

PARTNERSHIPS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Partnerships Scrutiny Committee held in COUNCIL CHAMBER, COUNTY HALL, RUTHIN and BY VIDEO CONFERENCE on Thursday, 7 July 2022 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Joan Butterfield (Chair), Kelly Clewett, Pauline Edwards, Bobby Feeley, Martyn Hogg, Terry Mendies, Raj Metri, Peter Scott, David Williams and Elfed Williams

Cabinet Members – Councillor Rhys Thomas (Lead Member for Housing and Communities) attended for agenda item 7 and Councillor Elen Heaton (Lead Member for Health and Social Care) attended for agenda items 6 and 8.

ALSO PRESENT

Head of Legal, HR and Democratic Services (GW), Head of Planning and Public Protection (EJ), Interim Head of Community Support Services, Support Services (AL), Senior Auditor (LH), Head of Communities and Customer Services (LG), Programme Manager – Housing Development (MD), Service Manager, Business Support & Communities (NJ), Chief Internal Auditor (BC), Service Manager - Specialist Services (AP), Interim Head of Community Support Services (DS), Scrutiny Coordinator (RE) and Committee Administrators (SJ & KEJ [Webcaster])

The Chair welcomed Hedd Vaughan Evans - Head of Operations for the Portfolio Management Office of Ambition North Wales, Stuart Whitfield – Digital Programme Manager and David Matthews – Land and Property Programme Manager representing the North Wales Economic Ambition Board (Agenda item 6).

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Jeanette Chamberlain-Jones.

Members were informed the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) representative Nicola Stubbins had sent her apologies. Gary Williams, Head of Legal, HR & Democratic Services, was in attendance for SLT support.

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Councillors Kelly Clewett and Elfed Williams both declared personal interests in business item number 8 on the agenda 'Annual Report on Safeguarding Adults in Denbighshire'. Councillor Clewett as an employee of Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, and Councillor Williams as a director of the Conwy and Denbighshire Mental Health Advocacy Service.

Both councillors were advised to complete the required Declarations of Interest Forms and submit them to Democratic Services.

3 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR

Nominations were sought for the office of Partnerships Scrutiny Committee Vice-Chair for the 2022/23 municipal year. Councillor Peter Scott was nominated for the role by Councillor Terry Mendies and seconded by Councillor Bobby Feeley. No other nominations were put forward.

The Committee therefore:

Resolved: that Councillor Peter Scott be elected Vice-Chair of the Partnerships Scrutiny Committee for the 2022/23 municipal year.

Councillor Peter Scott thanked Committee members for their support and for entrusting him with a term as Vice-Chair of the Committee.

4 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

None.

5 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the Partnerships Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 10 February 2022 were submitted.

The Chair informed the Committee she had been present at the meeting and moved the minutes as a true record.

Matters Arising – Councillor Peter Scott asked if there was any further development or information regarding the change to pesticide used. The Chair informed the Committee that the service had recalled the pesticide that had been in use and replaced it with a different chemical pesticide that was more effective. The Committee.

Resolved: that the minutes of the meeting held on 10 February 2022 be received and approved as a true and correct record of the proceedings.

6 NORTH WALES ECONOMIC AMBITION BOARD ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22

Lead Member for Health and Social Care, Councillor Elen Heaton introduced the report (previously circulated) on behalf of the Leader, Councillor Jason McLellan Lead Member for Economic Growth and Tackling Deprivation. Members heard the purpose of the report was to provide members with the annual and quarterly performance summary of the work conducted by the North Wales Economic Ambition Board (NWEAB). She introduced officers from the NWEAB who were in attendance to present to members a presentation and answer the Committee's questions.

The Head of Planning and Public Protection thanked Councillor Heaton for introducing the report. Members were provided with some background to the growth deal and the highlight headlines of the annual report by NWEAB officers. The report provided information on the projects within each of the growth deal programmes. The report also provided guidance on the governance of the growth deal. Confirmation of Denbighshire County Council officers' involvement in the projects was stressed. Officers attended project board meetings to input Denbighshire's perspective on the given project.

