

PARTNERSHIPS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Partnerships Scrutiny Committee held in Council Chamber, County Hall, Ruthin and by Video Conference on Thursday, 12 September 2024 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Joan Butterfield (Chair), Jeanette Chamberlain-Jones, Kelly Clewett, Pauline Edwards (Vice-Chair), Bobby Feeley, Terry Mendies, Arwel Roberts, David Williams and Elfed Williams

ALSO PRESENT

Corporate Director: Social Services & Education (NS); Head of Corporate Support Service: Performance, Digital & Assets (HV-E); Conwy & Denbighshire Community Safety Partnership Manager (ST); Head of Regional Collaboration (GM); Asset Manager (BW); Facilities and Asset Team Manger (DR); Interim Chief Digital Officer (MW); Principal Manager Youth & Community Resilience (CT); Digital Officer (PB); Scrutiny Co-ordinator (RhE); and Committee Administrators (ED – Minute Taker) and (NH - Webcaster).

Chief Inspector, David Cust of North Wales Police for Business item 5.

Lead Members in attendance at the Committee's invitation to resent reports and answer questions on business items within their portfolios: Councillor Gwyneth Ellis, Councillor Elen Heaton, Councillor Julie Matthews and Councillor Rhys Thomas

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Brian Jones.

2 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

No items of an urgent nature had been drawn to the attention of the Chair prior to the commencement of the meeting.

3 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the Partnerships Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 16 May 2024 were submitted. The Committee:

Resolved: that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 16 May 2024 be received and approved as a true and correct record of the proceedings.

Matters arising: Business item 6 - Councillor Elfed Williams enquired on the outcome of the Cabinet's review of the Committee's recommendations in relation to

the decision called-in for scrutiny under the Council's Call-In Procedure Rules. He also queried whether the documentation he had requested be circulated to members had yet been received. The Scrutiny Co-ordinator advised that she would make a further request for the documentation to be circulated to members. As the Committee had resolved to uphold the Cabinet's original decision of 23 April 2024 in respect of the 'Sustainable Communities for Learning – Rolling Programme' Cabinet was not required to review its original decision having regard to comments made by Scrutiny. It had therefore been advised that the decision could be implemented with immediate effect.

4 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No members declared any interests of a personal, or a personal and prejudicial nature, in any of the business items listed for discussion.

Prior to the commencement of business item 5 the Chair informed members that the Committee would be discussing the Community Safety Partnership Annual Update for April 2023 to March 2024 in its capacity as the Council's designated Crime & Disorder Scrutiny Committee in accordance with the Police & Justice Act 2006 ss. 19 and 20.

5 COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL UPDATE FOR APRIL 2023 - MARCH 2024

The Lead Member for Housing and Communities, introduced the report (previously circulated) and explained that the Community Safety Partnership was a statutory body and as such was required to report to Scrutiny on at least an annual basis. The Lead Member extended his gratitude to the Community Safety Partnership's Manager, for the production of the report as well as being so attentive to the Partnership's objectives. The Lead Member also welcomed Chief Inspector, David Cust from North Wales Police to the meeting. Head of Service: Performance, Digital & Assets advised the Committee that the report circulated was a statutory report and stressed the importance of the Partnership along with the significance and benefits of all partners working together.

The Community Safety Partnership (CSP) Manager briefly went through the report and went on to explain the highlights. Three priorities were highlighted when discussing the overall Community Safety Partnership Activity Performance summary and it was noted that these priorities were multi-faceted. At the end of March 2024, performance in relation to two areas of these priorities were good, and one was acceptable. It was noted that there was an increase in theft, and this was different to what had been seen in previous years but ultimately this was not worse but remained acceptable.

It was noted that Priority 1- Reduce Crime and Disorder in the area by working in Partnership, had a statutory aim which was to be more effective without partners duplicating their efforts. The main focus of this objective was to support vulnerable people and reduce the number of victims of anti-social behaviour.

