

**Minutes of the Meeting of the Healthier Communities Overview and Scrutiny
Committee held at the Council Chamber, Neuadd Cyngor Ceredigion,
Penmorfa, Aberaeron and remotely on Monday, 3 July 2023**

Present: Councillor Caryl Roberts (Chair), Councillors Ceris Jones (Vice-Chair), Amanda Edwards, Eryl Evans, Keith Evans, Wyn Evans, Gwyn James, Ann Bowen Morgan, Mark Strong & Carl Worrall.

Also in attendance: Councillors Euros Davies, Rhodri Evans & Gareth Lloyd.

Cabinet Members present: Councillors Matthew Vaux & Alun Williams.

Officers in attendance: James Starbuck, Corporate Director; Audrey Somerton-Edwards, Interim Corporate Lead Officer- Porth Cynnal; Geraint Edwards, Corporate Lead Officer- People and Organisation; Duncan Hall, Corporate Lead Officer- Finance and Procurement; Lowri Edwards, Corporate Lead Officer- Democratic Services; Heather West, Corporate Manager- Targeted & Short-Term Services; Llyr Hughes, Corporate Manager- Housing Services; Cerys Purches-Phillips, Senior Housing Officer; Dwynwen Jones, Overview and Scrutiny Officer & Neris Morgans, Democratic Services Officer.

(10.00am- 12.26pm)

1 Welcome and Apologies

- i. Councillor Carl Worrall apologised for having to leave the meeting early.
- ii. Councillor John Roberts apologised for his inability to attend the meeting due to other Council commitments.
- iii. Councillors Elaine Evans and Sian Maehrlein apologised for their inability to attend the meeting.
- iv. Donna Pritchard, Corporate Lead Officer- Porth Gofal and Greg Jones, Interim Corporate Lead Officer- Porth Cymorth Cynnar apologised for their inability to attend the meeting.

**2 Disclosures of personal interest (including whipping declarations)
Members are reminded of their personal responsibility to declare any personal and prejudicial interest in respect of matters contained in this agenda in accordance with the provisions of the Local Government Act 2000, the Council's Constitution and the Members Code of Conduct. In addition, Members must declare any prohibited party whip which the Member has been given in relation to the meeting as per the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011.**

Audrey Somerton-Edwards, Interim Corporate Lead Officer- Porth Cynnal declared a personal interest in item 3, in accordance with the Code of Conduct for Local Government Employees.

3 Recruitment Challenges in Through Age Wellbeing Services

Councillor Alun Williams (Cabinet Member for Through Age and Wellbeing) presented an update to the Committee on Recruitment and Retention of Social Care Staff. The Council had a legal duty to provide safe statutory services for those most in need within the communities of Ceredigion. Whilst responsibility for this ultimately lied with the Council's Statutory Director of

Social Services (SDSS), there was an organisational responsibility to support the SDSS to ensure these responsibilities were discharged effectively and in a manner that resulted in a safe service.

The risk of not having a safe service would at worst present a risk to life in terms of service users, and significant financial risk and toll on staff capacity should the council be placed into special measures. Whilst agency staff were used within the local authority's social care structures, where recruitment was challenging, the cost of doing so represented value for money given the safe service that they were critical to maintaining. Agency staff were carefully selected and managed well to ensure the needs of the council and of service users were met. The challenge to recruitment in social care was nationally and was likely to remain so without a significant focus on the issues from Welsh Government.

Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) inspected the local authority's adults and children's services in March 2023. Following a robust inspection, an extremely positive report was provided with many examples of the significant good work that took place every day and citing the strong senior leadership that was in place. They also acknowledged areas for improvement that the local authority presented to them and confirmed that there were no areas of no compliance.

The recruitment and retention of an appropriately sized workforce was one of the most significant challenges facing local government and the public sector in general, with increased vacancy rates across all areas. As well as explaining the challenges in detail, the report also captured the ways in which the council was being innovative and creative in attempting to respond to them. The ability to attract and retain talent was critical to maintaining a skilled workforce capable of delivering quality services to the local authority's communities. The Council employed a workforce of around 3,700 employees, to a fulltime equivalent workforce of around 2,600 employees, largely female based at approximately 66%.

