

COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Committee held in Council Chamber, Russell House, Rhyl on Thursday, 4 July 2013 at 9.30 am.

PRESENT

Councillors James Davies, Peter Evans, Carys Guy, Huw Hilditch-Roberts (Chair), Bob Murray, Cefyn Williams, Cheryl Williams and Huw Williams

Observers: Councillors David Smith and Bobby Feeley

ALSO PRESENT

Corporate Director: Customers (HW), The Economic & Business Development Manager (TB), Development Control Manager (PM), Head of Environment (SP), Service Improvement Manager (VR), Strategic Highways Manager (MH), Section Manager: Network Management (TT), Senior Officer - Strategy and Partnerships (SL), Community Housing Manager (SK), Service Manager: Strategic Development (GG), Supporting People Team Manager (KN), Scrutiny Co-ordinator (RE) and Committee Administrator (SLW).

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Rhys Hughes, Win Mullen-James and Joe Welch

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No declarations of personal or prejudicial interest had been raised.

3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

No urgent matters were raised.

4 MINUTES

The minutes of the Communities Scrutiny Committee held on 23 May 2013 were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on the 23 May 2013 be received and approved as a correct record.

5 RHYL GOING FORWARD PROGRAMME (QUARTERLY REPORT)

The Economic & Business Development Manager (E&BDM) submitted a report (previously circulated) to provide information regarding progress in terms of implementing the Rhyl Going Forward (RGF) Regeneration Strategy.

The four workstreams of the programme and their current status were:-

- West Rhyl Regeneration Area had a current status of Orange
- Town Centre had a current status of Orange
- Seafront and Tourism had a current status of Yellow
- Live & Work in Rhyl had a current status of Orange

During consideration of the report, discussions went as follows:-

- DCC work in partnership with the Welsh Government and Pennaf on the West Rhyl Housing Improvement Project. The current orange status reflected the uncertainty around the project whilst awaiting the Inspector's decision following the Compulsory Purchase Order Public Inquiry which was expected imminently. Regardless of the decision, the next phase of demolition – north Gronant Street – was scheduled to begin this month.
- The proposed location for the new aquatic centre was on the promenade adjacent to the sky tower. The future plan was to demolish the existing Sun Centre and reconfigure and remodel the Pavilion Theatre. Due to the close proximity of the new aquatic centre to the sky tower, this raised more opportunities for the future use of the sky tower. The decision had not yet been taken as to the prospective size of the pool within the new aquatic centre. The 50 metre competition pool was unlikely to go ahead due to financial constraints and the limited amount of space available – as competition pools should also have warm up and cool down pool facilities on the same site. The two alternative options for consideration would be a 50 metre, four lane pool or a 25 metre pool with an enhanced leisure option. Partnership working on a detailed financial model was currently being undertaken. The aquatic centre would need to be an all year round facility for the local community as well as attracting visitors, for it to be financially viable.
- The former Bee Hotel renovations were completed and one tenant had been signed off. The building provided good quality office space and therefore the local authority did not foresee any problems signing up future tenants.
- Ocean Plaza Development. Councillor Joan Butterfield had been working with the Developers following Members concerns regarding the untidy state of the site. The developers had committed to replacing the hoarding boards at the site and the level of rubble was to be lowered and landscaped. Work would commence within the next month.
- The town centre was the focus of a bid for vibrant and viable places funding. The Queens Market would be included as part of the vibrant and viable places bid. If the bid was to be successful, it could be as much as £5 million annually. This would fund various projects in the town centre with delivery between April 2014 and March 2017. This would make an enormous difference to Rhyl over the next three to five years.
- Rhyl Harbour. The second arm of the bridge was due to be installed imminently.
- Rhyl High School designs were being developed. Investigations were taking place as to how to make the new facility work for the community and the business community as well as a school. Technology opportunities could create additional business in the evenings and weekends.

- The former Costigans building opposite Rhyl Railway Station had been fully renovated externally. Work was still required on the internal building as, unfortunately, not much interest had been shown in regard to prospective tenants renting the building. Therefore, the internal renovation would probably be required to encourage the signing up of a prospective tenant.

