
CARE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

30/01/2020

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

Councillors: Menna Baines, Annwen Daniels, Anwen Davies Gareth T M Jones, R.Medwyn Hughes, Eryl Jones-Williams, Cai Larsen, Dafydd Owen, Peter Read and Angela Russell.

Officers present: Llywela Owain (Senior Scrutiny and Language Advisor), Lowri Haf Evans (Democratic Services Officer) and Gruff Ellis (Democratic Services Officer)

Present for item 5:

Councillor Dilwyn Morgan (Cabinet Member for Children and Young People)
Marian Parry Hughes (Head of Children and Supporting Families Department)
Aled Gibbard (Senior Operational Manager - Childcare Resources)
Melvin Panther (Fostering Team Manager)

Present for item 6:

Councillor Dilwyn Morgan (Cabinet Member for Children and Young People)
Marian Parry Hughes (Head of Children and Supporting Families Department)
Aled Gibbard (Senior Operational Manager - Childcare Resources)
Melvin Panther (Fostering Team Manager)

Present for item 7 below:

Councillor Dilwyn Morgan (Cabinet Member for Children and Young People)
Marian Parry Hughes (Head of Children and Supporting Families Department)
Stephen Wood (Gwynedd and Anglesey Youth Justice Service Manager)

Present for item 8:

Councillor Dilwyn Morgan (Cabinet Member for Children and Young People)
Marian Parry Hughes (Head of Children and Supporting Families Department)

Present for item 9:

Councillor Craig ab Iago (Cabinet Member for Housing)
Dafydd Gibbard (Head of Housing and Property Department)

Present for item 10:

Councillor Dafydd Meurig (Cabinet Member for Adults, Health and Well-being)
Aled Davies (Head of Adults, Health and Well-being Department)
Mari Wynne Jones (Senior Adult Services Manager)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Linda Ann Wyn Jones

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

- a) Councillor Cai Larsen for item 9 on the agenda, as he sat on the Adra Housing Association Board.
- b) Councillor Dewi Roberts for item 10 on the agenda, as his wife worked with Dementia patients in the Dwyfor Area.

They were not prejudicial interests.

3 URGENT ITEMS

None to note.

4. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee held on 14 November 2019 as a true record.

5. THE NATIONAL FOSTERING FRAMEWORK

An update was submitted on the National Fostering Framework, which included comprehensive and substantial information regarding the Framework along with the proposed development of the Framework on a national and regional level. Reference was made to the main work streams associated with the Framework's work programme, along with the regional priorities. In addition to the regional priorities, it was reported that the Service in Gwynedd was reviewing its structure in response to the Service's requirements in terms of achieving better balance when assessing and supporting kinship and general foster carers.

Members were encouraged to attend activity days for foster parents which were arranged jointly by the Council and the Foster Parents Partnership in order to scrutinise the relationship and attempt to gain better understanding of the work.

Gratitude was expressed for the information, and the staff were congratulated on their hard work in a very important field.

During the discussion, the following observations were made by Members:-

- There was a concern regarding a lack of support from Welsh Government to fund the need
- The anticipation of the need for 180 new general foster carers over the next three years was ambitious
- There was a need for better marketing - some authorities were more innovative than others
- There was a concern that the private sector would gain more influence
- There was a need to ensure that Welsh speaking children were placed with Welsh families
- The report was too general - there was a need for more information regarding the situation in Gwynedd
- There was a concern, should two teams be established, that certain matters would fall 'between two stools'
- There was a concern that people were withdrawing from the process as the process was too complex and difficult - a suggestion was made to ask fosterers who withdrew for their reasons

In response to a question regarding the additional work which has been created with the arrival of the national work programme, it was noted that positive regional collaboration was in place across the regions and that, due to this, there were not many changes / amendments to be made.

In response to an observation regarding the reason people were withdrawing from the process, it was highlighted that the reasons varied but that the majority were due to a change in personal circumstances rather than dissatisfaction with the Service. It was expressed that there was a need to ensure a robust process with safe regulations and guidelines; the requirements and criteria were high due to the nature of the field.

It was added that the re-branding of the Service across Wales to attract people into the Service was one of the Framework's key work streams. It was noted that a bid had been submitted to the Government for additional funds for branding and recruitment in Gwynedd. Traditionally, marketing had not been a part of job requirements within the Gwynedd fostering model; however, the Service was now confident that establishing a specific post for marketing and recruitment would be a substantial improvement.

