

COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Committee held in Council Chamber, Russell House, Rhyl on Thursday, 12th September, 2013 at 9.30 am.

PRESENT

Councillors James Davies, Peter Evans, Carys Guy, Huw Hilditch-Roberts (Chair), Bob Murray, Joe Welch, Cefyn Williams and Cheryl Williams
Councillors M.Ll. Davies, H.Ll. Jones and G.M. Kensler.

ALSO PRESENT

Councillor H.Ll. Jones; Head of Environment (SP), Head of Planning and Public Protection (GB), Section Manager: Network Management (TT), Corporate Communications and Marketing Manager (GW), Team Leader- Tourism, Marketing and Events (PM), Scrutiny Coordinator (RE), Democratic Services Officer (KE), and Administrative Officer (CW).

1 APOLOGIES

Councillors T.R. Hughes, D.I Smith, H.C. Irving The Corporate Director: Customers (HW).

The Committee requested that their best wish be forwarded to Mr Hywyn Williams, Corporate Director: Customers, following his recent illness.

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No personal or prejudicial interests were declared.

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

The Minutes of a meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday, 4th July, 2013 were submitted.

***RESOLVED** – that the Minutes be received and approved as a correct record.*

5 PUBLIC REALM STRATEGY FOR DENBIGHSHIRE

A copy of report by the Corporate Director: Customers, which sought the Committee's views on the structure and content of the draft Public Realm Strategy for the Council, Appendix 1, had been circulated with the papers for the meeting.

The Head of Environment (HE) and Head of Planning and Public Protection (HPPP) introduced the report jointly. It was explained that an Internal Audit report on the Council's management of the public realm had recommended the creation of a strategy to develop clarity and coherence around how the Council deals with this important area. A second recommendation suggested better joint working between key services and a more corporate approach to the way the Council planned and responded to issues stemming from the public realm.

The draft Public Realm Strategy had been developed at a workshop and following research into other similar strategies in Wales and overseas. The strategic document defined the meaning of the term public realm, and how the Council could control and influence the work undertaken. It defined the importance of partnership working in implementing change in order to improve the state of the public realm.

The roles and responsibilities of key Members, Scrutiny, Member Area Groups and key officers had been defined. Four strategic principles had been identified which included:-

- accessible and well-connected public realm
- clean and tidy environment
- local identity preserved and developed
- a safe environment

Detailed descriptions of the meaning of the four strategic principles had been outlined in the draft document, together with some practical examples of recent developments. The Strategy would help to deliver the Corporate Priorities "Clean and Tidy Streets" and "Developing the local economy" and would affect all residents, workers and visitors to Denbighshire. Much of the work to deliver the Strategy would be incorporated into current service budgets and within any Corporate Plan allocations for the two Corporate Priorities.

Consultations had taken place with the relevant officers from the various services delivering aspects of the public realm within the Authority, together with the Lead Member and the Senior Leadership Team. Copies of the comments had been conveyed to City, Town and Community Councils, the voluntary sector and Natural Resources.

Councillor J.M. Davies emphasised the need for the inclusion of a general reference to the culture of the Council with regard to the involvement of all individuals in the reporting mechanism. The HE explained that details of the changes being implemented in respect of the introduction of a single point of contact would be presented at the Lead Member Workshop in October.

Councillor H.O. Williams commended the work undertaken in addressing dog fouling offences in his Ward. Councillors R.M. Murray and P.A. Evans highlighted problems which were being experienced in their respective wards. The HE outlined the difficulties in catching offenders because of the nature of the offence. However, it was emphasised that services were working in partnership to address the issue and reference was made to the Dog Fouling Campaign launched February, 2013.

The HPPP responded to a question from Councillor J.M. Davies and referred to Page 7 of the Strategy, Guidelines for Local Identity to the Public Realm, which acknowledged the scope for partnership working and consultation with Town and Community Councils, particular reference being made to the provision of signage and street furniture.

The Chair endorsed the intentions of the Strategy but highlighted the need for the inclusion of a process for assessing success, measuring outcomes and achievements and the procedures for reporting and communicating them. The HE highlighted the difficulty of measuring the success rate of some aspects of the Strategy, for example cultural change. The HPPP explained that the Public Realm Strategy was a strategic document and that the implementation of an additional process or mechanism would be required to measure success rates.

