

CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the virtual meeting held on 23 April, 2021

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

Councillors John Griffith, Bryan Owen, Margaret M Roberts

Portfolio Members

Councillors Llinos Medi Huws (Leader and Portfolio Member for Social Services), R. Meirion Jones (Portfolio Member for Education, Youth, Libraries & Culture) Alun Mummery (Portfolio Member for Housing and Supporting Communities) R.G. Parry, OBE, FRAGS (Portfolio Member for Highways, Property and Waste), Dafydd Rhys Thomas (Portfolio Member for Corporate Business), Robin Williams (Portfolio Member for Finance)

IN ATTENDANCE: Chief Executive
Deputy Chief Executive
Director of Function (Resources)/Section 151 Officer
Interim Director of Social Services
Head of Housing Services
Head of Democratic Services
Head of Profession (HR) & Transformation
HR Training Officer (CD)
Scrutiny Manager (AGD)
Committee Officer (ATH)

APOLOGIES: Councillors Richard Griffiths, Richard Owain Jones, Alun Roberts, J. Arwel Roberts, Nicola Roberts, Mr Keith Roberts, (Co-opted Member)

ALSO PRESENT: Corporate Programme Manager (Business Process Transformation) (KH), Scrutiny Officer (SR), Mr Gareth Williams (Local Democracy Reporter)

1 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor Dylan Rees declared an interest with regard to item 2 on the agenda as a volunteer with Bwyd Da Môn.

Councillor Robin Williams (not a member of the Committee) also declared an interest with regard to item 2 on the agenda.

2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The minutes of the meetings of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee held on 16 February and 8 March, 2021 were presented and were confirmed as correct.

3 COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19

The report of the Chief Executive outlining the Council's response to date to the coronavirus pandemic under the auspices of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 was presented for the Committee's consideration. The report focused specifically on the response in protecting the well-being of staff and communities and the effectiveness of the Track, Trace and Protect (TTP) strategy on the Island following a request by the Committee at its 14 September, 2020 meeting when considering the initial response to the pandemic that these particular aspects of the response be followed up subsequently.

The Chair said that this was an opportune time to reflect on the many who had sadly lost their lives to the coronavirus, their grieving families and friends and to think also of those who continue to suffer the effects of Covid-19. A minute's silence was held in remembrance of all those who had died as a result of the pandemic.

The Leader of the Council introduced the report as following on from the report presented to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 14 September, 2020 which detailed the initial response to the pandemic emergency from the perspective of the governance arrangements put in place, the key risk areas, redeployment of Council staff to help respond to the emergency, the financial impact and managing TTP at a local level.

The Chief Executive took the opportunity to thank everyone including the Council's staff, Elected Members and partners outside the organisation for the collaboration that had been critical to the success of the response to the pandemic hitherto.

The Deputy Chief Executive in setting the context emphasised that the daily uncertainty with regard to Covid 19 continues and although the situation at present is encouraging, circumstances can change very quickly. Whilst the challenges have been ebbing and flowing with each week, the Council's workforce has responded with commitment, resilience and flexibility and it is hoped that this agility and adaptability can be built on as the Council progresses with recovery. The structures both within and outside the Council have facilitated collaboration which has been a key element, making a rapid response possible and thereby helping to meet the challenges effectively. The collaborative efforts have also included the community as demonstrated by the situation in Holyhead which was managed within existing resources which was a significant challenge but which helped safeguard the health and well-being of the community. A piece by Audit Wales dated 22 April, 2021 refers to Covid-19 having demonstrated the value of local government in protecting people and communities; the Auditor General comments specifically *"our research has highlighted the vital part local government plays in protecting people and communities. The pandemic has seen local government stepping up to deliver essential services for their communities. However, a reduction in breadth of service delivery means local councils need to ensure they remain relevant to all their citizens. The pandemic has presented them with an opportunity to re-evaluate their role and find new innovative solutions to safeguard the essential services they provide."*

The Head of Profession (Human Resources) and Transformation referred to the TTP Strategy highlighting that the TTP systems are different in Wales and England; a regional model is operational across the 6 North Wales counties which is being funded by Welsh Government until 30 September, 2021. There are approximately 80 staff working for the local TTP team on Anglesey, including Business Managers, Tracers and Advisors. During the past 7 days, there have been 8 positive cases of Covid-19 on Anglesey most of which are linked to hospital; cumulatively the number of cases stands at 2,298 and the incidence rate is 11.4 (down from 17.2). A total of 540 tests have been carried out with a current positivity rate of 1.5 (down from 3.3). From the perspective of Anglesey Council as an employer, every Covid 19 related decision has been made having regard to the Council's duty of care to its staff as a responsible, considerate and good employer. A great deal of work has been undertaken co-operatively across the Council to support staff during this time enabled and facilitated by the Council's redeployment policy which was

one of a few of its kind amongst councils in Wales at the start of the pandemic. The support provided has included sharing information in a number of ways, the establishment at the commencement of the initial lockdown in March, 2020 of a Working from Home Well-being page which has kept staff updated on Coronavirus and health and well-being in general; the delivery of 21 information sessions on a range of health and well-being topics and the continuation of the of E learning programme to which Anxiety Awareness and Personal Resilience modules have been added. The report expands on these initiatives including the extent to which they have been accessed and/or utilised by staff during the pandemic thus far.

