

PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Performance Scrutiny Committee held in Conference Room 1a, County Hall, Ruthin on Thursday, 24 October 2013 at 9.30 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Bill Cowie, Richard Davies, Geraint Lloyd-Williams, Peter Owen, Arwel Roberts, Gareth Sandilands and David Simmons (Chair)

Lead Member, councillor David Smith attended at the Committee's request.

Observers: Councillors Win Mullen-James and Huw Jones.

ALSO PRESENT

Corporate Director: Economic and Community Ambition (RM), Head of Planning and Public Protection (GB), Public Protection manager (EJ), CCTV Supervisor (GS), Head of Environment (SP), Audit Manager (BS), Section Manager: Network Management (TT), Development Control Manager (PM), Scrutiny Co-ordinator (RE) and Committee Administrator (SLW).

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Meirick Davies, Colin Hughes and Dewi Owens

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No declarations of interest were raised.

3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

No urgent matters had been raised.

4 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the Performance Scrutiny Committee held on 19 September, 2013 were submitted.

Councillor Bill Cowie expressed his concern at the fact that the Information Briefing papers were received so close to the meeting. He personally would prefer to receive the information as and when it was received rather than included in one document immediately before the meeting to allow time to digest all the information.

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator confirmed that, if it was the Committee's wish to receive the information intermittently as and when received, she could supply the information in that manner.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 19 September, 2013 be received and approved as a correct record.

5 CCTV IN DENBIGHSHIRE

The Lead Member for Public Realm, Councillor David Smith, presented a report (previously circulated) to consult with Members on a range of options for modernising, upgrading and improving the Council's CCTV and Out of Hours contact team.

Members had requested an update report on the progress that had been made with proposals to develop the Council's CCTV and Out of Hours Calls function, following the meeting in April 2013.

The Head of Planning and Public Protection introduced the CCTV Supervisor and the Public Protection Manager.

16 possible options were listed within the confidential appendix to the report.

The options were to ensure a CCTV service would continue to be delivered within a reduced budget. The CCTV service running costs in 2010/11 were £341k but by 2014/15 the budget would be reduced to £228k.

The feedback received from Members and also from Partners was that it was a good and valuable service, therefore, Denbighshire was attempting to deliver the service at either the same or even an improved level whilst making savings. There was an opportunity to enhance the CCTV service and to run the service on a business footing.

Currently, comprehensive CCTV services only existed in certain areas of the county with limited CCTV service available in other areas.

During the evenings and weekends, call centre calls were diverted to the Out of Hours Team in the CCTV control room as the operators had a dual role.

Within the options were a mix of ideas to enhance the service and to provide the service for towns who do not currently have CCTV. Included in the options were proposals to approach Town Councils to seek their agreement to contribute towards the provision of these facilities. Businesses were also to be approached with the business plan for Denbighshire to offer to set up CCTV on their premises which could generate funding for the Council, whilst offering protection to their business and premises. Sponsorship of cameras was also under consideration.

RESOLVED that under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the Press and Public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 14 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

PART II

Following much discussion, the following points were raised:

- The main users of the CCTV service were North Wales Police. The contribution from the Police to each Local Authority was £18k. This figure had been set some years previous. The Police were reluctant to enter into negotiations over the payment either regionally or at a local authority level regarding any increased contribution. One option would be that the police may be able to provide staff support to the CCTV such as Officers on “light duties” as a secondment.
- Recommendation that a possible three year business plan be drawn up involving internal audit to turn the service into a profit base.
- Under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, the council had a duty to reduce crime and disorder in the area, but there was no statutory obligation to run a CCTV service.
- The issue of the staffing structure of the CCTV service was raised due to the fact that two members of staff had left voluntarily and had not been replaced. This had made a saving of approximately £50-60k. Therefore, due to the decline in staff, the 24 hour rota had been extremely difficult to keep running.
- Working in collaboration with Conwy County Borough Council had been one of the options within the appendix. There could be a future option of co-operating with Conwy and sharing resources during quiet times.
- Requesting a contribution from Town Councils brought further questions from Members. Rhuddlan Town Council Member stated that Rhuddlan Town Council would be unable to finance the CCTV scheme. Perhaps a smaller contribution would be acceptable. The cost would be approximately £250-£300 per camera per year. There would be negotiations and discussions with all Town Councils regarding the financial aspect of the service.
- The opportunity to project manage the updating and enhancement of CCTV cameras in some towns could be considered. The updated cameras would beam back images to the Rhyl Control Room, with a small annual fee charged for each camera.
- The CCTV control room ensured activity was recorded and kept for up to 30 days. The recordings were useful for a range of Council Services, the police and individuals in terms of providing clear evidence. As the CCTV service was often asked for video footage to support a prosecution or individual action, a charging regime could be introduced for providing the recorded information on disc or electronically.
- North Wales Police did not currently charge the Council rent for the use of the facilities within the Rhyl Police Station. Denbighshire did however pay for the electricity used.

