

PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Performance Scrutiny Committee held in the Conference Room 1a, County Hall, Ruthin on Thursday, 23rd February, 2012 at 9:30 a.m.

PRESENT

Councillors R.L. Feeley (Chair), G.C. Evans, I.A. Gunning, C. Hughes, T.R. Hughes, H.L. Jones and L.M. Morris

The Lead Member for Regeneration and Tourism and the Lead Member for Environment and Sustainable Development attended at the Committee's request and Councillor M.L. Davies attended as an observer.

ALSO PRESENT

Head of Business Planning and Performance (AS), Head of Internal Audit (IB), Corporate Improvement Manager (TW), Head of Finance and Assets (PMcG), Principal Energy Manager (RJ), Head of Planning, Regeneration and Regulatory Services (GB), Business and Performance Manager (EW), Corporate Improvement Officer (EMcW), Head of Housing Services (PMcH), Housing Strategy Officer (SL), Senior Quantity Surveyor (HC), Head of Libraries, Archives and Arts (AJ), Scrutiny Coordinator (RE) and Democratic Services Officer (RAH).

1. APOLOGIES

Councillors P.C. Duffy, M.J. Eckersley and D.W. Lee and the Corporate Director: Business Transformation and Regeneration (BJ)

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No personal or prejudicial interests in any items of business were declared.

3. URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

Attention was drawn to an article published in the Rhyl Journal that week which stated that the developer of the Ocean Plaza project was scaling back its plans for the re-development of the site of Rhyl's former funfair. This was considered to be a matter of urgency pursuant to Section 100B(4) of the Local Government Act 1972.

Councillor T.R. Hughes suggested that this could potentially affect the Council's plans for attracting investment under the Foryd Harbour project. The Head of Finance and Assets noted that the Ocean Plaza project was a private initiative and that such projects would always carry some risk. The Lead Member for Regeneration and Tourism advised the Committee that the Rhyl Going Forward Project Manager was in constant dialogue with the developers.

Councillor G C Evans drew attention to the potential affect of the scaling back of the development on the Council's housing policy and strategy for west Rhyl, as there would be fewer affordable housing units built in the area if the project was scaled down or put on hold. Members asked that the matter be drawn to the attention to the Corporate Director: Business Transformation and Regeneration with a request that elected members be briefed on the latest developments at the Council meeting the following week.

4. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The Minutes of a meeting of the Performance Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday, 12th January, 2012 were submitted.

Matters arising:-

Concerns relating to a local school – this had been raised as an urgent item under Part II business at the Committee's last meeting and members had been briefed on the developments which were of a confidential nature. The Chair had recently spoken to the Head of School Improvement and Inclusion who was confident that matters were now under control.

Examination results at Key Stage 4 and Post 16 – The Chair notified the Committee that the Estyn inspection had been completed and that the inspectors' findings and final report were unlikely to be published prior to the local authority elections, but initial indications were positive.

RESOLVED – *that the Minutes be received and approved as a correct and accurate record.*

EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED – *that under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the Press and Public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 12, 13 and 14 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.*

PART II

The Committee temporarily entered Part II business so a confidential update could be provided by the Scrutiny Coordinator on the developments in addressing the poor condition of the A5104 near Bodidris Hall, Llandegla and the reasons behind the delay in improving the A494 at Gwyddelwern that were discussed at the previous meeting.

PART I

5. ENERGY EFFICIENCY UPDATE

The Head of Finance and Assets (HoFA) presented a report that gave an overview of the Council's progress in reducing energy consumption and becoming more energy efficient following concerns raised by Performance Scrutiny Committee in relation to the Council's performance in meeting targets under the Corporate Plan (EEF002).

