

COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Committee held in Conference Room 1a, County Hall, Ruthin on Thursday, 30 November 2017 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Brian Blakeley, Meirick Davies, Rachel Flynn, Tina Jones, Merfyn Parry, Anton Sampson, Glenn Swingler, Andrew Thomas, Graham Timms (Vice-Chair), Cheryl Williams and Huw Williams (Chair)

Councillor Hugh Evans, Leader and Lead Member for the Economy and Corporate Governance was in attendance at the Committee's request for agenda item number 5.

Observers – Councillors Martyn Holland, Alan James, Brian Jones, Arwel Roberts, Peter Scott, Emrys Wynne and Mark Young

ALSO PRESENT

Corporate Director Economy and Public Realm (GB), Traffic, Parking and Road Safety Manager (MJ), Principal Engineer Traffic Management (PL); Team Leader – Tourism, Marketing and Events (PMc), Scrutiny Coordinator (RE) and Committee Administrator (KEJ)

WELCOME

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and conveyed a special welcome to Councillor Meirick Davies who was a new member of the Committee.

1 APOLOGIES

There were no apologies.

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No declaration of interest had been raised.

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 19 October 2017 were submitted.

Matters Arising – Page 11, Item No. 6 Scrutiny Work Programme, second bullet point – The Scrutiny Coordinator advised that the information requested by the Committee on 21st Century Schools Programme Band B proposals had been

included in the report to Cabinet dated 18 July 2017 and had been reproduced in the Committee's information brief for ease of reference.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 19 October 2017 be received and approved as a correct record.

5 TOURIST DIRECTION SIGNS FOR THE VALE OF CLWYD

The Council Leader introduced the Traffic, Parking and Road Safety Manager's report (previously circulated) which outlined the progress made to date with the project to develop a tourist direction signing scheme for the Vale of Clwyd. The report also detailed the application process which had to be followed to apply for tourist direction signs on the trunk road network generally. Introducing the report the Leader and the Lead Member for Highways, Planning and Sustainable Travel highlighted the complexities involved with gaining permission to place 'brown' tourist signs alongside a trunk road. The complex nature of the process was fettering the Council's ambition of developing the local tourist economy, a point which had been raised at a recent Destination Management Conference held in the county and which had been communicated to the Welsh Government's Minister for Culture, Tourism and Sport.

Due to the complexities involved with the application process for signage on trunk roads, particularly the strict eligibility criteria which had to be met in order to be able to apply to erect a tourist information sign on the trunk road, the Council was grateful to the local Assembly Member (AM) for establishing a working group for the purpose of devising an innovative way to enable rural areas, such as the 'Vale of Clwyd' to meet the required criteria. Details of the method by which the criteria had been met were contained in the report. It was thought that the approach taken, which involved the 'grouping together' of a number of standalone tourist sites, was the first example of a 'grouped' application anywhere in Wales with a view to meeting the eligibility criteria for tourist signs. The work had involved considerable effort on behalf of all partners, including city and town councils, the Diocese of St. Asaph, Cadw, Denbighshire County Council and the AM. Whilst the costs, as detailed in the report and reported in the press, did appear extortionate and were a concern, they were a conservative estimate of all costs associated with the project including the costs of the signs, safety work and trunk road closure etc. The Traffic, Parking and Road Safety Manager advised that with an estimated 36,000 trips a day being made along the St. Asaph section of the A55 the proposed signage had the potential to highlight the Vale's tourist sites to an extended audience, and whilst those travelling along the trunk road had already decided on their destinations for that particular day, seeing the signs to the Vale of Clwyd on the roadside may help entice them back at a later date to explore the area further. This could potentially represent a subsidiary benefit to gain from the new signs, and one which required to be capitalised upon, to ensure that once tourists had been directed off the trunk roads they were made aware of other places of interest to visit in the county. Once the tourist signs on the trunk road had been secured it would be important for a tourism signage strategy for the entire county to be developed in order to realise maximum benefits from those visiting the county. The Council's Team Leader – Tourism, Marketing and Events, who was in attendance, confirmed that the 'brown tourist signs' did have the potential to bring people off the trunk roads to visit other

areas nearby. The Welsh Government (WG) had recently launched a new 10 year project called 'The Wales Way', the purpose of which was to highlight the country's hidden gems. Developing a county tourism signage strategy which linked into the trunk road tourism signs would support the delivery of 'The Wales Way' vision in Denbighshire.

