

PARTNERSHIPS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Partnerships Scrutiny Committee held in on Thursday, 5 November 2020 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

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

Also in attendance:

Councillor Hugh Evans – Leader of the Council and Lead Member for the Economy and Corporate Governance

Councillor Brian Jones - Lead Member for Waste, Transport and the Environment

Councillor Tony Thomas - Lead Member for Housing and Communities

Observers: Councillors Alan James, Meirick Lloyd Davies and Graham Timms

ALSO PRESENT

Corporate Director: Economy and Public Realm (GB), Head of Legal, HR & Democratic Services – Monitoring Officer (GW), Head of Finance and Property (SG), Head of Community Support Services (PG), Principal Manager - Support Services (AL), Service Manager - Specialist Services (AP), Democratic Service Manager (SP), Scrutiny Co-ordinator (RE), and Committee Administrators (SJ and RTJ).

The Operations Manager from the North Wales Economic Ambition Board's Programme Office (HVE) was in attendance for agenda item 5.

The Local Democracy Reporter was also in remote attendance to observe proceedings. A representative from Audit Wales had also been invited to attend.

POINT OF NOTICE

Due to the current restrictions on travel and requirement for social distancing as a result of the coronavirus pandemic the meeting was held remotely by video conference and was not open to the general public. All members had been given the opportunity to attend as observers and the Local Democracy Reporter had also been invited to observe.

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Melvyn Mile

Apologies for absence were received from Corporate Director: Communities – Nicola Stubbins and the Lead Member for Well-being and Independence who unfortunately could not join the meeting due to a power failure.

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

None.

3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

No urgent matters were raised.

A question was raised in respect of the Committee's political balance, specifically in respect of the number of Conservative Group representatives on the Committee. It was explained that officers were waiting for the Independent Group to nominate a representative to serve as their third member on the Committee. Upon receipt of that nomination the Conservative Group would be asked to withdraw one of its representatives from the Committee.

4 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the Partnerships Scrutiny Committee held on 10 September 2020 were submitted.

Councillor Gareth Lloyd-Davies advised that he had tendered his apologies for the meeting and requested that they be recorded in the minutes and reflected in his attendance record.

Resolved: - that, subject to the above inclusion, the minutes of the Partnerships Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 10 September 2020 be received and approved as a true and correct record.

5 NORTH WALES GROWTH BID PHASE 2 - GOVERNANCE AGREEMENT

The Council Leader, Corporate Director: Economy and Public Realm, Monitoring Officer, Section 151 Officer and the Operations Manager from the North Wales Economic Ambition Board's Programme Office (OMNWEAB) provided members with detailed background information on the long-term objective of the Growth Deal, developed in partnership between the North Wales Economic Ambition Board (NWEAB) and both Welsh and UK Governments.

Details were provided of the financial implications for all partners, including Denbighshire County Council, and the anticipated long-term benefits of the proposed investment on the county and the region's economy. The close alignment between the Skills Strategy for the North Wales region and the Growth Deal should support the delivery of the programmes and projects outlined in the Business Plan and secure the area's future economic prosperity. Whilst projects were located in various areas across the region it was anticipated that they would all to a greater or lesser extent benefit the entire region, with some projects benefitting certain areas more than others. However, this would be counterbalanced by other projects benefitting other areas. Members were advised that in order to progress the Deal

to the implementation stage, secure the funding to deliver the projects and realise the anticipated economic benefits all partners were required to agree and sign the Final Deal Agreement, the Overarching Business Plan and the Governance Agreement 2 (GA2) before the end of 2020. The GA2 document provided the governance framework for the agreement which detailed the structures and processes that would be put in place to safeguard all partners and ensure open and transparent monitoring and scrutiny arrangements to safeguard the accountability of decisions taken by the Economic Ambition Board on behalf of all its partner organisations.

