

THE CABINET 29/03/22

Present-

Councillors: Dyfrig L Siencyn, Dafydd Meurig, Craig ab Iago, Gareth Griffith, Nia Jeffreys, Dilwyn Morgan, Ioan Thomas, Gareth Thomas, Catrin Wager and Cemlyn Williams.

Also present-

Dafydd Gibbard (Chief Executive), Morwena Edwards (Corporate Director), Iwan Evans (Head of Legal Services), Dewi Morgan (Head of Finance Department) and Lowri Haf Evans (Democratic Services Officer).

Items 7 and 8: Marian Parry Hughes (Head of Children and Supporting Families Department)

1. APOLOGIES

No apologies were received.

The Cabinet Members and Officers were welcomed to the meeting.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

None to note.

3. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

There were no matters arising from overview and scrutiny.

5. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 8 MARCH 2022

The Chair accepted the minutes of the meeting held on 8 March 2022 as a true record.

6. APPOINTMENT OF SENIOR CORONER FOR THE NORTH WALES AREA

The item was presented by Cllr Nia Jeffreys

RESOLVED

- a) **To delegate powers to the Head of Legal Services to prepare job and personal details as well as an appointment process for the post of Senior Coroner and make arrangements to advertise.**
- b) **To establish a Panel including the Chief Executive, Head of Legal Services and Head of Department to be designated by the Chief Executive in order to draw up a short-list and interview applicants, and to appoint Senior Coroners as needed.**

DISCUSSION

A report was submitted outlining arrangements to appoint a permanent Senior Coroner for North West Wales.

Following the retirement of Mr Dewi Pritchard Jones (former Senior Coroner) in November 2020, interim arrangements had been put in place when considering the appropriateness of merging the North West Wales Coroner area with other areas in the region. Following discussions between the UK Government's Courts and Tribunals Department and Gwynedd and Denbighshire Councils (i.e. the relevant authority for the North Wales Area (East and Central)), the Chief Coroner resolved that he would not seek to merge Coroner areas here, therefore, a permanent Senior Coroner should be appointed for the North West Wales Area (Gwynedd and Anglesey).

Attention was also drawn to the formal procedure of appointing a Senior Coroner by the Coroners and Justice Act 2009, and by the Chief Coroner's Guidelines which stated that every appointment should be approved by the Chief Coroner and the Lord Chancellor with Chief Coroner also required to approve the appointment process.

It was reported that Gwynedd Council was the relevant authority for the North West Wales Area, which meant that the Council had a statutory duty to meet the associated costs of running the service. It was highlighted that the relevant authority (Gwynedd) needed to form a Panel that would receive advice from the Propriety and Elections Manager and the Chief Coroner's representative, to draw a short-list, to conduct the interviews and to decide on the appointment. The composition of the panel was a matter for the authority, but the Chief Coroner or representative could attend the interviews. If the Coroner Area contained more than one authority, it was noted that the relevant authority must consult with the other authority before appointing a Senior Coroner. In this case, the Isle of Anglesey County Council would be involved in the process as appropriate.

Observations arising from the discussion

- Keeping Gwynedd and Anglesey as one area was welcomed.
- The procedure needed to commence as soon as possible.
- The Welsh language was the main language of Gwynedd and Anglesey Councils - this was essentially important in the context of communication.

In response to a question regarding the inclusion of Conwy in the Area, it was noted that England and Wales had been divided into coroner areas and that only two areas were for North Wales - there was no intention to change this. In response to the comment about the use of the Welsh language, it was noted that this was an essential requirement

in the job advertisement.

7. NO WRONG DOOR STRATEGY

The item was presented by Cllr Dilwyn Morgan

RESOLVED

To accept the 'No Wrong Door' strategy as the strategic direction for future developments in the children and young people field, as well as supporting its implementation locally in Gwynedd as part of a wider regional plan.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted noting that the strategy responded to a report by the Children's Commissioner for Wales (June 2020) calling on the need to transform the way services worked together to support children and young people who needed support. It was stated that current processes and systems were far too complex, with evidence of children and young people falling between the crevices, waiting on waiting lists for long periods and then being told that they were on the wrong list or knocking on the wrong door. It was considered that this regional strategy offered a solution to improve services for those children and young people by ensuring that services created teams around the family to meet their needs rather than expecting families to fit in with what was available.

The strategy was developed during summer 2021 following a review of the current situation in north Wales by an external company commissioned by the six authorities' Heads of Children's Services and health leaders. The work was completed by using an Appreciative Inquiry methodology that included working with operational managers across the region; researching good practice in Wales and beyond; holding a series of multi-agency workshops across the region, holding participation sessions with children and young people who had had contact with one or more agencies, and then developing the strategy through lifestyle by using feedback on the content from senior managers. It was reiterated that it had not been possible to include representatives from schools in the workshops due to work pressures on the education departments during the period. However, as they were a core partner to the success of the work, local discussions had been held to ensure that they were a key part of the development for the future locally.

