

## **COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Minutes of a meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Committee held in Conference Room 1a, County Hall, Ruthin on Thursday, 6 December 2012 at 9.30 am.

### **PRESENT**

Councillors James Davies, Huw Hilditch-Roberts (Chair), Rhys Hughes, Win Mullen-James, Joe Welch, Cefyn Williams, Cheryl Williams and Huw Williams (Vice-Chair)

Observers: Councillors Meirick Lloyd Davies, Huw Jones and Gwyneth Kensler.

### **ALSO PRESENT**

Corporate Director: Modernisation and Wellbeing (SE), Head of Environment (SP), Heritage Commercial Manager (SW), Community Engagement Manager (DD), Corporate Director: Customers (HW), Democratic Services Officer (RAH), and Committee Administrator (SLW)

#### **1 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Peter Evans, Carys Guy-Davies and Bob Murray

#### **2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No personal or prejudicial interests were declared.

#### **3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR**

No items were raised which, in the opinion of the Chair, should be considered at the meeting as a matter of urgency pursuant to Section 100B(4) of the Local Government Act, 1972.

#### **4 MINUTES**

The Minutes of a meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday, 25<sup>th</sup> October, 2012, were submitted.

Councillor Mullen James informed the Committee that with regard to the item "Review of Highway Verge Grass Cutting 2012" there was to be a meeting taking place on 13<sup>th</sup> December, 2012 in Caledfryn, Denbigh, to discuss the terms of the grass cutting contract.

***RESOLVED*** that the Minutes be received and approved as a correct record.

## 5 REVIEW OF HERITAGE AND ARTS ASSETS

The Head of Environment (H:E) introduced a report to consider the progress to date in realising efficiencies with respect to the County's Heritage and Arts assets and strategies developed with a view to ensuring their future viability. The aim was to develop a service that would deliver the maximum benefits for local residents, communities, tourists and the council.

In November 2010 a comprehensive report was produced entitled "Review of Heritage Assets and associated arms-length companies". The report analysed the options available to the council, and concluded there was no easy option for disposal or outsourcing of the assets. The document had not been published as it was an internal document but the document would be available if requested by Members.

The service was transferred to Environmental Services on 1 April 2011. Significant changes had taken place since the transfer and more changes were planned for the future.

It was decided a more commercial approach was required. The generation of increased income was required to improve the service. H:E introduced the Heritage Commercial Manager (HCM) who gave a brief outline of her background experience.

The following sites are council run:

- Ruthin Gaol
- Nant Clwyd y Dre (Ruthin)
- Plas Newydd (Llangollen)
- The portfolio also covered the Council's relationship with the Bodelwyddan Castle Trust.

In the past, the sites had been run as museums and were heavily dependant upon receipt of grant funding which had dramatically reduced over the years. Research had taken place over the last 12 months investigating potential growth. The sites were to be run as visitor attractions for education purposes, tourist attractions and heritage centres, whilst not losing museum accreditation status. Weddings were also now taking place at the sites and bookings had already been received for 2013.

The paranormal market was a huge growth area and the historic buildings were fascinating for these investigation groups. The paranormal groups had no impact on the day activities held at the sites. The groups arrive at 8.00 p.m., carry out their investigations over night and leave at approximately 5.00 or 6.00 a.m.

Income raised from the paranormal groups was £17,000. A target increase of income of 10% had been set for next year. Work was ongoing to bring down costs and increase income. In 2010/2011 there had been approximately £60,000 income but in 2011/2012 the income had increased to £71,000.

Staffing rotas were now more efficient e.g. in the past, during the summer, the Old Gaol would close for two days per week, therefore losing the custom of visitors. This was to change to encourage a larger number of visitors.

Denbighshire were working with Conwy, Flintshire and Wrexham Councils as to how other Local Authorities monitor their budget.

Rhyl Museum was only an exhibition room adjoining the library which needed to be brought out from the library. The museum was very interesting, but an alternative location needed to be found. Unfortunately, at the present time, there was no budget for this to take place.

A project was due to commence in 2013 to catalogue all the artefacts currently held in stores. Once this project had been completed, more of the artefacts could be used in exhibitions.