The HoFA reported that the receipt of accurate meter readings from sites had increased from 30% in April 2011 to over 80% in January 2012, and that between April 2011 and December 2011 consumption of electricity had reduced by 13%, and consumption of gas had reduced by 24%. Proposed internal sanctions had been deemed to be unmanageable and the improvement in energy efficiency was attributed largely to better housekeeping procedures, for example the £6,000 savings in energy costs realised from improved practices at Llangollen Royal International Pavilion. Capital works for renewable energy schemes had been investigated and an agreement had been reached with E.ON Energy Solutions for the provision of a biomass boiler at Rhyl Leisure Centre, with the energy produced by the boiler to be bought by the Council. This would give an estimated annual saving of £5,000. The Council was also said to be performing well in reducing its production of carbon, with figures from the Local Government Carbon Management Review showing that three of the four Wet Leisure Centres operated by the Council were in the lowest quartile for the volume of carbon produced.

Following consideration by Cabinet in January of Performance Scrutiny Committee's concerns on the Council's performance in this area a range of proposals had been submitted to the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) to continue to improve performance in the efficient use of energy which included:

- The development of corporate awareness;
- Continued improvement in housekeeping practices;
- The identification of poorly performing buildings;
- The investigation of potential avenues to attract external investment in energy schemes; and
- The reinvestment of savings from energy efficiencies into further energy saving schemes

Councillor G.C. Evans asked how accurate the figures were, particularly for electricity consumption in empty buildings and shared sites e.g. schools which were also used as community facilities, and whether Council tenants are recharged for their electricity consumption. The Principal Energy Manager confirmed that there is a combination of approaches for recharging but that electricity costs incurred by the Council are passed on to tenants, and that more accurate and up-to-date figures would be available in April.

Councillor L.M. Morris drew attention to Appendix 4 which listed improvement works that had been undertaken on Council properties and noted that they were principally low cost projects with a quick turnaround for savings, and asked what plans were in place for larger projects that would

provide returns over a longer period. The HoFA said that future projects would depend on the success of projects such as the partnership with E.ON Energy Solutions at Rhyl Leisure Centre, but that the Council was keen to engage with suppliers and to benefit from their expertise in realising projects that would be attainable with minimum investment.

Councillor I.A. Gunning suggested that the heat produced by the underground car park in Rhyl could be extracted and used to heat nearby Council buildings in the Children's Village. The HoFA accepted that the idea could be explored once the Rhyl High School project had been completed, but that any project would have to be subject to a tendering process before any work was commenced. Councillor M.L. Davies added that he had observed lights being left on into the evening in County Hall and that the automatic lighting system was not efficient. The Principal Energy Manager attributed this to a lack of awareness from staff and said that measures were being taken to improve the understanding of the importance of energy efficiency for members of staff.

The Chair and other members commended the more focused approach to energy saving that had been adopted and noted the big improvements that had been made. The Committee:

RESOLVED – *to note the report and the progress made in relation to the Council's energy saving objectives, and to support the proposed measures being developed to continue improvements in carbon reduction and energy efficiency.*

6. PLANNING, REGENERATION AND REGULATORY SERVICES

The Head of Planning, Regeneration and Regulatory Services (HoPRRS) introduced a report, circulated prior to the meeting, which summarised the performance of specific areas within the service and sought the Committee's observations on performance related issues.

Local Development Plan (LDP) – The HoPRRS updated the Committee of recent progress in implementing the LDP, which had been at the 'Examination in Public' stage since 10th January 2012 and would conclude with an independent Planning Inspector's report of recommendations, anticipated for August 2012, which will be formally binding on the Council. A key point of discussion had been the Council's justification for not meeting the Welsh Government's housing growth target for 2021. An LDP Steering Group had also been set up to monitor the progress with the LDP.

The composition and functioning of the LDP Steering Group was questioned and the HoPRRS explained the specific role that the group would be carrying out. It was further explained that the targets for housing development set by the Welsh Government (WG) depended on the housing market as the Council only had the capacity to earmark land for development. The Committee also asked for clarification on the role of the Inspector and the soundness of the LDP. It was said that once the LDP had

been passed by County Council the Inspector determines the viability of the plan and is allowed to make small amendments which the Council is duty-bound to adopt. It was confirmed that the Inspector had the capacity to insist that the target for newly built houses was raised, but a list of potential sites and alternatives for contingency had already been identified and approved should this be required.

