

PARTNERSHIPS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Partnerships Scrutiny Committee held by video conference on Thursday, 10 February 2022 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Joan Butterfield, Jeanette Chamberlain-Jones (Chair), Rachel Flynn, Pat Jones, Rhys Thomas and Emrys Wynne (Vice-Chair)

Cabinet Lead Members – Councillors Bobby Feeley (Lead Member for Wellbeing and Independence) and Huw Hilditch-Roberts (Lead Member for Education, Children's Services and Public Engagement) attended for agenda item 5, and Councillor Tony Thomas, Lead Member for Housing and Communities attended for agenda item 6

Observer – Councillor Meirick Davies

ALSO PRESENT

Corporate Director Communities (NS), Interim Head of Service, Business Support Services (AL), Principal Manager (JW), Head of Highways and Environmental Services (TW), Works Unit Manager (AC), Scrutiny Coordinator (RE) and Committee Administrators (KEJ & SJ [Webcaster])

POINT OF NOTICE

The Chair had agreed to vary the order of the agenda in response to a request from officers. Agenda item 6 – Highways Grass Verge and Hedge Maintenance would be brought forward for consideration ahead of agenda item 5 – Regional Population Needs Assessment 2022.

1 APOLOGIES

Councillors Ann Davies, Christine Marston, Melvyn Mile and David Williams

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No declaration of personal or prejudicial interest had been raised.

3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

No urgent matters had been raised.

4 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the Partnerships Scrutiny Committee held on 16 December 2021 were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 16 December 2021 be received and approved as a correct record.

5 HIGHWAYS GRASS VERGE AND HEDGE MAINTENANCE

[This item was brought forward on the agenda with the consent of the Chair.]

Councillor Tony Thomas, Lead Member for Housing and Communities and the Head of Highways and Environmental Services presented the report (previously circulated) on the Council's policy with regard to verge/hedge maintenance and pesticide application. The report had been requested by the Committee following previous consideration of the matter in February 2021.

The report and appendices had been presented to enable the Committee to discuss the current policy and approach being taken ahead of the new financial year. The Committee's attention was drawn to the appendices which detailed the policy on maintenance of highway verges together with the position on the use of pesticides for the purpose of weed control, and included a Welsh Government Information Note on the use of Glyphosate-based products to which the Council's position was aligned. Reference was made to the climate change and ecological ambitions of the Council and whilst there was currently no viable alternative to using pesticides in weed spraying treatments, work was continuing to source potential future alternatives and move towards those ecological ambitions.

During debate members raised a number of issues with the Lead Member, Head of Service and the Works Unit Manager who responded as follows –

- whilst not directly related to the report the Head of Service responded to issues raised by Councillors Emrys Wynne and Bobby Feeley regarding safety concerns over a pathway along the A525 between Cantaba Farm and Jericho Lane, Ruthin. He advised that no significant works had been carried out pending consideration of the site as an active travel route. However, following the decision that it would not be suitable for active travel, plans had been made to improve the situation. He also highlighted the challenges of prioritising financial resources available to best meet demands across the highway network and associated footpaths and confirmed he, and relevant officers, would be willing to discuss those issues further with members, either through the Member Area Groups, the scrutiny process, or other forum as appropriate
- reiterated there was currently no viable alternative to using chemicals to treat weeds on the highway network but work was continuing in that regard. Discussions were ongoing with the Council's existing contractor who was undertaking trials of various potential alternatives on behalf of an English local authority in order to remove the emphasis and reliance on glyphosate, and work was also ongoing with Countryside Services with a view to identifying trial sites in the county for potentially suitable alternatives such as acetic acid
- weed spraying treatments had been reduced over recent years from four times a year to twice a year with most spraying limited to urban areas within a 30 mph zone, and concentrations of glyphosate were strictly limited to 300ml per litre. The use of glyphosate had been approved and weed spraying was carried out in

accordance with current guidelines and constraints. It was noted that neighbouring authorities also used glyphosate for the treatment of weeds

