

COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Committee held in remotely via Video Conferencing on Thursday, 22 October 2020 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Mabon ap Gwynfor, Brian Blakeley, Rachel Flynn, Tina Jones, Merfyn Parry, 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.

Councillor Huw Hilditch-Roberts Lead Member for Education, Children's Services and Public Engagement was present for item 5.

Councillor Julian Thompson-Hill Lead Member for Finance, Performance and Strategic Assets was present for item 6.

Councillor Tony Thomas Lead Member for Housing and Communities was present for item 7.

Observers – Councillors Meirick Lloyd Davies, Bobby Feeley, Martyn Holland, Gwyneth Kensler and Emrys Wynne

ALSO PRESENT

Corporate Director: Economy & Public Realm (GB), Corporate Director: Communities (NS), Interim Head of Education (GD), Principal Manager – School Support (JC), Head of Legal, HR and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) (GW), Community Benefits Manager (KB); Framework Manager (TS), Head of Business Improvement and Modernisation (AS), Countryside and Heritage Services Manager Denbighshire (HR), Business Information Team Manager (CB), Scrutiny Coordinator (RhE) and Committee Administrator (RhTJ).

The Local Democracy Reporter and a representative from Audit Wales were also in remote attendance to observe proceedings.

POINT OF NOTICE

Due to the current restrictions on travel and requirement for social distancing as a result of the coronavirus pandemic the meeting was held remotely by video conference and was not open to the general public. All members had been given the opportunity to attend as observers. The Local Democracy Reporter and a representative from Audit Wales had also been invited to observe.

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Anton Sampson and Glenn Swingler.

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Councillor Meirick Lloyd Davies declared a personal interest in agenda item 4, 'Minutes' as a member of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority.

The following members declared a personal interest in agenda item 5, 'Impact of Ruthin Primary Area Review':

Councillor Huw O Williams – parent of a pupil attending one of the schools
Councillor Meirick Lloyd Davies – School Governor Ysgol Cefn Meiriadog
Councillor Huw Hilditch-Roberts – Parent and School Governor Ysgol Pen Barras
Councillor Merfyn Parry – School Governor Ysgol Bryn Clwyd and Ysgol Gellifor
Co-opted Member Neil Roberts – School Governor Ysgol Borthyn
Councillor Cheryl Williams – School Governor Christ the Word School
Councillor Emrys Wynne – School Governor Ysgol Brynhyfryd & Ysgol Borthyn
Councillor Martyn Holland – School Governor Ysgol Bro Fammau
Councillor Andrew Thomas – School Governor at one of the County's schools
Councillor Tina Jones – School Governor at Ysgol Melyd
Councillor Graham Timms – School Governor at Ysgol Dinas Bran, Llangollen

3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

Review of Cabinet Decision Relating to the Disposal of Land Adjacent to Ysgol Pendref, Denbigh: the Chair invited the Vice-Chair to address the Committee in relation to Cabinet's response to the Committee's recommendations following its examination of the above decision. Whilst Cabinet had debated the Committee's recommendations in some detail and half the Cabinet members had supported the Committee's recommendations the Executive had, on the Chair's casting vote, confirmed its original decision. The Committee's Vice-Chair registered his disappointment with the outcome, and questioned whether Scrutiny could ever persuade Cabinet to review their decisions.

Executive members in attendance at the present meeting advised that in their view Scrutiny had effectively held decision-makers to account and generated constructive debate. A number of matters had been aired which were likely to be considered when determining future planning policy. The use of the casting vote had highlighted that the Council's Cabinet was balanced, and comprised members of different viewpoints.

4 MINUTES

The minutes of the Communities Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 3 September 2020 were submitted.

Matters Arising -

The Scrutiny Officer informed the Committee that a Moorland Management Officer had recently been appointed however the Fire Service had again confirmed that they would not jointly fund the post as they felt providing financial support would set a precedence for others seek funding. However, the Service would continue to

provide Advice and Support where necessary. Members expressed their disappointment with their decision.

