

CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the extraordinary meeting held on 10 December 2018

PRESENT: Councillor Aled Morris Jones (Chair)
Councillor Dylan Rees (Vice-Chair)

Councillors Lewis Davies, John Griffith, Richard Griffiths, Bryan Owen, Alun Roberts, Nicola Roberts

Co-opted Members: Mr Keith Roberts (The Catholic Church), Mrs Anest Frazer (The Church in Wales)

Portfolio Members

Councillor R. Meirion Jones (Portfolio Member for Education, Libraries, Youth and Culture)

IN ATTENDANCE: Chief Executive
Assistant Chief Executive (Governance and Business Process Transformation)/Director of Social Services (for items 2 & 3)
Head of Function (Resources) and Section 151 Officer
Head of Learning (for item 5)
Head of Children and Families' Services (for item 2 & 3)
Interim Head of Highways, Waste and Property (for item 5)
Architectural Services Manager (GWT) (for item 5)
Scrutiny Manager (AGD)
Committee Officer (ATH)

APOLOGIES: Councillors Richard Owain Jones, J. Arwel Roberts, Llinos Medi Huws (Leader & Portfolio Member for Social Services), Robin Williams (Portfolio Member for Finance), Dyfed Wyn Jones (Parent-Governor Representative),

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors Carwyn Jones (Portfolio Member for Major Projects and Economic Development) Dafydd Rhys Thomas (Portfolio Member for Corporate Business), Head of Democratic Services

1 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor Nicola Roberts declared a personal but not prejudicial interest in item 4 on the agenda as a governor of Ysgol Talwrn and Ysgol y Graig, Llangefni and the parent of a daughter attending Ysgol y Graig.

2 MONITORING PROGRESS - CHILDREN'S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The report of the Head of Children and Families' Services outlining progress to date in implementing the Service Improvement Plan was presented for the Committee's consideration.

The Assistant Chief Executive (Governance and Business Process Transformation)/ Director of Social Services reported that since the Service Improvement Plan was created in February, 2017 as a result of the CIW inspection of October and November, 2016 the pace of improvement within the Service has been significant with 13 of the 21 action points having now progressed to Green status. No action points are showing as Red and only 2 are on Amber with 6 on Yellow. The two amber areas relate to improving the quality of practice and reviewing all children who are looked after to ensure outcome- based care and support plans are in place in securing permanence. The Officer said that the Service is aware that some aspects will require more time to become fully compliant and these have been the subject of discussion in the Children's Services Improvement Panel which continues to closely monitor progress against the Plan. It is envisaged that work on the Plan will continue in order to ensure that all the action points raised by CIW progress to Green status by March, 2019.

In addition, there continues to be improvement against Performance Indicators during the last quarters as demonstrated by the table in paragraph 3 of the report which shows the improvement during Quarters 1 and 2 of 2018/19 compared to the cumulative figures for 2017/18 for the national and local PIs listed. The Service is committed to ensuring that this improvement is maintained and taken still further.

The Head of Children and Families' Services highlighted that as well as focusing on bringing the Amber and Yellow ragged areas to a Green status, the Service is also keeping a watching brief over the "Green" areas to ensure that no slippage occurs. The Service has continued to advertise and recruit experienced Social Workers with several appointments having been made leaving only one vacant Social Worker post that needs to be filled. Although the Service continues to employ agency staff who are engaged on an over-establishment basis as approved by the Executive to provide support to newly qualified Social Workers, the reliance on agency staff to fill vacant posts has greatly reduced.

The Committee in considering the report acknowledged the significant strides made by the Children and Families' Services in addressing the areas highlighted by CIW in its inspection of 2016 as requiring improvement, and it thanked the Service's staff for their collective effort, and also the Director of Social Services and Head of Service for their leadership in guiding the Service to this point. The Committee also made the following points –

- The Committee noted that the financial pressures that come with rising demand are affecting Children and Families' Services leading to overspending; the Committee sought clarification of how the Service assesses its likely financial position for the remainder of the current financial year.

