
DEVELOPMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE, 20.03.12

Present: Councillor Ioan Thomas (Chairman)
Councillor Glyn Roberts (Vice-chairman)

Councillors: Endaf Cooke, T.G. Ellis, O.P. Huws, Anne Ll. Jones, Charles W. Jones, Elin Walker Jones, Penri Jones, Keith Marshall, John W. Meredith, John P. Roberts, Owain Williams and R. J. Wright; and Councillors John W. Jones and W. Roy Owen (Portfolio Leaders) and Councillor John G. Jones (ex-officio member)

Officers: Iwan Trefor Jones (Corporate Director), Sioned E. Williams (Head of Economy and Community Department), Ann Owen (Strategic Policy Manager – Economy, Regeneration and Skills), Llyr B. Jones (Senior Manager – Economy and Community), Roland Evans (Senior Manager – Economy and Community), Dylan Griffiths (Strategic and Development Manager), Gareth James (Corporate Scrutiny Manager) and Gwyn Parry Williams (Committee Officer)

Apologies: Councillor Alan Jones Evans

1. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

Councillor Anne Ll. Jones declared a personal interest in the following items for the reasons noted –

- a) The future of Parc Glynllifon as she was a member of the Coleg Meirion Dwyfor Council which was part of Coleg Llandrillo.
- b) Keeping the Benefit Local as she was the Director of Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd.

The member was of the opinion that they were not prejudicial interests, and she did not withdraw from the meeting and participated fully in the discussion on the relevant items.

2. MINUTES

The Chairman signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee held on 6 December, 2011 as a true record.

The Chairman noted that it had been agreed in the preparatory meeting to include an item on “Green Gwynedd and the Low Carbon Sector (Nuclear Energy and Renewable Energy)” on the agenda of this meeting, but later on the Head of Economy and Community Department had concluded that it was premature to discuss the matter to today; however, it was intended to discuss it in the future.

3. SLATE AREAS

- (a) Submitted – the report of the Head of Economy and Community Department on the current and proposed activities to maximise the local benefit from the heritage of the Slate Areas.
- (b) The following matters were raised by members:-
 - (i) In response to a question by a member regarding the Slate Valleys Partnership and specifically the area of Abergynolwyn, the Head of Economy and Community

Department notified the members, in respect of the original areas, that Abergynolwyn was not part of the communities that had been submitted in the application, but it was part of the wider area.

- (ii) With respect to the North Wales Slate Industry World Heritage Site, and particularly the former Dorothea Quarry Site, a member referred to the discussions that had already been held regarding the possibility for the Council to take over this site. The member referred to an article that had appeared in the press recently regarding developing the site, and noted that there was a strong consensus in Dyffryn Nantlle that the site should be developed.

In response, the Head of Economy and Community Department noted, in respect of the reputed current owners, that there were no details to hand as regards their plans to develop the site. The first step would be to hold a meeting with the new owners to obtain information on their connection with the site and their arrangements as former owners, and to obtain information about their vision. In terms of the World Heritage Site, she noted that this was one of the reasons why UNESCO had interest in the site and in the slate areas. She referred to other sites such as the Penrhyn Quarry, Bethesda, Llechwedd and Blaenau Ffestiniog where there was a live industry. There was a need to identify areas of special value within the catchment area that had unique characters in the slate areas. The challenge would be to decide which areas were to be protected and managed.

- (iii) A member emphasised the importance of holding discussions with the owners of the Dorothea site as soon as possible in order to develop the site.
- (iv) In response to a question by a member regarding the CADW Heritage Tourism Project, the Head of Department notified members that partners had been invited to express an interest in being part of this project. The Senior Manager – Economy and Community noted that this was a joint partnership process with Conwy County Borough Council and that there was an opportunity to jointly develop a substantial strategic application. To realise this, applicants or partners were invited to join the Council on the project, and based on the expressions of interest, they were scored and the successful applicants/partners were invited to be part of the project. No formal expression of interest had been received for Dyffryn Nantlle.

