

COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Committee held in Conference Room 1a, County Hall, Ruthin on Thursday, 9 July 2015 at 9.30 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Brian Blakeley, Huw Hilditch-Roberts (Chair), Martyn Holland, Rhys Hughes (Vice-Chair) and Cefyn Williams

Lead Member Councillor D.I. Smith attended at the Committee's request.

ALSO PRESENT

Corporate Director: Economic and Community Ambition (RM), Head of Highways and Environmental Services (SP), Head of Business, Improvement and Modernisation (AS), Head of Planning and Public Protection (GB), Traffic, Parking and Road Safety Manager (MJ), Development Manager: Planning and Public Protection (PM), Democratic Services Manager (SP) Graduate Trainee Officer (IW) and Administrative Officer (CIW).

The Chair welcomed Councillors B. Blakeley and M.L. Holland to their first meeting following their appointment to the Committee.

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bill Cowie, Peter Evans, Win Mullen-James, Bob Murray, Cheryl Williams and the Scrutiny Coordinator.

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No Members declared any personal or prejudicial interests in any business identified to be considered at the meeting.

3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

In accordance with the requirements of Section 100B(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the Chair declared that he intended to include for discussion the following matter requiring urgent attention under Part II:-

1. The removal of unauthorised signs from highway land.

Councillor T.R. Hughes made reference to an instance where the Council had requested that a sign be moved a distance of approximately eight inches. The Head of Highways and Environmental Services explained that the relocation of a sign, even over a minimal distance, could be significant to members of the public such as buggy and wheelchair users. He referred to the work of the Events Team and confirmed that officers did work closely with owners of the signs, and in most cases an amicable agreement was achieved.

4 MINUTES

The Minutes of a meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday, 25th May, 2015 were submitted.

RESOLVED – *that the Minutes be received and approved as a correct record.*

5 METHODOLOGY FOR SETTING APPROPRIATE CAR PARKING CHARGES IN DENBIGHSHIRE

A report by the Head of Highways and Environment Services (HHES), which detailed the methodology utilised to determine appropriate car parking charges within Denbighshire, and the principles adopted for negotiating subsidy arrangements with Town Councils, and/or any other bodies, had been circulated with the papers for the meeting.

Councillor D.I. Smith introduced the report and explained that the setting of fees and charges had been delegated to Head of Service level, with an expectation that Members would be consulted about any contentious changes.

The Head of Environmental Services (HHES) explained that Denbighshire car parking charges had not been increased for 6 years and Appendix A provided details. The shortfall experienced had been made-up by cross-subsidies from the general highways maintenance budget. The implications of continued cross-subsidisation had been outlined in the report.

The Council's budget setting process for 2016-17 incorporated the Freedoms and Flexibility process, and the current budgetary anomaly could be considered as part of that process. Although Members would decide on general budget levels, it was not fair, or reasonable, to expect them to set charges in individual car parks, for individual durations of stay, hence the delegation of that function to officer level. The charging arrangements would need to be developed in a logical and fair manner, and the mechanisms that had been used to get to a fair and logical charging position, within the allocated budget, had been included in the report.

An outline of the fundamental principles used to determine charge levels had been provided together with:-

- Provision costs.
- Regulation of parking space availability.
- Pricing schedules.
- Proposed charging rates for Denbighshire.
- Resulting charge levels being very similar to those that applied Conwy.
- Analysis of Prestatyn Town Council's proposal to subsidise Denbighshire car parks.

The following appendices, which had been included with the report, were summarised by the officers:-

- A. Detailed methodology
- B. Proposed charging rates
- C. Comparisons with other service providers and other Councils
- D. FAQ sheet prepared to address the topic of Town Council Subsidies
- E. Equalities Impact Assessment

The Chair referred to the purpose of the discussion, to examine the delivery of the service within the budget, and not to gain economic benefit through the implementation of an alternative car parking structure. He felt there were two separate areas of discussion, and that they could be associated with regard to achieving the end goal.

