

COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Committee held in Council Chamber, County Hall, Ruthin and by video conference on Thursday, 14 March 2024 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Michelle Blakeley-Walker, Karen Edwards (Vice-Chair), James Elson, Jon Harland, Carol Holliday, Alan James, Brian Jones, Cheryl Williams and Huw Williams (Chair)

The Lead Member for Environment and Transport (Councillor Barry Mellor) for agenda item 5 and the Lead Member for Economic Growth and Tackling Deprivation and Leader of the Council (Councillor Jason McLellan) for agenda item 6.

PRESENT AS OBSERVERS

Councillor Joan Butterfield, Councillor Justine Evans, Councillor Huw Hilditch-Roberts, Councillor Hugh Irving, Councillor Terry Mendies, Councillor Gareth Sandilands and Councillor Andrea Tomlin

ALSO PRESENT

Corporate Director: Economy and Environment (TW), Scrutiny Co-ordinator (KE), Head of Highways & Environmental Services (PJ), Principal Manager - Catering & Cleaning (HJ), Senior Committee Administrator and Zoom Host (KJ) and Committee Administrator (SJ).

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Merfyn Parry and Councillor Delyth Jones.

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest raised.

3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

No items of an urgent matter had been raised with the Chair or the Scrutiny Co-ordinator prior to the commencement of the meeting.

4 MINUTES

The minutes of the Special Communities Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 11 January 2024 were submitted.

Matters arising – Councillor Brian Jones asked if there was any update regarding alternative funding streams to support keeping libraries open.

In response the Corporate Director - Economy and Environment informed the Committee a Task and Finish group had been established to look at all the issues and concerns raised by Members, including alternative funding streams. Further updates would be shared with the Committee following that group meeting. The group had not yet met or agreed to terms of reference or planned work including timescales. It was stressed Members would be made aware of the work and timescales once determined.

RESOLVED, that the minutes of the Special Communities Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 11 January 2024 be approved as a true and correct record of the proceedings.

The minutes of the Communities Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 1 February 2024 were submitted.

Matters arising – Page 18 - Feedback from Committee Representatives - The Scrutiny Co-ordinator confirmed the officer responsible for Adult Social Care and Homelessness had circulated the actions and notes from the service meeting to the representatives.

RESOLVED, that the minutes of the Communities Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 1 February 2024 be approved as a true and correct record of the proceedings.

5 PUBLIC CONVENIENCES SAVINGS PROPOSAL

The Lead Member for Environment and Transport along with the Corporate Director: Economy and Environment introduced the report on Public Conveniences Savings Proposal (previously circulated).

The Lead Member reminded Members that this report formed part of the Council's major savings plan. The report was with regards to the potential transfer or closure of the public toilets within Denbighshire.

The Corporate Director: Economy and Environment continued by introducing Paul Jackson, Head of Highways & Environmental Services and Hayley Jones, Principal Manager - Catering & Cleaning.

The report presented provided Members with the proposal to remove the budget from the public conveniences function and in doing so withdraw from operating public conveniences in the future. Members were reminded the proposal presented had always been included in the major savings ideas for 2024/25 budget and discussed in the budget workshops held over recent months. It had also been the subject of a specific Member workshop on the 24th January 2024.

It was made clear to Members that no formal decision had reached on this proposal. The proposal would be subject to Cabinet decision, however as it has always formed part of the savings proposals for 2024/25 there was a clear expectation that this saving would be delivered. If the saving did not materialise, it

would create an unplanned pressure for the authority to source from alternative areas of the council.

The final decision would be made by Cabinet, prior to the report being presented to Cabinet, Members heard appropriate scrutiny and consultation had to take place. This included corresponding with Members and City, Town and Community Councils to ascertain if there was any appetite for the provision to be taken over by City, Town and Community Councils.

Members heard there were two types of public toilets in Denbighshire, brick building facilities or pod facilities. The majority of the pod facilities were needing attention or replacing which would also cost the authority money. It was therefore mainly the toilet buildings that officers were looking at when discussing transfer of ownership. All options would be discussed and considered.