It was stated that the strategy proposed a radical review and change of the current arrangements and offered an ambitious model for collaboration, with the aim of improving the mental health and well-being outcomes of children and young people up to 25 years old - it would build on the strengths of the current system and tailored to meet local requirements. With recognition that children and young people's mental health and well-being needed to be supported within a complex framework of numerous services and interventions, it was noted that the strategy had implications for all agencies and partners that contributed towards the health and well-being outcomes of children and young people to support them to live their best lives. It was noted that all agencies would need to analyse their systems, strategies and policies to complement the strategy.

It was noted that the strategy was in accordance with the principles of Ffordd Gwynedd and lied within the arrangements of Gwynedd Council's Children and Supporting Families Department for developing the way the service strengthened front door arrangements, access to services, and the approach of offering early and preventative interventions to avoid problems from getting worse. It was stated that the service was

confident that the appropriate structure and foundation was in place to develop the service to meet expectations and already operated one front door that combined statutory services, early intervention and supporting families by using a team around the family model. It was reiterated that the 'Gwynedd Family Hub' had been established for many years now with clear accountability and governance arrangements. As a result, it was considered that the Service was starting from an advantageous position.

It was explained that developing the plan would not be cost neutral and currently, it was difficult to predict what the financial implications would be in terms of meeting expectations and realising the plan. It was suggested that it would be possible to look at using a portion of the transformation funding and the RIF (formerly ICF) to set a direction and allow further development.

Observations arising from the discussion

- The concept was coherent although the report was comprehensive.
- The recognition of working in partnership was welcomed.
- Discussions with Education Officers were welcomed.
- Investment in early intervention services was key.
- Creating a single entry point to a service was to be welcomed - this avoided frustration for users and was crucial to the success of the strategy.
- The strategy contained the principles of Ffordd Gwynedd.

8. NATIONAL COLLABORATIVE ARRANGEMENTS FOR WELSH (LOCAL AUTHORITY) ADOPTION AND FOSTERING SERVICES

The report was submitted by Cllr Dilwyn Morgan

When establishing Foster Wales, he highlighted that the Welsh language was awarded secondary status with no reference to the Welsh language in the branding or in relevant documentation. Following pressure and persuasion by Morwena Edwards and Marian Parry Hughes, it had been ensured that the language was granted a worthy position in the arrangements - they were both thanked for their work.

RESOLVED

- a) To adopt arrangements for the development of governance arrangements for the National Adoption Service for Wales as it takes responsibility for Foster Wales.**
- b) To agree that the authority signs the Joint Committee's Agreement for the National Adoption Service and Foster Wales and establishment of the National Joint Committee.**
- c) To appoint the Cabinet Member for Children and Supporting Families to represent the Authority on the Joint Committee.**

DISCUSSION

A report was submitted noting the need, in accordance with instruction from the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), to put the co-operation between Welsh local authorities on a formal footing in order for the National Adoption Service to take responsibility for Foster Wales and to operate effectively on behalf of all 22 authorities.

In accordance with the preference of WLGA and the Association of Directors of Social Services Cymru (ADDSC), this would take place through a National joint committee. It was noted that the work of establishing a National Joint Committee had continued and was ready for implementation - the proposed Joint Committee and the agreement underpinning it had been extended to include Foster Wales as had the capacity and functions for national co-ordination and enabling through a combined Central Team. As a result, the national Joint Committee, on behalf of the 22 Welsh Local Authorities, would exercise their powers for the provision of the collaborative arrangements for the National Adoption Service for Wales and for Foster Wales. It would be comprised of Council Members and meet twice yearly.

It was highlighted that WLGA lawyers had drafted a Joint Committee legal Agreement to be signed by all 22 local authorities and that agreeing on the proposals and signing the Joint Committee Agreement would formalise Gwynedd Council's co-operation in the governance arrangements. It was reiterated that there would be roles and responsibilities to maintain and deliver national functions that supported and enabled local authorities to achieve their adoption and fostering responsibilities and for them to be formalised by adopting the system.

9. STRATEGIC SAFEGUARDING PANEL REPORT 2021-2022

The report was submitted by Cllr Dilwyn Morgan

DECISION

To accept the report and note the information about the work of the Strategic Safeguarding Panel for 2021-22.

DISCUSSION

A report was submitted which included an overview of the work of the Strategic Safeguarding Panel during the period between January 2021 and March 2022, which gave a clear and fair picture of the work achieved along with references to reports or observations by external inspectors on the work. It was noted that the Statutory Director was required to consistently and regularly report to Members on the Panel's work on safeguarding, and that they could be satisfied that the Panel had undertaken the required work in a thorough and conscientious manner.

Members were reminded that the aim of the Strategic Safeguarding Panel was to ensure that appropriate arrangements and procedures were in place at a corporate level across the Council to ensure the safety of children, young people and adults. Since 2017/18 the Panel was also responsible for an overview of wider safeguarding issues across Gwynedd.

Attention was drawn to some of the barriers, reporting that responses and

evidence provided assurance that all departments responded and followed up on any concerns in a timely manner.

