

CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 13 November, 2017

- PRESENT:** Councillor Aled Morris Jones (Chair)
Councillor Dylan Rees (Vice-Chair)
- Councillors Richard Griffiths, Trefor Lloyd Hughes, MBE, Richard Owain Jones, Shaun Redmond, Alun Roberts
- IN ATTENDANCE:** Chief Executive
Assistant Chief Executive/Statutory Director of Social Services
Head of Function (Resources) and Section 151 Officer
Head of Learning (for item 4)
Head of Housing Services (for item 5)
Head of Adults' Services (for item 3)
Head of Corporate Transformation (for item 3)
Interim Head of Children's Services
Interim Children's Services Manager
Head of Profession (HR) (CE) (for item 3)
Housing Technical Services Manager (DR) (for item 5)
Library Services Manager (RR) (for item 4)
Programme and Business Planning Manager (GM) (for item 3)
Scrutiny Manager (AGD)
Committee Officer (ATH)
- APOLOGIES:** Councillors J. Arwel Roberts, Nicola Roberts, Mr Keith Roberts (The Catholic Church) Anest Frazer (The Church in Wales)
- ALSO PRESENT:** Councillors Llinos Medi Huws (Leader and Portfolio Member for Social Services), John Griffith (Portfolio Member for Finance), R. Meirion Jones (Portfolio Member for Education, Libraries, Youth & Culture), Alun Mummery (Portfolio Member for Housing and Supporting Communities), Dafydd Rhys Thomas (Portfolio Member for Corporate Services) Gwilym O. Jones (Chair, partnership and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee)
- Mr Paul Goodlad (Wales Audit Office), Assistant Chief Executive (Partnerships, Community & Service Improvement), Head of Democratic Services

The Chair welcomed all those present to this meeting of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee; he extended a particular welcome to Mr Paul Goodlad, Wales Audit Office who was present as an observer. The Chair also congratulated Mr Fôn Roberts, Interim Children's Services Manager on his appointment as Head of Children and Families Services at the Council, and Shan Lloyd Williams, Head of Housing Services on her appointment as Chief Executive of Grwp Cynefin. He wished both officers well in their new posts.

1 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

No declaration of interest was received.

2 MINUTES OF THE 4TH SEPTEMBER, 2017 MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee held on the 31st October, 2017 were presented and were confirmed as correct.

3 PERFORMANCE MONITORING: CORPORATE SCORECARD Q2 2017/18

The report of the Head of Corporate Transformation incorporating the Corporate Scorecard for Quarter 2 2017/18 was presented for the Committee's consideration. The report portrayed the Council's position against its operational objectives as set out and agreed collaboratively between the Senior Leadership Team, the Executive and the Shadow Executive.

The Portfolio Member for Corporate Services reported that performance at the end of Quarter 2 is generally good with the majority of indicators performing well against their targets with the exception of 3 indicators (one in Adults' Services and two in Children's Services) where performance is presenting as either Amber or Red. These are elaborated upon in the report and the remedial measures to improve performance in these specific areas are outlined. With regard to People Management, the sickness absence rate at the end of Quarter 2 was 4.25 which is an improvement on the performance of 4.89 for the same period in 2016/17. However, further work needs to be done to embed Return to Work (RTW) interviews and Attendance Review Meetings (ARM) across the Council's services. While 72% of the RTW interviews were held within timescale by the end of Q2 which is an improvement on the Q1 figure of 67%, this performance continues to be below the target of 80%. The ARM figures for Q2 at 59% have declined on the 78% seen in Q1 (not inclusive of schools). Although improvements can still be made in terms of adhering to the Absence Management Policy by conducting the RTW interviews and ARMs as a matter of practice, it is encouraging to note that the overall sickness target has been achieved for the 4th consecutive quarter. If this trend continues, the projected end of year sickness level would equate to 9.9 days per FTE (based on a 3 year average).

