

COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Committee held in via Video Conference on Thursday, 21 January 2021 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Mabon ap Gwynfor, Brian Blakeley, Rachel Flynn, Tina Jones, Merfyn Parry, Anton Sampson, Peter Scott, Graham Timms (Vice-Chair), Cheryl Williams and Huw Williams (Chair)

Cabinet Members – Councillor Hugh Evans – Leader of the Council and Lead Member for the Economy and Corporate Governance, Councillor Julian Thompson-Hill Lead Member for Finance and Efficiency and Councillor Brian Jones, Lead Member for Waste, Transport and the Environment.

Observers –Councillor Joan Butterfield, Councillor Jeanette Chamberlain-Jones, Councillor Meirick Lloyd Davies (Cefn Meiriadog), Councillor Hugh Evans, Councillor Alan James, Councillor Brian Jones, Councillor Barry Mellor, Councillor Melvyn Mile and Councillor Julian Thompson-Hill.

ALSO PRESENT

Corporate Director: Economy and Public Realm (GB), Head of Finance and Property (SG), Head of Planning, Public Protection and Countryside Services (EJ), Traffic, Parking and Road Safety Manager (MJ), Principal Engineer - Traffic Management (PL), Business Support Manager (PB), Business Support Officer (Contracts & Performance) (RT), Economic and Business Development Officer (NC), Democratic Services Manager (SP), Scrutiny Coordinator (RE) and Committee Administrator (SJ and SLW).

Citizen Advice Denbighshire Business Development Manager - Graham Kendall

The Chair wanted to offer his thoughts and wishes to those that had been affected in the recent flooding. He thanked all the emergency services and all those that had offered support to those that had been affected.

He also welcomed Councillor Peter Scott to the meeting following his recent appointment as a member of the Committee.

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Glenn Swingler.

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

None.

3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

None.

4 MINUTES

The minutes of the Communities Scrutiny Committee on 10 December 2020 were submitted.

Item 5 - Flood Risk Management across Denbighshire – Members were informed that appendix 5 to the Scrutiny Work Programme included the terms of reference for the task and finish group.

RESOLVED that – *The minutes of the meeting held on 10 December 2020 be received and approved as a correct record.*

Due to technical issues the meeting was suspended at 10.20. a.m.

The meeting reconvened at 10.30. a.m.

5 RHYL REGENERATION PROGRAMME AND GOVERNANCE

The Leader Councillor Hugh Evans provided members with background information behind the regeneration programme in Rhyl. It was confirmed that Rhyl had two of the most deprived wards within Wales.

Due to technical difficulties video and audio connection with the Leader was lost. The Corporate Director for Economy and Public Realm (CDEPR) proceeded to guide members through the report (previously circulated). It was emphasised to members that Rhyl as an area was in need of regeneration. It was stressed that officers noted that all towns and wards had been faced with difficult times and needed support.

Within the report an update of arrangements around the priority of the town centre vision and the governance arrangements had been included. A Rhyl Regeneration Programme Board had been established. It was confirmed that Rhyl MAG had been communicated with all developments and a Rhyl Reference Group attended by Rhyl Councillors, Rhyl Town Council members and the local AM and MP. It was stressed a lot of work had been completed in Rhyl. Including work on the promenade, harbour and ongoing work at the Marina Quay. It was confirmed that one of the priority areas was to concentrate on the town centre, whilst another one would focus on regeneration for the people and residents of Rhyl. Confirmation was given that a Rhyl Community Development Board had been established with partners such as health and the police.

Members were provided with more details from the Economic and Business Development Officer. The vision document included as an appendix to the report had been the result of 18 months of work and been signed off by Cabinet at the end

of 2019. It was hoped it would provide guidance on the vision for the town centre and its regeneration.

