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PARTNERSHIPS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Partnerships Scrutiny Committee held by video conference on Thursday, 11 February 2021 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Joan Butterfield, Jeanette Chamberlain-Jones (Chair), Ann Davies, Gareth Davies, Hugh Irving, Pat Jones, Christine Marston, Melvyn Mile, Rhys Thomas and David Williams

Observer – Councillor Meirick Lloyd Davies

Also in attendance -

Councillor Tony Thomas – Lead Member for Housing and Communities
Councillor Brian Jones – Lead Member for Waste, Transport and the Environment.

ALSO PRESENT

Corporate Director Communities (NS), Head of Highways, Facilities and Environmental Services (TW), Works Unit and Streetscene Manager (AC), Democratic Services Manager (SP), Scrutiny Coordinator (RE) and Committee Administrators (SJ and KJ).

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Emrys Wynne.

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No declarations of interest had been raised.

3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

No urgent matters had been raised.

The Chair extended the Committee's best wishes for a full and speedy recovery to the Vice-Chair, Councillor Emrys Wynne, following his recent surgery.

4 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the Partnerships Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 17 December 2020 were submitted.

No matters were raised in relation to the contents of the minutes.

Resolved: - the minutes of the Partnerships Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 17 December 2020 be approved as a true and correct record of the proceedings.

5 HIGHWAYS GRASS VERGE AND HEDGE MAINTENANCE AND PESTICIDE APPLICATION POLICIES

Councillor Tony Thomas – Lead Member for Housing and Communities and the Head of Highways, Facilities and Environmental Services provided members with detailed background information on the Highways grass verge and hedge maintenance and pesticide application policy. The report (previously circulated) had been requested by the Committee following a previous report that had been discussed.

The following points were raised during the discussion –

The Lead Member, Head of Highways, Facilities and Environmental Services and the Works Unit and Streetscene Manager answered members' questions in relation to various aspects of the policies. The following were discussed in more detail:

- Confirmation was provided that research had been undertaken into the different pesticides used in the county. Challenges had been faced over previous years regarding the use of pesticides. It was stressed to members the requirement to control weeds with the method with the least impact on biodiversity and ecology. Alternative solutions to the use of pesticides had been looked into and continued to be researched on an annual basis. Members were informed that further guidance had been sought from Welsh Government to ensure the work the authority completed was in line with National Policy.
- Close working took place with the National group- Amenity Forum to look at best ways to approach biodiversity whilst effectively managing weed growth.
- It was confirmed that 21 pilot sites had been identified as open space experimental biodiversity sites. These sites had been selected based on their nutrient rich basis and because of their animal biodiversity potential. It was hoped to expand the number of sites in the future. The sites had been identified by the Countryside Services as the most suitable to encourage biodiversity. It was confirmed that initially 97 sites had been identified as possible sites. Currently 21 sites had been initiated with a further 2 sites to be developed in the upcoming season. The potential sites had been established across the county regardless of whether they were within the designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) or not.
- The Streetscene Service was working closely with Countryside Services to identify potential future biodiversity sites. Denbighshire was regarded as a national leader in this field of work.
- Confirmation was provided that consultation with local members regarding the additional sites would take place.
- The Council was currently in the process of purchasing new cut and collect grass mowing equipment for use by the Streetscene Service in conjunction with Countryside Services. The latter Service had been able to source grant funding towards the cost of the equipment.

- Members wanted to thank the officers for the addition of the yellow salt bins in the Llangollen area, as this reduced run off from salt piles and its adverse effects on biodiversity and ecology of the area.
- It was difficult to adopt a one size fits all approach across the county. The pesticide application used in the countryside was done so sparingly. Members were advised that the cost of pesticide was expensive and therefore it was only used when and where needed. To reduce the potential environmental damage only the minimum amount of pesticide needed to be effective was used to complete the work. Members were directed to the method statement that had been included in the report pack (previously circulated).
- It was confirmed that generally it was the responsibility of the landowner to maintain overhanging of branches and hedges. The Authority would take responsibility if the overhang impacted a highway. In rural areas verge cutting was in line with the biodiversity policy to encourage growth and development.
- The Highways Grass Verge Maintenance Policy stated that a one metre swathe should generally be applied when cutting grass verges and hedgerows. Health and Safety cuts were undertaken on designated junctions and blind corners etc. When concerns were raised on an individual basis, they would be investigated and addressed on a risk based approach basis. It was confirmed that a back to boundary approach had not been adopted.
- It was confirmed that the Council had adopted a Tree Management Policy. The general approach to tree management had been to only take action if the tree had become hazardous. A summary document had been made available on the public internet for access and information.

The Chair thanked officers for the detailed report and the appendices attached within the pack. The papers had covered a large scope of information for members to discuss. The members wanted to thank the officers and Countryside officers for the positive work that had begun.

It was therefore,

RESOLVED to receive the contents of the report and the associated appendices:

- ***to support the Council's policy with respect of verge and hedge maintenance and its Pesticide Application Policy;***
- ***that a follow up report be presented to Committee in a year's time; and***
- ***that information reports be circulated to each Member Area Group (MAG) detailing the verge, hedge cutting and pesticide application schedules for their respective areas.***

6 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

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

Discussion focused on the following –

- Members agreed to defer the business item on the Health Board Capital Plans for services in Denbighshire until May 2021.
- The Chairs and Vice Chairs Group would be meeting in the near future and may add further reports to the forward work programme (FWP) for the Committee to consider. Confirmation was provided that two reports, relating to Denbighshire Voluntary Services Council (DVSC) and Homelessness, had been included on the FWP by the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs Group, for the Committee for later in the year.
- The April committee meeting had no reports at present, members agreed to keep the meeting in the diary. If nothing had populated the work programme by then, it could be cancelled closer to the meeting date.

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.

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

The meeting concluded at 10.55 a.m.