

CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the extraordinary meeting held on 17 January, 2019

- PRESENT:** Councillor Aled Morris Jones (Chair)
Councillor Dylan Rees (Vice-Chair)
- Councillors Lewis Davies, John Griffith, Richard Griffiths, Richard Owain Jones, Alun Roberts, J. Arwel Roberts, Nicola Roberts
- Portfolio Members**
- Councillor Llinos Medi Huws (Leader and Portfolio Member for Social Services)
- IN ATTENDANCE:** Chief Executive
Assistant Chief Executive (Governance and Business Process Transformation)/Director of Social Services
Head of Children and Families' Services
Scrutiny Manager (AGD)
Committee Officer (ATH)
- APOLOGIES:** Councillors Bryan Owen, Robin Williams (Portfolio Member for Finance)
Trefor Lloyd Hughes, MBE, Kenneth Hughes (Invitees), Mrs Anest Frazer (Co-opted Member)
- ALSO PRESENT:** **By Invitation:** Councillors G.O. Jones, R. Llewelyn Jones, Dafydd Roberts, Peter Rogers, Alun Mummery (Portfolio Member for Housing and Supporting Communities)
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The Chair, in welcoming all those present to this meeting of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee extended a particular welcome to Christine Jones from Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) who was present to lead on item 2 on the agenda. The Chair also took the opportunity to congratulate Dr Caroline Turner, Assistant Chief Executive and Statutory Director of Social Services on her appointment as Chief Executive of Powys County Council, and in wishing her well in her new post, thanked her for work at the Isle of Anglesey County Council.

1 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

No declaration of interest was received.

2 INSPECTION OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES BY CARE INSPECTORATE WALES (CIW)

The report of the Head of Children and Families' Services summarising the outcome of CIW's re-inspection of Children and Families Services at the Isle of Anglesey County Council in October, 2018 was presented for the Committee's consideration. The report referred to the improvements which CIW recognises has been made since the original inspection in November, 2016 which gave rise to a number of significant concerns; the areas for development and the Service position on each area as well as the steps to be taken following re-inspection. Attached for the Committee's attention was a full copy of CIW's re-inspection report.

Christine Jones, CIW provided the Committee with a presentation of the key findings of the Inspectorate's report. As part of the follow-up inspection, CIW evaluated the quality of practice, decision making and multi-agency work alongside the quality of the leadership, management and governance.

The key findings in October, 2018 include the following –

- The Isle of Anglesey's Children's Services are able to demonstrate significant improvement in a number of key areas with some areas still requiring further work.
- Staff morale is high and there is passion and commitment at all levels to continuing to work hard on the journey of improvement to deliver excellent services for children.
- The Information, Advice and Assistance (IAA) service has improved significantly since the last inspection in November 2016.
- Safeguarding responses are mostly timely and proportionate. There is room for improvement in collation and recording of evidence and analysis of risk.
- Improvements in management oversight and professional accountability at all levels is continuing to highlight cases where opportunities to support children have been missed in previous years.
- There is a lack of suitable placements for children. More work is required to ensure placement options meet the particular needs of children within their community.
- There is strong leadership and governance in the Isle of Anglesey County Council. Senior Officers are visible, available and driving improvements.
- There is positive feedback from partners about the changes they have seen in Anglesey, describing a new open culture and good joint working.

Ms Jones said that overall, Anglesey's Children's Services are in a much improved place compared to where they were in November, 2016 with the Service having a good understanding of its strength and weaknesses and the areas where more work is required. These are the early stages of an ongoing journey of improvement for Children's Services in Anglesey which will involve putting into practice the new policies, procedures and processes that have been developed and ensuring that improved performance against key indicators becomes embedded. The aim is to achieve sustainable improvement ensuring that in becoming a good service, Children's Services at Anglesey remain a good service in the long-term. The Service should monitor those areas it has developed, setting high expectations and maintaining a focus on audit and the delivery of policies that have been developed. Further follow-up by CIW will take place via its regular monitoring activity and will concentrate on specific case files to review the progress made in terms of the actions implemented, the supervision taking place, the quality of recording and the prevention of drift.

The Assistant Chief Executive (Governance and Business Process Transformation)/ Statutory Director of Social Services thanked Care Inspectorate Wales for the support and encouragement which the Inspectorate had provided over the past 2 years which had proved valuable in ensuring the Authority remained on the right course. The Officer said that thanks are also due to the staff of Children and Families' Services and to its Management Team and Head of Service for providing strong and clear leadership and to Elected Members through the Children's Services Improvement Panel, the Corporate Scrutiny Committee, the Executive and the Portfolio Member for their contribution in both supporting and providing challenge to the Service. The Service's working relationships with both its internal and external partners have also improved significantly during this time. The Officer gave assurance that the improvements achieved will continue, with lessons having been learnt from past experiences that it is essential to take steps to ensure there is no backsliding in terms of performance.