RESOLVED that the progress report on implementing the Rhyl Going Forward Regeneration Strategy be received and noted.

6 CONTROL OF CARAVAN SITES

The Development Control Manager (DCM) introduced a report (previously circulated) providing information regarding the progress of the project to monitor and enforce legislative controls on caravan sites in the county and to control the emergence of new ones.

This had been an update to the report presented to Communities Scrutiny Committee in July 2011.

The problem within the county had been that a number of caravans were not utilised for holiday purposes but as a main residence. An immense amount of intelligence gathering would be required to identify any breaches in planning or licensing conditions. The caravan parks could be regularised with new planning and licensing applications and they would be requested to make the sites lawful. A Caravan Site Strategy was to be drawn up. The Environmental Health Officer would be collating information on caravan sites including council tax, police and fire service information. A Caravan Site Seminar with larger caravan park owners was to be set up by the Public Protection Manager.

Within the Local Development Plan (LDP) it was stated that there was no requirement for any additional static caravan sites to be set up within the county, unless a need was identified with respect to supporting the area's tourism offer.

Problems arose if people resided in a caravan unlawfully, as there was a potential for them to be made homeless. Social Services and Housing would also need to be involved with this issue.

Planning was to be regularised with specific action points to address the problem of residential caravans within holiday sites. There was an urgency to assess if the local authority had re-housed any people in caravans, thereby involving social services and housing.

If a caravan site was found to be in breach of regulations but did not apply for a "change of use", the hard line approach option could be to close down the site. If this scenario were to take place, the county could be left with a derelict site. The second option could be an application put before Planning Committee and to state what percentage of pitches were used as residential pitches.

Concern was expressed by members at the speed of the process. A list of the sites being targeted was requested. The fact a number of people were residing in

caravans was thought to be a drain on the Council's resources. A multi-agency approach and risk/impact analysis would be drawn up as part of a Caravan Sites Strategy. Corporate support would therefore be required and the Corporate Director: Economic and Community Ambition would be consulted.

Conwy County Borough Council had been running a pilot scheme, the outcome of which was yet unknown.

RESOLVED that:-

- (i) The Committee receive and note the report*
- (ii) A multi-agency report and risk analysis/impact analysis along with a draft Caravan Sites Strategy for Denbighshire be brought back to the Committee in October 2013 for members' consideration.*

With the Committee's approval the Chair varied the order of business at this juncture.

7 IMPROVING OUR HIGHWAY/PUBLIC REALM SERVICE DELIVERY METHODS

The Head of Environment (HoE) submitted a report (previously circulated) updating members on the reorganisation of the Council's Highway/Public Realm Services.

On 18 December 2012, Cabinet decided to reorganise the Council's highway/public realm services. The report outlined how ideas were being developed and implemented. The presentation of the report provided Committee Members with an opportunity to shape the final outcome.

The key aims, set out in the Cabinet decision of December 2012 were:

- (i) To engender a culture-shift via a well-planned and carefully managed change programme that puts the customer at the heart of how services are delivered.
- (ii) To develop a strong management team that will deliver the change programme and manage continual improvement thereafter.
- (iii) To improve the Council's resilience when dealing with winter maintenance and emergency situations.
- (iv) To develop operational systems which were lean, efficient and flexible.
- (v) To engage positively with the national drive towards a regional transportation service.

The project would be a three year rolling programme. The newly merged Work Unit would procure works in the most cost effective manner. This could result in the use of local contractors rather than in house staff. Closer supervision of the work being paid for would take place, and overall would provide better value for money as the quality of work would be higher and therefore last longer.

Routine maintenance activities were to be undertaken by joined-up operational teams with one point of contact controlling each team. This was referred to as a Streetscene Model. Overall, there would be fewer Service Managers with more delegation given to the blue collar staff. The use of agency staff would be

eliminated in time. The blue collar staff would be required to commit to flexibility whilst working. Annualised hours and multi-tasking would be investigated and discussed with the Unions. If a lean and efficient workforce worked flexibly, that would be the best way to safeguard jobs.

