive induction programme as well as Workforce Strategy are all designed to provide enhanced support to new as well as existing staff. Whilst some staff turnover is a natural element of the workforce, it is hoped that the strategies being implemented will make it easier for the service to retain staff.

Having considered the information presented both verbally and via the written reports, the Committee RESOLVED –

- **That on the basis of the information presented, it was satisfied with the pace of progress and improvements made to date within Children's Services**
- **It noted the progress made to date with the work of the Children's Services Improvement Panel**
- **It noted that all work streams pertaining to the Service Improvement Plan appear to be on target thus far.**
- **It noted that there are no matters at this point that need to be escalated by the Panel for consideration by the parent committee.**

NO ADDITIONAL ACTION WAS PROPOSED

6 FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Corporate Scrutiny Committee's updated Forward Work Programme to April, 2018 was presented for the Committee's consideration. **The Committee accepted and noted the Forward Work Programme as presented.**

NO ADDITIONAL ACTION WAS PROPOSED

7 ITEM FOR INFORMATION - ANNUAL REPORT 2016/17: LISTENING AND LEARNING FROM COMPLAINTS

The Social Services Representations and Complaints Procedure Annual Report for 2016/17 was presented for the Committee's information. The report set out the way in

which the Social Services' Representations and Complaints Procedure was implemented within Adults' and Children's Services during 2016/17.

The Committee noted that an analysis of the complaints to Children's Services shows that one of the themes found in Stage 1 complaints were numerous changes in social worker. The Committee sought clarification of whether the Service monitors the frequency of changes in looked after children's social workers. The Committee further noted that the percentage of looked after children who have experienced one or more changes of school during periods of being looked after is monitored via the Corporate Scorecard because of the potential impact such change might have on the child, and it suggested that the same standard should apply to changes in social workers.

The Officers confirmed that whilst changes in social workers is not currently an aspect of performance that is tracked and monitored the introduction of a new IT system might make that more feasible. Staff turnover and recruitment and retention issues can lead to such changes; however the re-structuring of practice teams and the implementation of a Workforce Strategy which covers recruitment, retention and support issues are expected to lead to more stability, consistency of practice and therefore less changes and less complaints to the Service in future.

The Committee noted the annual report for information purposes including –

- **The views of service users received during 2016/17 regarding the services provided by Social Services;**
- **The performance of Social Services in implementing the Representations and Complaints procedure and dealing with complaints;**
- **The Action Plan for developing the arrangements for dealing effectively with representations and complaints received for service users and their representatives.**

ADDITIONAL ACTION PROPOSED: Officers to examine the feasibility of monitoring systematically the frequency of changes in looked after children's social workers and to report back to the Committee's next meeting.

**Councillor Aled Morris Jones
Chair**