

COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Committee held by video conference on Thursday, 20 January 2022 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Brian Blakeley, Gwyneth Ellis, Alan Hughes, Hugh Irving, Tina Jones, Merfyn Parry, Anton Sampson, Peter Scott, Graham Timms (Vice-Chair), Cheryl Williams and Huw Williams (Chair).

Lead Members –

Councillor Brian Jones - Lead Member for Waste, Transport and the Environment
Councillor Huw Hilditch-Roberts – Lead Member for Lead Member for Education, Children’s Services and Public Engagement

Observers – Councillors Meirick Lloyd Davies, Martyn Holland, Barry Mellor, Arwel Roberts, Tony Thomas and Emrys Wynne

ALSO PRESENT

Head of Highways and Environmental Services (TW), Highways Asset and Risk Manager (TT), Team Leader Places (TD), Head of Finance and Property Services (SG), Scrutiny Coordinator (RhE) and Committee Administrators (SJ and RTJ)

1 APOLOGIES

No apologies for absence were received.

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No declarations of interests were raised.

3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

No urgent matters had been raised with the Chair prior to the meeting.

4 MINUTES

The minutes of the Communities Scrutiny Committee held on 9 December 2021 were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 9 December 2021 be received and approved as a correct record.

5 HIGHWAYS MAINTENANCE POLICIES FOR UNCLASSIFIED ROADS

The Chair adjourned the meeting for two minutes to allow officers and Lead Members to join the meeting.

The Head of Highways and Environmental Services (HHES) guided members through the report (previously circulated). It was stressed to members that 44% of the road network observed in the authority was unclassified roads. Members were reminded that officers had continued to stress the need to invest more in the highways network. The HHES emphasised the key principle had always been to ensure that there was at least one good quality road serving any community. Members heard that at times other roads servicing a community may not be prioritised for improvement. Members were guided to the extracts from the Denbighshire Highways Code of Practice, detailing the criteria and approach to works.

The HHES stated there was two aspects to the highways work. He provided members with details of each, the first was the Capital Programme which was funds to repair to agreed roads in the authority. It was confirmed a report was to be presented to all MAG to agree the programme of works. The second aspect was the revenue funded in-house highways maintenance. Further context was provided to members on the resource available for the in-house maintenance team. In the authority there was 14 highways operatives employed, this number had reduced from previous years.

The Lead Member for Waste, Transport and the Environment felt the highways funding was extremely important and should be included within the Corporate Plan. It was the opinion of the Lead Member that the department was in a more positive position than at the start of the term.

The Chair thanked the Lead Member and the officers for the report, he also noted the pressures on officers due to the difficult work. He stressed highway maintenance had been an increasing issue to try and resolve.

In response to Committee members' questions the following details were provided by officers and the Lead Member:

- Out of the allocated budget of £2.5mil for 2021/22, £800,000 had been allocated for surface dressing. Officers stated that the majority of the surface dressing had taken place on A and B road network. Re-surfacing on B roads was scheduled. Officers stated that 50% of the budget was allocated to 80% of the network. Officers stressed that the department was managing risk and busier roads carried a higher risk and required priority if needing repair.
- £900k additional funding had been provided. An allocation of £450k had been made for rural roads. The works had been listed on the reserve list that officers had previously circulated to Member Area Groups (MAG's).
- Members heard that the inspection frequencies had changed. Town centres were done monthly; the remaining network was inspected every 4 months with rural roads inspected every 6 months. Once a pothole was identified to officers there was a policy to repair it within 10 days. In response to members questions the maximum time for a pothole to be repaired would

therefore be six months and ten days. However, if the pothole had been reported by a councillor, member of staff or the public ahead of the programmed inspection it would be repaired within 10 days of being reported. Hence the importance of everybody reporting potholes as and when they came across one.

- The HHES stated officers were always grateful and hopeful for extra funding. If funding was awarded for specific purposes it would have to be used for that reason. If funding was received it would be applied in year and the authority's funding would be carried forward to the following year.
- It was promoted that officers from the service or other areas of the council, reported any issues observed in their day to day jobs.
- Officers confirmed if layby's formed part of the adopted highway they should be maintained to the same standard as the highway.
- Every rural road was inspected twice a year. Reference was made to a scanner, which was an external contract which used lasers to consider road condition. All A, B and half of C roads were inspected using this system.
- Officers noted the significant issue of water on roads. Officers stressed the importance of clearing water to aid maintenance of the condition of the road.
- It was confirmed that a small budget had been allocated to footways. Officers stated a low number of complaints had been received regarding the condition of footpaths.
- Officers confirmed they would address members concerns in relation to matters within individual wards with members outside the meeting.

