
COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 26-03-2013

PRESENT (Committee members) - Councillor Eric M. Jones, (Chairman)
Councillor Angela Russell, (Vice-chair).

Councillors:- Stephen Churchman, Annwen Hughes, Louise Hughes, Dilwyn Morgan, Nigel Pickavance, Caerwyn Roberts, Mandy Williams-Davies, Gruffydd Williams, Gethin Glyn Williams and Eurig Wyn.

OFFICERS: Gareth James (Member Support and Scrutiny Manager) and Ioan Hughes (Member Support and Scrutiny Officer).

OTHERS INVITED TO THE MEETING: (*For item 5 on the agenda – The Development of Transport Services in Gwynedd*), Bethan Russell Williams, (Mantell Gwynedd - Chief Officer), Barbara Snowball (Mawddach Bus Users), Rona Lewis (Director of the Dolgellau Campus, Coleg Meirion Dwyfor) and Linda Wyn, (Executive Director Academic Services, Coleg Meirion Dwyfor).

APOLOGIES: Councillors David Gwynfor Edwards, Mike Stevens and Robert J. Wright.

WELCOME: Councillor Nigel Pickavance, who was attending his first meeting of the committee for some time, was welcomed. He had not been able to attend for some months due to his daughter's illness, and the Chairman wished the member and his family well.

SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION: A scrutiny investigation had been undertaken recently, which dealt with the 'Provision of Housing for Local People'. Councillor Stephen Churchman, the Chairman of the Scrutiny Investigation Group confirmed that all the recommendations made had been approved in a meeting of the Informal Cabinet.

He added that this was the first time for the Cabinet members to consider the scrutiny investigation and that their response was very positive. Councillor Churchman thanked everyone, members and officers, who had been part of the investigation, and explained that the Cabinet Member would now collaborate with the relevant officers to submit the report to the Formal Cabinet in the coming weeks or months.

1. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were received from any members present.

2. MINUTES

The Chairman signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee held on 5 February, 2013 as a true record.

3. THE DEVELOPMENT OF TRANSPORT SERVICES IN GWYNEDD

3a) An interview with Bethan Russell Williams, Mantell Gwynedd – Chief Officer

a) The Chairman welcomed Mantell Gwynedd's Chief Officer to the meeting and thanked her for attending the meeting.

b) Mantell Gwynedd Chief Officer referred to proposed changes in relation to reorganising Health Services across north Wales and noted that the third sector was concerned about

how the residents of areas such as Llŷn and areas of Meirionnydd would travel a great distance if specialist services would be centralised.

Consequently, some work was undertaken by Betsi Cadwaladr Heath Board and Mrs Williams submitted information that they had provided in light of the possible reorganisation.

c) She added that voluntary organisations were facing problems in terms of funding, maintaining the service and forward planning. She further explained that Mantell Gwynedd did not provide a service, but that they worked to support the voluntary organisations.

ch) In response to an enquiry, it was noted that increased pressure tended to be placed on the entire third sector services, although the financial support was not available. The speaker added that consideration could be given to ensuring support for the voluntary organisations that would offer better value for money. She added that this could be achieved in a pilot area where transport difficulties already existed.

She also noted that the third sector could gain access to funds, such as the Lottery, who did not support the public sector.

d) It was further reported that consideration could be given to the value of taking services to the public, rather than waiting for them to travel, especially bearing in mind that problems could arise as a result of changes to the benefits system. It was suggested that the Council should consider how to improve consultation methods and ways of reaching the public.

dd) Members agreed that work should be undertaken to draw the public into the discussions in order to gain an understanding of the weaknesses in the transport service and consider how to ensure improvement.

3b) An interview with Barbara Snowball, a representative of Mawddach Bus Users

a) The Chairman welcomed Barbara Snowball to the meeting and thanked her for attending the meeting.

b) The speaker referred to concerns that existed in relation to the impact of cuts to the local bus service on the residents of rural areas in Meirionnydd and specifically referred to the service in the area of Llangelynnin Ward.

c) The campaigners noted that later buses were needed to travel between Dolgellau and Tywyn. Specific reference was made to difficulties faced by those who travelled on the bus to and from the hospital and it was noted that the travelling timetable was restrictive and inconvenient.

ch) It was further emphasised by the campaigners that the bus service was crucial in order to promote the tourism industry and they noted that the entire local community would benefit if a later bus service would be restored.

