

PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Performance Scrutiny Committee held in Conference Room 1a, County Hall, Ruthin on Thursday, 21 March 2019 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Ellie Chard, Ann Davies, Huw Jones (Chair), Geraint Lloyd-Williams and Arwel Roberts.

Lead Members, Councillors Tony Thomas, Brian Jones and Julian Thompson Hill attended at the Committee's request.

Observers – Councillors Meirick Lloyd Davies, Alan James, Rhys Thomas, Julian Thompson-Hill, Graham Timms and Emrys Wynne

ALSO PRESENT

Chief Executive (JG), Lead Officer - Corporate Property & Housing Stock (DL), Lead Officer - Community Housing (GD), Service Manager – Localities (JM), Head of Highways & Environmental Services (TW), Fleet Performance Manager (CB), Service Improvement Manager (VR), Head of Business Improvement & Modernisation (AS), Performance & Systems Administrator (EJ), Scrutiny Co-ordinator (RE) and Democratic Services Officer (KE)

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Committee members Councillors Rachel Flynn, Hugh Irving, Martyn Holland, Bob Murray and David Williams.

In addition apologies were received from Councillors Bobby Feeley and Richard Mainon Lead Members for items five and seven respectively.

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest.

3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

There were no urgent matters.

4 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting of the Performance Scrutiny Committee held on 29 November 2018 were submitted and agreed for accuracy.

Matters Arising:

Verified External Examination Results:

- (page 8) the Scrutiny Coordinator had asked the Head of Education and Children's Services for suggestions on which aspects of the management of school governing bodies may benefit being reviewed by scrutiny.
- (page 9) a letter had been sent to the Chief Executive of Qualifications Wales and a response had been received (both were included in the Information Brief document previously circulated). The Chair had a meeting scheduled the following week with North Wales Regional Assembly Member Llŷr Gruffydd to discuss the matter. A number of other Assembly Members had responded to the letter stating that similar concerns to those of the Committee had been raised with them by constituents and schools etc.

Library Standards (page 10) –the Council's Team Leader: Tourism, Marketing and Events and Assistant Manager of Rhuddlan and St. Asaph Libraries had been in discussion regarding the provisio of tourist information panels at Rhuddlan Library. It was anticipated that this could be facilitated in the next financial year.

Resolved that, subject to the above, the minutes of the Performance Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 31 January 2019 be received and approved as a correct record.

5 HOUSING SERVICES

The Lead Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Environment introduced the joint report by the Lead Officer Community Housing and the Lead Officer Corporate Property and Housing Stock (previously circulated). The report presented the Council's response to the findings of the Wales Audit Office (WAO) Service User Perspective Review of August 2018, in relation to the Welsh Quality Housing Standard and the Authority's work with tenants.

During his introduction the Lead Member thanked the Committee for the opportunity to respond to the two proposals for improvement proposed by the WAO following its review. The lead Member drew members' attention to the results of the Survey of Tenants and Residents (STAR) 2019 (Appendix 3 to the report) which had returned a 90% satisfaction rate in response to the question on their views on the overall quality of their home, which was extremely pleasing.

The Lead Officer Community Housing reminded the Committee that Denbighshire County Council had achieved the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS), nevertheless maintenance and improvement works to the Council's housing stock continued, albeit on a smaller scale than that to achieve the WHQS. Referring to the WAO Service User Review the Lead Officer Community Housing advised that the WAO had undertaken doorstep interviews with 122 tenants out of the Authority's total number of 3,385 housing tenants. That survey had concluded that the Council should consider:

- providing help to those experiencing damp and homes that were not adequately heated, fuel efficient, or well insulated and

- reviewing the long-term impact of the ending of the resident warden service from its sheltered housing schemes

With respect to damp and the fuel efficiency of homes the Lead Officer advised that it was important to understand that 23% of tenants surveyed by the WAO had mentioned that they suffered “damp and condensation” issues, however the WAO had not undertaken any follow-up investigations to the tenants’ problems or their sources.