On the whole the Inspector seemed to be content with DCC's plan, so fears that the LDP would be rejected outright, as had happened with Wrexham County Borough Council's LDP, were not deemed to be justified at present.

Disability Facilities Grants – DFGs were a statutory requirement under the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 which provide for adaptations to give disabled people better freedom of movement in their homes. DCC had spent over £6.6m over the past 5 years in delivering DFGs, and a move to streamline processes had brought about significant reductions in the amount of time taken to implement alterations.

Councillor L.M. Morris commented that the reduction in the time taken to make the necessary adaptations was a positive indicator but that indicators would not be relevant if in practice people were waiting for long periods to be initially assessed for the purpose of having adaptations made to their homes. The Head of Internal Audit said that his department could examine the indicators being used to ensure that performance measurements were reliable, that the definitions for waiting times e.g. for initial assessments/adaptation commencement and completion times were consistent across authorities and therefore gave genuine comparisons.

North Wales Hospital – The Committee was given an update of the progress of work undertaken to maintain the North Wales Hospital in Denbigh and the difficulties that had arisen from the project. DCC had served an Urgent Works Notice against the off-shore company which owns the hospital site to undertake essential works to prevent the collapse of the building's roof and other essential urgent maintenance works. As no response had been received the Council contracted to have the work to save the buildings completed in default, and had served two notices under s.55 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to recoup payments of £250k for the urgent work, which had not been acknowledged. The projected final cost of the work was estimated at £850k.

As DCC did not want to take ownership of the site, the viability of creating a Single Purpose Vehicle (SPV) was being considered as an option in order to serve a Repairs Notice against the hospital site. Consultations with The Prince's Regeneration Trust had led to the proposal of a Building Preservation Trust to be set up to act as the Single Purpose Vehicle should the Council need to apply a Compulsory Purchase Order, and to develop a project for the site based on an adopted master plan. It was also noted that there had been other enquiries from the private sector and one developer in particular had been enthusiastic after meeting with DCC Officers.

The Committee discussed the reality of attracting private sector investment, and the progress of negotiations in further detail. The HoPRRS confirmed that should a Compulsory Purchase Order be necessary that costs would be minimal as the buildings were now regarded as negative equity. Councillor T.R. Hughes queried whether the circumstances of the project put plans for social housing at risk and was informed that more lucrative offers from developers would be preferred in order that profits could be reinvested in the buildings' maintenance.

Enforcement – The Committee was provided with a brief summary of the areas of responsibility that the regulatory component of the Service covered which included Animal Health, Food Safety and Health & Safety, Housing Enforcement, Pollution and Public Health and Trading Standards. The work of the Community Safety Enforcement team was looked at in more detail and the team's recent developments were summarised, which included

- The introduction of mandatory MOT testing by the Council's own Fleet Department for all taxis licensed by the Authority
- A reduction in alcohol-related crime in Denbighshire and Conwy
- The delivery of education about the dangers of smoking in schools
- The submission sent to County Council for approval to introduce Designated Public Places Order targeted at addressing the increase in complaints related to drinking in the street
- An increase in the number of fixed penalty notices for environmental crimes
- A review into the staffing structure for Planning Enforcement

The Chair registered concern about the level of engagement with taxi drivers and the HoPRRS attributed discontentment amongst taxi drivers to the new MOT requirements, but stated that this had been a necessary measure. Councillor T.R. Hughes also had concerns about taxis operating in Denbighshire that had been licensed in other counties and did not meet DCC standards. The HoPRRS confirmed that any taxis transporting school children would need to be licensed but would also need formal approval from DCC's School Transport Department and be subject to Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks. However, DCC did not have the power to impose their standards on taxis otherwise operating in Denbighshire if they had been licensed by other local authorities.