It was:

RESOLVED that:

- *subject to the above comments on the contents of the report, the Committee support the proposed initiatives and agree the need for Officers to undertake a detailed business case analysis on each of the proposals; and*
- *that an update report on the progress attained in developing a business case be presented to the Committee in six months.*

PART 1 - THE PRESS AND PUBLIC ARE INVITED TO ATTEND THIS PART OF THE MEETING

6 TAXI LICENSING UPDATE

The Lead Member for Public Realm, Councillor David Smith, presented a report (previously circulated) to inform Members of the progress that had been made in reviewing the taxi licensing function including the implementation of improved, more robust procedures for the protection of the public, particularly the vulnerable within the communities.

A thorough review of licensing procedures took place and had approved by the Licensing Committee in June 2013. These procedures were now being implemented by officers.

In addition to the review of procedures, a complete review of taxi licensing policies was taking place. The revised policy was hoped to have been reported to the Licensing Committee in December 2013, however, the project had been more complex than initially envisaged and as such Licensing Committee would be asked in December to review when best to report on the revised policy.

Multi-agency working had been of great benefit. Denbighshire had been working with the North Wales Police, VOSA, and the Department of Work and Pensions with respect to taxi licensing enforcement matters.

Councillor Bill Cowie stated he had been a member of the Licensing Committee for the past 5 years and things had definitely improved. Committee members asked that their congratulations on the improvements achieved be conveyed to all staff involved with taxi licensing procedures and enforcement.

There was no longer extensive collaboration with Conwy Borough County Council but there was a level of co-operation, as indeed was the case with other bordering local authorities.

The taxi drivers' quality of driving was an issue which would be addressed. Every taxi driver had to take part in a "knowledge test". During review of the policy, a penalty point system was to be put in place to include driver conduct and attitude. Drivers had been before the Committee due to this issue. The taxi drivers were not currently tested on their driving skills. There had been an example recently when a taxi driver had to attend a driver awareness course following his attendance at Licensing Committee. The taking of a driving test of some description to assess the taxi drivers driving skills would be looked into and reported back to the Scrutiny Co-ordinator.

When new processes were reviewed, Internal Audit had been involved. Therefore, an audit review was in place. The result of the review would be reported to the Corporate Governance Committee in due course.

***RESOLVED** that subject to the above, the Committee note the contents of the report and the improvements achieved to date.*

At this juncture (10.45 a.m.) there was a 15 minute break.

Meeting reconvened at 11.00 a.m.

7 DROPPED KERBS STRATEGY UPDATE

The Lead Member for Public Realm, Councillor David Smith, presented a report (previously circulated) to update Members on progress with the development of a Dropped Kerbs Strategy, the establishment of key routes in communities, and prioritised schedule of installations.

Due to a change in grant funding, the dropped kerb initiative had not been progressed as expected. However, plans were now afoot to try and restart the process of installing dropped kerbs in a strategic manner across the County. The first step in the process was to develop a policy and to understand what a key route was e.g. between centres of population and health or leisure facilities, between care facilities and bus routes, from day nurseries and local housing, etc.

The Project Plan had been developed with the Corporate Equalities Officer.

Denbighshire was looking to improve mobility across the county. A meeting was due to take place on 5 November 2013 between the Section Manager: Network Management (SM: NM) and stakeholders, for their views so the needs of all could be addressed in a focused and sustainable way. Following the meeting, the SM: NM would liaise with Councillor Bill Cowie with an update on the plan.

During development of new housing estates, the developer could be consulted to include more dropped kerbs within the development.

The average cost to the council of the installation of a dropped kerb was approximately £600. This figure included the installation plus the time taken to install the dropped kerb.

The overall budget would be allocated from within the existing Highways block allocation.

It was confirmed that once a strategy was in place then a gap analysis would be carried out.

Whilst the Disability Discrimination Act may apply to highways it had not really been challenged and there was always the risk that the county may have been asked to show its commitment to complying with the Act in this regard and, therefore, this approach would mitigate such potential action.

***RESOLVED** that, subject to the above and an audit being undertaken of dropped kerb requirements across the County, the Performance Scrutiny Committee note the progress made to date.*

8 PLANNING APPLICATIONS

The Lead Member for Public Realm, Councillor David Smith, presented a report (previously circulated) to identify emerging trends or pressures that would affect the delivery of the Council's corporate priorities in relation to ensuring access to good quality housing and developing the local economy.

The report had been requested by Members following the discussion on the Annual Performance Report at the Performance Scrutiny meeting in September 2013.

Comparison figures had been requested for 2011/12, 2012/13 and 2013/14 (to date) as they had felt clarification was required as to why Denbighshire was not performing in the top quartile in Wales in relation to the speed of determining householder applications within 8 weeks.

Officers explained that performance varied year on year, dependent on a number of variables such as staff resources, sickness, complexity of applications etc.

The Head of Planning and Public Protection clarified that planning applications were broken down into different categories. As well as the speed of dealing with the applications received, the quality of the decision being made was important. The speed of which a householder application was dealt with could be affected e.g. if it had to go to Planning Committee, or if a large commercial application was pending this could slow down the process for householder applications due to resources being diverted to deal with the large application.

