

COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Committee held in Conference Room 1a, County Hall, Ruthin on Thursday, 17 October 2013 at 9.30 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Huw Hilditch-Roberts (Chair), Rhys Hughes, Win Mullen-James, Bob Murray, Joe Welch, Cefyn Williams and Huw Williams.

Lead Members Councillors H.H. Evans, R.L. Feeley and H.C. Irving attended at the Committee's request.

Councillors M.Ll. Davies, and M.L. Holland, attended as Observers.

ALSO PRESENT

Head of Housing and Community Development (PM), Coastal Team Leader Economic and Business Development (MD), Supporting People Team Manager (KN), Scrutiny Coordinator (RE) and Administrative Officer (CW).

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors James Davies, Peter Evans, Carys Guy, Cheryl Williams and H Williams

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No personal or prejudicial interests were declared.

3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

In accordance with the requirements of Section 100B(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the Chair declared that he intended to include for discussion the following matter requiring urgent attention under Part II:-

Erection of new signs on the Nant Y Garth Pass

In response to a question from Councillor T.R. Hughes regarding the excessive size of the traffic signs erected on the Nant Y Garth Pass, the Chair explained that details relating to the provision of the signs had been referred to in the Traffic Update circulated on the 4th October, 2013. Officers agreed to enquire on the reasons why such large signs had been erected.

4 MINUTES

The Minutes of a meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday, 12th September, 2013 were submitted.

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

5 RHYL GOING FORWARD PROGRAMME - QUARTERLY REPORT

A copy of a report by the Economic and Business Development Manager, which provided information regarding progress in terms implementing the Rhyl Going Forward (RGF) Regeneration Strategy, had been circulated with the papers for the meeting.

Councillor H.H. Evans introduced and provided a detailed summary of the report. The most recent Programme Update reports been attached as Appendices 1a to 1d. These demonstrated that in terms of the four workstreams of the programme:-

- West Rhyl Regeneration Area had a current status of Yellow
- Town Centre had a current status of Red
- Seafront and Tourism had a current status of Yellow
- Live and Work in Rhyl had a current status of Orange

West Rhyl – Confirmation had now been received from the Welsh Government (WG) with respect to the Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs) on the respective blocks. The selection process for the appointment of the Design Team for the Green Space had been completed, but the final appointment would potentially be delayed until receipt of confirmation of the CPO to avoid any potential abortive costs. Members were informed that the next phase of demolition in Gronant Street had now commenced

Town Centre – The Leader explained that the bid submitted by Denbighshire, to the WG's Vibrant and Viable Places programme, for £12 million funding to support the regeneration of the Town Centre had been unsuccessful. One possible reason for the bid's failure was the change of WG Minister responsible for the programme and the subsequent change of emphasis towards housing. He confirmed that work was continuing with partners, local Members and the Town Council to develop a strategy for the Town Centre and to seek alternative funding mechanisms as part of the wider process for developing the Town Plan for Rhyl.

In reply to concerns expressed by Councillor W. Mullen-James regarding the change of criteria during the Vibrant and Viable Places programme bidding process, the Leader confirmed he had made strong representations to the respective Minister and it had been implied that the bid to the Vibrant and Viable Places Scheme had not been appropriate for this aspect of the Rhyl Going Forward Programme. Councillor Mullen-James agreed to pursue the matter through the appropriate political channels.

Options were currently being explored to replace the Town Centre Manager post. These included having a more focused role looking at promoting and finding tenants for empty properties in the town centre. The scope of similar posts in other towns were currently being studied. The opening of the LEGO Innovation Centre at the former Bee and Station Hotel had taken place on the 20th September.

Seafront and Tourism - Work was continuing on the development of the case for new leisure facilities along the coast. The Honey Club had been demolished and the Development Agreement with Chesham Estates had been approved by

Cabinet. Designs for the new hotel were being developed and a planning application would be submitted by the end of the year.

The bridge was due to be opened the following week and works on the harbour building and square were scheduled to be completed in early 2014.

