

COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Committee held in Conference Room 1a, County Hall, Ruthin on Thursday, 23 May 2013 at 9.30 am.

PRESENT

Councillors James Davies, Peter Evans, Carys Guy, Huw Hilditch-Roberts (Chair), Rhys Hughes, Win Mullen-James, Bob Murray, Joe Welch, Cefyn Williams and Huw Williams

Cabinet Members – Councillors Hugh Evans, Bobby Feeley, Huw Jones and David Smith attended for particular agenda items relating to their individual portfolios

Observers – Councillors Brian Blakeley, Meirick Davies and Gwyneth Kensler

ALSO PRESENT

Corporate Directors Customers (HW) and Economic Ambition & Community Ambition (RM), Strategic Regeneration Manager (MD), Head of Housing and Community Development (PMc); Head of Communication, Marketing and Leisure (JG), Senior Officer – Strategy and Partnerships (SK), Head of Adult and Business Services (PG), Services Manager: South Locality (HT), Catering Manager (HJ), Public Protection Manager (EJ), Strategic Procurement Manager (AS), Procurement Officer (APJ), Scrutiny Coordinator (RE) and Committee Administrator (KEJ)

1 APOLOGIES

Councillor Cheryl Williams

2 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR

No CVs/statements had been received prior to the meeting for the position of Vice Chair of the committee for 2013/14. The Chair sought nominations from those present and Councillor Bob Murray proposed, seconded by Councillor Peter Evans that Councillor Cary Guy be appointed Vice Chair. There being no further nominations it was –

***RESOLVED** that Councillor Carys Guy be appointed Vice Chair of the Communities Scrutiny Committee for the ensuing year.*

3 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No declarations of personal or prejudicial interest had been raised.

4 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

Grass Cutting – Councillor Win Mullen James reported that a meeting of the Highway Grass Verge Cutting Working Group was being arranged to discuss grass cutting schedules and biodiversity issues. Members highlighted the need for a

common sense approach to the grass cutting programme and in responding to local biodiversity concerns. The Corporate Director: Communities agreed to ensure that information previously requested by the committee in terms of grass cutting schedules and maps, including the operation of biodiversity cuts in the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), was circulated as soon as possible.

[HW – to facilitate the above]

5 MINUTES

The minutes of the committee's last meeting held on 18 April 2013 were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 18 April 2013 be received and approved as a correct record.

6 TOWN AND AREA PLANS

The Strategic Regeneration Manager (SRM) submitted a report (previously circulated) outlining the Council's performance to date in delivering its town plans and seeking members' views on progress. The quarterly performance report for town plans (Annex A); commentary about individual actions with red/orange status (Annex B) together with a summary of the principal outcomes for the first year of the Plans (Annex C) had been attached to the report.

The process developed for monitoring the performance of Town and Area Plans involved quarterly reports presented to Member Areas Groups (MAGs) highlighting delivery confidence attached to priority actions. That information would also be aggregated and included in quarterly performance reports to Cabinet. A recent funding allocation for delivering the corporate priority for improving the local economy had enabled priority actions identified for early implementation to proceed and would feature in the next quarterly reports to the MAGs. Work had also started on the process of developing Town Plans into Town & Area Plans in order to address the needs and priorities of smaller and more rural communities.

Councillor Hugh Evans, Leader and Lead Member for Economic Development highlighted the important role of the Town Champions within the process and his hopes that the Plans would evolve and become more ambitious in the future to create a vision for each town and its surrounding area.

During consideration of the report members commented as follows –

- it was encouraging that most projects were on track for delivery but there was also a need to report upon clear outcomes and impact
- the importance of funding being available when required to deliver projects as planned was highlighted
- acknowledged the plans were still in the early stages and would take time to develop to reach their full potential
- suggested that the straightforward projects, particularly those with visual impact, be undertaken at an early stage
- highlighted the importance of local members in progressing their town/area plans together with interaction with the Town Champion and Link Officer

- stressed the need for plans to provide a true reflection of the overall investment and benefits within the different areas together with identified funding sources for projects/actions to ensure transparency and accountability
- there was a need to ensure the delivery of identified actions were not beyond the Council's control
- emphasised the important role of the Rural Champion within the process and his interaction with local area members
- Councillor Cefyn Williams referred to the report reference that the Edeyrnion area educational review had supported improvements in educational attainment and he wished to clarify that there was no evidence to support that statement which was a matter of opinion and still an issue of contention.

In responding to members' comments officers advised that the funding allocation to progress priority actions for improving the local economy had only recently been endorsed and given the lead time for capital projects reporting on delivering those projects would feature in the next report to the MAGs in July. Work was ongoing to broaden the existing town plans into town and area plans following which the content and detail would be further developed. It was the responsibility of the local members and Town Champions to set their own priorities for actions identified. In terms of measured outcomes it was agreed to supplement the report on delivery confidence with additional information regarding the number of projects completed and their subsequent impact. Councillor Huw Jones, Rural Champion reported upon the work he was undertaking to ensure the interests of all rural communities were incorporated into the emerging Area Plans.