Appeals – The Committee was given an overview of planning appeals between 2007 and 2011, which included a notable increase in the proportion of successful appeals with 53% of appeals allowed in 2010/2011. Decisions made by the Licensing Committee relating to premises and taxis could be appealed through the Magistrates' Courts and in the last 5 years only 2 significant appeals had been submitted.

The Committee queried if there had been a reason for the increase in successful planning appeals, suggesting that the rate of successful appeals indicated that the initial system might be flawed. The HoPRRS said that there was no particular reason for the increased success rate of planning

appeals but recognised that the decision making process might benefit from further scrutiny.

Bringing empty homes back in to use – Figures were presented to the Committee which detailed the Council's performance over the last 6+ years in bringing vacant private sector dwellings back into occupation. In 2010/2011 154 of the 913 vacant residential properties across Denbighshire (16.87%) were brought back in to use, which compared favourably with the Welsh median of 3.59% and was the 3rd best performance in Wales. It was noted that the data across Wales contained significant discrepancies in the number of empty homes, so there was some doubt over the value of the comparative data but the HoPRRS was confident that the Service was performing well in this respect.

Councillor C. Hughes recognised the strong performance in 2010/2011, but asked why fewer properties had been brought back into use than in 2009/2010. The Business Performance Manager attributed the reduction to the Council being able to undertake a large number of quick, small-scale projects to get properties back in to use at the start of the project, and that the works undertaken in the last year had been more complex. The Lead Member for Regeneration and Tourism added that a loss of WG finance and difficulty in locating the owners of vacant properties had also made regeneration works more difficult.

Houses in multiple occupation – A House in Multiple Occupation (HMO) was explained to be a property in multiple occupancy with shared facilities or self-contained units, e.g. a large house sub-divided into self-contained flats. The Committee was told that while HMOs were subject to planning, building and licensing controls that a significant number of the estimated 366 HMOs in Denbighshire were not licensed. The Council had taken possession of an unlicensed HMO in Rhyl under an Interim Management Order in September 2011, and had successfully prosecuted two other landlords running unlicensed HMOs in West Rhyl.

Financial Plan for Rhyl Regeneration – The Committee was notified of the restructure of the Rhyl Going Forward Team and that the Council had adopted the Rhyl Going Forward Delivery Plan, which concentrates on the West Rhyl Regeneration Area, Town Centre, Tourism & the Coastal Strip and Housing & Neighbourhoods. The report had asked the Committee to determine if a separate report should be produced in order to scrutinise the Rhyl Going Forward project in more depth but the Scrutiny Coordinator informed the Committee that the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group had already decided to allocate the project's scrutiny to the Partnerships Scrutiny Committee, with the West Rhyl Strategy being considered by Communities Scrutiny Committee.

The report also referenced the 'proposal for improvement' of the Rhyl Going Forward project received from the Wales Audit Office's Annual Improvement Report which recommended that:

“By September 2012 the Council should establish how it will support the RGF delivery plan, including:

- Showing how it fits with County regeneration programme
- Confirming the staff and financial resources that will be available to support delivery
- Arrangements for the periodic evaluation of progress”

The Head of Business, Planning and Performance added that the Wales Audit Office provided a degree of scrutiny of the project but that this would need to be supplemented by DCC’s own scrutiny mechanisms.

RESOLVED – *that the Committee:*

- a) notes the recent developments across the Service; and*
- b) recommends that further scrutiny is carried out in respect of planning appeals; planning enforcement; taxi licensing and the regeneration of Rhyl*

Councillor I A Gunning left the meeting at this juncture

7. MONITORING CORPORATE PLAN PERFORMANCE 2011-12 QUARTER 3

The Corporate Improvement Manager (CIM) introduced a report, circulated prior to the meeting, which provided a summary of performance in 2011-12 against the Council’s Corporate Plan, Performance Indicators (PIs) and the Corporate Project Register.