Rhyl Going Forward Group Programme Board - The Leader emphasised that the Rhyl Going Forward Group Programme Board was a strategic group and that its remit was not to focus on day to day issues.

Live and Work in Rhyl – The new mountain biking track at Glan Morfa was almost complete, and the design of the new school building at Rhyl High School was progressing. The Coastal Team Leader (CTL) confirmed that smaller issues pertaining to Rhyl would be pursued through the development of a Town and Area Plan, and work on promoting Rhyl as a place to live and invest or work would be developed.

Details pertaining to the Corporate Priorities, Priority 1 and Priority 6, had been incorporated in the report, together with, cost implications, consultation process and possible risks and the steps implemented to address them.

During the ensuing discussion, the following responses were provided to issues and concerns raised by Members:-

- The Leader explained that he was unaware of any negative impact on the 21st Century Schools programme following the recent announcement of funding cuts. He agreed to raise the matter with the WG Minister for Education and Skills, and expressed the view that the Rhyl High School project should not be adversely affected by the cuts. The Leader referred to the previous lack of investment in schools and the need to review the strategic approach to investment in schools.
- Members were informed by the CTL that Rhyl Town Centre had met the requirements and criteria in the original guidance, and had been the only town in the county eligible to bid for a grant from the Vibrant and Viable Places funding stream. It was explained that the town centre was the only area in Rhyl which had not been addressed by other projects and initiatives in the Town.
- The CTL referred to the possible support for the Rhyl Town Centre Strategy through the new European programme which would be commencing in 2014. He explained that the Rhyl Town Centre Manager's post had been reviewed by all the partners, who were examining good practice elsewhere, and details of the funding stream for the post were provided. Members were informed that work pertaining to the branding and the web-site had been undertaken by the Council's Communications, Marketing and Leisure Services.
- Councillor H.C. Irving highlighted the importance of the Housing Improvement Project in progressing and improving the Rhyl area. He made reference to the need for a change of culture and the significance of adopting an ethos towards owner occupation.

- Rhyl had not previously benefitted from a Town and Area Plan. The creation of such a plan for Rhyl would help to bring all workstreams and projects in the Rhyl area together to complement each other. The Corporate Priority Budget was a County wide budget and bids in respect of priorities identified from all settlements would be considered.
- With respect to Pont y Ddraig contractors would provide Denbighshire staff with training for the operation of the new bridge, and staffing costs would be incorporated in the operational costs of the harbour. The Leader confirmed that the creation of an income source from the bridge was being examined, together with, a 25 year plan for its operational costs. The Chair explained that details of costs had previously been presented to Scrutiny and the income potential had been positive and the business case presented had been favorable. The CTL explained that the project had encompassed the improvement and expansion of facilities in the harbour and not just the provision of the new bridge.
- In response to a request from the Chair, it was agreed that the maintenance agreement, and long-term operational costs of the new bridge, be presented to Scrutiny for consideration when completed.
- Surveys had been undertaken to seek the views of residents and visitors to Rhyl regarding their perception of the town including the impact of the initiatives introduced under the RGF Programme.
- In response to a question regarding the reduction in the provision of disabled parking spaces in Rhyl, the CTL explained that a report on the Council's Parking Enforcement Strategy and its impact on economic development would be considered at the next meeting of the Committee.
- The Head of Housing and Community Development (HHCD) explained that the WG was currently in the process of reviewing priority groups for rehousing and it was likely that ex-offenders would not be afforded a priority as they were as present. He highlighted the need to re-balance the housing market in West Rhyl by reducing the number of multiple occupancy properties and attracting families to the area. Councillor R.M. Murray referred to the need to improve employment prospects to assist in transforming the culture and ethos of the area, the Leader responded and referred to the work being undertaken in respect of the Rhyl City Strategy which involved working in partnership to create employment in the area.

In response to concerns expressed by the Chair regarding the importance of the inclusion of consistent and clearly defined objectives in the report to measure the initiatives being undertaken, the Leader explained that the colour status provided in the report related to the general status of the project in question.