Responding to members' questions the Leader, Traffic, Parking and Road Safety Manager, Senior Engineer Traffic Management and the Team Leader (Tourism, Marketing and Events):

- explained the reasons why Rhyl and Prestatyn's beaches and tourist attractions were sign posted from different junctions on the A55;
- emphasised that residents in Dyserth were concerned about the volume of traffic travelling through the village at present and that some highways work was planned for the village to try and alleviate current pressures;
- advised that once the Aquatic Centre and other new facilities in the pipeline for Rhyl were open appropriate signage to them would need to be erected close to the nearest exit on the trunk road. Consideration was required now in relation to sourcing the funding for these signs;
- confirmed that whilst the estimated costs for the Vale of Clwyd signage project seemed extremely high in comparison to indicative costs of £5k to £20k as illustrated in the August 2013 WG guidance document 'Traffic Signs for Tourist Destinations on Trunk Roads and Motorways in Wales', they were of the view that the estimated cost quoted in the report was fairly accurate. This cost was based on the size of the required signs and the associated amount of civil engineering, traffic management and road closure works required;
- the proposed tourist signs for the Vale of Clwyd would need to be large due to the fact that they would be drawing attention to three different tourist attractions on a single sign (Denbigh and Rhuddlan Castles and St. Asaph Cathedral) and easy to read from a distance. The project would therefore entail the erection of 4 large tourist signs alongside the A55, other signs on the slip roads and further along the highway network to direct the traffic to their chosen destination;
- confirmed that the Council would make every effort to keep road closures and traffic management costs to a minimum when erecting the signs by attempting to undertake the work at the same time as other scheduled road closure/traffic management works were being carried out. However, in reality this type of co-ordination was rarely possible;
- advised that the Working Group established to bring this project to fruition had been convened on the understanding that the relevant city/town councils, and tourist site operators would pay for the project. The County Council's contribution of circa £23k would be based on the scheme development costs, design, administrative and contractor supervision costs;
- confirmed that officers would be willing to make enquiries with Visit Wales to establish if it had any funding streams that could be utilised towards the costs of the tourist signs for the Vale of Clwyd;
- advised that the next step with the project, once support had been gained for the proposal in principle, would be to reconvene the Working Group to progress the work, which would include securing the required funding to realise the project in its entirety;

- advised that barriers were always erected in front of all trunk road signs to protect drivers and passengers in the event of a road traffic collision in the vicinity of the signs. Routine maintenance work to trunk road signs would fall to the local County Council's Highways Service, which received a budget from the WG's Transport Division specifically for undertaking maintenance work on trunk roads. Damage to signage on trunk roads caused by road traffic accidents would in the first instance be charged to the insurance company of the vehicle owner involved;
- confirmed that it would be important for the three attractions that would be listed on the Vale of Clwyd tourist signs to give careful consideration to what tourist offer they would provide for those visiting the sites. The Council's Tourism, Marketing and Events Team could possibly assist them via the Tourism Ambassador scheme with promoting their offer;
- described how tourists would be signposted to the individual tourist attractions listed on the trunk road sign once they left the trunk road and entered the county's highways network;
- confirmed that the availability of sufficient parking for each of the attractions signposted was calculated on the basis of parking facilities at the attraction itself and the proximity and capacity of public car parks nearby;
- advised that in relation to tourist sites that were near county or national borders officers would liaise with relevant counties and road network authorities with respect of signage requirements;
- confirmed that the WG determined the safety requirements in relation to the erection of signs on trunk roads, whilst the local authority determined the requirements in relation to the local highway network;
- advised that if the required funding could be sourced and the final approval on the design and specification for the signs could be secured from WG, it was anticipated that the signs would be in situ by 2019;
- agreed with members that work required to be undertaken to ensure that the rest of the county, and in particular local businesses, benefitted in future from tourists enticed off the trunk road by the tourist signs. Whilst WG guidance noted that only tourist attractions within 10 miles of a trunk road could be signposted from the trunk road there was nothing to prohibit the Council from promoting other sites of interest once tourists had entered its highway network, for example Flintshire County Council had its own Flintshire Leisure 'Tour' Signs which directed visitors to all corners of the county. In other areas easily recognisable symbols were used on signs to denote places of interest or services available. The development of an in-county tourism signage strategy could benefit a number of smaller businesses in the area and support the development of the local economy. Town and Community Councils, tourism businesses and other stakeholders' views on the provision of in-county tourism signs could be sought as part of the development of a county tourism signage strategy;
- agreed that linkages required to be made between highway authorities and satellite navigation companies to ensure that routes designated as tourism routes were correctly reflected on satellite navigation systems to make sure that both navigational methods complemented and not contradicted one another. This work could be undertaken as part of the Destination Management Strategy project.

