

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, 1 February 2024 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Karen Edwards (Vice-Chair), Pauline Edwards, James Elson, Jon Harland, Carol Holliday, Alan James, Brian Jones and Cheryl Williams

The Lead Member for Environment and Transport (Councillor Barry Mellor) for agenda item 5 and the Lead Member for Housing and Communities (Councillor Rhys Thomas) for agenda item 6 and 7.

ALSO PRESENT

Corporate Director: Economy and Environment (TW), Head of Planning, Public Protection and Countryside Services (EJ); Parking and the Road Safety Manager (MJ), Head of Housing & Communities (LG), Head of Housing & Communities (GD), Neighbourhood Manager (NE), Scrutiny Co-ordinator (KE) and Committee Administrators (NH, RhTJ).

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Michelle Blakeley-Walker and Huw Williams (Chair) – the Vice-chair. In the Chair's absence Councillor Karen Edwards presided over the meeting

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Councillor Cheryl Williams raised a personal interest in agenda item 6 and 7 as a Denbighshire County Council Tenant.

3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

None.

4 MINUTES

The minutes of the Communities Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 7 December were submitted.

Matters arising

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator advised that the query regarding the need for secondary heat sources in accommodation fitted with Air Source Heating Pumps was raised with Building Control and it was not a requirement.

In areas of the county off grid for gas supply gas where Air Source Heat Pumps had been installed, some tenants had chosen to keep their log burners or Charnwood Stoves for back up.

The Service were working on a Heating Policy that could be presented to the Committee for feedback prior to implementation in the future.

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

5 DRAFT CAR PARK INVESTMENT PLAN 2024 - 2029

The Lead Member for Environment and Transport, alongside the Head of Planning, Public Protection and Countryside Services and the Traffic, Parking and the Road Safety Manager introduced the Draft Car Park Investment Plan report (previously circulated). The report aimed to provide the Communities Scrutiny Committee details of the Council's draft Car Park Investment Plan for the period April 2024 to March 2029, to enable the Communities Scrutiny Committee to examine the content of the draft Car Park Investment Plan, including the suggested programme and comment accordingly.

The Lead Member for Environment and Transport informed the committee that within the plan there was a proposal for the parking tariffs to increase for the first time since 2016. The main reason for the proposed increase was to reflect the increase in maintenance costs across the board.

The Committee were reminded that decisions relating to increased parking tariffs were delegated decisions made by the Lead Member. However, due to the potential impact on residents the matter had been discussed with CET, Cabinet and scrutiny before being implemented.

In closing the Lead Member for Environment and Transport advised that updating the car park pay and display system would cost the authority roughly £13-14,000.

The officers guided the Committee through the report and appendices highlighting key areas. Members were shown original 5 year plan, produced in 2018 together with appendices B and C comparing planned work versus completed work. The Road Safety Manager informed members that since the plan roll out all the Authority's pay and display machines had been updated to allow multiple methods of payments, including digital payment..

Officers advised that the plan had been to the Capital Scrutiny Group for discussion and would be taken to full Council for the final decision before being implemented.

Responding to members queries, officers advised that: –

- Nine car parks across the County had EV charging points installed – including rapid charging points at the hub in Rhyl and Kings Avenue car park in Prestatyn.
- Increasing EV charging spaces within Council carparks was an aspiration by the team. Data was not collated as to whether more points were required. The price of electricity at these points would be competitively priced.

- Planned waterproofing of the surface of the multistorey carpark in Denbigh had been deferred to accommodate other structural and remedial repairs. It was not anticipated that there would be a significant impact on permit holders if the lower decks were closed whilst work was being carried out. The opening of the lower decks could be aligned with the free parking days that the Town Council allocated for special events throughout the year.
- Any significant works on car parks would need a business case considered at Asset Management Group and Capital Scrutiny Group etc.

The Committee requested that an annual review of the Car Park Investment Plan 2024 - 2029 be presented to the Committee.

RESOLVED that:

- I. The committee confirmed that it had read and understood and taken account of the Well-being Impact Assessment and***
- II. The content of the Car Park Investment Plan 2024 - 2029 report be noted.***

6 COMMUNITY HOUSING TENANCY MANAGEMENT

The Lead Member for Housing and Communities presented the Community Housing Tenancy Management Report (previously circulated) alongside the Head of Housing & Communities, the Lead Officer Community Housing, and the Neighbourhood Manager.

Before the officers gave details of the report, the Lead Member for Housing and Communities gave a brief introduction to the committee. He noted that this report and the following Tenant Feedback report reflected the two sides of landlord and tenancy. One from Denbighshire's housing management side of social housing, whilst the next (item 7), focused on the opinions of the tenants regarding the Housing Service's actions.

The Lead Officer Community Housing thanked the lead member for the introduction. He reminded members that at a previous scrutiny committee meeting, where they had discussed the Housing Strategy and Homelessness Action Plan a question was raised regarding whether the authority were enforcing tenancy conditions robustly enough.