The CTL responded to concerns raised by the Chair regarding the need for a strategic document to incorporate the entire Rhyl Plan, he referred to the development of the Town and Area Plan and Town Centre Strategy which would assist in coordinating and delivering the work streams. Following an in-depth discussion the Committee:

RESOLVED – *subject to the above observations, to receive the report and note the progress made.*

Councillor H O Williams left the meeting at this juncture.

6 NORTH WALES GYPSY AND TRAVELLER ACCOMMODATION NEEDS ASSESSMENT

A copy of a report by the Housing Care and Support Manager, which provided information regarding the North Wales Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment (GTANA) undertaken by Bangor University had been distributed with the papers for the meeting.

The County Councils of Denbighshire, Flintshire, Conwy, Ynys Môn, and Gwynedd jointly commissioned Bangor University to undertake research and assess unmet accommodation need for Gypsies and Travellers. The collaborative approach had been in line with WG guidance which urged “Local Authorities to work in a regional capacity and share the legal, moral, financial and political responsibility to address the accommodation inequality experienced by the Gypsy and Traveller community in Wales” (Travelling to a Better Future, WG).

The study had concluded that Denbighshire should be required to provide 2 residential pitches for Gypsies and Travellers, each to accommodate up to 4 caravans, and one transit pitch to accommodate up to 7 caravans on a short term basis to be developed on a sub-regional basis with Conwy County Borough Council. It had been recommended that the Scrutiny Committee support the proposed composition of the Steering Group to drive the recommendations forward. The HHCD outlined the legal implications of failing to take action which could also result in an increase in illegal encampments. Details of problems recently experienced by a local business were outlined by Councillor H.C. Irving who highlighted the need to be proactive and address the issue.

The Executive Summary to the Bangor University North Wales GTANA contained key findings and recommendations and had been attached as Appendix 1.

Current site provision across the partaking LAs included a total of 78 pitches; 66 of being situated within Flintshire and 12 within Gwynedd. The report indicated that site provision should be increased by a further 62 residential pitches and 28 transit caravan spaces by 2016. The growth requirement for residential pitches had been identified per LA, with transit requirements being identified only as a regional figure. It was being recommended that collaboratively the partaking LAs identify and develop three or four transit sites across the region each accommodating up to seven caravans. With regard to static provision it had been identified that Denbighshire should make provision for two residential pitches. In reply to Councillor R.M. Murray, it was explained that reference had been made to the minimum provision and any site recommended would be subject to the Planning process.

Legal advice sought had indicated that the GTANA be adopted as it had identified an accommodation need within Denbighshire which the Council would be obliged to

respond to. This requirement would be strengthened by the WG in the forthcoming White Paper whereby LAs would be mandated to provide sites for the Gypsy and Traveller Community where there was evidence that a need existed. It would be important for the Council to open up a dialogue with the Gypsy and Traveller Community to ensure their needs would be met by the proposed sites which may be offered. Conwy County Borough Council was undergoing a similar process and it had been suggested that the Working Group should take the opportunity to collaborate where appropriate, particularly in relation to the provision of a sub-regional transit pitch. The HHCD confirmed that where sites had been provided following dialogue with the Gypsy and Traveller Community the number of illegal encampments had subsequently decreased. Councillor C.H. Williams explained that he understood the legal implications relating to the provision of sites, but would find it difficult to voluntarily support the provision of sites for people who continually flouted the law.

Members were informed of the statutory obligation to provide sites and it was confirmed that charges would be imposed for sites provided and these could be incorporated in the options appraisal. The HHCD confirmed that privately owned sites would be financed by its occupiers and a full cost appraisal would be required for sites provided by the Council.

Within its Corporate Plan Denbighshire had listed the following as priorities:-

- Vulnerable People were protected and able to live as independently as possible.
- Ensuring access to good quality housing.