The recruitment and retention in the local authority's Through Age Wellbeing social care services had proved to be increasingly challenging, especially over the past 18 months, post-Covid period. These services employed a workforce of around 700 employees, a full-time equivalent workforce of 500 and a higher than the corporate average female workforce percentage of 74%. Of these roles, 240 were supporting statutory services and vacancy levels in these roles were currently at 45 (19%), and 21 of these were occupied by agency staff. Of the remaining 460 roles, vacancy levels were at 88 (19%) but only 9 of these were occupied by agency staff, in residential homes and Enablement team.

The agency staff covering statutory services included the eight members of the managed team arrangement through Innovate Services. Their appointment was following a procurement exercise and the contract was awarded on an initial 6-month contract, with the option of extensions of up to 6 months in three-month blocks. Whilst this team was not included in the

financial scope of the report, the added value they provided to the organisation and their role in helping to maintain a safe service was clear.

An overview of the following as outlined in the report was provided:

- Financial considerations
- Recruitment and retention issues in Social Care
- Local Government pay
- Regional picture overview
- Current position in Ceredigion
- Recruitment and retention initiatives
- Using recruitment agencies for permanent recruitment
- Outreach
- Current recruitment campaigns
- Conclusion

The local authority worked collaboratively with other local authorities regionally and nationally. It was highlighted that salaries differed in each local authority and not only were they in competition for staff but agency staff too. There were attempts to limit the fees of agency staff, however, this could lead to the lack of agency staff based in Wales. The Social Care sector was under pressure, similar to the NHS, and an improvement in Social Care would have an impact on the NHS.

Audrey Somerton-Edwards provided a presentation outlining the following trend analysis as they stood on 27.10.2022 and 18.05.2023:

- Open Cases – Referral Status
- Open Cases by RAG Amber and Red Status
- Number of LAC and % with visits in last 12 weeks
- Number of CPR and % with visits in last 10 days

Members were provided with the opportunity to ask questions which were answered by Officers in attendance and Councillor Alun Williams. The main points raised were as follows:

- From exploring options, developing a Masters Degree programme in Social Work was the most appropriate course as opposed to an undergraduate course, as this was where all involved felt they could effectively recruit. Work by Aberystwyth University and the local authority with an oversight from Social Care Wales to develop the course was in the early stages but the aim was to replicate the success of the nursing course available at Aberystwyth University.
- Placements for trainees studying the 3-year Social Work degree through the Open University were arranged by the local authority. Trainees were required to work for the local authority for a minimum of 2 years post-qualification.
- It was clarified that at no point the service was unsafe during recent challenges. As soon as issues were identified, a strong recommendation was provided by the previous Statutory Director of Social Services to ensure the service remained safe. Without the support of the Innovate Team, the caseload would have been very unmanageable for staff who had remained loyal and committed to the authority.

- At present, there was no evidence to suggest either way that hybrid working that had been trialled over the past 12 months had an impact on staff's wellbeing. Staff members working in Triage worked in the office daily, and Social Care staff had utilized the opportunities to work in a hybrid manner. It was acknowledged that a supportive environment, supervision and access to well-being services were important for the staff's health and well-being.
- There were challenges in recruiting staff due to competition such as higher salaries offered by other local authorities, but Ceredigion County Council generally had no challenges in retaining staff. Vacancies were usually due to career progression or retirement. Raising the need for a national pay scale across Wales for the Social Care sector with Welsh Government (WG) at any given opportunity was vital along with highlighting that given the financial pressures on local authorities, this should be fully funded by WG.
- At present, there were 38 agency Social Workers across the local authority (there were 8 Social Workers and 2 Senior Practitioners in Planned Care). Most of the recently qualified Social Workers had opted to work with adults whilst most of the agency staff worked with children given the level of vacancies. Hopefully, the proposed MSc degree would lead to recruitment locally and would strengthen the services.
- To recruit people to work in the Social Care sector within the local authority, members felt it was important to promote social work positively and the opportunities available across the county. Video clips from employees discussing and promoting their roles and the area had been used in recent recruitment campaigns. As technology and communication evolved, it was important to consider all available options.
- In response to concerns raised around the language skills of agency staff, it was clarified that some agency staff spoke Welsh. Members felt there could be greater collaboration with academic institutions such as Bangor University, to develop training and work placement with a particular regard to training bilingual Social Workers.
- An element of using agency staff would always be required in the local authority, but having the balance was key. During the next few years, work on succession planning was important, not only due to vacancies but due to retirement. Members would be updated on this in due course.