With the use of the CRM, and with the Streetscene model in place, in future customers would receive quicker and more definitive responses to any queries submitted. The CRM responses would be monitored to ensure time deadlines were adhered to.

RESOLVED that members receive the report and endorse the general direction of travel with respect to improving service delivery.

8 **CONDITION OF THE COUNTY'S HIGHWAYS**

The Strategic Highways Manager (SHM) submitted a report (previously circulated) to outline the present condition of the County's highways network and identify areas which required maintenance work including the parameters and methodology for developing a three year draft programme of works.

The Assets Management role was to ensure that the Council obtains the best value from the ongoing investment in the highway in line with the latest asset management techniques.

The development of the programme had become more evidence based. The process was based on a number of condition indicators, views of the Network Manager and Area Engineers, consultation with Town and Community Councils, and discussion and agreement at Member Area Groups (MAGs).

Condition Indicators were:-

- SCANNER (Surface Condition Assessment for the National Network of Roads). The survey was undertaken annually but did not cover the whole of network and was particular poor on C/unclassified roads, which were the largest part of Denbighshire's network.
- SCRIM (Sideway-force Coefficient Routine Investigation Machine). Measured the wet skidding resistance and profile of the road surface and had similar coverage to the SCANNER survey. Due to the significance of this data, it underpinned the decision on which roads to maintain.
- RCI (Road Condition Indicator). This was a local measure of the visual condition of all the roads within the county. The Council's Highways Supervisors inspected the highways on a regular basis. The RCI data was the best indicator of the condition of the highways as it was frequently updated and covered the entire network.

The programme for this year was underway and continued work was required with the existing processes for the 2014/15 programme. It was recommended that a Working Group be set up to develop a strategic approach to highways asset management which would determine the future allocation of capital funding and that a Member from each Member Area Group (MAG) serve on the Working Group. The Scrutiny Co-ordinator confirmed she would contact the Community Engagement

Manager to arrange this. The condition of the highways would be reviewed annually at the end of the winter season.

Councillor Cefyn Williams expressed his concern regarding the standard of the roads within his local area. Councillor Williams read from the Wales Audit Office's Annual Improvement Report 2013 for Denbighshire which stated that roads in "areas such as the Dee Valley [appeared] to be in a very poor condition". He wished it to be known that he had no complaint against any officers but needed to express his annoyance at the state of the roads. The SHM agreed to meet with Councillor Williams to discuss this issue on a separate occasion outside the meeting.

The Section Manager: Network Manager confirmed to the Committee that all roads within the county were surveyed at least twice a year. Four cycles of data had been collated over the past two years and a list of the top worse roads within the county had been compiled. The SHM confirmed that a draft Highways Asset Management Strategy would be drawn up. The Head of Environment confirmed a 3 year Highways Capital Plan would also be compiled

RESOLVED that:-

- (i) Members receive and approve the report*
- (ii) The Committee agreed that a draft Highways Asset Management Strategy be presented to the Communities Scrutiny Committee in November 2013 following the establishment of the Working Group.*

9 DEVELOPING THE LOCAL HOUSING STRATEGY - DENBIGHSHIRE (2013-18)

The Senior Officer – Strategy and Partnerships (SOSP) submitted a report (previously circulated) to provide Members with the opportunity to comment on the draft Local Housing Strategy prior to wider consultation.

The Local Housing Strategy (LHS) set out the current local housing situation across all tenures and provided strategic direction for five years. The current LHS was adopted in 2007 and was currently being fully revised.

Denbighshire County Council was working in close partnership with Glyndŵr University to develop the LHS as they offered a wealth of expertise, had an excellent track record and presented value for money.

The LHS was to be presented to Full Council in September 2013.

A request was made to the Community Housing Manager (CHM) for costings showing the comparison of living in a rural area compared to living in an urban area. The CHM clarified that a new Research Officer had been appointed and the figures would be available in approximately six months.

RESOLVED that:-

- (i) Members receive and note the report and the draft Local Housing Strategy 2013-18*

(ii) a quarterly "information report" on the Local Housing Strategy implementation plan be submitted to the Committee for monitoring purposes, with the proviso that it may call the Lead Member and officers in if any areas of concern came to light.

