

COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Committee held in Conference Room 1a, County Hall, Ruthin on Thursday, 28 February 2013 at 9.30 am.

PRESENT

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

ALSO PRESENT

Councillor Hugh Carson Irving, Councillor Jason McLellan, Councillor Paul Penlington and Councillor David Smith

Corporate Director: Communities (HW), Head of Highways and Environmental Services (SP), Waste Management and Recycling Manager (JE), Head of Communication, Marketing and Leisure(JG), Head of Planning and Public Protection (GB), Planning Policy Manager (AL), Community Grants and Rural Development Plan Supporting Officer (AS), Democratic Services Manager (SP), Scrutiny Co-ordinator (RE) and Democratic Services Officer (RH).

Councillor Clive Carver, Councillor Richard Jones, Councillor David Mackie and Margaret Parry-Jones representing Flintshire County Council

Ena Lloyd and Paul Goodlad representing the Wales Audit Office

The Chair welcomed everybody present to the meeting and extended a special welcome to the representatives from Flintshire County Council's Peer Learning Exchange Team, who were observing the meeting as part of the Wales Audit Office's Scrutiny Improvement Study. For the benefit of those observing the meeting, the members and officers present introduced themselves and briefly explained their individual roles.

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Peter Evans

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No personal or prejudicial interests were declared

3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

No urgent matters were raised

4 MINUTES

Councillor Rhys Hughes noted that the summary of the urgent matter on the provision and siting of grit bins (page 5) was not accurate, with the 'grit bins' described on the Horseshoe Pass actually just being grit left in piles. The Head of Highways and Environmental Services (HHES) had only recently taken responsibility for the Highways and Infrastructure service so was not able to give details on the decision to adopt the recommendation of the Environment Agency to provide a grit source at specific locations. The HHES agreed to clarify the details and report back to the local Member Area Group.

RESOLVED - *That subject to the above amendment, the minutes of the meeting held on 17th January 2013 were approved as an accurate record.*

5 REVIEW OF THE ROLL OUT OF THE X2 RECYCLING SCHEME

The HHES delivered a report (circulated prior to the meeting) which gave details of the problems encountered in introducing new 'X2' recycling arrangements for the south of the county in November 2012, and the measures that were taken to address these problems. Some of the key decisions made prior to the implementation were acknowledged as having contributed to the problems incurred by residents, such as the decision to implement the new system in November rather than waiting until Spring 2013.

Delays in the delivery of essential equipment and problems resulting from the use of a computerised route optimisation system and operating in rural areas had been significantly underestimated and had resulted in confusion and delay for residents. The problems caused a back-log of complaints coming through Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. A recovery programme was implemented to urgently address the problems from the implementation and additional resources were deployed to rectify the situation. Despite the problems, the decisions to implement the recycling system in one session and to use a computer software system for optimising routes were considered to have been correct.

A thorough debate followed on the adequacy of the arrangements for the introduction of the X2 recycling scheme. The Council's response to the problems which had arisen were praised by the Committee, particularly with regard to the Customer Services Centre, but several concerns were raised in respect of:

- Poor communication with residents
- Inaccurate collection calendars being distributed in some areas
- Reputational damage to the Council
- Unfamiliarity of delivery and collection staff with the local area

The HHES and the Waste Management and Recycling Manager (WMRM) provided responses to a number of lines of enquiry and confirmed the following:

- The cost of the mistakes would be charged to the contractors where appropriate.
- Reputational damage was a valid concern, but although the recycling arrangements were an important and visible service, the costs of the roll-out was said to only account for a very small percentage of the service's overall budget.

- The market for computer mapping technology was competitive, and other options existed, but the problems resulted from the route being developed very close to the X2 implementation, and so little time was available to identify problems.
- Errors made in the distribution of calendars were attributed to mistakes in interpreting the coding system by distribution staff. Another collection calendar distribution was possible but would incur a cost, and the problem of miscollections was considered to be under control. Councillors would be contacted to identify areas with miscollection issues to be targeted. Work was also being undertaken to make collection schedules available through the DCC website.
- The aspiration was to have the full recycling service in place for the whole of the county, but the difficulties operating the large collection vehicles in rural areas made variations to the level of service across the county necessary.
- The equipment/materials were sourced from foreign suppliers following a tendering process which took into account quality and price.