The Head of Department noted further that information had been received in May 2011 noting that the Gwynedd Slate Industry application was on the short list, and at the time it was assumed that the Council would receive further details by June/July 2011 regarding the guidelines for submitting an application. Unfortunately, details of the guidelines were not received until January 2012, and she noted that it would be a long-term process and that they needed to proceed with the governance arrangements.

- (v) In relation to the World Heritage Site, the Head of Department noted that a Steering Group had been established to start the work, which included elected members from the slate areas. The plan was not mature enough to submit an application in April 2012. The Welsh Government had committed their expertise and staff to be used in association with the work. It was intended to appoint a person who had expertise in this work to lead on the work. The CADW Heritage Tourism Project and the European application were being led by CADW, within a fairly strict timetable, and efforts had been made to raise the various relevant bodies'/organisations' awareness to the project. She noted that developing the Dorothea site was a project

in itself, and it was essential to have the resource to proceed with the work since it would not be part of the World Heritage project.

- (vi) In response to a question by a member with regard to completing the Glynrhonwy infrastructure, the Head of Department notified members that work was ongoing at the moment on the electricity infrastructure on the site.
- (vii) A member highlighted that broadband on the Glynrhonwy site should be high-speed in order to try and attract businesses to the site.

In response, the Head of Department noted that this committee had recently prioritised sites in the work programme, and main employment sites in the county was one of the priorities. The sites of Trawsfynydd, Ferodo and Glynrhonwy had been identified for acquiring a broadband system. Discussions were ongoing with the Welsh Government regarding the need to have a much faster broadband system. There was no decision yet as regards who would be the broadband provider on behalf of the Welsh Government, but an announcement was expected soon. She promised to give a list of the priorities to the member.

RESOLVED to accept the report and that the relevant officers note the points referred to above.

4. THE FUTURE OF PARC GLYNLLIFON

- (a) Submitted – the report of the Head of Economy and Community Department that the Council had decided on 10 December, 2009, when adopting the savings strategy, to save £79,870 by outsourcing Parc Glynllifon. She gave details of the savings profile that was submitted to the Council on 1 March 2012, which reflected the steps already taken in 2011/12 to secure the savings, along with the previous decision of this Committee for the Council to continue to manage the Park for the first two years under a transitional board, which would pave the way for subsequent long-term management.
- (b) The following matters were raised by members:-
 - (i) In response to a question by a member regarding the membership of the Shadow Transitional Board, the Head of Department notified members that there were two members of the Council on the Board, namely Councillor O. P. Huws and Councillor John P. Roberts. The Board's membership was yet to be confirmed, due to the changes with merging the colleges.
 - (ii) A member expressed concern about the timetable. The Glynllifon Improvement Working Group had submitted a report on the way forward and it was wished for the working group to continue for a while so that it could monitor developments. He noted that if discussions were to be held with the college, there was a need to include the objectives that had been set at the beginning. He was of the opinion that a meeting of the working group should be held during the next fortnight in order to agree on the agreement headings.

In response, the Head of Department notified members that the committee's original decision had been to transfer the responsibilities to the college and report back to the working group when they were in a position to discuss the agreement headings. The working group had already agreed on the agreement headings from the Council's perspective, but the college's terms had not been discussed because of

its situation at the time. However, since then, several things had changed e.g. not being able to confirm the membership of the Transitional Board. She noted that the college still hadn't committed to take on responsibilities. It was aimed to change the arrangements for letting the café, the shop and the units, which would lighten the Council's responsibilities in terms of running the shop and café. The Council would continue to discuss implementation options for the new model with the college, and she was of the opinion that they should report to the working group at a time when there would be agreement with the college regarding the model. Holding a meeting of the working group during the next fortnight would be premature. She noted that the article that had appeared in the press was misleading as there was no intention to transfer the whole of the Park's management to the college.

