

CARE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE, THURSDAY, 29 SEPTEMBER 2022

Present: Councillor Eryl Jones-Williams (Chair)

Councillors: Menna Baines, Anwen J. Davies, Jina Gwyrfai, Dewi Jones, Elwyn Jones, Linda Ann Jones, Beth Lawton, Linda Morgan, Gareth Coj Parry, John Pughe, Rheinallt Puw, Meryl Roberts, Angela Russell, Einir Wyn Williams and Sasha Williams.

Officers present:

Bethan Adams (Scrutiny Advisor), Llywela Haf Owain (Senior Language and Scrutiny Advisor) and Sioned Mai Jones (Democracy Services Officer).

Present for item 6:

Councillor Dilwyn Morgan (Cabinet Member - Adults, Health and Well-being), Aled Davies (Head of Adults, Health and Well-being Department) and Rhion Glyn (Assistant Head - Adults, Health and Well-being).

Present for item 7:

Councillor Craig ab Iago (Cabinet Member for Housing and Property), Carys Fôn Williams (Head of Housing and Property Department) and David Mark Lewis (Energy and Commercial Services Manager).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors R. Medwyn Hughes and Gwynfor Owen.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

Declarations of personal interest were received for item 6 from Councillor Rheinallt Puw as his daughter worked in the care sector and Councillor Eryl Jones-Williams as his wife received care. These were not prejudicial interests therefore they did not withdraw from the meeting.

3. URGENT ITEMS

None to note.

4. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this Committee held on 7 July, 2022 as a true record.

5. PERFORMANCE CHALLENGE MEETINGS - CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

The Committee was reminded that one other representative was required to attend challenge performance meetings in the Children and Supporting Families work field. It was noted that these meetings will be an opportunity to receive updates on priority projects and a chance to challenge and bring issues to the attention of the Scrutiny Committee. These meetings would take place twice a year.

RESOLVED:

To nominate Councillor Sasha Williams as the second Councillor to attend the Children and Supporting Families work field meetings.

6. RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF STAFF (ADULTS, HEALTH AND WELL-BEING DEPARTMENT)

The Cabinet Member for Adults, Health and Well-being reported that the Recruitment and Retention of Staff Report provided the background and highlighted the staffing crisis that exists within the Department. It was noted that the report was honest and did not try to hide any issues. It was added that the staffing crisis in the field of adult care was a national crisis that impacts Local Authorities as well as Health Services.

The opportunity was taken to thank Department staff for their work as well as the Head and Assistant Head for the report. It was noted that the report would be submitted to the Leadership Team and the Cabinet and national and Regional discussions were being held to highlight the current crisis.

The report was presented by the Assistant Head who noted the background that reflected the seriousness of the situation. It was reported that staffing matters in this field had received priority for some time and attention locally pre-Covid, however, the pandemic had exacerbated the situation that was already vulnerable.

Members of the Committee were guided through the report and attention was drawn to the key challenges such as retention of staff and trying to attract new staff to the field. The reasons for these challenges were summarised prior to noting how the Department seeks to respond to the situation and the work that is currently on-going.

The Head of the Adults, Health and Well-being Department added that the report was very open about the challenges the Department faces and that other Departments such as the Children and Supporting Families Department, also faced significant challenges. It was believed that it was important to share the challenges as they impact the Department's ability to provide services. It was noted that this report gave an internal picture of the Council's situation and did not include similar challenges that exist in the private sector and in the third sector. It was reported that these sectors also faced the same recruitment challenges.

The impact of the situation was also mentioned for example long waiting lists, patients unable to return home from hospital and the pressure on staff. It was noted that a great deal of effort and activities were being undertaken, and although the Department had experienced small successes, there was no solution to the situation and this caused concern. It was emphasised that there was a need to look at what may be done locally and what was within the Council and the Department's control by securing a careful investment of current resources. It was noted that this was an initial report and it was hoped that suggestions would be received from the Scrutiny Committee and the Members' wish to assist and be part of the solution.

During the discussion, the following observations were submitted by members:-

- Members expressed their thanks for the report. It was believed that it was a duty of Councillors to promote jobs in the care field to local people.
- It was asked whether it was possible to increase the links with Colleges such as Coleg Meirion Dwyfor and to offer placements for pupils. It was asked whether it was possible to visit the College to talk about the type of work and opportunities available

in the care field. It was believed that health and social care classes needed to be encouraged to seek opportunities locally and ensure that continuous training was available in the workplace.