- The most recent annual performance information against the 2012 indicators showed significant improvements from the 2008-09 baseline of the Corporate Plan but performance against 3 of the key indicators was unlikely to exceed the Wales median for 2011-12.
- Performance against the outcomes of the Corporate Plan were generally positive but targets had not been met in respect of the outcomes relating to the improvement objectives associated with meeting the needs of older and disabled people, addressing deprived areas, and reduction of flood risk.
- On the Corporate Project Register the Foryd Harbour and Ysgol Dyffryn Iâl projects had been identified as having a delivery confidence of Red or Red/Amber
- Outcomes measuring performance in Safeguarding Children and Child Protection were neutral, with ‘Red’ status identified in the timeliness of Children In Need plan reviews, for Looked After Children visits within regulations and in sickness absence levels for staff
- Performance against the Protection of Vulnerable Adults (POVA) indicator for Q3 2011 showed that 87.2% of POVA cases demonstrated that the risk to adults at risk was removed or reduced.
- DCC was in danger of losing up to £250k of funding from the Welsh Government’s Outcome Agreement Grant depending on how the Council’s performance is interpreted under the scheme’s point-based performance measurement system. A maximum of £1m was

available but this would be reduced if a score lower than 25/30 was found across the various outcomes.

The Committee acknowledged that the Council had consistently improved its performance against the majority of performance indicators but had concerns with the indicators currently registering a 'Red' RAG status, those which were currently performing below the Wales median, and those which dealt with performance in the areas of safeguarding and child protection.

The Committee registered particular concern towards the risk posed to the Council of losing up to £250K of the Outcome Agreement Grant for 2011/12 due to the fact that 6 out of the 10 Outcome Agreements between it and the Welsh Government were registering below target performance and were at risk of being subject to financial limitations. Whilst the Committee acknowledged that a number of these agreements were delivered in partnership with other organisations and were therefore not wholly within the Council's control, and that factors outside of local control such as the economic climate also impacted on the Authority's power to deliver the expected outcomes, it was of the view that its concerns with respect to these matters should be drawn to Cabinet's attention. Cabinet and officers should be urged to ensure that all possible measures had been taken to mitigate the risks to the Council of financial loss with respect to the Grant from any lack of actions on its part. The CIM explained that indicators giving a 'Red' status served to highlight issues, which are then taken to the relevant Heads of Service who are responsible for addressing poor performance.

It was proposed that, post the local authority elections, the new Committee should be recommended to establish a working group that would meet regularly with the Corporate Improvement Team and the Head of Internal Audit to discuss any areas of concern identified with respect to the Council's performance against performance indicators and Outcome Agreements, in order to closely monitor and respond to slippages. The Committee:

RESOLVED – to

- a) note the highlighted areas where performance targets were unlikely to be met;*
- b) recommend that the Committee's concerns with respect to performance issues, particularly the potential loss to the Council of Outcome Agreement Grant funding be drawn to Cabinet's attention; and*
- c) recommend to the new Performance Scrutiny Committee, following the 2012 local authority elections, that it establishes a working group, consisting of four members of Performance Scrutiny Committee to meet on a regular basis with the Head of Internal Audit and Corporate Improvement Team personnel for the purposes of monitoring performance against the agreed indicators and agreements.*

8. CORPORATE RISK REGISTER

The CIM presented a report, circulated prior to the meeting, which gave details of the development of the new Corporate Risk Register and provided an update on the risks identified, and the measures that had been taken to mitigate these risks, for the 2011-2012 period.

All service risk registers had been reviewed by services prior to the last round of Service Performance Challenge meetings during October and November 2011 and the Corporate Improvement Team analysed all service risk registers to identify any risks of corporate significance or any risk themes emerging across services. Between December and January the Corporate Improvement Manager had met with the Chief Executive and individual members of the Corporate Executive Team (CET) in order to identify corporate risks, discuss proposed actions and to agree timescales and a final draft of the Corporate Risk Register was prepared for the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) meeting on 2nd February to allow for final amendments. The new Corporate Risk Register was presented to the Corporate Governance Committee on 8th February. The Corporate Risk Register would be formally reviewed by CET twice a year following each round of Service Performance Challenges and would be monitored by the Performance Scrutiny Committee and the Council's Internal Audit Department.