In relation to customer complaints management, the main area of underperformance relates to late responses by Children's Services due mainly to a failure to send written responses within timescale. Notwithstanding the service did hold a discussion with the complainant within timescale in 22 of the 25 complaints received.

In relation to financial management, although the position has improved from that reported in Quarter 1, there remain significant budgetary pressures on Children's and Families Services and on the Learning Service. The Heads of Service are aware of the issues and are working to reduce the level of overspending which is within their control at year end.

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

- The Committee noted that the **Housing Services' indicator in relation to the days taken to deliver a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG)** which showed as Red in Quarter 1 was now ragged Green with a performance of 196 days against a target of 200. The Committee noted the turnaround and sought clarification of the measures put in place to secure the improvement and whether those could be transferred as good practice to other services within the Council.

The Head of Housing Services said that the service has endeavoured to liaise more closely and more frequently with external parties as well as with Social Services which has helped improve the process as regards expediting the progress of applications from initial contact to the completion of works. With further co-operation and collaboration it is hoped that the time taken to deliver the DFG can be reduced still further. Ultimately, improvement has been achieved by applying performance

management measures and ensuring that every officer is aware of the performance targets. The Head of Adults' Services confirmed that the service has been working closely with Housing Services to come to an agreement on the changes to be made and to ensure that that is done in a timely way.

- The Committee noted that the Quarter 2 report pays attention to **performance issues in Children's Services** and that it provides an update on improvements which link into the Indicators on the Scorecard. The Committee sought clarification of whether the Children's Services Improvement Panel should play an additional role in scrutinising and monitoring improvements.

The Assistant Chief Executive/Statutory Director of Social Services confirmed that from an Officer perspective, the panel is working effectively – it has a clear and well defined work programme, and its meetings have well thought out agendas and are recorded thoroughly. The service has found the relationship with the Panel to be very beneficial.

- The Committee noted that the number of children on the Child Protection Register has decreased significantly over the last 6 months with 56 children currently on the register compared with 102 at the end of March, 2017. The Committee sought an explanation for the decrease and whether it can be attributed to actions taken by the service.

The Officers confirmed that the service has reviewed every case and in particular those children who have been on the register for a length of time, often as precautionary step. Where appropriate and where the risk has been assessed as having reduced, individual cases can be de-escalated and monitored through other means e.g. care and support arrangements. With regard to children who come into the Authority's care or who are on the register, the figures can vary on a day to day basis. Since instigating a review of the cases on the register, the number has fallen and has since remained fairly constant.

- The Committee noted that there has been **a decline in performance in relation to the percentage of carers of adults who requested an assessment or review that had an assessment of review in their own right and that the performance at 83.4% remains below the target of 93%**. The Committee sought clarification of whether this decline in performance is directly associated with the introduction of a new database and whether there were other interventions the service could make to improve performance.

The Head of Adults' Services said that moving to the new WCCIS database system has not had an impact on performance. The team responsible for conducting carers' assessments consists of 2 staff members only; however, support from the overall social work team ensured good performance to the end of year 2016/17. Whilst performance has deteriorated slightly in the first half of 2017/18, the service is confident that with further planned support from the social work team this performance will improve and the PI target will be met. The Officer said that the service would also wish to note that performance does vary slightly dependent on seasonal factors e.g. unscheduled care pressure or leave which can particularly affect a small team. The absence of one team member because of leave reduces capacity by 50%. There is potential to train other members of staff to provide cover in the event of any long-term absence.

- **The Committee sought assurance that the improvements seen last year with regard to managing sickness absence rates can be sustained and further improved.** The Committee noted that complying with the absence management policy by conducting RTW interviews and Attendance Review Meetings consistently and within timescale is likely to secure further improvement in sickness absence levels. However, the Committee also noted that although there has been an improvement on the Qtr. 1 performance with regard to the percentage of RTW interviews held it remains well below target. The Committee sought clarification of whether the Authority could take a more proactive approach to RTW interviews by for example seeking to conduct the interviews on the day before the staff member returns to work. The Committee also sought clarification of whether data is kept in relation to the demographics of staff who are on sick leave and patterns or trends with regard to sickness absence.

