

PARTNERSHIPS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Partnerships Scrutiny Committee held in by video conference on Thursday, 16 December 2021 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Jeanette Chamberlain-Jones (Chair), Ann Davies, Gareth Davies, Pat Jones, Christine Marston, Rhys Thomas and Emrys Wynne (Vice-Chair)

ALSO PRESENT

Corporate Director: Communities (NS), Head of Planning and Public Protection (EJ), Economic & Business Development Lead Officer (JE), Head of Community Support Services (PG), Interim Head of Service (AL), Head of Customers, Communication and Marketing (LG), Programme Manager – Housing Development (MD), Lead Officer – Community Housing (GD); Senior Auditor (LH), Chief Internal Auditor (LL), Scrutiny Coordinator (RhE); Committee Administrator/Host (RTJ) and Democratic Services Officer/Minutes(KE)

North Wales Social Care and Well-being Improvement Collaborative Representative – Catrin Roberts (Head of Regional Collaboration).

Lead Members, Councillors Bobby Feeley and Huw Hilditch-Roberts attended at the Committee's invitation.

Observers: Councillors Gwyneth Ellis and Tony Thomas

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Committee Members Councillors Joan Butterfield, Rachel Flynn, Melvyn Mile and David Williams, Leader of the Council, Councillor Hugh Evans and Chief Executive Graham Boase.

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No interests of a personal or prejudicial nature were declared.

3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

No urgent matters had been raised with the Chair ahead of the meeting.

The Chair advised that, in response to a request from officers, she had agreed to vary the order of business on the agenda. Discussions on business item 6 'Homelessness and Housing Support Services' and item 7 'Annual Report on the North Wales Regional Partnership Board' would change, with item 7 being presented before item 6.

4 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the Partnerships Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 4th November 2021 were submitted.

There were no matters arising.

Resolved: that the minutes of the Partnerships Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 4 November 2021 be received and approved as a correct record.

5 NORTH WALES ECONOMIC AMBITION BOARD

The Head of Planning and Public Protection (HoPPP) introduced the North Wales Economic Ambition Board (NWEAB) Quarter 2 report (previously circulated) on behalf of the Leader and Chief Executive. He reminded the Committee that the reports for quarters 1 and 3 were circulated to members for information purposes whereas reports for quarters 2 and 4 were presented to Scrutiny Committee for discussion.

The HoPPP explained that NWEAB was a 20-year project and comprised of several programme boards including:

- Digital
- Low Carbon Energy
- Land and Property
- Agriculture, food and Tourism and
- Innovation in High Value Manufacturing

Denbighshire's representatives from each Programme Board met on a quarterly basis to share information across the Boards.

The HoPPP highlighted that the report's appendix was very detailed and that there would be opportunity to discuss further when the Portfolio Office attended for its quarter 4 report. Members of the Committee were assured that if any questions could not be answered in full at the meeting then detailed responses would be circulated later.

Responding to the Committee's questions the HoPPP advised:

- Information relating to the NWEAB's procurement process would be sourced and circulated to the Committee.
- There had been a large scale recruitment process undertaken by the NWEAB's Portfolio Office. Several Programme Manager appointments and a Regional Transport Officer had successfully been made.
- The methodology undertaken for a project business case was a detailed and lengthy process. Although it appeared that no full business cases had completed a number of cases had cleared stages 1 and 2 of development and were progressing well through to outline business case stage – particularly the Regional Food Business Hub based at Grŵp Llandrillo Menai's Coleg Glynllifon site.
- The recent addition of the skills gap risk was being addressed by the attendance of a Skills Partnership Officer at each of the Programme Boards

to identify needs and risks and to help coordinate actions to address future skills requirements.

- The position regarding the replacement of Bangor University's Project Managers for the Low Carbon Centre of Excellence and the High Value Manufacturing Programmes would be inquired into and reassurance would be sought that they were committed to delivering projects allocated to them.
- Denbighshire's Lead Officer would be asked to respond to concerns regarding digital connectivity for:
 - Full Fibre at Key Sites and Connected Campuses projects and
 - rural area coverage and
- Clarification would be sought from the Lead Officer and Lead Member for Planning, Public Protection and Safer Communities on the respective responsibilities of the NWEAB and Denbighshire County Council with regard to future development-of the Bodelwyddan key strategic site.
- That no additional funding was being provided to the NWEAB, by either the WG or the UK Government, to compensate for project development delays due to the pandemic. However, projects would explore all possible funding opportunities available with a view to maximising their eventual economic impact on the region.

