
CARE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE THURSDAY, 23 NOVEMBER 2023

Present: Councillor Beth Lawton (Chair)

Councillors: Menna Baines, Jina Gwyrfai, Dewi Jones, Elwyn Jones, Eryl Jones-Williams, Linda Ann Jones, Beth Lawton, Linda Morgan, Gwynfor Owen, Gareth Coj Parry, Rheinallt Puw, Meryl Roberts and Angela Russell.

Officers in attendance: Llywela Haf Owain (Senior Language and Scrutiny Advisor), Ffion Elain Evans (Democracy Services Officer) and Ellie Mai Evans (Democracy Services Administrative Assistant).

Others invited:

Councillor Dilwyn Morgan (Cabinet Member for Adults, Health and Well-being)
Huw Dylan Owen (Statutory Director of Social Services)
Aled Davies (Head of Adults, Health and Well-being Department)

Present for item 5:

Mari Wynne Jones (Senior Adults Services Manager)

Present for item 6:

Rhion Glyn (Assistant Head - Adults, Health and Well-being)

Present for item 7:

Councillor Elin Walker Jones (Cabinet Member for Children and Young People)
Sian Griffiths (Well-being Leader, Supporting Health and Well-being Service)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Anwen J. Davies, Medwyn Hughes and Eirin Wyn Williams.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

Councillors Eryl Jones Williams and Gwynfor Owen declared interest in Item 7 as they were unpaid carers for members of their family. The members were of the opinion that it was a prejudicial interest, and they withdrew from the meeting during the discussion.

3. URGENT ITEMS

None to note.

4. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meetings of this committee, held on 21st September 2023, as a true record.

5. DAY CARE SERVICE

The report was presented explaining that the traditional model of providing Day Care had not been reviewed in Gwynedd for many years and it had not been adapted to meet the needs of the Social Services and Well-being Act (Wales) 2014 that came into force in April 2016. It was explained that it was timely to reconsider the provision especially considering recent work that had been done by the Welsh Government and the way that the pandemic had emphasised the importance of socialising opportunities and being a part of a community towards individuals' well-being. It was noted that the hope was that the review would be an opportunity to consider different, more suitable and flexible ways of providing support and services.

It was explained that the Council used to provide a programme of traditional day care activities in specific locations in the county for adults who needed support. These centres enabled elderly people to socialise and participate in specific activities, giving an opportunity for the ones who take care of them on a daily basis to have a brief respite.

It was explained that the department's intention was to move away from the traditional model of providing services associated with buildings and focus instead on how to address and support the well-being of individuals and carers in many ways. To achieve this, it was noted that the department intended to hold a review and consult with the people of Gwynedd on day care provision arrangements.

During the discussion, the following observations were noted:-

- The members expressed their thanks for the report and the developments were welcomed. The members' appreciation was expressed on how honest the content was and the way it admitted that the present provision failed to reach everyone.
- It was noted that the Social Services and Well-being Act (Wales) 2014 had been in force for seven years now therefore it was asked why was it now that the department intended to reconsider the provision?
 - o In response, it was explained that the department had started on the work before the pandemic, but the work had to stop because of safety matters. It was noted that it was timely to reconsider the matter now, but acknowledgement was given to the fact that the work should have been done years ago.
 - o The Cabinet Member for Adults, Health and Well-being added that there had been enormous pressure on the department and that had contributed directly to the time it had taken to revisit the work.
- Concern was expressed that the provision had not reached the rural areas of the County and there was a need to take steps to ensure better provision for these areas in the future.
 - o In response, it was agreed that the provision in rural areas was important, but it would not be possible to have a centre in every village.
 - o Despite this, it was noted that community activities had been happening in most communities and that there was a need to see what would be available in different areas and use them in order to provide the support for individuals.
 - o It was noted that one of the best ways of supporting people was to continue to let them be part of the community, especially in cases where companionship was the problem and therefore collaborating with the community was essential.
- It was accepted that there was a need to adapt the service in order to address the needs of individuals, but it was noted that the traditional model had worked for some

people. In association with this, it was asked why had three centres, in Bala, Porthmadog and Caernarfon closed?