The Head of Corporate Transformation said that the Authority does not always have advance notification of a return to work date – staff come back to work when they feel able to do so. The sickness challenge panels have asked services to put in place back-up plans in circumstances where a manager is not available to conduct the interview so a line manager within the section is available to do so. Support is available to staff for the first 5 days after the return to work. All services scrutinise sickness absences with the sickness absence co-ordinator in order to establish any emerging patterns of absence in order to address this at the outset.

The Head of Profession (Human Resources) said that conducting RTW interviews can sometimes be a matter of logistics especially with regard to staff who work off-site in locations other than the main Council office e.g. schools, care homes etc. In cases where arranging a formal RTW interview is difficult, the Authority does encourage managers to try to have an initial conversation with staff who are returning to work after a period of sickness as it then makes completing the formal process easier.

With regard to schools, the Head of Learning said that the service has had in place for over a year a sickness absence improvement plan for schools specifically. Head teachers and the Chairs of Governing Bodies have been given a presentation on the plan. Additionally, an officer has been commissioned to work with schools and as a result of these measures, sickness absence levels in schools have improved significantly. Schools are also provided with a monthly sickness absence update which benchmarks their performance against similar schools.

The Committee suggested that technology in the form of a dedicated template might help services who have missed their targets or which are finding it difficult to complete RTW interviews because of logistics, to expedite the interviews. Alternatively, the Committee to be provided with a follow-up report on how RTW interviews can be facilitated in relation to harder to reach staff.

The Chief Executive said that the Qtr. 3 data will if it shows an improvement, provide the Committee with the answer to this question.

- **The Committee noted that although the Q2 figures show an improvement on Q1 with regard to financial management, a significant overspend at year end is still anticipated.** The Committee sought clarification of the measures that have been introduced to bring these budget pressures under control.

The Portfolio Member for Finance said that the current overspend is due primarily to the pressure of demand in Children's Services particularly with regard to children who

require specialist out of county placements because of complex needs which cannot always be met within county and the knock-on effect this has on education provision.

The Interim Head of Children's Services confirmed that the number of children in the Authority's care has increased significantly over the past 18 months which is a trend that is replicated nationally. Some of these children's needs have been met by placements outside of Anglesey and, depending on the nature of the provision, these can cost up to £250k per placement per annum. The Authority is reviewing these placements via an out of county panel that has been established within the service to ensure they provide value for money and that they also still provide the appropriate care for the children in question. The Senior Leadership Team has asked Children's Services and the Learning Service to provide a further joint analysis of the position internally. In addition, the Authority has invested in the Resilient Families Team which is working with a number of these children and young people to enable them to return to their families and/or to foster care where that is the appropriate and safe option. These are often complex cases and the challenge lies in meeting the individual's needs whilst ensuring that they stay safe.

The Portfolio Member for Social Services informed the Committee that there is an ongoing discussion at national level regarding how best to provide for looked after children with complex needs and although the discussion is at an early stage, consideration may be given to developing a national scheme to address the issues.

The Head of Function (Resources) and Section 151 Officer said that the overspend is currently running at £2m which if that still remains the position at year end, will have to be met from the general reserves fund. The fund stood at £8.3m at the end of March, 2017 which is comfortably above the 5% of net budget benchmark which is customarily recommended which for the Authority, translates into £6m. The current and previous Executive's strategy has been to only draw on reserves to invest in initiatives that generate ongoing savings for the Council. However, the fund is available as rainy-day money to meet situations such as this where there is a deficit and where extra demand is placing pressure on budgets. The Officer said that the Council has other reserves which are currently being reviewed to see whether money can be released from them to be used to replenish the general reserve fund e.g. funds which have been set aside to meet costs arising from equal pay claims which the Welsh Government has now agreed can be capitalised meaning that Council balances do not have to be used to meet this cost. The Authority is in the process of establishing these costs in terms of who is to be paid and by what amount. At the end of that process any residual funds can be released back into the general balances.