Whilst Committee members had concerns about the potential impact the COVID-19 pandemic, along with the uncertainties surrounding BREXIT and any future trade deals would have on the projects which formed part of the proposed Deal as well as the area's future economic prosperity and resilience, they acknowledged that NWEAB had recognised these risks and were monitoring them. Members were assured that the governance arrangements outlined in the GA2 document and the Overarching Business Case capped each authority's annual financial contribution towards the Growth Deal, with safeguards in place that if any additional funding was required it would only be provided following approval via each authority's democratic processes.

The Council Leader, Corporate Director: Economy and Public Realm, Monitoring Officer, Section 151 Officer and the OMNWEAB answered members' questions in relation to various aspects of the Board's work to date, the Growth Deal and associated Business Plan and long-term objectives, and the Governance Arrangements, including future scrutiny of the Board and the Growth Deal. The following were discussed in more detail:

- Commitment had been provided from both Welsh and UK Governments to invest in businesses to grow and move forward, regionally and locally. Through the Covid-19 Pandemic the authority and the private sector had shown to be flexible and robust to overcome hurdles and concerns.
- It was noted that with Capital projects there would always be the risk of an overspend. The Lead Member confirmed that it would be a Board decision to support the overspend on projects. The maximum spend would be a cash amount of £240 million. The Head of Finance and Property Services stated the potential for overspending would potentially be seen in the big builds such as colleges. The regional projects would be more straight forward and remain within budget. The programme office had responsibility to monitor the projects. Emphasis was given that the Authority had a cap of £90K contribution, if that had to be reviewed it would have to be presented back to local authority for agreement.
- Confirmation was provided that the lead sponsor was a reference to the lead sponsor to any individual project. The accountable body was very tightly controlled and defined. Gwynedd Council, as the Accountable Body, would receive the money from Government on behalf of the region and administer the money to the given projects.
- The OMNWEAB informed members of the four main projects aimed at addressing broadband needs. One of those projects would focus on the more rural issues associated with broadband connectivity. It was emphasised the vital need for good broadband connection. Members were

reminded of the regional digital strategy which incorporated alternative funding mechanisms.

- The Corporate Director: Economy and Public Realm noted that one potential risk may be related to the financial contribution aspect. Some of the projects proposed for Denbighshire may not be fulfilled as proposed due to unforeseen circumstances or situations but as an authority the Council would be obliged to contribute financially. Overall it was emphasised that improvements regionally would filter down to each local economy. Confirmation was given that robust governance arrangements were in place to minimise risk. The OMNWEAB highlighted the impact of Covid-19 on the private sector. Securing the level of investment from the private sector, to maximise the impact of the growth deal and benefits to the region would be seen as a potential risk. It was stressed that officers felt the benefits to the Growth bid outweighed the risks.
- The sites that had been identified within the report for housing related sites that could attract funding through the land and property programme were mostly sites that are already been allocated for development within the Local Development Plan (LDP). Confirmation was provided that sites had elements of planning permissions or applications started. The funding package for housing was to aid the development of sites previously agreed to develop. It was hopeful that the projects would encourage people to live and work in the authority and benefit the economy.
- The report had included the minimum base line for investment. Work to gain further private sector investment was on going.
- The proposal would be presented to Cabinet and Council for approval of the overarching business plan, which sets out the strategy of how the growth plan would be implemented. The individual project business cases within the programmes would be for approval by the Joint Committee of the North Wales Economic Ambitious Board. If a change to the overarching business plan was required, it would have to be presented to and agreed by each of the Local Authorities and partners.

The Head of Legal, HR and Democratic Services explained that two provisions were in place for a partners to exit the agreement. The first being the provision of 12 months written notice of withdrawal following the lock in period of 6 years. The other method would be by notification of termination. This would be done following a default notice setting out methods to amend any discrepancies to obligations not fulfilled. Any partner leaving the agreement would be issued a liability report and be responsible for the costs to which they were already committed as well as the costs incurred as a consequence of their withdrawal or termination.

Having considered the documentation and information provided the Committee was satisfied and assured that the GA2 agreement would provide a robust framework for governance and accountability, risk management, performance and quality monitoring, and scrutiny arrangements, supporting the delivery of the Deal's objectives for Denbighshire and the region. Members were of the view that the Growth Deal provided an excellent opportunity for the region to realise its economic potential, but emphasised the need, once the Growth Deal Agreement had been approved and secured, for the NEWAB to link its work into that of other high profile

programmes, such as the Northern Powerhouse, in order to try and maximise the benefit to the region from the projects and the investment made.