An update of the present level of risk in each of the categories identified under the Corporate Risk Register was given and a critical inherent risk was flagged in respect of:

- the risk of a serious safeguarding error where the Council has responsibility
- the risk that DCC would be unable to develop the staff and management capability to deliver the change agenda
- the risk that the time and effort invested in collaboration is disproportionate to the benefits realised
- the risk that the economic environment worsens beyond current expectations, leading to additional demand on services and reduced income
- the risk that strategic ICT does not enable improvement and support change
- the risk that DCC's asset portfolio becomes an unmanageable obstacle to strategic planning

The Committee was particularly concerned about the risk of ineffective collaboration being classified as 'critical' and had doubts about how successful collaborative projects had been. Collaboration between authorities was explained to be a mandatory requirement of the Welsh Government and that the project would take some time before benefits were realised. The CIM said that risk assessment was consciously harsh in order to be honest about the Council's weaknesses, but that any issues identified would be looked at in detail.

The Committee questioned the depth of the Risk Register and asked whether all aspect of DCC's governance were considered in compiling risks. The Head of Business Planning and Performance assured the Committee that all services were considered, even if not every aspect of Council work was explicitly named, but that if the Committee felt that any risks had been overlooked then the Corporate Improvement Team would wish to know. Councillor G.C. Evans highlighted the potential risk posed by the close link between Scrutiny members and officers/Lead Members in the Service Performance Challenge process, and the inferences which could be drawn from scrutiny having such close involvement in a non-public forum for which the minutes/notes were not widely available, and not available to the general public. The Committee:

RESOLVED –

- a) to note and confirm the proposed actions listed in the Corporate Risk Register to address the identified risks;*
- b) that progress in terms of implementing agreed actions be included by exception in future quarterly performance reports; and*
- b) that a training workshop is set-up to ensure that newly elected Councillors understand the purpose of the Corporate Risk Register.*

9. HOUSING SERVICES

The Head of Housing Services (HHS) introduced a report (previously circulated) which provided an update on the performance of Housing Services in respect of delivering the Welsh Housing Quality Standards (WHQS); waiting lists and allocations; tenancy agreements; and rent arrears. The Committee was asked to provide comments on the work being undertaken in these areas, and also to consider the potential of the Single Access Route to Housing (SARTH) project.

Delivering the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS)

An update was provided which detailed the progress in delivering the WHQS and the planned works to bring properties up to the national standard. Further information was given that showed the wider regeneration benefits that the works would bring about and a 90%+ tenant satisfaction with improvements was reported. The paper gave an overview of the costs of the programme of works and highlighted some of the problems faced such as asbestos and changes in regulations.

The Committee discussed the work that had been undertaken and raised a number of points that included:

- the need to be vigorous with contractors to ensure value and effectiveness;
- questions relating to the £500k per annum spent on environmental improvements; and

- the difficulty found engaging tenants and in delivering WHQS in places that do not have tenants organisations.

Housing Allocations and Choice Based Lettings Pilot

The HHS explained to the Committee how a review of the Housing Allocation policy had led to an overhaul of the system, moving from an ineffective and unnecessarily bureaucratic process of administering applications to a more focused system of allocation based around a points-based scoring framework which is more efficient in identifying priority need. A new pilot policy had also been developed which would utilise a range of tools to market 'hard to let' properties in a more targeted way, and the policy would be reviewed after 6 and 12 months from implementation.

Councillor T.R. Hughes highlighted that whilst applications for housing far exceeded the number of properties available, many properties remain unoccupied. This was recognised as being a significant issue, and the HHS explained that reports are compiled every week of unoccupied properties with a view to making them available as quickly as possible. The Committee was also given assurances that every attempt would be made to maintain local connections in housing allocation, but that this was only one aspect in allocating properties. The Committee also registered the need for stricter regulation and closer monitoring of the provision of Council properties to ensure effective allocation.

