

COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Committee held in Conference Room 1A, County Hall, Ruthin on Thursday, 29 January 2015 at 9.30 am.

PRESENT

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

Observers – Councillors Ray Bartley, Stuart Davies and Gwyneth Kensler

ALSO PRESENT

Corporate Director Economic and Community Ambition (RM), Head of Highways and Environmental Services (SP), Traffic, Parking and Road Safety Manager (MJ), Waste and Transport Manager (JE), Scrutiny Coordinator (RE) and Committee Administrator (KEJ)

POINT OF NOTICE

The meeting was opened and adjourned until 10.05 a.m. when a quorum was reached.

1 APOLOGIES

Councillors James Davies, Carys Guy and Bob Murray together with Councillor David Smith, Lead Member for Public Realm

2 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor Huw Hilditch-Roberts declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 5 – Findings of the Traffic and Parking Review, because he had a shop in Ruthin.

3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

No urgent matters had been raised.

4 MINUTES

The minutes of the committee's meeting held on 4 December 2014 were submitted.

Matters Arising – Page 7, Item 3 Urgent Matters: Councillor Rhys Hughes confirmed he had been contacted by the Development Manager (Planning and Public Protection) following concerns he had raised at the last meeting regarding the lack of consultation over a planning matter relating to the 'Blue Lake' at a quarry on the Horseshoe Pass. As the planning certificate had already been issued there was no recourse. To prevent a similar situation arising in future members sought assurances that local members and neighbouring members (as well as neighbouring town/city/community councils) would be fully consulted on such future proposals/applications which would have wide ranging and far reaching implications

for their own and neighbouring communities. It was agreed that the Scrutiny Coordinator take the matter up directly with Planning Officers and report back to the committee thereon.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 4 December 2014 be received and approved as a correct record.

5 FINDINGS OF THE TRAFFIC AND PARKING REVIEW

The Head of Highways and Environmental Services introduced a report (previously circulated) detailing the findings of the Traffic and Parking review and recommended actions being proposed as a result. The review had been restricted to the ten main retail town centres in the county and explored what traffic and parking related interventions the Council could implement to benefit town centre retail in terms of increased footfall and trade.

The report contained two separate elements recommending members support –

- (1) the development of the recommended actions for submission to the relevant Member Area Groups (MAGs) for local consideration, and
- (2) further work being undertaken as part of the freedoms and flexibilities budget process to examine the potential of varying parking charges between towns.

The Traffic, Parking and Road Safety Manager provided some context to the report and elaborated upon the review methodology and proposed measures to address key findings. Members discussed the review report with officers and the following points were raised –

- responses to the residents and business community questionnaires issued as part of the review had been encouraging, with a higher than average return rate. The majority of concerns highlighted in the responses related to vehicles occupying on-street parking spaces for longer than the allocated time. This had a detrimental effect as it deterred others from stopping/visiting local towns and therefore the local economy suffered
- there was a need for sufficient short stay parking spaces across the county in order to increase town centre footfall
- sufficient on-street parking was also required to encourage passing trade and improve the health of the local economy and MAGs would be best placed to determine an appropriate time limit for their particular areas
- to reap economic benefits an element of incentivising residents/visitors to visit local shops, cafes etc. was needed to entice them into town centres; this in turn should pay dividends
- enforcement work required to be better managed, avoiding regular patrol patterns in towns. Enforcement staff also patrol different towns around the county to avoid over familiarity with public/business people which could potentially lead to less rigorous enforcement
- an appropriate balance should be drawn between rigorous enforcement action, applying a common-sense approach on a case by case basis whilst at all times being courteous and showing respect towards all concerned; the introduction of body worn cameras would positively influence future behaviours

- there was a need for clear and correct signage in all of the county's public car parks and also on approaching roads into the towns to ensure traffic was guided into appropriate car parks – particularly in tourist areas such as Llangollen, where tourists could be directed to use outlying car parks to free-up town centre car parks for shoppers
- a number of members were keen that once the MAGs had discussed and agreed the appropriate actions for their areas, that the respective town/city/community councils be informed of the decisions
- discussion needed to take place on the advantages and disadvantages of a county-wide standard parking charges scheme or a variable scheme which would suit individual towns' own needs. Discussion on future car parking charges would form part of a forthcoming budget workshop session in preparation for the 2016/17 budget
- any future parking strategy and/or charging policy would need to be sustainable and whilst members were keen for a focus on regeneration rather than income generation officers advised it would have to balance the needs of the local economy against the need for the Council to raise income as part of its general drive to reduce budgetary demand
- members raised a number of points relating to parking problems within their local areas and there was also some disagreement over a number of the review recommendations and accuracy of the data used, particularly in the Llangollen area. Officers advised that the majority of those issues had been raised within the study and the detail of how to resolve individual problems would be discussed at length in the respective MAGs in due course
- whilst there were common issues across all towns a tailored approach to addressing them taking into account local circumstances would be required and it was accepted that MAGs were best placed to debate and determine appropriate traffic management actions for their individual areas – it was resolved to amend recommendation 3.2 of the report to include the need for MAGs to agree the necessary actions
- various types of car parking incentives and schemes were outlined, including indicative costs of installing and maintaining different types of parking meters, number plate recognition systems, etc.; whilst a number of measures had been explored some were costly and unpopular with the public and in the short term the use of enforcement officers was recommended
- the potential additional parking pressures in Llangollen as a consequence of the proposed new health centre and supermarket were raised and officers advised that a separate report on managing that traffic pressure had been commissioned, as had a report on traffic and parking management pressures in the town when special events were held at the Pavilion. Officers agreed to share that report with the Dee Valley MAG when available;
- members were advised that traffic officers would be contacted for advice once planning applications for Local Development Plan (LDP) developments were received with a view to recommending traffic management plans for the sites due for development;
- the issue of displacement due to new/revised parking restrictions was discussed and how that could be managed in future as was the availability of coach parks across the county, and