During the ensuing debate members took the opportunity to raise questions and discussed various aspects of the report with the officers present. Main discussion points focused on the following –

- Technical Advisory Note (TAN) 15 was Welsh Government (WG) advice in relation to developments with regard to flooding. It was highlighted that a number of areas within Rhyl had been identified as areas of potential flooding. Developments within the flood areas needed to have special regard to how they would address the flooding issues at the development site. It was confirmed that parts of Rhyl would still remain on the flood risk maps. A number of schemes within Rhyl to address concerns of flooding had begun. The guidance TAN 15, stated regeneration development should be promoted with all aspects of the development assessed.
- Appendix 2 to the report illustrated that the regeneration work at Rhyl had been separated into five different sectors. One of the sectors identified had been access and movement. This addressed and looked at transport and parking in Rhyl. Members heard a number of projects had been included to assess concerns. It was stressed that work had begun to look at developments for transport in Rhyl including work with the active travel routes, cycle paths and electric car charging points. The work would be a long term aspect of the regeneration project.
- It was stressed that members had not been excluded from the boards working on the regeneration project. Officers welcomed feedback and input from members and Rhyl councillors. Members heard that the Rhyl Regeneration Programme Board was a technical forum that ensured agreed projects were interlinked and worked together. It was felt an officer led board would best suited for any information to then be communicated with the other boards and groups. Rhyl Member Area Group (MAG) members had stressed a desire to be included on the boards working on the Regeneration project. The CDEPR stated he would feedback Rhyl MAG members' concerns on board membership. It was suggested a report be taken to Rhyl MAG to discuss further.
- Officers confirmed research into other regeneration projects completed by other local authorities had taken place. The Rhyl Regeneration Programme Board officers had worked with consultants who had been involved in other regeneration developments within in the UK.
- It was confirmed that regard the Council's Welsh Language policy would be complied with as part of the marketing strategy.
- Confirmation was provided that Denbighshire had a commitment to aid and support the homeless. A number of projects and work to address the temporary and emergency accommodation needs had begun. Members asked if it would be possible to include a time limit on the planning permission for the proposed new homeless unit in East Rhyl to avoid the property in time becoming another house in multiple occupation (HMO). The CDEPR confirmed he would discuss with the Rhyl MAG Chair to include a report on homeless and how the local authority could work with the Town Council to try and include them in plans to address the problem, on the forward work programme (FWP) for MAG members to debate.

- Members discussed the need for motorhome parks in Rhyl and Denbighshire as a whole. It was felt there would be a potential need for parking sites for individuals visiting the area, particularly post COVID-19. The Head of Planning, Public Protection and Countryside Services (HPPPCS) confirmed it would be beneficial to have discussions with officers from other departments to investigate potential developments. The HPPPCS suggested to members that he explored the provisions in place for a future report to scrutiny.

The Chair thanked the officers for the report and detailed response to members questions and concerns. It was noted members request to praise the work completed thus far on the Rhyl regeneration project. Following the discussion members,

RESOLVED: subject to the above observations -

- i). to receive report on the Rhyl Regeneration Programme and Governance report and note its contents;***
- ii). that the Corporate Director: Economy and Public Realm liaise with Chair of the Rhyl Member Area Group to include a report on the homeless accommodation provision in Rhyl and how the Council could work with the Town Council to address the need, on the Member Area Group's Forward Work Programme;***
- iii). that the Head of Public Protection and Countryside Services discuss with other officers the potential future provision for motorhome parking facilities in Rhyl and Denbighshire as a whole, and***
- iv). to receive future updates on at least an annual basis on the development and delivery of the Regeneration Programme.***

6 CAR PARK TARIFF SYSTEM AND RESIDENTS' PARKING SCHEMES

The Lead Member for Waste, Transport and the Environment, Councillor Brian Jones introduced the report (previously circulated). The report provided details on the existing car park tariff system and policy for residential schemes. Members were reminded that a similar report had previously been presented in 2015. Further detail was provided by the Traffic, Parking and Road Safety Manager (TPRSM). It was explained that Denbighshire had adopted a uniform charging system across the County.