- (iii) In response to a question by a member regarding having a new entity on the site, the Head of Department noted that priority was currently being given to the arrangements for the Urdd National Eisteddfod on the grounds of Glynllifon. In the meantime, discussions would continue with the college. She referred to another aspect of the plan, namely identifying financial savings of £80,000 and to date, £40,000 of savings had been identified on the site, with the remaining £40,000 to be identified during the next two years. She noted that communication was key and steps had already been taken to re-engage with the Friends of Glynllifon. She noted that if the college was not keen to proceed with the management of the park, then perhaps there would be some role for the friends.
- (iv) In response to an enquiry by a member regarding the tree nursery, the Head of Department noted that the nursery could not offer a competitive price, and therefore lost out on tenders. She noted that the nursery made a financial loss to the Regulatory Department and consequently, it was decided to terminate the service. In the meantime, the unit had been let to the college in order to strengthen the training in respect of horticulture and arboriculture, but it would not be a commercial enterprise from now on.

RESOLVED

- a) To approve the report and note the points referred to above.**
- b) That there is a need to look without delay at the kind of membership there will be to the Working Group within the new Council's governance system.**
- c) That there is a need to ensure continued influence by the Council on any new arrangements.**

5. KEEPING THE BENEFIT LOCAL

- (a) Submitted – the report of the Head of Economy and Community Department giving details about the plan and its activities during the first year.

It was noted that some local companies could not compete for large schemes because of the effect of the recession.

- (b) The following matters were raised by members:-
 - (i) With respect to the Blaenau Ffestiniog Town Centre Regeneration Project, a member drew attention to the fact that there was no reference in the report to the main contractor.

In response, the Head of Economy and Community Department notified members that Balfour Beatty was the main contractor for the two main contracts being

implemented at present, with Howard Bowcott as the sub-contractor. She referred to clause 4.5 of the report which noted the procurement process, and an effort had been made to raise awareness amongst local companies. Local companies had been supported, but when the formal tenders were assessed, unfortunately the department was not in a situation to appoint a local company. She was of the opinion that local companies' capacity needed to be increased to enable them to compete with national companies.

A member noted that the work by a company from Kent who installed new kitchens in homes for Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd was defective, and he asked how this could have happened after going through the procurement process.

A member expressed astonishment at the use of sea wall rocks from France in Tywyn and wind turbines from China and Canada in Pen Llŷn.

- (ii) In response to a question by a member regarding what could be done in the future to try and keep the benefit local, the Head of Department noted that the aim of this plan was to look at how the Council could respond to the situation. She noted that there was a package of activities in the plan ranging from supporting the private sector to be more competitive to looking at having special clauses in the procurement process, and also the skills required for working locally. There was also focus on the main capital investments.
- (iii) A member noted that the Pontio Project, Bangor, was committed to ensuring that local employees and businesses were given priority in relation to the work.
- (iv) In response to a question by a member regarding the Bro Dysynni Area School plan, the Senior Manager – Economy and Community notified members that the plan had received consideration from the Procurement Working Group as regards the clauses and terms that could be incorporated in the agreement. He drew attention to one very important principle the Council faced when considering ways of increasing the proportion of contracts being awarded to local contractors, namely that no contract arrangement could show favouritism to local companies, or on a geographic basis.
- (iv) In response to a question by a member with regard to the Trawsfynydd Nuclear Power Station site, the Head of Department notified members that the Council had not received confirmation from the Welsh Government regarding the Enterprise Zone status on the site. The Minister had announced that the site had been identified as a favoured site, and confirmation of the status was awaited in the coming weeks. In the meantime, businesses had expressed interest in the site, despite the fact that the site marketing process had not begun.
- (v) In response to a member's question regarding Objective 1, the Head of Department referred to a networking plan for areas within Objective 1 to enable businesses to be more competitive.
- (vii) The Corporate Director notified members that this plan was integral within the economic strategy, but certainty was needed that the expenditure resulting from capital investment would remain in Gwynedd. He referred to two substantial challenges in developing the plan over the coming years, namely the way that procurement would change nationally and how the capacity of the business sector would be developed locally. He noted that around 85% of all businesses in Gwynedd employed fewer than 10 local people. He referred to an investment of

£40m locally in the Pontio Project, Bangor. He also noted that the planning application for the Bro Dysynni Area School would be submitted before the Snowdonia National Park Authority Planning Committee the following day. Furthermore, he drew attention to an investment of £40m in Gwynedd schools during the next three years.

