

## **COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Minutes of a meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Committee held in Conference Room 1a, County Hall, Ruthin on Thursday, 3 April 2014 at 9.30 am.

### **PRESENT**

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

Lead Member councillor Huw LI Jones

Councillor Meirick LI Davies attended as an observer.

### **ALSO PRESENT**

Corporate Director: Economic and Community Ambition (RM), Economic and Business Development Manager (TB), Risk & Asset Manager (TT), Scrutiny Co-ordinator (RE) and Committee Administrator (SLW).

#### **1 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Rhys Hughes and Huw Williams

Apologies for absence were also received from Lead Members Councillors Hugh Evans and David Smith.

#### **2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

No personal or prejudicial interests were declared.

#### **3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR**

No urgent matters were raised.

#### **4 MINUTES**

The Minutes of a meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday, 6 March 2014 were submitted.

Matters Arising:

- Safer Routes – The Scrutiny Co-ordinator read to Members the letter which was to be sent to the Minister for Economy, Science and Transport.
- Kingdom – wearing of uniform. A response had been received from the Community Safety Enforcement Officer:
  - “The conditions concerning the wearing of uniform are that unless there is a specific instruction, officers do not have to wear uniform.

The instructions in relation to Rhyl are that officers will wear the uniform provided by Kingdom Security in the town centre which is the shopping area.

The instruction is the same in Prestatyn until further notice. If officers are seen in the town centre without uniform, there will be a specific reason that can be explained”.

**RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of Communities Scrutiny Committee, held on Thursday 6 March 2014 be received and approved as a correct record.

## **5 TOWN AND AREA PLANS (QUARTERLY REPORT)**

The Economic and Business Development Manager introduced the Town & Area Plans report (previously circulated) to monitor the Council’s performance in delivering its Town Plans and their benefit to the towns themselves and outlying communities.

At the Cabinet meeting held on 25 March 2014, the following elements had been adopted:

- Denbigh Town & Area Plan
- Rhuddlan Town & Area Plan
- Rhyl Town & Area Plan

The Bodelwyddan Town & Area Plan was still outstanding as it was a late addition, but it should be available by early summer.

In-depth discussion took place and the following issues were raised:

- Members queried whether there was any flexibility within the plans to accommodate changes in communities’ priorities, and whether a standard formula had been used to calculate the funding allocation for each plan.
- Members also felt it was crucial that each Town & Area Plan should outline the long-term vision for the area.
- Officers advised that it would be the decision of each Member Area Group (MAG) to determine whether a change in priority or amendment to any priority could be accommodated within their plan and whether they would be able to fund any new/revised project.
- Following a meeting of the Corporate Executive Team (CET), it had been requested that a review of the impact of the Town & Area Plans take place in early May. The Programme Manager, Economic & Community Ambition and the Head of Internal Audit were to carry out the review. The review would examine matters such as a funding formula, the nature of the contents of current plans and whether each plan would be underpinned with a long-term vision for each town and associated area.

The Corporate Director, Economic & Community Ambition, advised that she would provide Members with the Terms of Reference for the review.

The Lead Member for Leisure, Youth, Tourism and Rural Development offered to visit any Member Area Group (MAG) or areas to assist with any difficulties experienced with plans.

**RESOLVED** that:

- (i) *Subject to the above observations, to note the progress made to date in delivery of the Town & Area Plans.*
- (ii) *Consideration of the findings of the review of the Town & Area Plans to take place at the Communities Scrutiny Committee meeting to be held on 26 June 2014.*

## **6 CONCEPT DESIGN OF GREEN SPACE - WRHIP**

The Economic and Business Development Manager (E&BDM) introduced the Concept Design of Green Space – WRHIP report (previously circulated) to provide Members with details of the Green space which was an integral part of West Rhyl Housing Improvement Project (WRHIP) and the potential implications for ongoing maintenance and potential funding sources.

The E&BDM informed Members that the WRHIP was a large project led by the Welsh Government and it was partnership working between Denbighshire County Council and Pennaf Housing Association.

Discussion took place and the following points were raised:

- It had been emphasised that, whilst the green space project had been an integral part of the improvement in west Rhyl and the Rhyl Going Forward Programme, it was a community/ neighbourhood amenity and not a tourist attraction.
- The rationale behind providing a green space in the area was to make the area more attractive to families. Work was taking place to transform the housing offer in the area to more of a mixed tenure, particularly increasing owner occupier and private rented family accommodation.
- Officers confirmed consultation would take place with National Resources Wales (NRW) with respect to any flood risk to proposed housing developments prior to submitting any planning applications. Councillor Win Mullen-James enquired whether it was feasible to have an underground water holding tank beneath the park to hold any additional water and mitigate the risk of serious flooding. Officers advised that the completion of Phase 3 of the Coastal Defence work should address any flood risk to the park itself.
- Questions were raised with respect to whether agreement had been reached on the most appropriate storage location for residents' wheelie bins. The E&BDM confirmed to check on the matter and advise the Committee accordingly.
- The E&BDM provided details of where residents, whose homes had been made the subject of Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs) for the purpose of developing the green space area, had moved. 122 had been moved and of those, 97 had chosen to stay in Rhyl. Those who had moved elsewhere had

done so from choice and all were now living in improved quality accommodation.

