

COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Committee held in Conference Room 1a, County Hall, Ruthin on Thursday, 12 April 2012 at 9.30 am.

PRESENT

Councillors David Smith (Chair), James Davies, Diana Hannam, Rhys Hughes and Cefyn Williams

Observers: Councillors William Cowie, Gwilym Evans and Gwyneth Kensler

ALSO PRESENT

Principal Regeneration and Investment Strategy Officer (RW), Section Manager: Network Management (TT), Community Engagement Manager (DD), Business Transformation Project Coordinator (AB), Scrutiny Coordinator (RE) and Committee Administrator (KEJ)

POINT OF NOTICE

The Chair congratulated Councillor Cefyn Williams on being one of the four county councillors standing unopposed in the forthcoming county council elections.

1 APOLOGIES

Councillors Brian Blakeley, June Cahill, Richard Jones, Peter Owen, Selwyn Thomas and the Corporate Director Learning and Communities

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No declarations of personal or prejudicial interest had been raised.

3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

The Chair declared that he intended to include for discussion the following matter which required urgent attention – **B5105 Mwrog Street, Ruthin.**

Councillor Rhys Hughes referred to recent negative publicity regarding traffic safety concerns relating to a section of Mwrog Street, Ruthin which campaigners had indicated was too narrow and hazardous for pedestrians. The Section Manager: Network Management reported upon a recent meeting held with residents to discuss their concerns and he advised that various options were being explored. The Chair commented that county councillors had not been involved in that meeting because of the purdah period and it was agreed to consider the matter further following the forthcoming county council elections.

RESOLVED that the position be noted and the issues raised regarding Mwrog Street, Ruthin be considered by the committee following the county council elections to be held in May 2012.

4 MINUTES

The minutes of the Communities Scrutiny Committee held on 1 March 2012 were submitted.

Matters Arising –

Page 5 – Item No. 7 Changes to the Supporting People Strategy for 2012/14 and Supporting People Operational Plan for 2012/13 – In response to a question from the Chair the Scrutiny Coordinator advised that Cabinet had agreed the changes to the Strategy and Operational Plan at its meeting on 20 March 2012. Changes to the Regional and National Supporting People Programme would be considered by the Partnerships Scrutiny Committee following the elections in May 2012.

Page 9 – Item No. 10 Scrutiny Work Programme – The Scrutiny Coordinator advised that the joint Task and Finish Group meeting established to consider proposals for the North Wales Safer Communities Board had been cancelled because proposals would not be developed until early summer. It was likely that a scrutiny committee would consider the proposals prior to their submission to Cabinet.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 1 March 2012 be received and approved as a correct record.

5 ETAPE CYMRU

The Principal Regeneration and Investment Strategy Officer (PR&ISO) and Section Manager: Network Management (SM:NM) submitted a report (previously circulated) informing members of progress with the arrangements for the Etape Cymru 2012 cycling event since the committee's last meeting on 1 March 2012. The committee had previously resolved to endorse the road closure to allow the event to take place subject to a number of conditions.

Actions undertaken since the last meeting included –

- regular communication between the Council and Participate Sport (event organiser) and Wrexham County Borough Council
- production of an updated communication plan (circulated at the meeting) with an agreed route and timings for the temporary closure of the Horseshoe Pass (to ensure it remained open over lunchtime). Specific timings needed to be agreed for some surrounding roads and the route map would be finalised within the next two weeks
- consultation had been undertaken with town/community councils and county councillors along the route and a press release issued (Appendix 2 to the report)
- consultation and engagement had been undertaken with Council departments and relevant Lead Members
- the Safety Advisory Group had met to oversee traffic, transport and pedestrian management procedures (Appendix 3 & 4 to the report) and plans had been produced to address consultation, communication and traffic management issues identified in the debrief following last year's event

- initial meetings with key businesses had been held to discuss opportunities for them to engage and benefit from the event with future planned visits to businesses along the identified route once the route map and timings had been finalised, and
- a media launch of the event in Llangollen.

Unfortunately it had not been possible for Participate Sport to attend today's meeting but the officers expressed their confidence that the event organisers were addressing the issues identified as requiring attention and gave an undertaking to ensure that agreements reached over the event would be met. The PR&ISO also highlighted the publicity value of such events and economic benefits generated for Denbighshire as a visitor destination.

Members were reassured by Participate Sport's reputation and previous experience of organising cycle/sporting events and in hearing how they were effectively handling the arrangements to prevent a repeat of the problems encountered at last year's inaugural event. Councillor Rhys Hughes referred to his personal experience of dealing with representatives from Participate Sport, particularly at a meeting of Llantysilio Community Council when changes to the proposed route had been agreed which would ensure fewer people were affected over the event period. He also confirmed that the organisers had met with businesses to reassure them over the event. The SM:MN confirmed that businesses had been assured that the Horseshoe Pass would be open to traffic by 11.00 a.m. although some tidying up of the route may still be required after that time. Reference was also made to a cycling event at the Clwydian Range and the potential for other routes as a consequence of Etape Cymru. In response to a question from Councillor Gwilym Evans, the SM:MN confirmed that the council was not providing financial support for the event but a significant amount of officer time had been spent in helping to organise the event which would be absorbed by the service.

