

PARTNERSHIPS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Partnerships Scrutiny Committee held in County Hall, Ruthin on Thursday, 27 September 2012 at 9.30 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Brian Blakeley (Chair), Joan Butterfield, Ann Davies, Meirick Davies, Pat Jones, Margaret McCarroll, Dewi Owens, Merfyn Parry, Bill Tasker and Huw Williams

ALSO PRESENT

Councillor Bill Cowie, Councillor Bobby Feeley and Councillor Eryl Williams

Corporate Director: Customers (HW), Corporate Director: Modernisation and Wellbeing (SE), Strategic Regeneration Manager (MD), 14-19 Network Co-ordinator (JG), Community Safety Partnership Manager (ST), Head of Planning and Public Protection (GB), Local Safeguarding Children Board Business Manager (GH), Senior Waste Officer (AR), Scrutiny Co-ordinator (RE) and Democratic Services Officer (RAH)

The Chair welcomed everybody to the meeting and extended a special welcome to Councillor Sue Lloyd-Williams, the Chair of Conwy CBC's Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Professor Michael Scott, the Vice-Chancellor of Glyndwr University, and Matthew Stewart from North Wales Police.

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ms C. Burgess, Ms. D. Houghton and Alice Jones

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No Members declared any personal or prejudicial interests in any business identified to be considered at the meeting.

3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

No items were raised which in the opinion of the Chair, should be considered at the meeting as a matter of urgency pursuant to Section 100B(4) of the Local Government Act, 1972.

4 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of a meeting of the Partnerships Scrutiny Committee held on 12th July 2012 were submitted and were approved for accuracy.

The Strategic Regeneration Manager notified the Committee that further to Item 8, Regional Collaboration on Economic Development, the Cabinet had since approved Denbighshire County Council's participation in the North Wales Economic Ambition Board.

Resolved that the Minutes be received and approved as a correct record.

5 REVIEW OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN NORTH EAST WALES

The Strategic Regeneration Manager (SRM) introduced a report which requested the Committee's observations on the current arrangements for higher education in North East Wales prior to a review being undertaken by an independent review panel under the Chairmanship of Professor Sir Adrian Webb, designed to facilitate closer regional coherence between local further education colleges and Glyndwr University in Wrexham.

The SRM introduced Professor Mike Scott from Glyndwr University who delivered a presentation to the Committee regarding the University's role in North East Wales. Professor Scott noted a number of issues that the University was presently contending with including declining admission numbers, a 53% reduction in financial support provided by the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, and the cessation of teacher-training courses in Wrexham meaning potential teaching students would have to travel to Bangor or Chester.

Glyndwr University was said to be striving towards becoming an expert economic partner for the region through focusing on providing relevant, industry-related courses and the success of Glyndwr's Early Childhood Studies department and its involvement in developing technology through the newly purchased Technium OpTIC in St Asaph was driving this.

The Corporate Director: Communities (CD:C) emphasised the importance of Glyndwr University's presence in improving the local economy and its role in advancing Denbighshire's ambition of economic regeneration and development. The University was said to be a vital institution for local students who could not afford to attend universities further afield and the importance of having quality higher education provision locally for lifelong learners was stated.

Members of the Committee thanked Professor Scott for his presentation and raised a number of points which were felt to be important to the future provision of higher education in North East Wales.

- The need for strengthening links between Glyndwr University and local further education colleges, as well as with other universities
- Concern for the lower level of funding relative to other universities due to small regional population.
- The importance of avoiding any constraints on the positive work undertaken by the University following the review, and in continuing the development of a strong and vibrant university for the local area.
- The suggestion of supplementing the relevance of courses to industry by facilitating scholarships, apprenticeships and post-graduate training with local and national companies and organisations.
- The necessity of retaining talent in Wales, possibly through closer co-operation with other universities in course delivery such as with teacher training.

Resolved:

(i) to acknowledge the importance of having higher education provision in North East Wales to underpin the area's economic viability and the Council and region's ambition for developing future prosperity;

(ii) to acknowledge the importance of having accessible higher education provision in the area to develop the required skills and qualifications local businesses and industries need in order to flourish and drive economic prosperity;

(iii) to support the important research work being undertaken locally in Denbighshire and its potential to aid the economic development and regeneration of the area;

(iv) that every effort should be made to work with neighbouring universities to enable teachers to have the required skills and qualifications that would permit them to teach in their local communities, through the medium of Welsh, English or both languages, and to teach 'y cwricwlwm Cymraeg';

(v) that Glyndwr University should be encouraged to actively promote its courses in schools and colleges within Denbighshire with a view to attracting more students from the county to study there.