Hedd Vaughan Evans, Head of Operations for the Portfolio Management Office of Ambition North Wales, presented members with a PowerPoint presentation. He introduced to the Committee Stuart Whitfield the Digital Programme Manager and David Matthews, Land and Property Programme Manager.

Members were provided with background information on the Board and advised that the Programme Office reported directly to the Board which set the direction of the work and took any decisions required. The NWEAB had been in existence since 2016, setting a vision for North Wales. The Heads of Terms Agreement for the Growth Deal had been signed in 2019 following a lot of work and discussions between officers across the board. The Portfolio Office was subsequently created in January 2020. By the end of 2020 members heard the Board had signed and secured the final deal with both Governments, securing £240m investment into North Wales. Confirmation was provided that the growth deal had clear objectives built into the deal with the government.

The North Wales growth deal had been agreed on the basis of a portfolio of 5 programmes; Agri-food and Tourism, High Value Manufacturing Programme, Low Carbon Energy, Land and Property and Digital Connectivity. Members were presented with an extract that summarised the progress of each of the projects. The representatives guided members through each project and provided further detail of the work completed and work ongoing.

Included in the papers had been the annual report which highlighted some of the highlights from the activities of Ambition North Wales. Members heard over £1million of additional revenue had been secured to fund specific activities that complimented the growth deal. This included an innovation grant of £500k in partnership with Coleg Cambria Llysfasi to look at pilot projects to help the agricultural sector to decarbonise. An energy strategy had also been adopted for North Wales, working closely with Welsh Government. Highlighted to members was the successful delivery of the full fibre network project which was a UK Government funded project. The project delivered full fibre connectivity across public services across North Wales. Over 300 sites had been reached, significantly improving the quality of connectivity and the resilience of connectivity. Denbighshire had 65 sites connected. Members heard an element of the project had been to support rural areas with connectivity. It was hoped with the aid of Welsh Government funding the scope of the project could be extended to expand to a further 28 sites in the region.

The Chair thanked the officers for the presentation and for attending the meeting remotely to present the report. The following elements were discussed in more detail:

- The key strategic site of Bodelwyddan - substantial work was on going with the project. Planning policy may create substantial changes to the originally approved. Discussions with Denbighshire officers to assess the changes would take place and the project would be reassessed in the growth deal. It was hoped a decision on the project would be reached by the board by early winter. A horizon scanning questionnaire exercise was taking place to assess any potential alternative projects to be considered by the Board. The NWEAB would make the decision on any changes to the growth deal projects including removal or replacement projects.
- The Low Carbon Energy Centre of Excellence project with Bangor University had been scored as behind delivery due to a request from the University to delay of four months to confirm the scope of the project. The delay had not been accepted by the board as yet.
- Clarity on the Llysfasi Net Zero Farm project was also anticipated in the coming months. The delegated authority lay with the NWEAB to determine if a project would be removed from the programme.
- The funding received for Growth Deal projects was from a completely separate funding source to the Levelling Up funding.
- Inflation was a risk that would be considered by the Board. No further funding from either government would be received. Each project would be evaluated and inflation cost factored into the costing and any savings that could be made.
- Members heard all growth deals were required to have growth value added (GVA) as a target. It had been included on each project set on an individual project basis looking at the GVA uplift from jobs created. It had to be recorded as part of the growth deal. The Board viewed a range of benefits particularly the impact the projects had on communities and the area.
- The scope of the Digital Connectivity programme did not include schools. Welsh Government had historically invested in fibre connectivity to schools. Information provided to the board in 2019/20 indicated there being no additional need for connectivity to schools in the region. Confirmation was provided that the company Open Reach had been used for the scheme. Members heard Open Reach had published its exchange area plans for the UK including North Wales setting out its plans of investment.
- Confirmation that the video on Communication and Engagement project be circulated to members.

The Head of Planning and Public Protection provided reassurance that Denbighshire officers were working closely with the NWEAB colleagues. It was hoped that a potential Council briefing session on the Growth Deal and programmes could be arranged to brief all Councillors.

The Chair thanked all officers for the detailed presentation and response to members' comments and questions.

The Committee:

Resolved: subject to the above observations along with the answers and assurances received during the course of the discussion, to receive the North Wales Economic Ambition Board's Quarter 4 Performance Report 2021/22 and its Annual Report for 2021/22.

