

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, 19 December 2024 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Joan Butterfield (Chair), Jeanette Chamberlain-Jones, Kelly Clewett, Bobby Feeley, Jon Harland, Brian Jones, Pauline Edwards (Vice-Chair), Terry Mendies, Arwel Roberts and Elfed Williams.

ALSO PRESENT

Corporate Director: Social Services and Education (NS), Corporate Director: Governance and Business (GW), Corporate Director: Economy and Environment (TW), Head of Highways and Environmental Services (PJ), Asset and Risk Manager (AR), Scrutiny Co-Ordinator (RE), and Committee Administrators (ED and NH).

Natural Resources Wales (NRW) – Head of North East Wales Operations (LR), Operations Manager North East (SP), Senior Officer- Regulatory Approaches (TL)

Dŵr Cymru/Welsh Water – Sewerage Manager (MW), River Quality Liaison Manager (North) (EP).

North Wales Counties – Regional Emergency Planning Service (NWC-REPS) – Emergency Planning Officers Helen Kilgannon (HK) & Madeleine Zalot (MZ)

Lead Member for Environment and Transport (in attendance at the Committee's invitation) – Councillor Barry Mellor.

Observers: Councillors Martyn Hogg, Gareth Sandilands, Rhys Thomas, Merfyn Parry, Mark Young.

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor David Williams and the Lead Member for Corporate Strategy, Policy and Equalities, Councillor Julie Matthews.

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Councillor Gareth Sandilands declared a personal interest in business item 6 in his capacity as one of the Council's appointed representatives on the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority.

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 7 November 2024 were submitted. The Committee:

Resolved: that the minutes of the Committee's meeting held on 7 November 2024 be received and approved as a true and correct record of the proceedings.

Matters arising: Business item 5, 'Section 19 Flood Investigation Report – Storm Babet': a copy of the communication sent by Natural Resources Wales (NRW) to Councillor Arwel Roberts in response to his enquiry on the inspection timeframes for the bunds along the river Clwyd in the Rhuddlan and Rhyl areas had been circulated to Committee members for information as part of the 'Information Brief' document ahead of the meeting.

5 BLUE FLAG STATUS FOR DENBIGHSHIRE'S BEACHES

The Lead Member for Environment and Transport introduced the report (previously circulated) to members. The Chair welcomed representatives from both Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water (DCWW) to the meeting to contribute to the discussion and answer members' questions. The Lead Member thanked officers for their attendance at the meeting.

The report enabled Members to scrutinise the work being undertaken with partner organisations in a bid to achieve blue flag status accreditation for as many as possible of the county's beaches. It was emphasised that it would be very difficult for Rhyl to achieve Blue Flag status due to its proximity to the estuary of the river Clwyd and the effects of the incoming tide. The obstacles and challenges Rhyl faced with regards to this were outlined in presentations given by both NRW and DCWW as were the reasons why Prestatyn's beaches had moved from excellent water quality to good water quality resulting in its Blue Flag status being removed.

The Senior Officer: Regulatory Approaches Natural Resources Wales (NRW) guided members through a presentation on the Blue Flag Status for Denbighshire's Beaches. Members were guided through the classification process used to determine the water quality on beaches.

In 2015 the process for testing water quality became more stringent with samples assessed for faecal bacteria E Coli and Intestinal Enterococci. Members were shown detailed graphs containing the percentages of bacteria found in water over previous years. If the Prediction and Discounting (P&D) data recorded more than two consecutive days of poor water quality the water was deemed unfit for bathing. In such cases Denbighshire County Council (DCC) would put out signs by 10am to warn the public that the water was classified as unfit for bathing.

Impacts on water quality in Rhyl were explained including sewage works, pumping stations and sewer overflows along with agricultural impacts such as livestock access to streams and land spreading which all had implications on the quality of the water on Rhyl's beaches.

Moving forward, NRW had a number of schemes in place to try and reduce agricultural bacteria spilling into the water system, namely the continued regulation of permitted discharges, Storm Overflow classification Guidance and the continued focus on the reduction of agricultural bacteria sources. Longer term solutions were outlined and explained. However, a significant increase in funding from central government would be required for agricultural schemes to provide incentives for farmers to install schemes.

The Chair thanked the Senior Officer: Regulatory Approaches for NRW's presentation.

The River Quality Liaison Officer from DCWW guided Members through a presentation on bathing water quality.

DCWW disinfected the final effluent near bathing waters, but this was not usual practice for rivers. This helped to maintain the bathing quality. Denbigh, Dyserth, St Asaph and Llanasa wastewater treatment works all received UV treatment. DCWW worked with NRW to make further improvements and where identified these would become part of their five yearly investment plans. DCWW also undertook investigations into bathing water quality in areas where their assets may contribute to worse status locations.

