
CARE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 31/01/19

PRESENT: Councillor Eryl Jones-Williams (Chair)
Councillor Dewi Wyn Roberts (Vice-chair)

Councillors: Menna Baines, Annwen Daniels, Cai Larsen, Beth Lawton, Dafydd Owen, Rheinallt Puw, Peter Read, Angela Russell and Catrin Wager.

Officers: Gareth James (Members' Manager - Support and Scrutiny), Eirian Roberts and Rhonwen Jones (Member Support Officers).

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

In relation to item 5 on the agenda - Councillor Dilwyn Morgan (Cabinet Member for Children and Young People), Marian Parry Hughes (Head of Children and Supporting Families Department), Aled Gibbard (Senior Operational Manager - Care Resources) and David Owen (Post-16 Team Manager).

In relation to item 6 on the agenda - Dewi Morgan (Senior Manager - Revenue and Risk) and Dylan Griffith (Benefits Manager).

In relation to item 7 on the agenda - Aled Davies (Head of Adults, Health and Well-being Department) and Bethan Richardson (Temporary Business Support Officer).

Rhonwen Jones, Member Support Officer, was welcomed to her first meeting of this committee.

1. APOLOGIES

Councillors Anwen Davies, Alan Jones Evans, Medwyn Hughes, Elin Walker Jones, Linda Ann Jones. Also Councillor W. Gareth Roberts (Cabinet Member for Adults, Health and Well-being).

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were received from any members present.

3. URGENT ITEMS

No urgent items were received.

4. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meetings of this committee held on 6 and 15 November 2018, as a true record.

5. YOUNG PEOPLE LEAVING THE COUNCIL'S CARE

Submitted - the Report of the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, providing the Committee with information on young care-leavers, referring specifically to:

- the Council's progress against the Child Commissioner's Hidden Ambitions report;

- the 'When I'm Ready' scheme;
- contact with the Corporate Parent Panel;
- the achievement of looked-after children; and
- Welsh medium out-of-county services.

The Cabinet Member and officers expanded on the content of the report, and also responded to questions / observations from the members.

The following main points were highlighted during the discussion:

- The success of the service offered to young people between 21 and 25 years old was highlighted through the fact that 38 of the 40 open cases had opted to continue to receive the support.
- The fact that the personal counsellors assisted the young people to claim the financial support available to them was welcomed.
- Support was expressed towards the collaboration arrangements with the universities, which now acknowledged the situation of young care-leavers, e.g. through allowing the extension of their course length.
- It was noted that it was evident that the department's understanding of young people's development had improved and that it could therefore give them the appropriate support at the right time.
- It was suggested that the wording of the service's letter to care-leavers (included in the appendix to the report) was lengthy and complicated, and it could be more inclusive. Nevertheless, the difficulty due to the expectation for the letter to be in-keeping with the report of the Children's Commissioner was acknowledged.
- The members were glad to hear that an enthusiastic group of young people and workers were eager to re-establish a young people accommodation and support group, and the intention to engage with these people through social media was welcomed.
- It was emphasised that it was important that the individual fulfilled his/her full potential, and although this was measured by the department, it was not shown in the Government's statistics on looked-after children's GCSE results.

To conclude, the Chair thanked the Cabinet Member and the officers for the information and their answers to the questions, noting that it was clear that the service was doing its best for previously looked-after young people.

The Cabinet Member noted that he would like to take the opportunity to thank the Post-16 Team for going the extra mile in supporting these young people.

Copies of the individual case study that received support from the ADTRAC (a scheme to support young people between 16 and 24 years old in North Wales who faced barriers that prevented them from moving forward into education, employment or training) were given to the members at the end of the meeting.

6. DISCRETIONARY HOUSING PAYMENTS

Submitted - the report of the Cabinet Member for Housing, Leisure and Culture, responding to the committee's enquiries at its previous meeting on the Council's expenditure on the Discretionary Housing Payments.

The officers elaborated on the content of the report, and also responded to questions / observations from members. Referring to paragraph 32 of the report, it was noted that the remaining amount of money to spend in this financial year had reduced from £47,446.91 to

just under £23,000 since the time of preparing the report, and that over 1,500 applications had received support.

The following main points were highlighted during the discussion:

- The fact that Gwynedd received the rural enhancement as a result of lobbying by local authorities, including Gwynedd, was welcomed.
- As the Government had committed funding in 2015 for the Discretionary Housing Payments scheme for a five-year period only, a concern was expressed regarding what would happen if the funding ended in 2020/21, especially given the delay in introducing the new universal credit arrangements. The fact that units within the Council had identified and started to look at this and that lobbying work had already taken place was welcomed, and it was also noted that the Council had scope to work jointly in terms of lobbying with the other Councils in Wales that received the rural enhancement.
- The members were satisfied that the Council's actual expenditure had been very close to the sum allocated by the Government for Discretionary Housing Payments in each year. Also, due to the nature of the expenditure, where expenditure for the whole year needed to be committed, and where contingency funds needed to be retained to deal with new applications that would come in during the year, it was believed that the annual performance in terms of the variation between the budget and the actual expenditure was within the expected limits.

To conclude, the Chair thanked the officers for a full and clear explanation of the situation.

7. SUPPORTING GWYNEDD'S DISABLED PEOPLE SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION - UPDATE

Submitted - a progress report on the work of the Supporting Gwynedd's Disabled People Scrutiny Investigation, to:

- remind the members of the background and the aim of the investigation;
- elaborate on the background of the prosthetic and wheelchair provision that was currently available and evidence of the service users; and to
- outline the next steps.

The Chair of the Working Group, Councillor Dewi Roberts, and the officer, elaborated on the content of the report, and also responded to questions / observations from members. It was noted that eight other service users had given evidence since the report was prepared, and that all of them were having difficulties and were critical of the service received.

The following main points were highlighted during the discussion:

- The importance of getting the right wheelchair was emphasised, as it could make a real difference to the individual's life.
- Concern was expressed that there was no specialist in Wrexham for active wheelchair users, such as young people who had suffered an accident.
- It was noted that one of the current problems was the lack of communication on various levels.
- It was suggested that there was a perception of differing standards of service provided by various Posture and Mobility Service (PMS) centres across Wales, and the need to investigate this further was emphasised.

To conclude, the Chair noted that it was evident that the Working Group was looking into this field in detail, and he asked that the Investigation continue with its work and submit recommendations to this committee when the full picture was obtained.

The meeting commenced at 10.30 am and concluded at 12.00 pm

CHAIRMAN