- It was asked whether there was an intention to increase the wages of carers in the future to retain them and ensure they do not leave their posts.
- It was noted that the figure demonstrating a reduction of 42% in the number of persons who had applied to qualify as Social Workers across Wales this year compared to 2016, was striking. It was asked what the figure was for Gwynedd.
- It was asked if a national wage level existed for Social Workers as was in place for teachers.
- Pride was expressed that lobbying work was being undertaken with the Government and encouragement was given for this to continue in order to try and seek national change.
- It was asked how wage levels in Gwynedd compare with Anglesey or Conwy.
- It was noted that it was disheartening to hear about the crisis in the care field, especially that 44% and 34% of jobs advertised had not received any applications between April and July this year. It was asked how these figures compared with other Counties and with other Departments within the Council.
- It was added that it would have been beneficial for the report to focus more on the solutions to the recruitment problems.
- Reference was made to section 5.4 of the report enquiring about an update on the work of the officer appointed in December 2021 to further develop the career pathways within the field and to undertake various marketing work.
- It was asked what plans were in the pipeline to re-produce the success of the Plas Hedd event in Maesgeirchen.
- It was believed that there was concern amongst Social Workers and concerns had been stated regarding the transformation of domiciliary care arrangements that had been undertaken. It was asked, how does the Department support existing staff as well as trying to recruit new staff. There was a wish to know how much effort there had been when care workers ask for help and was it possible to lighten their load.
- It was suggested that the Department should look at further opportunities e.g. offering part time jobs when no one is available to fill full-time posts and look at the Council's in-house staff who may be trained to assist for a few days a week. It was emphasised that flexibility was required and perhaps to try and target staff who lose their work as a result of establishments/shops closing.
- It was asked whether the Department held interviews with staff leaving to note the reasons for leaving their jobs.
- It was asked whether staff had been lost in Gwynedd because they had refused their covid vaccines.
- The previous comments of Members regarding targeting Schools and Coleg Meirion Dwyfor were agreed, however, it was questioned if rural residents would take the opportunities to train while travel costs, fuel and running cars were so expensive. It was added that this was a challenge bearing in mind that shop workers were paid the same if not better than some jobs within the care field. It was believed that carers' wages were insufficient in recognition of the responsibilities.
- It was felt that the health and social care system did not cooperate effectively e.g. people unable to return home from hospital.
- It was believed that there was a need to work with the health system to ensure that jobs and further training were available to graduates in the field or those completing health and social care courses.

- The Chair expressed his appreciation of the Department's work under very challenging circumstances and he took the opportunity to thank Department staff for their work. In addition, Committee Members were thanked for their questions.

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

- It would be possible to make inquiries to see if there has been a reduction in the number of those from Gwynedd who have applied to qualify as a social worker.
- The salary levels of social workers vary across Authorities. It was noted that Social Care Wales were looking at this National issue and it was part of the discussions with the Welsh Government. It was agreed that a National wage level would save staff from moving between Authorities.
- The Department was trying to encourage people to follow careers locally and a good relationship existed with Coleg Meirion Dwyfor. There was a need to ensure that this relationship continued and offers and opportunities were given in the context of work experiences and our part to assess courses. It was reported that the Workforce Development Manager was trying to move this work forward.
- It was possible for an Officer to attend Coleg Meirion Dwyfor to talk about the opportunities in the Care field. It was explained that this had occurred in the past, however, it was believed that cooperation should be emphasised and to firstly improve the structure. It was added that this may happen in the future.
- There was information in the report on the impact of the employment pay agreement, that was general across Local Authority jobs. It was reported that National negotiations were taking place with Partners to look at wage levels in the care field. It was added that internal work was also on-going to review Job Descriptions. It was considered timely to look at the duties and responsibilities of workers in the field as the work had increased and was more complex in the last few years. It was noted that the needs of residents had changed and intensified, by now workers needed to possess specialist skills and training before undertaking aspects of the work and therefore wages paid to staff needed to be verified.
- Following a request for clarification regarding what was noted in section 3.8 of the report, it was confirmed that 13 was the total number of staff in social work teams in the Adults field who had left their posts in 2021/22 to either work for other Local Authorities or to follow careers outside the sector. It was noted that the figure as a percentage was not currently available. It was added that the majority of these 13 posts had now been filled but it would take time for new post-holders to gain relevant experience.
- There would be a need to look further to find the figures regarding how the wage levels in Gwynedd compare to the wage levels in neighbouring Counties.
- It was agreed that the recruitment situation was complex and generally it was thought that consistent messages from other Counties suggested that they were facing the same recruitment challenges as Gwynedd. Compared with other Departments within the Council, it was confirmed that it was the Adults field that was facing the biggest challenges in terms of recruitment.
- It was noted that the post referred to in section 5.4 of the report had shown its value from the first month and that the demands on the officer were high. Reference was made to events that were held e.g. in Maesgeirchen, however, the officer had to select what could be achieved. It was reported that such posts were essential in order to assist to improve the image of working in this field and to