7 HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING SUPPORT SERVICES

Councillor Rhys Thomas, Lead Member for Housing and Communities introduced the Homelessness and Housing Support Services report (previously circulated). The report on the work on the Homelessness Service included as appendix 1 a progress report on the service provision, presented on behalf of the Internal Audit department of the Council. The Lead Member reminded members that homelessness had been and continued to be a challenging issue for all local authorities. New approaches had been called for by Welsh Government.

The Interim Head of Community Support Services, informed members that the report was a follow-up report to the one that had previously been reported to the Committee late last year. It was stressed that the Homelessness Service had undergone significant changes in 2021. A multi-disciplinary team had been established to support the homelessness team. Following the implementation, the Service had become more bedded in to the approach that Welsh Government wanted local authorities to take. This approach looked at addressing the wider impact of homelessness as well as trying to secure permanent accommodation.

The numbers in emergency and temporary accommodation remained at around 180 households. This figure included single people or families. The number was remaining constant as households were supported. Members heard the biggest concern the Service was the number of single people under the age of 35 presenting as homeless. Another challenge faced by the team had been to source and allocate housing for larger families. During the last 12-18 months, due to close working with the Community Housing team and registered social landlords, the Service had secured 99 households into permanent tenancies in social housing.

Working with the private rented sector to establish a private rent sector scheme had been challenging, due to the change in the housing market with a rise in demand for rented properties. The Welsh Government had subsequently changed the scheme which the Homelessness Team were in the process of implementing.

Members were informed that officers had been asked to develop a rapid rehousing approach. Development of an interim plan to submit to Welsh Government had begun. Rapid rehousing was where an individual would come into the homelessness system, be assessed, a tenancy sought and found and the Service would ensure that all the necessary support was in place. It was hoped that this would reduce the reliance on using emergency accommodation.

A contract had recently been awarded to deliver early intervention and prevention services. The Service had through the housing support grant funding procured a contract which was made up of a partnership agreement to support individuals and prevent people becoming homeless. The contract had been awarded in April 2022 and was just about to go live.

Members were informed that in Denbighshire the numbers of rough sleepers were relatively low. Officers were aware of those individuals whose choice it was to

'sleep rough;' therefore every effort was made to support and manage those people maintaining contact with each individual. Households entering the Homelessness Service usually did so as a result of a loss of tenancy of a property.

The Senior Auditor confirmed the original audit of homeless accommodation provision had concluded in March 2020 and raised seven risks and issues, two of which had been major risks. The low assurance rating had been raised due to the significant risks identified. The first follow up audit review was conducted and reported to Partnerships Scrutiny committee in December 2021. The follow up audit demonstrated a number of improvements but the time to deliver the improvements had taken longer, therefore the low assurance rating remained. The second follow up review recently conducted identified that considerable progress had been made. Only 5 of the 18 actions were remaining. The main areas of improvement remaining were around the recording of case reviews and putting in place written procedures. Following the second review the assurance rating had been awarded a medium rating. A further review was scheduled for December 2022.

The Chair thanked all the officers for the detailed papers. Officers provided further information on the following points raised by members:

- Housing First services were still being provided. Housing First was offered to the most entrenched homeless people with the most complex needs. It was a longer term service that offered 24/7 support. It provided ongoing intensive support. Funding had been received from Welsh Government and was currently continuing to be received. The rapid rehousing model included Housing First type provision.
- Under 35s remained a concern for the Homelessness Service as they were only entitled to local housing allowance rates for housing benefit. It was lower than what was typically affordable for those individuals. Officers were not aware of any changes expected to change the level of benefits.
- Following the Covid pandemic the numbers of households entering homelessness had remained static not reducing or increasing.
- A high assurance rating had been considered by Internal Audit following the recent review, but as two actions remaining were related to major risks the review was kept to a medium assurance rating. If the progress continued as it has been it was hoped the next review would result in a high assurance.
- Emergency accommodation was limited in rural areas. The Service did try and accommodate households in the areas where they requested, but this was not always possible.
- Social housing demand was monitored across the whole of the county, with the majority of the demand observed being in the north of the county. The law stipulated that individuals could only identify the county area of their preference for social housing, although the local authority made every effort to offer housing in the areas of the individual's choice wherever possible. When social housing became available, the Homelessness Team were approached first to offer to potential households.
- Members were reminded there was a policy in place to buy back former council properties that had been purchased as part of the Right to Buy Scheme. When those properties were placed on the market the Authority did look to purchase them.

