

## **PARTNERSHIPS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Minutes of a meeting of the Partnerships Scrutiny Committee held in Conference Room 1A, County Hall, Ruthin on Thursday, 11 July 2019 at 10.00 am.

### **PRESENT**

Councillors Joan Butterfield, Jeanette Chamberlain-Jones (Chair), Gareth Davies, Hugh Irving, Pat Jones, Christine Marston, Melvyn Mile, Rhys Thomas and Emrys Wynne (Vice-Chair)

### **ALSO PRESENT**

Corporate Director – Economy & Public Realm (GB) (Substitute for Chief Executive); Principal Manager – Support Services (AL), Head of Community Support Services (PG), Head of Highways & Environmental Services (TW), Countryside and Heritage Services Manager (HR), Ecology Officer (JW), Built Environment Manager (GR), Public Protection Officer – Trading Standards (NS), Lead Officer – Destination, Marketing and Communication Team (SO), Scrutiny Co-ordinator (RE), and Committee Administrator (SLW).

#### **Also in attendance:**

Councillor Brian Blakeley – Homeless Champion  
Lead Member for Wellbeing and Independence - Councillor Bobby Feeley  
Lead Member for Planning and Public Protection – Councillor Mark Young

#### **Observers:**

Councillors Meirick Lloyd Davies, Glenn Swingler and Graham Timms

## **1 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Peter Scott and David Williams

Apologies for absence were also received from Lead Member for Housing & Communities, Councillor Tony Thomas, and Service Manager – Community & Business Services – Abbe Harvey

## **2 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR**

In accordance with the Council's Constitution, nominations were requested for the office of Vice-Chair of the Partnerships Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Rhys Thomas nominated Councillor Emrys Wynne, seconded by Councillor Jeanette Chamberlain-Jones.

**RESOLVED** that Councillor Emrys Wynne be appointed Vice-Chair of Partnerships Scrutiny Committee for the ensuing year.

### **3 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

None.

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

No urgent matters had been raised.

### **5 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING**

The minutes of the Partnerships Scrutiny Committee held on 4 April 2019 were submitted.

**Matters Arising** – Page 10, Item 5 Denbigh Infirmary – the Chair suggested that the eight options put forward should be separated to ensure there was no confusion and that these were eight separate options.

Councillor Emrys Wynne suggested that part of the translation be amended as the wording was incorrect. For clarity in the Welsh version the final word of the second paragraph 'sef', should form the final part of the preceding sentence, "...gwasanaethau yn yr Ysbyty, sef:"

Page 11 – Item 5 - The Head of Community Support Services confirmed that a meeting between Denbighshire County Council and Grŵp Cynefin was to take place in the next 14 days to discuss the future vision for health and social care provision in Denbigh.

**RESOLVED** that, subject to the above, the minutes of the Partnerships Scrutiny Committee, held on 4 April 2019, be received and confirmed as a correct record.

### **6 SAFEGUARDING AND MEETING THE NEEDS OF HOMELESS PEOPLE**

The Lead Member for Well-being and Independence introduced the report and appendices (previously circulated) the purpose of which was to outline the progress made to date with the new corporate approach to dealing with homelessness in the county. The report included the new draft Corporate Homelessness Action Plan along with details of the recent restructure of the Homelessness Prevention Team which formed part of the Council's Community Support Services. Also detailed in the report was the Council's corporate approach towards preventing homelessness, providing emergency/temporary accommodation to individuals and families who presented themselves as homeless, and how the Council then worked to move those in emergency/temporary accommodation on to long-term sustainable housing solutions. During her introduction the Lead Member emphasised that homelessness was an increasing problem across Wales and as a result the Welsh Government (WG), similar to Denbighshire and other local authorities, had identified the need to address the matter as a priority.

The Lead Member explained that part of Denbighshire's solution for addressing homelessness issues involved the establishment of a partnership with Conwy County Borough Council to trial a pilot project across both counties called Housing

First. Details of the project were contained in Appendix 6 to the report. Grant funding from the WG's Housing First Trailblazers fund, totalling £330K, had been awarded to the pilot project which had resulted in the establishment of a new team to assist homeless people with high and complex needs. The Team's aim was to ensure people were settled as quickly as possible into their own home and provided with the relevant support. Support would be available to them for as long as they needed it in order for them to be able to sustain their tenancy. Evidence gathered from across the UK and other parts of the world indicated that this type of innovative approach had the potential to deliver a sustainable way out of homelessness, improve health and well-being and enable social integration. Housing First in Conwy and Denbighshire expected to welcome its first tenants before the end of July 2019.

