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## SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

### 28.11.13

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**Present:** Councillor Dyfrig Siencyn – Chairman

**Councillors:** Huw Edwards, Elin Walker Jones, Siôn Wyn Jones, Eryl Jones-Williams, Beth Lawton, Dilwyn Lloyd, Dewi Owen, Liz Saville Roberts, Ann Williams, Eirwyn Williams and Hefin Williams.

**Others invited:** Cllr. Siân Gwenllian (Cabinet Member - Education), Cllr. Paul Thomas (Cabinet Member - Gwynedd Iach), Cllr. John Wyn Williams (Cabinet Member -Housing), Cllr. R H Wyn Williams (Cabinet Member - Care).

**Also Present:** Morwena Edwards (Corporate Director), Iwan Trefor Jones (Corporate Director), Nia Elis-Williams (Senior Business Manager/Executive Support), Marian Parry Hughes (Senior Manager Children's Services), Ian Jones (Senior Development Manager), Arwel Owen (Senior Manager Housing), Arwel Ellis Jones (Senior Manager Corporate Commissioning Service) and Glynda O'Brien (Members' Support and Scrutiny Officer),

**Apologies:** Councillors Peter Read, Linda Ann Wyn Jones, Llywarch Bowen Jones, Rev Robert Townsend (Church in Wales), Dilwyn Ellis Hughes (UCAC)

#### 1. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Dilwyn Lloyd to his first meeting of this Scrutiny Committee.

#### 2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

- (a) Councillor Eryl Jones Williams declared a personal interest in Item 7, Implementation and Grant Expenditure on Adaptations for Disabled People, as his wife was disabled and he would withdraw from the Chamber if matters were discussed regarding this interest.
- (b) Councillor Dilwyn Lloyd declared a personal interest in Item 7, Implementation and Grant Expenditure on Adaptations for Disabled People, as he was registered disabled and he would withdraw from the Chamber if matters were discussed regarding this interest.

### 3. MINUTES

The Chairman signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee held on 3 October 2013 as a true record, subject to adding the name of Mr Dilwyn Ellis Hughes (Teaching Union representative) to the list of those present.

### 4. CORPORATE PARENTING

The report of the Cabinet Member – Education was presented in response to the following questions of interest by Members on work linked with the Council's corporate parenting:

- (a) Number of children that the Council acts as a corporate parent for them and the arrangements for taking on this responsibility.
- (b) How do the Council's arrangements tie-in with the Welsh Local Government Association's checklist for the role of a corporate parent?
- (c) Arrangements to commence discussion with looked after children and respond to their views.
- (d) Arrangements to share practical responsibilities across members and Council officers.
- (e) Membership, responsibilities and arrangements of the Corporate Parent Panel, giving attention to good practice.
- (f) Measuring the Council's success as a corporate parent – the current assessment of the work.

Members were given an opportunity to ask questions on the contents of the report and the relevant officers responded as follows:

- (i) It was explained that it was a challenge for the Service to recruit individuals for foster care, however, an assurance was given that an emphasis was placed on the need to be bilingual when advertising.
- (ii) It was explained that the Council's strategic plan gave appropriate attention to this in order to extend placements and work experiences and they worked closely with Careers Wales and the Llandrillo Menai Group to get opportunities for young people. It was also trusted that other employers were eager to offer apprentice opportunities for young people and it was understood that an officer from Careers Wales was collaborating with the Child Care Team for joint planning in order to respond to the needs of the children.
- (iii) The 'End to End' review stressed the importance of early intervention in the lives of needy children in order that they would not have to be referred to residential care. However, it was noted that it was inevitable that some children would have to go into residential care due to their circumstances and profound needs. It was proposed to report to the Cabinet with recommendations early in the New Year
- (iv) An assurance was given that it was possible for clients and foster parents to contact a team of Social Workers who work outside working hours across Gwynedd and Anglesey. In response to a further query regarding continuing care when a child moves out of care to be independent, it was explained that the Service had a statutory plan for them.
- (v) That 'Speakout' was a group of looked after young people who meet four times a year which gave these young people a voice. The group was established approximately ten years ago in Gwynedd and facilitated by the Advocacy Service (National Youth Advocacy Service). It was noted that the Senior Manager Children's Services attended these meetings together with Cabinet members.