Agreement on the recommendation was by consensus. No formal vote was taken. All members indicated they were in favour of the recommendation, no one indicated they were against it and no one indicated they wanted to abstain.

Resolved: - that the minutes of the Communities Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 3 September 2020 be received and approved as a true and correct record

5 IMPACT OF RUTHIN PRIMARY REVIEW

Interim Head of Education, Geraint Davies (GD), Principal Manager – School Support, James Curran (JC) were in attendance for the item.

Councillor Huw Hilditch-Roberts introduced the report providing information regarding the impact of the Ruthin Primary review against the seven well-being goals of the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015. Denbighshire's Cabinet agreed in November 2012 to commence informal consultation regarding a review of Primary Provision in the Ruthin area. It was agreed that the area review would focus on the following objectives: ensuring the sustainability of high quality education provision; improving the quality of school buildings and facilities and providing the right number of places, of the right type in the right location. Cabinet reviewed the findings of the informal consultation and made six recommendations which would impact on school provision in the area.

In essence the outcome for the majority was a good one, the area had benefited from substantial investment, but there had also been experiences from which lessons had been learnt i.e. the consultation in respect of the future of Ysgol Pentrecelyn and Ysgol Llanbedr D C. The experience gained from the consultation had generally been beneficial. Children were being educated in good environments and there had been good investment in the Ruthin area. There has also been an increase in the number of Welsh speakers in the area.

The Interim Head of Education agreed with Councillor Huw Hilditch-Roberts that the investment made to the schools made the whole education experience easier and more productive for teachers and pupils. It was also stated that an unforeseen and unintended positive consequence of the investment was that the larger build schools had made keeping COVID compliant much easier.

During the debate the following points were raised:

- The Chair informed the Committee that following the successful campaign to keep Ysgol Llanbedr D C open, the number of pupils had continued to increase.
- Members queried whether there a follow-up impact assessment had been carried out since the Ysgol Rhewl was closed to see the impact on the community and the economy. Officers responded that an information report had been circulated on the impact of the closure of the school on pupils. The

local member requested that a report be provided on impact on the community and economy of the Rhewl area.

- Officers highlighted the impact on the Welsh language in the area. There had been an increase in the number of children attending Welsh medium schools and also the Welsh language offer had increased.
- Confirmation was provided that the Ruthin Area Review had been delivered within budget, and whilst at the commencement of the review the Welsh Government's (WG) focus had been on reducing surplus places it had during time refocussed on the educational offer for pupils. Recent Estyn reports on schools which formed part of the Ruthin area review had highlighted the positive outcomes for pupils stemming from the review;
- No security concerns due to large open spaces had been raised with school or Education Service staff and no negative comments had been received from School Governors with respect of such matters. The wellbeing aspect could be looked at further. Schools felt more secure with fobs required to gain access to schools and due to secure fencing surrounding schools.
- Work was currently underway in relation to ensuring equitable and practical outside space provision for both Ysgol Pen Barras and Rhos Street School; and
- It was confirmed that renewable energy solutions would be explored as part of the 21st Century Schools Band B bids

At the conclusion of the discussion a vote was taken: 10 voted in favour, 0 against, 1 abstention.

The Committee:

Resolved: having considered the findings in the report and presented during the discussion –

- (i) to receive the information on the impact of the Ruthin Primary Area Review as assessed against the seven well-being goals of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015;***
- (ii) to confirm that, as part of its consideration, it had read, understood and taken account of the Well-being Impact Assessment (Appendix 1);***
- (iii) that an information report be prepared for circulation to members on the economic impact on Rhewl following the closure of the school as part of the Ruthin primary area review;***
- (iv) that information be provided to members detailing the statistics of the Welsh Language Survey undertaken across Denbighshire recently; and***
- (v) that members' gratitude be conveyed to all school based, Education Service, and other Council Services' staff for their efforts and commitment in securing the delivery of education and support to the county's pupils throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.***

Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Finance, Performance and Strategic Assets Julian Thompson-Hill, the Community Benefits Manager Karen Bellis and the Framework Manager Tania Silva were all in attendance for the item.