- members requested information on the annual income generated by each of the county's car parks.

Officers clarified that some of the review elements required local decisions for individual areas but others, such as the varying car parking charges, would need to go through the decision making process for members. The committee agreed to receive a report back on conclusions of the parking charges review prior to its submission to Cabinet.

RESOLVED that the Committee –

- (a) *receive the report and note the contents of the Review;*
- (b) *support in principle the development of the series of recommended actions in the Review as summarised in Appendix C to the report, including the calculation of indicative costs to each of the actions, and the discussion and agreement of those actions with each of the respective Member Area Groups;*
- (c) *support the undertaking of a further piece of work to examine in greater detail the potential of varying parking charges between towns according to supply and demand as identified by the Traffic and Parking Review, and*
- (d) *receive a further report on the conclusions of the varying parking charges review when available and prior to its submission to Cabinet.*

[Councillor Rhys Hughes voted against resolution (c) above.]

At this juncture (11.20 a.m.) the meeting adjourned for a refreshment break.

6 INTRODUCTION OF CHARGES FOR GREEN WASTE COLLECTIONS

The Waste and Transport Manager submitted a report (previously circulated) detailing progress on the level of customer take up of the new chargeable green waste scheme together with associated service and budget implications. He was pleased to report upon the latest customer take up figures and explained in more detail the mechanics of the scheme as follows –

- the take up target was between 10,000 – 15,000 properties and as of 29 January (two months ahead of the scheme's commencement) 8,308 properties had signed up for the service, this exceeded the estimated figure at this point in time; this positive trend was expected to continue with a tranche of customers towards the end of March
- the deadline for the 'early bird' discount for those who registered for the scheme had been extended from 31 January to 14 February 2015
- the on-line registration process had proved extremely effective and easy to use with two thirds having registered on-line
- the scheme had been introduced as an efficiency saving measure and its take up directly affected the amount of staff required to undertake the work – as it was expected that some individuals would not register for the scheme until the

growing season had started it was difficult to confirm at this point how many staff would be made redundant as a consequence of the scheme's introduction

- a number of expressions of interest in taking voluntary redundancy had been made across Highways and Environmental Services and it was anticipated that those expressions of interest, coupled with 'natural wastage', should be sufficient to cover any redundancies required following the introduction of the new chargeable green waste scheme
- whilst Denbighshire was the first council in North Wales to introduce charges for collecting and disposal of green waste, six councils in South Wales were already charging for the service.

In response to members' questions officers –

- confirmed that the charging policy for the service was fully in-line with the Welsh Government's Collections Blueprint guidance; it was also similar to what a number of councils in England did with respect to green waste
- advised that they did not foresee the number of flytipping incidents of green waste increasing greatly following the introduction of the charge. Responding to reports which indicated that Denbighshire was the worst performing authority in Wales with respect to flytipping statistics, officers advised that this was due to the robust recording practices in the county and the national 'Flycapture' data system's capacity to reflect this and the county's performance in removing flytipping waste. This issue had been debated by scrutiny in the last twelve months
- whilst around 38,000 properties currently had been issued with green bins not all of them used the service and a number composted the waste themselves. Those who composted were not counted in the county's recycling figures
- currently around 4k tonnes of green waste was collected annually in the county and whilst it was assumed that those registered for the scheme would put out more green waste, savings had been calculated based on the number of routes and manpower required to operate the scheme as opposed to the amount of green waste collected
- it was envisaged that the withdrawal of the free service would result in the Council losing its place at the top of the Welsh recycling league, probably registering a reduction of around 4%. However, it should still be among one of the highest recyclers and not incur penalties as a result of the reduction in its recycling rate
- once the new scheme was operational, during the last week in March 2015, it would then be a 12 month recycling service. Green waste would be collected on a fortnightly basis – 24 collections a year (missing one collection at Christmas)
- the service would run for 12 months from the first collection which for the majority of people would be March to February next year but for those joining later, e.g. June, they would receive the service until the following May
- those properties registered with the service would receive barcodes to attach to their green bins, and as an additional verification measure each green collection refuse vehicle would be fitted with GPS equipment to validate bins and property addresses
- £9k had been set aside to advertise and set up the new service, £4k of which had been earmarked to employ agency staff to deal with the registration

process. To date no agency staff had been employed as the registration process had been undertaken in-house through the use of Service staff who were currently on 'light duties' following injury or sickness