The officers raised the following salient points and provided the following responses to issues raised by Members:-

- One of the aims of the review had been to stop people parking all day as this practice limited the number of parking spaces available for potential shoppers.
- Traffic and parking data details had been provided on the spread sheet, and officers outlined how the figures had been compiled.
- Reference was made to the misconception that increased charges discouraged visitors to the area. Confirmation was provided that the retail offer had the greater impact on influencing choices made by service users.
- An outline was provided of the implementation process to address the problems identified.
- The importance of a balanced budget was highlighted, and confirmation provided that Members could amend the budget through the budget setting process if they so wished.
- It was confirmed that Denbighshire could consider offers of subsidy provision from Town Councils. However, each case would be considered on its merits, and particular reference was made to existing arrangements with Prestatyn and Ruthin Town Councils respectively.
- The budget was currently being balanced through the maintenance budget, and the importance of delivering the service within the budget was emphasised.
- In response to reference by Members to car parks within their respective areas, the HES explained that each car park and their respective locations were different and it was intended to retain the basic structure of the policy with regard to long and short stay car parks.
- The financial implications of additional investment in Pay and Display machines was discussed. Reference was also made to the possible benefits to service users by the introduction of contactless payment and payment by smart phone.
- It was emphasised that it would be important to note that the Council should not operate or provide car parking provision on a commercial basis, or seek to generate a profit from income received.

During the ensuing discussion Members expressed their views in respect of the following issues:-

- The general consensus of the Committee was to support an increase in charges from 10p to 20p, and that the charging regime be based on a half-day period of 3 hours rather than 4 hours. It was anticipated that the proposed change would discourage the practice of buying two 4 hour tickets instead of purchasing an all-day ticket.
- Reference was made to the regeneration programme in Rhyl and the possible negative response to an increase in car parking charges.
- It was suggested that consideration be afforded to the possible introduction of a period of grace, possibly of 5 or 10 minutes, for service users who had exceeded the time limit on their parking tickets. Officers felt this would not be practical and that it would be difficult to set agreeable margins and boundaries.
- The need to ensure the availability of short stay car parking provision for local shoppers and visitors to the towns within the County.
- A request was made for clarification of the agreement made with the permit holders regarding the utilisation of long and short stay car parks.
- Clarification was provided that only one car park had achieved an increase in income during the past year. The need for an incentive to increase the usage of car parks, while meeting budget, was intimated.

The Chair referred to the recommendations in the report and the following comments and views expressed were noted. During the ensuing discussion the Committee:-

- emphasised that they were not a decision making body but endorsed the recommendation that budgets had to be balanced, including the car parking budget, subject to the Freedoms and Flexibilities process.
- agreed the methodology set out in the report provided a logical method of setting charges, determining income levels and meeting the main operational need of the service, i.e. to increase the availability of spaces for shoppers and visitors, and
- noted that the final budget could be varied via the Council's budget setting process, including any amendments that might arise from the Freedoms and Flexibilities process, this had the potential to affect the charges that would need to be levied. The Chair explained that in the interest of clarity any charging increases or decreases decision be made following the budget setting process.

Following further discussion it was:-

RESOLVED – *that the Committee:-*

- (a) receives and notes the contents of the report, and*
- (b) supports the recommendations contained in the report, subject to the above comments, and in particular the lower of the two proposed charges and tariff bands shown in Appendix B with a 3 hour half day period.*

6 BETTER REGULATION OF CARAVAN SITES PROJECT UPDATE

A report by the Development Manager, Planning and Public Protection (DM) had been circulated with the papers for the meeting.

Councillor D.I. Smith introduced the follow up report to the report presented to the Committee in April, 2015. The report outlined the work carried out to date and planned the next steps by the Business Improvement and Modernisation Service (BIMS), along with providing an update on the Planning and Public Protection element of the project. It provided information on progress on the project since responsibility for data sourcing had been assigned to the BIMS.

The Head of Business, Improvement and Modernisation (HBIM) made reference to the results of the pilot project, and it was confirmed that responsibility for the corporate aspects of the project had been transferred to the BIMS. Planning and Public Protection had been tasked with continuing with the production of a regulatory procedure which would detail the regulatory options for managing the unauthorised residential use of holiday caravans from the planning and licensing perspectives. Although some of the project milestones would be achieved by different services this would be run as a single project.

Details of the progress to date in identifying the magnitude of the problem, as outlined in the report, were summarised for the Committee. An outline of the next steps to target and regulate service users, by utilising the Electoral Register and working with caravan site owners, was provided. A comprehensive list of all holiday caravan site addresses in the County, and individual holiday caravans, had been included in Section 2 of Appendix 1. A further five key milestones had been identified for the project which included:-

- Undertake mapping of holiday caravan site locations and allowances by Planning and Licensing, as identified in Appendix 3.
- Develop a data processing system to enable reporting on service use by holiday caravan 'residents' for data collected to date. This had been included in Appendix 4 which was exempt from public disclosure as per paragraph 13 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act, 1972.
- Undertake analysis and mapping of service use results.
- Produce a corporate caravan strategy.
- Development of a regulatory procedure and implementation plan.