Councillor T.R. Hughes spoke against the proposed recommendations in the report and made reference to the adverse impact on the Council of the recent WG announcement regarding funding cuts. Councillor M.L. Holland felt that the provision of small sites would ensure that the Council retained control over their operation, and he expressed the view that a request be made to WG to provide funding towards the provision of such sites.

Details of possible financial implications and the requirement of additional resources had been included in the report, together with, the consultation process undertaken and possible risks and measures implemented to address them. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) on the findings of the Bangor University GTANA had not been undertaken. However, a full EIA would be completed as part of the options appraisal for any recommendations made by the Steering Group to Council.

In response to a request from the Chair, the HHCD agreed to incorporate in the report to Council, the current costs relating to the removal of settlers from illegal encampments. He highlighted the difficulties which could be encountered in providing definitive costs relating to the provision of sites, due to the number of variables to be addressed prior to undertaking an options appraisal. The HHCD explained that the report sought the Committee's support for the principle relating to the provision of accommodation for North Wales Gypsies and Travellers.

During the ensuing discussion Councillor W. Mullen-James proposed, and Councillor R.M. Murray seconded, recommendation 3.1 in the report. As the voting was tied with 3 votes for and 3 votes against, the Chair exercised his casting vote against the recommendation. Councillor W. Mullen-James proposed, and Councillor R.M. Murray seconded, recommendation 3.2 in the report. Again as the voting was tied at 3 votes for and 3 votes against, the Chair exercised his casting vote against the recommendation.

Consequently, the Committee, in acknowledging that the GTANA's recommendations would be presented to County Council in due course requested that its views be reported to Council and that the report presented to County Council include estimated costs to the Council of providing the recommended sites, including maintenance and administration costs, and the economic benefits to the county of providing sites, the approximate costs involved if the Gypsy and Traveller community managed and ran the sites themselves, as well as details of the costs the Council currently incurs in clearing illegal encampments. The Committee:

RESOLVED –

- (a) to note the recommendations of the Bangor University Report; that Denbighshire should be required to provide 2 residential pitches for Gypsies and Travellers (each of which could accommodate up to 4 caravans) and one transit pitch which could accommodate up to 7 caravans on a short term basis - to be developed on a sub-regional basis with Conwy County Borough Council, and*
- (b) to note, but not support, the proposed composition and remit of the Steering Group, as outlined in Appendix 2 to the report; and*
- (c) that the further details and costings requested above be incorporated into the report that will be presented to County Council in due course.*

7 SUPPORTING PEOPLE LOCAL COMMISSIONING PLAN

A copy of a report by the Supporting People Team Manager, which detailed the two-year Local Commissioning Plan (LCP) for the Supporting People programme in Denbighshire, had been circulated with the papers for the meeting.

Councillor R.L. Feeley introduced the report and explained that Supporting People (SP) was a policy framework and funding stream to provide housing related support to vulnerable people, promoting independence and preventing homelessness. The LCP for 2014/15 and 2015/16 would be submitted to Cabinet on the 29th October, 2013 for agreement.

Supporting People provided housing related support services to a wide range of vulnerable people and details of the services supported by SP in Denbighshire had been outlined in the report. Housing related support aimed to enable people to maintain their housing tenure and live as independently as possible. The SP Programme had been evaluated at national level and shown to deliver very positive financial and other benefits.

The report incorporated details of changes to the administration of the SP programme which included new guidance and governance, contractual

arrangements and funding distribution formula. The funding distribution formula had cut the Denbighshire SP budget by 5% each year from 2012-13 until 2016-17. Plans had been introduced to manage the cuts without significantly impacting on service levels in 2012/13, 2013/14 and 2014/5 and to develop and consult on a fair and transparent strategic prioritisation framework to inform the management of cuts in 2015/16 and 2016-17. In July, 2013 the WG had detailed further cuts from April, 2014 and the Council had been consulted on options for managing the cuts. It was understood that the total level of cuts in 2014-15 would be in the region of 12%, though this had not been confirmed by WG.