In response to an observation regarding the need for 180 new general foster carers over the next three years, it was highlighted that this was a regional figure, and that Gwynedd anticipated the need for 30 carers over the next three years. While accepting that this was ambitious, the need to ensure a work programme for Gwynedd on what was needed was emphasised.

In response to a concern regarding splitting the fostering team into two, it was emphasised that there was no intention to split the team. What was being considered was a division of roles, in order for one team to focus on general foster carers and the other to focus on kinship foster carers.

RESOLVED to accept the report

- **An update on the marketing element is required in 12 months' time.**
- **An update on the successes / failures of dividing the fostering team's roles is required in 12 months' time.**
- **A request is made for a report explaining how Gwynedd's work interlinks with regional work (successes and failures)**

6. NORTH WALES ADOPTION SERVICE

An update was submitted on the North Wales Adoption Service. Members were reminded of the work done by Local Authorities in North Wales to work in partnership to create a regional service, by pooling resources and acting efficiently when placing children. The Service became operational in April 2010, and the National Adoption Service was established five years later. Reference was made to the Annual Report (2018 - 2019) of the National Adoption Service, which was appended to the report.

It was explained that Wrexham Borough County Council was the Host Authority for the Service and that the staff, since 2010, had been seconded to the Service but continued to work within their original authorities. The fact that the performance of all Welsh regions was collated by the National Adoption Service was highlighted, and that four main achievements had been identified for North Wales in 2018 - 2019:

- The appointment of a Contact Co-ordination Officer who offered consistent responses and support to adoptive and biological parents in terms of direct and non-direct contact.
- Worked with the specialist, Richard Rose, to implement the Life History Framework.
- Extended the Buddy Scheme for Adopters.
- Invested in increasing the Training Officer's skills

Following a review of the Service in 2017-2019, insufficient capacity on an operational and strategic level to manage and develop the service was identified, and therefore the structure was remodelled by moving over to a Service which was managed fully by Wrexham Council. It was noted that all current staff would transfer into Wrexham Council's employment in 2020, but would continue to work from their current local authorities. It was reported that additional funding was available on a national level for the development of adoption support services along with National Lottery funding for a TESSA Service.

During the discussion, the following observations were made by Members:-

- That many of the Service's work streams were dependent on grants or additional funding, and that this created concern as a result of having to depend on grants. There was a need to consider plans for reserve funding.
- There was a risk that schemes could be withdrawn due to a lack of budget
- Should Gwynedd Council consider the option of buying a house in order to keep children from the same family together?
- There was a need for better marketing of the Service as well as improving communication methods

In response to an observation regarding permanent budgets, the Cabinet Member noted his desire to ensure that open discussions were being held when any successful and effective grant funded scheme continued.

In response to an observation that the data submitted with the report highlighted that Gwynedd appeared very low in terms of enquiry numbers, the number of adopters available, children placed in 2018 and the number waiting for placements, it was noted that there were no particular reasons for the low levels. It was acknowledged that there was a need to ensure that people received the correct information and that there was a need for better marketing of the service and to erase the historic perception of requirements for adopting. It was added that there was a way to discuss and collaborate through any situation.

In response to a question as to whether the children who were fostered moved on to be adopted by the same family, it was noted that there were successful examples to be had, but that consideration of the child's true needs was the priority. It was noted that no child was placed with the intention of being moved on to adoption.

It was noted that there were insufficient adoption providers for children and that the number of families / enquiries displayed a lower trend than usual. However, this was not unique to North Wales and, as a result, the matter was being addressed on a national level.

RESOLVED to accept the report, and a request was made for an update in 12 months' time

7. DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROBLEMATIC AND HARMFUL SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR TEAM (PHSB TEAM)

A report was submitted notifying Members of the development and key expectations of the Problematic and Harmful Sexual Behaviour Team established for Gwynedd in September 2019. The purpose of establishing a multi-agency integrated team was to provide support to co-ordinate cases of problematic and harmful sexual behaviour in response to the requirements of the Harmful Sexual Behaviour Inspection and Framework. It was noted in the Report that, although good work was being done, there was very little early intervention available.

Attention was drawn to the rationale for establishing the team in addition to the way the team was funded via the Integrated Care Fund. It was highlighted that the Gwynedd Team (now known as the Emrallt Team) comprised of four members and was located with the Youth Justice Service, where it benefited from the established partnership strategies and cross-sector networks.

