

CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the virtual meeting held on 8 July 2021

- PRESENT:** Councillor Aled Morris Jones (Chair)
Councillor Dylan Rees (Vice-Chair)
- Councillors Richard Griffiths, Richard O. Jones, Alun Roberts, Margaret M Roberts.
- Portfolio Members**
- Councillors Llinos Medi Huws (Leader and Portfolio Member for Social Services), R. Meirion Jones (Portfolio Member for Education, Libraries, Culture and Youth)
- IN ATTENDANCE:** Chief Executive
Director of Social Services
Director of Education, Skills and Young People
Scrutiny Manager (AGD)
Committee Officer (ATH)
- APOLOGIES:** Councillors Bryan Owen, Nicola Roberts, Mr Keith Roberts and Mrs Anest Frazer (Co-opted Members), Councillor Dafydd Rhys Thomas (Portfolio Member for Corporate Business), Councillor Robin Williams (Portfolio Member for Finance), Mr Dylan Williams (Deputy Chief Executive), Mr J.Huw Jones (Head of Democratic Services)
- ALSO PRESENT:** Scrutiny Officer (SR)
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The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and referred to the main business to be considered comprising of the Annual Report of the Statutory Director on the Effectiveness of Social Services in 2020/21 which would also be presented to the Executive and thereafter to Full Council.

1 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor Dylan Rees declared a personal but not prejudicial interest with regard to item 3 on the agenda having volunteered with the Bwyd Da Môn initiative.

2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee held on 7 June, 2021 were presented and were confirmed as correct.

3 REPORT OF THE STATUTORY DIRECTOR ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SOCIAL SERVICES 2020/21

The Director's draft Annual Report on the effectiveness of Social Services in 2020/21 was presented for the Committee's consideration. The report is produced in accordance with statutory requirement and seeks to promote awareness and accountability for the performance and progress made over the past year in delivering Social Services within the Council as well as outlining the improvement priorities for the forthcoming year.

The Director of Social Services in presenting the report emphasised that it is a reflection of the achievements of Social Services working in partnership with other Council services, elected members, and supporting agencies to deliver the range of Social Services functions in 2020/21; it provides an overview of what has been achieved in the past twelve months in terms of making a difference in people's lives and it sets out the priorities for the coming year. The Director referred to the year gone by as having been one of the most challenging years to have been employed in Social Services because of the world wide coronavirus pandemic; thanks are especially due to all Social Services staff for their efforts and hard work during this very challenging period and also to the Authority's Foster Carers for meeting the challenges which adapting to a very different way of working created.

During the year Social Services maintained regular contact with Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) colleagues and both Adults and Children and Families' Services were the subject of a recent assurance inspection by CIW the outcome of which was positive and will be detailed in a formal review letter to be published in the near future. CIW also conducted visits to the Service's two Small Group Homes the feedback from which was equally positive. As people's needs evolve and change so must Social Services and the Service is looking at the way in which it provides services going forwards – a process which has been accentuated by the pandemic which has brought about a rapid change in the way that things are done and prompted the introduction of a number of innovative working practices. The Council and Social Services' Officers as professional practitioners play their part in contributing to both regional and national dialogue and discussions in order to ensure that the needs and voice of Anglesey residents are heard when decisions at those levels are made.

In highlighting some of many developments in Adults' and Children and Families' Services during the year the Director of Social Services referred to the shift to digital platforms and the use of technology to engage with a number of client groups including the development of virtual village halls and the provision of online services to support people with dementia and their carers; technology has also been used to deliver special interest and leisure activities including yoga sessions and a knitting club; the Service has been able to provide clients with the necessary technology and to support them in its usage. Partnership working has proved invaluable and Social Services has worked closely during the period with Medrwn Môn, Menter Môn and with Mencap Môn and has supported the latter with the opening of a Hub in the centre of Llangefni for adults and children with a learning disability. The number of Direct Payments clients has increased and with Covid related restrictions leading to the closure of community hubs/centres, clients have used their payments differently to make purchases that support their well-being.

With regard to Children and Families' Services, the drive to recruit foster carers has continued successfully despite the pandemic with 9 mainstream (general) fostering households being approved and 14 connected persons (family and friends) households. Two Small Group Homes were opened on Anglesey and together these provide a home for three young persons who would otherwise have had to remain in care placements out of county. The Adtrac Project which offers support into work and /or training for unemployed young adults has helped a number of young people during the year against the backdrop of Covid restrictions.

The Director of Social Services concluded by saying that the main message to be taken from the annual report is that Social Services has continued to meet all its statutory duties during the year whilst continuing to make progress with its development work in terms of changing the way services are provided so that they more closely accord with clients' expressed needs and wishes. The year has proved the value of partnership work to which Anglesey Social Services remain committed both with its internal partners within the Council with the Education and Housing Services being key partners, and more broadly with the third sector, local schools and the Health Board.

The Leader and Portfolio Member for Social Services referred to the challenge of providing statutory social services under the impact of Covid 19 and she congratulated the Director of Social Services for the guidance he had provided during the year and the staff whose efforts and hard work ensured the continued delivery of essential social services to the most vulnerable within the community. Social Services cover a range of functions and reach into the lives of many people and their contribution during the pandemic is equally deserving of public recognition as a key service.

