
CARE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

26/11/2020

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

Councillors: Annwen Daniels, Anwen J Davies, R. Medwyn Hughes, Berwyn Parry Jones, Gareth Tudor Morris Jones, Eryl Jones-Williams, Olaf Cai Larsen, Dafydd Owen, Rheinallt Puw, Angela Russell

Ex-officio Member: Councillor Edgar Wyn Owen

Officers present:

Bethan Adams (Scrutiny Advisor), Vera Jones (Democracy and Language Services Manager) and Einir Rhian Davies (Democracy Services Officer)

Present for item 7:

Councillor Dafydd Meurig (Cabinet Member - Adults, Health and Well-being and Relationship with the Health Board), Aled Davies (Head of Adults, Health and Well-being Department) and Mari W Jones (Senior Adults, Health and Well-being Service Manager)

Present for item 8:

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

1. ELECTION OF CHAIR

RESOLVED to re-elect Councillor Dewi W Roberts as Chair of this Committee for 2020/21.

2. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

RESOLVED to re-elect Councillor Beth Lawton as Vice-chair of this Committee for 2020/21.

3 APOLOGIES

Councillors Menna Baines, Linda A Jones and Linda Morgan

4. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

Declarations of personal interest were received as follows in relation to item 7 on the agenda:

- Cllr R Medwyn Hughes – Member of the Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board

The member was of the opinion that it was a prejudicial interest, and he did not participate in the discussion on the item.

- Cllr Eryl Jones-Williams - Has a relative who is a wheelchair user
- Cllr Rheinallt Puw - Employed by Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board
- Cllr Dewi W Roberts - Member of the Working Group
- Cllr Angela Russell - Member of the Working Group

The members were of the opinion that these were not prejudicial interests and they participated fully in the discussion on the item.

5. URGENT ITEMS

None to note.

6. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this Committee held on 30 January, 2020 as a true record.

7. PROGRESS REPORT ON THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION: SUPPORTING THE DISABLED PEOPLE OF GWYNEDD (WHEELCHAIR SERVICE)

Gratitude was expressed for the progress report, following the submission of the matter to the Scrutiny Committee in September 2019. A request was made for comments on the actions as a result of the recommendations, and it was noted as follows:

It was confirmed that the Cabinet Member had written to Vaughan Gething in 2019, drawing attention to the report, but he noted that no response had been received, however it was felt that the matters arising from the recommendations were for local action. He noted that the work had highlighted the collaboration between the Council and the Health Service and it was felt that a number of the recommendations in the Report were directed to the Health Service. Consequently, the importance of keeping communication live with the Health Board was expressed. The Senior Adults, Health and Well-being Manager confirmed that the response of the Health Service to the recommendation was in the report.

A report on matters specific to the Health Service was given (see below), which showed a shift in the matters; however, progress had slowed down due to COVID.

It was confirmed that the Regional Partnership Working Group was yet to be established but that local arrangements had been established between the Posture and Mobility Service and Gwynedd Council to improve collaboration.

The appointment of an Occupational Therapy Leader for Gwynedd Council has facilitated communication and collaboration with the Health Service.

Electronic referral documents were currently being trialled by Health Service and it is intended to introduce an electronic referral procedure soon.

Joint training is taking place between the Posture and Mobility Service and the Gwynedd Community Resources Team.

Concern was expressed regarding the delay in terms of home environment assessments, along with a concern that occupational therapists were not receiving training, and it was questioned whether this had been resolved? It was confirmed that it is the responsibility of the Council's Occupational Therapists to carry out a home environment assessment and that it is the responsibility of the Posture and Mobility Services' occupational therapist's to complete assessments for specialised equipment. There is no further developments regarding an agreement by the Health Service for Occupational Therapists from Local Authorities to receive specialised training. Nevertheless, there has been an increase in the joint visits between the Local Authority's therapists and the Posture and Mobility Services' which improves collaboration and reduces the delay in ensuring suitable and timely equipment. It was confirmed that any developments would be shared with the Committee.

It was confirmed that the members of the working group had spoken with some patients about the impact/shortcomings and confirmation was received that the Working Group had been able to improve the service and that the Health Board had moved on, and that much had changed, for the better, whilst the investigation had been in progress.

Pride was expressed when reading the recommendations; however, the substantial difference between North and South Wales was noted. It was noted that it was important not to forget the recommendations, to continue to receive updates and continue to improve in order to move forward. It was confirmed that the assessments were better in the South and that there was room to improve the Service in the North and that this required the attention of the Health Board and the Health Council.

A question was asked of the equipment being issued to the patients and it was noted that it was not always suitable and it was questioned whether that problem had been resolved. It was noted that this was important for the well-being of individuals and the Senior Adults, Health and Well-being Service Manager confirmed, in relation to the individuals coming through the Council's Social Services, that they had not received concerns regarding suitability of equipment that has been provided. The example where some individuals required a special chair was shared; without a special chair, they deteriorated and there were problems with the health service's storage facilities.