The Chair requested that the briefing previously presented to members on the aims and objectives of the NWEAB be offered again following the May 2022 local authority elections.

The Committee:

Resolved: subject to the above observations and the provision of the additional information requested during the course of the discussion, to

- (i) receive the Quarter 2 2021-22 report on the work undertaken and the progress made by the North Wales Economic Ambition Board (NWEAB);***
- (ii) request that a briefing session is arranged for all county councillors post the May 2022 local authority elections on the vision, aims and objectives of the NWEAB; and***
- (iii) agree that in future Quarter 2 reports are circulated to the Committee for information purposes, similar to Quarter 1 and 3 reports.***

CHANGE IN ORDER OF BUSINESS

At this juncture the Chair agreed a change to the order of business to accommodate presenting officers who were involved in other meetings.

6 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE NORTH WALES REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP BOARD

The Corporate Director: Communities (CD:C) introduced the Head of the North Wales Social Care and Well-being Improvement Collaborative (NWSSIC) to members and welcomed her to the meeting.

The Lead Member for Well-being and Independence introduced the report (previously circulated) explaining that it was a statutory report provided on an annual basis as required under Part 9 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.

The North Wales Regional Partnership Board (NWRPB) comprised of the 6 North Wales local authorities and worked in conjunction with BCUHB, other public bodies and voluntary sector services to improve wellbeing outcomes for residents of North Wales.

The CD:C gave an overview of one of the Partnership's projects – The Children and Young People's Transformation Programme on which the CD:C led. One of the projects that formed part of this Programme was the Bwthyn y Ddôl Children's Residential Assessment Centre. Denbighshire's representatives on the project board for this Centre were the Lead Member for Education, Children's Services and Public Engagement-along with Scrutiny's representative Councillor Christine Marston. Whilst this project had encountered difficulties with the appointed contractor being placed in administration, plans were now in place for the design and build tender to be advertised during December 2022. The Children's Transformation Programme (CTP) had led to significant developments across the region. Developing a multi-agency team and improving access and information around emotional health, wellbeing and resilience.

There were four regional programmes that were part of the transformation as well as a number of working groups that had achieved significant progress in integration and improvement of service through the Regional Commissioning and Regional Workforce Boards.

The NWSSIC representative explained that there were literally hundreds of projects ongoing regionally and locally but the format of the report did not allow for their inclusion. They offered to circulate a list of projects undertaken by the Board that highlighted what had been achieved locally for Denbighshire residents.

Responding to the Committee's questions members were advised:

- That the NWRPB was a strategic board which did not get involved at operational level, for example with Denbighshire's care workers during the pandemic. However, care work was a priority area at strategic level and a regional approach was being considered for improving services and support for carers.
- The NWRPB had been agile throughout the pandemic, learning lessons and changing approach to how they worked. A forum had been established to

provide mutual aid and support, devise solutions along with identifying lessons learned.

- The NWRPB had provided regular updates throughout the pandemic to the Regional Emergency Planning Service in accordance with Civil Contingencies Act in respect of the impact of Covid on workforce, domiciliary and residential care provision and children's mental health and wellbeing etc.
- Examples of where the NWRPB transformation programmes had adapted their plans to meet the needs of their population group with respect of Covid included:
 - Setting up support groups for people with learning disabilities in isolation and
 - Providing iPads in care homes for residents to communicate with their families and friends.
- The Committee could invite any of the Boards to future scrutiny committee meetings to provide examples of case studies, unfortunately case studies could not be included in the Annual Report as its format was determined by WG.
- Plans were afoot to improve communication between the NWRPB and its partners for more regular and area specific information.
- The Social Value Steering Group was back up and running with one of the directors stepping into the Chair position.
- Historically the 6 local authorities had pooled funding to support regional working. Recently, over the past 18 months there had been an acknowledgement from BCUHB that it should contribute too. It was now contributing.
- Welsh Government grants such as the Integrated Care Fund (ICF) and Programme Transformation Grant monies were held by the Health Board initially before being redistributed – e.g. to Denbighshire who hosted the Regional Collaborative Team. Changes to the ICF stream were planned but no details were available as yet.
- Concerns were raised at a recent NWRPB meeting with BCUHB representatives regarding the perception that all other illnesses and conditions were being neglected in favour of treatment for Covid. To that end a letter had been received from the Health Board's Chief Executive inviting the Lead Member for Well-being and Independence to a meeting to discuss the subject.