RESOLVED that, *subject to the members' comments above, the progress made with the delivery of Town Plans in their first year be noted.*

At this juncture (10.15 a.m.) the committee adjourned for a refreshment break.

7 RESTRUCTURING OF THE REGENERATION, BUSINESS SUPPORT AND TOURISM SERVICES

Councillor Hugh Evans, Lead Member for Economic Development introduced the report (previously circulated) outlining the rationale and process for restructuring the services in order to deliver the Council's economic and housing priorities. Following members' concerns regarding the impact of the proposals on individuals and communities assurances had been given that the process had been undertaken with full support and advice from Human Resources and would move closer to communities by providing a locally based structure. He also made reference to his vision for the service advising that the new structure would deliver the expectations contained within the emerging Economic Ambition Strategy.

The Head of Housing and Community Services (HHCS) detailed the service review process undertaken in conjunction with the Head of Communication, Marketing and Leisure (HCML) where there was a shared service outcome. The service review concluded the existing structure, skills base and resource allocation were not fit for purpose on a number of levels and would not be capable of delivering the ambitious programme of Regeneration and Business Development contained within the Corporate Plan and Economic Ambition Strategy. A new structure (Appendix 1 to

the report) had been developed providing a joined up, robust and strategic approach with alignment of resources to deliver the Council's Economic Ambition priorities. The Senior Management Team restructure would be completed in June with all posts appointed by the end of September. The HCML reported upon the next phase of the process in terms of Communication and Marketing Services and integration of the Tourism function to ensure a fit for purpose structure to respond to corporate priorities. He highlighted the merits of that restructure and welcomed the opportunity to provide a detailed report back to members in September.

The Chair reminded members to focus on proposals for service delivery rather than operational matters concerning individual positions within the service. In response to members' concerns in that regard assurances were provided that every effort would be made to retain staff who wished to remain with the authority and the appropriate processes for managing operational change were being followed.

The committee acknowledged the need for a restructure within the service in order to effect improvements and meet business needs and recognised the amount of work which had gone into the comprehensive review. Members sought assurances regarding future savings; the development of funding bids for community groups and services, and clarification on the outcomes and impact of the new structure on service delivery. Questions were also raised regarding the interaction and involvement with other agencies such as the Denbighshire Enterprise Agency and partnership working to deliver aims and improve the local economy. [The Leader declared a personal interest with respect to Denbighshire Enterprise Agency] The need for better communication with members and a clear tourism strategy was also highlighted. The Chair was keen that social media be used as a promotional and marketing tool. The following responses were received –

- the restructure would be cost neutral with a reduction in managers generating savings which would be reinvested in front line services
- the new structure would facilitate excellent service provision with a focus on localities to make it easier for members, businesses and stakeholders to receive quality advice, assistance and support
- acknowledged the main risk associated with restructures was failure to deliver outcomes but this risk had been mitigated by the strategic approach taken
- elaborated upon the aims of becoming closer to businesses and to work closely with other agencies in providing support and advice to businesses
- a headline action from the emerging Economic Ambition Strategy sought to explore the creation of a partnership of business support agencies
- provided assurances that the new service would provide clear leadership for staff with good governance and accountability
- indicated that funding streams and opportunities would be discussed further once the Senior Management Team was in place and assurances were provided that funding bids would be developed in a joined up way
- plans for social media had been included as part of digital marketing
- confirmed that the restructure would maximise tourism opportunities and provide a stronger Tourism, Marketing and Events function

- the finalised Economic Ambition Strategy would help shape service delivery leading to the further development of measureable outcomes and it was agreed to receive an information report on the Strategy in October.

Councillor Meirick Davies referred to Welsh Language issues and the absence of Welsh essential posts in the structure. The HCML advised that there was reference to the Welsh Language Policy in the Communication & Marketing Services structure and he agreed to circulate the policy regarding designated Welsh essential/desirable posts to councillors for clarity. The HHCS added that this aspect would be considered further when considering resource requirements for each locality. In response to concerns raised by Councillor Gwyneth Kensler the HCML agreed to provide clarity on the function of the Rural Development Plan in relation to the Economic Ambition Strategy and the role of elected members. Finally reference was made to a recent article in the Daily Post highlighting that Rhyl had double the amount of overseas visitors last year while figures for other traditional holiday towns were down. Councillor Brian Blakeley congratulated the Council on that achievement and commended the work of officers in that regard.