- In response, it was explained that the centres had been closed for many years and the ones in Bala and Porthmadog had closed as part of the extra care housing developments.
 - It was explained that the situation in the context of Caernarfon was a little bit different. The centre was closed because the building was sub-standard and work on the building would have been too costly. It was noted that the department had decided not to spend on that as there was an intention to restructure. It was also explained that Age Cymru had opened a centre in Bontnewydd therefore a provision continued in the area although it was provided in a different way.
 - It was explained that closing these centres a few years back was an initial part of the programme that was now being resumed.
- It was noted that it was necessary that the provision was expanded over all of Gwynedd and if revisiting the matter as a whole, it would be necessary to look at how people got transported to the locations.
 - In response, it was noted that the comment was fair enough but to bear in mind that day services of this kind were not a statutory requirement. Instead, what was statutory was a provision that supported adults.
 - It was explained that transport was one of the matters that needed consideration once it would be clear what was offered across Gwynedd. It was noted that maybe there would be a way for families to help with transporting individuals to some locations.
 - Concern was expressed that there would not be an opportunity for families to have a period of respite if they had to transport the individuals to the locations.
 - It was agreed that there was a need to consider the well-being of the families and it was confirmed that the department intended to explore different options to ensure that they were not totally dependent on transport from the families.
 - Questions were asked about the sum of money that was wasted on paying rent on empty buildings and on staff who did not work their full contract hours. Concern was expressed that agency staff were called in to fill the gap.
 - It was noted that this was a problem now and that work was under way to try to improve the situation. It was explained that the department hoped that the picture improved after the restructuring.
 - Enquiries were made regarding the timescale of restructuring by noting that the department had many ideas and that the work of discussing and holding investigations could take years. Because of this, it was noted that having a clear timetable was essential and it was asked what intention was there to monitor / review the process to ensure that another seven years did not elapse.
 - In response, it was explained that the department was eager to get a recommendation soon and that they did not want the matter to slip. Despite this, it was noted that they did not have a specific programme yet but that they intended to have a robust timetable soon.
 - It was confirmed that the department intended to monitor the work whilst going forward instead of holding formal reviews.
 - It was noted that many more things were happening within our communities now compared to what was available seven years ago. It was proposed that there was possibly room to consider using virtual opportunities as well as trying to collaborate with businesses and other organisations in the community in order to boost the local economy more widely.

- Enquiries were made regarding the sustainability of collaborating with other organisations which were often dependent on grant money in order to provide the service. It was asked if there was a financial risk here?
 - o In response, it was noted that the department was not likely to provide grant money towards this type of service and that the work would be commissioned instead.
 - o It was explained that the sustainability of providing the service was a significant factor in the proses of planning, especially when considering how diverse the situations were within different communities.

RESOLVED

- a) To accept the report and to note the observations.
- b) Support the proposal to hold a full review of the current provision and consider an alternative model.
- c) Ask the officers to ensure that the new model provided consistent service across the county including service for those who lived in rural areas.
- d) Ask the department to present a further report on the review and the possible models when timely in order to give the scrutinisers an opportunity to give further input.

6. ARRANGEMENTS FOR MANAGING AND MAINTAINING CARE HOMES

The report was presented by explaining that Cyngor Gwynedd had 13 care homes that supported and cared for adults across the county, and that they were inspected frequently by a wide range of internal and external auditors. It was noted that this report gave specific attention to audits that had been held by the Council's Internal Audit Service and they had inspected three care homes during the 2022/23 financial year. Those homes were Plas Gwilym, Hafod Mawddach and Bryn Blodau. It was explained that the purpose of the audits was to ensure that suitable arrangements were in place for appropriately managing and maintaining the homes in accordance with relevant regulations and standards.