The Corporate Director: Customers (CD:C) stated that it was to be expected that any large project would encounter implementation difficulties, but expressed disappointment that so many issues had arisen. The response of officers to the circumstances was praised, with officers acknowledging the mistakes and working very hard to recover the situation. The CD:C identified that the problems encountered in implementing the recycling scheme could provide an important lesson on project delivery for all departments within the Council.

Councillor David Smith, the Lead Member for Public Realm, informed the Committee that he had issued an apology for the implementation problems through the local press, and emphasised that at the time it was more important to recover the situation than to apportion blame. It was noted that the implementation of the X2 scheme had resulted in an increase of 34% in food waste recycling already, with Denbighshire now having the highest recycling rate in Wales.

The Chair commented that the problems in implementing the X2 arrangements had to be recognised, and commended the officers and Lead Member for their work in acknowledging and addressing the situation. The importance of good communication with local residents and service partners was emphasised, and the role of the Service's leadership in ensuring that the improvements are implemented was stated. The Chair summarised that although some people were dissatisfied with the X2 scheme's implementation, the majority of people had not encountered any problems and the increased rate of recycling was very encouraging. The Chair thanked the officers for attending the meeting and said that their honesty in discussing the implementation problems was appreciated.

RESOLVED – *that the Committee:*

- i)* Agrees that the lessons learned are used to underpin any future service changes that might be planned across the Council;
- ii)* Agrees that the outcomes from the roll-out are publicised through a press release and County Voice as soon as definitive figures on the improved recycling rates are available;

- iii) Supports the proposal that the publication of outcome figures in the next edition of County Voice should be accompanied by an apology for the problems that were encountered during the roll-out, and an explanation of what went wrong;
- iv) Recommends that all councillors are contacted, once a costing exercise has been undertaken, to establish whether another distribution exercise of collection calendars is required in any part of their council wards;
- v) Requests that figures detailing the overall costs and benefits to the Council of recycling in comparison to the previous waste disposal regime are provided to the Committee for information, along with details of monies etc. withheld from the contactors engaged to deliver this latest roll-out; and
- vi) Requests that, as part of the Service Challenge process, the Service explores the viability of operating alternate week food collections across the County with a view to realising the optimum level of recycling provision possible along with associated benefits and costs of providing this service, and that a summary report on future service provision be submitted to the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group initially for consideration.

6 ENGAGING WITH OUR COMMUNITIES AND REDEFINING OUR APPROACH TO BEING 'AN EXCELLENT COUNCIL CLOSE TO THE COMMUNITY'

The Lead Member for Customers and Communities, Councillor Hugh Irving, introduced a report (circulated prior to the meeting) which invited the committee to comment on how the Council engages with the community and the redefinition of the strands informing the Council's approach to being an 'excellent council close to the community'.

The CD:C explained that, previously, community forums had offered an opportunity for communities to engage with the Council's work, but that public participation had not been strong and the forums were discontinued, without being replaced. More recently, the Council's most effective work with local communities had been through a series of public consultations on specific issues, such as the review of primary education. The CD:C invited members to offer suggestions of potential options for improving links with local communities in Denbighshire and a number of suggestions were made:

- Providing an option for residents to sign up for the 'Denbighshire Today' emails that are circulated to members.
- The suggestion of Special Member Area Group meetings being held, either before or after the normal meeting, at which members of the public could discuss issues with their local members.
- Flintshire County Council's recent distribution of a 'Democracy Cookbook' to youth clubs, which had been designed to help explain to young people how democracy and politics work, was cited as a positive example of engaging young people in the work of local authorities which Denbighshire could learn from.
- Better communication between officers and local members to ensure that local councillors were aware of everything that was going on/affecting their wards. There was some concern that, now and again, the local member became a secondary consultee on matters affecting his/her ward.