The Chair thanked the officers for the detailed responses to members concerns and questions. It was noted that highways maintenance was a difficult subject matter for all concerned.

The Committee:

Resolved: - subject to regard being given to the above observations and comments, that

- (i) it was satisfied that the correct approach to highway maintenance was being applied, insofar that the best alignment between the risk to users and the utilisation of available funding was being achieved;***
- (ii) efforts should be made to encourage all councillors and employees to adopt and foster a 'One Council' corporate approach towards reporting problems or matters relating to the highways network; and***
- (iii) an information report be circulated to Committee members on the condition and maintenance plans for laybys adjacent to the County's highways network.***

6 SAFEGUARDING WELSH PLACE NAMES IN DENBIGHSHIRE

Councillor Huw Hilditch-Roberts, Lead Member for Education, Children's Services and Public Engagement introduced Tim Dillon, Team Leader - Places Team, were welcomed to the committee meeting. The Lead Member guided members through

the report (previously circulated) stating the report presented the duties and role of the authority in safeguarding Welsh and historical place names in the county.

The Team Leader- Places Team provided members with further detail, stating the legal position was to have due regard to the guidance and Welsh heritage and language. It was not a specific duty to have strict Welsh Language naming but to have due regard to this. Members were informed that Denbighshire had very recently approved a policy in the context of street naming and numbering where the authority demonstrated above the legal requirement. Within the adopted policy it stated any new street named in the authority had to be in the Welsh Language.

The Chair thanked the Officer and Lead Member for the detailed report. The Lead Member and officer responded to members' comments, concerns and questions as follows –

- The Team Leader confirmed he would follow up concerns raised by councillors in relation to specific streets in member's wards. He requested members to contact him with details for further investigation.
- The owner of a new estate could propose names to the county for approval following the correct process and discussion.
- Praise was given to the authority for the commitment in naming street names in the Welsh language.
- Members raised concerns on the use of the word 'drive' on Welsh street names. The word 'Ffordd' was used on many street signs. It was suggested by the Team Leader to recommend to Cabinet for the policy to be amended to remove the word 'Dreif/Drive' from the list stated in the policy. The Scrutiny Co-ordinator stated it may be a Lead Member decision as it was only a slight amendment. Clarity on the correct procedure would be sought and adopted.
- Members noted the importance of the heritage behind many Welsh named roads. Local authorities had a duty to take into consideration historic Welsh names and not the literal interpretation or translation.
- The policy stated a street could not be named after an individual alive or deceased. Changing the name of an existing street would be done following the procedure set out in the street name changing policy. The Welsh Government policy would be followed for that change to take place.

The Chair brought the debate to a close and highlighted the concern regarding the amendment to the policy raised by members for consideration when formulating their resolutions. After a final discussion on the resolutions the Committee –

Resolved: subject to the above observations –

- (i) Confirm that it is satisfied that the Council is fully utilising all powers conferred upon it with regards to safeguarding Welsh and historical names in both the natural and built environment; and***
- (ii) That representations be made to the Cabinet Lead Member seeking him under powers delegated to him as Lead Member to approve the removal of the prefix/suffix 'Dreif'/'Drive' from the 'New Street***

Names' list in Section B2 of Denbighshire's Street Naming and Numbering Policy January 2021.

7 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

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

Discussion focused on the following –

- A decision was taken by the Chairs and Vice Charis group in November 2021 to cancel Scrutiny meetings during the pre-election period starting 18 March 2022.
- The next Communities Scrutiny meeting was scheduled for 10 March 2022. The SC advised that there were four items being discussed at the next meeting. The SC informed members she had not received confirmation that all reports would be ready for that meeting. The Task and Finish group for flood risk and riparian land ownership had also requested to report back to committee it's resolutions at the March meeting.
- The SC confirmed enquiries were being made on the Tourism Sign Strategy as it had been delayed due to Covid-19.
- Members were reminded to complete the scrutiny proposal form if there was anything members wished to examine in detail.

It was:

Resolved: - subject to the above comments, and the outcomes of the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group meeting to be held later that day, to confirm the Committee's forward work programme.

8 FEEDBACK FROM COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES

The Chair advised the Committee that the Flood Risk Management and Riparian Land Ownership Task and Finish Group was scheduled to hold its final meeting the following day. At that meeting it would hopefully be finalising the contents and conclusions of its report with a view to presenting its recommendations to the Committee at its next meeting on 10 March 2022.

Councillor Merfyn Parry reminded members that a request for a report on the impact of the closure of Ysgol Rhewl on the community was presented to the committee. The Scrutiny Co-Ordinator confirmed that an information report had been included on the forward work programme to be circulated to members next month.

The meeting concluded at 11.47 am.