
CARE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

14/01/21

Present: Councillor Dewi Roberts (Chair).
Councillor Beth Lawton (Vice-chair).

Councillors: Menna Baines, Annwen Daniels, Anwen J Davies, Alan Jones Evans, Berwyn Parry Jones, Gareth Tudor Morris Jones, Linda Ann Jones, Eryl Jones-Williams, Olaf Cai Larsen, Linda Morgan, Dafydd Owen, Rheinallt Puw, Angela Russell

Ex-officio Member: Councillor Edgar Wyn Owen

Officers present:

Bethan Adams (Scrutiny Advisor), Einir Rhian Davies (Democracy Services Officer), Vera Jones (Democracy and Language Services Manager), Llywela Haf Owain (Senior Language and Scrutiny Advisor), Eirian Roberts (Democracy Services Officer)

Present for item 5:

Councillor Dafydd Meurig (Cabinet Member for Adults, Health and Well-being Service and Relationship with the Health Service), Aled Davies (Head of Adults, Health and Well-being Service), Mari W Jones (Senior Manager - Adults, Health and Well-being Service), Matthew Hawes (Occupational Therapy Lead for the Adults, Health and Well-being Service)

1. APOLOGIES

Councillor R Medwyn Hughes and Councillor Peter Reid

2. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

The following declarations of personal interest were received, as the individuals/their families had been involved with the Occupational Therapy Service in their personal lives:

Councillor Menna Baines

Councillor Eryl Jones-Williams

Councillor Cai Larsen

Councillor Linda Morgan

Councillor Angela Russell

3. URGENT ITEMS

None to note.

4. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this Committee held on 26 November, 2020 as a true record.

5. OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY SERVICE, GWYNEDD SOCIAL SERVICES

A report was submitted by the Occupational Therapy Lead (OTL) giving an overview of the work of the Occupational Therapy Service as well as the challenges as a result of Covid-19.

It was noted that Covid had had a huge impact on the Service, and the projections suggested that there would be a tremendous increase in the demand for the service. It was added that the increase was as a result of the number that had been shielding during the Covid period, and had not been contacting the service timely and the long-term effects of Covid on the health of individuals. It was noted that the service needs to develop to be more proactive in order to achieve what is important to the individual. It was also noted that giving preventative support would be more cost effective to the Council.

The OTL introduced himself to the meeting. He has been appointed to the role since a one year period. The OTL noted that he had had an opportunity over the last year to review the OTS and note priorities for the next twelve months to ensure more effective service, with the emphasis on preventative services and sustainable and recoverable skills. He added that staying still is not an option and that which is of importance is to have a service of standard which offers value for money to the individual and Council. He elaborated that there had been gaps in the service in terms of staff as a result of the retirement of two very experienced officers and many away on maternity leave, however they had managed to recruit to all posts.

During the discussion the following matters were raised:-

- In response to a question regarding an individual's pathway from hospital and collaboration between Health and the Council, the OTL noted that it was the hospital that commenced the work with the individual. One problem as a result of Covid was the pressure on hospitals to discharge clients, including some with complex needs. Work is being carried out to review the input of OT to support the releasing from hospital effectively. The Covid period has been an opportunity to learn and adapt, and looking back it is possible to see that we have missed opportunities to stop individuals from having to be admitted to hospital.
- In response to a question, the OTL confirmed that there were enough staff in terms of Occupational Therapists to deliver the essential duties and they did their work particularly well, however, he did not have the capacity to do enough of the preventative and proactive work with the current team.
- In response to a question regarding recruitment, the OTL confirmed that recruiting to OT posts within the Council has been difficult in the past. The opportunity to work in the field of health, education and the private sector all competed against each other. He noted that working for the Council had to be made to look more attractive. He also reported that he was now collaborating closely with the University to give educational opportunities to Welsh students and attract staff to the Council. The Senior Service Manager supported the above, and confirmed that there were a number of challenges

to attract Occupational Therapists to Gwynedd. She noted that a course used to be offered in Bangor University, but she confirmed that the course had ended and had moved to Glyndŵr University. She noted the work that was afoot with the University of Wales Bangor. Of course, she noted the wish to develop the Council's own staff and confirmed that one officer was currently attending an OT degree course at Glyndŵr University.

