

COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Committee held in COUNCIL CHAMBER, COUNTY HALL, RUTHIN AND BY VIDEO CONFERENCE on Thursday, 19 October 2023 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Karen Edwards (Vice-Chair), James Elson, Jon Harland, Carol Holliday, Alan James, Brian Jones, Delyth Jones, Merfyn Parry, Cheryl Williams and Huw Williams (Chair).

Lead Member – Lead Member for Local Development and Planning, Councillor Win Mullen-James was in attendance at the Committee's invitation for agenda item 7.

Lead Member – Lead Member of Environment and Transport, Councillor Barry Mellor was in attendance at the Committee's invitation for agenda items 5 & 6.

ALSO PRESENT

Corporate Director: Governance and Business (GW), Councillor and Chair of Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment Task and Finish Group (PS), Corporate Director: Economy and Environment (TW), Head of Planning, Public Protection and Countryside Services (EJ), Traffic, Parking and Road Safety Manager (MJ), Project Manager: Corporate Programme Office (KM), Strategic Planning and Housing Manager (AL), Project Manager (RV), Scrutiny Co-Ordinator (RE) and Senior Committee Administrator (KJ) and Committee Administrator (NH)

Observers: Councillors Jeanette Chamberlain- Jones, Bobby Feeley, Huw Hilditch-Roberts and Andrea Tomlin.

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Michelle Blakeley-Walker.

Councillor Brian Jones had notified the Chair that, due to a prior appointment, he would be unable to attend the meeting from the outset but would be joining later.

Prior to proceeding with the agenda's business the Chair advised members that, in response to a request from the Lead Member for Environment and Transport, he would be varying the order of business on the agenda to enable both of the Lead Member's reports to be considered on a consecutive basis. Therefore, business item 7, 'Waste Service Remodelling Project Update' would be dealt with as item 6 with the 'Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment' item becoming business item 7. He thanked officers in attendance for accommodating the changes to the business schedule.

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

The following councillors declared personal interests:

Councillor Huw Hilditch-Roberts – Business item 5, ‘Review of Car Park Tariffs’ (as a business owner/operator in two towns in Denbighshire.

Councillors Alan James and Merfyn Parry – Business item 7, ‘Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment’ as both were members, Councillor James also being the Vice-Chair, of the Task and Finish Group whose report would be presented to the Committee under this particular business item.

3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

No items of an urgent nature had been raised with the Chair or the Scrutiny coordinator prior to the commencement of the meeting.

4 MINUTES

The minutes of the Communities Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 7 September 2023 were submitted. The Committee:

Resolved: that the minutes of the meeting held on 7 September 2023 be approved as a true and correct record of the proceedings.

Matters arising

Page 8, ‘Minutes’ - the Scrutiny Co-ordinator advised that the membership of the Flood Risk Management Task and Finish Group had recently been finalised and that arrangements had been made for it to hold its inaugural meeting on 23 November 2023.

5 REVIEW OF CAR PARK TARIFFS

The Lead Member for Highways and the Environment introduced a report (previously circulated) on the proposed changes to the Council’s Car Park Tariffs Policy and associated tariff structures.

The Lead Member highlighted the well documented pressures on the Council’s budget and explained that the proposed increases in parking charges was an avenue to bring monies into the Council.

The purpose of the report was to explain the proposed tariff increases for Council car parks; changes to car park charging periods, and the potential introduction of charges in some car parks that were currently free.

The Head of Planning, Public Protect and Countryside Services reiterated that the proposed changes to car parking tariffs were part of a Corporate decision on savings and were a way of bringing income into the Council. The proposals also including reviewing payment options available in car parks and also a revision of the hours in which the Council would be asking for payment.

The Council’s car parking tariffs had not been reviewed since 2016 therefore, as a Service it was felt reasonable to review them at this time due to the current financial

climate. It was also stated that the proposed car parking tariff changes would be a positive contribution to the Council's financial situation.

The decision to impose the proposed changes to car parking tariffs would ultimately under delegated powers be the decision on the Head of Service however, it was stated that officers would work closely with Members to gain their thoughts and to engage with the public. Another part of the process would be for officers to work with the Communications Team to develop an Engagement Plan for various groups who would be most affected by the changes.

It was proposed to continue to offer various free parking initiatives. These included free parking after 3pm in all town centre pay and display car parks from late November until the 31 December every year. The small areas of free, short stay parking that were present in some pay and display car parks would also remain. Finally, the Council would continue to provide 5 free parking days each year for every City, Town and Community where pay and display car park facilities were in operation.

A Well-being Impact Assessment (WBIA) was attached to the report for members' consideration.