During the ensuing discussion the officers provided the following responses to questions and issues raised by Members:-

- Members were informed that in instances where cycle paths were provided, cyclists could not be forced to use them as an alternative to travelling on the highway. Councillor C.H. Williams explained that it was an offence to ride a bicycle on the pavement but this was rarely enforced. Individuals who cycled for leisure should be encouraged to use the cycle paths provided.
- In response to concerns expressed that debris from hedge cutting activities, resulting in punctures from hawthorn hedges, discouraged cyclists from using cycle certain cycle paths, the HE explained that in cases where the Council had an agreement with the landowners for the Authority to cut hedges there was also a policy to remove hedge cuttings from the cycle path.
- It was explained that not all play areas were the responsibility of the County Council as in some cases play areas were linked to housing developments or provided by Town or Community Councils. Members highlighted the importance of ensuring that when play areas were constructed they included a full maintenance programme and safety aspects should be monitored closely. Members asked that the annual inspection of play areas should also include the identification of cosmetic public realm matters, such as painting and tidying requirements, as these would enhance the appearance of the play areas and make them more attractive to the public and residents. The HPPP explained that from a planning perspective, and taking into consideration the current financial climate, it would be important to ensure a balance between the provision of open spaces and play areas and the subsequent maintenance costs on other service providers.
- The HE referred to the proposed introduction of procedures to be followed in cases when members of the public fail to cut or maintain hedges which become hazardous or obstructive to other members of the public. The Committee were informed that the proposed procedure, which would entail sending a warning letter to the offender initially, would be discussed at the Members Workshop in October.
- The HE referred to the potentially contentious issue of trimming or tree felling. The Chair stressed the importance of ensuring that local Members were kept fully informed of Public Realm related issues in their respective Wards.

- Concerns expressed by Members regarding the design of gully covers were endorsed by the HE. He explained that maintenance requirements had not been considered at the design stage.
- Members emphasised the need for effective CRM reporting and monitoring arrangements to be in place to ensure the Strategy's effectiveness. They also asked that the Strategy include some high level key goals and objectives.

RESOLVED – *that the Committee:-*

- (a) receive and note the contents of report, and*
- (b) subject to the incorporation of the above recommendations and inclusions, endorse the draft Public Realm Strategy for presentation to Cabinet for approval.*

6 PREPAREDNESS FOR WINTER MAINTENANCE 2013/14 SEASON

A copy of report by the Head of Environment (HE), which sought Members' observations on the proposed winter maintenance arrangements to deal with adverse and severe weather conditions on the county's roads, had been circulated with the papers for the meeting.

The report provided information on the delivery of safer routes for the County's residents and on keeping the County open for business during adverse weather conditions. Members were requested to consider the information provided and comment on the Winter Maintenance arrangements in place and whether they would be sufficient for an average winter, with more severe conditions being covered by contingency considerations.

Minor alterations had been made to the approach to winter maintenance for 2013/14 and the report highlighted the changes and improvements. However, good practice from previous years would be retained. The 11 gritting routes would remain, however, the routes did not fully mirror the extent of the principal bus network and as a result three of the routes had been amended and extended to include an enhanced level of service in the Cwm, Llangwyfan/Llangynhafal and Derwen/Clawddnewydd areas.

The HE responded to a question from Councillor J.S. Welch and confirmed that the suspension of the Nantglyn bus service would not affect the gritting programme in that area. He also explained that a number of roads on urban bus routes would be treated on a reactive basis.

A minimum of 33 drivers would be required to meet legislation relating to drivers working hours with some relief drivers being utilised to provide additional resilience. In terms of plant four new gritters would be added to update the ageing fleet and this would provide three spare vehicles. The services of a number of Agricultural Contractors would be retained to provide a support service to the remainder of the rural network in the event of any snowfall. One would be equipped with salt spreading capability in the Llangollen area, which had proved particularly effective, and at least one more spreader would be procured to be deployed in the Bryneglwys area with further extensions in the coming years.