Members were informed that the Local Commissioning Plan (LCP) had focused on managing known reductions whilst also being in a position to respond to additional budget cuts while minimising the impact on service users. Planning the 2014/15 budget had involved abandoning projects which had not been commissioned, decommissioning projects with the consent of providers and negotiating reduced contracts for projects which were not fully occupied or struggling to maintain service delivery.

Confirmation was provided that the challenges for 2015/16 would increase. However, the impact on service users would be minimised wherever possible through negotiating efficiency savings and reconfiguration with individual service providers. Concern had been expressed that not all the savings for 2014/15 could be achieved and that contracts may have to be reduced where savings had not been negotiated or identified by 10%. However, the Council was seeking to achieve savings by consensus and had already negotiated 75% of the expected scale of savings for 2014/15. While promoting a strategic approach to identifying efficiencies, WG had explicitly required constructive engagement from providers to deliver savings in 2014/15, and this had proved helpful.

It was explained that Denbighshire was committed to taking a strategic approach to the difficult choices ahead, which potentially included the decommissioning of some services, and the development of the Strategic Priority to Fund framework would continue.

Details of actions listed in the SP LCP for 2014/15 and 2015/16 had been incorporated in Appendix 1. The main strategic priorities which had been identified included:-

- Women & Men experiencing Domestic Abuse
- People with Learning Disabilities
- Young People with Support Needs (16 - 24)
- Generic/Floating Support/Peripatetic (tenancy support services which cover a range of user needs)

The Supporting People Team Manager (SPTM) provided a summary of the SP Spend Plan included in the report. The final SP Spend Plan would be concluded following confirmation of the funding level. Summaries of the grant calculations and the anticipated impact of the spending reductions for 2014-15 had been included in a confidential document Appendix 2.

Details of the consultation process undertaken, the Chief Finance Officer Statement, risks and steps implemented to reduce them and cost implications had been included in the report.

Councillor C.H. Williams highlighted the lack of reference in the report to the provision of services for men who were victims of domestic abuse. The SPTM referred to services currently provided for men, and explained that the remodelling of the SP service had incorporated the improvement of service provision for male users. In response to a request from the Chair, it was agreed that clarification of service provision for men be incorporated in the report. The Committee:

RESOLVED – *subject to clarification on the service provision available for men being incorporated into the report, to support the Supporting People Local Commissioning Plan 2014/15 and 2015/16, for submission to the North Wales Regional Collaborative Committee and the Welsh Government.*

8 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

A copy of a report by the Scrutiny Coordinator, which requested the Committee to review and agree its forward work programme and which provided an update on relevant issues, had been circulated with the papers for the meeting.

The Cabinet Forward Work Programme had been included as Appendix 2 and a table summarising recent Committee resolutions, and advising on progress with their implementation, had been attached at Appendix 3 to the report.

Draft Caravan Sites Strategy for Denbighshire – As a result of workload pressures relating to the Local Development Plan and the associated urgent Supplementary Planning Guidance, the Planning and Public Protection Department had been unable to progress the development of the draft strategy as originally intended. Members agreed that the presentation of the draft strategy be deferred until the spring of 2014.

Draft Flood Management Strategy - Due to the need to dedicate officers' time and efforts to the investigations into the major flooding incidents in the County it had not been possible to focus on the draft Flood Management Strategy. As the Strategy should be available in the near future the Chair had agreed for its presentation to be rescheduled to November's meeting. As a result the report on the 'Community Covenant with the Armed Forces', scheduled for the meeting in November, had been rescheduled to the meeting in January, 2014.

Members were informed that the next Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group meeting had been scheduled for the 24th October, 2013. In response to a question from Councillor H.O. Williams, the Scrutiny Coordinator explained that the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs Group had been asked to consider a request that the Joint Board of the AONB be subject to scrutiny in the future..

Councillor J.S. Welsh informed the Committee that the rescheduling of the meeting of the Committee from the 28th November, 2013 to the 25th November, 2013 had

not been noted in the Members diary. The Scrutiny Coordinator agreed that a cancellation request for the meeting on the 28th November, 2013 would be issued.

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

Meeting ended at 11.35 a.m.