- Questions were raised regarding small business units being made available near to the green space area. Officers advised that the results of the consultation with local residents had firmly indicated that they wished to see the type of park proposed in the report, where families could spend quality time together. Other work streams of the Rhyl Going Forward (RGF) Programme were attempting to address employment issues.
- In response to concerns raised regarding the negative letters published in the local press concerning the work underway in West Rhyl, the Corporate Director: Economic and Community Ambition advised that a conscious decision had been taken not to respond directly to the letters. However, the Council were working with the press, in particular, the Daily Post, in a bid to publish positive news stories on achievements and the progress being made in Rhyl. It was felt that, in the long term, this approach would reap benefits for the Council.

**RESOLVED** that subject to the above observations, to note the progress made with the delivery of the West Rhyl Housing Improvement Project and specifically the green space element.

**At this juncture (10.20 a.m.) there was a 10 minute break.**

**Meeting resumed at 10.30 a.m.**

Due to the meeting progressing earlier than the anticipated timings, it was agreed by the Chair to vary the remaining items on the Agenda. As the Highways representative for item 7 (Highway Grass Verge Cutting Policy & Programme 2014/15) was not due until 11.00 a.m. it was agreed to discuss the Scrutiny Work Programme (Item 8) followed by Feedback from Committee Representatives (Item 9).

## **7 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME**

A report by the Scrutiny Co-ordinator was submitted (previously circulated) seeking Members' review of the Committee's Forward Work Programme and providing an update on relevant issues, a draft Forward Work Programme (Appendix 1), Cabinet Forward Work Programme (Appendix 2) and Progress with Committee Resolutions (Appendix 3).

Members agreed to the following revisions to the Forward Work Programme:

- (i) 15 May 2014**  
The Communication Report had been deferred until 15 May 2014 due to pressure of work.
- (ii) 26 June 2014**  
Review of Town & Area Plans to be added to the 26 June 2014 Agenda.  
Lead Members requested to be present at the meeting.

***RESOLVED** that subject to the above amendments, the Communities Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme be approved.*

## **8 FEEDBACK FROM COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES**

Councillor Joe Welch raised an issue, at this point, with regard to the Service Challenges. If members of Scrutiny were unable to attend any Service Challenge then it was requested a substitute member attend in their place.

This was agreed by all present at the meeting.

**At this juncture (10.40 a.m.) there was a further 10 minute break.**

**Meeting reconvened at 10.50 a.m.**

## **9 HIGHWAY GRASS VERGE CUTTING POLICY & PROGRAMME 2014/2015**

The Risk and Asset Manager (R&AM), introduced the Highway Grass Verge Cutting Policy & Programme 2014/2015 (previously circulated) to provide information regarding the preparations for this year's highways grass cutting programme including an assessment of the consultation that had taken place with stakeholders since autumn 2013.

Discussion took place and the following points were raised:

- Members were informed that the highways grass verge cutting programme for this season had been scheduled to commence on 12 May 2014. However, there was flexibility in the agreement to commence the programme a week earlier if the warm weather persisted.
- The Lead Member for Leisure, Youth Tourism and Rural Development advised that a series of visits to Town and Community Councils to explain the details of the "biodiversity" cut had commenced. However, they were now on hold until the autumn as it would be too late to change the schedule for 2014/15 to accommodate any changes to the requirements in individual areas. He also advised members that he would be willing to attend Town & Community Councils or any other local organisations to explain the grass cutting regime and the biodiversity option.
- The R&AM advised that as both urban and rural verge management would now be dealt with by the same service and, therefore, historical anomalies on the outskirts of towns should no longer exist. Any future problems should now be resolved promptly.
- In response to members' questions, the R&AM outlined how external contractors were managed and advised that 2014/15 would be the final year of the contract. Next seasons highway verge cutting contract would be subject to a tender process. It had been suggested that in urban areas such as Rhyl, volunteers and community groups could be approached to take on some of the work. In view of this, Councillor Win Mullen-James requested that a copy of the maintenance schedule for Rhyl be issued to her.

- The R&AM also undertook to follow-up concerns raised regarding overhanging tree branches obscuring road signs.
- Concerns were raised regarding amenity grass areas being cut during heavy rainfall and litter on verges and it was requested these matters be addressed. The R&AM advised that the litter picking schedule did coincide with the grass verge cutting schedule, but due to the different nature of both types of work, litter was likely to be visible for some time following the grass being cut.
- The R&AM confirmed that grass at junctions and blind corners would always either be cut or strimmed. The R&AM requested members to advise the Customer Service Department immediately if they came across dangerous areas which had not been cut. The service would then address the matter and include them in future schedules.
- In response to a question on whether Town & Community Councils were the most appropriate forum to consult on highway grass cutting schedules, Committee members and officers agreed they were the voice of local communities.

***RESOLVED*** that subject to the above observations, to agree the preparations for the 2014 season and confirm that the concerns over the biodiversity elements of the cutting regime had been assessed and incorporated appropriately into the programme.

**The meeting concluded at 11.10 a.m.**