

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 November 2024 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Jeanette Chamberlain-Jones, Pauline Edwards (Vice-Chair), Bobby Feeley, Brian Jones, Terry Mendies, Arwel Roberts and David Williams

ALSO PRESENT

Councillor Elen Heaton, Councillor Jason McLellan and Councillor Barry Mellor, Corporate Director: Economy and Environment (TW), Corporate Director: Social Services & Education (NS), Head of Highways and Environmental Services (PJ), Head of Adult Social Care & Homelessness Service (AL), Asset and Risk Manager (AR), Service Manager – Adult Social Care & Homelessness Service (MR), Scrutiny Co-ordinator (RE) and Committee Administrators (KJ and ED).

Hedd Vaughan-Evans – Head of Operations for Ambition North Wales
David Matthews – Land and Property Programme Manager for Ambition North Wales

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Joan Butterfield (Chair), Kelly Clewett, Raj Metri and Elfed Williams.

Councillors Jeanette Chamberlain-Jones, Bobby Feeley and Terry Mendies advised that they would need to leave the meeting before its conclusion.

In the absence of the Chair, the Vice-Chair chaired the Committee's proceedings.

Prior to proceeding with the meeting's business the Chair advised that, following the publication of the agenda, a request had been received to vary the order of business to enable the 'Section 19 Flood Investigation Report into Storm Babet Event on 20th October 2023' (Agenda item 6) to be discussed ahead of 'Ambition North Wales Board Annual Report 2023/24' (Agenda item 5). This request had been permitted and the Chair thanked all Lead Members, Council and external officers, for accommodating this late change to the order of business.

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No members declared any interests of a personal, or a personal and prejudicial nature, in any of the business items listed for discussion.

3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

No items of an urgent nature had been drawn to the attention of the Chair prior to the commencement of the meeting.

4 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the Partnerships Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 12 September 2024 were submitted. The Committee:

Resolved: that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 12 September 2024 be received and approved as a true and correct record of the proceedings.

Matters arising: Business item 3 – the Scrutiny Co-ordinator confirmed that Councillor Elfed Williams had been furnished with the documentation he had requested in relation to the ‘Sustainable Communities for Learning – Rolling Programme’. Copies of which had since been circulated to all Committee members as part of the ‘Information Brief’ document earlier in the week.

Business item 5 – in response to an enquiry from Councillor Brian Jones on the current position regarding the review of the contract for monitoring CCTV activity in Rhyl and other towns in Denbighshire, Councillor Arwel Roberts offered to update Councillor Jones on the matter following the meeting.

5 SECTION 19 FLOOD INVESTIGATION REPORT - STORM BABET

The Lead Member for Environment and Transport introduced the report (previously circulated) to the meeting. It was explained that on the 20th October 2023, there was a period of very heavy rainfall which affected a lot of the properties in the North of the County. National Resources Wales (NRW), Denbighshire County Council (DCC) and Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water (DCWW) investigated why these floodings occurred. The purpose of the report was to introduce the findings or their investigations to the Committee and ask for any comments from members.

The Asset and Risk Manager advised that he was willing to attend each Member Area Group (MAG) meeting regarding the same and to provide an update. The Corporate Director: Economy and Environment added that Storm Babet was a significant storm which affected 62 homes and six businesses.

As part of the investigation, a door knocking exercise occurred to compile the information that was presented. It was noted that the report was multi-faceted and focussed on the properties affected and an attempted to ascertain solutions moving forward. Members attention was drawn to Sections 7 and 8 of the report (Appendix 1 to the report) which focussed on flood event and the improvements identified.

The meeting then opened up to members for questions. Members suggested that more maintenance that could be done to clear ditches and culverts, maybe this could have prevented further flooding. Comments were made by members surrounding maintenance of the pumping station in Rhyl which appeared to be lacking.

Officers responded and advised that maintenance was not just required to Denbighshire County Council's infrastructure but also to DCWW and NRW assets. The authority was looking to replace the system being used at that time from hiring individual contractors to clear green spaces and introduce a more ad-hoc system where hotspots would be identified and to approach the issue this way. It was also important to note that the authority had not stopped clearing ditches, this work was undertaken on a risk-based approach.

