
CARE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE THURSDAY, 22 JUNE 2023

Present:

COUNCILLORS: Menna Baines, Linda Anne Jones, Jina Gwyrfai, Dewi Jones, Linda Morgan, Meryl Roberts, Elwyn Jones, Eryl Jones-Williams, Beth Lawton and Gareth Coj Parry.

Officers in attendance:

Llywela Haf Owain (Senior Language and Scrutiny Advisor) and Rhodri Jones (Democracy Services Officer).

Others invited:

Huw Dylan Owen (Statutory Director of Social Services)

Present for item 7:

Councillor Dilwyn Morgan (Cabinet Member for Adults, Health and Well-being).
Aled Davies (Head of Adults, Health and Well-being Department)
Mannon Trappe (Senior Manager, Safeguarding, Quality Assurance and Mental Health)

Present for items 8 and 9:

Councillor Elin Walker Jones (Cabinet Member for Children and Families)
Marian Parry Hughes (Head of Children and Supporting Families Department)

1. TO ELECT A CHAIR FOR 2023/2024

It was resolved to elect Councillor Beth Lawton as Chair of the Care Scrutiny Committee for 2023/2024.

2. TO ELECT A VICE-CHAIR FOR 2023/2024

RESOLVED to elect Councillor Linda Ann Jones as Vice-chair of the Care Scrutiny Committee for 2023/2024.

3. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Rheinallt Puw, Gwynfor Owen, Einir Wyn Williams, Richard Medwyn Hughes, Sasha Williams, John Pughe, Anwen Jane Davies and Angela Russell.

4. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were received.

5. URGENT ITEMS

None to note.

6. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee held on 20 April 2023 as a true record.

7. UPDATE ON THE GWYNEDD MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE

An update was provided on the Gwynedd Mental Health Service. The members were reminded by the Senior Safeguarding, Quality Assurance and Mental Health Manager that the Mental Health service had been an integrated team since 1996, and that the Health Board led on the service. It was detailed that the work was being guided by the Together for Mental Health Strategy, introduced by Welsh Government in order to improve the mental health provision available to support individuals in Wales.

It was explained that the service had been divided to offer support within primary services for low-level cases, and within secondary services for more intensive cases. It was confirmed that referrals were being received from GPs, before being scrutinised daily to consider if there was sufficient information to make a decision on suitability to receive a mental health assessment. It was noted that referrals were being referred back to the GPs with explanations, if they were not suitable to be referred to the relevant service.

It was explained that there were clear responsibilities within the partnership with the Health Board. As the Health Board led the service, the focus was on a diagnosis and medication on their behalf - the medical element. It was confirmed that Cyngor Gwynedd's role as a local authority was to focus on the social elements. It was noted that Cyngor Gwynedd also led on the work under the Mental Health Act 1983. It was emphasised that workers were the service's main resource as they offered therapy and support to individuals to overcome or cope with their illness.

It was confirmed that Cyngor Gwynedd employed staff in a number of different roles in order to offer this service, including:

- 2 Area Leaders (North and South Gwynedd)
- 12.5 Social Workers
- 9 Support Workers to work more intensively with individuals on care and treatment plans (with a financial contribution from the Health Board to employ them).

It was intended to re-model the current multi agency mental health scheme that Cyngor Gwynedd and Betsi Cadwaladr Health Board had, following a consultation with the Head of Adults, Health and Wellbeing Department, Senior Mental Health Manager and the two Area Leaders for Mental Health Services. It was highlighted that there was a need to review the role of the Support Worker within the service and a need to review out-of-county placements in order to ensure that we understood individuals' aspirations to return to the area or not.

It was reported that difficulties had arisen across Gwynedd and the rest of Wales when local authorities collaborate with the Health Board in order to integrate Health and Social Care, including:

- Lack of clarity about outcomes
- Calling something a 'partnership' to make it sound better
- Lack of clarity about organisational drivers
- Lack of clarity about unstated motivators
- Being unrealistic and over-ambitious;

- Not enough attention to practical details.

It was confirmed that these general dangers were noted as core barriers by mental health leaders, which prevented them from realising their statutory duties effectively. It was noted that the level of these risks had increased and were having an effect on staff well-being making them feel isolated and not an integral part of the partnership.

Details were given on another risk which affected the partnership by confirming that the Health Board used paper-based systems rather than technology systems (such as WCCIS). It was explained that using paper-based systems to collect sensitive data was dangerous and acted as a barrier to information sharing and effective service planning. It was explained that this led to additional risks including:

- Governance risk: regarding secure data management
- Communication risk: regarding the recording and sharing of current information
- Role risk: about fulfilling the statutory role outlined in the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.