Members were given details on water overflow in the vicinity of Rhyl and Prestatyn beaches. Across the bathing season storm overflows were discharging on two sample days with exceptional wet weather recorded by the Met Office also contributing to poor bathing water results.

DCWW completed a Coastal Bathing Waters study for Rhyl and Prestatyn in 2017 which indicated that diffuse pollution sources were the main factor for affecting bathing water quality. Further support from DCWW was requested by NRW to expand understanding of diffuse sources and therefore the Natural Environmental Programme (NEP) output for DCWW to complete another bathing water study for 2020-2025. Water quality data from the studies carried out were explained in detail to members.

The Chair thanked the River Quality Liaison Officer for DCWW presentation and questions were welcomed from Members.

Members questioned the strategies that were in place for pumping stations and outflow pipes. The Sewerage Manager stated that routine maintenance was carried out regularly across the county. Pumping stations were inspected on at least a weekly basis, with some in coastal areas more prone to sand blockages being inspected more frequently. Cleaning of pipework was also frequently conducted. DCWW held a lot of intelligence on all its infrastructure and this data was used to manage its infrastructure on risk basis. Artificial Intelligence (AI) was also now coming to the fore with respect of storm overflow management. Officers emphasised that the source of most pollution that entered the sea was the river systems, not DCWW assets.

Members asked if funding was an issue within the current climate. The Sewerage Manager stated that funding was not a problem currently.

Members highlighted the need for there to be a working partnership with NRW, Welsh Water and farmers and questioned what incentives were in place to encourage farmers to work alongside the schemes. The Senior Officer: Regulatory Approaches (NRW) stated that there were currently no incentives in place for farmers. There were no regulations in place prohibiting farm livestock using or entering rivers. Nevertheless, NRW worked closely with riparian landowners to encourage the fencing of riverbanks and identification of alternative water sources for livestock to access. The issue potential funding had been raised with Welsh Government however, no information was available to suggest that this was being considered at this time.

Members asked questions on beaches, rivers, ditches/drainage systems, as well as planning matters relating to their specific wards, it was suggested that these questions were answered in Member Area Group (MAG) meetings which were held to discuss issues within different areas of the county. NRW and DCWW officers indicated their agreement to attend MAG meetings for this purpose, subject to each MAG providing them with a detailed brief on the issues that required their input. This would ensure that the most appropriate officers would be in attendance in order to provide comprehensive answers to the questions raised. Both organisations advised members to encourage residents to report any incidents of pollution, burst mains, flooding etc. to their helpline numbers as this was the most effective way for them to respond to incidents and to improve services going forward.

At the conclusion of an in-depth discussion the Chair thanked NRW and DCWW representatives for attending the meeting to give their informative presentations and for providing comprehensive answers to members' wide-range of questions. It was:

Resolved: subject to the above to –

- (i) acknowledge the work being undertaken by all partner organisations with regards to improving the quality of bathing water in Denbighshire, including each partner's specific role in relation to achieving Blue Flag status accreditation for as many as possible of the county's beaches; and***
- (ii) acknowledge both Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water's (DCWW) willingness to attend any of the Council's Member Area Groups (MAGs) meetings to discuss local/specific areas of interest or concern subject to each MAG providing the organisations with a clear brief beforehand on the issues they wish to discuss.***

6 NORTH WALES REGIONAL EMERGENCY PLANNING SERVICE'S ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24

The Corporate Director: Governance and Business introduced the North Wales Councils' Regional Emergency Planning Service's (NWC- REPS) Annual Report 2023/24 (previously circulated) to Members.

The purpose of the report was to promote the NWC-REPS Annual Report and provide confidence to Members that Denbighshire was prepared in the event of an emergency. NWC-REPS ensured that significant arrangements were in place regarding emergency planning within the Council and the report specifically detailed:

- How the regional service contributed to resilience and security of communities in Denbighshire.
- The current work programme of the Service.
- The structure within Denbighshire County Council to respond to a crisis or emergency.
- Out of hours emergency planning provision.
- Training and Development for staff in Emergency Planning roles.

The Isle of Anglesey County Council, Conwy County Borough Council, Denbighshire County Council, Flintshire County Council and Wrexham County Borough Council worked together in a partnering relationship through the establishment in 2014 of a Regional Emergency Planning Service for North Wales.

The Service undertook the functions of the Councils in respect of civil contingencies and was accountable to an executive Board that comprised of senior representatives of those Councils. NWC-REPS provided a service to ensure the Local Authorities were compliant with the following legislation:

- Civil Contingencies Act 2024
- Control of Major Accident Hazards Regulations, 2015
- Pipeline Safety Regulations, 1996
- Radiation (Emergency Preparedness and Public Information) Regulations, 2019

The Annual report detailed the work of note NWC-REPS had undertaken in the last year.

The Chair thanked the Corporate Director: Governance and Business for the report and questions were welcomed from Members.