Following a detailed and an in-depth discussion the Committee:

Resolved: - subject to the above observations –

- (i) that, having considered the information provided during the discussion and the documents relating to the Final Growth Deal attached as Appendix 1 to the report, to support and recommend the proposals contained within the documents for submission to Cabinet and Council for formal endorsement and approval; and**
- (ii) confirmed that as part of its consideration it had read, understood and taken account of the contents of the Denbighshire County Council Well-being Impact Assessment attached as Appendix 2 to the report.**

At this juncture (11.30 a.m.) there was a 15 minute break.

The meeting reconvened at 11.45 a.m.

6 HOMELESSNESS - EFFECTS OF COVID 19 AND RECOVERY PLANS, HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY AND ROUGH SLEEPER CENSUS

The Head of Community Support Services (HCSS) introduced the report and appendices (previously circulated) to members. The HCSS wanted to highlight the added pressures on the service due to the changes in regulations following Covid-19 from Welsh Government. It was observed that the number of homeless households had almost doubled due to the change in Welsh Government regulations. Confirmation was provided to members that Capital funding had been secured to reduce the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation for families. It was also stated that revenue funding had been allocated to support the development of a new model of support required by Welsh Government.

Due to the changes in regulations an amendment to the homeless strategy had been required. The changes had been included in the appendices to the report.

The Principal Manager - Support Services (PMSS) informed members they had been asked to submit a recovery plan (outlined in the appendix to report).

Members heard that the phase 2 guidance from Welsh Government had been driving recovery of the service. The overall aim of the guidance information was to end homelessness and introduce a rapid rehousing model. Emphasis was made on a corporate approach with a number of services working together.

The Principal Manager - Support Services emphasised the work that had taken place in line with the guidance on rough sleepers with the aim to have no individual rough sleeping. It was confirmed that no rough sleeping census would take place this year.

Members thanked the officers for the report and appendices. During discussion, the following points were raised:

- The Private Rented Leasing Scheme only guaranteed rent at the local housing rental rate, that may be less than the commercial rent potentially available. The 5-year scheme had a slow uptake, work continued with

landlords to engage with officers and join the scheme. The demand for rental accommodation was high.

- The Private Rented Leasing Scheme Pilot had been intended to go live in February 2020 but due to the Covid-19 outbreak the launch date was postponed until July 2020.
- Close working with Council's Planning and Public Protection Service on bringing empty properties back into use had continued. Working with landlords to develop properties and get properties to a standard to enable people to occupy them. The Corporate Director: Economy and Public Realm stressed that it took time to refurbish long standing empty properties to a standard to allow a family to accommodate the property.
- Support continued to be provided to individuals prior to them becoming homeless. Support at all levels had been made available. A Welsh Government scheme called Housing First had been established jointly with Conwy County Borough Council to help and aid rough sleepers.
- Often the use of bed and breakfast accommodation was the only solution initially available for families and individuals who presented as homeless. It is often used as an emergency provision. The Welsh Government funding will be used by the Council to buy a property that could be used to provide support, to prevent families with small children moving to bed and breakfast facilities. The process of looking for a property had begun but it was stressed it was at the early stages of enquiry. A larger property would have to be acquired to house single individuals, it was all in the very early stages at present.

Members thanked the officers for the report and wanted to show gratitude to the team for the hard work during the Covid- 19 pandemic. It was;

Resolved: - subject to the above observations members confirmed that they were assured that Denbighshire's Homelessness Prevention Team was working to the Welsh Government three phase plan 'Planning Guidance for Homelessness and Housing Related Support Services' in addressing homelessness issues in the county and in its response to pressures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

7 ANNUAL REPORT ON SAFEGUARDING ADULTS IN DENBIGHSHIRE APRIL 2019 - MARCH 2020

The Head of Community Support Services (HCSS) guided members through the annual report (previously circulated) for 2019/20. Elements of 2020/21 had also been included to reflect the impact of Covid-19 on the level of safeguarding referrals.

