

COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Committee held in Council Chamber, County Hall, Ruthin on Thursday, 12 March 2020 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Brian Blakeley, Tina Jones, Merfyn Parry, Anton Sampson, Glenn Swingler, Andrew Thomas, Graham Timms (Vice-Chair), Cheryl Williams and Huw Williams (Chair)

Education Co-opted Members Kathleen Jones and Neil Roberts attended for business item 5.

Lead Member for Education, Children and Young People, Councillor Huw Hilditch-Roberts attended for agenda item 5.

The Leader, Councillor Hugh Evans, attended for agenda item 7.

Lead Member for Waste, Transport and Environment, Councillor Brian Jones attended for agenda item 8.

Observers - Councillors Meirick Lloyd Davies, Martyn Holland and Emrys Wynne

ALSO PRESENT

Corporate Director: Economy and Public Realm (GB), Head of Highways, Facilities & Environmental Services (TW), Head of Planning and Public Protection (EJ), Traffic, Parking and Road Safety Manager (MJ), Senior Countryside Officer (DS), Principal Finance & Assurance Officer (MD), Planning and Resources Manager (IL), Principal Manager - Modernising Education (GD), Passenger Transport Section Manager (PD), Team Leader - Tourism, Marketing & Events (PM), Scrutiny Co-ordinator (RE), and Committee Administrator (SJ).

Jeremy Evans Wales Audit Representative was in attendance.

Nick Thomas and Rhys Ellis Natural Resource Wales representatives was in attendance

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mabon ap Gwynfor and Rachel Flynn

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Councillor Huw Williams declared a personal interest in Item 5 - Denbighshire's Learner Transport Policy: Non-Statutory Elements, as he has children that use the school transport provision.

Councillor Huw Hilditch Roberts declared a personal interest in Item 5 - Denbighshire's Learner Transport Policy: Non-Statutory Elements, as he is a parent Governor.

Councillor Brian Blakeley declared a personal interest in Item 6 - Progress report on recommendations stemming from the Llantysilio mountain fire review, as he was a member of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Board.

Councillor Meirick Lloyd Davies declared a personal interest in Item 5 - Denbighshire's Learner Transport Policy: Non-Statutory Elements, as he is a parent Governor.

Councillor Meirick Lloyd Davies declared a personal interest in Item 6 - Progress report on recommendations stemming from the Llantysilio mountain fire review, as he was a member of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Board.

3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

No urgent items.

4 MINUTES

The minutes of the Communities Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 23 January 2020 were submitted.

Accuracy –

Page 10 – Councillor Graham Timms was Chair of Llangollen 2020 which was a possible beneficiary of the Business Improvement District.

Matters Arising –

Page 8 – Matters Arising – An update had been circulated to members providing the response received from the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Page 9 – Well-being of Future Generations Act in relation to Flood Risk Management in Denbighshire – Confirmation was provided that 2 areas of funding had been established- Natural Resource Wales and the Council. Wayne Hope would be able to aid members for grant funding in relation to flooding in local areas. Corporate Director: Economy and Public Realm, Graham Boase highlighted a member workshop would be arranged with regards to recent severe weather that had been observed in recent months.

Page 13 – Broadband and mobile networks in rural areas - The response from Welsh Government had been circulated to members for information.

RESOLVED that, subject to the above, the minutes of the Communities Scrutiny meeting held on 23 January 2020 be received and approved as a correct record.

5 DENBIGHSHIRE'S LEARNER TRANSPORT POLICY: NON-STATUTORY ELEMENTS

The Lead Member for Education, Children and Young People, Councillor Huw Hilditch-Roberts, Principal Finance & Assurance Officer Martyn Dodd, Planning and

Resources Manager Ian Land, Principal Manager - Modernising Education Geraint Davies, Passenger Transport Section Manager Peter Daniels were all in attendance for the item.

Councillor Huw Hilditch-Roberts introduced the report providing information regarding Denbighshire's Learner Transport Policy: Non-Statutory Elements. He stated the report had first appeared at Scrutiny May 2019 for debate. Since that initial report work had been completed by Officers and the working group to preserve post-16 school transport. It was explained that Welsh Government were undertaking a review of the current legislation, which may result in changes to it once completed.