The Assistant Chief Executive (Governance and Business Process Transformation)/ Director of Social Services said that the situation remains challenging with the number of children requiring care having increased further in the past 4 months. The Legacy Team established to reassess historical cases where the Service may not have responded appropriately has identified cases where the Service's original input needs to be reviewed as a result of which over 20 additional children have been brought into care bringing the total number of children and young people whom the Authority currently looks after to 161. This has cost implications for the Service. The Service is putting in place plans to increase the availability of local placements via the Small Group Homes model and an enhanced Foster Carers package which should help to bring down costs in the long-term. However, the Service's budget remains under pressure.

- The Committee sought clarification of the Authority's position with regard to the number of children and young people it looks after comparative to that of similar sized local

authorities. The Committee further sought an update on the work of the Resilient Families Team which was established to provide early intervention for children and their families in order to limit more intense and costly interventions down the line when children are brought into care.

The Assistant Chief Executive (Governance and Business Process Transformation)/ Director of Social Services said that figures for children in care per 10,000 of the population are produced annually along with the average cost per county. When comparing the data for local authorities it is sometimes difficult to draw out a clear pattern because authorities may have different models or they may be at different stages of modernising their structures and working practices so the figures can vary from authority to authority. The Service in Anglesey has been clear about focusing on the needs locally while being mindful of the national statistics – the county's figures for the number of children it looks after have been historically very low; they are now up to a level expected by the Authority and CIW if not slightly higher because the Authority is playing catch-up with regard to children who may have required care sooner and are now entering the system. Children who come into care remain in care for some time; where possible and where it is safe to do so the Service endeavours to return children to their families.

The Head of Children and Families' Services in clarifying the work of the Resilient Families Team said that the team has worked with 58 children many of whom would likely have come into care had not the team intervened early to work intensively with their families. The cost of the Resilient Families Team is in the region of £250k which when balanced against the cost of a single care placement which can also amount to £250k demonstrates the value of the resource in terms of both effectiveness and value for money.

The Head of Function (Resources)/Section 151 Officer said that the Service's financial position over the past two years has been challenging. The Service was overspent by £1.78m at the end of 2017/18. In anticipation of the continuation of the pressures on the service budget, the Service was given additional funding of around £300k from the Council Tax increase for 2018/19. Those expectations have been realised with the figures for Quarter 1 of the 2018/19 financial year forecasting an end of year overspend of £1.28m; by the end of Quarter 2 the predicted overspend had risen to £2.03m. A further revision to the end of October, 2018 shows the figure to be £2.07m. It is therefore hoped that the overspend has peaked at around the £2m mark and that the implementation of the Small Group Homes scheme and the enhanced package of benefits for Foster Carers approved by the Executive will start to yield results and help contain the overspend by the end of the financial year. In forecasting ahead, the Finance Service basis its projections on a worst-case scenario taking into account children who are known to Children's Services but who are not yet in care – if these children continue not to require care then the overspend will be reduced. For 2019/20 the Children and Families' Services have been allocated an additional £1.4m in the draft budget with the reasoning being that the budget uplift and the Service's own plans for managing expenditure will together bring down the overspend to a point where spending and the service budget more closely align meaning that from 2019/20, the Service is expected to operate within its budget. It has been made clear that in light of the Council's reducing reserves, it is difficult to justify making available any further additional funding to the Children and Families' Services unless there is a further significant increase in the number of children needing to be looked after.

- The Committee noted that the Christmas period can bring additional problems or intensify existing problems within families. The Committee sought clarification of the Service's arrangements for dealing with children who might require additional care at this time or be in need of care at short notice or in an emergency given that meeting those needs is likely to add to the pressures on the Service. The Committee noted the

introduction of the Universal credit system to Anglesey in December as an added complication at what is already a difficult time for some families.

The Head of Children and Families' Services said that although the Service has plans and is ready for Christmas and will be staffed over the period, historically there has been no major increase in referrals during this time. The Service always plans in advance of any significant events, holidays etc in the calendar year where circumstances can lead to or increase family tensions potentially creating more referrals. The Service's staff have also received training in relation to Universal Credit and are equipped to provide support for those families who are known to Social Services; the Service will however check referrals to establish whether there is any increase due to families experiencing financial difficulties or trying to come to grips with Universal Credit.

The Head of Function (Resources)/Section 151 Officer said that the effects of Universal Credit are likely to be felt gradually over a period of time as individuals transfer to the new system during which time also services will be able to improve their understanding of the impact as they see the effects on the numbers transferring. The most significant change is likely to be seen at the end of the summer as seasonal work ends and individuals making benefit claims make those claims under the Universal Credit system. The Finance Service is planning on the basis of an incremental increase in the meantime with the potential for a sharper increase at the end of the summer.