The Leader and Portfolio Member for Social Services echoed the Officer's thanks to all those who have shared the Service's improvement journey to date and said that the Strategic Leadership Team and the Interim Head of Children's Services who initiated the Service Improvement Plan following the original inspection, should also be included; she emphasised the importance of and commitment towards maintaining the momentum into the future.

The Head of Children and Families' Services said that the Service now intends to develop a new Service Improvement Plan which will incorporate the two elements of the current plan that need to be completed having regard also to the 14 areas of development highlighted by CIW in its follow-up inspection. In addition, the revised Plan will include elements which the Service itself has identified as requiring improvement. The new SIP will be presented to the Children's Services Improvement Panel in February; it will be shared with CIW and will only be implemented when there is consensus on the contents. The Officer said that the differentiation between the new SIP and the old SIP which has served its purpose well, comes from the enhanced self-awareness gained by the Service and its knowledge of where its strengths and weaknesses lie. It is an additional objective that the new Service Improvement Plan should reflect the input of the children and young people whom the Authority looks after as well as the Service's key partners.

The Committee, in considering CIW's follow-up inspection report and the Officers' and Portfolio Member's comments, made the following points -

- The Committee noted that it was pleased with CIW's follow-up inspection report and that it agreed with and accepted the contents, noting also that the report does not say anything that Management and Elected Members are not already aware of.
- The Committee acknowledged the collective contribution and commitment of all Children's and Families' Services staff over the past two years towards the improvement journey. The Committee noted further that there remains a strong commitment at all levels within the Authority to ensure that Children and Families' Services continue to improve on the journey towards becoming a consistently good service and that the Committee recognises and accepts that continued vigilance is required to ensure that there is no lapse in performance. This can be achieved by close oversight and monitoring of the Service and by being alert to any early signs of concern.
- The Committee recognised the positive contribution made by the Children's Services Improvement Panel since its establishment to the process of improving Children and Families' Services. The Committee noted that the Panel has provided its members with the opportunity to gain an in-depth understanding of Children and Families' Services thereby gaining a better appreciation of the complexities of the Service, meaning members are better placed to both support and challenge the Service and can do so with confidence. The Committee noted that the Panel will remain an important vehicle in ensuring that the Service continues to deliver on its improvement objectives, and it sought clarification of how it can contribute in other ways to the improvement agenda.

Christine Jones, CIW said that Social Workers need a framework and a structure within which to work as well as the fresh perspectives which others are able bring to safeguarding, including the Children's Services Improvement Panel. The Local Authority including its Elected Members in discharging their corporate parenting responsibilities need to know the children and young people they look after in terms of their needs, where they are at and the expectations for them and whether these can be met. They need to be diligent in remaining fully informed about the welfare and progress of the children they look after. Safeguarding is not the preserve of Social Workers but is everyone's business.

- The Committee noted that the Service position with regard to the first of the 14 areas for development identified by CIW in the follow-up inspection denotes the area as Green meaning that the actions in this area have been completed. The Committee sought clarification of whether this designation is premature given that the inspection report indicates that there is more work to do.

The Head of Children and Families' Services said and was corroborated by Christine Jones that of the 14 identified areas for development, maximising the opportunities to provide feedback to people who make referrals was a "quick win" in terms of implementation as an electronic form is already available and only needs to be used more consistently in order to communicate with those making referrals.

- The Committee noted that the recruitment and retention of staff and maintaining adequate levels of staff have historically been an issue for Children's Services. The Committee sought assurance that the Service's staffing arrangements are now adequate for the volume of work it is expected to deal with.

Christine Jones said that it is not the Inspectorate's role to advise on staffing levels. Neither are they prescribed by legislation. Social Work is underpinned by the four essential principles of the Social Services and Well-being Act 2014 which are People, Partnerships, Integration and Prevention; there are outcomes which the Service is expected to deliver for the people whom it comes into contact with in terms of their care, safety, dignity and respect. How these are achieved is determined by the Authority in the context of its priorities and budget requirements. It is Management's responsibility to consider the messages that come from the comments staff make about caseloads and to identify any underlying reasons for them. An additional factor is the quality and effectiveness of the Service's preventative services at the front door as well as the availability of resources in the form of placement options. These are all factors that can help or hinder the Social Worker role in day to day work.