- discussions had been held with Natural Resources Wales previously with regard to the use of chemicals and impact on watercourses with no concerns raised given the Council's compliance with the requirements governing that use
- noted problems experienced the previous year in some urban areas overgrown with weeds with specific reference to Princes Street, Rhyl and an explanation of the timescale and programme of work for weed spraying was provided with much dependent on weather conditions, and lessons had been learnt from the previous season in terms of the timing of weed spraying for best effect
- officers responded to suggestions for more engagement with members and the community to help identify and address problematic areas at an earlier stage, advising that the Works Unit provided regular updates to members and as much notice as possible was given as to the programme of works for weed spraying and grass cutting together with the cyclical maintenance carried out on the A525 and A547 – members were encouraged to contact the Works Unit Manager in the event those communications were not being received
- in terms of supervision and ensuring the quality of work met the necessary standards, the areas were inspected by Street Scene Co-ordinators and there was close working with the grass cutting and weed spraying contractors
- given that weed spraying treatments had reduced from four to twice a year in order to reduce the amount of chemicals used and help meet the Council's ecological ambitions, it was expected that there would be an increase in issues associated with the control of weeds
- as a bee keeper Councillor Rhys Thomas had been satisfied with the use of glyphosate as a systemic herbicide which was effective in the control of weeds and indicated that he was happy to accept the report and its contents; he did not consider it necessary to receive a report back on an annual basis as had been the case previously but only if there was some major change within the policy
- Councillor Rachel Flynn referred to issues associated with Japanese knotweed near the railway line in Prestatyn and she asked that officers take up the issue directly with Network Rail as the organisation responsible; the Chair suggested Councillor Flynn could also look to approach Network Rail directly in that regard
- Council owned hedges were cut to the terms within the policy and issues with privately owned hedges were acknowledged which were the landowners responsibility – the Council had been actively involved in following up concerns raised in that regard and contacting landowners to resolve those issues
- the cut specifications and standards had been set out within the policy and there was discretion to undertake a greater cut than the 1m wide swathe from the edge of the road at specific locations, predominately for health and safety reasons such as ensuring visibility was maintained for road users and pedestrians, and inspections were carried out on a regular basis to mitigate any concerns; in many areas it was not necessary to cut back more than 1m which was in keeping with the work on the wildflower sites and biodiversity
- highlighted the current management arrangements for the wildflower meadow project to allow for growth and development in order to maximise biodiversity benefits and to arrange cutting within a specific time period towards the end of August/early September – the Chair felt it would be beneficial to cut back those

areas more regularly than every 3 years to enhance the appearance of the sites and ensure they were more aesthetically pleasing

- there were currently 75 wildflower meadow sites across the county which would soon be increased to 105 sites, managed in conjunction with Countryside Services, with a large proportion of roadside verges included in the project. Welsh Government funding had been secured to procure specific equipment to cut and collect the grass for those sites and enable other wildflowers to flourish – that work would be undertaken late August/early September.

The Committee, having considered the information supplied in the report, its appendices, along with that provided during the course of the discussion –

RESOLVED to endorse the Council's current policies and approach in relation to highways grass verge and hedge maintenance as well as pesticide application.

6 REGIONAL POPULATION NEEDS ASSESSMENT 2022

The Chair welcomed to the meeting Councillors Bobby Feeley, Lead Member for Wellbeing and Independence and Huw Hilditch-Roberts, Lead Member for Education, Children's Services and Public Engagement who had joint responsibility for the item. The Corporate Director Communities, Interim Head of Service, Business Support Service and Principal Manager were also in attendance.

Councillor Bobby Feeley presented the report (previously circulated) seeking members' views on the North Wales Regional Population Needs Assessment (PNA) and support for its publication. She provided a general overview, in brief –

- it was a statutory duty for local authorities and health boards to develop a joint assessment for the care and support needs of regional population across Wales on a 5-yearly basis and the first PNA published in 2017 had been used as the basis for the latest document
- the PNA had been produced by the North Wales Regional Partnership Board as a joint exercise involving the six local authorities, Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB) and Public Health Wales with the document split into various thematic chapters
- Denbighshire's priorities would be included in the final version of the PNA along with a similar document for each of the local authorities and BCUHB
- the PNA aimed to improve understanding of the population across North Wales and how their needs would evolve and change over the coming years, and had been an expansive piece of work, taking into account the views of the population
- a wide range of consultations had taken place with organisations, partners and around 350 individuals had taken part in a regional survey to inform the PNA
- highlighted next steps with the PNA being taken through the approval processes of the other five local authorities and BCUHB prior to formal sign off by the Regional Partnership Board and submission to Welsh Government in March.

Councillor Feeley thanked all involved in the production of the extensive document. The Interim Head of Service, Business Support Service added that key local messages for Denbighshire and priorities would be included as part of the PNA.