It was resolved that -

- **The Corporate Scrutiny Committee is satisfied both with the steps taken to progress the implementation of the Service Improvement Plan and the pace of progress and also with the pace of progress and improvements made to date within Children and Families' Services, and that**
- **The Committee recommends the report to the Executive.**

NO ADDITIONAL ACTION WAS PROPOSED

3 MONITORING PROGRESS - CHILDREN'S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT PANEL

The report of the Children's Services Improvement Panel on the work of the Panel to date was presented for the Committee's consideration.

Councillor Richard Griffiths, the Corporate Scrutiny Committee's representative on the Children's Services Improvement Panel in updating the Committee on the work of the Panel during the period from September to November, 2018 highlighted that the Panel had now met on 16 occasions since July, 2017 and that in that time its members have acquired a far better understanding of the issues and complexities involved in delivering Children's Services. Councillor Griffith referred to the schedule of Laming visits undertaken in the period October 2017 to September 2018 attached at Appendix A to the report which also provided a summary of the purpose and substance of each visit made.

The Assistant Chief Executive (Governance and Business Process Transformation)/ Director of Social Services said that the Panel has been of great help in the improvement process and that it is intended it should continue subject to a review of its arrangements for the longer term. The Officer emphasised however that the improvement journey is not at an end and that the Service is clear that more work needs to be done to complete all elements of the Service Improvement Plan and that this is likely to take a further 9 to 12 months.

The Committee in accepting and noting the update sought clarification of the position with regard to partnership working and also with regard to children who are home schooled specifically the availability of a national protocol.

The Assistant Chief Executive (Governance and Business Process Transformation)/ Director of Social Services confirmed that Children's Services have been consulting with Adults' Services on developing the arrangements to provide support to those young people who are making the transition from Children's Services to Adults' Services. Joint working and co-operation internally with the Learning Service and schools and externally with the BCUHB and North Wales Police have also improved. The Service now works with Adults' Services and the Housing Service on a joint planning basis rather than just for information sharing purposes. With regard to children who are home schooled, the Service seeks to ensure that it remains aware of children who are home schooled on Anglesey but that the quality of the education they receive is a matter for the Learning Service.

The Head of Children and Families' Services said that in light of the increase in the number of children who are home schooled on the Island, the Service has held three meetings to better understand the upward trend and the reasons for it. Consideration is being given to the arrangements internally for sharing information and also for assessing the children if required and for providing appropriate intervention to address any potential issues that might lead to children requiring a child protection plan.

The Head of Learning confirmed that although the Learning Service maintains a register of children who are home-schooled it is difficult for the Service to bring any influence to bear on the quality of the education that children so schooled, receive.

It was resolved to note the following –

- **The progress made to date with the work of the Children's Services Improvement Panel in terms of achieving its work programme.**
- **That all work streams pertaining to the Service Improvement Panel appear to be on target thus far.**
- **The areas of work covered during Laming visits as a means of further strengthening accountability and knowledge and understanding of Panel members.**
- **The ongoing development programme for Panel members much of which is delivered in-house**
- **The Committee noted also that the Panel has escalated for its attention the fact that although good progress has been made on implementing the revised staffing structure, a small number of social worker posts continue to be filled by agency workers. This is being addressed by appointing social workers (experienced and newly qualified) and supporting experienced support workers to qualify. The Committee further notes the actions taken to address this matter.**

NO ADDITIONAL ACTION WAS PROPOSED

4 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

It was resolved under Section 100 (A) (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, to exclude the press and public from the meeting during the discussion on the following item as it involved the disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 14 of Schedule 12A to the said Act and outlined in the Public Interest Test as presented.

5 SCHOOLS' MODERNISATION PROGRAMME: COMBINED STRATEGIC OUTLINE CASE AND OUTLINE BUSINESS CASE - EXPANDING YSGOL Y GRAIG AND CLOSING YSGOL TALWRN

The report of the Head of Learning incorporating the combined Strategic Outline Case and Outline Business Case (SOC/OBC) to expand Ysgol y Graig by building a new Foundation Phase block and closing Ysgol Talwrn was presented for the Committee's consideration and comment.