The Traffic, Parking and Road Safety Manager (TPRSM) guided Members through the key points of the report as follows –

- Car park tariffs were previously reviewed in 2016.
- In considering the tariff increases the Council considered the tariffs charged by other North Wales County Councils and the amount of inflation from 2016 to 2023, including an allowance for `future proofing` ahead of continuing high levels of inflation.
- Car Park charges currently applied from 8am until 5pm. It was proposed that the Council extend this period, so that charges applied from 8am until 11pm.
- It was proposed to increase parking permits costs as detailed in appendix D (attached to the report).
- The proposal included the removal of the 30-minute tariff, Denbighshire County Council were currently the only Council who offered this tariff.

The Chair thanked the officers for their report and questions were invited from members.

Members queried the maintenance of car parks as was agreed at the time of the last review of the tariffs in 2016. Members raised concerns about the general appearance of the car parks in their ward areas.

The Head of Planning, Public Protect and Countryside Services stated that there was an investment plan in place, with a revised investment plan currently being compiled for the 5-year period from 2024 to 2029. They would be happy to present this to the Committee at a future meeting. There were many examples of where

investments in car parks had been made including the installation of payment machines which included paying by card, cash and contactless. There had been a £2 million investment in car parks to date.

Members questioned that the report did not give any details on overnight parking charges and stated that this would be beneficial for motor home owners. The Head of Planning, Public Protection and Countryside Services acknowledged that there was an increase in demand for overnight parking for motor home owners and consideration would be given to this.

Members questioned the frequency of the review of car park tariffs and queried if 7 years was the standard review cycle. The TPRSM stated that at the last review in 2016 the tariffs were increased significantly and therefore it was agreed that there would not be a review for a number of years following this, as there were costs associated with implementing an increase in charges i.e. the reprogramming of all pay and display machines. However, due to current inflation rates there was a need to review tariffs more frequently.

Members expressed concerns regarding the removal of the 30 minute tariff stating that the public took advantage of this tariff when visiting local high streets. The TPRSM stated that the 30 minute tariff was debated during the proposal process and the removal of the tariff was agreed. There was free short stay parking on all high streets in Denbighshire. It was also stated that data collected indicated that there was not a large proportion of the public who used the 30 minute tariff.

Members referred to the Well-being Impact Assessment and referred to a survey conducted on the effect of parking fees on local businesses on the high street and requested further detail on this. The Head of Planning, Public Protection and Countryside Services stated that they wanted to engage and have conversations with local businesses on the high street to explain to them why the Council was proposing to increase parking tariffs and how best to promote the free parking spaces and initiatives that were in place.

Members questioned if it would be possible, if introducing charging after 5pm, for the tariff from 5pm onwards to be at a lower rate. It was felt that the introduction of a blanket tariff for day and evening could adversely affect community groups and events etc. The TPRSM stated that currently there were no plans to decrease the tariffs after 5pm however, this could be considered.

Members queried the electrical car charging ports and questioned who had paid for them. Members continued to question if when an electric car was using the charging ports, if they also had to pay for parking and who received the money from this. In response the TPRSM informed the Committee that there were currently two projects in place. Firstly, 8 car parks across the county were instated with electrical car charging ports, and these were funded by a grant from the UK Government and Denbighshire capital funding. The daily management of the car parks with charging ports was undertaken by the contracted company. The income generated from the

charging ports was split between the contracted company and the Council. The second project which was mainly in Council office car parks and also included some public car parks was funded by a Welsh Government grant and Denbighshire received the income from these. It was stated that users of the electric charging ports paid for parking and the use of the ports separately.

Members questioned if there would be an increase in the number of parking enforcement officers in line with the increase in the hours parking charges would apply. The TPRSM stated that there would be a need to extend parking enforcement work, the details of how this would be managed were currently being refined.

Members commented on the impact that the free after 3pm parking had on local high streets and queried if there was any data on the impact of it. The Head of Planning, Public Protection and Countryside Services stated that there was no current data available on this however, there had been feedback received from businesses which had been positive.

The Chair thanked officers for their report and members for a comprehensive debate. At the conclusion of the discussion officers agreed to explore further the following suggestions put forward by members during the discussion:

- the introduction of discounted/cheaper tariffs for evening parking (i.e. between 5pm and 11pm so as not to disadvantage or discourage people from attending community groups/events)
- the potential of keeping the free 30 minutes parking or introducing a lower tariff for up to 30 minutes
- the potential of having free car parking all day on Saturdays on the run up to Christmas rather than the current practice of after 3pm every day
- to discuss the proposed tariffs for individual car parks with each Member Area Group (MAG) prior to their introduction.

The Chair requested that the draft Denbighshire Car Park Investment Plan be submitted to the Committee before implementation and requested further information on the income and expenditure of car parks be sent to all Committee Members following the meeting.