bridge the national work and to invest in branding. It was added that the resource was valuable.

- It was reported that similar events to the one at Plas Hedd had been held e.g. in Porthmadog and Blaenau Ffestiniog but unfortunately they had not proven successful. It was noted that there were differences between communities and it was thought that local campaigns tended to be more successful than National campaigns. It was noted that the Department had a long list of areas they wished to target.
- In response to an observation asking if the department was considering targeting Schools to highlight careers in the field, it was noted that the Department was in the process of creating a package but this needed further attention. This would be a means to summarise relevant information and part of the work of the Workforce Development Unit and the Marketing and Career Development Officer.
- It was acknowledged that there was pressure on staff such as Social Workers and that staff welfare was important to the Department. The Department requests regular input from the Social Workers and they try to give support to the workers. It was noted that the Team Leaders and the Senior Managers kept an eye on the situation and sought to lighten the load. There is communication at all levels and visits are undertaken. It was noted that the Cabinet Member and the Head had visited individuals who work in the field as well as care homes to chat with staff and service users. Members were encouraged to contact them if they were aware of a member of staff within the Department who wanted a further opportunity to talk.
- It was reported that the Department in cooperation with the Council offered services such as Medra, and that National support programmes also existed. An offer to arrange a talk by the Senior Manager, Adults Services or the Senior Manager, Safeguarding, Quality Assurance and Mental Health with Members was made to enable them to receive more details about the Social Workers support service.
- It was reported that work to transform the domiciliary care arrangements was being undertaken for the correct reasons to try and improve the service for Gwynedd residents. It was added that it was unfortunate that this change had occurred at a time when the Service was under huge pressure and this was complicated further due to recruitment challenges. It was believed that the results could be evaluated in a year to a year and a half to see if the transformation had worked. It was added that it was not the transformation that had caused the problems but the timing had been unfortunate and it was currently difficult to measure success.
- It was noted that the Department was trying to promote opportunities, they had already sent a newsletter to Department staff informing them of training opportunities in order to assist with elements of the work. The next step will be to extend the offer to Council staff to see if some wish to help. It was added that the Department was considering and received requests for a variety of working hours and there were opportunities available for the hours individuals were able to work.
- A comment was made that the Department did sponsor and offer work experiences and had supported current Department staff to train and develop their careers and enable them to receive a post following completion of the relevant courses. Individuals interested in pursuing a career in the care field were encouraged to contact the Department.
- It was reported that the Department already conducted exit interviews and a great deal of the information included in the report derived from those interviews. It was

added that the Summer holidays was a difficult time as there was competition with well-paid seasonal jobs.

- It was confirmed that staff had not been lost from the Department as a result of an objection to be vaccinated.
- It was reported that the Council offered assistance to staff to help them buy a car. It was acknowledged that travelling was an issue for some and as a result there was some movement to jobs where there was no requirement to travel.
- In response to a question regarding the success of the pilot scheme in Nefyn, it was reported that there had been successes and this had contributed to learning about new models of working.
- It was reported that there was a great deal of collaboration between the Council and the health sector especially at a local level, but sometimes the difference between health systems and care systems could make things difficult. It was believed that there was room for improvement.