It was noted that a number of options had been considered for providing these services in the future, including:

- a) Continuing in the form of the existing service.
- b) Reviewing a new partnership arrangement for a period of one year, with quarterly meetings to review the arrangement/progress.
- c) Transferring to a separate social care/well-being team/service which coincided with establishing a well-being preventive social pathway for people who used the services.

A strong view was expressed that the current arrangement was unsustainable. In addition, there was a feeling that establishing yet another partnership agreement would not resolve the key issues or indeed mitigate the significant risks identified. The current model offered limited assurances of an effective and secure partnership

It was confirmed that a model such as option C above would be most suitable for Gwynedd as it would be a purposeful well-being model and would promote the key objectives. It was explained that these concentrated on:

- Mitigating the current risk due to the poor communication regarding progress and change by the Health Board.
- Providing greater ownership of well-being, social prescription and the social model of mental health recovery.
- Providing the opportunity to review services to promote a focus on prevention through greater ownership of primary care.

It was ensured that the information presented in the report was used in order to develop a business case to steer establishing a separate social care mental health well-being service, before creating a report on the further steps that would concentrate on detailed research of the project management process for establishing a separate Social Care Mental Health Well-being Service. It was noted that there had been several attempts to consult with the Health Board's Director of Mental Health to share ideas, plan and agree

on how the Council would work with them.

In response to the observations and questions from members, it was noted:

- That a number of other authorities, namely Conwy County Borough Council, Wrexham County Council and Flintshire County Council had already decided to establish a separate partnership to the Health Board, and that Anglesey Council was in a similar situation to Cyngor Gwynedd and were considering the future of their services.
- It was confirmed that robust collaboration was ongoing between the Health Board, Cyngor Gwynedd and the Government by working in partnership. It was noted that some of the other authorities that had brought the joint-service to an end had seen an improvement in the collaboration between them and the Health Board under their new arrangement.
- It was noted that the aim of Welsh Government was to integrate health and social care. It was explained that although the new model was contrary to that principle it would certainly strengthen the collaboration between both bodies in accordance with the principles of the Welsh Government.
- It was agreed that collaboration problems had existed for years, even before Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board had been established. It was noted if the model was not successful, the Department would acknowledge that and would be accountable for this.
- It was explained that there was a consultation with Social Workers and Support Workers within the service to get their input on the 14 June 2023. It was reported that the majority of those workers welcomed the change with some concerned as they had a good relationship with the Health Board staff. It was shared that the workers were looking forward to the changes.
- It was confirmed that regular communication was taking place with the other local authorities that had separated from their partnership with the Health Board in order for Gwynedd to learn from their successes and failures before establishing the most suitable model for the future.
- It was ensured that the process of separating from the Health Board was being programmed and the Care Scrutiny Committee would receive regular updates. It was noted that the Cabinet's approval was needed in order to move forward with the model, but that the department was confident that the new model would be operative by April 2024. It was emphasised that this date was not final and that there was a strong possibility that the timetable of the model would be amended.
- Details were given on the need to look at the financial costs as the number of referrals to the service were increasing quickly, noting that there was around 2000 more referrals this year compared to 2020.
- That the Cabinet Member would contact the Health Minister in order to explain the collaboration problems that arise between local authorities and the Health Board.

It was confirmed that separating from the Health Board in this field was not a failure. It was emphasised that the Health Board succeeded to provide excellent medical care for clients and that the model intended to be used in the future would be used in order to cope better with the social aspects of the care.

The department was thanked for their work within the mental health care field.

RESOLVED:

1. To accept the report and support the department's plans to establish a new work model for the Mental Health Service.
2. To ask the Cabinet Member for Adults, Health and Well-being to contact Welsh Government's Health Minister to explain the intention to create a new work model and the reasons for that
3. A progress report and regular communication between the officers of the Department and the Care Scrutiny Committee on the development of the Mental Health Service was welcomed.

8. WORKFORCE OF THE CHILDREN AND SUPPORTING FAMILIES SERVICE

The report was submitted by the Head of Children and Supporting Families department noting the following main points.

It was confirmed that the report was an update to what had been submitted to the Cabinet in November 2022 on matters that affect the Children's Service in relation to attracting, recruiting and retaining professional staff. It was explained that the Service had faced difficulties in this field during the 2020/21 year, following the Covid-19 pandemic and that the staff had decided to leave and get other jobs, or leave the profession all together. It was emphasised that the situation had improved by now and that there were no current vacant posts within the service.

It was stated that there were four fields to take action on in order to respond to the challenges that appeared in the service, namely:

- Salaries
- Attracting and retaining staff
- Investing in new workers
- Developing staff welfare

It was explained that salaries was the main matter that was affecting attracting and retaining staff. As a result of this, it was seen that staff were leaving to work for other authorities in order to take advantage of flexible working terms. It was noted that many jobs were being advertised numerous times before appointing staff, and that the salary scale often needed amending before attracting applicants.