A similar survey had been undertaken in other North Wales local authority areas, the sample size in Ynys Môn was similar to that in Denbighshire and 37% of tenants there stated they had experienced similar problems. The Head of Service advised that condensation problems could be caused by inadequate heating of a home through inefficient or intermittent use of the heating system, and/or inadequate ventilation measures not being taken by the occupier.

In order to provide advice and support to tenants the Council had produced an information leaflet (Appendix 2 to the report) on how to help avoid condensation in the home. It had also, in partnership with Citizen Advice Denbighshire (CAD), arranged a dedicated advisor to support council tenants in relation to fuel poverty, damp and condensation issues.

If damp was an issue, structural work could be undertaken to address the problem. As Denbighshire had achieved the WHQS all properties renovated under that programme would have sufficient heating and be free of damp related problems. The head of Service advised that it was extremely pleasing to report that the STAR survey had rated Denbighshire’s Housing Service as the top local authority in Wales for the ‘overall quality of the home’ and for the way the Service dealt with repairs and maintenance.

Responding to members’ questions in relation to the improvement proposal relating to damp and heating the Lead Member and officers:

- confirmed that the WHQS maintenance work had been financed in the main through Welsh Government (WG) funding and via rental income received by the Council from its tenants. However, going forward Denbighshire was aiming for the quality of its refurbishment work to be of a higher standard than the WHQS;
- highlighted that the STAR survey had identified a need to ensure that in addition to having nice houses to live in it was also important for tenants to feel that their neighbourhood was also a pleasant place to live. Having achieved the WHQS the focus of some of the work undertaken since in relation to the housing stock was on environmental and exterior work i.e. hedges, fencing etc. Although it was sometimes difficult to achieve uniform fencing and boundaries on estates, particularly where a large number of properties had been sold and were now in private ownership as not all private owners wanted to change their fencing;
- assured that when upgrading heating systems in properties the Council always installed the latest systems. Airing cupboards would not be removed where they already existed, instead the old hot water cylinder would be

replaced by a background heater for the purpose of airing clothes etc. However, some of the smaller Council properties did not have any room for an airing cupboard. The worst performing properties energy-wise would be identified for replacement heating systems first as their tenants would benefit the most from an upgrade ;

- accepted that if tenants refused to have their heating systems upgraded, which could result in the Council failing to achieve the target it had set itself in the Corporate Plan, there may be provision to class this as an 'acceptable fail' as the authority would have made every attempt to achieve the target;
- expected that the proposed new council housing that was to be built in the near future would be so energy efficient that they would not require an independent heating system to be installed;
- confirmed that extractor fans were installed as a matter of course when properties were refurbished;
- advised that the majority of Council owned properties had been fitted with a new central heating boiler within the last 8 years;
- assured that Housing Officers dealt with enforcement matters, such as over grown hedges, untidy gardens etc. as part of their day to day duties; and
- advised that in a bid to listen better to tenants and act on their concerns the role of the Housing Officers would be changing from April 2019. From this date onwards tenants would contact one officer in relation to all housing and tenant enquiries. Housing Officers would be visiting community centres on a regular basis to meet tenants, and where no community centres were available they would be visiting the estates with a van to meet residents and answer enquiries. Councillors would in due course be informed who the Housing Officer(s) were for their area

Committee members congratulated the Housing Service team for the advice leaflet on avoiding condensation, they felt the leaflet would be useful to all householders in the county. A number of members had recently visited refurbished Council owned properties in their wards and commented how impressed they had been about the quality of the renovation work undertaken at the properties.

With respect of the WAO's second proposal for improvement, to review the long-term impact of ending the resident warden service from its sheltered housing schemes, the Lead Officer Community Housing emphasised that the Council fully understood that the wardens were valued and well-liked by the tenants, however in latter years their presence had been more reassuring than anything else.

With the shift in focus of social care provision to be more about re-ablement and promoting independence the presence of wardens in housing complexes had the potential to indirectly make some residents more isolated and less likely to seek social interaction. Under the Supporting Independent Living (SIL) programme targeted social provision could be shared across the county irrespective of whether residents lived in Council accommodation, private rented accommodation or their own properties as all could have equal access to the services they required. Under SIL residents of some of the former sheltered housing complexes arranged their own social events in the community centres adjacent to the complexes, this reduced the risk of social isolation.