- (vi) Several Members noted that they were very interesting meetings and what stood out was how supportive the children were of each other and the importance of strengthening the relationship in order that they do not feel isolated when having to move from one place to the next. It was pleasing to note further that the Council's direction placed emphasis on listening to the voice of the child and in the last Panel meeting there was emphasis on collecting more qualitative data rather than merely quantitative. This discussion was welcomed as well as the need to be creative when creating opportunities for children to succeed.
- (vii) A Member wished to see many more Members attending the training.
- (viii) It was explained that the Advocacy Service provided a service to six authorities across North Wales with a budget of £50,000 per annum and was statutory to this cohort of children comprising children in need, looked after children and young carers.
- (ix) In terms of the future of the Corporate Parent expanding across authorities, the Cabinet Member for Education reminded members of the work that was on-going by the Commissioner Sir Paul Williams on the reorganisation of local government and the integration of the health service and social services.
- (x) It was asked what the service was doing to alleviate the young peoples' feelings of unfairness. In response, it was noted that as a corporate parent it was necessary to look at the role and try to imitate the role of real parents. Reference was also made to the need to add more qualitative analyses and the possibility of taking direct responsibility for this cohort of children. Reference was made to an example of a national project "When I'm ready" that the Service was part of where young people continue at a placement once they reach 18 years old if they are not ready to move on, and three individuals had chosen to remain where they were. It was recognised that it was difficult at times for young people to gain access to courses if they had any offences. An assurance was given that the Service dealt with every case individually by discussing them with the Colleges and the next step was to look at the larger picture to see the reasons why these young people had offended.
- (xi) In terms of drafting a corporate strategy and the process, it was noted that the Corporate Director (ITJ) would present a strategy to the full Council in April 2014 that will set clear standards for the Service and it was important to note and understand the young people's perspective regarding public services in the area. Sessions would take place with young people in due course in order to understand their needs and that these would be incorporated in the strategy and ensure corporate ownership across the Council.
- (xii) For information, it was noted that the Annual Report of the Corporate Parent's Panel would be submitted to the full Council on 5 December and it was suggested that it would be an opportunity to note the disappointment regarding the level of attendance by members in training last year, namely 24. It was suggested further that use should be made of the Area Forums to hold training that would perhaps attract more to attend.
- (xiii) The wish of the Scrutiny Committee was to know if the Council was succeeding in this field and how this was measured. In response, the Corporate Director (AME) was of the view that the discussion in the Panel had been fairly open and there was a need to do more work to ensure that young people were happy with the service. It was added that it was necessary to be much closer to the young people to ascertain what was successful and what was not, in order to find out the quality of the service offered. It was confirmed that the Service was on a journey but an assurance was given that they had a specific and clear path to move on and a much better response could be given to the above question in a year. The Senior Manager Children's Service noted that information was available regarding the successes of looked after children's educational results etc., but messages could

be received and an action plan could be drafted from the two investigations that the Service would face soon by the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) namely on 9 December 2013 and the other between January and April 2014 on the quality of life of looked after young people.

- (xiv) In response to the concerns of a member regarding post-care accommodation and the need to do more to ensure suitable homes for young people in care, the Senior Manager Children's Services referred to the historical problems and the tendencies in the past to place young people in one place and consequently this lead to anti-social behaviour problems. Research conducted by an independent person lead to a framework and they went out to contract for more providers in the field that could offer a better service. It was noted that the Service had a statutory responsibility for young people who leave care but on a voluntary basis only. It was ensured that the Service worked closely with Careers Wales, colleges of further education, GISDA and the health service in order to ensure a better quality of life for these young people and try to target and give suitable support to their needs.
- (xvi) That is was expected that colleges of further education would ascertain where students had reached in their lives and would it not be an idea as a step to measure success and as the Council's desire in its role as a corporate parent to see where looked after children had reached.
- (xviii) In the last two years it was seen that younger children were referred to the Service and it was comparatively easy to place young babies as there was an opportunity for them to be adopted, however in terms of older children it was a huge challenge for the Council as a corporate parent to offer placements.
- (xx) In response to a query regarding the reasons why children were referred younger, the Senior Manager Children's Services noted that it was difficult to specify one reason, however the tendency was for children to be referred due to injuries, inappropriate sexual behaviour, drugs and alcohol.

**Resolved: To accept and note the contents of the report together with the above observations.**

## **5. LEISURE CENTRES SUFFICIENCY REVIEW**

An update on the Gwynedd Leisure Centres Sufficiency Review was presented that was completed by an external specialist company 'Just Solutions'.

The Gwynedd Iach Cabinet member set the background by referring to the purpose of the review, namely to inform the Council of the local necessary provision to address future needs, identify possible schemes for improvement, rationalisation and development; together with securing the best possible management arrangements in order to take advantage of the improvement agenda and what the people of Gwynedd wish to have as facilities, which was identified earlier in the Review. Mr Howard Tolley and Ms Sarah Green from Just Solutions were welcomed to the meeting and it was noted that both were experienced in the field and had worked with several authorities across north Wales. The Cabinet member reminded the committee that the review had been on-going for some years and he referred to Appendix 1 attached to the report, namely an Executive Summary of the Just Solutions review. He stressed that it was necessary to consider what was possible for the service to achieve within the financial challenge and implications facing the Council. An apology was given that it was not possible to present the full Just Solutions report before the Committee as the translation was not ready. The intention of the Cabinet Member was to present the full report bilingually to the Area

Forums in order to hold local discussion regarding the contents and then to draft an action plan.