It was explained that the inspections had concluded that the assurance level of the homes in question was limited, therefore there was a need to take steps in order to improve compliance with the controls and to reduce the risks that were highlighted. In response, it was explained that the service had committed to implement actions for mitigating the risks that were highlighted and a list of those actions were provided in the report.

It was noted that follow-up audits had been held in the three homes in question in October 2023 in order to ensure that the service / home had implemented the actions they had committed to. It was confirmed that an improvement was seen in every home but there were further actions to be taken in order to reduce the risk further. It was explained that the number of matters that continued to need attention related to staffing matters, such as training and supervision. It was noted that the situation was challenging and varied between homes. It was confirmed that the situation and individual homes continued to be monitored to ensure that the actions would be implemented.

During the discussion, the following observations were noted:

- The members expressed their thanks for the report and the progress made since the first audits was welcomed.

- All care home staff were thanked for their work and commitment to their clients. It was noted that the praise from the people of Gwynedd for the homes was very good and that it was worth noting.
- Attention was drawn to the fact that the internal audit reports of the care homes were submitted to the Governance and Audit Committee before the Care Scrutiny Committee, and it was proposed that representatives from this committee should attend the Governance and Audit Committee meetings in the future when discussions are about care homes' internal audit reports.
- Concern was expressed about the fact that only three homes were being inspected annually and it was asked how to ensure standards in homes that are not inspected that year.
 - o In response, it was explained that Internal Audits chose three homes at random each year to inspect, and other audits also happened, whether external ones or internal ones by the service.
 - o It was noted that the service tried to learn from every audit and that any comments or suggestions for improvements were implemented in each home.
- Members were encouraged to visit care homes in the county as the staff and the residents would be glad to see them.
- It was noted that the individuals went to care homes with much more severe needs now and this led to increasing pressure on the staff. Attention was drawn to the domiciliary care staff who had difficulty meeting their hours as there were no hours available, and it was asked if it was possible to get some of these to help in the care homes.
 - o In response, it was noted that this was something to consider, and hubs were created in some care homes for domiciliary care staff so that staff could complete training, etc. but there was room to develop this further.
- Concern was expressed about the staffing problems, and it was asked if there was a need to look at how the contracts were issued in order to attract more staff. It was noted that the shifts could be long and maybe offering a variety of shorter ones would be a way of attracting people to fill the posts.
 - o In response, it was confirmed that shifts of varied lengths were offered and not all of them were long ones that were over ten hours.
 - o However, attention was drawn to the fact that some members of staff saw it better to work longer shifts as that meant working fewer days.
 - o It was noted that the department tried to do everything within its ability to be as flexible as possible and that individuals had a choice on what types of shifts they wanted to work. But the need was noted to ensure fairness for the whole staff, therefore there was a need to be consistent and sensible when considering what was possible.
 - o It was noted that there was more work to be done to attract young people to the field.
- It was asked how serious the staff shortage was and was there a need to depend on agency staff in some homes.
 - o In response, it was confirmed that agency staff continued to be used in some homes but not all. It was explained that the situation varied significantly with some homes better at retaining staff than others.
 - o It was noted that there was a challenge in terms of competing with the Health Board in context of weekend wages, etc. as they offered much better terms than the Council.

- Concern was expressed about the lack of training / time to hold training and it was asked had the department considered looking at other ways of holding training, for example in snippets or virtually.
 - o It was noted that offering on-line modules was useful if they had problems reaching the appropriate training levels but not as good as holding the training face to face. It was explained that the virtual modules were more useful as refresher sessions.
 - o It was explained that the training sessions were being offered in the homes also and the department was open to holding the sessions in many different ways.

- A question was asked about the external audits such as those by Care Inspectorate Wales and was there a connection between the problems that became apparent in the internal audits and in the external audits.
 - o In response, it was noted that the Quality Assurance Team was an internal team that audited services and did the same type of inspections as Care Inspectorate Wales.
 - o It was explained that an effort was made to coordinate aspects between the different teams and that everyone had a role to play. However, it was noted that there was a need to be cautious by ensuring that there was not too much pressure being put on the front-line services in terms of audits.
 - o It was admitted that further work needed to be done on coordinating the audits.