Priority 2- work collectively to reduce reoffending. Performance against this priority during 2023/24 had been assessed as 'Acceptable' in comparison to being 'Good' in the previous year. The main aims of this priority was to work to prevent children and young people from becoming victims of crime, prevent adults reoffending and work collectively to prevent organised crime. Work has been done alongside the Youth Justice Service (YJS) as well as Mental Health Services with Children and Young People in relation to prevention in this area. Analytical work had been undertaken in relation to knife crime in a bid to reduce such incidents. Hotspots had also been looked at which meant that the Partnership would going forward be able to target these areas more effectively.

Priority 3- local and regional priorities. Performance against this priority remained good. With the use of hotspots, the partnership was able to make a positive change with a focus on prevention and not criminalising young people. There was also a lot of work now being done collectively in relation to sharing information with all partners in relation to County Lines activity. An information sharing group had recently been set up that met on a monthly basis. Chief Inspector, David Cust, advised the Committee that this Group was key in supporting effective partnership working. Previously, partners had been reluctant to share such private information but it was now evident that the sharing of information realised many benefits for the communities.

The CSP Manager proceeded to discuss the priorities and focus for the 2024/25 year, detailing performance and project/activity. When discussing the aim of reducing crime and disorder, the "We Don't Buy Crime" initiative was noted for its execution. This initiative included encouraging people to sign up to "Community Report" and to be more aware of where they placed high value items in their homes and where retailers displayed high value goods e.g. away from the doors. This work had notable positive impacts and it was stated that the aim was to maintain this level of interaction with the communities.

Events were organised by the CSP throughout the year in order to maintain engagement and were advertised widely through social media. In addition, specific events that focussed around issues such as modern-slavery, anti-terrorism, White Ribbon Day to raise awareness of Domestic Abuse to the communities were also held and advertised widely. Crime prevention advice was also offered to contribute and support these campaigns. It was noted that it had been a busy year with no additional funding available to support these events, but the Partnership worked collectively to deliver these events nonetheless.

Whilst incidents of adult reoffending had increased slightly in Denbighshire there had been a marked increase in Conwy, work was underway to try and address this trend. The CSP Manager noted that work that had been conducted on the prevention side of reoffending with efforts made with the Youth Justice Service Management Board. A step change was seen over the previous 12 months and the work was beginning to reap dividends. The primary aim was to help Young Justice Management and young people to prevent youths offending. This collaboration had always worked well but had started working more effectively during the last 12 months. The CSP Manager noted that the Rhyl Forum had continued to work

diligently to try and change the misinformation and address the misconceptions about Rhyl. This was an ongoing project in Rhyl.

The Chief Inspector advised the Committee that the Clear Hold Build project was a Home Office backed initiative to improve the local environment and consequently reduce crime levels. As a result of this project lots of resources had been put into the west end of Rhyl which included various programmes to support residents to build their vision of the community they wanted to live in, supporting social media messaging of community events and measures taken to reduce anti-social behaviour in the west of Rhyl and to reduce false information. Work was ongoing to reduce crime levels as part of Serious Violence Duty strategy. The Home Office was supportive of specific projects aimed at reducing anti-social behaviour (ASB) and knife crime – this was viewed as a real step forward.

The impact of domestic abuse was beginning to be taught in schools in order to raise awareness of this behaviour to pupils at a young age. The “Don’t Steal My Future” initiative had been introduced and the age for raising awareness of it had been lowered and tailored to a Year 6 pupils. The aim of this programme was to let children know there was support available should they need it if they were experiencing any form of domestic abuse. Specialist training has been provided to those who presented this programme to children and young people to help and support them to have those difficult conversations and in an attempt to help them identify unacceptable behaviour towards others, such as those advocated by some social media ‘influencers’. Funding had been secured from the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) to support this initiative. This meant that officers would visit all schools in the county for the purpose of awareness raising. Other school initiatives were discussed throughout the meeting.