- (viii) The Chairman drew attention to clause 2.10 of the report which noted that it was currently premature in terms of jobs and investments; however, it was proposed to prepare an evaluation of the plan's success at the end of the period. He was of the opinion that an update on the situation was needed fairly regularly.

The need for a local post code on procurement reports was noted.

RESOLVED to accept the report and note the points referred to above.

6. SKILLS IMPROVEMENT WORKING GROUP

- a) Submitted – the report of the Chairman of the Skills Improvement Working Group, Councillor Ioan Thomas, updating the members on the developments and the latest situation. He gave details of some of the points that had been discussed at a meeting of the Working Group on 15 March 2012 –
- Due to the Welsh Government's requirements, change was vital and the Working Group had been clear from the start that having all the partners' commitment, including that of the secondary head teachers, was key.
 - He noted that the head teachers had been included in the development of the model and that the Working Group was glad of their response to date and their willingness to cooperate.
 - The Working Group saw the model as providing an opportunity in terms of providing for local employers and future work opportunities, and also in terms of extending the use of the Welsh language.
 - One of the Working Group's findings from its considerations was that positive messages were required in order to encourage learners to follow courses through the medium of Welsh across every learning establishment, including colleges.
 - Concern was expressed in the Working Group that Welsh medium/bilingual definitions were unclear, and there was also a lack of core data.
 - With regard to the model, it was reported that the heads were keen to have representation on the Leadership Board, but the Working Group was of the opinion that there was a different and strategic role to that level in the model.
 - In terms of further development of the work, a Memorandum of Understanding was required as a contractual basis to the collaboration, and a draft version would be submitted for further discussion with the heads in due course.
 - The heads were agreed that they should collaborate on the memorandum, and that this was the way forward.
 - There was a request by officers for the Working Group to give guidance on the type of document required, and the Working Group's view was that a robust and solid document was needed.
 - Clear milestones would need to be established for action.
 - There was agreement with the intention to send a letter to the governing bodies of Gwynedd secondary schools that had a sixth form, with information about the aims to date.
- b) The following matters were raised by members:-

- (i) Another member emphasised the importance of having a very robust Memorandum of Understanding and the need for everyone to understand that change was essential.
- (ii) The Corporate Director noted that the purpose of the learning partnership between Gwynedd and Anglesey was to coordinate this work. There was representation from the two local authorities, the colleges and the secondary schools on the partnership, with this Council leading on it. The heads had been part of the process of designing and developing the model and a meeting had been held with all the secondary heads of Gwynedd and Anglesey during the past few weeks to discuss the draft model. Some concerns had been noted in the meeting and some people were very keen to see the details of the memorandum, but in terms of the direction of this work, there was support by all the head teachers. The heads realised that there were requirements from the Government to extend the choices for post-16 young people and provide more courses, despite the reduction in funding and pupil numbers. He noted that the draft model was based on more collaboration, joint-planning, sharing of resources, reduced duplication and a greater partnership between the schools and colleges – and through this ensure that the Government's objectives were fulfilled. There was support by the heads to the work undertaken on the model. It was noted that the only other choice would be to close sixth forms in the secondary schools of Arfon and Anglesey and centralise the post-16 provision on one or two campuses in the area, but the implications of that to the future of many of the area's secondary schools would be far-reaching. The model being developed here was different to this, and was based on collaboration and sharing resources and having close partnerships between the different providers. He also noted the need to have a better planning arrangement in this field and that the model was a means of achieving this and securing learning pathways across the establishments which would correspond with the needs of the labour market and respond to the requirements of the area's employers from an academic and vocational perspective. There was also an opportunity with this plan to ensure a local slant to the curriculum in North West Wales which would be a reflection of the opportunities available in the economy, especially as a result of likely investment in the area.
- (iii) A member noted that the element of the Welsh language being an ethos and medium to be run through every post-16 structure should be emphasised, and that appropriate resources should be provided to that end.
- (iv) In relation to clause 2.8 of the report, a member was of the opinion that the bullet point which referred to promoting and strengthening the Welsh language as a medium of teaching, learning and assessing should be strengthened, and that it should also be included and promoted that the Welsh language was a skill in the workplace.