The Cabinet Member expressed his gratitude to the Committee for their questions. He added that matters appeared to be dark but innovative and exciting schemes were ongoing in the Department.

The Head added that every effort was being undertaken in the care field and he appreciated the Committee's input. It was offered to facilitate focus group meetings for two of the Scrutiny Committee members and Department staff in order to hold crucial talks that they could then report back to the Committee.

To close, the Head noted that he hoped that the report gave a taste of the work that was continuing and will be undertaken in the Department. He expressed his desire for Councillors to receive information to get a clear picture of the situation in the field. It was reported that the Department would try to update the Committee regarding possible developments in the hope that the Department would prove success and our ability to reduce the challenges.

DECISION

To accept the report, noting the observations made during the meeting.

7. NEW ENERGY CONSERVATION SERVICE

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Property gave an introduction and referred to the work of the team of Officers in the Property Service who were trying to reduce the Council's carbon footprint. He noted that they had experienced successes and as a result, when drafting the Housing Action Plan, there was a desire to assist the public in Gwynedd by offering help and practical support. As a result it was explained that the New Energy Conservation Service had been established. Under the leadership of the Energy and Commercial Services Manager it was considered that this service had been successful. Pride was expressed in the work and the importance of disseminating the message about the good work undertaken by the team was emphasised.

The Head of Housing and Property Department expressed her gratitude for the opportunity to report on the activities of the New Energy Service to the Committee. She noted that the report referred to the journey of establishing the service and what had been achieved thus far as well as the work that was in the pipeline. The report referred to how the Council's carbon management plan intertwines with the Climate Change work to which the Council had committed.

The report was presented by the Energy and Commercial Services Manager and he referred to the key messages in the report. It was noted that the report was in two parts, the first part referred to the New Energy Service and the second to the Carbon Management Plan and the work undertaken over the last twelve years.

Members of the Committee were guided through the report and attention was drawn to the de-carbonisation of homes and the help available from the Council regarding fuel poverty. It was noted that the information in the report such as the graphs were striking as they indicated the seriousness of the situation in Gwynedd and reference was made to the energy inefficiency of the majority of the County's houses. Details were provided of schemes such as Nest and ECO and the payments available to offer support to the people and residents of Gwynedd who are on prepayment meters.

It was added that the team was trying to ensure that the County's residents claimed everything that was available to them and to refer individuals to the appropriate schemes. It was anticipated that the demand on the team would increase as a result of increasing fuel costs and that time would tell if what is available from the team is sufficient for the needs of the people of Gwynedd. It was noted that there was a new site for poverty on the Council's website which contained useful information about the available support.

During the discussion, the following observations were submitted by members:-

- Thanks was given for an exceptional report and the detailed content was commended.
- A comment was expressed that it was more costly to have prepayment meters but this was the most affordable option for many in the County as there was no need to pay a quarterly lump sum.
- Reference was made to ECO 4 and the grants available to insulate housing to save energy. There was concern that damp may develop in a property as a result of insulation work and it was asked if someone from the Council carried out visits to ensure that the materials used by companies were suitable. It was also asked if the companies used were local, from Gwynedd or North Wales.
- It was stated that it was a good opportunity for joint working and for the Council to attract apprentices or to promote job opportunities. It was deemed that it would be good to offer opportunities for young people and to contribute to climate change work.
- It was asked what was the grants criteria and if help was available for those who pay bills quarterly.
- It was stated that the figures noted in the report were very heartening such as the 349 referrals to ECO 3. The Nest scheme was praised and this had assisted to warm the properties of residents and make them more energy efficient as well as offering advice. It was noted that these were schemes with a substantial benefit to the health and well-being of the county's residents as well as to reduce their bills.
- The figure for calls and referrals to Nest had been checked and it was noted that the report made reference to 55 referrals out of 257 of calls in one part but then there was a reference to 257 referrals in another part.
- It was asked if a person had received support via the Nest scheme in the past does the Council contact them again and is there further assistance available.
- It was asked whether those who receive Council tax single person allowance were eligible for the scheme.
- It was believed that there was a need to look at housing as a whole noting that there was not much value to improve boilers and heaters if there were poor windows in a property.