The discussion was then opened up for questions. In response to members’ questions the Lead Members and officers:

- advised that a lot of services were involved with various partnership working initiatives e.g. Licensing, Trading Standards, Children and Youth Services, Fire & Rescue Service, Probation Service, Public Health Wales (PHW), Police, Domestic Abuse regional teams etc. All work done was cross-cutting and involved almost all departments in the authority which ensured a multi-agency and multi-faceted approach towards delivering community safety.
- with respect to the criminal activities such as County Lines in North Wales the Chief Inspector advised that there were active Organised Crime Groups (OCG) in larger towns. Cuckooing was referred to as a major problem throughout the County. This entailed County Line criminals embedding themselves into vulnerable people’s homes and using these homes as headquarters for drug dealing. With a view to preventing such practices vulnerable people were able to give spare keys to the properties to Police Officers and then they attend the property to check on these individuals. It was advised that at present approximately 200 guardian checks were taking place on a regular basis. County Lines activities had been discovered during these visits. The Fire & Rescue Service were also briefed on these

procedures so the whole partnership was aware and able to combat these criminal occurrences.

- with respect to criminal activity in Rhyl, such as the growing of cannabis in the area and the fact that one group had actually managed to grow a lot of cannabis undetected and how the partnership was combatting this, the Chief Inspector responded that information sharing was key in order to detect and eliminate such activities. He referred to an information sharing partnership which the Police had with electricity suppliers as well as the use of drones in order to try to identify empty properties sold to organised crime groups. It was noted that OCGs employed sophisticated and effective operating practices and were very good at staying undetected with the use of carbon filters on vents and exploitation of vulnerable people to eliminate sight of people coming and going from their properties.
- advised that policing areas spanned the Conwy and Denbighshire county boundary and therefore intelligence and local information picked up in the West of Rhyl as well as in Pensarn, Towyn and Kinmel Bay were shared with partner organisations regularly. Concern over tourists in these areas and whether people were moving between Rhyl and Conwy to sell drugs were always investigated as were reports of unauthorised or illegal use of caravan sites and tourist areas. Similar types of community engagement work to that occurring in Rhyl West also occurred along the Conwy border as well as officers going into these caravan parks to target and prevent anti-social behaviour.
- the impact of the recently introduced early release from prisons scheme was yet unknown. However the CSP will monitor the impact of the early release scheme via the probation member on the CSP and raise any issues highlighted by them in the Internal Denbighshire County Council Community Safety senior leadership meeting chaired by the Corporate Director: Governance and Business
- with regards to the comparison of crime statistics between 1998, when the CSP was established, and 2024 members were advised that crime numbers had reduced dramatically but also changed. New 'types of crime' such as County Lines, on-line crimes such as fraud and hate crime had come to the fore and were on the increase. Comparing statistics from over 25 years ago was also difficult as things that were acceptable e.g. types of domestic violence were not acceptable now and this would explain the change in different crime rates.
- by accessing Levelling Up Funding a new CCTV system had been installed in Denbigh and all cameras in other towns which already had CCTV were now either brand new or less than three years old, which meant that the cameras could provide better quality footage, thus allowing the CSP to do more. The Lead Member was the chair the CCTV Partnership Board which comprised of from Rhyl, Prestatyn, Rhuddlan and now Denbigh Town

Councils. The Board held bimonthly meetings where those Councillors report back to their Town Council. During the quarter from 1st January to 31st March North Wales Police had accessed images from those cameras on 59 occasions. Whilst the cameras were still currently being monitored in Chester the CCTV monitoring contract was due for review. This review may result in the new contract stipulating that any future provider would have to be able to monitor common systems between Denbighshire and Conwy and this would support North Wales Police in having easier and quicker access to the footage they needed and would strengthen the Partnership.

- it was confirmed that the new Youth Centre on Rhyl promenade had made a positive contribution towards reducing youth crime in the area. It was an extremely useful venue to enable officers to engage and communicate with young people in a relaxed, less formal environment. It provided the youths with a safe space. The Chief Inspector advised that the centre has had a major impact on extending the work of the Youth Service which was now being expanded to Prestatyn. With facilities such as the Youth Centre, Police Officers were able to go in and liaise with individuals to see what they needed and what improvements were required etc.
- confirmed that the yellow cards system was still in operation for incidents of youth ASB. It was used as a deterrent and a warning that continued ASB behaviour would result in a criminal record.
- advised that crime rates in rural areas as well as theft of agricultural goods were included within the report under the statistics for general theft. “We Don’t Buy Crime” initiative was mentioned and stated that this tackled rural crime by giving smart water packs to farmers in agricultural areas this enabled them to mark their goods with yellow fluorescent deterrent marks that should make the equipment less attractive to would be thieves as it would be possible to track a piece of equipment to its original owner. There was a dedicated Rural Crime Unit within North Wales Police that regularly liaised with farmers and residents in rural communities. With regards to the use of drones to ‘patrol’ rural areas the Committee was advised that strict regulations were in place with regards to the use of drones in order to protect the privacy of individuals, therefore drones could only be flown and used under strict guidelines and for specific purposes.