- the Children and Supporting Families Department found it difficult to recruit and retain qualified staff. As a result, an individual was commissioned to work in the field, and it was hoped to complete this work by April 2022.
- there was concern about the DoLS (deprivation of liberty safeguards) service during the year as there were 550 on the waiting list at one point. Regardless, a successful bid of £100,000 was received by the Government to address the waiting list (which was now approximately 336).
- some parents chose to continue teaching their children from home when the schools reopened. Although the numbers were relatively low, an increase had been seen among vulnerable families - Welsh Government intended to legislate a requirement to register a child if they received home education.
- there needed to be reflexive action and address misogynistic culture among boys to get to the root of problems in the field of sexual harassment in schools as a result of the emergence of the *'Everyone's Invited'* website.
- data from the Police showed an increase in the number of domestic offences in Gwynedd during the last two quarters - the matter would be given priority at the Partnership's next meetings to ensure that enough was being done to get messages out to the public.

Cllr Dilwyn Morgan was thanked for chairing the panel along with officers and Members for their commitment to the excellent work that was being done in the safeguarding field and during a challenging period - mainly as a result of Covid-19 and the challenges relating to the virus. Regardless, it was noted that the Strategic Safeguarding Panel had continued to arrange on-line meetings and move the agenda forward. It was reiterated that there was also an intention to reflect on the working arrangements of the Strategic Panel and the Operational Group to ensure effective action - the work would be carried out in early 2022, introducing any changes to the operation of the group and the panel by the meetings of summer 2022 onwards.

Observations arising from the discussion

- Eager to look into the number of parents who continued to home-school their children - this caused concern given that children who, typically, disengaged from services were vulnerable.
- The vision of safeguarding girls in schools and attempting to change the misogynistic culture among boys was welcomed.

10. THE EFFECT OF COVID-19 ON BYW'N IACH'S 2022/23 BUDGET

The report was submitted by Cllr Ioan Thomas

DECISION

- a) To authorise the Head of Finance to extend the period of assurance previously given to Byw'n Iach Cyf up to the end of the 2022/23 financial year, and confirm that if the Covid-19 crisis continues, that Gwynedd Council will support the company financially until 31/03/2023 at least.

- b) That a further review of the company's business plan is submitted to the Cabinet within 6 months.**

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted highlighting that an accounting technical matter was the basis of the report. In accordance with the requirements of international audit standards, it was explained that an external auditor had to express an independent opinion about companies' ability to continue to trade for at least 12 months. In the context of Byw'n lach, which was a limited company, external auditors were required to give assurance of the viability of the business when providing an opinion on the company's accounts.

When considering the options, it was reported that maintaining an arms-length company under the Council's control to run the County's leisure facilities currently remained as the most suitable from a financial perspective, and mainly because of the advantages of non-domestic rates. However, it was highlighted that there was nothing in the administration agreement between the Council and the Byw'n lach company noting that the Council would give automatic indemnity to the company from financial losses - this would not be expected as the company was expected to maintain itself in a normal period.

It was noted that this was the third report of its kind to be submitted to the Cabinet since the beginning of the pandemic and it was highlighted that the Welsh Government's Hardship Fund and the Westminster Government's Furlough Scheme had supported Byw'n lach financially over the past two years. For 2022/23, Gwynedd Council would need to shoulder the financial burden itself as the Government schemes had come/were coming to an end.

When approving the 2022/23 Budget, it was stated that the Council had approved an additional £1.4m to a fund to cope with the side-effects of the pandemic (although it was noted at the time that it was not expected to be sufficient in itself). It was added that a Covid Recovery Fund had also been established when the 2020/21 accounts were closed to this end, and the Financial Strategy Reserve could be used if necessary. Although a figure for the need for support could not be provided, it was expected for it to be significantly lower than the 2021/22 contribution.

The Head of Finance Department noted that he was convinced, at present, that the Covid-19 crisis was the reason for the need to support Byw'n lach and as Finance officers collaborated with the company's officers on financial projections for the coming year, he highlighted that the number of Byw'n lach service users would remain lower than they were right before the pandemic. When planning for the new financial year, it was added that public confidence, and therefore the number of users, would gradually increase during the year. It was emphasised that it was not anticipated that the submission of a report similar to this one would become an annual arrangement - this would raise questions about the long-term viability of the company - in normal times, it would be expected for the company's auditor to be able to provide viable business assurance for Byw'n lach based on the robustness of its business plan without the need for a safety net by the

Council.

Should the recommendation be approved, the Head of Finance Department would consult with the Head of Legal Services and the Head of Economy and Community Department to draw up a letter before sending it to the Chair of the Company.

Observations arising from the discussion

- The impact of Covid was clear.
- The confidence of Leisure Centre users needed to be restored.
- Byw'n lach had had to survive the substantial impacts of Covid after only one year since its establishment.
- The Leisure Centres were now open and use was increasing.
- Accepted that drawing comparisons with the pre-pandemic period should not be done - it had to be accepted that social behaviour had changed substantially.
- A suggestion to amend the year 1 business plan to correspond with the change - consider outdoor activities and on-line gym exercises.
- Eager to provide financial assurance to Byw'n lach.

The meeting commenced at 13:00 and concluded at 14:00

CHAIRMAN