[JG to circulate copy of Welsh Language essential/desirable posts to members and to provide clarity regarding RDP]

RESOLVED that –

- (a) subject to members' comments above the report on the restructuring of the Regeneration, Business Support and Tourism Services be noted;*
- (b) an information report on the restructuring of the Communications and Marketing Services be received in September, and*
- (c) an information report on the Economic Ambition Strategy to include outcomes; timelines, delivery confidence status and performance measures be received in October.*

[recommendations (b) & (c) – RE to include in forward work programme]

8 REVISING THE LOCAL HOUSING STRATEGY - DENBIGHSHIRE

The Senior Officer – Strategy and Partnerships (SOSP) introduced Dr. Colin Stuhlfelder, Glyndwr University and submitted a report (previously circulated) outlining progress to date in revising the Local Housing Strategy (LHS) developed in partnership with Glyndwr University and sought members' input into the emerging Strategy. A series of consultation events had been scheduled following which a detailed report and an action plan would be submitted to the committee in July.

The LHS set out the current local housing situation across all tenures and provided strategic direction for five years. Dr Stuhlfelder outlined the LHS development process and explained that the high level summary and full progress report were the starting point with regards to setting the vision, themes and objectives. The Strategy would consist of three themes (1) Communication, (2) Consolidation, and (3) Construction with specific objectives and outcomes detailed for each.

The committee discussed various aspects of the housing strategy highlighting the need for affordable housing, particularly in light of the recent welfare reforms and sought further information regarding initiatives such as shared ownership schemes and intermediate tenures to meet current demand. Assurances were also sought that quality standards could be sustained in council housing stock. In response members were advised that –

- the Housing Need Update (research commissioned from Glyndwr University 2011) had recommended an affordable housing target of 36% but a target of 10% had been set in the Local Development Plan based on the economic viability of sites
- there was a need to balance a conducive environment for construction against the need for affordable housing and to explore alternative ways of funding affordable housing projects such as the Empty Homes Strategy and schemes with private landlords which may help achieve affordability targets
- research would be undertaken into models for shared ownership and their affordability together with other initiatives including intermediate rent
- the importance of the private rented sector within the county was increasing and work was ongoing with Registered Social Landlords in the development of appropriate models to address housing requirements
- the Welsh Quality Housing Standard for council housing stock should be achieved by the end of 2013/14 and a full housing stock survey had recently been completed with a rolling programme of investment to ensure standards were sustained in the future; there was also potential to increase housing stock following future changes to council housing finances.

RESOLVED that –

- (a) *subject to members' comments above, the report on progress made in revising the new Local Housing Strategy and the breadth of current housing challenges that need to be incorporated into the Strategy be noted, and*
- (b) *the proposed three theme areas for inclusion in the new Local Housing Strategy be endorsed.*

[SK&SL to note and action above]

At this juncture (11.50 a.m.) the committee adjourned for a refreshment break.

9 REVIEW OF DAY SERVICES IN NORTH DENBIGHSHIRE

Councillor Bobby Feeley, Lead Member for Social Care introduced the report (previously circulated) detailing revised proposals to remodel day care for older people in the north of the county prior to submission of the proposals to Cabinet. She highlighted the need for a sustainable service for the future in light of the growing population of older people and reduction in funding provision.

The Head of Adult and Business Services explained that the proposals had been revised following feedback from this committee and the consultation process. He elaborated upon the rationale behind the proposals which would ensure that the service delivered was consistent with the reablement approach and was sustainable going forward. Proposals included –

- moving existing services in Prestatyn from Llys Nant to Nant y Mor in order to provide further opportunities for people
- in the medium/long term to explore moving day care provision in Rhyl to Gorwel Newydd and using Hafan Deg to progress the reablement approach
- an initial move to 3 days provision of day care at Hafan Deg with the other 2 days focusing on providing reablement
- developing a detailed project plan for the current arrangements in both Hafan Deg and Llys Nant in consultation with service users and carers.

In response to questions members were advised that –

- officers were unaware of any impact on Nant y Mor as a result of the closure of Michael Phillips Respite Centre in Rhyl but would explore the matter further
- subject to approval of the proposals by Cabinet on 25 June detailed discussions would begin with Llys Nant service users and carers about the move to Nant y Mor; the committee was reassured that Llys Nant would not be closed until suitable arrangements had been made for all service users
- confirmed that the two Hafan Deg service users currently attending for more than 3 days each week would be provided with alternative support services
- confirmed that respite care provision would also transfer to Nant y Mor and support provided to carers would not be affected
- the authority would engage with the third sector and other parties about how more effective transport arrangements could be developed
- traditional models of social care could create a dependence but the new model focused on helping individuals to support themselves.