Gratitude was expressed for the report.

During the discussion, the following observations were made by Members:-

- Concern that the problem was on the rise
- There was a need to encourage / call upon parents to take responsibility
- There was a need to ensure early intervention
- Concern around the fact that the project was funded via the Integrated Care Fund - there was a need to secure permanent funding for the project
- All Councillors and Governors were encouraged to use / familiarise themselves with 'Myconcern' (a useful resource to record safeguarding concerns for schools)
- People needed to be encouraged to pick up the phone and discuss / highlight concerns - there was a need to reinforce the message
- There was need to ensure that messages were shared with school Welfare Officers and the Police

In response to an observation regarding the securing of permanent funding for this project, it was highlight that there was no indication that permanent funding was available for this project.

RESOLVED to accept the report

8. THE 'A HEALTHIER WALES' (CHILDREN) TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME

A report was submitted providing Members with an update on the implementation progress of the 'A Healthier Wales' (Children) Transformation Programme in Gwynedd. Members were reminded that 'A Healthier Wales' was Welsh Government's long term scheme for health and social care, published in 2018 in response to the Parliamentary Review of Health and Social Care. In relation to the Healthier Wales Scheme, there was an action plan, arranged in the form of a national programme of transformation and supported by the Transformation Fund. It was added that the North Wales Regional Partnership Board had responded to 'A Healthier Wales', securing resources from the transformation fund for four fields of work. It was highlighted that one of those fields was

Transforming Integrated Early Intervention and Intensive Support for Children and Young People. An update was provided on the programme's main work streams.

- Piloting of the 'Effective Child Protection' model - the pilot was operational in Gwynedd only, in an attempt to ensure that child protection practices were effective. The other north Wales regions were eager to see whether the project was successful
- The Intensive Support Multi-disciplinary Team - the establishment of a team across Gwynedd and Anglesey to ensure support for a small percentage of families who would benefit from intensive intervention due to complex needs
- Early Support Hub - work was ongoing to develop the Hub, which had already drawn together the Children's Social Services Admissions Team, the Information for Families Team and the Team around the Family. The hub would use one procedure for admission, assessment and referral, and would be a gateway for information, early support, preventative services, care and safeguarding.
- Children and Young People's Mental Health and Emotional Well-being - this work stream was being led by Betsi Cadwaladr Health Board. The first meeting of the Steering Group, arranged for January, had been postponed.

It was reported that the work streams supported by designated Project Managers reported to the North Wales Children and Young People Transformation Group.

During the discussion, the following observations were made by Members:-

- That postponing the Children and Young People's Mental Health and Emotional Well-being Steering Group was unacceptable, given the importance of the field
- There was a concern that Council services would have to fill the gap if the Health Board did not provide services
- There was a need to ensure that the effective child protection model continued beyond the pilot period.

In response to a concern regarding the fact that the first meeting of the Children and Young People's Mental Health and Emotional Well-being Steering Group had been postponed, it was noted that it was a challenging situation in terms of delivering the right service for children, and that it was the Steering Group's intention to have open discussions with the Health Board to improve the provision.

In response to an observation regarding the effective child protection model, it was noted that the work would continue as it was led by the Service's internal arrangements. It was added that Gwynedd would be launching a good practice model, and that the practice would be cascaded to the entire service over the coming year.

The service was thanked for its work

RESOLVED to receive an update in 12 months' time

9. HOUSING ACTION PLAN 2020 - 2025

A report on the Housing Action Plan for 2020 to 2025 was submitted by the Cabinet member and the Head of Housing and Property Department. The purpose of this report was to update the Care Scrutiny Committee on the impending work to develop specific solutions to the housing challenges facing the residents of Gwynedd, in order to consult with the Committee before the proposed expenditure programme was submitted for the Cabinet's approval in due course, in March of the same year. The report explained the main housing challenges seen in Gwynedd, the resources available for the housing plan 2020-25, and the long list of schemes which needed priority. It was emphasised that this was an early step in the process, and that the presenters were at the meeting to listen to Committee members' input and priorities, in order to begin the work of turning the Council's housing strategy into an operational plan for the next financial year.