The Committee noted that there is merit in addressing the issue of complex, high cost care placements at regional and/or national level and that this may be the best approach to reducing the costs. The Committee also noted that the Finance Scrutiny Panel has commissioned a report from Children's Services and the Learning Service on this matter and is monitoring the situation with regard to budget overspend.

Having considered all the information presented along with the explanations given for under-performance and mitigation measures proposed, the Committee resolved

-

- **To accept the Corporate Scorecard report for Q2 2017/18**
- **To note the areas which the Senior Leadership Team is managing to secure improvements into the future as set out in paragraphs 3.1.1 to 3.1.4 of the report, and**

- To accept the mitigation measures as outlined therein.

NO ADDITIONAL ACTION WAS PROPOSED

4 DRAFT LIBRARY SERVICE STRATEGY

The report of the Head of Learning incorporating a proposed draft Library Service Strategy for 2017 to 2022 was presented for the Committee's consideration

The Portfolio Member for Education, Libraries, Youth & Culture reported that the draft Library Service Strategy proposes a three-tier approach to the future provision of library services on Anglesey thereby aiming to lay firm sustainable foundations that will enable the service to meet residents' needs as well as fulfilling the statutory requirements over the coming years. The three tiers consist of Area Libraries (Holyhead and Llangefni Libraries) at Tier 1, Council led Community Libraries with elements of community support (Amlwch, Benllech and Menai Bridge Libraries) at Tier 2, and Council led Community Supported libraries (Beaumaris and Rhosneigr Libraries) at Tier 3. In addition to the above, the Mobile Service including the mobile libraries and housebound service will remain part of the Anglesey Library Service provision subject to review as regards the model and routes to be adopted. The public consultation on the draft strategy which was authorised by the Executive in February, 2017 took place over a period of 12 weeks during the summer of 2017; the results of the consultation can be found in Appendix 2. A substantial amount of work has been undertaken to develop a revised library provision model over the past few years; the Committee is asked to endorse the resulting strategy and to provide a view on the 3 options for implementing staffing structure savings.

The Committee considered the draft strategy document and made the following points –

- The Committee sought clarification of the approach taken to the public consultation process in order to garner as many views as possible from across all affected groups.

The Head of Learning said that there were 2,000 respondents to the initial public and stakeholder consultation held in October 2015 which was undertaken to gather views on the options identified by the Library Service Review and to invite any alternative ideas. With regard to the proposed draft Strategy, the consultation online and offline questionnaire (the consultation survey) attracted a significant response – 450 full responses and 28 incomplete responses. In addition, 748 responses were received from meetings attended by the Council as part of the consultation engagement activities. Section 2 of the consultation report provides a breakdown of the data collecting methodologies used. The options are the best the service is able to provide in order to meet the commitments made in the Corporate Plan 2013-17 to reduce the overall costs of leisure, culture and library services by 60% over the period of the plan and to achieve the target savings for the library service whilst at the same time maintaining a viable service. The three options put forward for realising savings from the staffing budget represent the minimum level of savings (Option A £50k savings); the maximum level of savings (Option B £72k savings) and the median level of savings (Option C £57k savings)

- The Committee noted that the Officer recommendation offers 2 alternatives – Option B or Option C and that no mention is made of Option A even though the difference with regard to the delivery of savings is only £7k and even though Option A carries fewer risks.

The Officers said that the challenge to the service was to come up with the maximum savings possible; Option A does not meet this objective. In maximising the savings, the service is also seeking to mitigate the effects. The Strategy can be implemented

and can work with each of the three options and whilst Option B is the most difficult to deliver in terms of risk and impact, it offers the highest level of savings.