Members heard from the Planning and Resources Manager (PRM) of the new regulations regarding public service vehicles and their impact on the discretionary chargeable school transport.

During the debate the following points were raised:

- Confirmation that the authority did provide college transport. Within the policy, the authority provided suitable transport to the closest education provision. It was explained that if individuals chose alternative providers the cost would be reviewed by the authority and the provider, to establish who would fund transport costs.
- Concerns regarding overspend on the budget for learner transport were discussed. The PRM emphasized the legislation stated the statutory requirement to provide school transport. Thus stating if a child was eligible for transport to school as an authority we had to provide the service even if over budget. Members heard that an increase in the school transport budget for the next year had been approved.
- If Council policy changed and charged post-16 students the school transport fleet provision would have to be reviewed to ensure compliance. It would potentially cause issues in availability of suitable vehicles.
- Meetings that had been arranged for members of the Learner Transport Working Group had provided a lot of information and illustrated to members the position the authority was in. It provided members with clarity and information on the school transport budget and policy.
- Within the policy a level of flexibility and discretion on land borders still applied.
- Discussions with housing had taken place. Communication with housing and the homelessness team continued. The discretion element of the policy had allowed a child to continue to receive transport to their school even if they moved away from the area. All individual cases were examined and all options explored. Decisions would be made by the Head of Service to offer school transport, with each case been assessed on its own merits.

The Chair thanked all the Officers for the detailed report. It was therefore:

Resolved: - subject to the above observations –

- (i) to endorse the Working Group's recommendation that there should be no change to the non-statutory elements presently in the Learner Transport Policy;***

- (ii) that, in line with the Chair of the Working Group's suggestion, the Working Group should not be disbanded and that the Authority keep a watching brief over the next 12 months on the impact of the Public Vehicle Accessibility Regulations (PSVAR) and the Welsh Government's review of Post 16 Learner Travel, both of which will have significant bearing on post-16 transport discussions; and*
- (iii) provide the Committee with a report in due course on the impact of the above on the Council's learner transport policy and associated budget.*

At this juncture it was agreed to vary the order of the Agenda.

6 TOURISM SIGNAGE STRATEGY FOR DENBIGHSHIRE

The Leader, Councillor Hugh Evans, Traffic, Parking and Road Safety Manager, Mike Jones and Team Leader - Tourism, Marketing & Events and Peter McDermott were in attendance for the item.

The Leader, Councillor Hugh Evans, introduced the report (previously circulated) to provide information regarding the development of the Tourism Signage Strategy, including an update on ongoing tourism signage schemes.

Members heard the report had highlighted the need to address the Tourism Signage within Denbighshire. Tourism is very important to Denbighshire, a large amount of time and work had been invested by officers. It was highlighted that the report was outdated as the remaining funding for the Vale of Clwyd signage to be erected on the A55 had been agreed by Strategic Investment Group. The Leader welcomed the establishment of a working group to develop a follow-on Tourism Signage Strategy with a view to directing tourists to all parts of the county. Concerns were raised over the finance for the strategy, would high expectations be attainable from the private sector and the strategy be aligned to the Wales Way.

The Traffic, Parking and Road Safety Manager (TTPR) explained the remit of the Working group to the committee. Members from each of the member area groups had been invited to attend the group. The intention of the group had been to oversee the development of the Tourism Signage strategy. The 5 proposed objectives of the strategy, outlined within the report would be monitored by the Working group.

Members were provided an overview of the Wales Way from the Team Leader - Tourism, Marketing & Events (TLTME). It was confirmed Denbighshire was included in the North Wales Way with all other Authorities in North Wales. Emphasis was given to the importance of partnership working with the other authorities. Promoting Wales and its attractions through the North Wales Way information was being undertaken to encourage tourists to visit Wales.

Discussions took place regarding the signage from the A55 towards Rhyl. The TTPR confirmed that numerous options had been explored by officers. It was explained that numerous complaints had been received from Dyserth residents about traffic. Officers agreed signage for Rhyl from Junction 31 would increase traffic passing through Dyserth and thus increase complaints. It was explained officers had looked at other solutions. The proposed new signage scheme will allow the public to get to a destination and onto a tourist attraction.