Prior to concluding the discussion officers undertook to provide members with detailed breakdown of the cost involved with the project.

Following an in-depth discussion members were firmly of the view that the county council should commence work to link the proposed trunk road tourist signs into a county-wide tourism signage policy through the development of a consistent tourism signage strategy that would help entice tourists once they had left the trunk road to visit other destinations in and around Denbighshire.

The Committee:

RESOLVED that subject to the above observations –

- (a) *to receive the report and support the progress made to date in relation to the Vale of Clwyd tourist direction signage project;*
- (b) *to acknowledge the Welsh Government's eligibility criteria for providing brown tourist signs on trunk roads;*
- (c) *to recommend that the Working Group established by the local Assembly Member be reconvened to progress the delivery of the Vale of Clwyd Tourist Direction Signs Project and source the required funding to bring it into fruition, and that an information report on the project's progress be circulated to the Committee in March 2018;*
- (d) *that an officer and elected member working group be established for the purpose of developing a consistent tourism signage strategy for Denbighshire to complement trunk road tourism signage, and that the terms of reference for this working group include identification of potential funding sources for the tourism signs, and*
- (e) *that the latter Group report on its progress to the Committee at a meeting in the spring of 2018.*

6 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

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

Discussion focused on the following –

- a report on the Council's plan for redundant school sites and any other vacant sites as requested at the Committee's last meeting would be submitted to their next meeting on 18 January 2018
- Welsh Audit Office officials would be attending as observers at the next Committee meeting as part of their fieldwork on a study 'Fit for the Future' examining how provisions of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 were impacting on scrutiny, and would also be meeting with the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs Group and other members as part of that process. They

would also be assessing progress against the action plan drawn up following their previous improvement study in 2014/15 on 'Good Scrutiny? Good Question!'

- the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs Group had referred a matter for scrutiny relating to the findings of the Section 19 Flood and Water Management Act 2010 on the investigation into the summer 2017 flooding incidents in Rhyl, Rhuddlan and Prestatyn, which had been included in the Committee's work programme under future issues for consideration
- members agreed to invite the relevant Lead Cabinet Members to the Committee's next meeting and to schedule a pre-meeting briefing beforehand
- referred to the Committee's recent scrutiny of the charging scheme for 'blue badge' holders for parking in council car parks and confirmed that the Committee's views had been taken into account as part of the delegated decision process with the intention of introducing an extra hour for the same tariff as other users. The Corporate Director confirmed he would ensure that members were informed once the delegated decision had been implemented
- the reports requested by the Committee under the previous agenda item would be included within the work programme and actioned as appropriate.

RESOLVED that, subject to the above, the forward work programme as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report be approved.

7 FEEDBACK FROM COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES

The Chair had been unable to attend the recent Planning and Public Protection Service Challenge and the Corporate Director confirmed he had taken the challenge as the former Head of Service and no major issues had been raised. Members were advised that the notes of the Service Challenge would be circulated with the Committee's information brief in the usual manner. The notes of the Customers, Communication and Marketing and Business Improvement and Modernisation Service Challenge meetings held in October had been included in the Committee's latest information brief. Councillor Glenn Swingler advised that since his last report on the Customers, Communication and Marketing Service Challenge meeting more work had been undertaken on the use of social media. The Committee noted the importance of being represented at Service Challenge meetings and was advised that any issues identified by members within the notes for further scrutiny could be taken forward in the usual manner following completion of the member proposal form.

RESOLVED that the verbal reports be received and noted.

The meeting concluded at 11.45 a.m.