The Chair reminded members that a report detailing the impact of the 2012 event would be submitted to the committee for consideration in October 2012.

RESOLVED that the progress report on the arrangements for the Etape Cymru 2012 cycling event be received and noted.

6 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT UPDATE

The Community Engagement Manager (CEM) submitted a report (previously circulated) seeking members' support for the approach in developing a structured methodology for the Council's consultation and engagement activities. The approach sought to ensure that community engagement was streamlined and carried out to a consistently high standard throughout the county.

In light of the committee's previous comments on the draft strategy a section on consultation and engagement with elected members had been included (Appendix 1 to the report referred). The CEM updated members on progress made with the 'Let's Keep Talking' Community Engagement Strategy and elaborated upon particular engagement activities including –

- On-line Consultation Management System – potential introduction of a dedicated ‘consultation page’ linked to the website providing software for creating surveys, analysing data and generating reports, and the advantages of adopting such a system
- New approaches to engaging with young people – proposals to deploy young students to act on the council’s behalf to engage and consult with fellow young people using social networks and social media in social situations or at locations where they naturally congregate
- Local Service Board (LSB) Communication Plan – a draft plan would be presented at the next LSB meeting setting out overall communication objectives: supporting the LSB in communicating with others; key messages and a communication work plan.

The Strategy was being produced in an easy read format and would be subject to further consultation before being adopted as a guide for services and members. The committee welcomed the inclusion of a section within the strategy to deal specifically with elected members. In discussing the report with the CEM members raised the following key issues –

- councillors were not always kept informed of issues affecting their wards and there was an inconsistency of approach
- when alerting members of particular issues within their specific wards consideration should also be given to the impact on the wider community and contact should also be made with other elected members if the issue could impact on other ward areas. Paragraph 9.2 of the ‘Community Engagement Strategy’ should be amended accordingly to ensure that this happened
- assurances were sought that officers were being made aware of the protocol for engaging with councillors; that they could easily identify relevant ward members, and that clear, accurate boundary maps were readily available
- officers may be involved with town/community councils in particular activities and it should be recognised that county councillors may not be aware of such issues and needed to be kept informed
- the need to ensure that up to date information for town/community councils was available on the council’s website with e-mail links where appropriate
- it was suggested that the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chair’s Group consider which committee was best placed to scrutinise the Local Service Board.

The CEM agreed to include references within the strategy to reflect members’ comments and further improve communication with councillors and ensure officers were made aware of the requirements within the protocol. He advised of the intention to visit departments to raise awareness of the strategy and the Charter between the Town/Community Councils and the County Council and officers responsibilities in that regard. In terms of accessing information the CEM agreed to investigate the accuracy of the ward maps and to ensure there was a clear process to easily identify ward members for particular areas. He would also check that the information provided by town/community councils had been recorded on Denbighshire’s website. In response to a question from Councillor Rhys Hughes, the CEM advised that there were no plans to amalgamate Area Member Groups which would require a change to the council’s constitution.

RESOLVED that, subject to members' comments as detailed above, the committee supports the approach outlined in the report in developing a structured methodology for the Council's consultation and engagement activities to ensure the Authority adopts a professional, co-ordinated and cost effective approach.

At this juncture (10.25 a.m.) the committee adjourned for a refreshment break.

7 GETTING CLOSER TO THE COMMUNITY

The Business Transformation Project Co-ordinator (BTPC) submitted a report (previously circulated) updating members on progress with work undertaken by the Getting Closer to the Community Programme Board since the last report considered by the committee on 27 October 2011. The 'Getting Closer to the Community' Action Plan (Appendix 1) had been attached to the report.

Following a rationalisation process the latest Action Plan featured 29 actions across the following three priority areas –

- (1) Representation and Engagement – How to engage with communities
- (2) Service Delivery – Develop the right culture and attitudes
- (3) Community Development – Community, Enrichment & Empowerment

The actions had been amended to reflect the comments and concerns raised by members at their meeting on 27 October and the BTPC and Community Engagement Manager (CEM) updated members on those issues and further discussed matters with members relating to the following –

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) – much work had been undertaken since October and a more robust system of recording complaints and feedback to complaints had been introduced. Members were pleased that feedback had been improved and Councillor James Davies suggested it would be useful to provide a contact name in e-mail responses to councillors. Councillor Gwilym Evans asked that councillors receive a list of complaints dealt with in their particular ward areas on a monthly basis which could be provided electronically. He also highlighted the importance of ensuring that all councillors utilised the CRM system to register issues and complaints and did not approach individual officers to resolve matters. With regard to Priority 2, Action 2 (page 45 of the Action Plan) the BTPC agreed to change the measure for improving the Council's responses to complaints to better reflect the outcome to be achieved.