In response, the Corporate Director notified members that focus on the moment was on 16-19 year olds training through the partnership's work, but by taking the model a step further, it could also influence training in the workforce in due course.

RESOLVED

- a) To accept, note and approve the work of the Skills Improvement Working Group.**
- b) To note the contents of the current proposals for the shape of the arrangement for joint-planning, commissioning and delivering the post-16 learning provision for Gwynedd and Anglesey.**

c) To recommend that the Skills Improvement Working Group, with its current membership as far as is possible, becomes an advisory group under the new Cabinet arrangement from May 2012 onwards.

7. GWYNEDD'S ECONOMY – QUARTERLY OVERVIEW (FEBRUARY 2012)

- a) Submitted – the report of the Head of Economy and Community Department, giving details of the economy's performance in Gwynedd at the end of the quarter and end of the year.
- b) The following matters were raised by members:-
 - (i) In response to a question by a member regarding categorising agriculture under the "services" heading in the report, the Head of Department noted that it was not this Council who had set the bands and the table indicated employment figures.
 - (ii) A member referred to a clause in the report which noted that the median salary for all employed full-time workers in Gwynedd in 2011 was £453.20, namely 90.5% of the UK average, and the corresponding figure for employed part-time workers was £148.40, namely 96.4% of the UK average. The member asked for details of the percentage of employees working in the public sector. In response, the Head of Department notified the member that the percentage was 37%. Furthermore, the member asked whether there was a salary average for the public and private sectors. In response, the Head of Department noted that it was an average salary percentage across Gwynedd.

The Corporate Director noted that perhaps it would be possible to obtain details on the average salary of Gwynedd Council, Bangor University and Ysbyty Gwynedd, which were the three largest public establishments in Gwynedd. Public sector salary was higher than private sector salary in Gwynedd, but in other areas the private sector salary was higher than the public sector salary. He drew attention to the recent statement of the Chancellor of the Exchequer which looked at areas in different parts of Britain and suggested freezing public sector salaries in poor areas, but rather to increase public sector salaries in areas that were wealthier in nature. In an area like Gwynedd that was very dependent on the public sector to drive the economy forward, this could have negative and far-reaching implications on the state of the economy and on the demand for services and products that would also affect the viability of the private sector.

- (iii) A member asked for information about the percentage of young people migrating out of Gwynedd.

In response, the Strategic Policy Manager – Economy, Regeneration and Skills noted that figures to this end had been prepared formerly, but perhaps they would be dated by now. She agreed to look at what was available and to send a copy to the member in due course.

The Corporate Director notified the members that details of the 2011 Census would be published in due course, and they would illustrate population movements and the trends over the last 10/15 years. It would also identify the impact on the Welsh language in several areas.

- (iv) A member was of the opinion that a letter should be sent to the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Deputy Prime Minister, expressing dissatisfaction regarding the suggestion not to increase public sector salaries in poor areas.
- (v) In response to a question by a member regarding the percentage of young people who were looking for work, the Head of Department noted that there had been a substantial increase in the number of young people who were unemployed in Gwynedd, which was a cause for concern. The situation in light of the reduction in benefits in Gwynedd, and its potential effect on statistics, would be monitored.
- (vi) A member asked for information on the number of people from Eastern Europe who had settled in Gwynedd and had found work here, and the effect of this on local people.

In response, the Head of Department noted that the information was not known at present. However, the Welsh Government had undertaken work in the past when the impact of workers from Eastern Europe on the tourism and agriculture sector was seen, and perhaps statistics resulting from that work could be obtained.

RESOLVED

- a) To accept and note the contents of the report.**
- b) To send a letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Deputy Prime Minister expressing dissatisfaction regarding the suggestion not to increase public sector salaries in poor areas.**

At the end of the meeting, the Chairman noted that this would be the last meeting of this committee before the local government elections in May 2012. He thanked his fellow members and the officers for their cooperation during his term in the chair.

The meeting commenced at 10.30am and concluded at 12.50pm.