Planning Officers worked with developers and agents within a forum which had been set up with a view of enhancing and streamlining the planning application process for all concerned.

Planning Officers checked through applications and if there was a need e.g. for an amended plan, rather than reject the application, the officer would contact the applicant for an amended plan to enable the application to be granted rather than reject and take time to re-apply. This process could take longer than the original 8 weeks but it would take less time than having to submit a new application. This could contribute to the issue of the time taken to complete applications. However, the general feeling was that this equated to a better quality service for all in the long run.

The 8 week time scale was statutory for benchmarking purposes in comparison with other local authorities.

Another side to planning was the public service of asking for an informal discussion prior to the submission of a planning application. Historically, informal discussions had taken place free of charge. Over recent years, charging schemes had been

introduced for pre-application advice. Occasionally, if pre-application advice had not been sought then applications received could require a lot of work. If pre-application advice had been obtained, the application could be dealt with in a speedier manner.

The free planning surgeries which were held every two weeks would continue.

Within the Developer and Agent Forum, the charging mechanism had been discussed and they were agreeable to pay for the council's services.

It was confirmed that people had the right to apply for retrospective planning permission. The charges for this were set by the Welsh Government and there was no penalty for a retrospective planning application. The Welsh Government was due to review this in the future.

The Planning Department did not have a policy or a requirement to be cost neutral. The Department had a budget and an income stream. Planning Service provided services over and above services of planning applications, e.g. the Local Development Plan (LDP) and Development Control function. It also had a crucial role to play in developing and delivering the Council's Economic Ambition priority and strategy.

RESOLVED that subject to above, the Performance Scrutiny Committee note the information contained within the report.

9 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

A report by the Scrutiny Co-ordinator was submitted (previously circulated) seeking Members' review of the Forward Work Programme (FWP):

- (i) CCTV Report update to be added to the 1 May 2014 FWP.
- (ii) Next meeting to take place on 12 December 2013. Councillors Hugh Irving and David Smith to be invited to attend at Lead Members. Councillor Barbara Smith to attend at her own discretion.
- (iii) 16 January 2014 meeting currently had two education items together with fly-tipping. Both Lead Members, Councillors Eryl Williams and David Smith to attend.

RESOLVED that subject to the above additions and agreements, the Forward Work Programme be approved.

10 FEEDBACK FROM COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES

Councillor Richard Davies gave a brief summary of the Customer Services and Education Support Service Challenge he had attended. The following subjects had been discussed:

Education:

- All schools were required to be fit for purpose. There was a need to address the decline in numbers and work out how to reduce the number of surplus places, which currently stood at 21% above the WG target.
- New Faith School
- Mobile Classrooms
- Investment in senior schools
- Investment in special schools (particularly due to a risk identified with respect to future numbers at Ysgol Plas Brondyffryn following the recent investment at Ysgol y Gogarth)
- An action plan was in place for absenteeism and this was now improving
- Post 16 transport provision and payment towards it. Possibility this would go out to tender next year.

Customer Service:

- There was continued improvement
- CRM challenged and to be monitored during the next 12 months
- New website easier and clearer to use
- Proposed efficiency savings identified of circa £30K

Councillor Geraint Lloyd-Williams reported he had recently attended a meeting with the Head of Communication, Marketing and Leisure. The risks of arms-length companies were discussed. Councillor Lloyd-Williams enquired whether a report could be submitted to Scrutiny regarding the performance of these companies. The Corporate Director: Economic & Community Ambition confirmed she would take the matter to the Corporate Executive Team (CET) to discuss the arms-length companies' performance and what aspect should be looked at by scrutiny and when this should be examined. A full list of all arms-length companies would need to be drawn up.

Councillor Geraint Lloyd-Williams confirmed that the Council had been approached by a company that was interested in staging a half marathon in Rhyl. There was also a possibility of holding four major events throughout the whole county.

Councillor Gareth Sandilands had recently attended the Strategic Investment Group. Discussions included at that Group had included:

- Flying Start
- West Rhyl Housing Programme
- World War 2 trench being put in at Bodelwyddan Castle

Councillor Arwel Roberts had recently attended a meeting of the School Standards Monitoring Group (SSMG) and commented that the Lead Member and Head of Education were very thorough in their questioning and challenge of the school representatives in attendance. The schools in attendance were Ysgol Esgob Morgan, St. Asaph – this was a happy school and a good school - and Ysgol Gallt

Melyd –a very good school. The next meeting was to take place on 11 November 2013 and Rhos Street School and Ysgol Brynhyfryd School would be attending.

Councillor Huw Jones informed members that he had been in Rhyl on Wednesday 23 October in a meeting with 'Human Race' to discuss the Etape race. The company was keen to move things forward. Company representatives had been shown in Events Arena, Marine Lake and Pont y Ddraig and had shown a keen interest in arranging an event from Conwy to Prestatyn, possibly including running, cycling and BMX disciplines.

Councillor Bill Cowie expressed his concern, at this point, that the temporary classrooms were still a huge problem within the county.

The meeting concluded at 12.00 p.m.