6 COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP

For the discussion of this item the Committee sat as the Council's designated Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee in accordance with the Police and Justice Act 2006 ss.19 and 20.

The Community Safety Partnership Manager (CSPM) presented a report which gave details of the progress made in delivering the Three Year Community Safety Action Plan during 2011/12 for the Community Safety Partnership between Denbighshire County Council and Conwy County Borough Council. The CSPM then introduced Matthew Stewart of North Wales Police who took the Committee through a detailed performance summary of the Partnership over the last year, measuring performance against the five Priority Areas which aimed to:

- Reduce crime and the impact on the community
- Reduce re-offending
- Effectively tackle Anti-Social Behaviour and behaviour adversely affecting the environment
- Reduce harm caused by alcohol and substance misuse
- Effectively tackle domestic abuse

Members of the Committee raised a number of questions relating to Community Safety issues which are summarised below:

- The success of a recent pilot project which used a hard-to-let flat in Princes Street, Rhyl as a local resource centre for Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) was recognised, and the Committee was advised that

similar initiatives would be introduced across North Wales to follow on from this success.

- Councillor Dewi Owens noted that since St Asaph's PCSO had not been able to provide the same regular presence as previously that petty crime had increased in the town and stated that PCSOs needed sufficient time to undertake their role. Mr Stewart confirmed that one hundred PCSOs were currently in training and would shortly be able to assist in supporting communities and in addressing petty crime through a pre-emptive, problem solving approach which helps to anticipate crime before it can take place.
- Concerns were raised that the CCTV cameras in place were not being used effectively and that persistent problems with parking infringements and alcohol related anti-social behaviour in Rhyl town centre were not being addressed. This was attributed to recent staffing reductions and unavoidable sickness absence within the CCTV team, but it was noted that the team was now close to being back to capacity. The Head of Planning and Public Protection told the Committee that the Council's provision of CCTV was presently being reviewed in the context of a reduction in the budget for CCTV, and advised that further details would be given following the discussion of this matter by the Corporate Executive Team. The Committee agreed that the problem of alcohol related anti-social behaviour in Rhyl remained a serious issue and would require proper attention before it could be resolved. It was agreed that this issue would be referred to the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group so that this could be allocated for further scrutiny.
- The increase in drug and alcohol related admissions to Glan Clwyd Hospital was observed and members were notified that measures were in place to provide a community detox programme, but that the present arrangements did not necessarily flow in to each other.

A number of issues were also raised which related more specifically to policing matters, and the CSPM advised that these would be passed on to the Police Implementation Group so that full responses could be provided to the Committee. The issues raised are summarised below.

- Concern that the Owl Watch initiative was not as effective as the Farm Watch scheme that had previously been in place, and that the well regarded text message service alerting residents of suspicious vehicles in their area was no longer operational.
- Councillor Bill Cowie, DCC's representative on the Police Authority/Police and Crime Panel and a former police officer, suggested the reintroduction of a previously used method whereby vehicles would be left with a card notifying the owner of any infringements, and requiring the owner to contact the police. This was said to have been a very effective way of identifying other, less conspicuous crimes/legal infringements.
- Problems of anti-social behaviour related to alcohol consumption in the area around Rhyl Town Hall exacerbated by reduced police presence and now a significant issue. The Committee asked for measures to be taken to address

this problem, possibly through the implementation of an alcohol-free zone in the area or from more regular patrols.

- Concern about people drinking outside pubs on Bodfor Street from as early as 9am creating an unpleasant environment for residents and visitors.
- Continuing problem of lead thefts from church and school roofs. Greater efforts need to be made to identify where the market driving these thefts is coming from in order to get to the root of the problem.

Resolved that:

i) The Committee receives the report and notes the progress made against the Community Safety Partnership Action Plan for 2011-12;

ii) The areas of concern highlighted by members of the Committee are recognised by the Community Safety Partnership as areas requiring further attention to be considered for targeted action;

iii) An update on the Council's capacity for CCTV provision will be communicated to the Committee following clarification at the meeting of CET on 1st October; and

iv) The issue of anti-social behaviour in town centres is to be raised with the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group for appropriate allocation.

7 NORTH EAST WALES HUB FOOD WASTE PROJECT

The Senior Waste Officer (SWO) presented a report which provided an update on the collaborative food waste project with Conwy CBC and Flintshire CC following the Preferred Bidder, NEAT Biogas Limited, being unable to secure the necessary financial support to develop and operate the Hub digestion plant. NEAT withdrew from the project and the Reserve Bidder, BiogenGreenfinch, were brought in to build and operate the digestion plant at a slightly increased cost, but this was said to still be comfortably affordable within the budget allocated for the project. The change in bidder had caused a 6 month delay to the project but the contractual work was at an advanced stage and the financial close was scheduled for 15th/16th October 2012.

