

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT
COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNTY HALL, LLANDRINDOD WELLS, POWYS ON
WEDNESDAY, 16 DECEMBER 2015**

PRESENT

County Councillor D R Jones (Chair)

County Councillors M J Dorrance, D Bailey, G J Bowker, A W Davies, L R E Davies, E R Davies, J Gibson-Watt, G M Jones, S McNicholas, P J Medicott, G W Ratcliffe, K M Roberts-Jones, J M Williams, Mrs A Davies, Mrs M Evitts and Mrs L Jenkin

Officers: P Higham (Head of Children's Services), L Hocking (Fostering Team Manager), L Patterson (Scrutiny Officer)

1.	APOLOGIES	PSC44-2015
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Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors M Mackenzie, J Shearer and G Vaughan.

2.	MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING	PSC45-2015
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The Chair was authorised to sign the minutes of the meeting held on the 17th September 2015.

3.	DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST	PSC46-2015
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No declarations of interest were received.

4.	DECLARATION OF PARTY WHIP	PSC47-2015
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No declarations of party whip were received.

5.	CHAIR'S BRIEFING	PSC48-2015
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The Chair welcomed County Councillor Gibson-Watt to the Committee and advised that there were a number of vacancies on the scrutiny groups that he may wish to consider joining.

The Chair advised that he had received a letter from one of the schools which had been invited to attend school scrutiny. The school had responded to a request for comments on the process and all the points raised by the school would be addressed.

6.	CARER RECRUITMENT	PSC49-2015
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The Fostering Team Manager presented an update report on Fostering Marketing and Recruitment (copy filed with signed minutes).

There is a particular need for foster carers for teenagers. There is one Marketing and Recruitment Officer who works 4 days a week and to the service are trying to work closely with other agencies.

The initial visit is undertaken by a qualified social worker who makes a recommendation to proceed or not. It is rare to terminate an enquiry at this early stage. The applicants progress to the four day preparatory training course. As a result of the autumn recruitment campaign there are a number of initial visits which are planned for the new year. New applicants are unlikely to be ready to foster teenagers or children with complex needs and it is usual for new applicants to start with short term care at first.

The assessment process takes approximately three months and then the application is considered by Fostering Panel. It is no longer necessary to attend the preparatory training prior to starting the assessment process as previously that was delaying the process. The preparatory course is now attended during the application process.

Although there are currently 22 vacancies for foster placements not all may be suitable for all requirements as it is necessary to ensure that the matching is suitable for existing foster children and birth children within the family.

The most recent figures for placements were provided as of 30 November 2015:

LAC	154
In house	86
Friends and relatives	19
Adoptive	7
Parents	11
Independent living	3
IFA	17
Residential – external	*
Residential – internal	*
Secure Unit	0

*these figures to be confirmed but unlikely to change and therefore expected to each be 5.

Questions

Are people expressing an interest in fostering able to speak to existing foster carers?

The preparatory training includes sessions with existing foster carers, care leavers and birth children of foster carers to enable prospective foster carers to get an idea of what to expect.

How well placed are the authority to attract foster carers for looked after children with specific ethnic/religious needs?

The foster carers in the authority reflect the population of Powys and are largely white Welsh or white British. Where there has been a requirement for specific ethnic or religious needs then the foster carers have taken advice from the community to ensure they were meeting the needs of the child. This is a changing position and for example the adoption service have recruited a Polish family. As the population changes the carers that are needed will change.

What is the difference between a secure unit and residential unit?

Children and young people are only placed in a secure unit if they are likely to be a danger to themselves or to others. Secure orders are rare as effectively the

child is locked up and may be subject to regular observations for the safety of themselves and others. They are made by a Court for a set period of time. If the Court makes a secure order then the Council is required to make the placement. Whilst a child is in a secure unit therapeutic work will be undertaken and if this progresses well it may be possible for the Court order to be changed and the child moved to a residential unit to continue with therapeutic work. The costs of a secure unit placement can be £6k a week.

It is understood that LAC figures are higher in Wales than England. How does Powys compare?

Powys has the second lowest figures in Wales and work is being undertaken to understand why the figures in Wales are higher than England. The figures for Powys are generally around 145-155 so if a large sibling group become LAC then this can have a big impact. There can be particular problems with families that move around a lot in identifying children who may need to be taken into care.

Adverts for foster carers do not include the actual allowances paid. Would including actual rates increase the number of enquiries as people understand how this may fit with their circumstances?

Current adverts advise that generous payments are made and the allowances are discussed at the first meeting with applicants. Current carers consider that actual figures should not be included on the first advert as the service should not be looking to attract foster carers wanting to make money out of fostering.

One of the Committee Members outlined their experience of making an enquiry regarding becoming a foster carer and being given a negative view of the service which was off-putting and questioned if this approach was putting off potential foster carers?

This information was noted by the service.

There has recently been publicity about taking new-borns into care. What is the position in Powys?

There has been an increase of new-borns being taken into care in England and trends in England are usually followed in Wales. There have been a number of cases where new-borns have been taken into care in Powys. There are a number of schemes across the county where other agencies work together to help mums address the problems which had led to their baby being taken into care. The service are having discussions with health and substance misuse colleagues as the service are not best placed to work with mothers whose babies have been taken into care. There is a huge challenge to break the cycle of mothers becoming pregnant again before their first baby has been placed.

Is the lack of foster carers an all Wales problem?

This is a national problem with finding foster carers for children with more complex needs and the authority are approaching this by offering more training in therapeutic parenting to existing foster carers.

Does the information on short breaks and respite care include children who are not LAC?

Short breaks are offered to disabled children and there are 6 children who are accessing short breaks. It is difficult to find people able to offer short breaks for disabled children and this requires ground floor bedrooms and bathrooms.