The Head of Housing Services spoke about the work undertaken to ensure the well-being of communities across the Island during this challenging period and he referred to the value both of the place shaping activity which had started before the onset of the pandemic which has contributed to the Council's understanding of its communities, and the existing partnership with Menter Môn and Medrwn Môn which has helped with establishing the Community Support Group. This provided a robust foundation for action to be taken swiftly and for support to be delivered to communities. Three work streams were identified and set up in relation to food supply, community well-being and volunteering. The demand has been high and 2,000 food packages have been prepared and distributed by food banks during the pandemic in what has been an unprecedented period. Medrwn Môn established the Neges Scheme which has provided 3,000 neges packs for vulnerable Anglesey residents. An additional food related stream is the Anglesey Good Food scheme which has focused on reducing food waste which will continue into the recovery period. One of the highlights of the response has been the way communities have rallied round to work together on a volunteer basis with 37 local area teams deploying 860 volunteers in operation during the first wave of Covid 19. Over the past year 8 Good Turn Schemes have been put on a formal footing and these have empowered communities to do more for themselves - 14,000 "good turns" have been undertaken for 1,700 individuals and these have included fetching shopping, medicines and keeping in touch which has proved especially helpful to people who have little or no family support. Volunteers have also taken individuals to receive their vaccination and have delivered Covid 19 test to households during the recent outbreak in Holyhead.

The Director of Social Services described the work done by Social Services' staff to support the pandemic efforts in addition to their statutory responsibilities including maintaining contact with vulnerable children and their families, delivering Free School Meals, distributing face masks to children and young people, providing over 600 activity packs and offering advice and guidance to parents who were struggling throughout this period. Contact Môn and Adult Services telephoned all residents on the shielding list totalling just under 4,000 people. A digital scheme through Medrwn Môn, Adults' Services and Gwynedd and Môn Age Well was launched with ICF funding to maximise the digital skills of Anglesey residents so they could attend virtual hubs and manage their food shopping or finance on-line.

The Officers were given an opportunity to summarise what they saw as the key considerations entering into the recovery period and a different normality. Reference was made to the substantive role of local government in the pandemic with local authorities expected to continue to play a pivotal role in recovery ; the importance of learning lessons from the experiences gained in responding to the emergency at organisational and community level including by remaining agile and by ensuring the resilience of both ; continuing to support the health and well-being of staff and keeping them fully informed; managing risks on an ongoing basis including the future of TTP after September, 2021; managing local outbreaks should they occur and maintaining vigilance and preparedness in case of a possible third wave of Coronavirus.

The Committee in commending the way the Authority had responded to and dealt with the pandemic working alongside communities and partners, raised the following points –

- Referring to the recent Coronavirus outbreak in Holyhead, the Committee wanted to know why Welsh Government did not put resources into vaccinating the Island as a whole in light of the fact that Holyhead was one of only two Covid 19 hotspots in Wales at the time and given that a proportion of Ynys Cybi residents had already been vaccinated.

The Deputy Chief Executive clarified that the focus of the efforts in Holyhead was to control the spread of the virus and reduce the number of cases; vaccination would not have achieved this objective. An interval of at least 28 days must elapse before a person who has tested positive can be vaccinated, and positive cases could not be identified until a mass community testing programme had been carried out. In addition, Welsh Government has put in place a clear vaccination strategy based on priority groups which it has adhered to despite pressures from various organisations and/or groups to do otherwise. Had the community spread in Holyhead persisted then further intervention might have been necessary; as it is the Incident Management Team in Holyhead will meet for the last time today and lessons will be taken nationally from the experience and practice of dealing with the outbreak in the area.

- In acknowledging the leading role taken by the Council in marshalling efforts to help and support communities in finding a way through the pandemic, and the willing response of communities, the Chair suggested that when time and opportunity allow, the lessons and good practices developed could be brought together in a handbook to illustrate community resilience on Anglesey on similar lines to that issued by the Local Government Association with reference to London.

The Chief Executive confirmed that lessons from the pandemic will be learnt and reflected upon; she advised that the work in Holyhead under the direction of the Deputy Chief Executive has been completed and will be the subject of a report which can be shared more widely subject to sign off by the Incident Management Team. Councillor Llinos Medi, Leader of the Council said that she would like to take the suggestion of a handbook on community resilience in Anglesey back for discussion to the Community Support Group in order to ensure that the handbook is not focused on the Council's perspective alone, but that it should capture the views and experiences of its partners in Medrwn Môn and Menter Môn as well.

- The Chair further sought clarification of the approach taken with regard to vaccination and whether information on take up by the Council's staff is available.