- The Team worked closely with the Revenue and Benefits Service and were provided with access to data that could identify potential households at risk of homelessness. This piece of work had been conducted as a pilot scheme and was successful. Members heard that often the team relied on families communicating with the team for support. It was hoped that this early intervention work would be beneficial to support families and individuals as they encountered difficulties, encouraging them to contact the Service as early as possible with a view to averting a housing crisis at a later date.
- Where households required adapted properties, a team of officers supported individuals and worked closely with the family to assess needs and what support they required. Emergency accommodation for households requiring additional needs had been an issue. Accommodation already owned by the Council was often adapted to accommodate the needs of households.
- A private rented sector landlord forum was established, to allow officers to communicate with landlords and partners to open a dialogue of needs and discuss concerns.
- Landlords were required to be registered with Rent Smart Wales. It was one of the conditions that officers assessed when tenancies were obtained with landlords.

The Chair thanked all the officers for the detailed report and thanked all officers and their teams for the continued support for individuals and households.

At the conclusion of the discussion the Committee:

Resolved: subject to the above comments –

- (i) that it was assured the implementation of the multi-disciplinary homelessness service and cross-service Corporate approach was in line with the Welsh Government's vision of homelessness and housing support, and that it was contributing to the Homelessness Prevention Service's aim to ensure that everyone was safeguarded and supported to live in homes that met their needs; and***
- (ii) that having reviewed the significant progress made in addressing the audit actions it was now satisfied that any further update reports on the progress of the improvement plan be submitted from thereon in to the Governance and Audit Committee.***

8 ANNUAL REPORT ON SAFEGUARDING ADULTS IN DENBIGHSHIRE

Councillor Elen Heaton, Lead Member for Health and Social Care introduced to members the Annual Report on Safeguarding Adults in Denbighshire (previously circulated). The report covered the period from April 2021 – March 2022. In her opinion the report reflected the hard work that had been invested in maintaining the improvement of the quality and consistency of safeguarding work in Denbighshire. She commended the staff for the work and their achievements.

The Service Manager- Specialist Service, guided members through the report. It provided an overview of the performance of the team over the previous year. The report detailed the activities conducted by the Team with a focus on maintaining the

improvement in the consistency of the quality of the safeguarding work including the performance against the Welsh Government performance indicator to complete enquires within 7 working days. Officers were pleased to inform the Committee, that Denbighshire's performance against this indicator remained high at 99.7% over the last year.

The report also showed how the team had been fully implementing the Wales Safeguarding procedures which included reports or referrals relating to individuals in a position of trust. Members were guided to appendix 2 to the report which provided further detail in the form of a case study of a Person in a Position of Trust referral received. Appendix 3 provided the Committee with details on 'Section 5: Safeguarding Allegations/Concerns about Practitioners and Those in a Position of Trust Practice Guide'. It was stressed the implantation of this area of safeguarding was relatively new within the Wales procedures and had at times been challenging for the safeguarding team.

The report provided members with data including the number of referrals received over the last 3 years. It was noted the number of referrals had decreased since the COVID pandemic but did not cause officers concern, similar patterns had been observed in neighbouring authorities. The Team had received a number of calls from provider services and other professionals seeking advice and guidance. Information was provided on the Deprivation of Liberties Safeguards. Providing members with statistics demonstrating an increase in the number of calls received in this area. The applications were mainly received from care homes and nursing homes and mainly regarding individuals who did not have the capacity to make a decision to live in a care home. Therefore, an assessment was required to ensure that the placement was in the individual's best interest. Members were guided through the key achievements during the 12 months as detailed in the report.