Councillor Julian Thompson-Hill, Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Finance, Performance and Strategic Assets presented the report (previously circulated) seeking the Committee to consider and comment on the proposed Community Benefits (CB) policy and its alignment with the Council's corporate plans and priorities.

June 2019 the Denbighshire County Council's (DCC) Programme Board for Young People and Housing approved the creation of the Community Benefits Hub (CB Hub), along with the inclusion of community benefits in all relevant contracts. The Hub would provide support, and enable Services to include CBs in contracts at the earliest opportunity.

The commissioning cycle process would be central to achieving best value and outcomes for DCC spend and it is to be expected that by applying a CB approach at an early stage this would go toward increasing value for DCC spend. A CB Hub Officer had been appointed in February 2020 and a CB Hub manager appointed in March. The Community Benefits Policy would support the work and actions of the CB Hub in achieving intended outcomes and targets.

The Council spent £116m in 2017/18 so with a modest 1% CB return this could potentially generate £1.16m in new benefit per annum. This Policy would support the work of the CB Hub, and the council officers it supports, to access such funding and benefits to reinforce the Council's corporate plan priorities that would help communities to become more independent and resilient. The Council delivers its services directly through its own workforce, and through private and third sector organisations. It also procures a wide range of goods, services and works from over 4,500 suppliers, service providers and contractors.

The CB Policy would provide a framework for internal and external stakeholders to be active in continued and developing engagement allowing us to monitor and evaluate, learn lessons, measure impact, and design fit for purpose CB planning the future. The policy would also support the CB Hub to track, monitor and report on community benefit outcomes across the council and become a means of assessing the strength, vitality and performance for the Corporate Plan 2017-2022. This in turn would be used to formulate strategies for improvements and influence policy decisions. It would also provide opportunities to involve local communities in the delivery of community benefits.

The Hub through its work was attempting to maximise the benefits and the impact of all decisions in line with the duties placed upon public bodies by the Well-being and Future Generation Act by ensuring that there was not only a financial gain from contracts but also a positive long term impact.

During the debate the following points were raised:

- The Committee queried whether the officers for the CB would work closely with elected members, officers responded stating they would be

corresponding with local members as they were best placed to engage and communicate with local people on matters of interest to communities.

- Committee members queried whether wording within the policy could be changed from 'limiting pollution' to 'preventing pollution'. Other members and officers advised that 'preventing pollution' or eradicating pollution was virtually impossible to achieve and therefore suggested the words be amended to 'limiting pollution where possible'. The Committee agreed to this amendment.

The Head of Legal, HR and Democratic Services commended the work which had been carried out by the Officers in developing the Policy and driving its implementation forward. He also agreed with the officers' views that regular updates on the Policy and a dialogue with local Member Area Groups (MAGs) on potential schemes within their localities which may benefit from the Policy would be key, if the policy was to realise its potential and maximise funding available for local projects.

Agreement on the recommendation was by consensus. No formal vote was taken. All members indicated they were in favour of the recommendation, no one indicated they were against it and no one indicated they wanted to abstain.

The Committee:

Resolved: - having considered the policy –

- (i) to support its aims and objectives;***
- (ii) to confirm that, as part of its consideration, it had read, understood and taken account of the Well-being Impact Assessment (Appendix 2); and***
- (iii) recommended that on page 4 of the policy, under the 'Environmental Sustainability Initiatives' section that the words "limiting pollution" be replaced by "limiting pollution where possible".***

7 NORTH EAST WALES ARCHIVES AND RUTHIN GAOL

The Lead Member for Housing and Communities Tony Thomas, the Head of Business Improvement and Modernisation, Alan Smith, the Countryside and Heritage Services Manager Huw Rees, and the Business Information Team Manager Craig Berry were all in attendance for the item.