- In response to an observation regarding multi-agency working and collaboration, the OTL noted that he was in contact with his fellow officer in Betsi Cadwaladr Health Board, and they were collaborating on any barriers and undertaking a partnership method of response. He noted that he resolved any matters by engaging with staff, going out on visits and joint working.
- In response to a question about joint equipment store, jointly with the Health Board and Conwy and Anglesey Authorities, the OTL noted that the equipment stores works better since the Covid pandemic, but that some attention needs to be given to some matters, but that on the whole he had not encountered many problems. The Head of Service added that there were a great deal of advantages to pool funds together, but of course it was not a solution for everything. He also noted that it did not necessarily lead to a better service and bringing the funding together should be a natural step, which follows on from collaborating on the elementary elements and achieve what is important to the individual. The Head of Service reiterated that there had been problems with the joint stores in the past, but by now the relationship, through the OTL's hard work had led to changes. The Head of Service noted that one thing that has changed is the working relationship – everyone appears clearer in their minds and more in agreement regarding what is needed, and it has been a period to achieve adjustments, but that small improvements had taken place, but that the work had slowed down over the Covid period.
- In response to a question regarding the number of Social Work Practitioners employed by Gwynedd, the Senior Service Manager confirmed that 15 are employed by the Department and that they are very experienced staff. The OTL referred to the need to up-skill Local Authority staff and Health Board staff to assess and provide small equipment, and he referred to courses that are available for this. He confirmed that there is a wage difference between OTs employed by the Health Board and Gwynedd Council and that this poses an additional challenge when trying to build an efficient team.
- In response to the comment about the national dimension on preventative services and restoring skills, the OTL noted that it was possible to meet what was important to individuals and sustain their independence by working more proactively. He referred to specific cases where the support of the OT and the providing of appropriate equipment had ensured that we address that which is important to them, together with providing a cost effective service. The vision is to develop a more proactive OT service and obtain more resources to develop a specialist moving and handling team.
- In response to a question about the Disabled Adaptations Grant, the OTL confirmed that the grant was available for complex adaptations, and anyone could apply for this, however, it would be the occupational therapists who would make the recommendation. He noted that there was a great deal of work to be done here to accelerate the process. Reference was also made to the case study, and it was noted that an environment assessment was initially undertaken via joint working. Covid has restricted on the ability to complete much adaptation work over the last year.

It was confirmed that it had been a very important step to bring this report to Committee, , and although it was an interesting report, it raised many questions.

The Portfolio Member was given an opportunity to comment. He noted the importance of doing the right thing for residents, that it was important not to allow matters slip and eventhough there is only one pot of money available that this should not prevent anyone from doing nothing.

The Chairman thanked the Occupational Therapy Lead for the report, and suggested that such a presentation would be valuable to all the Councillors. The main conclusions of the discussion/matters that require attention were summarised as follows:-

- The Service was facing a few challenges, however, it was also a period of opportunity to improve the service. Concern was noted that the staffing level did not correspond to the work that was coming in.
- It is the Department's vision to set up a moving and handling service that would support the timely releasing from hospital arrangements and ensuring that the individual receives the correct support and equipment to allow them to meet that which is important to them. An application has been made for funds from the Welsh Government's Independent Living Fund to fund this service.
- It is important to have an opportunity to explain the situation and it was asked where the Service goes from this point?
- There is a need to keep an eye on the effect of Covid on the service and whether they have adequate resources to deal with their workload.

RESOLVED: To accept the content of the report and thank Councillor Dafydd Meurig, Aled Davies, Mari W Jones and Matthew Hawes and the team for their very hard work. It was agreed to monitor the effect of Covid-19 on the demand for the occupational therapy service, and the impact of this on the service.

The meeting commenced at 10:30 and concluded at 13:00

CHAIR