The role of farmers in contributing to the maintenance of these ditches and culverts adjoining their land were also discussed. The Head of Highways and Environmental Services advised that more work was required with farmers and landowners with a view to building better relationships to try and improve these issues, but this had proved to be a challenge in the past. Members asked how much cooperation there was from farmers to contribute to maintenance of hedges and ditches for example. It was advised that it was a difficult situation. The previous Asset and Risk Manager had tried to get some movement with this and increase engagement with the farming unions with the intention of using this as a leverage tool, however, ultimately, the land was privately owned despite affecting DCC infrastructure. The Council could not access any land or property in private ownership without the owner's permission, so it was a very difficult situation to manage.

Members raised concerns surrounding the inspections of river bunds and their maintenance and NRW and DCWW's cooperation with respect of this. It was asked when these bunds had last been inspected and whether if the bunds had not been inspected, serious floods could have been occurred. It was advised that the exact time frame for the inspection of each bund was not known, but officers offered to report back to members regarding the frequency. Officers advised that the authority liaised with DCWW and NRW regularly regarding the maintenance of all flood risk assets and were given assurances by both organisations that regular maintenance work was undertaken on their assets. Officers actively liaised with third parties however, these organisations had their own budget constraints.

Officers advised that preventative work was carried out and this work involved examining culverts around the county, especially those close to where flooding had previously occurred. As soon as weather warnings were received officers visited these well-known problem areas. The authority had invested in new software that enabled it to compile a profile of each infrastructure asset, the data profile of each asset held on this system would inform the Council's flood risk assessments in each area. Over time, the more data that was collected the more accurate the Council could identify hotspots more clearly and quickly.

Officers assured members that flood risk assessments would form part of the development, planning and consultation phases for the Council's new Local Development Plan (LDP).

Members emphasised the need for local volunteer Flood Groups to be established and supported and these were valuable networks to help residents plan and deal with flooding incidents.

At the conclusion of an in-depth discussion, and subject to officers discussing matters pertaining to the Maes y Gôg estate in Rhyl with the local member, the Committee:

Resolved:

- (i) to support the implementation of the improvements or the revision of working practices identified within the report with a view to mitigating against the future risk of flooding in the county; and***
- (ii) that a Member Scrutiny Proposal form be issued to the relevant Committee members for completion with a view to inviting representatives from Natural Resources Wales (NRW) to a future meeting to discuss flood related matters.***

6 AMBITION NORTH WALES BOARD ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24

The Council Leader in his role as Lead Member for Economic Growth & Tackling Deprivation introduced the report (previously circulated) and explained that this was an annual report brought before the Committee. It was advised that the objective of the Board was to bring in private sector investment through these projects and introduce high quality jobs into North Wales. It was noted that this report was the third report of the 15-year cycle plan. The Lead Member also thanked his predecessor, Councillor Hugh Evans, for all the work conducted in the previous term.

The Head of Operations and the Land and Property Programme Manager gave a PowerPoint presentation which illustrated all the work that the Ambition Board had conducted in its third year and throughout its existence. This presentation emphasised that the aim of Ambition North Wales was to realise a confident and cohesive region by focussing on improving economic, social and environmental factors of North Wales. Projects that the Board had facilitated focussed on a number of varied themes, including language, culture and heritage. There were five programme areas which included 23 projects in total with a £1 billion target for investment with the aim of creating over 4000 new jobs for North Wales. During 2023-24 two key projects had made significant progress and another five new projects had joined the Growth Deal, all of which were detailed within the report.

The meeting opened up to members and questions surrounding the former North Wales Hospital site were raised. It was suggested by members that it did not seem much work had been done towards this. Officers advised members that this was not the case, the Levelling Up Fund (LUF) had been secured. Whilst the change in government had caused an inevitable delay in relation to an announcement on the funding, things had continued behind the scenes such as the Board approving the Outline Business Plan submitted by Jones Brothers. Officers advised that many new homes as well as commercial premises would, subject to planning approval be built on the site. Jones Brothers already recruited and provided apprenticeships and graduate schemes for young people and had relocated its training department to the site.

Other work that had been undertaken regarding the former North Wales Hospital included ensuring legal documents were in place such as the s106 and preparations to legally transfer the land and buildings from the local authority to Jones Brothers. Bats were also present on site, so licenses and relevant bat facilities had to be constructed. Next steps included to manage demolition of parts of the site and to deal with asbestos present. Officers advised they were looking to protect and enhance the project where possible and ensuring biodiversity was preserved.

Members asked questions surrounding employment with this project. It was advised that with regard to full time employment, 70 full time roles were expected to be based at the site during the project development stage but with regard to construction as well as apprenticeships, it was advised that at least 300 jobs would be created, but it was possible than this figure could be exceeded.