Tenancy Agreement

The Committee was informed that a new tenancy agreement and handbook was to be drafted to replace the present tenancy agreements for introductory and secure tenancies, which had not been reviewed since 1996. Consultations would be undertaken in conjunction with key stakeholders including tenants, local councillors, police, social services and support services, with the target of receiving Cabinet approval in December 2012 for implementation in February 2013. The new tenancy agreement would comply with current legislative standards and make the responsibilities of both parties more clear. The HHS confirmed that a tenant profiling exercise would be undertaken during the coming year in order to establish whether present tenants were occupying suitable properties for their current circumstances.

Housing Services Rent Arrears Performance

A report was presented which charted the Council's performance in collecting rent arrears from tenants living in Council properties and noted the challenges that could negatively impact upon rent collection such as the scheduled changes to housing benefits and the 5.65% increase in rent levels for Denbighshire's Council-owned properties. Tenant arrears were placed at 1.68% of total debit for 2010/11, which was in the upper quartile for Wales, and actual arrears for 2010/11 were £189,932, within the target of £200,000 and represented a reduction in levels of actual arrears for the fifth consecutive year.

Single Access Route To Housing (SARTH) Project

The HHS gave a report on the Single Access Route to Housing (SARTH) project which was a large scale collaborative project that would co-ordinate the various housing allocation frameworks in North East Wales and allow the allocation process to be more efficient for both applicants and providers. It was explained how demand for housing greatly exceeds the number of properties being let by each of the partner local authorities and Registered Social Landlords (RSLs), and examples were given of the problems and inconsistencies faced by applicants. It was anticipated that a revised framework for housing allocation would offer a more effective and transparent system to those awaiting properties, and would focus on promoting alternatives for the remaining applicants who had little prospect of being housed directly. Consultation with partners in other local authorities, housing associations and Glyndwr University was scheduled to take place over the following 18 months, where a common allocations framework would be agreed.

The project was anticipated to cost £394,955 over a 4 year period and a bid had been submitted to the Welsh Government for partial funding, with the remaining costs to be distributed proportionately between the other partners. The HoFA added that collaboration in this area would be crucial, and that it was important to press ahead with the project even if funding could not be secured from the Welsh Government. Following an in-depth discussion members:

RESOLVED –

- (a) to note the progress made in each of the four areas detailed in the report;*
- (b) to support the plans put in place to improve services in these areas and the objectives of the Single Access Route to Housing (SARTH) project; and*
- (c) that the draft Tenancy Agreement and Handbook be submitted to the Committee for consideration prior to its presentation to Cabinet in late 2012*

10. LIBRARY SERVICES

The Head of Libraries, Archives and Arts (HLAA) presented a report, circulated prior to the meeting, which gave details of the performance of the Council's Library Service as determined by the assessment of the Director of CyMAL (Museums, Archives and Libraries Wales). The assessment had found Denbighshire's Library Service to have performed in the lowest quartile in respect of four performance indicators, and the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group had requested that a report be submitted to explain the assessment's findings.

The assessment was explained to consist of measurement of performance against 14 standards and 20 performance indicators. Denbighshire's Library

Service had met 8 of the standards, partially met 3 of the standards and failed to meet 3 of the standards, which was below the Welsh average of meeting 9 of the standards. Of the three standards that had not been met the one relating to expenditure on library stock had since surpassed the target as the threshold had now been lowered. The same applied to the target for replenishment of lending stock, whilst the staffing level per 1,000 population was within 0.02% of meeting the standard of 0.37%.