- The Committee noted that a collaborative model of provision is proposed for Beaumaris Library. Bearing in mind the impact which the loss of a service can have on a community the Committee sought clarification whether if it proves successful, this model can be applied in other areas.

The Library Service Manager said that every community has been canvassed for their views on adopting this approach. Canolfan Beaumaris Social Enterprise has expressed a formal interest in taking over the running of the library in the town; so whilst the Council will be providing a core service, there is scope to extend access through the community. This collaborative model approach has been considered and offered to all areas of Anglesey and thus far, Beaumaris remains the strongest possibility in terms of realising this option. Llanfaelog community council has expressed an interest in safeguarding Rhosneigr Library, pending the receipt of further information following consultation.

- The Committee sought clarification of the Officers as to whether they were satisfied that everything possible had been done to encourage community councils and community groups to consider collaborating as a way forward to ensure the continuation of a library service in their area. Particular reference was made to Cemaes especially in light of the advent of Wylfa Newydd and the potential this offers in terms of making an approach to Horizon for community benefits.

The Head of Learning said that in the process of consulting several approaches have been made to the community councils to seek a firm commitment on their part to work with the Council to support a library service provision. Some have felt unable to help because of insufficient capacity or because they are a small group of enthusiastic individuals who are not able to take the matter further. The community response in some areas has been poor. Whilst the service is aware of the possibilities linked to Wylfa Newydd, it has now come to the point where consideration has to be given to implementing the draft Library Service Strategy which has been 3 years in the making. The door remains open to further discussions with Cemaes and other communities in future where that is feasible, subject to the financial situation at the time. Likewise, the service is prepared to co-operate with Horizon should the opportunity arise, but for now the priority is to bring the strategy to fruition.

- The Committee noted with disappointment that the response from the young people's consultation (Rhoscolyn) had highlighted a lack of awareness of the library service and a lack of knowledge about what it is able to offer. The Committee sought assurance that the service has a strategy to market the library service provision in that and other areas.

The Library Service Manager said that the revised staffing structure ensures that resources are put into the main libraries – 3 members of staff and a manager; this will create capacity within the service to undertake marketing activities e.g. Facebook etc. and disseminate information about the service to school and communities.

- The Committee noted that implementing Option B carries with it the risk of legal challenge and/or ministerial intervention even though the savings difference between it and Option C is only £15k. The Committee sought clarification therefore whether the costs of consultation justifies the amount of savings that can be delivered and whether the potential substantial costs of effecting one of the options outweigh any gains that

might be derived from it. Given that the Library Service is a statutory service, the Committee sought further clarification whether adopting Option B would likely place the service in a critical position.

The Head of Learning said that the savings which the service hopes to realise at the end of the 3 years are in addition to the £50k of savings secured over the last 3 years bringing the total to approximately £100k. The service has been given project management funding in the previous 3 years to cover the costs of transforming not only the library service but the culture and youth service as well, so it is considered that the cost of one project management officer is justified and provides good value for money in the context of the work undertaken in totality. Additionally, the consultation related work has been undertaken internally by officers within the Council as it is felt that the issue requires a solution from the perspective of the service in Anglesey rather than one that would have been provided at a cost by external consultants. The service has been aware from the outset of the legal challenge and the risk of judicial review hanging over library services in both Wales and England the difference in Wales being the Public Library Standards which Welsh Government uses to establish whether authorities are fulfilling their statutory duty with regard to library services. The service has therefore been receiving legal advice throughout this process in order to ensure that all the procedures followed are correct and that Elected Members are aware of the picture in totality. There is a possibility of Ministerial intervention in the event that the Library service falls significantly below the requirements of the Public Library Standards. The Officer said that she could not be confident that the service would not come under strain as a result of putting Option B into effect and the report sets out those risks clearly. Therefore, whilst Option B shows how the service has met the savings challenge in full, the report also makes Members aware of the risks that are attached to it.