Members heard the intention was to relaunch the Community Toilet Scheme as a way of mitigating against the impact of any public toilets that's do have to close. Details of which were included in the report.

It was stressed the service was a non-statutory service that the authority did not have to provide. The net budget taking income into consideration was around £270k. Members also heard there was often an over spend on this budget due to number of different reasons.

Responding to members queries, officers advised that: –

- City, Town and Community Councils would be provided with information and facts and figures including costing levels when options were discussed with officers. Officers had been collating the data and information as it engaged with councils and would present all the findings to Cabinet once collected.
- Members suggested that officers could look at alternative solutions such as keeping certain conveniences open in areas of higher tourism such as Rhyl and Llangollen.
- It was stressed that officers did not find the decision to propose the closure of public conveniences easily. Numerous difficult decisions would have to be reached in order to balance the budget.
- A needs analysis was currently being undertaken based on the population of every area and visitor numbers to determine how many toilets would be sufficient. That data would provide the information required to analyse how many Community Toilet Scheme / businesses would be required in an area. There was currently one business in Denbighshire that had signed up to the Community Toilet Scheme. It was stressed that priority was ascertaining how many public toilets could be transferred into the community.
- Members reiterated the need to have more information and facts/ data to discuss the proposal in greater depth.
- It was highlighted that one of the Council's core policy objectives was the promotion of tourism to grow the regional economy. Tourism played a vital part in Denbighshire's economy with 6.03 million visitors in 2022. It was felt the impact of closing toilets in tourist areas would have a negative impact on businesses and the economy.

- Members heard the toilet situated in Market Street in Llangollen generated an income of £171,396.61 in 2022/23 which equated to 43% of the total income from car parks with public conveniences. The public toilets were an essential support of tourism in the town.
- If portable toilets were required as part of an event, it was the responsibility of the event organiser to make provision of such toilets available as part of their event management.
- Officers stated there was no increase in reporting of street fouling during the covid pandemic. There was no reported increase due to public toilets being closed during the pandemic period.
- The plan for any toilet buildings that were closed would be bespoke to each particular build, including any alternative uses. The short-term position for many of the toilet buildings would be to lock the buildings up until a plan was known.
- The Community Toilet Scheme was a Denbighshire County Council scheme which enabled the authority to shape what that scheme looked like in the future. Officers stated they could look into whether a City, Town or Community Council would be eligible for the £500 compensation. The terms and conditions of the asset that was transferred would have to be discussed during the transfer discussions. The revised scheme would be brought back to scrutiny for discussion when the review was completed.
- Officers had looked at all avenues of potential savings including part year savings and reducing opening times. If that was a consideration it would reduce the amount of savings that would be made by the service. Officers confirmed further detail on the work explored would be included in the future report presented to Scrutiny.
- The proposal formed part of the major savings proposal for the financial year 2024/25. It was already assumed prior to the additional ideas to balance the budget. The service had put forward £250k saving to retain a small percentage of the budget to remain for any ongoing costs.
- Officers advised it was yet unknown whether the potential closures would cause or create any redundancies in the service, further detail and work would need to be undertaken before that could be provided to Members.
- It was made clear that the toilets listed in appendix 3 did not generate any income. They were a cost to the authority for opening and closing etc.
- Discussions with City, Town and Community Councils was due to commence imminently. The communication had been delayed due to ensuring the procedure followed a legal and proper course.
- Members shared their concerns on the level of detail within the report and stressed the importance for further detail to be provided to Communities Scrutiny Committee prior to a report to Cabinet.
- Members were informed the budget around public conveniences was £270k, the income generated by toilets was around £70k per year which was reinvested back into the service. The service often went over budget at around £30k per annum, thus officers had to source that additional cost from other budget streams in the service.