10 UPDATE ON SUPPORTING PEOPLE FUNDED INTERNAL SERVICES IN DENBIGHSHIRE

Apologies were received from the Head of Adult and Business Services for this item.

The Lead Member for Social Care and Children's Services presented a report (previously circulated) providing up to date information regarding the funding of internal services provided by the Supporting People Programme in Denbighshire and the planning to secure those services in the light of the Supporting People (SP) funding cuts.

Cabinet had requested that Communities Scrutiny Committee considered the impact of the new arrangements on the delivery and funding of SP services in Denbighshire, including identification of pressures caused and potential solutions to alleviate any pressures.

The Supporting People programme had been launched ten years ago. The funding of key internal services provided by the SP programme in Denbighshire included:-

- Extra Care Housing
- Support for People with a Physical Disability
- Support for people with Mental Health Needs
- Support for people who have a Learning Disability
- Telecare Services
- Reablement Services

The Denbighshire SP budget would be facing cuts in the region of £330K per annum for 2014/15 and 2015/16. This would be a five year programme of cuts which would see the total Supporting People Programme Grant to Denbighshire reduced by approximately 20%. That would equate to cuts over £70,000 per annum for the next two years in support provided to Denbighshire Adult Services. At the end of the two year period, there would be a possibility of further cuts being made.

It had been necessary to ensure all the services were supported fully, complying with grant conditions, otherwise a claw back of funding could result.

A letter had been received from the Welsh Government on the morning the Communities Scrutiny Committee meeting had been held, an excerpt of which stated as follows:-

"I want to make sure local authorities and service providers budget in for further cuts. Supporting People National Advisory Board is looking at further cuts".

The Supporting People Team Manager explained to the Committee that contracts of employment had been re-written to reflect the work staff actually do. A number of projects had been cancelled. With regard to finding further funding cuts, Supporting People will need to make decisions around what projects are strategically relevant to fund. The needs of all the people who need them most must be met.

It was suggested that, on receipt of details of the further announced cuts, another SP Programme report be submitted to the Committee.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) *Members receive and note the report*
- (ii) *An update report be provided to Communities Scrutiny Committee detailing the further cuts announced by the Welsh Government in July 2013, their impact on the services provided by the Council, and the measures to be taken to mitigate the effects of the funding reductions and safeguard vulnerable people.*

11 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

A report by the Scrutiny Co-ordinator was submitted (previously circulated) seeking Members' review of the Committee's Forward Work Programme and providing an update on relevant issues. A draft Forward Work Programme (Appendix 1); Proposal form for Agenda Item for Communities Scrutiny – Talented Athlete Grant (Appendix 2); Cabinet's Forward Work Programme (Appendix 3) and Progress on Committee Resolutions (Appendix 4) had been attached to the report.

Members agreed to the following revisions to the work programme –

- October – Draft Flood Management Study and the draft Caravan Sites Strategy to be added to the FWP
- November – draft Highway's Asset Management Strategy and Three Year Capital Plan be added to the FWP

Regarding the proposal form submitted for "Talented Athlete Grant" to be added to a future Communities Scrutiny Committee business agenda, unfortunately, due to work programme pressures and the fact that the "impact" of the item had not scored highly, the Committee decided not to include it on its programme of future work.

At the recent Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group meeting, it had been agreed that in the future a Lead Member for a subject report would be expected to introduce and lead the item with the officer attending as support. A protocol would be drawn up for future meetings. A meeting had been provisionally scheduled between Lead Members and the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group in early September.

Councillor Bob Murray requested information regarding fixed penalty fine notices issued by Kingdom be received immediately rather than wait until the scheduled agenda item in October.

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator requested a Committee representative to serve on the Corporate Parenting Forum. Councillor Win Mullen James was recommended. The Scrutiny Co-ordinator confirmed she would contact Councillor Win Mullen James.

RESOLVED that subject to the above, the forward work programme as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report be approved.

12 FEEDBACK FROM COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES

None.

THE MEETING CONCLUDED AT 12.35 P.M.