Denbighshire's decision to adopt a corporate approach towards tackling homelessness and appointing a Corporate Director to lead that work underlined its commitment to reducing the number of individuals and families presenting themselves as homeless in the county. In future the delivery of the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan would be led by the Housing Strategy Group. The focus of the Action Plan was early intervention and prevention. The introduction of the Single Access Route to Housing (SARTH) had assisted the authority and registered social landlords (RSLs) to prioritise applicants for social housing, however, the majority of the homeless households were currently sitting in Band 2 and were not in the high priority banding. Both the local authority and RSLs were in the process of co-ordinating the building and purchase of approximately 370 affordable/social housing units.

Councillor Brian Blakeley informed the Committee that, in his capacity as the Council's Homelessness Champion, he had witnessed first-hand the excellent work the Homelessness Team undertook under very difficult circumstances at times, and was confident that the Council was moving forward in its aims of addressing the county's homelessness issues.

Responding to members' questions the Lead Member, Corporate Director: Economy and Public Realm, Head of Community Support Services and the Principal Manager: Support Services:

- provided clarity on who was classed as 'homeless' – Denbighshire had a very limited number of people sleeping rough. Its 'homeless' individuals and families tended to be:
  - staying with friends on a temporary basis (sofa surfers);
  - tenants whose landlords wanted to sell the property where they lived;
  - victims of domestic abuse;
  - people whose homes were about to be repossessed following failures to keep up mortgage or rent payments;
  - young people who were no longer able to live at home but had insufficient income to rent or buy a place of their own etc.

It was emphasised that not all homeless people were vulnerable individuals, but may be people who had fallen on hard times due to no fault of their own i.e. being made redundant or unemployed;

- confirmed people from outside of the county could present themselves as homeless in Denbighshire if they could prove a local connection with the area;
- advised the legal requirement for a local authority to have and to publish a Homelessness Strategy was laid out in the Housing (Wales) Act 2014;
- emphasised having all Council services' input into the Homelessness Strategy and taking ownership of it could only benefit and strengthen the Council's approach to finding sustainable solutions and relieving pressures on other services. Nevertheless there would always be some need for emergency and temporary accommodation to meet people's needs in the short term. Having a nominated Lead Member and Corporate Director to lead the Council's work to in relation to homelessness issues ensured that every effort was made to find sustainable solutions;
- advised the Council's Empty Homes Strategy, which aimed to return 500 empty properties back into occupancy, would help alleviate homelessness in the county. However, not all 500 properties were intended for occupation by people/families presenting as homeless. The Empty Homes Strategy was one piece of a large jigsaw aimed at delivering the Council's corporate priority relating to housing;
- advised the Council was looking to devise solutions to problems faced by young people, particularly young single people, in trying to access suitable housing. Work was currently underway with the Working Denbighshire project and with RSLs to explore potential packages that could help young single people to access suitable housing and establish themselves as a householder;
- provided an overview of the Housing First initiative which was to find the individual or family with complex needs a home first and then work with them via the provision of intensive support to help them establish themselves and develop the required skills to sustain a long-term tenancy and consequently improve their well-being. In order to establish this initiative both councils had worked closely with landlords in order to secure suitable properties to let to Housing First tenants. Through the Landlord Offer, the Council would take-on the tenancy on behalf of the vulnerable individual/family and be liable to pay the rent to the landlord prior to being reimbursed through the Housing Benefit system. To date 18 properties had been secured via this method which gave the landlords security in relation to rental payments. If the supported resident(s) gained the anticipated confidence and skills as a result of the intensive support provided to them the objective would be for the Council to negotiate with the landlord to secure the transfer of the tenancy to the resident in the long-term;
- confirmed the Strategic Housing and Homelessness Group (SHHG) would approve its terms of reference at its next meeting. The objective of its re-establishment was to give a greater focus on delivering the Housing Strategy and to incorporate the Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan into the Council's overall Housing Strategy and Action Plan with a view to ensuring a corporate approach to all housing related matters;
- confirmed the Council did not have plans currently in place to deal with any major reduction in Supporting People (SP) funding that may result from the WG's redistribution of the SP Housing Support Grant. If it transpired that this redistribution would have a significant adverse effect on the authority a

strategy would require to be drawn up to deal with the loss of funding. No indications had yet been provided on how the redistribution would affect Denbighshire's funding, there was potential for the redistribution of funding to work in Denbighshire's favour;