The development of a proposed pilot scheme in Llangollen formed part of a wider traffic and parking management arrangements for the town, which included discussions around varying parking charges between car parks. A question had been raised on whether a higher charge for central parking could be adopted and a lower charge for car parks on the periphery. It was confirmed that the current policy did not allow this method of charging. The TPRSM confirmed that the overall income for a given town had to be as cost neutral as possible. The proposed pilot scheme's aim was to allow more flexibility for varying charges in a town to aid traffic flow and availability spaces. Officers stressed that the proposal was being presented to the Committee for comments and agreement to proceed with the pilot scheme. Confirmation was given that an update report and any findings would be presented to committee following monitoring of a period of 12 months.

Councillor Graham Timms presented members with a brief history of the issues experienced in Llangollen related to car parking. Members were made aware that Llangollen car parks created the second largest income from car parks in the County. It was felt that by varying the cost of parking in the town provision would be available that would cater for all needs, e.g. residents, commuters and local businesses. Councillor Melvyn Mile highlighted to members the work that had begun in Llangollen to identify issues that were important for all individuals and visitors.

During the ensuing debate members took the opportunity to raise questions and discussed various aspects of the pilot scheme with the officers and Lead Member. Main discussion points focused on the following –

- The existing permit system for parking in Council car parks was still in existence for individuals to purchase. Officers would determine which car park was most suitable for permit holders to use.
- Reassurance was provided that the income generated from car parks had been reinvested back into car parks or road safety related functions within Denbighshire. It was confirmed communication had taken place with Highways to evaluate service level agreements for each car park within Denbighshire.
- Officers stated they had not been made aware of any security issues at car parks in Llangollen. Security was an important consideration for car parks. Monitoring of car park security would continue.
- Confirmation was provided that car parking charges in the County were last increased in 2016. Whilst there were no specific plans at present to increase parking charges, fees and charges were revised on an annual basis.

The Chair thanked officers for the comprehensive report and answers provided to members concerns.

Following the discussion, the Committee,

RESOLVED that, subject to the above observations

- i). recommended that the pilot scheme in Llangollen where car park tariffs were to be varied in the various car parks within the town on the basis that, where possible, there should be no net loss in car park income from all the car parks in Llangollen town centre, be implemented;*
- ii). that a further report is presented to the Committee, approximately 15 months following the Scheme's implementation, on its effectiveness and any lessons learnt from the pilot scheme for similar schemes in future; and*
- iii). confirmed that as part of its consideration it had read, understood and taken account of the Well-being Impact Assessment.*

At this juncture (12.05 p.m.) the meeting adjourned for a 20 minute refreshment break.

The meeting reconvened at 12.25 p.m.

7 UNIVERSAL CREDIT

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting including Graham Kendall, from Citizen Advice Denbighshire (CAD) for the discussion on Universal Credit.

Councillor Julian Thompson- Hill, Lead Member for Finance and Efficiency introduced the Universal Credit report (previously circulated). It was highlighted that the Committee had originally requested the report (previously circulated) for the purpose of reporting on the final migration of recipients on to Universal Credit. The Covid-19 pandemic had impacted on this process and consequently details had been included within the papers for members comments. Reference was made to the data figures having reflected the current pandemic. The number of claimants had increased due to factors out of individuals control.

The Head of Finance and Property (HFP) provided a brief introduction on how Denbighshire County Council was supporting residents in relation to UC and associated support. It was stated Universal Credit had increased during the year due mostly to the pandemic. The increase in numbers offered reassurance that residents of Denbighshire had received financial support. Due to the increase in applications for Universal Credit an impact on Denbighshire County Council (DCC) finances had been observed. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) administered the Universal Credit, other benefits such as Housing Benefit were administered by DCC. It was explained to members that the Housing Benefit administration grant had reduced in line with the migration to Universal Credit. It had been noted that although the funding had reduced the workload had remained the same. It was highlighted that the Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) was offered to eligible residents, and uptake had increased over recent months. This had resulted from the Covid-19 pandemic; it was stressed the recovery would be slow. Members were informed that a cash grant to aid the financial impact due to an increase in the uptake of the CTRS had been secured for 2020/21, but it was as yet unclear whether any assistance would be available for the forthcoming financial year. The HFP wanted to thank officers and the CAD for all the hard work that had been put into the smooth transition to Universal Credit especially during the difficult few months.