Signage for charging points in car parks had not been included in the design of the new tourist signage, the TTPR confirmed it may be included in future discussions. Charging stations for smart cars was supported by smart technology that included maps which included charging stations, it was felt that this was adequate for the current demand.

Confirmation that the Council's approval for the funding had only just been agreed. Members heard the approval notification had not been discussed with Town, City and Community Council's to date. Communication with Welsh Government for work timescales would take place with the aim to have a timescale in place by the summer of 2020.

The Chair stated the trunk road passed through a number of local wards, it was suggested that the North and Mid Wales Trunk Road Agency (NMWTRA) be involved in the Working group along with the members. The importance of the working group to examine and explore members' concerns including funding and budgets was emphasised.

The Leader supported the suggestion of using symbols on tourist signs from the Trunk Road could be an area for the working group to look at. A letter could be sent to the Welsh Government asking for the policy to be reviewed, to allow promotion of towns further away from the trunk road.

Members were pleased to see images from Denbighshire had been included in the North Wales Way document. It was confirmed that more information and tourist attractions in Denbighshire would be promoted online and in further documents.

At the conclusion of the discussion the Committee:

Resolved:

- (i) subject to the above observations to support the continuation of the work to develop the Tourism Signage Strategy, including extending an invitation to representatives from the North and Mid Wales Trunk Road Agency (NMWTRA) to contribute towards the Strategy's development as and when the Working Group deemed appropriate; and***
- (ii) be presented with the final draft of the Tourism Strategy in late 2020/early 2021 for examination prior to its approval***

At this juncture (11.35 a.m.) there was a 15 minute break.

The meeting reconvened at 11.50 a.m.

7 PROGRESS REPORT ON RECOMMENDATIONS STEMMING FROM THE LLANTYSILIO MOUNTAIN FIRE REVIEW

The Head of Planning and Public Protection, Emlyn Jones, Senior Countryside Officer, David Shiel and Natural Resources Wales representatives Nick Thomas and Rhys Ellis were in attendance for the item.

The Head of Planning and Public Protection (HPPP) guided members through the report (previously circulated) providing an update on the progress made against the recommendations made by Communities Scrutiny Committee in relation to the review into the Llantysilio Mountain Fire of Summer 2018. The report was provided as per the Committee's request.

The Natural Resources Wales (NRW) representative updated members on the work that had been completed by NRW at the site and the options for further work to be completed. A review of the options to restore the area had been completed. Meetings had taken place with land owners. A meeting with graziers had been scheduled prior to work commencing in the spring. Agreement to employ a moorland officer had been reached and funding approved from Denbighshire and NRW. The post holder would monitor work at the site and work with local landowners and graziers. Members wanted to thank NRW for the funding partnership to recruit a moorland officer for the site. Members expressed disappointment that the Fire and Rescue Authority had not agreed to financially contribute towards the moorland officer post. Officers emphasised the Fire Service had requested to participate in the training and support of the new post holder, but could not financially contribute to the role. Confirmation that no direct approach to other local authorities to aid the funding for the post had been made.

Members raised concerns of 'fencing' areas in the area. It was emphasised that communication with the graziers needed to take place. The relationship with the graziers would be of high importance. The involvement of the graziers with the restoration of the land was seen as vital. It was highlighted the problems faced by the graziers at the time and following the fire had been extremely challenging. The decision on fencing areas was a proposal for sections of the land, but no decision had been reached. It was explained the difficulties in fencing on common lands as a Section 194 agreement from Welsh Government would need to be obtained. It was the opinion of NRW to refrain from fencing areas of land, dependant on discussions with the graziers. Concerns on the level of vegetation in areas of the mountain were discussed. It was confirmed that certain areas had been damaged more than others. A number of different techniques and methods to regain and nurture the vegetation were planned and would be trialled. Certain areas would take a long time to repair and develop.

The HPPP explained the importance of the working group to monitor and review work done at the site to restore the land and grazing of the land. It was the opinion of NRW that in time further grazing of the land be observed. The new Moorland

Officer post would aid to build good relationships with graziers and facilitate working with Denbighshire and other agencies. The new post would provide the graziers with a key link to Denbighshire and NRW to communicate any concerns or observations.