- A comment was made that working persons now also face poverty and were sometimes poorer than those who are in receipt of benefits. It was emphasised that there was a need to assist this population group.
- It was believed that the increase in fuel costs had alarmed many people and there would be a higher demand for other services such as the ambulance as a result. There was concern that the efforts of the County's residents to save on energy costs would lead to them taking risks within the home.
- It was also asked what Hydro establishments in locations such as Llanberis, Maentwrog and Tanygrisiau contribute and whether they could contribute or offer support to Gwynedd residents.
- Concern was expressed about some companies adding costs to late payment electricity bills and within a week referred them to a debt company.

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

- All types of people contacted requesting assistance but the vast majority were on prepayment meters and the majority of the help available was for these people. It was confirmed that the tariff tended to be higher for residents on prepayment meters.
- It was noted that there were many issues with the former Arbed 1 and Arbed 2 schemes. It was explained that the Council's website listed four contractors who had been verified where these people could be referred to. It was reported that it was the Government who funded these schemes and the contractors were paid on condition that they had improved the EPC of the property in question. It was unlikely that the Council would conduct monitoring visits as it was a contract between the contractor and the person. It was confirmed that one of the four companies was from Anglesey with none from Gwynedd as they were large, specialist companies. It was added that there may be opportunities in the future to promote the scheme and attract more contractors following assessing the demand. It was noted that monthly meetings were held with the contractors.
- It was noted that the majority of the schemes were available for those on prepayment metres, however, payments such as DAF (discretionary assistance fund) were available for those who pay quarterly bills. It was added that the information on how to apply was noted on the Gwynedd Council's website.
- The Energy and Commercial Services Manager noted that he would check the Nyth figures in the report and would contact the Councillor in question to confirm as he had received the figure directly from Nest. It was reported that from now on as part of the service performance monitoring report they would report on the work completed and the houses that had been improved.
- It was reported that Nest usually conducted only one visit and there was nothing to prevent individuals from applying for help under the ECO scheme if they had received help from Nest in the past, as long as there was room to improve the property's EPC.
- It was considered that it was not a problem for those in receipt of Council tax single persons allowance to receive assistance from Nest and they would certainly be eligible under the ECO scheme. It was reported that the Department tended to refer more individuals to the ECO scheme.
- It was noted that the aim was to try and assist as many people as possible, especially in terms of the ECO Flex that would commence either in the Autumn or after Christmas. This would be flexible to include many people.

- It was reported that an additional scheme may be created; discussions would be held with the North Wales Economic Ambition Board who have some budget for this purpose. It was noted that unfortunately no scheme had ever existed to assist to improve and replace the windows of properties, this may be something the Council could look into.
- It was added that there was room to update the report as developments occurred swiftly and the report developed would be a live report.
- In response to a comment about re-opening fireplaces that had been closed in social housing, it was noted that unfortunately open fireplaces generated carbon emissions.
- It was reported that the electric carbon factor had reduced compared with 10 years ago mainly due to renewable energy such as Hydro, solar and wind turbines. It was noted that a study was taking place in Tanygrisiau to see whether it was possible to provide local electricity from the Hydro to the houses. It was explained that there were barriers e.g. the need for every house to be with the same electricity supplier, however, it was currently ongoing work.
- It was explained that work was being undertaken by the Ambition Board in terms of Smart Networks looking into local electricity for local people and reports were currently being produced. This work was being conducted across North Wales.

The Head of Housing gave thanks for all the enquiries and the opportunity to share the report with the Committee. A wish was expressed to come back in the near future in order to provide a further update on the schemes to Committee Members.

It was reported that the information shared today would be placed on the Members' Intranet so that Members may share the information with their electors. To close, it was noted that the Department was doing its best to assist as many people as possible in Gwynedd over the next winter and hopefully schemes such as the ECO 4 scheme gave assistance to a wide range of the County's residents.

DECISION

To accept the report that provided an overview of the New Energy service as well as the Climate Change work.

8. CARE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD PROGRAMME 2022/23

A short report was provided to the Members showing the Committee's latest work programme following changes due to slippage of items. It was noted that the November and February meetings would be heavy and may continue all day. Members did not have any observations or questions.

DECISION

To accept the report and adopt the work programme for 2022/23.

The meeting commenced at 10:30 and concluded at 13:50

CHAIR