- The Committee sought clarification whether in order to mitigate the effects, Option B could be achieved progressively by implementing Option C initially.

The Head of Learning said that from a professional perspective she hoped that the option that is approved will apply to the medium term; the service would not wish to have the burden of undertaking another consultation to reach Option B; neither would it be fair to the staff. Moreover, it would be difficult to manage in the context of the impending sixth Public Library Standards Framework given that the requirements of the standards change with every new framework.

Having considered all the information presented as well as the clarification provided by the Officers on the points raised, it was resolved –

- **That the Committee is satisfied that the service has undertaken the consultation process as comprehensively and inclusively as possible.**
- **That the Committee is satisfied, subject to noting the comments made with regard to the need for improved marketing of the library service, that the Equality Impact and Needs Assessment covers all the groups/aspects expected by Members.**
- **That the Committee recommends -**
 - **That the Executive adopts the draft Library Service Strategy for 2017-22, and**
 - **That it actions the proposed changes in the draft Library Service Strategy 2017-2022 as follows:**
 - **Close Cemaes Library, Moelfre Library and Newborough Library, continuing to investigate mitigating actions such as community**

access points and/or increase mobile provision in the areas affected by closure.

- **Develop a collaborative model with Canolfan Beaumaris in respect of Beaumaris Library.**
- **Receive a firm commitment from Llanfaelog Community Council in respect of Rhosneigr Library by 2 January, 2018. If no firm commitment is provided, then proceed to close as per the first bullet point above.**
- **In order to achieve maximum savings, implement Option B within the draft Library Service costings (Appendix 5 to the report) while accepting the risks as set out.**

NO ADDITIONAL ACTION WAS PROPOSED

5 ASSET MANAGEMENT STRATEGY – COUNCIL HOUSING

The report of the Head of Housing Services incorporating a draft Housing Revenue Account Asset Management Strategy (AMS) for 2018 to 2023 was presented for the Committee's consideration.

The Housing Technical Services Manager reported that the strategy defines the Housing Service's approach to managing the Housing Revenue Account assets; one of its main aims is to support the service's annual business plan. The strategy is focused on three key themes in relation to stock investment in order to continue to meet the requirements of the Welsh Housing Quality Standards (WHQS); active asset management in order to improve the performance of properties which may have poor social, economic or environmental performance and supporting wider objectives in order to contribute to corporate priorities.

The Committee considered the strategy and made the following points –

- The Committee sought clarification of whether the Housing Service is maximising opportunities with regard to major repairs loans. The Housing Technical Services Manager confirmed that the allowance has been claimed in full at the end of Quarter 2 and that expenditure totalling in excess of £2.6m had occurred during Quarter 1 and Quarter 2. The service has regular meetings with Welsh Government officials to monitor how the grant is spent.
- The Committee sought clarification of the Housing Services' approach to tenants who refuse to have improvement work done to their homes especially if the work is considered essential.

The Housing Technical Services Manager said that the WHQS allows tenants to refuse work to be done on their homes in certain circumstances e.g. if they are happy with their current kitchen and do not want an upgrade. Whilst all authorities respect tenants' right to make decisions about their homes this must be balanced with the need to meet health and safety requirements. The service does contact tenants who have previously refused to have upgrade work done to establish whether or not they have changed their minds and are now agreeable to the work being carried out. Any outstanding WHQS work e.g. kitchens, bathrooms, re-wires etc. is carried out automatically as a matter of policy at the end of a tenancy and prior to re-letting. It is often older tenants who have refused to have work done on their homes mainly because of the upheaval it sometimes entails, but many have since had a change of heart. The service reports to the Housing Services Board on the strategy for reducing the number of refusals.

- The Committee noted that tenants are sometimes reluctant for their homes to undergo a full re-wire; the Committee sought clarification whether any of the refusals which the service knows about fall into this category.