Respite is offered for children who are fostered and those with birth parents. Family and friends of foster carers are encouraged to become respite carers so that fostered children can go and stay with friends and family in the same way that birth children do.

How many fostered children go on to be adopted?

This information can be provided but Powys have a good record for adoption. It is not always the most appropriate course of action for example long term permanent foster arrangements may be more appropriate if relationships are maintained with the family.

7.	DEMENTIA CHAMPION	PSC50-2015
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County Councillor D Bailey presented a report on her work as Dementia Champion since being appointed in March 2015 (copy filed with signed minutes). Regular updates had previously been given to Shire Committee meetings however it was considered a more formalised reporting mechanism ought to be in place, hence the report for consideration by People Scrutiny Committee.

Cllr Bailey is closely involved with a number of initiatives across Powys. In recent months the former Powys Dementia Steering Group led by Powys teaching Health Board (PtHB) had been re-established and was now known as 'Action for People with Dementia in Powys' with responsibility for driving forward dementia services within Powys. A joint Dementia Plan for Powys was currently under development.

A proposal to launch a Powys Dementia Forum had also received support from the Health & Adult Social Care Integrated Leadership Board (HASCILB) and this project would be taken forward in 2016 and would be led by Powys Association of Voluntary Organisations (PAVO).

Cllr Bailey had also been invited to join the Prime Ministers Rural Dementia Task and Finish Group that meets in Westminster. Cllr Bailey is the only Welsh representative on this national committee which has its membership drawn from across the public, private and business sector. Cllr Bailey attended her first meeting in Westminster on 14th December 2015. The taskforce focuses on the needs of people affected by dementia living in rural communities and a set of UK guiding principles aimed at improving the lives of those living with dementia is to be developed.

8.	ADULT SOCIAL CARE SCRUTINY GROUP	PSC51-2015
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Documents considered:

- Progress report – Scrutiny Officer

Cllr Bailey advised that with an increasing workload associated with her Dementia Champion role, she had decided to resign as Lead Member of the Adult Social Care Scrutiny Group at the beginning of October.

Cllr Bailey referred to the last meeting she had chaired as Lead Member which had taken place on 8th September 2015. Scrutiny had met with the Directors of Social Care and Finance, the Portfolio Holders for Adults Services and Commissioning, the Head of Adults Services together with a number of other Service Heads, legal officers and inspectors from CSSIW to receive the CSSIW Domiciliary Care inspection report. The service improvement plan was also received.

Following the CSSIW meeting, the Lead Member and Chair of People Scrutiny had met to draw up a scrutiny response that was received at the extraordinary meeting of Council held on 18th September. Cllr Bailey then met with the Leader of the Council to reach agreement on how scrutiny would monitor the service improvement plan. It had been agreed the Lead Member of Adult Social Care would give progress reports to Cabinet on a quarterly basis commencing with the meeting of Cabinet to be held on 15th December 2015. These reports would also be presented to People Scrutiny Committee. This reporting arrangement had met with approval by the service and scrutiny officers and the Cabinet Business Manager had been informed.

Cllr Dorrance had been appointed to the role of Lead Member and advised he had been briefed by the Director of Social Care and Head of Adult Service and a full work programme was being developed. He wished to record his thanks to Cllr Bailey for all the work that she had undertaken in this role.

It was confirmed that the intention was to do quarterly progress reports to Cabinet which would commence in March 2016. These would also be reported to People Scrutiny Committee.

Outcome:

- That the update be received.

9.	CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY GROUP	PSC52-2015
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Documents considered:

- Progress report – Scrutiny Officer

The Lead Member advised that the meetings she had attended had not been updated in the progress report and that she had attended:

- CYPP 2nd October
- CPG 29th October
- CYPP 7th December

Outcome:

- That the update be received.

10.	CORPORATE MATTERS SCRUTINY GROUP	PSC53-2015
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Documents considered:

- Progress report – Scrutiny Officer

It was noted that this group which was made up of Lead Members of the other scrutiny groups had not met. Discussion took place regarding changing this group to a task and finish group which would meet as and when required.

Outcome:

- That the update be received.

11.	CULTURAL SERVICES SCRUTINY GROUP	PSC54-2015
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Documents considered:

- Progress report – Scrutiny Officer

The next meeting of this group had been arranged for 6th January 2016 where the Annual Library Standards Report would be considered.

It was requested that a piece of work be undertaken to assess how theatres had fared a year after the cuts to their subsidy had been implemented. Attendance figures were requested and that the Portfolio holder and theatre managers be invited to attend.

Outcome:

- That the update be received.

12.	EDUCATION SCRUTINY GROUP	PSC55-2015
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Documents considered:

- Progress report – Scrutiny Officer

The Committee observed that the Estyn outcomes did not reflect particularly well on the authority with too many schools being assessed as 'adequate'.

Discussion was held around

- the failure of using Free School Meals as an indicator of poverty in the rural context where a low wage economy meant ineligibility to claim but living costs were higher.
- Was there a link between distance to school and attainment
- Teacher workload
- Governing body training
- Term time holidays
- Federation

Outcome:

- That the update be received.

13.	JOINT CHAIRS NOTES	PSC56-2015
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Documents considered:

- Notes of meeting held on 20th November 2015.

Outcome:

- That the notes are received.

14.	HEALTH SCRUTINY	PSC57-2015
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Documents considered:

- Progress report – Scrutiny Officer

It was confirmed that scrutiny of the Mid Wales Health Care Collaborative should be mindful of the different views towards the collaborative from different parts of Powys.

Outcome:

- That the update be received.

15.	WORK PROGRAMME	PSC58-2015
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The Work Programme was noted.

County Councillor D R Jones (Chair)