The Library Service was performing above the Welsh average in 13 of the 20 indicators, a fact acknowledged by CyMAL, including polling the highest number of participants per 1,000 population at Library events. Four of the indicators were considered to be in the lowest quartile with below-average performance relating to the percentage of library service expenditure spent on books, and the percentage of adults who thought that computer facilities were very good, good or adequate. It was noted that in spite of the relative lack of expenditure on books that Denbighshire was ranked 5th for the number of books issued, and also that all public access computers had been replaced since the survey. The other indicators falling in the lowest quartile related to the percentage of users who thought that the choice of books available was very good, good or adequate, and the percentage of users satisfied that the library buildings offered an attractive environment. Both of these indicators were above the national average so the rankings were said to be rather meaningless and of little concern when the performance of libraries across Wales was so strong.

A Fourth Assessment Framework for library authorities had been issued, covering the 2011-14 period, and Denbighshire's Annual Return for 2011/12 would be submitted to CyMAL in July 2012.

The Committee accepted that the standards and indicators that had not been met were explained to their satisfaction and acknowledged the factors that informed the statistics and the improvements that had since taken place. Members then raised a number of questions relating to the provision of library services in Denbighshire. Councillor G.C. Evans asked if the residents who formerly benefitted from the mobile library service were being engaged after the service ceased. The Committee was advised that disabled residents were able to use the home library service now offered, whereas many of the residents using the mobile service previously were also using the main library buildings as well. Councillor Evans drew attention to the fact that the ICT booking system on the internet was difficult to use. The HLAA stated that the system had recently been upgraded but that there were bandwidth problems that were being investigated.

The Head of Business Planning and Performance questioned where money was being spent if national targets for spending on books and on staff had not been met. This was attributed to the cost of maintaining library buildings, but the service was working with Denbighshire's finance department in order to identify potential savings.

Councillor M.L. Davies enquired about the future of centralised libraries now that books were so widely available electronically, but borrowing across Wales was said to be increasing. Councillor Davies also suggested that arrangements for sharing books between local authorities should be investigated. The HLAA confirmed that the Service was about to launch an e-books lending service. The Committee:

RESOLVED –

a) to note the findings of the CyMAL assessment and confirm its satisfaction with the steps taken to address the targets that had not been met in 2010/11; and

b) that a copy of the Annual Return for 2011/12 be submitted as an information report to the Performance Scrutiny Committee once it had been sent to CyMAL and that a copy is also made available to those involved with the Service Challenge process at that time

11. SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMMES

The Scrutiny Coordinator introduced a report, circulated prior to the meeting, which asked the Committee to review its programme of future work and provided an update on relevant issues.

The Committee was informed that the Self-Evaluation Assessment of the effectiveness of the Council's Scrutiny function would be compiled following the deadline for returned questionnaires on 9th March. The results would inform the Annual Report of Scrutiny which would be presented to the new Council in May.

Members were advised that the information reports relating to the review of the Library Service's Housebound Service, and on the potential for unoccupied library space to be made available for hire to charities and other organisations were included in the Information Brief circulated to Committee members. With respect to the latter the Head of Libraries, Archives and Arts (HLAA) indicated that he had not been approached by any organisations with any such requests.

The Scrutiny Coordinator advised the Committee that their next meeting on 5th April would be the Committee's final meeting under its present composition prior to the election of the new Council. Only two items had been scheduled for the meeting therefore the Committee was asked to suggest additional items for the agenda and following the recommendation for further scrutiny of planning appeals and planning enforcement earlier in the meeting, the Committee agreed that reports on each of these issues be submitted for scrutiny at the next meeting.

Councillor T.R. Hughes suggested that an item on taxi licensing also be considered at a future meeting. However, the Committee agreed that the issue could be incorporated into a forthcoming programmed Internal Audit review, the findings of which would eventually be reported to the Corporate

Governance Committee. If any serious issues or concerns were highlighted in the review's findings the Corporate Governance Committee could ask scrutiny to examine them in detail and monitor the progress in implementing associated recommendations.

RESOLVED – *that, subject to the above amendments, to approve the forward Work Programme as set out in Appendix 1 to the report.*

The meeting concluded at 4.00pm.