- advised the Revenues and Benefits Service operated a Discretionary Housing Grant (DHG) which families could apply for to help them for example to secure a tenancy agreement. Payment of this one-off payment would be cheaper than supporting a family in temporary accommodation and would benefit their well-being;
- confirmed the amount the Council paid for temporary bed and breakfast accommodation varied, it was dependent upon the type of accommodation, the size of unit required for the family, the time of year it was required etc. The Council negotiated the rates with the business owner. In some cases, caravans were used as temporary accommodation as they were better suited to keep a family together rather than rooms in hotels or guest houses;
- advised during 2018/19 the Council paid £1.2 million for temporary accommodation for people presenting as homeless. The Authority acknowledged that this was unsustainable in the medium to long-term and was, therefore, exploring options with the assistance of the Economic Regeneration Team for providing some temporary housing solutions in-house i.e. the development of temporary emergency accommodation centres or pods and supported housing units. The aim was to develop a suite of small sized options, as a 'one-size fits all' solution would not work;
- agreed the average length of time people spent in temporary accommodation, currently 56 days, was unacceptable. However, the reason for this was the lack of suitable properties available to re-house them;
- confirmed if people presenting themselves as homeless could not prove a local connection to the area they would be advised and supported to return to their home area as long as there were no concerns for their safety if they did so. The Council would attempt to establish temporary accommodation provision for them in the area from which they originated and advise the relevant local authority of the situation;
- advised if a Council tenant was in arrears with their rent the Homelessness Prevention Team would work closely with the Council's Housing Service with a view to ensuring that the tenant would not be evicted and to attempt to devise solutions to secure the tenancy in the long-term;
- confirmed one RSL operating within Denbighshire had adopted a no eviction policy on health and housing grounds. This particular RSL was exploring whether 'tenancy holidays' could be granted if tenants were in hospital or cared for elsewhere on a temporary basis;
- advised the community also had a role to play in supporting vulnerable residents and those at risk of losing their homes;
- currently there were no citizens being accommodated in Denbighshire from Conwy and Flintshire, however, there were some Denbighshire residents being accommodated in Conwy and Flintshire. Local authorities notified each other if they were accommodating their citizens in temporary emergency accommodation in a neighbouring authority;
- advised the aim of the Regional Collaborative Committee was to draw up the Regional Homelessness Strategy with a view to reducing homelessness

across North Wales through sharing best practice and developing shared services where possible, thus ensuring maximum benefits were realised from the SP funding available;

- advised the Service made every effort to support people requiring assistance outside of their base at Russell House, Rhyl. The Service funded an officer based at the Job Centre in Rhyl with a view to delivering early intervention services from that location. It was also currently exploring options for basing a team within the community, possibly in conjunction with Citizens Advice Denbighshire (CAD); and
- confirmed specialist temporary accommodation were only accessed when specific needs were identified for those requiring accommodation. Individuals and families may be housed in these types of accommodation for longer periods than in ordinary temporary accommodation

Committee members agreed with the Lead Member and officers that adopting a proactive, early intervention corporate approach was a prudent way to address homelessness issues in the county. Managing people's expectations of the Service and the Council was also key.

Prior to concluding the discussion, the Committee requested that the Council's Customers, Communication and Marketing Service issue a press release/social media information clarifying the definition of homeless and homelessness with a view to educating the public in relation to the matter. Members also raised concerns with respect of the potential impact on the Council and service provision for residents if the redistribution of SP Housing Support Grant was unfavourable for the Authority. The Corporate Director reassured members that he, the Lead Member and other senior officers were always willing to discuss any concerns they had with them.

Following and in-depth discussion the Committee:

**RESOLVED** that subject to the above observations and the issuing of press/media statement:

- (i) to support the new corporate approach to dealing with homelessness via the Strategic Housing and Homeless Group;*
- (ii) to support the new draft Corporate Homelessness Action Plan;*
- (iii) to support the aims of the restructure of the Homelessness Prevention Team; and*
- (iv) that a report on the progress made in dealing with homelessness is reported back to the Committee in 12 months' time.*

## **7 BIODIVERSITY DUTY DELIVERY PLAN**

In the absence of the Lead Member for Housing and Communities, the Head of Highways and Environment presented to the Committee the Ecology Officer's report and the Council's draft Biodiversity Duty Delivery Plan and Well-being Impact Assessment (previously circulated). He advised that the report was being presented to the Committee to seek members' views on the Plan and its contents ahead of seeking the Lead Member's approval for the plan via the delegated decision process. The Head of Service explained that Section 6 of the Environment

(Wales) Act 2016 required all local authorities to embed the consideration of biodiversity and ecosystems into their early thinking and business planning and to publish a plan on how they proposed to maintain and enhance biodiversity and promote ecosystem resilience. He advised the Committee that in drawing up the Plan, identifying key actions, and performance indicators, significant engagement and consultation had taken place with officers across all Council services as in order for the Plan to be delivered all services needed to be engaged and willing to deliver their part of it. The Plan itself and a progress report on the actions contained within it required to be published by the end of 2019.