Members thanked the Lead Member, CSP Manager and Chief Inspector for the presentation as well as all the hard work and enthusiasm that they demonstrated towards their work and keeping residents and communities safe. The Chair indicated that members may wish in future to invite the Police and Crime Commissioner to a future meeting to discuss his vision for the future. As the Chief Constable was due to attend a Council Workshop session in the near future it was suggested that a request to invite the PCC to a future meeting be deferred until after the Chief Constable’s visit to the Authority. At the conclusion of an in-depth discussion the Committee:

Resolved: subject to the above observations to –

(i) receive the Conwy and Denbighshire Community Safety Partnership's Annual Update report on its activities during 2023/24;

(ii) congratulate the Partnership on its performance during 2023/24 and endorse its objectives and priority areas for 2024/25 as outlined in the report.

6 NORTH WALES REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP BOARD'S ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24

The Lead Member for Health and Social Care introduced the report (previously circulated) and advised that the Regional Partnership Board had been formed to meet the requirements of Section 9 of the Social Services and Wellbeing(Wales) Act 2014. The Board brought together a wide range of voices, including services, carers and service users. The main function of the Board was to ensure that these services were working together effectively and efficiently whilst also overseeing the use of key funding streams. The Lead Member highlighted some aspects of the report including the Radical Thinking Workshop which explored potential principles for transformative change for the wellbeing of North Wales residents.

The Head of Regional Collaboration thanked all staff for their efforts in delivering these services and noted that they were both dedicated and talented. The report highlighted the extent of the work undertaken to set up procedures to enable the delivery of the Collaboration's objectives. It was noted that one of the main principles within the Collaboration is the need for change and development.

In response to members' questions, the Lead Member and relevant officers advised that:

- the risks outlined in the report were recognised and acknowledged. As the Regional Boards developed over the years the expectation on the range of work and initiatives overseen by the Board had increased every year which meant that the work of managing the workload was in itself becoming a risk. This was a national risk and not just a regional one.
- the Board was meeting all its requirements and Statutory Duties at present but all partners were mindful that this could be a challenge in the future to maintain so it was important for all the partners to understand where these strains were in order to consider the bigger picture.
- regarding the setting of care home fees, despite trying to bring about a consistent approach, some authorities had deviated from the care fees agreement. It was for the individual Local Authorities and Health Board to set their own care fees. Whilst the Regional Fee Setting Board (subgroup of the Regional Partnership Board) which worked towards the principles and methodology for the setting of care fees, the Group did not have the powers to actually set the fees, it could only recommend a 'global' level across the region. The Group's aim was to ensure that all stakeholder worked together to establish better relationships with providers, Ultimately, the agreement had not deviated from, as the methodology had been used.

- that Dementia Services, in particular the Memory Support Pathway had recently started to offer services to help sufferers and carers. These events included guest speakers and a variety of services run by the Carers Trust utilising regional funding, with Dementia Support workers attending these events. One notable partner in commissioning and delivering dementia and Alzheimer support services in the Denbighshire area was Denbighshire Voluntary Services Council (DVSC). Nevertheless, recent changes in the Dementia Friendly accreditation process may have impacted on certain communities not yet being able to regain their accreditation.
- the Regional Partnership Board's funding was made up of a mixture of Welsh Government (WG) funding and funding provided by its core partners. The Regional Integration Fund (RIF) was a 5-year fund worth just over £57m, £29.7m provided by WG and £27.4m from other partners. The objective of this fund was to support integration and partnership working in relation to priority population groups. As this was a regional fund it was difficult to quantify exactly how much funding for each individual project operating in Denbighshire had been contributed by Denbighshire County Council in the first instance.
- the Health Board was a Statutory Partner of the Board and like all other statutory partners took its responsibilities seriously. It was not just the Health Board who were making cuts all public sector bodies finances were subject to cuts.
- they were not aware of any current plans to formally integrate Local Authority and Health Board Learning Disabilities Services; however this did not restrict them from working collaboratively.