The Committee acknowledged the worthy contribution of Social Services to the pandemic response effort and the Service's success in maintaining statutory provision throughout. The Chair highlighted the statistics at the beginning of the report which conveys in numbers who Anglesey Social Services has helped and supported during the year including 3,084 contacts with adults and 3,843 contacts with children and their families. In further considering the report, the Committee raised the following matters -

- The reasons for the growth in the number of Direct Payment clients. The Director of Social Services advised that the flexibility of Direct Payments has proved advantageous at this time as people who would otherwise have attended community centres have used the payments in different ways to achieve the outcomes they desire. Increased confidence in the process and system have also played its part as has the availability of increased resources to support the use of Direct Payments. The increase in Direct Payments can also be attributed to word of mouth recommendations with clients passing on their positive experiences of Direct Payment to others.
- Whether the pandemic has altered Social Services' priorities going forward. The Director of Social Services advised that whilst the vision for what Social Services want to achieve in terms of improvement objectives remains the same the timescales for many projects will in all likelihood have changed because of the pandemic with some being brought forward in order to meet people's needs and others slipping back. Attention will continue to be given to the services that will be delivered as well as how they will be delivered with increased focus on the use of digital technology to improve accessibility and participation. Following a review of Adults' Services consideration will be given to modernising the services under this heading with a view to making provision of services more efficient and delivery more effectual. The Service must also be mindful of the needs of its workforce whose efforts during the pandemic have not been as prominently acknowledged as some other key services but whose support has proved critical to the Health Service's success in managing the challenges of Covid 19. The Service will continue to develop services for children and young people who are looked after by the Authority including by further increasing the number of Local Authority foster carers and by expanding Small Group Homes.
- Whether the pandemic has led to an increase or a decrease in the number of people seeking support. The Director of Social Services advised that while demand for Social Services has increased generally in recent years, the onset of the pandemic and related restrictions saw a reduction in the number of referrals received. That pattern was reversed at the end of the first lockdown period when referrals began to increase and they have since increased significantly. The Service is looking at how it will

manage the increase in demand and is hopeful that confirmation of continuing ICF funding will be received as this is used to fund interventions that help prevent the escalation of needs and the involvement of statutory Social Services. In response to a further question about working in partnership within the Council during this time – specifically Education - the Director of Social Services confirmed that collaboration between Social Services and the Learning Service in responding to Covid 19 has been both strategic and operational and has involved information sharing, increased contact with schools and co-ordinated action which has helped in terms of identifying vulnerable and at risk children and providing essential support and provision for them and their families during the pandemic period. The Director of Education, Skills and Young People confirmed that the two services had been working together as a team and he cited as an example a project in the Holyhead area focusing on engaging with children which has been recognised by Estyn.

- Whether the Adtrac Project reached its targets for helping young people gain employment or training and whether there is a risk to the continuation of support now that Adtrac funding has ended. The Director of Social Services advised that the hard data does not convey the whole picture particularly as regards the extensive support provided in some instances to help young people who may not have left their homes for some time to re-gain confidence, re-engage and get to a better place mentally. Verbal feedback from young people and their families who have been helped by Adtrac reflects more fully the difference which the support provided by the Adtrac team has made to those individuals. The Director of Social Services confirmed that benchmarking the data against that of councils nationally he was satisfied with the work of the Anglesey Adtrac team and that its figures in terms of young people reached excel those of many a larger council in Wales. In respect of funding, a joint bid has been made for resources to enable the project to continue which has passed the first two stages; however, should that not come to fruition, the Service has formed a supplementary plan that would allow elements of Adtrac support to continue to be provided internally.
- The challenges and risks faced by Social Services going forwards. The Director of Social Services advised that Social Services are beginning to see the ongoing health effects of long Covid particularly in Adults' Services and the issue of how and by whom those needs will be met is a challenge; Social Services are working with partners in the Health Board and regionally to understand the needs of individuals with this new condition. Although 2020/21 proved to be a financially stable year for Social Services uncertainty about long-term funding especially ICF grant funding on which several elements of Social Services' work are reliant is a risk and a concern; efforts are being made nationally to obtain clarity on this issue and a Welsh Government announcement is expected soon. Demand pressures are expected to grow and will be a challenge and although Social Services have plans in place to manage demand in 2021/22 consideration will have to be given to demand management in 2022/23 and beyond. In light of the efforts expended in responding to the pandemic, ensuring the workforce's well-being will be a priority as will the recruitment and retention of staff which in the past has been a challenge in the social care sector.

- **Having thanked the Director of Social Services for his presentation and responses and for Social Services' work throughout the pandemic, the Corporate Scrutiny Committee resolved –**

- **To accept and to note the draft Isle of Anglesey County Council's Annual Director of Social Services' Report on the Effectiveness of Social Services in 2020/21 and to recommend the report to the Executive.**
- **To confirm that the Committee is satisfied that the report –**

- **Captures the Council's current position with regards to delivering Social Services.**
- **Accurately reflects its improvement priorities for both Adults' and Children and Families' Services for the forthcoming year.**
- **Reflects the Council's accountability and responsibility with regard to its Social Services.**

NO FURTHER ACTION WAS RECOMMENDED.

4 FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee's forward work programme to November, 2021 was presented for consideration. The Chair reminded Members to get in touch either with himself or the Vice-Chair should they have a topic which they would like to be considered for inclusion on the work programme.

It was resolved –

- **To agree the current version of the forward work programme for 2021/22.**
- **To note the progress thus far in implementing the forward work programme.**

**Councillor Aled Morris Jones
Chair**