Councillor Brian Blakeley thanked officers for listening to councillors' views and consultation feedback and amending the proposals accordingly. He commended officers on their hard work and suggested the committee keep the matter under review. The Chair was pleased to highlight the committee's role within the process and how it had influenced proposals to ensure an acceptable compromise was reached. Members thanked the officers for the work undertaken in that regard.

RESOLVED that –

- Cabinet be recommended to approve implementation of the new model as set out in paragraphs 4.10 to 4.13 of the report, and*
- an evaluation report on the provision of Day Care Services in Denbighshire be received by the committee in approximately twelve months' time.*

[PG & HT to progress both recommendations]

10 FOOD REVIEW TASK AND FINISH GROUP

The Corporate Director: Customers introduced the Catering Manager; Public Protection Manger and Strategic Procurement Manager and submitted a report (previously circulated) presenting the findings of the Task and Finish Group established to review the Council's policies and procedures with respect to food

procurement, regulation and contract management in the wake of the horsemeat scandal.

The Task & Finish Group discussed issues around the following key areas –

- the procurement of meat and meat products
- the Council's role as an enforcing and regulatory body, and
- the sufficiency of contractual arrangements with commissioned services.

Following scrutiny of the above areas officers were tasked with producing a Position Statement and recommendations for service improvement (attached to the report) and the report recommendations stemmed from those documents. Councillor David Smith, Lead Member for Public Realm commended the Council's response to the horsemeat scandal and how the authority dealt with such issues and emergencies in general. Councillor Win Mullen-James was a member of the Task and Finish Group and echoed those sentiments highlighting the hard work of the officers involved.

The committee raised questions regarding the sourcing of meat and contract specifications and sought further assurances regarding the robustness of the procedures in place to identify food fraud. In response officers –

- reported upon the current contracts and specifications for meat including the stipulation for British meat with beef under 30 months old and Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) status (Welsh origin) from approved suppliers for beef and lamb
- elaborated upon the results of recent investigations which had established that one product item (chicken) had been sourced from Germany
- explained that sampling was undertaken by both local authority and Food Standards Agency and a proactive approach was being undertaken to establish traceability, hygiene and the meeting of contract specifications
- highlighted the strengthening of contract management procedures including the need to report any changes in the supply chain
- provided assurances that robust systems were in place but in view of the nature of the industry fraud cases could not be totally eradicated
- elaborated upon the Food Standards Agency audit in July 2013 covering food hygiene, standards and delivery
- confirmed that an additional food standard officer had been employed for a period of 12/18 months until an existing trainee became fully qualified.

To guarantee the quality and origin of meat procured the Chair queried the possibility of stipulating that all suppliers must be Red Tractor Assured in future contracts. Officers referred to potential difficulties with that approach including supply problems and availability of products at particular times of the year together with the financial implications of imposing that requirement. In particular, any increase in school meals above £2.00 would have a detrimental impact on take up rates. It was noted that the Task and Finish Group would be maintained in the short term to monitor delivery of the report recommendations and it was suggested that the matter be given further consideration by that forum. It was agreed to

receive a report back on the work of the Task and Finish Group in approximately twelve months' time.

RESOLVED that –

- (a) *the recommendations of the Food Review Task and Finish Group as detailed in paragraphs 3.1 – 3.13 of the report be supported and recommended to Cabinet for approval;*
- (b) *the Food Review Task and Finish Group be asked to explore the viability of future meat procurement contracts stipulating that all suppliers must be Red Tractor Assured, and*
- (c) *a report back on the work of the Food Review Task and Finish Group be submitted to the committee in approximately twelve months' time.*

[HW to arrange for recommendations to be reported and for the Task and Finish Group to consider recommendation (b). RhE to action (c)]

11 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

A report by the Scrutiny Coordinator was submitted (previously circulated) seeking members' review of the committee's future work programme and providing an update on relevant issues. A draft forward work programme (Appendix 1); Cabinet's forward work programme (Appendix 2), and Progress on Committee Resolutions (Appendix 3) had been attached to the report.

Members agreed the following revisions to the work programme –

- September – Gypsy Strategy and information report on restructuring of the Communications and Marketing Services
- October – information report on the Economic Ambition Strategy
- May/June 2014 – Provision of Day Care Services in Denbighshire and Food Review Task and Finish Group

The Scrutiny Coordinator drew members' attention to the new service performance challenge process detailed within the committee's information brief (previously circulated). Committee representatives for each service assessment were sought and details of the meeting schedule had been provided. It was agreed to match as closely as possible the committee representatives previously appointed to the new service areas. Further consideration would need to be given to any unfilled positions following that appointment process.

RESOLVED that, subject to the above, the forward work programme as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report be approved. **[RhE to action above]**

12 FEEDBACK FROM COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES

No reports from committee representatives had been received.

The meeting concluded at 12.50 p.m.