Responding to members' questions the Head of Highways and Environment and the Ecology Officer:

- confirmed the cost of delivering the Plan presented to the Committee was based on the Service's current budget, making small changes to existing working practices etc. and the availability of external grant funding which the Service had a proven track record of securing. However, as a result of the recent Notice of Motion to Council on the Climate Change Emergency, dependent upon the recommendations of the proposed working group, additional resources may be required for biodiversity work in future and the Plan may need to be re-drafted;
- confirmed the Service worked closely with Natural Resources Wales (NRW) on a number of projects, via the Public Services Board (PSB) and the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB);
- advised the Service used volunteers for various projects, including monitoring the Little Tern colony. Bangor University was also involved with the Little Tern project and was studying the colony's behaviour;
- advised various Council services supported and contributed towards the delivery of biodiversity initiatives as part of their Service team building away days;
- confirmed ecological enhancements for planning applications had changed and the Service now routinely fed into the work involved with developing the Local Development Plan (LDP) and provided ecological observations on individual planning applications;
- advised seagulls were a protected species and that the Council had a separate action plan on how to manage seagulls and reduce the nuisance they caused. Communities Scrutiny Committee at its meeting the previous week had examined the effectiveness of this plan;
- advised the Council's policy on highways grass verge maintenance was, in the Council's opinion, the best in Wales in relation to promoting and supporting biodiversity;
- referred to a number of wildflower meadow biodiversity projects with which the Council was involved and how they were sourcing native seeds and plants for these meadows in a bid to ensure their sustainability;
- advised work was currently underway with the Council's Facilities, Assets and Housing Service to draw up biodiversity plans for green areas within the Council's housing estates;
- confirmed every effort was made with city, town and community councils in the county to promote the Council's biodiversity ambitions and the reasons underpinning its highways and grass maintenance policies. However, some

community groups had previously sown some resistance to the Council's approach;

- advised they were of the view that the Council had now struck the right balance in relation to highways grass verge maintenance between biodiversity and road users' safety. Health and safety was given precedence. Members were advised that if they had specific health and safety concerns in relation to highways verge maintenance policy they should be reported to the Council's Customer Service Centre to enable them to be registered on the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system and individually investigated;
- confirmed NRW was also required to publish and deliver a Biodiversity Duty Delivery Plan as would the WG's Trunk Road Agency who had responsibility for grass verge maintenance on the county's trunk roads;
- advised the Council's Countryside Services dealt with the removal of non-native invasive plants, whilst native species such as ragwort would be dealt with by Streetscene and other Highways and Environmental Services staff or contractors undertaking work on the Council's behalf; and
- agreed with members that a discussion needed to be undertaken on a national basis regarding litter picking on trunk roads

At the conclusion of the discussion the Committee:

**RESOLVED:**

- (i) that it had read, understood and taken account of the Well-being Impact Assessment (Appendix 2) as part of its consideration of the Biodiversity Duty Delivery Plan;*
- (ii) subject to the above observations to recommend to the Lead Member for Housing and Communities, under powers delegated to him, to endorse the Biodiversity Duty Delivery Plan;*
- (iii) that a presentation be given at a future Council Briefing session on the Authority's duties in relation to biodiversity and carbon reduction and the progress made to date in meeting these duties; and*
- (iv) to recommend to the Lead Member for Housing and Communities that he should write to the Welsh Government's Trunk Roads Agency seeking it to adopt a similar approach to biodiversity to that of Denbighshire County Council when undertaking highways verge maintenance cuts and to the removal of litter from verges*

## **8 NO COLD CALLING CONTROL IN DENBIGHSHIRE**

The Lead Member for Planning, Public Protection and Safer Communities introduced the report and appendices (previously circulated) which outlined how the No Cold Calling Zones in the county were currently administered. The report also sought members' views on new proposals for the process of introducing such zones in future.