The Business Support Manager addressed a number of concerns that members had raised before the meeting. It was explained to members the difficulty in providing accurate figures around the number of individuals that were still in receipt of legacy benefits. The data for those customers had to be sought from a wide range of different benefits that DCC did not have access to the information.

It was confirmed that the number of claimants for CTRS had increased by 2.8%, and that there had been a 10.95% increase in free school meal (FSM) applicants between March and November 2020. The Business Support Officer provided members with context for the data within appendix 1 and appendix 2. It was stressed that officers regularly monitored the statistics on a monthly basis to ensure that further investigation and intervention occurred as soon as needed. Members were reminded that a number of benefits and emergency financial measures were in place at present that residents may be eligible to claim, all had different criteria requirements.

Graham Kendall - Citizen Advice Denbighshire (CAD) Business Development Manager echoed the thoughts and comments of the Lead Member and officers praising the approach to Universal Credit had been the correct method. It had provided individuals with the information and partnerships to contact for support. It was highlighted that 1235 new claims had been received during the lockdown for Universal Credit. The continued close working relationship with DCC had proved invaluable for both officers from CAD and claimants. The CAD representative thanked members for the invitation to the meeting and offered his thanks to officers for the continued partnership working.

During the debate the following points were raised:

- The overall figures of individuals still on legacy benefits is difficult to obtain. It was explained that a number of different departments provided the data. The figures were very complex.
- It was confirmed that an increase of about 600 claims from individuals unable to work had been observed during the Covid-19 Pandemic. Officers advised that the increase in claims could be for low level support and not the full Universal Credit allowance. It was noted that a number of individuals dipped in and out of Universal Credit claims as work had been intermittent during lockdowns.
- An increase in cases had been noted by CAD. The entire workforce of CAD had been moved to online and remote working due to the pandemic. The use of a number of channels to engage with individuals had been adopted. Community outreach by a number of organisations had supported individuals being able to receive support if needed.
- Transitional protection on free school meals had been introduced before the Covid-19 pandemic by WG. It was in place to protect a very small number of children who would be eligible for free school meals under legacy benefits but not under Universal Credit. Since April 2019 if individuals who qualified for free school meals or had been receiving free school meals prior, would still receive the free school meals if the household finances changed. Within the Welsh legislation the transitional protection stated, would be in place until December 2024.

The Vice-Chair thanked all officers for the detailed response to members' concerns. A special thanks for all the work CAD had done to date was also offered. It was therefore

RESOLVED that, members receive the contents and information within the Universal Credit report.

8 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 –

- Members agreed to defer the item on 'The role of Denbighshire in Public Transport and Active Travel Provision' until October 2021.
- The items listed on the forward work programme for the next meeting on 11 March 2021 were reaffirmed.
- All members agreed to defer the report on 'The Planning Compliance Charter' until early 2022.
- members were asked to submit any proposal forms regarding topics for scrutiny.
- A draft remit had been included in Appendix 5 for the task and finish group to look at flood management and working with private landowners to mitigate the risk of serious flooding. It was that the terms of reference would be presented to all MAGs to request a nomination from each MAG to serve on the group. It was confirmed it would take some time to establish.
- Councillor Merfyn Parry requested that the report on the impact of the school in Rhewl on the communities of Rhewl and Llanynys include a 'Community Impact Assessment'. It was agreed that Councillor Parry and the Scrutiny Co-ordinator would liaise with officers to receive the agreed information. The CDEPR offered his assistance in sourcing this report.

RESOLVED that,

- i). *subject to the amendments and inclusions to the draft forward work programme proposed during the meeting to confirm the Committee's Forward Work Programme, and*
- ii). *the draft terms of reference for the Flood Risk Management and Riparian Land Ownership Task and Finish Group be approved.*

9 FEEDBACK FROM COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES

No reports from committee representatives had been received.

The meeting concluded at 13.20 p.m.