Introducing the Neighbourhood Manager it was explained that the service had moved away from specialist Housing roles that would deal solely with Income Management or Neighbourhood matters, to create generic officers who could provide a more holistic service to tenants and increases efficiency in managing workloads.

Information on how anti-social behaviour, or any behaviour that affected neighbours was managed had been provided, which included both formal and non-formal actions. The service worked in partnerships with the youth service and community reliance service as well as North Wales Police to support and mediate with tenants.

The report provided statistics and case studies on matters that arose with some frequency that demanded immediate response from the housing team.

Responding to the Committee's questions officers advised:

- With respect to the Digital Champion Scheme, the community resilience team were continuing to work to ensure that tenants were not digitally excluded from communicating with the service.
- Acceptable Behaviour Contract (ABC) were fairly and a relatively standard approach to addressing anti-social behaviour. Where the behaviour is related purely to tenancy issues (e.g. gardens) tenants were encouraged to participate in the voluntary agreement with the service in order to change that behaviour before resorting to enforcement action. Occasionally, where criminal activity had taken place the ABC would be taken in conjunction with North Wales Police.
- ABC's were most effective when the parties involved worked together to draw up the contract. ABC's were reviewed after 6 to 12 months to assess the behavioural change and were for the most part successful. If matters were not resolved other avenues for action were considered such as anti-social civil injunction – such cases were rare.

The Committee thanked officers for the full and thorough report.

RESOLVED that the Communities Scrutiny Committee note the content of the Community Housing Tenancy Management report.

7 COUNCIL HOUSING TENANT FEEDBACK AND SATISFACTION SURVEY

The Lead Member for Housing and Communities presented the Council Housing Tenant Feedback and Satisfaction Survey report (previously circulated) alongside the Head of Housing & Communities, the Lead Officer Community Housing, and the Neighbourhood Manager.

The Head of Housing & Communities reminded the Committee that the report outlined the Standard of Tenants & Residents (STAR) Survey 2024, whereby tenants gave feedback on their homes, communities and service Denbighshire provided. That information was then benchmarked against other organisations across Wales. Whilst gratifying to be positioned at the top of those tables the focus was on being able to provide safe, comfortable homes and supporting tenants to thrive in the communities in which they lived.

The Lead Officer Community Housing guided the committee through a presentation highlighting key areas within the report and the survey. He advised that it was:

- A Standard survey across Wales for local authorities and registered social landlords
- Usually undertaken every 2 years
- Measured tenant satisfaction
- Identified trends, priorities and areas for improvement
- Used to formulate action plans.

In December 2023, a STAR survey was sent to every council home in Denbighshire. Out of the 3,277 surveys sent, responses were received from 893 households which was an 28% response rate.

Previously responses were predominantly from the older generation but inclusion of digital channels had captured feedback from younger people and families.

The main outcomes showed that satisfaction was in the upper 80% range. The comments analysis identified the areas for improvement that the tenants' had highlighted as:–

- Improving the quality of the properties (54%)
- Carry out quicker repairs (14%)
- Completing outstanding repair work (10%)
- Reduce Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) in areas (10%)
- Listen to tenants more (9%)
- Improve communication (7%)

Responding to members queries regarding the percentage of feedback in certain areas officers advised that overall it was good, noting that generally with surveys people raised issues rather than praised them. Where there were areas of lower response efforts would be made to engage further for future surveys.

The Committee were informed that there was a Denbighshire Tenants and Residents Association that the service aimed liaise with to improve on communication and engagement moving forward.

Officers advised that:

- All tenants were encouraged to fill in the Star surveys and any feedback was gratefully received.
- The survey responses deemed 'skipped' were from tenants who had not responded to a particular question.

The Committee commended the service on the level of refurbishment undertaken on properties before they were re-let.

The Corporate Director: Economy and Environment observed that although it had been noted that the response rates were inconsistent that the survey had received 893 responses, 28% was impressive. The response rate was much higher. That 890 were submitted online and the age group with the most responses was the 65+ age group, suggested that digital inclusion among council house tenants was improving.

RESOLVED that the committee notes the contents of the Council Housing Tenant Feedback and Satisfaction survey.

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

Since the last meeting there had been a Special Communities Scrutiny Committee meeting convened on 11th January which discussed the cabinet decision relating to the Libraries /One Stop Shop savings proposal, the minutes from that meeting would be available at the next Communities Scrutiny Committee meeting on the 14th March.

The next Communities Scrutiny Committee was scheduled for 14 March 2024, proposed items for that meeting were -

- Rhyl Regeneration and Programme and Governance
- Future Operation of DCC's Public Conveniences. The item was had been added by the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-chairs Group after publication of the agenda pack.

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 18 March 2024.

RESOLVED: that further to the above that the Communities Scrutiny Forward Work Programme be agreed.

9 FEEDBACK FROM COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES

Councillor Alan James queried whether there were any minutes from the Adult Social Care and Homelessness meeting he had attended available to members, the Scrutiny Coordinator would contact officers to see if any were available.

Meeting Concluded 11:10am