In response to a question, he confirmed that the report of the Menai Straits Simultaneous Bridge Closure Group was expected to be available by the end of the current reporting year. He also outlined NWC-REPS' involvement in traffic management following the recent unexpected closure of the port of Holyhead due to the damage caused by Storm Darragh.

Members questioned if the Council should be monitoring threats that were happening around the world and asked if the planning process for potential emergencies incorporated these new threats as the world became more precarious. The Corporate Director: Governance and Business stated that there was a UK and an All-Wales Risk and Assessment Register which informed all plans currently in place. Plans were in place for potential cyber-attacks and climate change related emergencies. The Emergency Planning Officer further explained that the team worked closely with Welsh Government which then informed the Multi-Agency

Resilience Forum who looked at how upcoming risks were mitigated regionally. Planning for emergency situations was far bigger than just a regional and local approach, there was an emergency planning hierarchy in place. Dependent upon the nature of the risk UK Government and/or Welsh Government would identify the risks and national mitigation measures, this would then be fed down to regional emergency planning services to draw up more local mitigation measures and local plans to respond to the various emergencies if they occurred. Regional risk registers included both national, regional and local risks. The North Wales Risk Register was due to be published on North Wales Fire and Rescue Service's (NWFRS) website in the near future.

Members asked if the Council was prepared for any emergencies in relation to the resources available under the current financial climate and questioned how members could be trained to deal with a situation if it arises.

The Corporate Director: Governance and Business stated that the Council was prepared as much as possible. Members were well informed of any emergencies via Council meetings, circulated emails and a variety of communication forms. General awareness training looking at the emergency planning systems that were in place would be looked into following the meeting with the involvement of Lead Member.

The Emergency Planning Officer stated that a briefing session had been provided for Members previously in May 2022 and a Members Handbook was created at the time and circulated. The Emergency Planning Team were happy to provide any further training that was required. Officers offered to recirculate the handbook along with updated links to Members.

Members discussed the possibility of a checklist containing emergency contact information being circulated. The Corporate Director: Governance and Business stated that he would liaise with the Emergency Planning Team and discuss this further, adding that it would be beneficial for Members.

The Chair thanked the Corporate Director: Governance and Business and the Emergency Planning Officers for their attendance at the meeting.

The Committee:

Resolved: subject to the above observations and the provision of the information requested –

- (i) to acknowledge the work undertaken by the North Wales Council's Regional Emergency Planning Service during 2023/24 as detailed in the Annual Report; and***
- (ii) endorse the Service's efforts locally, regionally, and nationally to date during 2024/25 with a view to ensuring that sufficient arrangements are in place to respond and deal with any emergencies that may arise.***

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

Members were advised that Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board had confirmed that they would be sending representatives to the Committee's next meeting on 13 February 2025 to provide members with an opportunity to ask questions on the progress to date with the North Denbighshire Community Hospital Project. In addition, the report on the Council's Household Waste Recycling Centres, deferred from October 2024's meeting, would also be presented.

At November's meeting of the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group (SCVCG) an Audit Wales report titled 'Urgent and Emergency Care Flow Out of Hospital' had been referred to the Committee for further consideration. Whilst this was a national study, it had local and regional implications, therefore the SCVCG was of the view that it would be useful if the Committee could consider the progress made to date in implementing the study's recommendations. As the objective of the recommendations was that all partners worked effectively together for the benefits of residents, it would be prudent to have representatives from the Health Board, the Council, and the North Wales Regional Partnership Board in attendance for the discussion. The item had therefore been scheduled into the Committee's forward work programme for its April 2025 meeting.

As Denbighshire operated a joint Youth Justice Service (YJS) with Conwy County Borough Council the SCVCG had determined that it would be beneficial for an informal joint meeting of Denbighshire's Partnerships Scrutiny Committee and Conwy's Social Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee be held in order to examine the progress made to date by all partners in implementing the recommendations resulting from the 2024 HM Inspectorate of Probation's inspection of the Service. For this purpose, an informal joint meeting of both Committee's had been arranged for Tuesday, 18 March 2025. It would be held remotely via video conference with its minutes being submitted to each Council's respective formal committees for ratification.

Members were advised that the next SCVCG meeting was scheduled to be held on 20 January 2025 and their attention was drawn to Appendix 2 with contained the Members' Scrutiny Proposal form, which required to be completed and returned by early January if members had any topics they wished to be considered for inclusion on a future scrutiny committee forward work programme.

The Committee:

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

8 FEEDBACK FROM COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES

Councillor Bobby Feeley provided an overview of the progress achieved to date with the Bwthyn y Ddôl, Sub-Regional Children's Assessment Centre in Colwyn Bay. To date Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) registration had been granted for a 4-bed centre. Additional work and another two posts required to be filled before any

further beds could be granted registration. All outstanding matters had now been escalated for the attention of the Chief Executive and were expected to be resolved in the near future. Members:

Resolved: to receive the update provided.

Meeting concluded at 1.30pm