The Service Manager: Localities (Community Support Services) explained the transition process that had been followed for those sheltered housing tenants who had identified 'needs', outlined in Appendix 4 to the report. She advised that of the 66 residents who received support via the SIL service only two had complained, one of whom required additional support and was granted it in due course.

The SIL service continued to support about 15 tenants, but the majority of tenants in former sheltered housing accommodation were now tenure-neutral. In the near future the SIL Service would be re-aligned with the Re-ablement Service.

The new role for the Housing Officers from April 2019 would include allocating one half day a week working in one of the former sheltered housing complexes in their area to support, help and advise the tenants. All tenants in former sheltered housing schemes would be visited by the Housing Officer on at least an annual basis. In addition work was underway to examine the feasibility of introducing a 'mobile caretaker' service for the purpose of undertaking light maintenance work at the on-site community centres of the former sheltered accommodation complexes. That maintenance provision, for which a service charge could be levied as part of the rent, would be a presence on site on a rotational basis to liaise with residents and assist them with minor maintenance tasks. If that was a feasible option tenants would be consulted on the proposal prior to its introduction.

In response to members' questions officers advised that:

- one of the biggest challenges for officers from both the Housing Service and Community Support Services was to persuade people to attend social events etc. and see it as a way of improving their well-being and quality of life;
- the Council's working relationship with Age Connect was proving extremely successful, it hosted the Community Navigator service, a service that was funded via the Integrated Care Fund (ICF). It was pleasing that the ICF funding for the Service had recently been confirmed for 2019/20

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

Resolved: subject to the above observations –

- (i) ***to receive the information submitted and support the Housing Service and Community Support Services' efforts in addressing the two improvement proposals in relation to Council tenants arising from the Wales Audit Office's (WAO) Service User Perspective Review – Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS); and***
- (ii) ***that an Information Report be provided to the Committee in the summer of 2020 following a 'Review of the effectiveness of the new working model for Housing Officers'.***

6 DRAFT FLEET MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

The Lead Member for Highways, Planning and Sustainable Travel introduced the joint report by the Principal Manager: Service Improvement and Fleet and the Fleet Manager which presented the Committee with the revised draft Fleet Strategy for the Council's vehicle fleet. Copies of the report and draft strategy had been published and circulated in advance of the meeting. During his introduction the Lead Member emphasised the need for the Council to reduce its carbon emissions, but in doing so it was important that its fleet was fit for purpose to deliver vital services.

The Head of Highways and Environment advised that the default position would be, when replacing vehicles, not to automatically replace them with diesel vehicles. When a Service required to replace a vehicle it would need to consider replacing it with electric or alternative fuel vehicles in the first instance. If the Service was of the view that such vehicles would not be fit for the purpose for which they were required, they would then need to evidence the case why a diesel vehicle was the only suitable replacement. He emphasised that the Strategy related to how the Authority purchased and disposed of its vehicles and how that process fitted in and contributed towards the Corporate Plan, specifically to the work stream relating to reducing the Authority's carbon emissions.

Responding to members' questions the Lead Member, Head of Service, Principal Manager: Service Improvement & Fleet, and the Fleet Manager:

- confirmed that, as a pilot project, two electric vans had already been purchased for use by the Council's Business Improvement and Modernisation Service. These would be brought into service once electric charging points were installed in the main office and depot locations;
- advised that for the foreseeable future charging points installed on Council premises would be restricted for use to charge Council vehicles only;
- reassured that work was currently underway on a regional basis with partners to explore who was interested in working with local authorities in relation to establishing an electric vehicle charging infrastructure across North Wales;
- confirmed that the Council currently purchased its vehicle and heating fuel via the national fuel framework. The contract for its provision had recently been out for tender;
- asserted that, whilst purchasing electric vehicles could contribute towards reducing carbon emissions from the Council's fleet, driving techniques for all vehicles had a greater contribution to make to the carbon reduction agenda;
- assured that all Council vehicles were required by law to be equipped with Tachographs in order to monitor driver activity. Of the Authority's 400 vehicles, all but approximately 15, the majority of which were school minibuses, were fitted with telematic systems. Schools were advised when enquiring on replacing minibuses to ensure that they were fitted with telematics systems;
- agreed that all new vehicles in future would be fitted with more detailed information systems which would detail driving techniques data and their impact on fuel consumption and carbon emissions etc.;