The Head of Children and Families' Services said that significant investment has been made in Children's Services staffing over the improvement period which has led to the establishment of the Practice Group model and the Resilient Families' Team which has been particularly effective in relation to managing costs and securing better outcomes for children. The Service is aware that pressure from meeting the needs of the Leaving Care cohort of children will increase year on year from this point and consideration will be given to how this demand will be met internally. It is fortuitous that additional investment has been made in the Service as the Legacy Team has identified some historic cases that could have been dealt with more efficiently.

The Assistant Chief Executive/Statutory Director of Social Services said that the additional investment in Children and Families' Services was approved on the basis of a strong business case which clearly set out why the resources were required and how they would be spent.

- The Committee noted that CIW's follow-up inspection report identifies a lack of suitable placements for children and that more work is required to ensure placement options meet the particular needs of children within their community. The Committee sought clarification of the measures that can be taken to provide an increased range of placement options.

The Head of Children and Families' Services said that the Service is now implementing the Small Group Homes model which was recently approved by the Executive which involves developing Local Authority houses in suitable locations

within the community as homes for groups of two children at a time. One such house has been identified and the Service is working on locating another such dwelling. Such homes have to be registered by CIW the hope being that this can be done expeditiously. The Service has also received the Executive's approval for a new support package for the Authority's Foster Carers providing them with enhanced benefits. Although it is recognised that foster carers are motivated by considerations other than remuneration the introduction of the new support package has resulted in enquiries being made about foster caring.

- Whilst the Committee accepted that registering the Authority's small group homes is subject to necessary checks and balances to ensure the suitability of the properties, the Committee sought clarification of whether the registration process can be fast-tracked and whether CIW could report back to the Committee on this matter.

Christine Jones, CIW said that she would establish whether this is possible and confirmed that she would report back to the Authority adding that the registration process normally takes time because it has to be thorough.

The Assistant Chief Executive/Statutory Director of Social Services said that a team from CIW has been working collaboratively with the Head of Service for some time to identify the requirements and it is important that the Authority has all the necessary elements in place in readiness for the registration process. Once the first home has been registered, the process for preparing and setting up subsequent homes should be easier.

- The Committee noted that through its inspection process, CIW is seeking to provide assurance to Ministers and the public that statutory duties are being met; to drive improvement and to be alert to early indicators of concern. The Committee sought assurance that CIW is satisfied that these conditions have been met by Children's Services in Anglesey and that there is no cause for concern requiring immediate attention.

Christine Jones, CIW confirmed that the follow-up inspection had shown that no child identified as being at risk had not received a statutory response. She said that things can change within Social Services in a very short timeframe, sometimes as a result of one missed visit, meaning that having sufficient structures in place including supervision and audit, to ensure that should something be missed at the first stage it is then picked up down the line, is important. Whilst Children's Services on Anglesey are in a much improved position compared to two years ago, there is no room for complacency - the report notes that there is further work to be done; any relaxation of the drive for improvement could mean performance slips because that is the nature of Social Services. Regular supervision, management support, audit and clear evidence collection and recording are therefore essential.

- The Committee noted that providing adequate funding to meet demand within Children's Services is an issue; the Committee sought clarification of whether this is also an issue for Children's Services in other authorities in Wales.

Christine Jones, CIW confirmed that this is the message from Children's Services across Wales. As CIW's inspection approach changes to focus on individual, operational and strategic levels of service part of examining the strategic level of service will involve looking at whether budgets are aligned to need. As resources diminish, Authorities need to reflect on whether they have looked sufficiently at

integration, seamless services and building preventative services based on resilient communities.

The Chair, on behalf of the Committee, thanked Christine Jones for her presentation and her responses to the questions posed by the Committee.

Having scrutinised CIW's Follow-up Inspection report, the Committee noted that it was pleased with the report and agreed with its contents, noting that it did not contain any surprises. The Committee assured CIW that the recommendations of the report along with the Service's own self-assessment, will be used to develop a new Service Improvement Plan in order to further improve. It was therefore resolved –

- **To formally confirm that the Corporate Scrutiny Committee accepts the Care Inspectorate Wales Inspection of Children's Services Isle of Anglesey County Council Report and recommends the report to the Executive.**
- **Confirms that the Corporate Scrutiny Committee accepts and agrees with the Children and Families' Services' service position.**

ADDITIONAL ACTION – The Committee notes that CIW will report back with details of the registration process for the Authority's small group homes scheme and whether the process can be accelerated.

3 MATTER FOR INFORMATION – LIBRARY SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT 2017/18

The report of the Head of Learning incorporating the Library Service Annual Report for 2017/18 was presented for the Committee's information. The report highlighted the relative strengths and weaknesses of the Library and Information Service as identified in the 2017/18 Annual Report along with Welsh Government's (MALD) assessment of the Library Services 2017/18 Annual Report and the issues arising.

The report was noted for information purposes.

**Councillor Aled Morris Jones
Chair**