The Development Manager (DM), Planning and Public Protection, outlined the objectives of corporately reducing the number of people living in holiday caravans by severing at source access to the provision of Council services. He highlighted the need to regulate provision, which could be achieved by working with the caravan associations and caravan park owners, and detailed work had already been undertaken.

The officers responded to concerns raised by Members in respect of residents on caravan sites being included on Electoral Registers in more than one area, and the possible financial implications related to addressing the problems identified. The HBIM outlined the methods to be utilised through information attained to track services users residing in caravans. In response to a suggestion by the Chair that

such information should be available on all residents in the County, the CD:ECA explained that this was being achieved through the CRM system which matched people against addresses and service use.

The Head of Planning and Public Protection (HPPP) explained that the issue being considered was a corporate matter, and highlighted the advantages of addressing the issues through a corporate project and by agreeing an appropriate enforcement strategy. Reference was made to current legislation and he highlighted the need to identify the quantum of the problem which would assist in determining solutions and implementing a coordinate approach.

In response to concerns raised by Members, the officers provided details of the investigation process and mapping exercise adopted with regard to larger and smaller caravan sites. Details of current costs and future financial implications were provided for the Committee, and the HBIM highlighted the importance and advantages of building an accurate system to mitigate future costs.

The HBIM confirmed that it had been predicted that all project milestones would be achieved and all primary products produced by the end of 2015. He anticipated that a report would be presented to the Committee in late autumn, detailing the future strategy and regulatory procedure. During the ensuing discussion the Committee expressed its full support for the work undertaken, and the planned next steps outline in the report.

RESOLVED – *that the Committee:-*

- (a) receives the report.*
- (b) notes the project progress to date, and*
- (c) endorses the planned next steps outlined in the report, and agrees to receive a further report on progress in the Autumn of 2015.*

7 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

A copy of a report by the Scrutiny Coordinator, which requested the Committee to review and agree its forward work programme and which provided an update on relevant issues, had been circulated with the papers for the meeting.

A copy of the 'Member's proposal form' had been included as Appendix 2. It was explained that in future no items would be included on a forward work programme without a 'scrutiny proposal form' being completed and accepted for inclusion by the Committee or the SCVCG. A table summarising progress on recent Committee resolutions and advising Members on progress with their implementation had been included in Appendix 4.

A copy of the Cabinet forward work programme had been included as Appendix 3. Reference was made to the business item relating to Car Park Charges listed for the meeting on the 28th July, 2015. The CD:ECA explained that the item had been included to consider any issues or recommendations arising from discussions at the Scrutiny Committee, and she agreed to consult with the Lead Member regarding its deletion from the Cabinet work programme.

The Chair referred to the Review of Social Care which had been undertaken. He felt that due consideration had not been afforded to the effect on the community, and that the timescales had not permitted public input into the process. The CD:ECA provided details of the process adopted and explained that avenues had been made available, through the Task and Finish Group and Performance Scrutiny Committee, which had provided opportunities for issues to be addressed prior to consideration of the matter by Cabinet.

The Committee agreed that the respective Lead Members be invited to present the reports relating to the business items included on the agenda for the meeting of the Committee scheduled for the 10th September, 2015.

Confirmation was provided that the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group's next meeting was scheduled for the 23rd July, 2015.

The Welsh Local Government Association's (WLGA) Director of Finance, Mr Jon Rae, had accepted the Committee's invitation to attend the meeting of the Committee on the 10th September, 2015 to discuss the Impact of late notification of Central Government funding.

Councillor T.R. Hughes raised the business item, "Review of the Home to School Transport Policy", to be presented to the Committee at its meeting on the 27th October, 2016, to consider the findings of a review of the impact of the implementation of the Policy after the first full year. Members agreed that an update report also be presented to the Committee later this year following a month of operations of the new system which starts in September, 2015 detailing the impact of the initial implementation of the Policy.

In reply to concerns raised by Councillor B. Blakeley regarding the consultation process pertaining to the future arrangements for Hafan Deg and its service users, the CD:ECA provided details of the process and timescales. She explained that the matter would be considered by the Performance Scrutiny Committee on the 16th July, 2015, and the options available would be presented to Cabinet for consideration.

Following further discussion, it was:-

RESOLVED – that, subject to the above amendments and agreements, the Work Programme as set out in Appendix 1 to the report be approved.

8 FEEDBACK FROM COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES

No reports were submitted.

Meeting ended at 11.50 a.m.