The TPRSM stated that £1.3 million in income was generated from car parks in Denbighshire to the Council and agreed to circulate an information report to the Committee following the meeting.

At the conclusion of an in-depth discussion the Committee:

Resolved:

- (i) ***subject to further consideration being given to the issues raised and suggestions made during the discussion, to support the proposed***

- increase to parking tariffs and the other proposed changes detailed in the report; and*
- (ii) to request that the draft Denbighshire Car Park Investment Plan 2024-29 be presented to the Committee for consideration in early 2024 prior to approval and adoption.**

At this juncture the order of business was varied by the approval of the Chair, with business item 7, 'Update for Waste Service Remodelling Project' becoming agenda item 6.

6 WASTE SERVICE REMODELLING PROJECT UPDATE

The Lead Member for Highways and the Environment introduced an update report (previously circulated) on the roll out of the new Waste Service Remodelling Project.

The report was to inform the Communities Scrutiny Committee of the current progress of the project and to highlight the risk around the timely approval of the operational permit required for the new Denbigh Waste Transfer Scheme.

The Project's Corporate Executive Team (CET) lead officer explained to Members that the new Waste Service was the biggest operational change delivered by the Council for many years and had been many years in planning to get to this stage.

The new service would include recycled waste being collected weekly in separated containers and residual household waste being collected monthly.

The main issue currently was obtaining the operational permit which required to be granted by Natural Resources Wales (NRW), without this permit the Waste Transfer Station could not operate. It was expected that the permit would be granted in Spring 2024. The Council had submitted the application form for the permit for the Denbigh Waste Transfer Depot in January 2023 however, there had been a delay with NRW issuing permits due to a back log. This had now been resolved, the process which was expected to take up to 4 months to complete was now underway and weekly positive discussions were continuing with NRW. Any concerns raised during these meetings would be escalated immediately to Lead Member and CET Lead Officer level.

The new Waste Service Remodelling Service had a planned roll out from June 2024 with the depot being completed by December 2023.

Going forward there was a focus on recruiting staff and delivering the new containers to all households in the county.

The Project Team would be attending all MAG meetings in February/ March 2024 to give further detail on the roll out of the Project in their areas.

The Chair thanked the Lead Member and the Project Executive Lead Officer for their update and questions were welcomed from Members.

Members stated that a recent visit to the new Denbigh waste depot was very beneficial and requested another visit prior to the roll out of the service.

Members queried the change to electric wagons under the new service and questioned who was responsible for the cost of them. The Project Executive lead officer stated that the new service required a whole new fleet of wagons to deal with the kerbside sort containers within the new Recycling Service. However, current residual waste vehicles would still be suitable for delivering that service as the service model was not changing, only the frequency of service provision. Whilst more electric vehicles had been introduced into the fleet, the fleet was not entirely electric as there was a need to ensure robustness for all refuse collection rounds in the county.

Members registered their concerns regarding the potential backlash of complaints from the public that were anticipated and stated that this was not highlighted enough within the report. The Project Executive lead officer assured members that there was an understanding that residents would have some concerns about the change. In the New Year (January 2024) planned communications would be rolled out 6 months before the implementation. Other authorities who already had transitioned to the new model Waste Recycling Service had stated that there were concerns at the start of the roll out. However, once residents understood the new system residents preferred it.

Members questioned the total cost of the roll out of the project. The Project Executive lead officer stated that the Project was costing circa £22 million. Due to the current financial climate predicted costs had increased. £12 million of funding had been given from Welsh Government, with the remainder of the costs being met from within Service reserves and through Prudential Borrowing. It was stated that the cost of running the new service, once fully operational, would be less than the recycling service currently in place.

The Lead Member and officers acknowledged that, at present, the greatest risk to the timely roll-out of the new Service lay with the granting of the permit for the Waste Transfer Station by NRW. Although there was not a Plan 'B' or a contingency plan in place to instigate if there was a delay with the permit's granting, the Lead Member and officers were confident given the regular discussions underway with NRW both locally and nationally that the permit would be granted in time.

Members stated and agreed that there was a need to be positive about the new Waste Service and work with officers to inform the public.

The Chair thanked the Lead Members and the Project Executive lead officer for their report.

Following a detailed discussion, the Committee:

Resolved: subject to the above observations and the answers given to the questions raised -

- (i) to acknowledge the progress made to date with the Project's delivery, including the efforts made to secure the timely approval of the operational permit required for the new Denbigh Waste Transfer Station; and**
- (ii) that as part of its consideration it had read, understood, and taken account of the recently updated Well-being Impact Assessment, attached at Appendix 1 to the report.**

7 GYPSY AND TRAVELLER ACCOMMODATION ASSESSMENT

The Lead Member for Local Development and Planning introduced the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment report (previously circulated) to Members.