Questions arose from members regarding a lack of tourism and transport in Rhyl, particularly the train links. Members were advised as follows:

- both Welsh Government and UK Government had determined that transport should not form part of the Growth Deal, therefore the Plan did not encompass transport matters.
- That, whilst the Board had no formal role in relation to the proposed new National Park in North East Wales, its Agri-food and Tourism ambition did support the enhancement of tourism skills across all areas and facilitated targeted training and retraining to improve this.

Following an in-depth discussion, the Committee:

***Resolved:* subject to the above observations, to receive and endorse the progress made by the Ambition North Wales Board during both Quarter 4 and the 2023/24 financial year in delivering the third year of the North Wales Growth Deal.**

The Committee adjourned for a break at 11.55am and re-convened at 12pm.

As a number of members had left the meeting by this juncture the Committee was inquorate for the purpose of formulating recommendations. Consequently, those members still in attendance agreed to continue to transact the remainder of the Committee's business on an informal basis.

7 SAFEGUARDING ADULTS IN DENBIGHSHIRE ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24

The Lead Member for Health and Social Care introduced the report (previously circulated) to the meeting and highlighted the strong performance that featured throughout the report, including strong response times surrounding section 126 inquiries in which a 7-day target had been set by Welsh Government for such enquiries to be completed. The Council had achieved this target in dealing with 98.5% of the 409 enquiries received.

The Service Manager advised that it had been a busy year for the Adults Safeguarding Team. Completion rate at 98.5% for the completion of safeguarding referrals in the 7-day period. A number of audits had been conducted and scrutinised and despite the increase of workload, the high standard of work had continued and been maintained. Attention was drawn to Section 5 inquiries which refer to 'people in a position of trust (PoT)' and the reasons for the increase. It was advised that this was not a unique issue to Denbighshire, the increase was mirrored across the region, and was attributable to the increase in the complexity of clients' needs, as well as the raised awareness of the importance of making referrals.

The Chair then opened up the meeting for questions from members.

Members enquired whether family/unpaid/voluntary carers were monitored by the Safeguarding Team. It was advised by the Head of Adult Social Care & Homelessness Service, that the team did not get involved with family carers unless it was from a safeguarding perspective such as if a neighbour raised concerns for example. It was explained that the team relied on individuals reporting these instances if there were any concerns of any type of abuse occurring.

The increase in referrals was questioned by members and whether there was sufficient staff to cover the increasing workload. Officers advised and emphasised that this was not unique to Denbighshire and members were reassured there was enough staff to deal with this increase. It was also emphasised that, whilst the Police were actively involved with initial investigations, not all referrals advanced to a full investigation, an increase in numbers of referrals did not mean a corresponding increase in full investigations. It was anticipated that, once available, the revised Guidance on Position of Trust, would further aid the investigation of Section 5 referrals.

Members congratulated the Safeguarding Team on their efforts in ensuring that vulnerable adults in Denbighshire are protected from harm and:

Recommended: subject to the above observations that the Committee acknowledge the importance of a corporate approach to the safeguarding of adults at risk and the responsibility of the Council to view this as a key priority area.

8 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator introduced the report and appendices (previously circulated) which sought the Committee to review its programme of future work.

During her introduction she advised that a report on the 'Household Waste Recycling Centres' that had originally been scheduled for presentation to the present meeting had, due to pressures within the reporting Service, been rescheduled for the Committee's February 2025 meeting. The Committee's next meeting on 19 December 2024 had two items listed for presentation:

- North Wales Regional Emergency Planning Service's Annual Report 2023/24; and
- Blue Flag Status for Denbighshire's Beaches

The Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group (SCVCG) was scheduled to hold its next meeting on 25 November and members were reminded to complete and return the Members Proposal Form at Appendix 2 to the report if they had any matters which they felt merited scrutiny. At Appendix 3 to the report was a copy of Cabinet's forward work programme for members' information, whilst Appendix 4 provided an update on the progress to date with the Committee's recommendations from its previous meeting. The Information Brief document circulated to Committee members earlier in the week contained the additional information which had been requested by members at the Committee's previous meeting along with Information Reports. Members:

Recommended: that subject to the above the Committee confirm its programme of future work as set out in Appendix 1 to the report.

9 FEEDBACK FROM COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES

None.

Meeting concluded at 12.10pm