Following discussion the Committee:

Resolved:

- (i) subject to the above observations to acknowledge the progress made to date in implementing the Committee's recommendations following its inquiry into the fire on Llantysilio Mountain and its impact;***
- (ii) confirmed that as part of their consideration they had read, understood and taken into account the Well-being Impact Assessment (WIA) on the Moorland Management and Wildfire Prevention Project (Appendix 2 to the report); and***
- (iii) that representations should be made to North Wales Fire and Rescue Service), via the Council's representatives on the Fire and Rescue Authority, seeking it to reconsider its decision not to provide financial support for the Moorland Management Officer post that was to be established in the near future***

8 WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS: AN EXAMINATION OF TAKING STEPS TO REVISE HOUSEHOLD WASTE COLLECTION, SUPPORTING THE WELL-BEING OBJECTIVE OF DELIVERING AN ATTRACTIVE AND PROTECTED ENVIRONMENT

The Lead Member for Waste, Transport and Environment, Councillor Brian Jones, Head of Highways and Environmental Services, Tony Ward and Wales Audit Office (WAO) representative Jeremy Evans were in attendance for the item.

Head of Highways, Facilities & Environmental Services (HHFES) introduced the report (previously circulated) to provide information regarding the report by the WAO on the steps the Council was taking to revise household waste collection and how those steps supported the corporate priority of delivering an attractive and protected environment and aligned with the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

The WAO report outlined some areas of improvement, the HHFES stated his role was to respond to those highlighted areas. The proposed improvements had been considered, with some elements already being worked upon. One concern had been the current budget, funding for improvement would be difficult. Work would be completed within the current waste service resources and budget.

Jeremy Evans (WAO) explained to members the reason why the report had been produced. He stated a number of positives had been observed during the report these included; potential wider benefits, established collaborations and involvement of local residents. The areas of improvement that had been suggested had included a longer term strategy.

During discussion the following points were raised:

- Communication was vital to the delivery of the changes to the service. Involvement with residents and other organisations would be important to the smooth transition.
- Educating children from a young age was agreed to be vital in the understanding of the importance of recycling and the reduction of plastic use and the Council's carbon footprint. Key working with schools would be required.
- Waste from schools needed to be reviewed to work more effectively, with better recycling. It was confirmed a website which provided information on where Denbighshire waste goes existed. The HHES would clarify that the link for the website was available through Denbighshire County Council Website.
- The sustainability of longer-term waste strategy had to incorporate the emerging new strategies from the Welsh Government. The new strategies had not been made clear to date, when clarification was provided they would be included in the strategy. The new model had been designed to be more sustainable with the ability to response to new strategies. The WAO report had encouraged the Council to look at and review the future sustainability of the strategy as part of the report. Confirmation was provided that the new strategy would be presented to scrutiny at a future date.

The committee thanked the WAO officer and the HHFES for the positive report and welcomed the report on the strategy when completed.

At the conclusion of the discussion the Committee:

Resolved: - following consideration of the findings of the Wales Audit Office (WAO) and subject to the above observations, to confirm that it was satisfied with the Council's response to the suggested opportunities for improvement identified within the WAO's report.

9 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator submitted a report (previously circulated) seeking members' review of the Committee's work programme and provided an update on relevant issues.

Discussion focused on the following –

- The next scheduled meeting on 7 May 2020, had 3 items on the Forward work programme at present. The next meeting had capacity for a further one item to be added. Lead Members were to be invited.
- The meeting of Chairs and Vice Chairs was due to take place the following week and may propose an agenda item for the forthcoming meeting.

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator reminded members of the scrutiny proposal form (Appendix 2 previously circulated) and advised that any proposals should be sent to

her directly, so these could be considered by the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs Group for inclusion on the forward work programme.

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator asked members for requests for social media coverage, the committee agreed the following –

- The funding from Natural Resource Wales towards the post of a moorland officer had been confirmed.
- Confirmation that school transport would still be available to all school pupils.

RESOLVED that, subject to the above, the forward work programme as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report be approved.

10 FEEDBACK FROM COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES

No feedback.

The meeting concluded at 1.05 p.m.