The Chair clarified the service needed to be integrated in town plans and summarised that:

- the Heritage Service was presently costing more than the income it was generating.
- emphasis needed to be placed on providing services that visitors wanted, and that this would rely on strong communication.
- each individual site would require a business plan to be developed in conjunction with the Town Plans.

The Chair suggested that the business plans for each site should be presented to the appropriate Member Area Group to maximise commercial opportunities and to ensure that services were relevant to the priorities of local people.

**RESOLVED** that the Communities Scrutiny Committee:

- (a) Endorse the operational measures that the Service has put in place, and the direction of travel that is now being followed; and
- (b) A further report is submitted to the committee in a year's time in order to give an update on the effectiveness of the strategy introduced following the Review and to appraise the Service's financial position.

## **6 SUPPORTING PEOPLE STRATEGY UPDATE**

The Corporate Director, Modernisation and Wellbeing (CD:MW) introduced a report regarding the three year spend plan for Supporting People and changes to the Supporting People Strategy including the implications for Denbighshire County Council (DCC) of changes to the Supporting People Programme across Wales.

Cabinet had requested that Scrutiny consider the impact of the national changes on DCC. Further detail would be provided in 2013 as implications of the new arrangements become clearer.

Supporting People was a significant programme providing "housing related" support services to a wide range of vulnerable groups, including people who were homeless, people with mental health needs, learning disabilities, the young &

vulnerable, people with substance misuse need, ex-offenders, people fleeing domestic violence and older people. The aim was to enable them to maintain secure housing while developing other aspects of their lives promoting independence. The Supporting People Programme had been evaluated at national level and shown to deliver very positive financial and non financial benefits. In Denbighshire, Supporting People funded a wide range of services including elements of sheltered housing, extra care, women's refuges, community living schemes for people with learning disabilities and schemes for homeless people.

Changes to the administration of the Supporting People programme were taking place across Wales. These included a new funding distribution formula and transfer of contracting responsibilities for some services from Welsh Government to local authorities. In addition, new governance arrangements, including Regional Collaborative Committees (RCC) with key responsibilities for the Supporting People programme, had been established across Wales. Denbighshire were to lose £1.5 million of funding over 5 years. All North Wales Local Authorities stood to lose funding within the Welsh Government Standard.

The RCC would look at how this resource was spent and how it could be used in a more cost effective way. The report set out potential implications and another aspect was to give members information of what the changes were in the Supporting People Strategy 2013/14 – Appendix 1.

The big issue was the amount of funding DCC stood to lose over a short period of time. The Welsh Government requested a 3 year spend plan. DCC were providing a spend plan for 2013/14 but were not prepared to provide information how a further £600,000 would be taken from the budget over a further 3 years. This was a risk, but would allow a longer period of time to prepare.

Essentially, savings were to be found from schemes run by the council, but, there were also schemes run from other organisations. In 2014/15, cuts were to be spread across these organisations also.

The Committee recognised that the Council had gone as far as it could to resist the reduction in funding and accepted that the 3 year spend plan and the revision of the Supporting People Strategy were an appropriate response to a difficult situation.

***RESOLVED*** that the Communities Scrutiny Committee receives the report and notes the 3 year spend plan and the changes made to the Supporting People Strategy for 2013/14.

## **7 COMMUNITY COVENANT WITH THE ARMED FORCES**

The Community Engagement Manager (CEM) introduced a report regarding an Armed Services Covenant.

All Welsh Local Authorities had been asked by the WLGA and others, to sign a Community Covenant with the Armed Forces which sought to establish a commitment of care to serving Service personnel, their families and veterans. The aims of the covenant were to encourage local communities to support the service

community in their area and increase awareness and understanding amongst the public of issues which affected the Armed Forces Community. The report contained a draft Covenant defining what could be offered to the Armed Services personnel in order to ensure they did not suffer any disadvantage when accessing public services.

A Community Covenant is a voluntary statement of mutual support between a civilian community and its local armed forces community. It was intended to compliment the national Armed Forces covenant which outlined the moral obligation between the nation, the government and the armed forces at a local level.

The report had been unanimously endorsed by Council in September 2012 and requested Communities Scrutiny Committee satisfied itself on the measures Denbighshire wished to adopt.