- emphasised that all vehicles currently had to meet European emission standards and that diesel was not as bad as media publicity portrayed it;
- advised that battery power technology was currently developing at an increasing rate;
- explained the reasons why Liquid Petroleum Gas (LPG) powered vehicles were not being considered for inclusion in the Council's fleet, mainly because the majority of LPG vehicles were either hybrid or converted vehicles as manufacturers did not produce LPG only vehicles;
- advised that the Council procured its vehicles via a framework agreement, similar to the way it purchased its fuel;
- confirmed that when disposing of vehicles they were cleaned and valeted and all traces of names or logos were properly removed ahead of their sale;
- agreed that the Council did have a lot of vehicles on the road at the same time, whilst there was risk that this may be perceived by some as a waste of the Council's resources all vehicles undertaking journeys at the same time were delivering specific services to residents and businesses from a very wide range of services i.e. Highways, Social Care, refuse collections etc.;
- advised that circa 90% of the work in commissioning vehicles for the Council's use was undertaken by the Authority's own Fleet Department;
- explained that consideration had been given to permitting staff and the general public to use the proposed 20 new electric charging points to be located at various Council run locations by the end of 2020/21, however it had been decided not to permit this for the foreseeable future. The reason being that if the Council's own fleet of electric vehicles increased during this period the Authority could have to withdraw permission for staff and the public to use the charging points, which would damage the Authority's reputation in the long-run;
- confirmed that the provision of vehicle charging points for public use was being considered as part of the Council's draft Sustainable Travel Plan which was currently being drawn-up. This draft plan was scheduled to be presented to the Committee in early 2020 for consideration. Vehicle charging points would be available for public use at the car park that would be developed on the site of the former Post Office in Rhyl;
- clarified the role of the Corporate Hire Desk Facility;
- explained that the Council could not share 'spare' lorries etc. with neighbouring authorities as it had to hold an Operator's Licence for every Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) it operated. Also, spare specialist vehicles such as gritting lorries were likely to be required by all authorities at the same time, due to the specific type of service they were used for delivering. It was however pleasing to report that the WG had recently purchased two gritting vehicles specifically for the purpose of keeping the A55 key travel route open on and around Rhuallt Hill; and
- advised that it seemed unlikely at present that electric powered vehicles would be suitable to collect refuse, even under the proposed new waste and recycling model. Whilst electric vehicles were being developed for all types of purposes, at present it seemed more probable that larger vehicles may in future be powered by hydrogen.

The Lead Member for Finance, Performance and Strategic Assets undertook to raise with the Procurement Team whether there were any specific requirements under the procurement process - apart from Corporate Plan considerations - that when setting up a tendering process for replacing vehicles consideration should initially be given to purchasing electric vehicles, then alternative fuel vehicles ahead of vehicles fuelled by fossil fuels.

Members welcomed the proposed new strategy and its aims and ambitions. They also congratulated officers for producing a well written, clear, concise and easy to understand document.

At the conclusion of the discussion the Lead Member and officers, in response to the Committee's request, agreed to include a reference in the Strategy to the fact that all vehicles would be fitted with tracking/telematics equipment for monitoring purposes to ensure that all vehicles are driven efficiently . It was therefore:

Resolved: - subject to the above observations and the inclusion of a section on fitting vehicle tracking and telematics equipment to Council vehicles to aid efficient driving practices, to support the Strategy's adoption

At this juncture the Committee became inquorate but continued to transact its business on an informal basis.

7 STREET NAMING AND NUMBERING POLICY

The Head of Business Improvement and Modernisation introduced the Street Naming and Numbering Officer's report (previously circulated) which provided the Committee with the current Street Naming and Numbering Policy. The report sought members to review and determine whether any changes were required to the policy.