Works to provide a hard standing in the Ruthin depot had provided a significant increase in capacity, and further salt deliveries would be made as the season progresses. During recent years treated salt had been utilised in the Kinmel depot. However, due to changes in recommended salt spread frequency and rates and a review of costs, it had been decided to revert to the standard dry salt on all of routes. The supplier had built up the strategic stock at the mine in Cheshire and in addition the Welsh Government was currently constructing a Strategic Salt Store in Rhuallt which Denbighshire would have access to should the need arise. Salt heaping and salt bin replenishment would begin in September and be completed before the end of October, with restocking taking place as and when required.

The usual rota arrangements for forecasting and supervision would continue to ensure 24 hour cover which could be increased if conditions dictate. The communication strategy developed over recent years in conjunction with the Public Relations team and Customer Services, which had proved effective, would be utilised again.

It was a service priority that residents and visitors to Denbighshire would have access to a safe and well-managed road network, and the provision of a timely and effective winter maintenance activity would be a fundamental aspect of the aim. The base budget from the Highways revenue allocation of £709K remained, with further contingency available of £226K in the event of severe conditions. In reply to a question from Councillor P.A. Evans, the HE confirmed that the situation of an underspend had not occurred and he expressed concern regarding the level of contingency balance available in the event of severe winter conditions. Severe weather in March had resulted in the contingency having to be utilised, with ten days of snow clearance activity having cost £176,000.

In reply to a question from Councillor C.H. Williams regarding the provision of snow clearing on private lanes or drives, the HE provided details of the Council's responsibilities and Winter Maintenance policy and explained that the winter maintenance section did work with Social Services, if welfare issues arose, and with organisations such as the Mountain Rescue Service and Red Cross.

The HE responded to questions from Councillor G.M. Kensler and explained that any winter maintenance work undertaken on trunk roads was recharged to Welsh Government. He confirmed that in the event of severe weather conditions public realm staff would undertake snow clearing duties in Town Centre's and liaise with shop keepers to clear pedestrian areas. It was confirmed by the HE that cross boundary highway gritting arrangements were agreed annually between neighbouring authorities.

At the request of the Chair it was agreed that an information report on the Council's arrangements to address minor and medium scale flooding incidents be circulated to Committee members.

RESOLVED – that -

- (a) the Committee, having considered the report, concludes that the winter maintenance arrangements in place should be sufficient for an average winter, with more severe conditions being covered by contingency considerations; and*
- (b) an information report be submitted to the Committee outlining the Council's arrangements to deal with minor to medium scale flooding incidents.*

7 DESTINATION, MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS TEAM - NEW OPERATING MODEL

A copy of a report by the Head of Communications, Marketing and Leisure (HCML) had been circulated with the papers for the meeting.

The Team Leader Communications and Campaign Management (TLCCM) introduced the report which set out the key changes in the re-structure of the Destination, Marketing and Communications Team, the new operating model for this team, and outlined ways in which the services would be delivered by the team to meet the enhanced performance required by the Council. It was confirmed that the literature review report would follow at a later date due to difficulties relating to the events programme and other priorities over the summer.

The key driver for changing the service had been the requirement to deliver an enhanced economic performance in Denbighshire through improved marketing and communications, leading to increased economic activity, investment and job creation. The other key requirement for change had been the need to adequately resource the new team to ensure that the enhanced performance required was achievable, with the capacity of the existing team having been identified as an issue.

The Team Leader - Tourism, Marketing and Events (TLTME) summarised the key principles for change which had been listed in Appendix 2. The remit and structure of the new team would ensure a greater focus on the development of destination management and destination marketing with key interfaces agreed to mirror the Economic and Business Development team structure and objectives. The new team would deliver a more efficient and better service, primarily through improved evaluation and performance management, and better co-ordination. Re-structure costs included project management costs and an allowance of £26K had been set aside for the review as a one off cost from the 2011/12 budget. The re-structured team would provide a more complete and tailored service to other services through the introduction of account management and campaign management, some of which would generate income to cover the expansion of the remit. Full informal and formal consultation had been undertaken with staff and services directly impacted by the change, and with the Corporate Executive Team (CET), Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and Council through presentations at each forum. The Head of Service has also been available to members on a one to one basis.