Regeneration – robust actions had been introduced to ensure delivery of the strategy for better engagement with the business community and most of the last Programme Board meeting had been dedicated to that issue. An options appraisal in each area (Coastal, Central and Dee Valley) would be carried out to ensure a robust strategy to deal with the business community and formalise engagement with them.

Community Funding – a paper would be submitted to CET about how funding could be better allocated to communities for project delivery. As that work was in the

early stages the matter would likely be brought back to this committee for further consideration. Members reiterated their concerns regarding the current lack of structure or guidelines to address funding allocation together with the onerous application process which disadvantaged applicants for smaller projects. The BTPC responded that the paper to CET would seek to address the allocation of community funding to ensure a fair and equitable process of identifying projects and develop a criteria to be met before funding would be released. She added that the application process would also be made clearer.

Councillor Diana Hannam highlighted the perception that the Council allocated more funding to projects in Rhyl to the detriment of other parts of the county which she felt had been due in part to European grants allocated to Rhyl's most deprived wards. In order to dispel that misconception she asked that an analysis of expenditure within the County be undertaken to provide a true reflection of the Council's spend and identify any disadvantaged areas. The Chair agreed that a breakdown of figures would be useful.

During consideration of the Action Plan the officers responded to members' questions, particularly regarding the residents survey, Community Development Fund and Community Forums. The CEM explained that alternatives to the Community Forums needed to be considered due to lack of attendance and indicated that more focus may be placed on specific service areas engaging with communities and clients and work would likely be undertaken with Local Service Board colleagues in that regard. It was agreed that any proposals to replace the Community Forums be submitted to the committee for consideration.

At the invitation of the Chair, Councillor Cefyn Williams asked whether it would be possible for local ward members to be present at Citizenship Ceremonies for applicants living in Denbighshire. The request had been made to him by Councillor Gwyneth Kensler who had indicated that some Denbigh residents had taken part in a Citizenship Ceremony and had been disappointed to note that the local member had not been present. The Chairman, Councillor William Cowie advised that the Lord Lieutenant and he (as Chairman of the County Council) were the only officials in attendance and therefore he would welcome the presence of a local member. Members also supported the proposal and it was agreed that the matter be raised with the Member Support and Development Manager as the responsible officer.

RESOLVED that –

- (a) *subject to members' comments as detailed above, the Getting Closer to the Community Action Plan as set out in Appendix 1 to the report be supported;*
- (b) *a report on the draft proposals for alternative arrangements to replace Community Forums be submitted to the committee in September or October 2012, and*
- (c) *the Community Engagement Manager approach the Member Support and Development Manager with a view to providing an opportunity for local members to attend future Citizenship Ceremonies for applicants living in Denbighshire.*

8 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Coordinator submitted a report (previously circulated) seeking members' review of the committee's future work programme and providing an update on relevant issues. A draft forward work programme (Appendix 1); Cabinet's forward work programme (Appendix 2), and Progress on Committee Resolutions (Appendix 3) had been attached to the report.

Members were also asked to consider whether topics previously identified were still relevant for future scrutiny and to consider future scrutiny of the work streams arising from the Rhyl Going Forward Programme. During consideration of the committee's work programme members scoped the purpose and expected outcomes of a number of report items they wished to scrutinise in the future and agreed to –

- receive reports on the effectiveness of enforcement action with regard to dog fouling and Public Transport within the County (including TAIH and rural transport) at an early stage following the forthcoming county council elections
- refer the item on Challenging Behaviour and its impact on Council services to the Partnerships Scrutiny Committee
- receive future reports on the Quality and Provision of Community and Education Facilities; Community Sustainability; Flood Risk Areas within Denbighshire; Review of Heritage and Arts Assets, and Disposal of Council Buildings, Property and Land
- defer consideration of the relevance of particular items for future scrutiny until after May's county council elections relating to Access to the Countryside; Waste Management Provision for Business and Schools; Transfer of Services to Town Councils; the effectiveness of CCTV, and Wind Farms
- delete the report scheduled for September 2012 on Ysgol Dinas Bran as the transport issue had been virtually resolved
- scrutinise the three major projects/work streams arising from the Rhyl Going Forward Programme and dedicate their meeting on 13 September 2012 to that purpose. Members asked that the meeting be held in Russell House, Rhyl and that outside organisations involved with the Programme be invited to attend. It was also requested that the meeting be drawn to the attention of local residents so they may also observe proceedings. Following that meeting members felt it would be useful for the committee to undertake a tour of the key sites around Rhyl.

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

9 FEEDBACK FROM COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES

No reports from committee representatives had been received.

Prior to the close of the meeting the Chair took the opportunity to thank members for their service on the committee and conveyed his best wishes for the future. Councillor Rhys Hughes indicated that he had enjoyed his time on the committee and thanked the Chair for his contribution.

The meeting concluded at 11.30 a.m.