The Portfolio Member for Education, Libraries, Culture and Youth said that the SOC/OBC report is technical in nature and sets out the strategic, economic, commercial, financial and management grounds for expanding Ysgol y Graig by building a new Foundation Phase block and closing Ysgol Talwrn in line with the 21st Century Schools Business case process for capital funding for the project.

The Head of Learning said that the SOC/OBC sets out the case for the modernisation of the schools in the eastern part of Llangefni which is to be effected by building a new Foundation Phase block at Ysgol y Graig to accept the increasing number of pupils in the catchment area and to take pupils from Ysgol Talwrn which would then close. He referred to the key aspects of the proposal and the anticipated project costs along with the potential site for the new block, how the proposal is to be procured and the specification for the build. The financial case gives consideration to how the project will be funded and its overall affordability whilst the management case sets out the outline project plan and delivery schedule.

The Architectural Services Manager showed the Committee a plan of the potential site for the new Foundation Phase Block which was identified following a site evaluation exercise having particular regard to the need to site the new block as near as possible to the current Ysgol y Graig building. In explaining the plan, the Officer referred to the following considerations –

- The identified site for the new block is subject to confirmation.
- A detailed site survey has not been undertaken. However, as the site is very wet, it is likely that some extensive drainage engineering works will be required to resolve the land drainage issues on the site.
- The site is also likely to be subjected to intensive archaeological investigations to establish whether or not there are any potential archaeological features below ground.
- The works above as well as other possible works i.e. overhead powerline diversion could impact on the overall cost of the project.
- Other possible site options in the immediate area are being considered being mindful of the proximity factor.
- There are major traffic issues at the current Ysgol y Graig school site. The Highways Service has indicated that the traffic issues must be resolved for the complete campus as part of the project development which will mean a new car park to meet the minimum parking standards for schools that fulfils the requirements for both the existing school building and the new Foundation Phase block. The proposed scheme will see a new car park being sited between the existing Ysgol y Graig and the new Foundation Phase block which will serve both buildings.

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

- The Committee noted that from the plan as presented it found it difficult to see how the two buildings – the current school building and the new Foundation Phase block will work effectively as one school entity in practice. The Committee noted that the two sites are not as close to each other as it would have liked thereby increasing the risk that the two buildings will be run as separate entities; this concerned the Committee.

- The Committee noted that the proposal involves locating a new car park in an area between the two buildings regarding which it had reservations from a safety perspective there being serious traffic issues in the area. The Committee questioned the suitability of locating the car park in this position.

The Interim Head of Highways, Waste and Property advised that when Ysgol y Graig was built originally it was designed in accordance with Welsh Government's "green school" guidelines meaning it provided for the minimum parking requirement the intention being that pupils would walk to school there being a large housing estate close by. In practice, a large number of pupils are still brought to school by car with others from outside the catchment area also coming to Ysgol y Graig by car. Siting the proposed car park between the two buildings means that both are equally accessible from the car park whereas if the car park were to be located at the farther end, it would mean the pupils of the current school having to walk a greater distance.

- The Committee noted that providing its share of the costs of the project will in any case be challenging for the Authority. The Committee further noted that there are also project costs designated as "abnormal costs" due to site conditions. The Committee sought clarification of the risk of one or more of these costs escalating, thereby potentially affecting the whole project. The Committee noted in addition that if the costs of the project rise as a result of abnormal items it may have a wider impact on the overall funding for projects in other areas of the Island.

The Architectural Services Manager said depending on the final confirmed location of the new Foundation Phase block, some of the abnormal costs linked to site conditions may not materialise or may be mitigated. "Abnormal items" are included as a matter of course in the outline business case to be submitted to Welsh Government because if the projected costs exceed the Welsh Government's design cost standards (cost per square metre) it will be due to these abnormal items. Notwithstanding, the Officer confirmed that there are risks attached to unforeseen site conditions. A site survey will be undertaken at the earliest opportunity and any works identified as a result of the survey will be factored into the Full Business Case.