The funding available to achieve these schemes was discussed, and attention was drawn specifically to the source of income from Council tax on second homes and empty houses. In response to a question from the members, it was noted that the figure in the report and the anticipated income from this tax was reasonable. It was estimated that £2.7m would be collected annually from this tax; however, it was noted that £2.9m had been collected in the first year. The challenge posed by people who had ways and means of avoiding this taxation, such as by registering the house as a business, was discussed. It was noted that there were upcoming discussions with the Government regarding ensuring that people did not avoid paying as they were required to do. It was also explained that the Council had the ability to take out loans at a cheaper rate than housing associations, should the Council decide that more funding was needed to support the housing plan. In response to a question regarding the Council's relationship with housing associations, it was emphasised that the intention and aim was to work with the housing associations rather than to compete against them. It was explained working alongside the housing associations was an opportunity to combine resources, skills and strengths in various fields, especially as the Council had transferred its expertise in tasks such as rent collection to Adra.

In response to members' enquiries regarding the ambition, it was acknowledged that there were many obstacles, including financial ones, but it was emphasised that they were ambitious, and wished to achieve as many of the schemes as possible. In response to a question from members regarding what the Housing and Property Department considered to be the priorities, the head of department noted the following: bringing empty houses back into use as this achieved more than one objective, increasing the housing options available to local people, schemes involving care and supported housing, and schemes addressing homelessness issues.

The Cabinet Member and the Head of the Housing and Property Department expanded on the content of the report, and also responded to questions and observations from members. They expressed their gratitude to the Committee for its work, that they appreciated the good relationship, and that they were eager for the Committee to play an increased role in future. During the discussion, the following observations were made:

- Each of the schemes noted in the report were approved, noting that it was difficult to prioritise them. However, the priorities mentioned or highlighted during the discussion were increasing the number of affordable houses for young people, offering support to people who were unable to get a mortgage or who were unable to secure temporary accommodation while the house was being built, housing for large families with many children, prioritising vulnerable people and the schemes which would have the widest impact on the largest number of people, prioritising supported housing in order to ensure that people were able to live independently (something the Council, in the opinion of the member, had not always succeeded

in doing in the past), and purchasing empty houses in order to bring the buildings back into use.

- In response to an observation that support for large families with many children was not included within the schemes, reference was made to three items in the plan which could address this issue; however, it was acknowledged that there was a need to make direct reference to large families in order to highlight this.
- In response to observations regarding the number of affordable houses, the support available to young people at present, and the general definition of affordable housing, it was explained that some of the matters referred to were planning matters. It was noted that the Plan would attempt to address the need to increase housing options and supply for local people.
- In response to members' observations regarding the relationship with the planning department, the Head of Department noted that constructive discussions had already commenced with the planning department in terms of what was possible to achieve. The Head of Department noted that both departments had a very good relationship and that they would continue to work together on what was possible to achieve within the Planning framework. It was also emphasised that the importance was in providing according to need rather than windfall development, thus agreeing with a member's observation that the point in the report regarding establishing the actual need for houses in our communities was of core importance to the plan in moving forward.
- It was noted that the Council ran an empty houses scheme, which had succeeded in bringing 56 houses back into use in the current year. It was explained that the process of recovering well-known empty buildings in town centres was a lengthy and complicated one, but that there were upcoming discussions with the Government in order to understand how this process could be undertaken, and that it was possible that there would be new powers available in the near future.
- In response to an observation that getting a mortgage was the main obstacle preventing people from acquiring a house and that the Council should therefore consider purchasing houses or offering loans, it was explained that the Department was aware of a previous discussion regarding a mortgages scheme, but that part-ownership schemes seemed more promising as a solution at present.
- The possibility of supporting individuals through the self-build process was also discussed. It was noted that one of the schemes within the report referred to this situation, as the Government was investing in a similar scheme. It was noted that it appeared to be a complex scheme at present.
- The suggestion that councillors should help by drawing officers' attention to land which went up for sale in their wards in order to allow the Council to move quickly should it be possible to purchase was welcomed. The Committee was asked for its approval to develop this idea further, in order to obtain guidance as to how this could be done and via which process.

RESOLVED to accept the report and look at establishing a task and finish group in order to work alongside the Housing and Property Department, and to offer support through the process of prioritising the housing schemes.