In response to concerns expressed by Councillor H.O. Williams, the TLCCM supported the views expressed regarding the importance of addressing any breakdown in communication between officers and Members, and made particular

reference to the need to improve the dissemination of information to Local Members in respect of activities in their respective Wards. He highlighted the advantages of Elected Members utilising social media as a tool to communicate with members of the public and also made reference to the possible negative implications. Councillor C.L. Guy felt one of the weaknesses had been failing to communicate with members of the public who did not utilise the website or read County Voice, she felt that it would be important to target young people by using the social network, possibly through Facebook or Member and staff visits to Colleges and Schools.

The HCML agreed to circulate contact details for staff members to councillors in the Destination, Marketing and Communications would be circulated to Members. He also provided details of how social networks would be utilised by the Authority, through Facebook and Twitter, to communicate with the public and promote the work of the Council. In response to a question from the Chair, it was explained that the Council's social media account would be updated on a daily basis by the Corporate Communications Officer.

The TLCCM agreed to liaise with Countryside Services in respect of the concerns expressed regarding the need to improve signage provision in the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and the need for AONB personnel to communicate with local elected members on matters of concern.

It was confirmed that the Council's logo would not be changed. However, the branding of corporate literature would be reviewed with the coloured waves on the base of documents being removed. Councillor M.LI. Davies enquired why staff manning public contact areas such as reception desks were no longer bilingual, which seemed to contravene the Council's own language policy. Officers agreed to look into the matter. He also suggested that Welsh background music be played at public buildings and tourism businesses across the area to promote the Welsh culture and the ethos of the County. The HCML also provided confirmation that the Members printed photo gallery would be updated in the near future.

The Chair expressed appreciation to the staff for the work carried out at the recent National Eisteddfod in Denbigh, particular reference being made to Ruth Williams, the Council's former Principal Regeneration Strategy Officer's, contribution to the event's success.

RESOLVED – *that, subject to the issues raised by Members, the Committee expressed its support for the new approach, and positive engagement in the process of change.*

8 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

A copy of a report by the Scrutiny Coordinator (SC), which requested the Committee to review and agree its forward work programme had been circulated with the papers for the meeting.

A meeting had been held on the 3rd September between members of the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs Group (SCVCG) and Cabinet to discuss proposals that

Cabinet Members should present reports on topics from their own portfolio to Scrutiny Committees. It was felt that this would bring Lead Members and Scrutiny together and it had been agreed that Cabinet Members would attend to present an overview of their own reports when invited and available to attend. The SC explained that Scrutiny Chairs would ask their Committee at every meeting, when discussing the Committee's forward work programme, whether they required the relevant Lead Member to attend, having regard to whether the Lead Member's attendance was necessary and would add value to the debate.

The Committee agreed that the respective Lead Members be invited to the following meetings of the Communities Scrutiny Committee to address business items pertaining to their portfolios:-

Councillors H.H. Evans, R.L. Feeley, H.C. Irving and D.I. Smith be invited to attend the meeting on Thursday, 17th October, 2013, and Councillor D.I. Smith and the Leader be invited to attend the meeting on Monday, 25th November, 2013.

Members of the Committee were invited to submit any questions they had for the Lead Members to the Chair or SC prior to the respective meeting.

Following the meeting of the SCVCG on the 5th September, 2013 the Committee agreed that:-

- The Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment for North Wales be included in the FWP for October, 2013.
- The Anti-Fouling Strategy be rescheduled to November 2013 to accommodate the above item.
- Following receipt of a request from the Ruthin Area Member Group an item pertaining to the Granting of Leases be included in the FWP for November, 2013.
- A report on the Parking Enforcement Strategy be included in the FWP for November, 2013.

Two proposal forms had been received for consideration by the Committee at the meeting. Appendix 2a, referred to the Supporting People Local Commissioning Plan and Members agreed that this item be included in the Forward Work Programme for the October, 2013 meeting. Appendix 2b related to the 'Concept Design of Green Space – West Rhyl Housing Improvement Project (WRHIP)', which one local Member had expressed the importance of Scrutiny considering the item prior to its submission to Cabinet. Members agreed that this item be included in the Forward Work Programme for January, 2014. Following further discussion, it was:-

RESOLVED – that, subject to the above amendments, the Committee's Work Programme be approved.

Meeting ended at 11.55 a.m.