The Chair summarised some of the points raised during the discussion. He stressed Members requested a further report which provided the committee with

greater detail including facts and figures in relation to asset transfer, Community Toilet Scheme information and suggestion of winter closure. It was reiterated that it was important to have all the information available before a final decision could be made. All Members were in agreement that a further report be presented to Communities Scrutiny at a future meeting.

Councillor Karen Edwards thanked Members and officers for the detailed discussion. She proposed the following:

Proposed that a further report be produced recognising that the budget for Public Conveniences should not be removed in its entirety and would identify -

- a) The take-up of third-party management of toilets.
- b) All costs of accommodation work prior to transfer, or decommissioning, and redundancies.
- c) The on-going budget required to operate those toilets to be retained as essential tourist infrastructure.
- d) Revenue costs for retained toilets to be supported by savings made in the Tourism marketing budget and a review of the charges made for the use of Public Conveniences.

Councillor Brian Jones proposed to accept the proposal stated by Councillor Edwards. Councillor James Elson seconded the recommendation.

Members sought clarity on what the Committee were being asked to vote on. Councillor Alan James proposed that a further report be presented to the committee with the information as discussed during the debate to allow a deeper scrutiny of the service with the requested information. Councillor Jon Harland seconded the proposal.

Members of the Communities Scrutiny Committee voted for the proposal suggested by Councillor Alan James which resulted in a tied outcome. The Chair Councillor Huw Williams had the casting vote and supported the proposal by Councillor Alan James that a supplementary report be provided to the Communities Scrutiny Committee, detailing all the points raised by Members during the meeting's discussion. The follow up report would be added to the forward work programme.

RESOLVED that the Communities Scrutiny Committee note the content of the report and request a further report providing greater detail on points raised during the discussion be presented back to Communities Scrutiny Committee prior to the report to Cabinet for decision.

At this juncture (11.20 a.m.) there was a 15 minute comfort break.

The meeting resumed at 11.35. a.m.

6 RHYL REGENERATION PROGRAMME AND GOVERNANCE

Lead Member for Economic Growth and Tackling Deprivation and Leader of the Council, Councillor Jason McLellan introduced the report (previously circulated). He informed the Committee the report was a high level overview of the projects and governance arrangements around the delivery of those projects. He thanked his predecessor Councillor Hugh Evans for having the vision to begin the programme and regenerating Rhyl Town Centre.

The Corporate Director: Economy & Environment echoed the statement by the Lead Member. In addition, he stated the report also included details of future plans to allow Members to debate how the programme would be delivered.

Although each project had individual highly detailed planned programmes the report presented to the committee provided an overview of full programme of works. Appendix 2a provided Members with a copy of the overview dashboard, which detailed the current status of each project.

He advised that the Rhyl Regeneration Programme had focused on the physical regeneration projects in the Town Centre of Rhyl. The overall ambition had been to deliver projects which acted as a tool for economic development and growth in the town. The ambition had been to create the environment for residents to have access to good quality employment and a developing economy.

It was anticipated that the programme had almost reached a point where the Town could stand by itself and not rely on public investment in order to support the economy and regeneration. It was hoped the town would attract ongoing inward investment.

Members were informed that the Authority had been successful recently in securing the Vale of Clwyd Levelling Up bid. Work was on going to secure that funding, a range of projects had been proposed through that funding stream. It was also advised that since the time of writing the report, confirmation had been received that £20million had been allocated to the regeneration of Rhyl from the Levelling Up agenda. The funding would be provided over a 10-year period and would provide officers the opportunity to be strategic with the use of that funding over that time period. The requirements and arrangements of the additional funding was still in its infancy and officers had to work through the details involved in the agreement.

The Chair thanked the Lead Member and Corporate Director: Economy & Environment for the detailed introduction.

During the discussion the following areas were discussed in greater detail:

- The detailed completed projects should all read as completed. It was stressed if the project was listed as completed there was no outstanding elements that required to be done.
- The term light touch review referred to officer's intention to review and offer information on a smaller scale than what had been offered at the initial stages of the scheme. It was felt the themes of the regeneration programme remained the same.