The Housing Technical Services Manager said that although some tenants have refused a full re-wire, the Council as landlord insists that it be allowed to undertake the minimum work necessary both to fulfil health and safety requirements and to meet current standards e. g. replacing electrical distribution boards

- The Committee sought clarification whether the Service has documentary evidence to show that a tenant has refused improvement work and also whether it ensures that all households conform to minimum safety standards.

The Housing Technical Services Manager confirmed that the service holds casefiles on every household and that it undertakes all work necessary to ensure that homes meet the minimum health and safety requirements. Gas safety certification is undertaken annually for example. The Strategy outlines the legal, regulatory and local standards which the Council is required to meet.

- The Committee sought assurance that the service is adequately resourced and skilled to be able to make regular visits to the housing stock to make condition checks and to identify any issues that need addressing.

The Head of Housing Services confirmed that the service would benefit from having more officers to undertake at least an annual inspection visit. The service currently has 3 housing management officers; in addition, contractors who carry out improvement works on the Council's housing stock are trained to identify anything untoward e.g. signs of domestic violence. The service also checks to establish whether there is a pattern to call-outs or whether the expenditure on some properties exceeds that on others and whether there are underlying reasons for this.

The Committee noted that there is therefore a staffing need in the Housing Service with regard to monitoring and overseeing the housing stock.

- The Committee sought clarification of the impact, if any of the introduction of Universal Credit on maintaining the housing stock.

The Head of Housing Services said that the Council corporately has put in place a programme to prepare and to support tenants with regard to the Government's welfare reform changes so that that they are aware of what to expect. Universal credit affects people in private tenancies as well as those employed on short-term contracts etc. As part of HRA related work, the service undertakes scenario planning and stress testing of the Business Plan; the latter will be brought to scrutiny for challenge next February to ensure that the Council is not over extending itself. It is considered that the 30 year plan is robust. The service is aware of some of the difficulties experienced by other authorities with regard to increased rent and council tax arrears as a result of welfare reform changes and it expects this to happen in Anglesey also but only in the short-term. The service is monitoring developments in Flint and Torfaen councils.

- The Committee sought clarification with regard to investment planning, whether it is the service's intention to prioritise the renewal of heating systems in order to tackle fuel poverty/energy efficiency and whether it is able to target those properties where tenants can and need to reduce their fuel bills. The Committee noted that it is essential to help households who may be in financial distress because of the costs of

heating their homes and it emphasised that consideration should be given to bringing forward renewal plans for these households.

The Housing Technical Services Manager said that the service has in the last 18 months commenced on an investment programme for boiler replacement. The service works on the basis of a 15 year expected boiler lifespan. It is anticipated that boiler replacement programmes will feature prominently throughout the 5 year period covered by the AMS. Moreover, the matter has been the subject of recent attention including in a visit by the Wales Audit Office last month where the focus was on targets and WHQS in relation to energy efficiency. A high percentage of housing in Anglesey is not connected to the natural gas network and achieving the targets for these properties can be difficult. The service has agreed with the WAO that it prepares a working paper setting out how it intends to increase the number of houses that meet the standards; this will be presented to the Housing Services Board at the end of the month. .

It was resolved to accept the draft Housing Revenue Account Asset Management Strategy for 2018/23 and recommend its adoption by the Executive.

ADDITIONAL ACTION PROPOSED: The Housing Service to report back to the January, 2018 meeting of the Scrutiny Committee on its plans for supporting households which are experiencing and/or are at risk of fuel poverty.

6 CHILDREN'S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT PLAN PROGRESS REPORT

- A report by the Scrutiny Manager incorporating a progress update on the work of the Children's Services Improvement Panel was presented for the Committee's consideration. The report provided a summary of the matters which have received the Panel's attention over the past two months.