Following a comprehensive discussion, the Committee:

Resolved: subject to the above comments along with the provision of the requested information, to –

- (i) confirm that, as part of its consideration of the North Wales Regional Partnership Board's Annual Report it had read, understood and taken into account the work that is required to be undertaken by the Regional Partnership Board; and***
- (ii) acknowledge the progress made during 2023/24 in relation to the work areas being taken forward through the North Wales Regional Partnership Board.***

12pm: At this juncture the Committee adjourned for a break and re-convened at 12.10pm.

The Lead Member for Finance, Performance and Strategic Assets introduced the report (previously circulated) advising that the report covered the time period 2024-2029 and that the financial forecast, at least for the initial part of this time period, was not encouraging at present. She emphasised how vital this strategy would be to the Local Authority to enable it to make decisions about its assets going forward. It was noted that the Local Authority held 669 assets on 519 sites. This equated to a large number of assets from which to fulfil statutory duties and some of these assets would present an opportunity to generate capital sums for the Council. Managing assets differently, adopting different attitudes, and cooperation with partners would all enable the Authority to realise the maximum benefits from its Asset Portfolio. It would also ensure that the Council had the right assets, in the right place and in the right condition to meet current and projected future needs, which was the Strategy's underlying principle.

Head of Corporate Support Service: Performance, Digital & Assets advised the Committee that draft Strategy (Appendix 1 to the report) was a vital document and asset management formed one of the seven pillars of good governance and was therefore reviewed annually. The Head of Service thanked the Asset Manager and Facilities and Asset Team Manager for their hard work in drawing up the draft Strategy.

Responding to members' questions the Lead Member and officers:

- Clarified that Section 7.2 of the Strategy referred to surplus pupil places within the County's portfolio of Education assets. The Council's Modernising Education Programme was the vehicle used to manage the modernising of the county's schools and manage surplus places. Ongoing maintenance in schools was reliant on the availability of funding via the budget setting process, but reactive maintenance as and when required, for example when the issue of Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) was identified in schools, was addressed immediately.
- agreed to make enquires with the Education Department on the current position regarding the Cylch Meithrin building at Ysgol Dewi Sant, Rhyl
- advised that a decision would be taken as part of the budget setting process in relation to the future of public toilets.
- in regard to the value of current assets, it was advised that it was not possible to be explicit about the value of specific assets in a public report. There was a list of assets declared as surplus which the Authority was actively trying to dispose of them. This list was not extensive, and all proposed disposals were reported to the Asset Management Group (AMG) which was open to all councillors to attend.
- individual services were responsible for management of those assets which lay within their Service areas i.e. Countryside Services were responsible for the sites which they operated across the county. It was a Service decision on how their budget was used to invest in those sites.

- agreed to a request that members have sight of the list of Council owned assets within each Member Area Group (MAG) area.

At the conclusion of a comprehensive discussion the Committee:

Resolved:

- (i) subject to the above observations and the provision of the requested information, to recommend to Cabinet that the draft Asset Management Strategy 2024/2029 (Appendix 1 to the report) be approved and adopted;***
- (ii) as part of its consideration had read, understood and taken account of the Well-being Impact Assessment (Appendix 2 to the report); and***
- (iii) that a list of all Council owned assets in their respective areas be circulated to all Member Area Groups and that the list specify each asset's current and anticipated future status, along with its estimated market value.***

8 UPDATE REPORT ON AUDIT WALES "DIGITAL STRATEGY REVIEW"

The Lead Member for Corporate Strategy, Policy and Equality introduced the report (previously circulated) advising that the report was based on field work conducted between May to November 2023. There were four recommendations from the report given by Audit Wales (AW) and these were highlighted in Appendix 3. Attention was drawn to appendix 4 and it was advised that this gave details of the progress made in delivering the current strategy. It was noted that this was an information update report.