The Lead Member for Housing and Communities presented the report (previously circulated). Its presentation followed a report presented to Communities Scrutiny Committee during October 2019, where plans were outlined for North East Wales Archives (NEWA) and the possible move to Mold by 2025 (subject to National Lottery Heritage Funding(NHLF)). During that meeting, the Committee had requested an update during 2020 on the utilisation of the potential vacated space at Ruthin Gaol.

A working group had been established earlier in the year to develop plans for the long-term use of Ruthin Gaol. The working group consisted of Local Members, key officers and a representative from Ruthin Town Council and had developed exciting

and innovative plans for expanding the heritage attraction at the Gaol, as outlined in the report. The Business Improvement and Modernisation Service had earmarked a £65k reserve for the purpose of facilitating the expansion work.

The plans for the Gaol, were in line with the budget allocated which was £65k, this budget would be used whether the Archives Service would move or not. The proposed expansion of the Heritage Service at the site would incorporate the current vacant building at 46 Clwyd Street. A range of external funding streams were being currently being explored with a view to delivering the entire project.

During the debate the following points were raised:

- The Committee queried why the item was being discussed prior to the public consultation being completed. Responding officers clarified that public engagement was required for the next stage of the bid for NHLF funding the Archives Services Hub. The consultation would be promoted through social media to ensure there was extensive public engagement.
- There would be an Archive presence at the Gaol whether the Archives Service would relocate or not. Records would be available for access on-line or digitally accessed at local Libraries. There would also be a physical presence at the site on one or two days of the week. The details of this were yet to be finalised.
- The partnership between Flintshire County Council (FCC) and Denbighshire's County Council's Archives Services was currently on an informal basis, and either Council could leave the arrangement at any time. However, the partnership was working well at present.
- The proposals for the Gaol were dependent on the Archives Service vacating the site. However, the Council was working on a wider vision for the facility.
- The differences between DCC and FCC's Welsh language policies were raised, with members seeking assurance to which policy would be adopted if the NEWA Hub was built. The Committee was advised that the language policy would be determined as part of the 'lead partner' appointment process if, and when, the bid for NHLF funding was successful.

A vote was taken on the recommendation: 6 in favour, 1 against, 0 abstentions.

Having considered the report on the North East Wales Archive Service and Ruthin Gaol the Committee:

Resolved:

- (i) to note the progress made to date and support the proposals for the future use of Ruthin Gaol;***
- (ii) to register concerns that no contingency plans currently existed for the Archives Service or the heritage offer at Ruthin Gaol if the bid to the National Lottery Heritage Fund for funding to develop a Hub in Mold for the North East Wales Archives Service was unsuccessful; and***
- (iii) that the results of the current North East Wales Archives Service Access Consultation be circulated to members for information.***

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator presented the report (previously circulated) seeking members' to review the Committee's work programme and provide an update on relevant issues.

Discussion focused on the following -

- The Flood Management Responsibilities in Denbighshire NRW had confirmed their availability to attend the December meeting, confirmation was still awaited from Dŵr Cymru if they could attend.
- The Rhyl Regeneration Programme and the Car Park Charging Policy and Residents' Parking Schemes had been scheduled for the January 2021 meeting, with a report on the Planning Compliance Charter being scheduled for May following the recent Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group meeting.
- A request had been made by the Waste Remodelling Board for it to present a progress report to the Committee early in the new year. It was decided to schedule an additional meeting in early February 2021 to discuss the item.

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator reminded members of the scrutiny proposal form (Appendix 2) 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.

Agreement on the recommendation was by consensus. No formal vote was taken. All members indicated they were in favour of the recommendation, no one indicated they were against it and no one indicated they wanted to abstain.

Resolved: having considered the information provided, and subject to the above observations and suggestions–

- (i) to approve the Committee's forward work programme; and***
- (ii) that an additional meeting be arranged for early February 2021 to consider matters relating to the Waste Service Remodelling Project***

9 FEEDBACK FROM COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES

No feedback received.

The meeting concluded at 1:17pm.