- assurances were given that refuse lorries did not go out to pick up missed collections which were the fault of the householder and not the authority
- refuse lorries were on a rolling replacement programme, therefore any vehicles which became surplus to requirements once the take-up of the chargeable service had been established would be disposed of under this programme
- residents who would not be using the new service and who did not want to keep their green bins would be advised that it was recyclable and that they could take the bin to their local civil amenities site if they wished
- further publicity around the scheme would be undertaken during the forthcoming months, including advertising on refuse vehicles etc. Members suggested that it may be useful, as part of this latest publicity campaign, to highlight to residents the value for money aspect of the service in comparison to loading the dirty waste into their cars, cost of fuel and wear and tear of taking it to the local civil amenities site

Members asked officers to monitor the areas of risk associated with this new service during its introduction, particularly the tonnage of residual waste collected in comparison to the current rate, number and nature of flytipping incidents and the take-up of the service by residents. This information would prove useful to the Scrutiny Task and Finish Group that would be evaluating the impact of the Cutting Our Cloth budget cuts in due course.

RESOLVED that subject to the above observations –

- (a) *the report be received, and*
- (b) *the Scrutiny Task and Finish Group (established to evaluate the impact of the budget cuts) examine and monitor the impact of the introduction of the charges for green waste collections as part of its work on the Cutting Our Cloth proposals.*

7 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Coordinator submitted a report (previously circulated) seeking members' review of the committee's work programme and providing an update on relevant issues.

During consideration of the work programme members –

- discussed which representatives would be best placed to fill the vacancies on the Service Challenge Groups and be appointed to the Scrutiny Task and Finish Group currently being set up to evaluate the impact of the budget cuts. The Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs Group would confirm the membership of the Group in due course
- reaffirmed that a report on the review of varying parking charges be added to the work programme as agreed earlier in the meeting

- agreed that the April meeting be restricted to two main business items to ensure sufficient time was dedicated to scrutinise the report on Language Categorisation of the County's Schools
- agreed not to invite the Lead Member for Public Realm to attend the committee's next meeting given the technical nature of the business items, and
- noted the information report on Community Endowment Fund which had been included within the committee's information brief.

The Scrutiny Coordinator referred to an action arising from the last committee meeting (under the Draft Caravan Sites Strategy item) to arrange a meeting between the Development Manager and the owner of one of the county's largest caravan sites. Members asked that this meeting take place ahead of their next committee meeting in March in order to inform debate when progress with the Caravan Site Strategy was being discussed.

RESOLVED that –

- (a) *subject to the above, the forward work programme as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report be approved;*
- (b) *Councillors Huw Hilditch-Roberts and Rhys Hughes expressed an interest in being appointed the committee's representatives on the Scrutiny Task and Finish Group to evaluate the impact of the budget cuts with Councillors Win Mullen-James and Joe Welch expressing an interest in being appointed substitute representatives, and*
- (c) *the following committee representatives and substitute representatives be appointed to the Service Challenge Groups –*
 - Highways – Councillors Rhys Hughes and Cefyn Williams (substitute)*
 - Planning – Councillor Win Mullen-James and Cefyn Williams (substitute)*
 - Finance & Assets – Councillor Peter Evans (to replace Councillor Rhys Hughes, to take effect from the next round of Service Challenges).*

8 FEEDBACK FROM COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES

Committee representatives reported upon their attendance at meetings as follows –

Councillor Win Mullen-James was a member of the Corporate Parenting Forum and reported upon a useful meeting held the previous week with foster parents during which a number of points were raised which would lead to service improvements for both foster parents and looked after children.

Councillor Joe Welch referred to his attendance at the recent School Standards Monitoring Group and reported upon the new format which focused on discussion. There had been positive outcomes for each of the three schools discussed – Rhyl High School, Ysgol Plas Cefndy, Rhyl and Ysgol Penmorfa, Prestatyn.

Councillor Cefyn Williams reported upon a meeting of the Affordable Housing Working Group and the comprehensive review being undertaken which would likely lead to significant changes. One more meeting of the Working Group would be held before a report was brought before members for consideration.

The Chair reported upon the following –

- Cadwyn Clwyd (Rural Development Agency) had not met for some time and appeared to be winding down with European funding unlikely to become available until September 2015
- Coleg Cambria was also facing budget cuts which were becoming more of a struggle to manage
- the next meeting of the Taith Board would discuss its future with all six North Wales local authorities putting forward a plan to the Transport Minister
- during a meeting of the Economic and Community Ambitions Board he had challenged the targets and how they would be achieved and more work was being undertaken in that regard
- he was a member of the Strategic Investment Group and the outcome of their work was reported through Cabinet and Council.

RESOLVED that the verbal reports from members attending meetings be noted.

The meeting concluded at 12.35 p.m.