The Head of Communication, Marketing and Leisure noted that a new Communication Strategy had been adopted by the Council and the 1st Year Action Plan looked at channels for development, particularly relating to social media and press releases. It was also mentioned that a recent youth forum was held in Rhyl to discuss The BIG Plan, which was attended by the Council's senior leadership and other organisations involved in the Local Service Board such as the Police, and had been well received by those in attendance.

The CD:C directed the Committee to the second part of the report, and explained that the Council was looking to review the definition of the Council being 'close to the community' to align with the priorities set out under the new Corporate Plan. The progress that had been made in implementing the Getting Closer to the Community Action Plan over the last 18 months was summarised under the three themes of 'Representation and Engagement', 'Service Delivery' and 'Community Development'. To build upon this work, four new strands were being proposed, and the Committee was invited to comment before the new strands were finalised. The proposed strands were:

- 1) Democratic and community engagement
- 2) Putting our customers first
- 3) Mapping community needs and aspirations and building capacity
- 4) Service improvement
 - a) Developing the right culture
 - b) Designing services to be physically close to their communities

During the discussion that followed Councillor Huw Williams emphasised the importance of relaying information through Member Area Groups to ensure that councillors are fully informed of what is going on. The Chair stated that the proposed strands were agreeable but that the important work would be in their delivery, which would need to be monitored. The CD:C said that the 'actions' flowing from the strands would be clarified, with arrangements for monitoring their success to be established once the four strands have been agreed.

The Lead Member for Customers and Communities added that a workshop on customer services had been arranged for 5th March in order to help identify customer needs, which all councillors were welcome to attend. Following an in-depth discussion it was:

RESOLVED – that:

- i) the Committee support the methods outlined in the report, including increased use of social media tools, for the purpose of improving engagement opportunities with county councillors, residents and interested groups;*
- ii) consideration is given to holding 'issue-led' Special Meetings of the Member Area Groups (MAGs) when consulting/engaging with communities on specific matters; and*
- iii) the Committee support the revised approach to the definition for being 'An Excellent Council **Close to the Community**' and that an outcome-based action*

plan, to include success measurements and key milestones, be drawn up with a view to delivering this aspiration, and that the action be closely monitored.

7 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator (SC) introduced a report (circulated prior to the meeting) which set out the Committee's future work programme and gave an update of recent developments relating to the Committee's work.

The SC advised the Committee that the report on the Supporting People Strategy that had originally been scheduled for the meeting had been deferred until July due to the time frame for assessing the local impact of the new strategy not being sufficient to compile a comprehensive analysis. This had been agreed by the Chair.

The Committee were directed to the Information Brief, which gave details of the Cabinet's resolution on 19th February specifying the conditions of authorisation for the road closure to allow the Etape Cymru cycling race to take place. This had followed from Communities Scrutiny Committee receiving a report on the arrangements for the race at their meeting on 17th January, from which a number of issues had been raised for the attention of Cabinet.

The SC notified the Committee of two issues that had been referred from the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group (SCVCG). The Committee agreed to schedule a report on the 'Play Sufficiency Assessment and Action Plan' for their meeting on 18th April, with the report on the 'Control of Caravan Sites' to be moved to the meeting in May to allow for this. The item on 'Access to the Countryside' had been inherited from the membership of the committee prior to the May 2012 elections and the SCVCG had asked the Committee to determine whether they wished to take this forward. The Committee were in agreement that this was not an issue that required the attention of a scrutiny committee at present.

A proposal form had been received from the Corporate Director: Economic and Community Ambition requesting that Communities Scrutiny Committee review the proposals for developing the town plans into broader area plans before they were submitted to Cabinet at their meeting on 16th April. The Committee agreed that it would be necessary to convene a special meeting to meet this timeframe, and the SC agreed to arrange this for 2nd April. It was felt that the attendance of the Leader and Lead Member would be beneficial in discussing the report.