During the debate, the following points were discussed in greater detail:

- The figures on referrals of abuse reported in care homes was high as the individuals in these establishments were vulnerable. Staff had a duty to report any sign of suspected abuse. The number of referrals did not mean the level of abuse was higher than other establishments. The data was regarding the number of referrals it did not always mean abuse had taken place.
- Officers confirmed there was a waiting list for applications under the Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards applications received. The demand was high, the waiting list was reviewed regularly and managed by the safeguarding team.
- Confirmation that two Best Interest Assessors (BIA) had been temporary recruited in an attempt to reduce the waiting list in preparation for the implementation of Liberty Protection Safeguards (LPS) in 2023.
- A review and remodel of the Team was currently taking place. Part of that review would include looking at what future resource the team would require.
- Recruitment and retention of appropriately qualified staff across all aspects of social care was very challenging at the current time. Corporate officers were aware of the challenges and discussed any actions to

support and improve the service on a regular basis. The challenges faced where seen across the whole of the UK.

- Local authorities were the responsible lead organisation for assessing adult safeguarding concerns. The report was solely based on the safeguarding of adults. If a report was received by a third party, it would have to be sent to the Denbighshire's Safeguarding Department for investigation, regardless of where the alleged incident occurred. The Council would then work alongside all partner agencies in undertaking the investigation. This model of reporting was in place across all other authorities in Wales.
- The Conwy and Denbighshire Delivery Group is a monthly meeting of partner agencies where safeguarding data and any trends are shared and discussed and benchmarked against Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) national statistics where appropriate. The Delivery Group feeds through to the North Wales Safeguarding Board.

Members offered congratulations to the Service Manager- Specialist Service on her Caring in Welsh award received earlier in the year.

Members:

Resolved: subject to the above observations to –

- (i) receive and endorse the contents of the report;***
- (ii) acknowledge the importance of adopting a corporate approach to the safeguarding of adults at risk; and***
- (iii) the responsibility of the Council to view this as a key priority area.***

9 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Coordinator submitted a report (previously circulated) seeking members' review of the Committee's work programme. Members were informed the purpose of the report was to review the Committee's future work to ensure it included all items requested by members.

Included as appendix 2 to the report was the Scrutiny request form. The Scrutiny Coordinator explained that if members had an item they wished to discuss they should complete the request form. The form would then be reviewed by the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs Group who determined if the topic was suitable for Scrutiny or a different forum. The next Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs Group meeting was scheduled to take place on the 28th July 2022.

The current forward work programme (appendix 1) had been inherited from the previous committee. Included on the forward work programme (FWP) for the meeting on 15th September was the Community Safety Partnership's Annual Report on its activities. Members heard the Committee had been designated as the Council's Scrutiny Committee for crime and disorder and received the report on an annual basis. Also on the September FWP was a report on Denbighshire Voluntary Services Council, confirmation on their attendance was currently awaited. The

previous Committee had received a report and asked for an update report to be provided for members information. The Chair thought it would be beneficial to receive an update report, members were in agreement.

The Cabinet forward work programme had been included at appendix 3 to the report for members information.

The Scrutiny Coordinator informed members the standing item Feedback from Committee Representatives on Council Boards and Groups had not been included on the agenda for the meeting as to date no representatives had been appointed to serve on any Boards or Groups had been agreed. The purpose of that agenda item was to allow members the opportunity to report back from meetings they attended.

Members heard that pre-covid the committee would hold a pre-meeting planning session ahead of formal committee meetings. These would allow members to highlight and discuss areas of concern they wished to raise at the meeting. The Scrutiny Coordinator suggested if members thought these would be beneficial a virtual meeting could be arranged for committee members a day or two before the meeting. Members thanked the Scrutiny Coordinator and thought a pre-meeting would be beneficial for members especially those new to Scrutiny.

In response to members comments the Head of Legal, HR and Democratic Services confirmed that any public meetings for webcast had to be run from the Council Chamber in Ruthin as that was the only site that had the necessary equipment. He reminded members that the process adopted by Full Council had been for members and officers to attend meetings from a location that best suited their work load either remotely or in person. It was:

Resolved: subject to the above to –

- (i) confirm the Committee's draft forward work programme, as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report; and***
- (ii) arrange a pre-meeting planning session for all Committee members ahead of the Committee's next meeting in September 2022 meeting.***

The meeting concluded 12.45pm