Responding to questions the Lead Members, Corporate Director Communities, Interim Head of Service, Business Support Service and Principal Manager –

- reported on the range of community provisions in place for children to achieve personal outcomes with tailored provision for different cohorts of children, including provision for children with more complex needs, and provided illustrated examples of the commissioned services and work with the third sector and partners to deliver a variety of activities for young people in Denbighshire
- provided assurances that looked after children were placed locally where possible but placements would be made out of county if it was in the child's best interests to do so, for example with a kinship carer, as directed by the Courts, or to access specialist or niche provision not available within the county
- a number of factors may have contributed to the increase in adults reported as suspected of being at risk across the region from 2016/17 to 2018/19, with people being actively encouraged to report their suspicions, the legislative changes around that time and re-launch of the Wales safeguarding procedures
- accepted there was a mixed picture across the region of the number of children on the child protection register but the numbers in Denbighshire had remained consistently between 75 – 90 children on the register in any given year, and further detail on the reasoning behind those fluctuations could be discussed at the Corporate Parenting Forum; assurances were provided that children were only registered where it was absolutely necessary and in their best interests
- it appeared that BCUHB had provided data from a national survey to inform the percentage of adults participating in physical activity (Tables 41 & 42) but the Interim Head of Service, Business and Support Service agreed to seek confirmation of how that data had been captured and report back thereon
- gave an update on the Bwthyn y Ddôl development to provide a residential assessment unit and intensive therapeutic support for children, young people and their families together with staffing resources and associated costs
- since the onset of the Social Service and Wellbeing (Wales) 2014 Act there had been a focus on determining what provision best met the needs of the individual to combat social isolation and loneliness and social workers and occupational therapists carried out initial assessments which were regularly reviewed; much work involved getting people engaged in local community activities and there was currently sufficient day care provision in the main towns to meet current demand – if demand for day care increased the situation would be reviewed
- the Council kept a record of children educated at home and had established relationships with a high percentage of those families but there was a need for reform around home education to support wellbeing and educational outcomes, and as a safeguarding action, which had been raised by the Children's Commissioner for Wales and Directors Social Services and Education in Wales
- work was underway with health partners to improve early diagnosis of dementia and a team of dementia social care practitioners worked specifically with individuals going through a dementia diagnosis or who had already been diagnosed with dementia, with much work to raise awareness of the issue. However, it was acknowledged that there was further work to do in that regard.

Councillor Bobby Feeley highlighted that the Regional Partnership Board was launching a Children's Sub Group to provide a greater focus on children and young people which had also been reflected in the Committee's questioning of the report.

The PNA was a live document and additions would be made as more information became available to reflect the changing care and support needs of the population in order to identify how best those needs could be met going forward.

The Committee welcomed the comprehensive report and highlighted the importance of capturing and using that data, both for the purposes of informing future provision and ensuring the needs of the population were met, but also to help inform other local and regional plans and strategies moving forward.

RESOLVED, subject to the above comments and observations, to recommend the publication of the North Wales Regional Population Needs Assessment.

7 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Coordinator 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 Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs Group had previously resolved that no scrutiny committee meetings should be held after commencement of the pre-election period (18 March) unless urgent business necessitated a meeting being held, therefore the Committee's next scheduled meeting on 7 April had been cancelled with no further meetings scheduled during the current Council term
- the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs Group had allocated an item for consideration by the new Committee at their meeting in October 2022 with regard to partnership working in relation to mental health
- Councillor Joan Butterfield suggested the Royal Alexandra Hospital, Rhyl as a future topic for scrutiny by the new Council given the lack of progress with the project and need to keep the matter under close review. The Scrutiny Coordinator referred to the process for allocating potential items for scrutiny via the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs Group following completion and submission of the proposal form which had been attached as an appendix to the report.

RESOLVED, subject to the above, to confirm the Committee's draft forward work programme, as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report, for presentation to the new Partnerships Scrutiny Committee post the 2022 local authority elections for it to take forward and develop in future.

8 FEEDBACK FROM COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES

No feedback from Committee representatives had been received.

Given that it was the Committee's last meeting of the current Council term the Corporate Director Communities, on behalf of officers, thanked the Chair and the Committee for the excellent scrutiny and challenge undertaken during that period. The Chair also thanked the Committee for their support and scrutiny work and conveyed her best wishes to those standing for re-election.

The meeting concluded at 11.50 am.