The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 required that an assessment of accommodation needs for Gypsies and Travellers must be undertaken and submitted to Welsh Government (WG) every 5 years. The Council undertook the assessment between August and October 2021, and this was submitted to WG on 24 December 2021.

Following Cabinet approval and WG submission of the previous Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA), a family with an existing need who had previously declined to participate, contacted the Council, and asked to now be included.

Following a report to Cabinet Briefing on 9 January 2023, the Gypsy and Traveller Needs Assessment (GTAA) Task and Finish Group (T&F) was re-established to support work on the new assessment. That T&F Group had now concluded its work and the final report from the Group was attached as appendix 1 to the report. The report provided the conclusions from the work of the T&F Group.

The Chair of the T&F Group outlined the conclusions of the Group and work that had been completed as follows:

- The T&F Group had 4 meetings and the consultants, ORS, conducted interviews with the additional family and undertook a light touch review with the families who had previously engaged with the assessment process to ensure that their findings continued to be pertinent. The T&F Group was satisfied that the correct process had been followed.
- The T&F Group was satisfied as a Group that the findings and recommendations of the assessment were a result of following Welsh Government methodology and applying a robust approach to the work.

- As a Group it was felt that a Member T&F Group with an elected Member from each MAG had worked well, and the approach would be beneficial for future work.

The Lead Member thanked the T&F Group for their hard work and Councillor Scott for his role as Chair.

The Corporate Project Manager reiterated the Council's legal obligations. The Housing (Wales) Act required all Councils to undertake an assessment of Gypsy and Traveller accommodation needs and submit it to Welsh Government. There was also the responsibility to address any needs identified.

The Project had been led by the Project Board which included Senior Officers and the Lead Member, and all work had been overseen by the T&F Group.

Acknowledging the need identified within the Assessment for residential pitches members queried why a need for transit provision had not been identified. The Lead Member and officers advised that whilst illegal encampments did occur in the county periodically, these were usually for short periods of time and were more effectively managed via a negotiated and tolerated approach. This was also the view of the Gypsy and Traveller community.

The Chair gave thanks for the report and questions were welcomed by Members.

Members commented on the improved process in place and the excellent work that had been completed, which would support the development of the new Local Development Plan (LDP) in due course.

The Chair thanked the Lead Member and Officers for the report.

Following a comprehensive discussion, the Committee:

Resolved:

- (i) to endorse the conclusions of the Task and Finish Group that the Welsh Government methodology had been applied appropriately to the analysis of need;***
- (ii) confirmed its support for the approach adopted for the delivery of Denbighshire's Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment as being robust and in line with Welsh Government guidance;***
- (iii) to recommend to Cabinet that the revised draft Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment be approved for re-submission to the Welsh Government; and***
- (iv) confirmed that as part of its consideration of the information provided it had read, understood and taken account of the Well-being Impact Assessment, Appendix 3 to the report - completed prior to the first assessment submission in 2021 and reviewed in 2023.***

8 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Coordinator guided members through the Communities Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme report (previously circulated).

The next meeting was scheduled for 7 December 2023, proposed for that meeting were four agenda items.

- i. Second Homes and short-term Holiday lets.
- ii. Draft Sustainable Transport Plan.
- iii. Housing Rent Increase and Budgets 2024/2025.
- iv. Rhyl Regeneration Programme and Governance.

The Scrutiny Co-Ordinator informed the Committee that the 'Second Homes and Short-term Holiday lets' report would not be ready for the December meeting following a discussion with officers, as further guidance on a licensing regime for such properties was awaited from Welsh Government. The Committee consented for it to be rescheduled.

A report on Car Parks Draft Investment Plan 2024 - 2029 would be added to the Forward Work Programme for February/ March 2024.

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator encouraged Members if they had concerns on any matters to complete and return the Members Proposal Form (Appendix 2) for deliberation at the next Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs meeting on the 28 November 2023.

The Committee:

Resolved: subject to the rescheduling of the above mentioned 'Second Homes and Short-Term Holiday Lets' item, along with the inclusion of the 'Draft Car Park Investment Plan 2024-29' report for early 2024, agreed earlier during the meeting, to confirm the Committee's forward work programme as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report.

9 FEEDBACK FROM COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES

Councillor Delyth Jones informed members that she had recently represented the Committee at the Education and Children's Services Service Challenge meeting. She was currently awaiting the notes of the meeting. Upon receipt she would brief the Committee on the proceedings.

The Chair thanked officers and members for attending the meeting and closed the meeting.

Meeting concluded at 12.15pm