It was mentioned that the Department was trying to identify talent within the present workforce and provide opportunities for individuals to gain qualifications to develop their careers. It was noted that the staff that received that support stayed to work with the department for a long time. Also, it was confirmed that this assisted the Department to ensure that the staff were bilingual.

It was pleasing that the Department was now attracting applicants when advertising jobs. An example was shared of Autism related Jobs advertised recently where there were 20 applications for 4 posts.

It was explained that the Department was trying to avoid using agency staff where possible. It was noted that difficulties could arise when trying to use the agency as only one week of notice needed to be given before they finished working for the Department. In addition, it was noted that most of the agency staff were non-Welsh speaking and that their salaries were around 40-70% higher than the usual rate. Despite this, it was confirmed that a maximum had now been set on agency staff salaries. It was confirmed that no agency staff had worked for the Department for around 7 years as a result of their success filling posts.

It was noted that the department was eager to continue to provide encouragement and to give urgent attention to important matters when inspiring and leading. It was explained that there were three possible strategic options to follow, namely:

1. Continue in the same direction and maintain the status quo.
2. Choose a transformational, ambitious method.
3. Choose a proactive approach towards continuous improvement.

It was confirmed that the Department favoured the third option above as it was an achievable option to resolve the Department's challenges. It was confirmed that they needed the support of the Council to implement this option in the future as the number of applications that reached the Department had increased significantly over the past few years. It was explained that there were 7175 applications in the 2022/23 financial year compared to 2500 in the 2019/20 financial year.

In response to the observations and questions from members, it was confirmed that the Salaries Working group had considered a number of options for the future including offering qualifications for individuals in the middle of their careers.

The department and the social workers were thanked for their continuous work.

RESOLVED:

The report was accepted and support was expressed to the intention of the Children and Supporting Families to place focus on the four main matters noted in the report as a response to the staffing situation, whilst acknowledging that some of the work had already commenced.

9. FEEDBACK FROM THE SAFEGUARDING REVIEW BY CARE INSPECTORATE WALES

The report was submitted by the Head of Children and Supporting Families Department noting the following main points.

It was confirmed that the Child Practice Review had been held in November 2022 concentrating on Wales Safeguarding Procedures, Working Together to Safeguard People and the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.

It was detailed that the review was trying to determine to what extent the current structures and processes ensured that children were placed on the Child Protection Register and also removed from it when safe to do so. It was also emphasised that it was an opportunity for joint learning, identifying good practice and positive systems of operating.

It was confirmed that Cyngor Gwynedd was one of five local authorities chosen to receive this review. It was noted that the review had taken place between 26th and 29th of March 2023 and that verbal feedback had been shared with the Head of Department and the Statutory Director of Social Services. It was explained that there was no specific report being published for Gwynedd, but that a composite report for the entire review would be published when the review came to an end.

A number of the findings that were relevant to Gwynedd were shared, including:

- That children in Gwynedd were benefiting from different agencies sharing information effectively.

- That there was a clear focus on risk assessment and to give specific attention to the threshold if the child had, or was likely to be suffering from significant harm,
- That clear decisions were made regularly and based on evidence.
- That good practice was in place and that the voice and life experiences of children were being taken into account when making decisions on safety.
- It was recognised that further work was needed to develop opportunities for children to take part in conferences.
- It was mentioned that the role of the social care practitioner was a valuable asset.
- It was noted that clear communication with parents would take place especially when staff were trying to explain to the parent why they considered that their children were in danger of significant harm.
- It was explained that the role of the case conference chair was essential in terms of reminding members of the objectives of the case conference held in accordance with the Wales Safeguarding Procedures.

The Department was thanked for the report.

RESOLVED:

To accept and note the report.

10. CARE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD PROGRAMME 2023-24.

The Care Scrutiny Committee forward programme for 2023/24 was presented by the Senior Language and Scrutiny Advisor following the decisions of the Members at the annual Committee workshop held on 9 May 2023.

It was noted that two items remained to be scheduled for this year, namely:

- Autism Plan Task and Finish Group Brief
 - It was considered that this item would be submitted to the Committee in September.
- Autism Plan Task and Finish Group Report
 - It was noted that no date had been confirmed for when this item would be submitted to the Committee and that it depended on further meetings.

Members were reminded that the forward programme was a live document and therefore it was possible to amend the forward programme if additional matters arose during the year.

RESOLVED

To adopt the Committee's work programme for 2023/24.

The meeting commenced at 10.30am and concluded at 12.15pm.

CHAIR
