

Minutes of a Meeting of the Co-ordinating Overview and Scrutiny Committee held in the Council Chamber and Hybrid on Thursday 27th March 2025

PRESENT: Councillor Wyn Evans (Chairman), Councillors Keith Evans, Marc Davies, Chris James, Elaine Evans, Gwyn Wigley Evans, Rhodri Evans, Amanda Edwards.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Duncan Hall, Corporate Lead Officer and Section 151 Officer, Audrey Somerton-Edwards, Corporate Lead Officer and Statutory Director of Social Services, Lowri Edwards, Corporate Lead Officer, Diana Davies, Corporate Manager, Timothy Bray, Partnerships and Civil Contingencies Manager, Nia Jones, Corporate Manager, Lisa Evans, Standards and Scrutiny Officer, Dwywnwen Jones, Overview and Scrutiny Officer and Translators.

ALSO PRESENT:

Cabinet Member: The Leader of the Council, Councillor Bryan Davies.

IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillor Gareth Lloyd.

Hazel Lloyd-Lubran, Chief Executive of CAVO and Chair of the Public Services Board.

(10am – 12:20pm)

1 Welcome and Apologies

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

1. Councillors Caryl Roberts, Ceris Jones and Rhodri Evans apologised for their inability to attend the meeting.
2. Geraint Edwards, Corporate Lead Officer, apologised for his 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

None

3 Chairman's Announcements

The Chair requested that Members of the Committee focus their questions to the specific agenda items.

4 Recruitment and Retention report

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Bryan Davies, introduced the Recruitment and Retention report explaining that the reason for the report was to inform the Committee of the current position regarding recruitment, retention and the use of agency social workers, care workers and occupational therapists.

Audrey Somerton-Edwards, Corporate Lead Officer and Statutory Director of Social Services then presented the information.

Main points arising from discussion were as follows:

- The engagement of agency professionals has become more prevalent within social care over the last ten years for all local authorities in Wales. In recent years Ceredigion County Council has seen an increase in the need to engage qualified social workers, occupational therapists, and care workers. In response to this situation Ceredigion County Council has been creative in identifying a range of solutions to ensure a safe service is delivered.
- There has been an encouraging increase in applications received for permanent roles in the local authority over recent months. However, we remain reliant on expensive agency provision to deliver social care services in Ceredigion.
- The Council has a legal duty to provide safe statutory services for those most in need in Ceredigion. Whilst responsibility for this lies with the Council's Statutory Director of Social Services (SDSS), there is an organisational responsibility to support the SDSS to ensure these responsibilities are discharged effectively and in a manner that results 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, but also significant financial risk, and toll on staff & capacity should the Council be placed into special measures. Where recruitment is challenging across social care structures agency staff are used. The cost of doing so represents a necessary spend given the safe service that they are critical to maintaining. Our utilisation of agency staff ensures the needs of the Council and those of our service users are met.
- The challenge to recruitment in social care is a national one, and one which is likely to remain without a significant focus on the issues from Welsh Government.
- In response to a question regarding Welsh speaking staff, it was confirmed that a considerable proportion of Staff are Welsh speakers.
- It was confirmed that the authority works closely with Swansea University to receive work placements.
- It was confirmed that Ceredigion County Council Secondary Schools offer the Health and Social Care A-Level, which is suitable for students interested in careers in healthcare and social care.
- In response to a question regarding the projected outturn position of an £808k overspend forecast for 2024/2025, it was agreed that costs continue to accelerate with demand for social care services increasing due to an ageing population, rising complex care needs, and legislative changes and Out of County spend. It was also noted that the Direct Payments Scheme is under

extreme financial pressure and that Residential Homes are costly to run albeit safety always takes priority.