It was important to underpin the ethos that the Armed Forces were not disadvantaged when accessing Denbighshire services, however, the Council must also be careful not to actively discriminate in their favour to the detriment of other groups in society unless positive discrimination was already enshrined in legislation.

The suggested measures to be adopted by Denbighshire were set out fully within the report (5.2).

The council were bound by legislation and the armed forces personnel received additional housing points compared to other members of the community. It would be challenging looking after the residents of Denbighshire and making sure legislation was met. Most measures were within the report, not because armed services personnel would be given priority, but because they were governed by legislation.

CEM to take the housing issue back, to obtain clarification of the legislation. Once clarification received, he would inform the Committee.

The issue of employment was raised as a similar issue to housing.

CEM confirmed he would obtain clarification on the issue. Discussions would also take place with agencies, who provided career advice etc. All employment agencies were involved with the covenant.

The discount to Leisure Centres offered by Denbighshire County Council to armed services personnel would not disadvantage other groups. Discount was available to members of the police force, and fire service and it had been agreed armed services personnel fell into this category also. The discount would be for actively serving personnel, not veterans or families of armed service personnel. The discount would be restricted to access to the swimming pool and gym only.

A question was raised if members of the Territorial Army or Cadets were included. CEM stated they were not but would seek guidance to this question. The actual template of the covenant had been agreed, so a lot of ethos in terms of how it should be adopted was now in place.

The Covenant was a living document which could be reviewed. Once Scrutiny agreed to the recommendations, the intention would be to formally adopt the Covenant at a future Council meeting with representatives from the Armed Services, and other outside organisations in attendance.

CEM suggested the report be brought back to Committee on an annual basis and if additional measures needed to be added or removed, this could then be dealt with.

The Chair stated that once clarification of the points were obtained then there was no need for further discussion by Communities Scrutiny. Agreed to endorse the measures for it to be presented at a future Full Council meeting.

**RESOLVED** that the Communities Scrutiny Committee:

- i) *endorses the Community Covenant with the Armed Forces subject to clarification being provided of the potential impact on housing and employment in Denbighshire;*
- ii) *agree to add a report to the Forward Work Programme to be considered in 12 month's time which will allow the Committee to review the Measures contained in the Covenant.*

## **8 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME**

The Democratic Services Officer (DSO) introduced a report on the Committee's Forward Work Programme. He advised that two reports:

- (a) Town Plans
- (b) Etape Cymru 2012

had been deferred until January 2013.

The Committee was advised that the report titled "Disposal of Council Buildings, Property and Land" that was originally scheduled for the meeting had been withdrawn, with the Chair's agreement, following a decision at a recent Service Performance Challenge that it would be beneficial for the council to undertake a review of its assets. The Committee agreed to add a report on "Strategic Asset Management" to the agenda of the January 2013 meeting, which would replace and expand on the original report.

The chair agreed to add a report on the implementation of the new recycling arrangements to the agenda for the February 2013 meeting, with the item on the Control of Caravan Sites to be deferred to the April 2013 meeting.

School transport report – originally asked for information report to this meeting but request received for it to be deferred to Spring 2013. The committee agreed to accept the information report at the meeting in April 2013.

DSO informed the Committee that as part of the Wales Audit Office's (WAO) scrutiny evaluation and improvement project "Good Scrutiny? Good Question!" members of Wrexham County Borough Council's Peer Learning Exchange Team

and representatives from the WAO would be attending the Communities Scrutiny meeting in February, 2013 to review the meeting.

**RESOLVED** that subject to the above amendments, the Communities Scrutiny Forward Work Programme be approved.

## **9 FEEDBACK FROM COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES**

Councillor Huw Williams informed the Committee that he, together with other Councillors as part of Denbighshire's Peer Learning Exchange Team, had attended the Wales Audit Office (WAO) "Good Scrutiny? Good Question!" event in Llandudno on Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> December. He personally thought Denbighshire were ahead of other Local Authorities and were doing a very good job.

Councillor Gwyneth Kensler added there were 4-5 Councillors attending per Local Authority and Steve Price, Democratic Services Manager was also in attendance.

The Democratic Services Manager, Steve Price, would be collating all the information and presenting the findings to the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs meeting.

**The meeting concluded at 10.35 a.m.**