The Head of Function (Resources)/Section 151 Officer said that the project above is funded from the resources allocated for Band B by the Welsh Government. Welsh Government will fund the costs up to a specified cost per square metre as well as the abnormal costs in accordance with what it deems reasonable. Any costs above that limit which it deems not to be reasonable will fall to the Local Authority. Should the Welsh Government accept the abnormal costs as reasonable and as costs which the Authority has to pay then that is likely to affect the amount of Band B funding which the Authority draws on for the project meaning there is potentially less resources for other projects in the Authority's Band B funding envelope. However, it could be possible to transfer some projects to Band C for which funding is yet to be confirmed. An alternative funding option made available by Welsh Government is the Mutual Investment Model whereby a private partner builds and maintains the school with the Local Authority making an annual payment for use of the building for an agreed period. Welsh Government makes a contribution to the annual fee.

- The Committee noted that there is a need to provide additional schools places to accommodate the increasing number of pupils at Ysgol y Graig. The Committee sought clarification of whether it would be reasonable to consider reviewing the catchment area to enable pupils from the area to attend the proposed new school to replace Ysgol Corn Hir and Ysgol Bodffordd. Consequently a smaller extension to Ysgol y Graig might then be sufficient thereby reducing the cost of the project and potentially allowing the extension to be sited closer to the school.

The Head of Learning said that from a capacity perspective, both the extension to the Ysgol y Graig and a new school for Ysgol Corn Hir and Ysgol Bodffordd are required as planned. If the catchment area was changed to allow pupils from the area to attend the new school to replace Ysgol y Graig and Ysgol Bodffordd and the extension to Ysgol y Graig were to be reduced in size as a result, the new Ysgol y Graig school would have to be larger to accommodate the additional pupils which would drive the cost upwards offsetting any savings from reducing the size of the extension to Ysgol y Graig.

The Architectural Services Manager said that the capacity issues in the eastern and western parts of Llangefni means that changes need to be made to both the existing Ysgol y Graig and the existing Ysgol Corn Hir. Should the new school to replace Ysgol Corn Hir and Ysgol Bodffordd be completed sooner, it is possible that parents will chose to send their children to the new school. In any case proposed developments linked to the Coleg Menai campus mean that changes still need to be made to Ysgol y Graig.

- The Committee noted that at a time when the Council is facing a challenging programme of budget efficiencies over the next three years at least it is committing itself to a scheme of unsupported borrowing. The Committee sought clarification therefore of how affordable are the proposals in the combined SOC/OBC on top of the other schools modernisation schemes to which the Council has already committed itself.

The Head of Function (Resources)/Section 151 Officer said that it has been recognised from the outset that the school modernisation programme would entail costs to the Council. The increase in the Welsh Government's contribution to the costs of each project in Band B from 50% to 65% is of great help to councils in implementing school modernisation schemes. Although there will be costs to the Revenue Budget in the form of the Minimum Revenue Provision (the minimum amount which the Council must charge to the Revenue Budget each year to cover the cost of borrowing and interest charges) the proposal does generate annual savings and the capital receipts from the sale of Ysgol Talwrn can be used as part of the Council's contribution towards the costs thereby reducing the amount it needs to borrow to fund the project. It is unlikely that a capital programme to invest in schools whereby 65% of the costs of projects is borne by the Welsh Government will be made available again making it essential that the Council takes advantage of this opportunity to bring its school stock up to 21st Century standards; otherwise it is simply postponing the issue of modernising schools to a future date when it is probable the Council would have to fund the modernisation costs in full itself. The Twenty-First Century School programme is a long term investment programme whereby local authorities take out long-term borrowing to fund their school modernisation projects with the costs being spread out over a long term period/ the period during which a new school will operate.

Having scrutinised the SOC/OBC, the Corporate Scrutiny Committee resolved to recommend to the Executive that subject to its noting the Committee's concerns regarding traffic, the siting of the parking provision and the challenge of making the existing Ysgol y Graig and the new Foundation Phase Block work as one school entity, it approves –

- **The combined Strategic Outline Case and Outline Business Case (SOC/OBC) to expand Ysgol y Graig by building a new Foundatin Phase block and closing Ysgol Talwrn.**
- **Forwarding the combined Strategic Outline Case and Outline Business Case (SOC/OBC) to expand Ysgol y Graig by building a new Foundatin Phase block and closing Ysgol Talwrn to Welsh Government. (Councillor Lewis Davies abstained from voting).**

NO ADDITIONAL ACTION WAS PROPOSED

**Councillor Aled M. Jones
Chair**