- One of the most significant challenges is salary levels in local government.
- The recruitment and retention issues affecting social care in Wales have previously been reported and the key challenges noted in July 2023 remain today and are listed in the report.
- Audrey Somerton-Edwards stated that the following actions are being taken relating to recruitment and retention initiatives, with the aim of making Ceredigion self-sufficient with a regular supply of qualified social workers: Social work trainees have been recruited to enrol on the Open University (OU) course, sponsored by the local authority. The 'grow your own social worker' (GYO) scheme (insist on 2 years caveat) has successfully recruited cohorts for several years' worth of qualifiers. Grants have been secured for external candidates' salaries, plus several internal colleagues joined the scheme 'on the job' with grants covering their tuition.
 - 2022/3: 3 trainees – 2 external / 1 internal (all qualified and placed in Ceredigion)
 - 2023/4: 3 trainees – 1 external / 2 internal (all qualified and placed in Ceredigion)
 - 2024/5: 6 trainees – 5 external / 1 internal
 - 2025/6: 6 trainees – 2 external / 4 internal
 - 2026/7: 3 trainees – all external
 - 2027/8: 6 trainees expected - 3 external / 3 internal– recruitment underway now
 - 2028/9: 4 trainees expected – 2 external / 2 internal – recruitment Feb 2026.
- Current recruitment campaign materials have been revised with many developments listed on page 13 of the report. These were reported as beginning to have a positive impact on the recruitment and retention of qualified social workers.

Recommendation

Following discussion, Committee Members agreed to note the content of the report. The Chair thanked Officers for a very comprehensive report and thanked Councillor Bryan Davies, Cabinet Member and Leader of the Council, and Audrey Somerton-Edwards, Corporate Lead Officer, for presenting the report and for being honest and open during discussion.

Ceredigion Public Services Board (PSB) meeting held on the 3rd of March 2025
Hazel Lloyd-Lubran, Chair of the Public Services Board, was welcomed to the meeting to present the draft minutes of the 3rd of March 2025 meeting.

Under Section 35 of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, Local Authorities are required to ensure their Overview and Scrutiny Committees have the power to scrutinise decisions made, or other action taken, by the Public Services Board for the Local Authority area in the exercise of its functions.

Main points arising from discussion as follows:

- The West Wales Regional Partnership Board (RPB) are looking to review their governance structures and operational effectiveness within the Regional Health and Care System. This includes a survey assessing the performance of all Boards under the Regional Board. A meeting with key Regional Board partners will look to cement commitment to the Board and solidify its strategic focus. A subsequent report summarising these discussions will be circulated for review and consideration once finalised. Hazel Lloyd-Lubran confirmed that she has met with other Chairs regionally, who expressed an interest in establishing a collaborative agreement on shared priorities and topics of focus. She advised the Committee that it was proposed timely to review the PSB's own governance structure as well.
- It was reported that Russell Hughes-Pickering, Ceredigion County Council's Corporate Lead Officer for Economy & Regeneration, presented a spotlight Session on Ways of Working. He explained that following COVID, Ceredigion County Council began work on a 'Ways of Working' project, which also included the production of a Hybrid Working Strategy. The project was established to explore the appetite for long-term change within the workforce and the extent of a shift in the wider strategic vision of where, when, and how people can access services. Hybrid workspaces are available in Canolfan Rheidol and Penmorfa. During the last year, over 17,000 desks were booked, not including those who attended both locations to attend meetings in meeting rooms. A public engagement exercise was conducted early in the process whereby residents were asked how they would like to see any unused spaces in Canolfan Rheidol and Penmorfa being used. Feedback from the public showed that Health and Social Care were the most popular suggestions across the two sites. Based on the feedback, offices have been re-designed to support the Through Age and Well-being Programme in Penmorfa, with the new Centre for Independent Living opening in 2024 on the ground floor. In Canolfan Rheidol, the Health Board are currently trialling the use of areas on the ground and second floor, which includes physiotherapy sessions. Partners expressed willingness to be involved in further conversations around exploring opportunities for co-locating services, with a consensus that costs spent on additional overheads could be better used on frontline services. The Chair advised the Committee that a focus group will be set up to consider and explore innovative practices for potential building sharing and co-location in Aberystwyth in the first instance and that CAVO would approach the 3rd sector to enquire about any office or building needs and plans they may have in the Town.

Recommendation

Following discussion, Committee Members agreed to receive the draft Ceredigion PSB meeting minutes held on the 3rd of March 2025.

For the Overview and Scrutiny Coordinating Committee to conduct their role of taking an overview of the overall effectiveness of the PSB.