Responding to members' questions the Lead Member and officers:

- advised that the Council was legally required to have measures in place to meet the needs of digitally excluded residents to prevent isolation. The Digital Officer currently undertaking a lot of work with a view to reducing digital exclusion.
- explained that tackling digital exclusion has been a priority for a number of years. The Authority had utilised opportunities from other funding streams, such as the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) to deliver training to residents on how to access and use online resources. A lot of work was being done to combat digital exclusion and isolation.
- emphasised that all services that were offered online were also available upon request in hard copy or via in person contact. Members had a key role to play in informing the Council if they were aware of any residents who due to age, isolation or mobility difficulties were unable to access services via Council offices or the county's libraires, to enable officers or voluntary organisations to contact them regarding their queries. A great deal of work was currently focussed on breaking down physical and communication barriers that prevented residents from communicating with the Council. The

Digital Officer was always willing to help members, officers, communities and residents with digital and connectivity issues, whilst other services had officers that undertook home visits to people who struggled to leave the house, to assist them with specific service queries e.g. social care.

- with respect of the other three recommendations made by Audit Wales relating to 'Partnership Arrangements and Collaboration', 'Costing and Resourcing the Strategy', and the 'Arrangements for Monitoring the Value for Money and its Impact', members were advised that all of these elements would be factored into the work currently in hand to develop the Council's new Digital Strategy from 2026 onwards. Partnership working opportunities would be explored in detail as they had the potential to realise financial savings and aid effective and efficient working with other public sector partners.
- Undertook to make further enquiries on whether the Council had any plans in place to implement the Welsh Government's new social care information management system, Wales Community Care Information System (WCCIS) in conjunction with the Health Board, and if so whether any external and/or internal funding had been sourced for its implementation and integration.

At the conclusion of the discussion the Committee:

Resolved: to –

- (i) subject to the above observations to endorse the progress achieved so far in delivering the Council's Digital Strategy 2019/2025; and***
- (ii) acknowledge the progress made to date against the four Audit Wales recommendations and how they will be used to shape the approach taken to develop a new Digital Strategy for 2026 onwards.***

9 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator introduced the report and appendices (previously circulated) which sought the Committee to review its programme of future work. During her introduction the Scrutiny Co-ordinator advised that she was awaiting confirmation on whether the reports on 'Blue Flag Status for Denbighshire's Beaches' and the 'Household Waste Recycling Centres' were likely to be available for presentation to the Committee at its November meeting. However, the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group (SCVCG) was due to meet to consider scrutiny requests the following week, therefore if one or both reports were not available for November's meeting the SCVCG may refer items for the Committee's detailed examination at that meeting. At the SCVCG's previous meeting in May 2024 three items had been referred to Partnerships Scrutiny Committee, namely the Draft Asset Management Strategy 2024 to 2029 and the Digital Strategy Review, both of which had been examined during the current meeting. The third item related to the Annual Report of the North Wales Regional Emergency Planning Service (NWREPS) 2023/24, which had been listed for submission to the Committee at its December 2024 meeting.

Members were reminded that a number of information reports had been circulated to them earlier that week in the 'Information Brief' document. If any of the information contained in these reports were a cause of concern to them they should complete a Member Proposal Form seeking the SCVCG to refer the matter to a Scrutiny Committee. The Committee:

Resolved: subject to any necessary amendments required in relation to the rescheduling of items currently listed on the forward work programme, to confirm its programme of forthcoming work as set out in Appendix 1 to the report.

10 FEEDBACK FROM COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES

Bwthyn y Ddôl Sub Regional Children's Assessment Centre: Councillor Bobby Feeley, Scrutiny's representative on the Project Board for this specialist unit provided an update on the project's delivery during which she advised that the building work was nearing completion. A launch date had been set for November 2024. At present the Health Board were encountering difficulties in recruiting into two specialist posts that would be based at the centre, but it was anticipated that these posts would be filled ahead of the Centre's opening in November. Committee members were advised to contact the Council's Head of Children's Services if they would like to visit the Centre ahead of its official opening. Committee members:

Resolved: to receive the information provided.

Meeting concluded at 1.20pm