RESOLVED

- a) To accept the report, welcome the progress already made since the initial audits and thank the care homes' staff for their service.
- b) Declare concern for care homes' staffing challenges and problems that emerge as a result, for example, difficulty completing training.
- c) Ask the department to consider how we can ensure that every home reached the high assurance level in the future.
- d) Ask for the Care Scrutiny Committee's Chair and Vice-chair to be invited to attend the Governance and Audit Committee meetings in the future when there are discussions regarding care homes' internal audit reports.
- e) Inform the Governance and Audit Committee members of the observations and decisions of the Care Scrutiny Committee members.

7. SUPPORT FOR UNPAID CARERS

The report was presented by explaining that the report was jointly between the Adults, Health and Well-being Service and the Children and Supporting Families Service as supporting unpaid carers was an important and challenging field which was relevant to both departments. It was explained that it was the unpaid carers that provided the vast majority of care and support to vulnerable, disabled and ill individuals in the community therefore there was a need to ensure that sufficient support was available for them. It was noted that 8.9% of Gwynedd's population identified themselves as unpaid carers according to the 2021 Census but that the real figure was much higher than that.

It was explained that supporting unpaid carers had been identified as one of the objectives within the 'A Caring Gwynedd' priority area in the Council's 2023-28 Plan. It was noted that the Council was eager to collaborate with their partners to develop a strong and ambitious Carers' Plan for Gwynedd, and that the priorities and the aspects that could be addressed had been divided into four themes:

1. Identifying and valuing unpaid carers.
2. Providing information, advice and assistance.
3. Supporting life alongside caring.
4. Supporting unpaid carers in education and the workplace.

Attention was drawn to 'AiDi', a new app that was developed jointly with the Isle of Anglesey County Council in order to help young carers find information and support. The app allowed young carers to get discounts at many local shops and enabled them to quickly contact school or college if they ran late because of their responsibilities. It was noted that 61 young carers had registered so far.

It was explained that the hope was to extend the support that is currently available for unpaid carers with the intention of ensuring fair and timely support and recognition for them.

During the discussion, the following observations were noted:-

- Thanks were expressed for the report and for all the work done by the team to support unpaid carers.
- Praise was given to all the unpaid carers' hard work across Gwynedd. Attention was drawn towards the importance of the work done by them as it directly contributes towards reducing the pressure in other fields.
- Interest was expressed in having more information on direct payments in order for the Councillors to become aware of how the system worked.
 - o In response, it was noted that direct payments were seen as a complex matter in the past but there was so much potential to use them to pay for a wide range of different things.
 - o It was explained that there was uncertainty in terms of how to present the matter among the staff therefore there was a need to work on increasing their confidence and awareness.
 - o Bearing this in mind, it was agreed that it would be beneficial for the Councillors to receive further information about direct payments. It was added that increasing the awareness of the support available for unpaid carers was key and the members were encouraged to spread the message.
 - o It was suggested that the most suitable way of providing the information to the Councillors was a presentation and it was proposed that it would be helpful for it to be provided face to face.
- It was noted that there was a need to work on raising awareness and build the confidence of the unpaid carers so that they became aware of the support available for them.
- The AiDi app was welcomed noting that it was a huge step forward in the context of supporting young people and it was noted that it should be considered whether there was room to extend the provision for adults.
- Attention was drawn to a book that had been developed by the department in order to provide information about the support and assistance available for unpaid carers in Gwynedd. It was confirmed that the book was nearly ready and would be available in libraries, on-line and sent to all staff of the department.

RESOLVED

- a) To accept the report and declare support to raise awareness of the help available to unpaid carers including the direct payments scheme.
- b) Ask for a presentation and further information for members regarding the direct payments scheme.

The meeting commenced at 10.30am and concluded at 1.20pm.