

COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the County Council held in Council Chamber, County Hall, Ruthin LL15 1YN on Tuesday, 20 October 2015 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Raymond Bartley, Joan Butterfield, Bill Cowie, Ann Davies (Vice-Chair), Meirick Davies, Richard Davies, Peter Duffy, Hugh Evans, Peter Evans, Bobby Feeley, Carys Guy, Colin Hughes, Rhys Hughes, Hugh Irving, Alice Jones, Huw Jones, Pat Jones, Gwyneth Kensler (Chair), Geraint Lloyd-Williams, Jason McLellan, Barry Mellor, Win Mullen-James, Bob Murray, Peter Owen, Merfyn Parry, Paul Penlington, Pete Prendergast, Arwel Roberts, Gareth Sandilands, David Simmons, Barbara Smith, David Smith, Julian Thompson-Hill, Joe Welch, Cefyn Williams, Eryl Williams and Huw Williams

ALSO PRESENT

Chief Executive (MM), Principal Solicitor (SC), Strategic Planning Team Manager (LG), Economic & Business Development Team & Project Manager (MH), Head of Business Improvement and Modernisation (AS), Head of Planning & Public Protection (GB), Service Manager, Safeguarding and Reviewing Team (CT) and Committee Administrator (SLW).

Prior to commencement of the Council meeting, the Chair, Councillor Gwyneth Kensler extended condolences to Councillor Bill Tasker following the recent loss of his sister.

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ian Armstrong, Brian Blakeley, Jeanette Chamberlain-Jones, Stuart Davies, Huw Hilditch-Roberts, Martyn Holland, Dewi Owens, Anton Sampson, Bill Tasker and Cheryl Williams

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No Declarations of Interest.

3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

No urgent matters.

4 CHAIRMAN'S DIARY

A list of civic engagements undertaken by the Chair and Vice-Chair for the period 13 August 2015 to 12 October 2015 had been circulated prior to the meeting.

RESOLVED that the list of civic engagements undertaken by the Chair and Vice-Chair be received.

5 MINUTES

The minutes of the Council meeting held on 8 September, 2015 were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 8 September, 2015 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

At this juncture, the Chair introduced Meira Owen of HomeStart to give a brief explanation to Members of the work undertaken by HomeStart within the community and the families they assist.

Meira Owen thanked Council Members for allowing her to have the opportunity to explain the work of HomeStart.

HomeStart were a charity who had supported families in Denbighshire for the past 15 years. There were a team of approximately 100 volunteers from diverse communities across the county together with 5 members of staff. The criteria to be referred to HomeStart was that there needed to be one child of the family under the age of 11 years.

Following the presentation by Meira Owen, the Chair and Councillor Raymond Bartley thanked Meira and her team for all the hard work they did within the communities which was invaluable.

6 2014-15 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REVIEW

The Lead Member for Finance and Assets, Councillor Julian Thompson-Hill, introduced the Annual Performance Report (previously circulated) for members to approve the draft 2014/15 Annual Performance Review, subject to agreed changes, to enable translation and publication prior to 31 October 2015.

The Head of Business Improvement & Modernisation explained that the Council's Corporate Plan 2012-2017 set the strategic direction for the Council and its priorities for the five year period. Details of the Council's intention to deliver the priorities had been set out in the annual service plans and the Corporate Plan Annual Delivery document and a set of Outcome Agreements with the Welsh Government.

The Annual Performance Report provided a retrospective evaluation of the Council's success in delivering against these plans during 2014-15, and whether the Council had successfully fulfilled its obligation to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement.

The report had been developed by the Strategic Planning & Performance Team, in consultation with other council services. The performance information contained within the document had been provided by services, and had been drawn from the Verto Performance Management system. Consultation had taken place with the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) prior to being submitted to County Council for approval.

This had been the most ambitious plan to date and was the third year of the plan. Good progress had been made but a lot of work still needed to be carried out. The statistics within the report were to date as at the end of March 2015.