The positive comments from Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) in relation to safeguarding within the report was highlighted. It was a reflection of the hard work the service had provided and gave a morale boost to the team.

The trend in referrals continued to show a rise, although a slight dip had been observed in 2020. Emphasis that the rise in number of referrals should be seen as a positive measure as it showed people had reported concerns they had. Confirmation was given that the number of referrals progressed on to the strategy

meetings for concerns such as abuse had reduced. This showed that early intervention had worked well and had prevented further work needed.

Confirmation was provided that care homes would always present the highest incident figures. The HCSS confirmed the most vulnerable individuals were generally resident in care homes. It was emphasised that the figures were in relation to referrals, more than one referral could be made in relation to an individual. An observation was made that the number of alleged persons responsible for abuse from paid employment was high. It was explained that the high number was due to employees and employers reporting all incidents as per regulations and policies. Confirmation was given that all referrals were investigated but following investigation not all were escalated to a higher level. The categories of alleged abuse, location of alleged abuse and alleged perpetrators were designated by Welsh Government. Confirmation was provided that the category 'others' could relate to individuals such as neighbours or unknown person. The Service Manager - Specialist Services confirmed that the number of referrals received had been slightly lower than previous years, but she assured members that employees continued to be mindful of safeguarding the vulnerable in the community and had received a high volume of calls since the Covid-19 lockdown seeking advice and guidance in relation to safeguarding.

Members thanked officers for the case study included in the report, they stated it was very useful and informative.

It was;

Resolved: -:

- (i) to acknowledge the Council's efforts to safeguard vulnerable adults in the county; and***
- (ii) the importance of a corporate approach to the safeguarding of adults at risk, and the responsibility of the Council to view this as a key priority area.***

8 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

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

Discussion focused on the following –

- Members agreed for the next meeting on 17 December 2020 to include a report on Community Safety Partnership.
- The Scrutiny Co-Ordinator confirmed to members the Chairs and Vice-Chairs were meeting later that day to discuss proposals.
- Members wished to thank the Head of Community Support Services for the clear and comprehensible reports.

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator reminded members of the scrutiny proposal form (Appendix 2 previously circulated) and advised that any proposals should be sent to

her directly, so these could be considered by the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs Group for inclusion on the forward work programme.

Members requested that the Committee's support of the North Wales Growth Deal be highlighted on social media. The Chair said she would discuss any further points with the Scrutiny Co-ordinator following the meeting. It was therefore;

Resolved: - ***subject to the above observations and to enquiries being made with Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board officials on their availability to attend a meeting to discuss the items listed under the 'Future Issues' section, to approve the Committee's forward work programme.***

9 FEEDBACK FROM COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES

Councillor Christine Marston stated she had attended a remote meeting of the Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB) Stakeholders Reference Group at the end of October. Councillor Marston informed members the group discussion had focused on three key areas:

- Winter planning
- Digital enabled clinical records
- Business case for the development of the former Royal Alexandra Hospital site in Rhyl into the new North Denbighshire Community Hospital

Concerns had been raised regarding the Hospital business case as no planning application had yet been agreed and granted by Denbighshire County Council's Planning Department. Councillor Marston informed members of the stakeholders reference group she would consult the Planning Department and the Lead Member for an update. Confirmation that close working and communication between the Denbighshire's Planning Department and BCUHB had continued.

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator directed members to the forward work programme report (previously circulated) that included a future report on 'Health Board plans for services in Denbighshire'. At present it was emphasised to request a representative from Betsi Cadwaladr Health Board to attend a meeting may be an issue given the Covid-19 pandemic. The Scrutiny Co-ordinator confirmed she would enquire if anyone would be available to attend the next Partnerships Scrutiny meeting in December.

Resolved: - ***to receive and note the information received, and that issues relating to the progress to date with delivering the North Denbighshire Community Hospital project be raised with Health Board representatives when they next attend a meeting of the Committee.***

The meeting concluded at 12.40 p.m.