Members were advised by the Street Naming and Numbering Officer that the policy had been adopted in 2014, with the latest amendments to it being approved, via a Lead Member Delegated Decision, in August 2018. The Policy stipulated that all new street names in Denbighshire should either be Welsh or bilingual. It was important that street names were consistent with the local heritage for the area and clear for the purpose of property location for deliveries and emergency services' purposes. Of the 20 street names approved in recent years 18 had Welsh only names, with the remaining 2 having bilingual names.

Responding to members' questions officers:

- advised that where English only street/road names were currently shown on signs, they would not be replaced with bilingual ones until such time as the signs were broken/required replacing due to the additional costs involved. If town and community councils were willing to fund the costs of new signage, the Council would replace the English only ones with bilingual signs;

- confirmed that where bilingual names existed it was Royal Mail's policy to publish the English version of the address and hold the Welsh version in the background;
- explained that, whilst the policy discouraged the practice of naming streets after specific individuals, alive or deceased, the Authority had permitted the naming of six new streets in Rhyl after local servicemen killed in action. As the Town Council had put forward the names of a total of eight local service personnel killed in action, the names of the next two streets to be built on the development would bear the remaining two servicemen's names;
- affirmed the latest addition to the list of approved names that could be used was 'Cae';
- advised that whilst postcodes were useful when attempting to locate the area where a property was located, as they covered quite a large area having easily identifiable street names was helpful when narrowing the search down for a specific property, particularly for the emergency services and for delivery purposes;
- confirmed that the local authority had the final decision on the naming of a street or road; and
- agreed that all street names should be displayed in a standard format and a standard font size. If this was not adhered with members should raise the matter with the Council's Highways Service

Members queried a number of anomalies or inconsistencies within the Policy. Amongst these were the following:

- English version - Section B: paragraph 2 'mead' should read 'mede';
- no direct translation of 'cae' included in the English version;
- Welsh version – Section B: paragraph 2 'heol' should be included as it did exist in local street names already;
- Section B: paragraph 2.2 – the prohibition of the use of the definite article 'The' in English and consequently of 'Y/Yr' in Welsh did cause a problem in Welsh as the definite article ('y fannod') was a requirement in Welsh as a prefix to certain names;
- Section B: paragraph 2.4 – the use of North/East/South and West needs to be revisited as the meaning may not always be clear in the Welsh version;
- Section D: paragraph 3.3 in both English and Welsh versions the reference to "between 2013 and 2016" needs to be updated/deleted; and
- Section D: paragraph 4.1 in both Welsh and English versions – names of partner organisations need to be updated to reflect current official titles e.g. North Wales Fire Service should read North Wales Fire and Rescue Service, Dee Valley Water should be replaced with Hafren Dyfrdwy.

The Committee was of the view that the policy would benefit from a thorough review to ensure it was up to date and contained no inconsistencies. Members therefore:

Recommended: - that officers having regard to the above observations –

- (i) ***undertake a thorough review of the Street Naming and Numbering Policy;***

- (ii) that as part of the review the Council's Welsh Language Steering Committee is consulted on its contents and the accuracy of the draft policy; and*
- (iii) that the revised draft Policy is presented to Performance Scrutiny Committee in the autumn of 2019 for consultation prior to being submitted to Cabinet for approval and adoption*

8 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator introduced the report (previously circulated) seeking Members' review of the Committee's work programme and providing an update on relevant issues.

A copy of the "Member's proposal form" had been included in Appendix 2. The Scrutiny Co-ordinator requested that any proposals be submitted to herself. The Cabinet Forward Work Programme had been included as Appendix 3, the table summarising recent Committee resolutions, advising on progress with their implementation, had been attached as Appendix 4.

The Scrutiny Coordinator highlighted the Performance Scrutiny Committee meeting scheduled for May only contained one agenda item – the Corporate Risk Register.

With the Committee's consent it was agreed that unless any items were, in the meantime, agreed for the Committee's examination that the Corporate Risk Register in May would be deferred to June's meeting and May's meeting would subsequently be cancelled.

Resolved that subject to the above the Forward Work Programme be approved.

9 FEEDBACK FROM COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES

Councillor Ellie Chard reported that she had attended the Education Service Challenge lines of enquiry meeting and was due to attend a further meeting in April.

Meeting concluded at 12:35pm