The Chief Executive advised that the Council's staff are strongly encouraged to accept the offer of vaccination and the importance of being vaccinated is emphasised in the Chief Executive's weekly messages to staff. The Head of Profession (HR) and Transformation confirmed that the Council has been working with the unions who support the efforts to encourage staff to be vaccinated and with the Health Board to deliver a question and answer session for staff. A video and FAQs section prepared by Health professionals are also available on the Council's intranet site. In response to a question about the deployment of staff who do not wish/are not able to be vaccinated in settings involving contact with the public, the Officer clarified that local authorities across Wales recognise that national guidance on the matter is required and it is understood that such guidance is in process; locally the approach is to encourage staff to be vaccinated and to continue to provide information in response to staff questions and any anxieties they may have on this point.

- Acknowledging the importance of the bottom line, Councillor John Griffith wanted to know the extent of the impact of the pandemic on the Council's financial position.

The Director of Function (Resources)/Section 151 Officer advised that from the outset Welsh Government has been providing financial support to help with the additional costs incurred in dealing with the pandemic and to make up for the loss of income. To date the Council has claimed in the region of £7m from Welsh Government most of which has been paid. The Council is projected to underspend by approximately £1m at the end of the 2020/21 financial year with a report on the 2020/21 budget outturn due to be presented to the Executive in May. The pandemic has not had a significant impact on the Council's finances because of the support provided by Welsh Government without which the Council would have had to utilise its reserves to meet the financial pressures created by Covid-19.

- In relation to the well-being of staff, Councillor Dylan Rees referred to a chaplaincy scheme which a local chaplain had offered to provide free of charge to the Council's staff; Councillor Dylan Rees said that he was surprised and disappointed that the initiative had been declined for reasons of equality and because the support arrangements in place are considered sufficient and that he disagreed with those reasons. He felt it showed a "can't do" attitude on the part of the Authority especially as he understood that North Wales Police had taken up the offer for its own staff. He asked the Council to reconsider and seek feedback on the scheme from North Wales Police or at least to run a pilot as he believed that staff could benefit from the availability of a listening ear at this time such as that offered by the chaplaincy scheme.

Both the Chef Executive and Head of Profession (HR) and Transformation expressed disappointment that Councillor Dylan Rees considered not taking up the offer as reflecting a "can't do" attitude particularly as the Authority's Officers have dealt with the pandemic in a "can do" way for 7 days a week. The Head of Profession (HR) and Transformation confirmed that a response on this matter had been sent to Councillor Rees personally since he had brought the offer to the Authority's attention, as well as directly to the applicant. She clarified that the Authority procures an independent counselling service from a professional company which has no faith perspective, thus ensuring that all staff are treated equally. In addition, aspects of the document which accompanied the offer did not meet with the Authority's requirements for the provision of such service. The Authority must have regard to its duty of care towards staff when considering the provision of service. Officers have been working under considerable pressures in dealing with the pandemic and they have also worked hard to ensure the well-being of staff during this time including by introducing a number of new initiatives as outlined in the report. The Head of Profession (HR) and Transformation advised that it was suggested to the prospective provider that the Authority saw no reason why an invitation could not be made for members of staff to contact the provider individually if they so wished but that she was not aware that such an invitation had been issued.

The Chair proposed that the Committee be provided with a report so that it could be apprised of the issues/considerations involved. Councillor Dylan Rees said that the intention was not to undermine current provision but to provide an additional service; he did not see the necessity of a report as he was only asking that the offer be reconsidered. The proposal that a report be submitted was not supported by the Committee.

- The Committee recognised that the recovery process will involve becoming accustomed to a new normality. Councillor John Griffith queried what the new normality will look like and in what ways will it differ to the pre-pandemic normality.

The Deputy Chief Executive advised that recovery will involve reviewing how the pandemic has changed the ways in which the Council operates and deciding what changes will be maintained in the long-term being mindful also that much of what the Council does is statutory and will continue. It is envisaged that the Council will move towards a hybrid model in the next phase wherein some pre-pandemic elements will be retained alongside some of the new practices/ways of working adopted during the pandemic period in order to create a future that will be different. This work has commenced by inviting feedback from middle managers who by virtue of their position have a direct link to their frontline teams as well as an understanding of strategic direction, performance management and accountability requirements. The pandemic provides an opportunity to effect a change of culture for the better, and to work in more effective ways in terms of performance, meeting the needs of the community and also achieving balance between work and personal well-being. It is anticipated that it will be September, 2021 when the Council is able to move with confidence into the next normal phase after which it is expected that there will be a cycle of changes as the post pandemic situation evolves.

In response to a question about the resumption of the democratic process at the Council's Offices, the Chief Executive advised that work is ongoing in the background to assess what is possible subject to the guidelines being observed, to accepting that the vaccination programme improves but does not resolve the situation, and to there being no third wave of the virus.

It was resolved to note the Council's response to the pandemic and specifically the response in protecting the well-being of staff and communities and the effectiveness of the Track and Trace Strategy.

Additional Action: That an Anglesey Community Resilience Handbook be created to capture the lessons and good practices of the pandemic at community level. The LGA London Community Resilience Handbook to be consulted as reference and the Community Support Group to be consulted for input.

4 FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee's forward work programme to November, 2021 was presented for consideration.

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**