During his introduction the Built Environment & Public Protection Manager emphasised that the Authority was not proposing to do away with 'no cold calling zones' or to prohibit the designation of new 'no cold calling zones', but due to



pressures caused by diminishing financial resources North Wales Police no longer had the capacity to undertake the public engagement and consultation to establish new zones or to support the re-invigoration of established zones. They would, however, continue to respond to complaints in relation to cold calling. With a view to facilitating current zones to continue and new zones to be established the Council proposed that in future residents/communities who were interested in establishing 'no cold calling zones' would be expected to arrange the public engagement and consultation exercise themselves and that the costs of associated signage etc. would also have to be borne by the individuals or community groups instigating the application. The Council would, however, support them with the process and provide them with a self-help toolkit, which would contain template documents for consultation, voting, launching the zone and evaluating its effectiveness. The Council would also be willing to identify local businesses that may be willing to help with the costs of signage etc., whilst North Wales Police was willing to continue to supply window stickers, raise awareness at community events and via social media channels. Between 2007 and 2016 circa 355 'no cold calling zones' had been established in Denbighshire. All zones had been established at the request of residents and/or the Police. In 2017 a part review of the effectiveness of zones had been undertaken, the outcome of which had indicated that some residents were not aware that they lived in a 'no cold calling zone'. Nevertheless, the majority of those surveyed were of the view that deterrents such as 'no cold calling zones' were useful.

In response to members' questions the Lead Member, Built Environment & Public Protection Manager, and the Public Protection Officer (Trading Standards):

- advised that the prices quoted in the report for external signage informing people that they were entering a 'no cold calling zone' cost in the region of £200 per sign. This was the price the Council had paid to its internal Sign Shop, prior to its closure. It had won the contract at that time following a tendering process;
- confirmed that the Council was willing to engage with any agency or organisations who wanted to support work relating to 'no cold calling zones' i.e. OWL (operated by North Wales Police);
- advised that the Council did not have any formal contract or service level agreement (SLA) in place with respect of a 'No Cold Calling Zone';
- confirmed that traders were liable for prosecution if they made unsolicited visits to properties in 'no cold calling zones'. However, the Council's Trading Standards Service initially preferred to undertake prevention work, including leafleting every home in the area with a view to protecting residents, especially vulnerable residents from cold callers and scammers;
- advised that individuals and groups who wanted to establish a 'no cold calling zone' would generally have a vested interest in establishing the zone. Once steps had been taken to establish a zone Trading Standards officers would check that all necessary measures had been taken in order to formally establish it within six months of the original request;
- confirmed that it would be the Council's Trading Standards Service who would be responsible for enforcement action against individuals or companies who disobeyed 'no cold calling zone' restrictions, this could extend to prosecuting the offender(s). However, residents rarely wanted the 'cold caller' to be prosecuted unless a serious offence had taken place,

- usually a word of caution from the Trading Standards officer was sufficient to stop unwanted visits from continuing;
- advised that the majority of Trading Standards work relating to ‘cold calling’ complaints involved gathering evidence and sharing it with other authorities. Both the Council and North Wales Police had entered into a data sharing agreement to facilitate the sharing of intelligence and analysis. This assisted both organisations to target resources to effectively deal with complaints; and
  - agreed that having a county-wide ‘no cold calling zone’ would be beneficial to all residents, particularly the vulnerable, if resources to support the concept were available

Members felt that the costs quoted for external signs was excessive and requested that officers request quotations from sign makers on current sign costs. They also asked officers to ensure that all signs and stickers conformed with Denbighshire’s Welsh Language Policy, and were manufactured from environmentally friendly materials and recyclable.

In addition they requested that either a Council Briefing or training event be arranged for all county councillors on the Scambusters Programme.

At the conclusion of the discussion the Committee:

***RESOLVED*** that subject to the above observations and the provision of costs for external signage and environmentally friendly stickers, to support the proposed future approach towards administering the introduction of ‘no cold calling zones’ and their operation.

## **9 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME**

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

During the ensuing discussion –

- It was noted that the meeting scheduled for 23 May 2019 had been cancelled due to the European Parliamentary Elections.
- The Scrutiny Co-ordinator confirmed to members present that the meeting due to be held on 16 September, 2019 would take place in Russell House, Rhyl.
- Single Access Route to Housing (SARTH) would be moved from the 16 September 2019 meeting to the 7 November 2019 meeting.
- The next Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs meeting would take place on 31 July 2019.

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

**10 FEEDBACK FROM COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES**

None.

**The meeting concluded at 12.45 p.m.**