In response the Committee asked for the recommendations to be amended by adding their concern regarding the funding element of the North Wales Regional Partnership Board.

At the conclusion of the discussion the Committee:

Resolved: - subject to the above observations:

- (i) confirmed it had read, understood and taken into account the work required to be undertaken by the North Wales Regional Partnership Board;***

- (ii) register its concerns about the financial situation of the North Wales Regional Partnership Board;*
- (iii) note the work and progress in 2020-21 on the work areas being taken forward through the North Wales Regional Partnership Board; and*
- (iv) schedule the North Wales Regional Partnership Board's 2021/22 Annual Report into its forward work programme.*

7 HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING RELATED SUPPORT SERVICES

The Chair welcomed the Head of Community Support Services to his last meeting before entering retirement. The Chair thanked them for his service and wished him well in his retirement.

The Lead Member for Well-being and Independence introduced the report (previously circulated) inviting members to examine the effectiveness of the newly restructured service, implemented in April 2021, undertaken with the Welsh Government vision for homelessness and housing related support in mind. Adopting a cross service / corporate approach the emphasis was being placed on intervention and prevention of homelessness.

An Internal Audit review of Accommodation Provision for the Homeless was completed in March 2020 which gave a low assurance rating. The Internal Audit follow up report showed that six actions were marked as completed, ten actions were in the process of being addressed. Audit did acknowledge that progress had been made but for the time being the low assurance rating remained. The Lead Member complimented the service staff for all their work under the pressure of the pandemic.

The Interim Head of Service, Ann Lloyd, advised that as a result of the restructure a multi-disciplinary team had been implemented. Increased resources meant the team had their own mental health practitioners, a counsellor, social workers and homelessness support practitioners to provide more holistic support. They were awaiting the arrival of a seconded BCUHB substance abuse mental health professional to complete the team.

There was an expectation that the numbers of people in emergency temporary accommodation to remain static for the time being – 150 to 180 households. There had been a reduction in the number of families presenting which was being attributed to the Welsh Government stopping evictions and the Court process had not yet caught up with the backlog of cases. They were expected to rise. There had been an increase in the number of under 35s presenting as homeless.

Working in conjunction with Housing Services they had been able to secure 99 household tenancies through direct lets from Denbighshire's Community Housing and other Registered Social Landlords.

Funding had been provided for Tenancy Support Workers, focussing on prevention and intervention in order to slow the number of households becoming homeless down. Funding had been secured from the Housing Support Grant to tender for provision to promote engagement with households with issues such as debt, rent

arrears or neighbour conflict and early intervention to prevent them becoming homeless.

Better quality emergency accommodation was being sought but the barrier of the unavailability of properties remained. There were less rental properties readily available and those that were available were cost prohibitive.

Responding to the Committee's questions the officers advised that:

- The implementation of the restructure and subsequent creation of the multi-disciplinary team had had a positive effect on the citizens being supported, despite the complications that arose with the pandemic.
- Denbighshire was now ahead of the game in relation to the Welsh Government regulation changes – the rapid rehousing model – in comparison to other local authorities.
- There had not been a cut in the core budget for the Service. The Housing Support Grant could not legally be used to supplement the Core Budget which covered the statutory services provided.
- Rent was not paid by the Authority on properties rented from the Community Housing portfolio. It was the householder's responsibility to pay rent.
- Corporately the Senior Leadership Team had set up a Homelessness sub group specifically to look at accommodation issues, to improve the quality and availability of emergency and permanent accommodation.
- A temporary accommodation facility for families – Epworth Lodge – should be available in the new year.
- There was a higher level of demand in the north of the county rather than the south. There was emergency accommodation available in the south of the county but it would most likely be in a Bed and Breakfast establishment.
- Every attempt was made to temporarily and permanently accommodate a homeless person or family in their local area and/or close to family support, if it was safe to do so and if suitable property was available. However, this was not always possible, especially in an emergency situation.
- Whilst it may appear strange for the Council to decide to dispose of a parcel of land in one part of the county - that could have been used for property development to accommodate the needs of the homeless – the greatest need for accommodation at that time was in Rhyl and the north of the county.
- A homelessness person could be supplied emergency accommodation (B&B or hotel) straight away. Sometimes the accommodation might be outside of the County.
- 'Move on' accommodation was very difficult to source for the under 35s due to their lack of entitlement to full housing benefit and
- The potential development of the Maes Emlyn site in Rhyl would be consulted on at Rhyl Member Area Group meeting in January 2022.

The Chair asked that a further update report on progress with the improvement action plan be brought to the Partnerships Scrutiny Committee meeting scheduled to be held on 7th July 2022.

It was:

Resolved: - subject to the above comments and observations that the Committee –

- (i) was assured that the implementation of the multi-disciplinary homelessness service and cross-service Corporate approach was in line with the Welsh Government's vision of homelessness and housing support and was contributing to the Homelessness Prevention Service's aim to ensure that everyone was safeguarded and supported to live in homes that met their needs; and***
- (ii) having reviewed the progress with addressing the audit actions, request that a further update report on the progress with the improvement action plan be provided to it during the summer of 2022. The Chief Internal Auditor would be providing a summary of the progress made to the Governance and Audit Committee on the 16th March 2022 as part of the Internal Audit Update report.***

8 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

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

The next meeting of the Partnerships Scrutiny Committee had two items on its agenda on 10th February 2022:

- I. Highways Grass Verge, Hedge Maintenance and Pesticide Application Policies (annual report) and
- II. Population Needs Assessment 2022 which would be reviewed by all North Wales local authorities.

Earlier in the meeting the Committee had agreed to add the Homelessness and Housing related Support Services update to the 7th July committee meeting agenda.

The Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group had decided at their November meeting not to hold any scrutiny committee meetings (unless deemed urgent) during the pre-election period between mid-March and May 2022. Partnerships Scrutiny Committee had one item on its work programme for the meeting scheduled for 7th April – an update from Denbighshire Voluntary Services Council – which could be deferred until the meeting on 7th July.

Members were reminded to use the Scrutiny Proposal Form if they had anything that they would like to be scrutinised. The likelihood being that any proposals received would be scrutinised during the term of the new Council.

Resolved: subject to the above inclusions and amendments to confirm the Committee's forward work programme.

9 FEEDBACK FROM COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES

Councillor Christine Marston reported:

The project board for the Children's Residential Assessment Unit met on 16th November with an update.

- The re-tender process commenced on 30th November with the ground investigation ongoing.
- The boundary issues were resolved between North Wales Police and Conwy County Borough Council.
- Progress on Ingleside (temporary accommodation for children at risk) at Rydal/Penrhos continued. It was anticipated that it would be completed by early spring.
- Recruitment of staff was ongoing.

The BCUHB Stakeholder Reference Group met on 6th December:

- Clinical strategy was discussed with principles drawn up.
- The status of the Royal Alexandra Hospital was raised. BCUHB Chief Executive advised that they were still awaiting confirmation of Welsh Government funding.
- Issues around staffing levels meant that patients were waiting for care packages before being able to be discharged.
- A plan was being developed for 2022 – 2025 incorporating Denbighshire's challenge of a greater share of over 65-year-old population.
- A primary care update looking at GP and Dental services.
- A targeted improvement plan to be implemented as BCUHB come out of emergency measures.
- Socio Economic Duty would be implemented from March 2022.

Resolved: - to receive the feedback received from Councillor Marston on the discussions and activities of the Group and Board on which she served.

Meeting concluded at 12:30pm