10. DEMENTIA

A dementia report was submitted for information and to raise awareness of dementia, by providing Members with an overview of the work being done in Gwynedd to secure support and services for people living with dementia. In 2015, there were 1,927 aged 65 and over in Gwynedd who had dementia. By 2035, it was anticipated that there would be 2,923 people in Gwynedd who had dementia. It was noted in the report that it was

difficult to obtain accurate data on the actual number of individuals who lived with dementia or memory impairments in Gwynedd, since a great many of those who came to our attention had not received an assessment or an official diagnosis. It was stated in the report that the vision was to provide timely information, advice and support to individuals with dementia in Gwynedd. It was noted that a range of support was available to individuals diagnosed with Dementia, from information and community support as the early signs of the condition emerged, to mainstream services such as domiciliary care and day care, and specialist intensive care during the final stages. It was noted that the Council was eager to ensure that people with dementia received the most suitable care as locally as possible.

The report stated that Gwynedd Council would maintain its commitment to fulfilling the requirements of the Dementia Action Plan for Wales by working together with individuals, their families and friends, and our partners in the third sector and the Health Board. It was noted that the services were reliant on temporary funding to support a great number of the developments in care provision for individuals with dementia. It was noted that, as part of the previous year's bidding process, the department had submitted an application to bridge the Dementia Go Scheme gap, and that the challenge was to secure long-term funding to ensure the sustainability and continued development of this service.

The Cabinet Member and officers expanded on the content of the report, and also responded to questions and observations from the members. During the discussion, the following observations were made:

- The Cabinet Member and the officers were thanked for the report. It was noted that it was difficult to scrutinise the entire content of the report within a single session, and it was noted that a specific field under the title of dementia could be identified for scrutiny in depth if required.
- Sympathy was expressed towards people who lived with dementia or who cared for people with dementia, and it was acknowledged that this was a problem affecting an increasing number of people within our communities. It was noted that a number of families were facing the difficult situation of being unable to care for a person living with dementia and having to depend on a care service.
- Concern was raised regarding residential and nursing home fees, especially those additional fees within the service that people were expected to pay, noting that the fees in general were beyond some people's capacity to afford. It was acknowledged that this was a matter related to the dementia report, and that it was an increasingly problematic issue. It was noted that it was a reflection of the situation in general, across the care sector. It was confirmed that the Council was aware of the situation and was looking at sustainable fees, but it was noted that the Council was not the only commissioner within the field; therefore, until the situation in its entirety was given attention, it would be difficult to resolve.
- It was emphasised that, in the member's opinion, dementia was a matter for the Health Board. It was noted that there was a need for the Health Board and social services, with the Government's guidance, to work together to tackle the problem of dementia, and that it would be impossible to find a solution to the problem until this collaboration occurred.
- In response to members' observations, it was noted that individuals often arrived at the Council's door when their condition had deteriorated to a situation of

emergency, and that traditional care in care homes was the suitable response in such situations. It was noted that many people in our communities were currently living with the early symptoms of dementia, but had not been diagnosed. It was emphasised that there was a need to improve the methods of providing information regarding the services and the provision available from the Council and other sectors in order to reach people sooner, and to support them along the care pathway before they arrived at a care home in a state of emergency. The requirements of dementia provision meant that a wide range of support was available via the care system from the Council, the third sector and the Health Board. In addition to this, it was noted that reinforcing the support for carers was a priority and that the department had appointed a member of staff to look at this field in particular.

- In response to a question regarding units for partners within dementia care homes, it was explained that these units were not specifically available within the Council's services, but that it was possible to make arrangements for couples to be co-located in the same home. Units of this kind were available at some other care homes.
- In response to a question regarding the relationship with the Housing and Property Department, it was confirmed that there had been close collaboration, and that the schemes in the Housing and Property Department's report, presented during the previous item, reflected the Adults, Health and Well-being department's input and suggestions. The care schemes within the housing plan derived from the needs identified by the Adults' Department and the Children's Department. There were discussions regarding Frondeg in Caernarfon and the Penygroes Health Hub in particular. It was noted that this was a long term programme of developments in order to address the needs which increased annually.
- In response to members' observations regarding the lack of private sector care provision in south Meirionnydd, it was noted that there was a need to consider the possibilities in terms of the Council offering to fill the gap, and it was explained that the Council's investment in the homes in that area was a reflection of this.
- In response to a request made by the members, it was agreed to prepare a concise handout by the next meeting, giving an outline view of the service with information and figures in terms of bed numbers, staff numbers, length of waiting lists, etc.

RESOLVED to accept the report.

The meeting commenced at 10.30am and concluded at 3.10pm.

(lunch break 12:40 - 13:30)