In response to a verbal request from the Head of Communication, Marketing and Leisure the Committee agreed to schedule the presentation of the conclusions of the Review of the Council's Publications into its forward work programme for May 2013.

A Task & Finish Group had been set up to review the procedures for the procurement and regulation of food provided through Council services following the recent horsemeat in food allegations. The Committee agreed to receive a report on the Group's findings at its meeting on 23rd May.

The Committee were informed that a representative from Communities Scrutiny Committee was required on the Customers Service Challenge Group and Councillor Carys Guy-Davies agreed to receive be nominated.

Councillor Cefyn Williams raised an issue with regards to the state of the roads in some parts of the county, including in his electoral ward. The specific problem was scheduled for discussion at the Dee Valley Member Area Group the following week, but the Committee agreed that the wider issue of the condition of roads across the county would be an appropriate topic for scrutiny. The Committee asked for a report to be submitted in respect of this at their meeting on 4th July 2013.

RESOLVED – *That, subject to the above amendments, the Committee's Work Programme be approved.*

8 ALLOCATION OF COMMUTED SUMS AND COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY

The Head of Planning and Public Protection (HPPP) introduced a joint report, produced in conjunction with the Head of Housing and Community Development, which set out the current arrangements for the allocation of commuted sums payable in lieu of open space provision (as provided for by s106 Town and Community Planning Act 1990). The report also gave an update on the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Regulations, which will allow the Council to charge a fixed sum levy to contribute to the costs of improving infrastructure in order to support developments. The implementation of the CIL would be dependent on the adoption of the Local Development Plan (LDP) and was anticipated to significantly reduce the use of agreements under s106.

It was explained that the North Wales local authorities and the Snowdonia National Park Authority were working together to examine how the CIL could be implemented. The Council was in the process of recruiting to a temporary post established to progress this work, which had been jointly funded by the participating authorities. Due to the complexity of the CIL Regulations and the recent changes to the accompanying guidance, the Committee were advised that the report was only to raise awareness at this stage, with the Council needing to decide on whether or not to adopt the CIL in Denbighshire once the research into its impact had been completed.

Councillor Rhys Hughes questioned whether the Council had measures in place to ensure that developers were not able to evade their obligations, and the HPPP stated that the s106 provisions were usually enforceable but recognised that there had been some circumstances when this had not been possible, such as a case in Llangollen. The HPPP confirmed that members would be given training on the CIL prior to having to take a decision on whether to adopt the levy, and that Member Area Groups would also receive a report in the coming months on the potential changes.

It was affirmed that the CIL would allow significant scope in improving infrastructure compared to the s106 provisions, which were largely confined to improving open spaces. This would bring a risk that the potential increase in money available under

the CIL could be allocated by other organisations, diminishing the Council's control of the finances raised under the levy. The actual extent of the finance raised through the CIL would depend on the charging framework, which was still to be developed and so accurate figures were not yet available.

The Chair concluded that the true value of introducing the CIL could not be established until full financial details were available, and agreed that a report on the CIL should be listed as a future issue on the Committee's work programme once the research project had been completed.

RESOLVED – *That the Committee:*

- i)* acknowledges the figures on the income received from s106 Agreements for open space provision and maintenance, and the grant offers and payments which have been made; and
- ii)* notes the significance of the potential introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy and schedules a report on the proposals for implementing the CIL in Denbighshire into its forward work programme.

9 FEEDBACK FROM COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES

The Chair noted that he had recently attended a meeting of the Rhyl Going Forward Programme Board, which he described as being very interesting and said that the way that the multiple work streams for developing Rhyl were being co-ordinated as an overall project was very positive.

The Chair thanked the members of the Committee for their attendance and also thanked Flintshire County Council's Peer Learning Exchange Team, who had been observing the meeting.

The meeting concluded at 12:30pm.