The Head of Business Improvement & Modernisation proceeded with a powerpoint presentation for Members which included case studies to give clearer examples of the work taking place.

Seven priority areas required key actions to deliver and those priorities were:

- Economic Development
- Education
- Roads
- Vulnerable People
- Clean and Tidy Streets
- Housing, and
- Modernising the Council

The Economic & Business Development Team and Programme Manager (E&BDTPM) explained the Economic Community Programme developing initiatives. The importance of acceptable broadband and telecommunications and focussing on businesses in the use of technology. Within the DCC Website, there was to be a page set up which would contain information for businesses and the page would include short, sharp video clips of businesses explaining how they use technology to improve their business. There were plans to have approximately six different video clips in both Welsh and English.

The E&BDTPM showed an example of a draft version of a video from a company based in Denbigh.

Following the video, the following items were raised during discussion:

- Broadband speed in certain rural areas was an ongoing issue. It was confirmed that BT and superfast broadband were behind schedule but it was the responsibility of the Welsh Government to liaise with BT to improve the service. Councillors were requested to lobby the Welsh Government on the issue. The Chief Executive suggested the issue of the roll out of superfast broadband should be called to Scrutiny. The concerns would also be raised with the Assembly Members.
- Welsh language video clips were proving to be a more difficult task as there was a shortage of Welsh speaking business owners who were willing to take part to film a video.
- Following the restructure of the Department, there has been greater interaction with other Departments. A Project Manager was now in place and their task was to put together all information. There were currently 16 projects and meetings were regularly held to ensure the schedules for projects were kept on track.
- The Leader, Councillor Hugh Evans, reminded Members that the figures shown were up to and including March 2015. The work had been completed with a reduced team together with other Departments being integrated.

Companies outside the Local Authority were now being contacted and communication with them was growing. This had created a resource with the Local Authority on a reduced team.

- The Plan would be to retain current businesses. The Corporate Director: Economic & Community Ambition, together with the Leader had a timetable to meet with the top 10 or 15 businesses within Denbighshire to encourage growth and to support businesses to grow and employ a larger number of people. The electrification of the railway was also currently under discussion.
- Members agreed that Assembly Members also had a role to play as they should be made accountable and for them to support their Local Authorities.
- The issues of reduced rates for smaller businesses was brought into question, especially on Denbighshire's Town High Streets and also on St. Asaph Business Park. The Corporate Director: Economic & Community Ambition confirmed she would collate a briefing note of which schemes offered assistance with rates and circulate to Members.

Improving performance in Education and the quality of School Buildings. Students achieving their potential was "acceptable". There had been improvement in all education attainment indicators identified for this outcome in the 2013/2014 academic year. The smallest improvement had been made in pupils achieving the Core Subject indicator in Key Stage 2. Councillor Carys Guy stated that education could be improved. More teachers and teaching assistants were required. The Chief Executive expressed concern and stated improvements could be made.

Improving our Roads was "Good". The road condition indicators were compared with a group of similar rural local authority areas in Wales. Despite an improvement, the non-principal (B) roads were still considered a priority for improvement. Both the principal (A) and non-principal (C) roads had improved.

Vulnerable People are able to live as independently as possible was "Good". Within this outcome, the Local Authority pledged to reduce the number of adults who needed residential care by 200 (overall), from 815 in 2012 to 615 by 2017. The total for 2014/15 was 697 which showed good progress was being made towards the ambition.

Vulnerable People are protected was "Excellent".

Clean & Tidy Streets – produce an attractive environment for residents and visitors alike was "Excellent"

At this juncture, the Head of Planning and Public Protection presented a case study regarding eyesore sites.

The impact of eyesore sites were:

- Economic, social & environmental well-being of community
- Visual amenity
- Targets for anti-social behaviour

- Graffiti
- Fly-tipping
- Vermin
- Safety, and
- Local property values.