Given the recruitment challenges across the local authority, Councillor Rhodri Evans, Chair of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to include this item on the Committee's forward work plan for consideration. In addition, given his role on the Hywel Dda University Health Board, he was willing to raise matters related to recruitment as required.

Following questions, Committee Members considered the following recommendations:

1. To note the current position about the important use of agency workers within our social care services.
2. To note the activity already taking place in responding to the challenge of recruitment in this sector.

3. To provide feedback and suggestions of any other possible solutions to the recruitment challenge.
4. To endorse Officers working with partners including HDUHB to explore creative and innovative opportunities to provide longer-term solutions.

Committee Members agreed to recommend that Cabinet:

1. Committee Members agreed to note recommendation 1 and 2 above,
2. The Committee supports ongoing discussions with Welsh Government for a fully funded National pay scale for Social Care staff, and,
3. That the authority considers greater collaboration with academic institutions including Bangor University, to develop training and work placements with a particular regard to training bilingual Social Workers.

4 Direct Payments Support Service

Consideration was given to the Direct Payments Support Service Progress Report. A Direct Payment was money awarded by a Local Authority to allow Service Users to arrange their own package of care. Direct Payments could be offered to anyone who had been assessed as eligible to receive community care services. Once assessed, an individual must be offered the choice of a direct payment. The amount allowed depended on how much and what assistance was required and this would all be included in the care plan produced by the assessor. Some chose to use a care agency instead. Local authorities were required to provide support and assistance to people to manage their Direct Payment and employment responsibilities. This was the role of the Direct Payments Support Service.

Audit Wales has described the benchmark characteristics of a local authority that effectively encouraged, managed and supported people to use Direct Payments. An overview of the Current Situation was provided as noted in the report.

It was agreed to note the information and update on developments within the Direct Payment Support Service.

5 A report on the Housing Register

Councillor Matthew Vaux (Cabinet Member for Partnerships, Housing, Legal and Governance and Public Protection) explained that the purpose of the report was to provide information on the Housing Register's application process, the banding and the links and benefits involved. It was highlighted that the information captured helped the service identify trends, for reflection within the Policy and the Housing Strategy.

Llyr Hughes provided a presentation to the Committee, outlining the following:

- Purpose of the Register/ Service Demands
- Partners
- Application Process & Policies/ Registers
- Common Allocation Policy & Banding
- Applications- 01/04/2022 to 31/03/2023
- Current Breakdown of Current Banding

- Reasons for Move
- Allocations - 01/04/2022 to 31/03/2023
- Contact Details

Members were provided with the opportunity to ask questions which were answered by Llyr Hughes, Cerys Purches-Phillips and Councillor Matthew Vaux. The main points raised were as follows:

- In response to queries about the need to renew housing applications annually, it was noted that this was to ensure information was current and correct and there was still a housing need. There was a robust mechanism in place to ensure every attempt was made to contact applicants when their renewal was due, and it was key that details were correct in the event an offer of accommodation was made.
- Registered Social Landlords held responsibility for tenancy management, as opposed to the local authority, who held responsibility for pre-tenancy. Members were encouraged to contact the relevant housing association if there were issues to report.
- The importance of not having pre-conceptions on social housing allocation was highlighted; there was a policy and process to follow including meeting the local connections criteria to ensure applications were banded appropriately.
- There was no evidence to suggest there was increased homelessness following the introduction of Rent Smart Wales, but anecdotal information suggested landlords were leaving the market.

Following questions by the Committee Members, it was agreed to note the report.

6 To consider the Forward Work Plan 2023/2024

It was agreed to note the contents of the Forward Work Programme presented subject to the following:

- Extend an invitation to local registered social landlords (Barcud, Wales and West Housing and Caredig) to address the Committee (March 2024)
- Update on Hywel Dda University Health Board mental health services

7 Minutes of the previous Meeting and any matters arising therefrom

It was agreed to confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 24 May 2023.

Matters arising: None.

Confirmed at the Meeting of the Healthier Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 18 September 2023

Chairman: _____

Date: _____