The message of the Senior Adults, Health and Well-being Manager was reiterated by the Head of Adults, Health and Well-being Department who sympathised with the message, and he noted that he would like to reassure the councillor, however, this was a question for the Health Service and therefore, was it possible to send a letter to Health? It was agreed that the relationship with the Health Service had vastly improved, that there was a lot of shift and that there were ideas for the future, and he confirmed that the Councillor's comments would be addressed.

The Working Group and officers were thanked for adhering to Gwynedd Council's policy of putting people first.

RESOLVED to accept the content of the report and associated documents, noting the comments. Assurance was sought that the Service was keeping an eye on what was happening.

8. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

It was noted that the report was being submitted with pride in the staff and foster parents. A report was given on how the Service had responded to continuing with the

Service during this difficult period and responding to the demand during the lockdown period.

It was confirmed that there were 294 looked after children at the end of September 2020, and that they were being looked after for various reasons. It was noted that placing a child in care was the last resort, but sometimes, there was no other choice.

Reference was made to the figure of 27 first-time looked after children in the period between April and September - i.e. they were not known to the Council prior to this period, whilst accepting also that anonymous referrals had increased to 71%. On the other hand, it was confirmed that 24 had left the service during the period. In relation to the children who were the subject of a Care Order, it was confirmed that collaboration had taken place with the parents.

Reference was made to the attachment, which detailed numbers and placements, noting that some children were at home with family or members of the extended family.

In terms of fostering resources, it was noted that 72 placements had been registered that had the capacity to offer placement for 139 children, along with 60 other fostering placements by means of extended family. It was confirmed that additional placements had been registered during the period, and that the method of holding meetings had changed and that a recruitment campaign had taken place.

It was confirmed that it was difficult to obtain placements for a small percentage, which was the Council's responsibility, and that the real last resort was to place in unregulated placement. It was confirmed, during the past five years, that seven such arrangements had taken place for a period of three weeks at the longest.

Reference was made to Welsh Government policy to reduce the number of looked after children. The Committee was reminded that the policy direction was given the highest priority some years ago and the Government had been informed at that time that Gwynedd would not set a target, and avoid previous targets: this was not an easy stance.

It was noted that Covid had introduced new challenges and that the workforce had been incredible in adapting quickly, and had dealt with matters such as:

- Continuing to carry out Assessments
- Continuing to keep in contact with parents
- Closing Hafan y Sêr
- Collaborating with the Education Department
- Virtual Reviews for Looked After Children
- Establishing a Helpline
- Assistance to access materials such as medicines and baby food

Later on, matters such as the following were dealt with:

- Re-opening Hafan y Sêr
- Re-commencing contact arrangements between children and parents (with PPE of course)
- Continuing to work from home

Concern was noted about staff and it was noted that the Service executed its responsibilities in full, albeit in a different way.

In relation to the staff, it was noted as follows:

Health and Safety Procedures were tight
Managers were in regular contact
The management team and managers had had three sessions, giving an opportunity to report on challenges and concerns

Gratitude was expressed for the extensive report and questions were asked as follows:

In terms of the point 'At times, the ability to find a suitable residential placement is impossible', it was questioned whether this was a major risk for the staff? It was also questioned how the risk to staff could be reduced.

It was noted that some individuals needed a response to their special needs. Unfortunately, not only could private providers name their price, but also, placements were not always available. It was confirmed that the solution was very difficult. It was noted that when the situation arose, there was never a lack of staff who were prepared to volunteer to do the work.

It was questioned, if this was a national problem, then shouldn't the Government be challenged, accepting that it would not be easy? Was there possibly a work stream here to consider the matter and proceed with it nationally; despite the fact that the issue was an old problem? The Committee was glad that the Head of Children and Supporting Families Department was Chairing the discussion Group on this.

Concern was expressed about the pay-freeze, especially when staff were doing their best. It was noted that the high care figures showed that the Service looked after children and pride was expressed that the children were in good hands.

In terms of the Government's target of reducing the number of looked after children, support was expressed to Gwynedd's stance of not setting a % target, confirming there would be no more children in care than those who were in genuine need of being looked after. In addition, it was also noted that setting a target was not the answer, but rather to improve, and it was confirmed that there was a need to show clearly and regularly what improvements had been made and what barriers had been overcome.

The fact that more children had come into care now as a result of telephone calls from individuals was questioned - why was this? In response, it was noted that the individuals maybe had concerns, people were working from home and they saw or heard more or there were more eyes in our communities. It was noted that the Service continued to see anonymous referrals.

The Cabinet Member gave thanks for the work, and he referred to the challenges, including:

the government's target and the fact that Gwynedd had come under pressure, but continued to refuse to set a target.

A Care Inspectorate Inspection was in the pipeline, which had come at a difficult time
Staff well-being matters

Financial challenges, where no stone was left unturned to see whether a saving could be made, although safety was paramount

It may be interesting, and useful, to submit a case study of an individual in the system to the Committee in the future

The Head and the Department were thanked for the way they had responded to the situation.

RESOLVED to accept the report and note the comments.

The meeting commenced at 10.00 and concluded at 11.45

CHAIR