A database had been set up of approximately 100 eyesore sites which varied from large problem sites to individual untidy dwellings. A scoring matrix was devised to help prioritise the worst sites. The top 20 had focused effort and outside the top 20 were part of day to day regulatory activity.

There was a project structure and the Project Team met every other month:

- To consider enforcement/ regulatory options
- What were possible outcomes for each site, and
- To use enforcement powers to facilitate outcome.

Regular updates were provided to the Corporate Director: Economic & Community Ambition, the Lead Member for Public Realm, and Member Area Groups. Periodic updates were provided to Local Members.

The Head of Planning and Public Protection reiterated that the examples shown within the case study were from 2014. Members requested that an up to date list be circulated to them for information. The Chair suggested that a link to the database be circulated to Members and the consensus of agreement was in favour of this action.

Members took the opportunity to thank the Head of Planning and Public Protection and his Team for all their work.

At this juncture (11.35 a.m.) there was a 20 minute break.

The meeting reconvened at 11.55 a.m.

The Head of Business Improvement and Modernisation continued with the presentation.

Ensuring access to good quality housing. The housing market in Denbighshire would offer a range of types and forms of housing in sufficient quantity to meet the needs of individuals and families was “Excellent”.

The revised Housing Strategy was underway. A Lead Member Steering Group had been established with regular meetings being held to provide input into the emerging Strategy.

Following in-depth discussion, the following points were raised:

- The issue of monies which had been drawn down by Social Landlords over the past 9 years was brought into question as a majority of accommodation

provided had been flats and/or houses in multiple occupation. These problems were not being addressed and Councillors agreed questions needed to be asked as the registered social landlords had not been performing particularly well.

- Was there Member involvement with the Lead Member Steering Group? It had been confirmed Members were able to put forward any comments/questions to the Lead Member Steering Group but could not attend as members of the Group. It was clarified to Members that the Housing Strategy was to address strategy for the whole of the county and not just social landlords and affordable housing. The Strategy would be presented at Communities Scrutiny and then to Full Council.
- The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) had been removed from the Council Briefing Forward Work Programme for 2 November but consensus of opinion was taken and it was agreed to reinstate the HRA to the Forward Work Programme on that date.

Modernising the Council to be efficient & improve services for customers. Services will continue to develop and improve was “Good”. More flexible and effective workforce supported by cost efficient infrastructure was “Acceptable”.

The Council were working to use technology to improve efficiency and reduce costs. There had been investment in hardware and software that would enable staff to work in new ways to better enhance the customer experience. One thing was flexible working to enable work from any location. This would improve the benefits of work/life balance and eventually be more economical with office space.

The Service Manager, Safeguarding & Reviewing Team, Colin Tucker, explained to Members the success of flexible working within his Team. Staff were able to “hotdesk” which meant less time was taken up with travelling. Staff were able to work on their equipment whilst attending appointments and the appointment times were more conducive for the children and families as they could be seen after school hours.

Qualitative quality was to be introduced and the monitoring of performance of staff would take place. The intelligence would then be used to assist with training, developing new skills and to become a more qualified member of staff.

Both the Chair and the Lead Member for Social Care, Adult and Children’s Services, Councillor Bobby Feeley, thanked the Head of Business Improvement & Modernisation and his Team for all their work on the excellent report and case studies.

Proposed by Councillor Julian Thompson-Hill, seconded by Councillor Barbara Smith.

Vote took place by a show of hands – unanimously in favour of the recommendation.

RESOLVED that subject to any agreed changes, Members approve the draft 2014-15 Annual Performance Review to enable translation and publication before 31 October 2015.

7 COUNTY COUNCIL FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair introduced the Council's Forward Work Programme (previously circulated).

It had been agreed earlier in the meeting to reinstate the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) to the Council Briefing being held on 2 November 2015.

RESOLVED that subject to the above, the Council Forward Work Programme be approved and noted.

The meeting concluded at 12.35 p.m.