

Report to: Communities Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting: 12 September 2013

Lead Member / Officers: Lead Member for Public Realm

Report Author: Corporate Director: Customers

Title: Public Realm Strategy

1. What is the report about?

This report is about seeking Communities Scrutiny Committee's views on the structure and content of the draft Public Realm Strategy for the Council. The Strategy is attached as Appendix 1 to this report.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

To date, the Council has not produced a Public Realm Strategy which outlines the way it intends to deal with issues affecting the public realm within the County. An Internal Audit report into the way the Council manages the public realm, recommended that such a Strategy is necessary in order to develop clarity and coherence around how the Council deals with this important area. The second recommendation within the Audit report was to ensure better joint working between key services and a more corporate approach to the way that the Council plans and responds to issues that stem from the public realm.

3. What are the Recommendations?

That Scrutiny Members comment on the content of the draft Public Realm Strategy before it is formally presented to a future Cabinet meeting.

4. Report details

The draft Public Realm Strategy has been developed following research into similar strategies that exist elsewhere in Wales and beyond which include some strategies that have been considered from overseas. A number of key officers at Director and Head of Service level were involved in beginning to shape the Strategy. An earlier draft of this Strategy was shared at a workshop of senior and middle managers that contribute to the delivery of public realm services within the County. This workshop enabled further development of the Strategy to take place. The Lead Member has also been involved in the various stages in the development of the Strategy. The document aims to be a strategic document that defines what is meant by the term public realm, and how the Council can control and influence the work that takes place. The Strategy attempts to define the importance of partnership working in implementing change in order to improve the state of the public realm.

An attempt has been made to define briefly the roles and responsibilities of key members, Scrutiny, Member Area Groups and key officers. Four strategic principles have been identified which are:

- accessible and well-connected public realm
- clean and tidy environment
- local identity preserved and developed
- a safe environment

More detailed descriptions about what is meant by these four strategic principles are outlined on pages 5-8 of the draft document, together with some practical examples of some developments over recent months and years. This Strategy will help to deliver the corporate priority “Clean and Tidy Streets” together with the priority for “Developing the local economy”, although it is much broader than these two priorities alone, as it affects the life of all our residents and those who work and visit Denbighshire.

The purpose of this Strategy is to influence the way that Council services work in future and the way that the Council relates to partners in terms of our work in improving the public realm. In addition to developing and agreeing this Strategy, more work will follow to bring key service areas together to work more effectively on a coherent basis in order to deliver the precepts of the Strategy. An example of this kind of activity, which has worked well already, is the development and implementation of the Anti-Fouling Strategy. In addition, the bringing together of Highways & Environmental Services into one coherent Denbighshire based service, will also play a crucial role in securing better co-ordination of the Council’s own activity. Other services that play an important part in this work is the Planning & Public Protection Service, the Housing Service and our Communication, Leisure & Marketing Service. In order to respond to the second recommendation from the Audit report, the Corporate Director: Customers has brought relevant Heads of Service together to work on key developments.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

This Strategy will assist in the delivery of the corporate priority on Clean and Tidy Streets together with the corporate priority on “Developing the local economy”.

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

It is envisaged that much of the work to deliver this Strategy will be within current service budgets and within any Corporate Plan allocations for the two corporate priorities listed above.

7. What are the main conclusions of the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) undertaken on the decision?

The decision is to seek Members views on the structure and content of the draft Public Realm Strategy. The Equality Impact Assessment, which was undertaken on the draft strategy proposal (see appendix 2), will offer additional information to compliment Member understanding of the draft proposal.

8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

To date, the consultations that have taken place have been with relevant officers from the various services delivering aspects of the public realm within the Authority, with the Lead Member and the Senior Leadership Team. City, Town & Community Councils have also received copies for their comments, as have the voluntary sector and Natural Resources Wales. It is proposed that this draft Strategy be considered by the Communities Scrutiny Committee in September.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

Any additional costs arising from the implementation of the Strategy will have to be met from existing resources.

10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

If the Council decides not to develop the Public Realm Strategy there is a risk of not satisfying a recommendation that has come from an internal Audit report, and that the lack of coherence identified by Audit will continue as a problem within the Authority into the future. This poses a risk as the approach to handling the public realm within the Council may be less than effective and coherent. Developing an agreed Strategy for the public realm and an operational structure that will promote the implementation of this Strategy on a shared basis between relevant departments will reduce this risk and will potentially improve the approach to the public realm within the Authority, leading to positive evaluations from residents and visitors to the County.

11. Power to make the Decision

Section 111 Local Government Act 1972 and Section 2 Local Government Act 2000 as general powers, enable the Council to make decisions in respect of this.

Furthermore, the policy context section on pages 9 and 10 of the draft Strategy outline the Legal frameworks that govern how the public realm is managed.

Article 6.3.3(a) of the Council's Constitution sets out scrutiny's role with respect to policy development.

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