The Chair thanked Hazel Lloyd-Lubran, for presenting the report information, and Diana Davies and Timothy Bray for attending the meeting to answer any questions arising from the report.

Overview of financial matters

The Chair welcomed Duncan Hall to present the Overview of financial matters Controllable Revenue Budget – Financial Performance – Quarter 3.

Main points arising from discussion as follows:

- At this stage, a projected underspend is forecast for the year of £97k on the Controllable Budget. A balanced position is now expected to be achieved for the 24/25 financial year.
- In response to a question regarding the reversal of £35k for the proposal of the relocation of Lampeter library in the 25/26 budget, it was confirmed that this was a political decision.
- In response to a statement regarding the promenade in Aberystwyth parking fees agreed during the 24/25 budget but not achieved, this was confirmed as a political decision which has now been taken and therefore it was no longer shown in a RED status.
- It was confirmed following a question relating to the Ceredigion Community Housing (Shared Equity) Scheme that the scheme is being actively promoted and that to date seven applications have been approved. It was suggested by a Councillor that the Authority investigate the possibility of purchasing properties to modernise and then sell.
- Storm Bert (23/11/24) and Storm Darragh (05/12/24) are currently projected to cost the Council in the region of £350k, with an upside risk. During the discussion in relation to the costs incurred, it was suggested that the Thriving Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee may wish to request a report on this at a future meeting, particularly in relation to preventative matters e.g. Trees and Gully emptying.
- From April 2025, the National Insurance rate will rise by 1.2% to 15%, and the secondary threshold will decrease from £9,100 to £5,000. These changes mean a higher National Insurance burden. There is still no news on the exact timing and level of funding that the Local Authority will receive. It was also confirmed that the House of Commons voted to overturn a House of Lords proposal that would have exempted Social Care providers from the National Insurance increases.
- In relation to a query regarding Sewage Treatment Works that stayed with the Council after Housing Stock transfer and their adoption by Welsh Water transfers, it was suggested that the Chair of the Thriving Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee may wish to consider this topic in future.
- In response to a question regarding whether the authority is doing all it can to facilitate empty homes being brought back into use, it was agreed that the Healthier Communities consider this at a future meeting.
- The Chair suggested that all Overview and Scrutiny Committee's consider all Council budget Services at the relevant Scrutiny Committee. Duncan Hall

advised the Committee to agree a clear scope as it is impossible to scrutinise everything. It was suggested and agreed that a Task and Finish group is set up to define the range of Services and produce a clear achievable scope.

A Member thanked Duncan Hall and expressed appreciation for the comprehensive and meticulous work undertaken by him and his Service. This was reiterated by the Chair and all Committee Members agreed.

Recommendation

Committee Members agreed to note the overall revenue position outlined in the report.

To receive an update from the Chairs of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees and to consider the draft Forward Work Programmes

Each Chair/vice Chair/Overview and Scrutiny Officer in turn gave an update on their respective Committee's Forward Work Plans.

During discussion, it was agreed to add the following to a Forward Work Plan:

- Preventative measures in the face of an increasing number of storms – Thriving Communities
- Progress on Welsh Water adopting the Council's Sewage Treatment Works– Thriving Communities
- Establish Task and Finish Group to define the range of Services and produce a clear achievable scope in relation to the scrutiny of Council Budgets - Coordinating Committee
- Bullying/Discrimination at work report (Human Resources) - Corporate Resources
- Healthier Communities to consider Empty Homes.

Minutes of the meeting held on the February 2025 and any matters arising from the minutes.

It was **AGREED** to confirm the minutes of the February 2025 Committee meeting as a true record. There were no matters arising from those minutes.

The Chair thanked Members for attending, Officers, Translators, and Lisa Evans and Dwynwen Jones for their support during the meeting.

The Chair paid special thanks to Lisa Evans, who is at the end of April leaving her current role to commence another in the Authority. He thanked her for her continued support during his time as Committee Chair and stated that she will be missed.

Dwynwen Jones took the opportunity of expressing her personal thanks to her colleague, Lisa, who has always been a support to her and wished her well in her new role.

Chairman: _____

Date_____