The Committee posed a number of questions relating to the possible use of by-products. The SWO advised that although the heat produced at the plant could be useful in some circumstances, it was unlikely to be of any specific practical use for the planned site due to the need for the heat to be piped directly to its destination given the relative isolation of the site from other buildings. However, the biogas produced as a by-product could be converted to electricity and also the digestate produced in the process had been identified as being useful to local farmers.

Councillor Margaret McCarroll questioned whether a recent issue with poor quality disposal bags being provided for food waste had been resolved. The SWO stated that the issue had been identified and that improved bags were now in circulation,

but recognised that occasionally supplies of the poorer quality batch had been distributed

The Committee asked how the operation of the plant could be monitored and it was suggested that a report could be submitted to the Committee when the plant was operational in approximately 12 months time. Members were also invited to visit the site when it was up and running.

Resolved that the Committee receives the report and notes the implications of the change in preferred bidder for developing the food waste plant to BiogenGreenfinch.

8 CONWY AND DENBIGHSHIRE LOCAL SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN'S BOARD (LSCB) ANNUAL REPORT

The Corporate Director: Modernisation and Wellbeing (CD:MW) introduced a report which gave an overview of the functioning, governance and financial arrangements of the Conwy and Denbighshire Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) and the performance of the LSCB against its key priorities for 2011-12. The Business Manager of the LSCB gave the Committee an update from the Annual Report 2011-12 which covered partner contributions, training provision, audit and quality assurance arrangements, Serious Case Reviews and the progress made against the Business Plan.

A six month update also set out the LSCB's priorities for 2012-13 as:

- 1 Children exhibiting Inappropriate Sexualised Behaviour are identified early and offered help, and children at risk of harm from other children are protected
- 2 The LSCB is assured that all available actions have been taken to reduce risks to children from unsafe staff
- 3 A common understanding of thresholds for intervention supports vulnerable families and helps identify children in need of protection
- 4 Children are safer because partnerships with safeguarding responsibilities work together to safeguard children

And, continuing from 2011-12

5. Children experiencing difficulties due to their parents'/carers' drug & alcohol, mental health or domestic violence problems are identified so that concerns do not escalate from safeguarding to child protection issues
6. To ensure that the direction, work and review of the LSCB is informed by consultation and participation with children, young people, their parents and carers

In response to questions from members of the Committee the CD:MW was able to clarify the following information:

- That there was an extensive programme of safeguarding training undertaken at different levels, including training in identifying inappropriate sexualised behaviour.
- Table 4 showed attendance at training courses across different agencies and the relatively poor attendance of DCC staff was noted. The differences were attributed to the range and frequency of applicable meetings for different agencies, and it was stated that the main board was actually very well attended with DCC having made a very positive contribution.
- The time taken to produce a report in to a child suicide was said not to be unusually long due to the complexity of an investigation involving multiple organisations. The report had been finished and was due to be published shortly.

The Chair thanked the CD:MW for the report, noted that there had not been any significant failings in safeguarding children, and agreed that the LSCB's work was very important in ensuring awareness of potential problems through effective monitoring.

Resolved that the Committee:

i) receives the Local Safeguarding Children Board Annual Report, and members' comments in respect of the report are noted; and

ii) notes the recent developments in relation to the priorities set by the Local Safeguarding Children Board in the first quarter of 2012-13

9 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Coordinator (SC) presented the Scrutiny Work Programme report which set out the Committee's scheduled work over the coming months, gave an update of the progress made in the implementation of Committee resolutions and identified other issues related to the Committee's work.

It was explained that an item on Flood Risk in Denbighshire had been referred from the Communities Scrutiny Committee at their meeting in July and the Partnerships Scrutiny Committee agreed that this item be considered in the new year.

The SC advised the Committee that two special meetings had been set up, to consider a report on the full integration of Highways and Infrastructures for Conwy CBC and Denbighshire CC on 11th October, and to meet with representatives of Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board on 29th November.

The Committee agreed to appoint Councillor Dewi Owens to the Schools Monitoring Group, and to appoint Councillor Joan Butterfield to the Corporate Equalities Group, with Councillor Owens as the named substitute.

Resolved that subject to the above:

i) The Forward Work Programme be approved; and

ii) The above named members be appointed to serve as the Committee's representatives on the Schools Monitoring Group and the Corporate Equalities Group.

10 FEEDBACK FROM COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES

No feedback from other committees was submitted