During the ensuing discussion the following observations were highlighted by individual Members:

- (a) It appeared that the Council was assisting the Health Service and therefore should not the Health Service contribute towards the costs, bearing in mind that the Welsh Government stressed the need for them to cooperate with authorities?

In response, it was explained that the Council Service worked closely with the Betsi Cadwaladr University Board in order to move the Service to create a culture of health improvement and keeping people as healthy as possible to enable them to live in their own homes as long as possible rather than having to move to residential care. However, it was also recognised that it was necessary to consider steps for the short term and the report before them addressed those needs.

- (b) That there were very interesting ideas in the review summary together with models to be implemented locally.
- (c) A request was made for an explanation regarding the recommendation that further consideration should be given to place leisure in the correct Service/Department.

In response, one of the consultants explained that it was the Council's decision in the end to place Leisure in the correct Service/Department and it was stressed that the purpose of the report was to ascertain the principle of supporting Leisure centres and motivate young people to undertake physical activity be that in a Leisure Centre or in any outdoor activity. In order to try and maintain the Service it was inevitable that there should be a joint community approach in order to give a better offer to the customer as well as more variety. The importance of unifying activities was noted not necessarily via a structure but in the way that provision is provided to communities.

- (ch) Concern regarding the idea of moving libraries, community centres etc as it would be more difficult for people to reach them.

In response, it was recognised that the above point was interesting and would be subject to a Cabinet discussion in due course. The Corporate Director felt that it would be a shame to place too much emphasis on structures as the Council corporately looked across the Services and no Service should consider itself in isolation. Whatever service would be responsible for this field the most important thing was to cooperate and provide the correct activities in an effective way. There should be a focus on the outcomes and not the boundaries of the structures within the Services/Departments. It could already be seen that some Leisure Centres offered provision for youth, nursery groups, tourist centres etc but certainly more such opportunities could be offered.

- (d) That Gwynedd Council's aim was to improve the public's quality of health, however, in the current financial climate it was asked if the Council should look to advertise the Leisure Centres and offer a discount to Council staff for their use that would in turn save job losses.

In response, the consultants did not envisage that a discount offer to staff would make a huge difference to Leisure Centre business but it did suggest that the Council should contact staff to advertise activities in the Leisure Centres via salary slips, headteachers as well as contacting Universities, Colleges of Further Education, employers in the area as it was felt that links were important.

The consultants referred to examples of communities in Gwynedd with approximately seven different clubs within the same town and it was suggested that there should be an understanding of the requirements of the communities as as a result a different provision could be offered that would create savings. It was important to work together with the voluntary sector and it should be considered and borne in mind that every community was different in terms of their needs.

- (dd) That voluntary organisations were decreasing within communities.

In response, it was recognised that this was true, however, having said that worthwhile work was undertaken by voluntary organisations. Collaboration with volunteers and especially the parents of young people underpinned any community. They were aware through cooperation with sports organisations that commendable work occurred in schools in the field of sports and that assistance could be given to promote this better by collaboration with parents etc. The Council's role was to support the voluntary sector and the key point was how they could be assisted to offer a better and easy provision. This could not be done unless basic changes were made.

- (e) The importance of contacting and discussing with local clubs within communities to find out what they could contribute to running leisure centres was noted.

The consultants agreed with the above comment and it was central for the Council to work jointly with voluntary clubs and offer support for them to be able to expand.

- (f) It was asked if there was an opportunity to market school resources such as playing fields, gymnasiums, halls for use outside school hours.

In response, the consultants stated that operating as a community was central to sharing the vision and that it was much easier in rural communities to get people to collaborate. It was necessary to re-structure the service that was offered.

**Resolved: (a) To accept, note and thank the Cabinet member and the consultants for the report.**

**(b) Support the intention of the Gwynedd Iach Cabinet Member to present the full report to the Area Forums for a local discussion prior to drafting an action plan.**

## **6. IMPLEMENTATION AND GRANT EXPENDITURE ON ADAPTATIONS FOR DISABLED PEOPLE**

A report was presented by the Cabinet Member on the implementation and grant expenditure on adaptations for disabled people.