- The Leader advised that the work of the Board was filtered heavily through all the democratic processes.
- The Rhyl Vision document was just that, a vision, it did not include detailed design and costs of schemes. It was a long-term strategy of the intention to move Rhyl forward. The detail could only be generated through the process and development of specific schemes. The vision provided a vehicle to lever in the funding.
- The Board was seen by officers as a delivery mechanism for the schemes to be developed. It was focused and involved key officers responsible for those schemes. It was felt the involvement of local knowledge and the community would be vital in shaping the development of future projects. The Rhyl Reference Group would be used more to receive the projects listed in the dashboard for discussion.
- The additional £20m funding being allocated was a different funding stream from the UK Government Towns fund. There was a requirement for a board to be established. It would be specifically established for that funding stream, officers were still working through the details of the funding and what was required by the authority.
- The Corporate Director: Economy & Environment was happy to discuss with Members any ideas for the regeneration of Rhyl outside of the meeting.
- The completion date for the Levelling Up Fund round 3 projects was listed and could not be adjusted. The projects had to be completed by end of March 2026. Some of the projects were more advanced than others, each project had a team of officers developing the work on each element. It was advised that there was a budget for Levelling Up Funding round 3, with the schemes being reviewed and designed around the available budget. Members were made aware of a UK wide concern regarding the strict timescale imposed by the scheme. It was confirmed that the imposed timelines were challenging.
- Resources across the whole of the Authority was challenging. Members were aware of the current financial requirements and restrictions faced by the Authority. The department would have to remain highly organised and focused to deliver the projects to the deadline. Each of the projects would be delivered to each individual need, with different mechanisms to work through each project. Officers were confident the projects would be delivered successfully on time.
- Communication with residents and local businesses to engage and inform of the works was vital.
- The Corporate Director: Economy & Environment stressed there were no requests for any additional financial resources to deliver the projects the authority was delivering in Rhyl.
- The Prestatyn Central Coastal Defence Improvement Scheme was included in the report as the scheme itself was located in Rhyl. It would protect properties in Prestatyn once completed.
- One of the overall outcomes of the programme was to promote Rhyl as being an area that attracts private investments and was a place people want to invest. In the long term it was hoped that the need for public money would not be required for public projects to start economic growth in Rhyl. The

Queens Market Project would allow the private sector to operate from that premises to support and kick start new and small businesses.

- Discussions around the empty Sea Aquarium Property were on going. There was no decision to report to Members currently.
- Communication and work with residents and businesses would be important in the future regeneration and continued development of Rhyl.

The Chair thanked the Corporate Director and Lead Member for the detailed responses to Members questions and comments. Members asked if a further update report could be presented to the Committee in October 2024. The Officers and Leader were in agreement that an update would be available for later in the year.

RESOLVED that the Communities Scrutiny Committee receive the Rhyl Regeneration Programme and Governance Report and a further update report be included on the forward work programme for the October Communities Scrutiny Committee meeting.

7 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Coordinator guided members through the Communities Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme report (previously circulated).

The next Communities Scrutiny Committee was scheduled for 09 May 2024, proposed items for that meeting were –

- Tree Maintenance & Management
- Second Homes and Short-term Holiday lets
- Draft Sustainable Transport Plan

Members heard that the Tree Maintenance & Management have had a change in officers and the Second Homes and Short-term Holiday lets report was awaiting further information from Welsh Government, therefore the Committee were awaiting confirmation that they would be ready for the next meeting.

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator encouraged Members if they had concerns on any matters to complete and return the Members Proposal Form (Appendix 2) for deliberation at the next Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs meeting on the 18 March 2024.

The Cabinet Forward Work Programme was presented for Members attention (appendix 3). Members were encouraged to raise any issues they felt warranted Scrutiny prior to Cabinet via the completion of a Member proposal form.

RESOLVED: that further to the above that the Communities Scrutiny Forward Work Programme be agreed.

8 FEEDBACK FROM COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES

There was no feedback from Member representatives.

The meeting concluded at 12.25 p.m.