Councillor Richard Griffiths confirmed that all work-streams pertaining to the Service Improvement Plan appear to be on target thus far. However, the Panel wishes to bring the Corporate Scrutiny's attention to the fact that although good progress has been made on implementing the revised staffing structure, posts remain vacant. This needs to be addressed as soon as possible.

- The report of the Interim Head of Children's Services setting out the progress to date on implementing the Children's Service Improvement Plan was presented for the Committee's consideration. The report outlined the focus of the work thus far in relation to the following aspects –
 - Service Re-structure
 - Recruitment
 - Workforce Strategy Supervision
 - Quality Assurance Framework

The Committee considered the information presented with regard to the progress of improvement within the service and, in line with the recommendation made by the Children's Services Improvement Panel which had highlighted continuing vacant posts as an issue, it sought clarification of the service on its approach to recruitment with particular reference to the following points –

- Whether the service is confident it will be able to fill the posts that are vacant without undue delay

- Whether the Service has considered taking a more proactive approach to recruitment by promoting social work as a career directly with schools and in careers fairs.
- Additionally, whether the service has considered intensifying the recruitment approach by marketing the Council directly to universities as a supportive employer and a positive place to work for new and experienced social workers.
- Given the complexity of Children’s Social Work as an area, the measures the service has taken to provide staff with the necessary support to help them deal with the challenges which the work brings and to develop professionally.
- The balance between experienced and inexperienced social workers within the service.

The Officers said that the service is running an ongoing advertisement for children and families social workers and that in the meantime, agency social workers are providing cover where necessary. Recruiting social workers remains a challenge for local authorities regionally. The work in relation to implementing the Workforce Strategy is continuing regardless and this will help with future recruitment. As well as actively recruiting from external sources, the service is also developing a “grow your own” approach to recruitment with the aim of ensuring a sustainable workforce over time. To this end the service has employed newly qualified staff as well as staff who are expected to qualify imminently. They will initially be working with reduced caseloads to help them settle into the work. Another element of the recruitment plan is to upskill support workers so that they are able to take on more responsibility. The service works closely with Bangor University to provide work experience, and whilst mindful of the need to recruit bilingual social workers in order to provide an appropriate service for families, the Authority has been considering advertising nationally with the aim of drawing back to North Wales, individuals from the area who may be currently employed in England.

As well as recruitment, the Workforce Strategy places emphasis on creating a supportive culture so that staff will want to remain with the Council. The new service structure coupled with the new Supervision Policy means that managers now have a greater awareness of caseloads including any problematic cases. Practice Leaders are more attuned to the work meaning they can provide advice and, via the formal supervision process, they can regularly review cases and practice. These measures are in addition to the Council’s corporate performance management arrangements. In the event of unusual or exceptional cases, the service has developed a protocol for staff to help them ensure that these are dealt with appropriately and correctly. To support staff further the service is developing a consistent and effective induction programme.

With regard to the mix of experienced and inexperienced social workers, the service currently employs 29 social workers, 22 of whom have been qualified for between 2 and 10 years; 1 has been qualified for a year and 6 have been qualified for less than a year.

Having considered the information presented both via the written reports and orally by the Officers the Committee resolved –

- **To note the progress to date with the work of the Children’s Services Improvement Panel**
- **To note that all work streams pertaining to the Service Improvement Plan appear to be on target thus far.**
- **To note and to acknowledge the Panel’s concern with regard to continuing vacant posts within the service.**

- That the Committee is satisfied with the steps and pace undertaken by Children's Services in relation to the progress made in implementing the Service Improvement Plan subject to noting that the issue of continuing vacant posts needs to be addressed.

ADDITIONAL ACTION PROPOSED: The Committee's suggestions for taking a more direct and proactive approach to recruitment e.g. with schools and universities be incorporated into the Recruitment Strategy

7 FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee's Forward Work Programme to June, 2018 was presented for consideration and review. **The Committee noted the Work Programme as presented without further comment.**

**Councillor Aled Morris Jones
Chair**

DRAFT