(i) The Cabinet Member for Housing set the background by stating that there were three types of funds for disability facilities grants:

- (a) Disability Facilities Grant – Private Sector
- (b) Adaptations for Disabled Housing Association Tenants
- (c) Disabled Adaptations within Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd

(ii) Within the above, there was a minor adaptations grant for the disabled to complete minor work and adaptations up to £350 which can be completed quickly usually within 15 days of referral, and was not part of the performance indicators. It was noted that there was a slippage in the performance indicator, however, the composition of the type of work influenced the timetable with larger work taking more time.

(iii) It was explained that some adaptations were very complex and there was a need to submit a planning application for extensions and this contributed to the time taken to deal with the grant application with the other applications being fairly simple and taking less time to process. At the end of the process, the Service invites individuals to submit comments in the form of a questionnaire and from the last feedback 96% of the clients complimented the work. However, it was noted that the view was that the timetable to process applications could be reduced and research was conducted recently and out of the 19 cases, it appeared that the clients themselves had contributed to the delay in eight of those cases. Whilst accepting that there were opportunities to improve, it was noted that the Service was being penalised at the expense of circumstances that they had no control over them.

(iv) Members were given an opportunity to scrutinise the contents of the report and they highlighted the following points:

(a) A Member gave high praise to the scheme from his experience of receiving adaptations to his property some years ago with the work being completed within three months.

(b) In response to a query regarding the slippage in indicator PSR/002, the Senior Housing Manager trusted that the indicator could be reinstated this year and the target of 15 days would be reduced for next year. He added that within the minor adaptations scheme work was undertaken within eight days. The minor adaptations schemes meant that applications did not have to go to larger adaptation grants that take more time and if more minor adaptations were undertaken the percentage indicator for the Service would decrease. The Senior Housing Manager was of the view that Gwynedd had more major adaptations and that this type of adaptation work could not be completed within 175 days.

It was added that one significant change had been introduced in the system recently namely that any sum above the maximum of £36,000 would be referred on the grounds of a legal charge on the property i.e. if the client moved house the Council could recover any investment made and it would be possible to focus on what was actually needed rather than this.

(c) It was stated that there was a tendency these days to expect people to remain in their homes for longer rather than refer them to hospital and to residential care. The Member was of the opinion that as there was more demand for adaptation grants that the budget should be increased and the communication was vital in order that individuals were aware of what was available. The tendency was that individuals were

not willing to admit that their health was deteriorating and they were not willing to ask for help.

In response, the Housing Cabinet Member noted that whilst he agreed with the above comment the Council's policy was to keep individuals in their own homes longer and it was a challenge of when to intervene. In terms of the budget, the problem was that the purpose of the scheme was to invest in private housing stock and it was an increasing challenge for the Service when individuals move from the house to recover the investment.

The Corporate Director (AME) added that in the future it would be necessary to look differently at expenditure and if the priority would be to keep individuals in their own homes for as long as possible, there would have to be a transfer within the budget and consequently perhaps at the expense of the budget of another service.

(ch) In response to a query regarding the relationship with Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd, the Senior Housing Manager confirmed that the relationship had improved. A sum of £600,000 had been allocated to them and it was assured that expenditure was under control and the forecast for the future was promising and it was trusted that this relationship could be built upon.

The Senior Manager – Corporate Commissioning Service added that quarterly meetings were held with Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd and that only a few individual responses had been received by Members regarding any concerns.

Stemming from the ensuing discussion, when concern was highlighted by Members regarding the standard of work by Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd in their individual Wards, it was suggested that an item should be placed on the next agenda of the preparatory meeting of this Scrutiny Committee for further consideration. It was further suggested to the individual Member that details of the specific case in his Ward should be presented to the Senior Housing Manager at the end of this meeting.

(d) It was asked who was responsible for the maintenance of the machinery installed in the houses, such as chairlifts etc. In response, the Senior Housing Manager confirmed that there was an agreement with the Company that installs the equipment with maintenance for two years. It was noted that the tenant or house owner was responsible following this as they owned the adaptation. It was confirmed that tenants and owners were aware of the terms at the start of the negotiation process with the Company.

(dd) In response to a query regarding sufficient capacity to undertake the work following the assessment of clients, the Senior Housing Manager explained that Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd had their own contractors. In the context of the Council, it was dependent on the level of expenditure and the process – with a contract under £5,000 three estimates for the work were invited, over £5,000 tenders were invited. In terms of larger contracts, work to install equipment would be undertaken by builders with companies working regularly for the Council. It was noted that some areas and their timetables were more challenging than others however, following the letting of a tender it was expected that the work would commence within six weeks.

**Resolved: (a) To accept and note the contents of the report together with the above observations.**



**(b) To request that the next preparatory meeting of this Scrutiny Committee considers the Council's relationship with Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd.**

The meeting commenced at 10.00 am and concluded at 12.50 pm.

**CHAIRMAN**