They suggested that the timetable could be changed for a trial period of a year. They were of the opinion that this would enable them to draw attention to the options available and encourage more people to use the bus service.

d) Mrs Snowball provided examples of problems faced by individuals along with difficulties that arose due to the current bus timetables.

dd) In terms of costs, she noted that a convenient arrangement would attract more people to use the bus service. She added that this emphasised the value of trialling changes for a

period of a year. She was concerned that using a reduction in the number of users as a reason for the trial would deteriorate the service further.

3c) An interview with Rona Lewis, Director of the Dolgellau Campus – Coleg Meirion Dwyfor and Linda Wyn, Executive Director Academic Services, Llandrillo Menai Group.

- a) As Linda Wyn was one of the Executive Directors of the Llandrillo Menai Group, that included Coleg Meirion Dwyfor, Coleg Menai and Coleg Llandrillo, it was explained that the information submitted would involve matters across Gwynedd.
- b) It was noted that one of the main concerns was the fact that Gwynedd's post 16 students, in the schools and colleges had to pay £180 per year to use buses in Gwynedd. The Group now involved four counties and it was noted that Anglesey students paid £60 per year and that Conwy and Denbigh students did not pay anything for the service. It was added that the Council's senior officers had suggested that those who felt hardship due to this payment could use the Education Maintenance Allowance. However, it was emphasised that the purpose of this allowance was to help towards other costs such as paying for equipment associated with vocational courses.
- c) Furthermore, it was noted that there was a restriction on the use that could be made of the bus passes. Although the payments were being made, the bus passes were not accepted on some routes, therefore an additional payment had to be made. In addition, Gwynedd Council insisted that payments for the bus passes were made via credit card, and it was believed that this discriminated against some groups of students.
- ch) The speakers noted that Gwynedd Council had not been very flexible in relation to permitting the tickets on a temporary basis. The temporary tickets were refused after three weeks although the permanent tickets did not arrive for five weeks on some occasions.
- d) Consideration was given to the bus times, and it was explained that the service was insufficient with some failing to attend some essential parts of the courses along with extra-curricular activities. The fact that some dropped out of the studies underlined the difficulties. It was also explained that the timetables had been arranged to tie-in with school terms which were different to the terms in the colleges. Consequently, students faced an additional payment of £5 per day.
- dd) General concern was expressed regarding the decline in range and quality of the transport service.
- e) In response to an enquiry, it was noted that approximately 15 students dropped out of their courses at the beginning of a term on the Dolgellau site as a result of the difficulties and the hardship.
- f) Concern was expressed by the members and it was noted that students missed opportunities due to the lack of flexibility and the unacceptable and unfair system.
- ff) The Chairman thanked the speakers for the information and promised that further enquires would be made to ensure that the matters would be drawn to the attention of the Cabinet Member.

RESOLVED to authorise the Members Support and Scrutiny Manager, in collaboration with the Chair, Vice-chair and Councillor Eurig Wyn, who is responsible for making the proposal, to provide a list of concerns expressed and

submit them to the Cabinet in order to receive a report in response to the observations.

4. BANGOR PRIDE

- a) Submitted – the report of the Member Support and Scrutiny Manager.
- b) Members were reminded that they had considered undertaking a scrutiny investigation into Bangor Pride Bangor in September 2012. However, it had been resolved at the time to prioritise the ‘provision of housing for local people.’
- c) In light of this, the Bangor Pride Scheme was being resubmitted, and it was explained that the scrutiny investigation would run between April and December 2013.
- ch) The members’ briefing notes were listed by the Scrutiny Officers and members were given an opportunity to submit observations.
- d) A member noted that it would be beneficial to consider the times of timely refuse collections, especially in the vicinity of houses of multiple occupation. He believed that they could collaborate with the Students Union in dealing with this matter.
- dd) A local member agreed that changes were needed and to ensure that appropriate bins were available. She was very supportive of the suggestion to collaborate with the students.
- e) It was agreed that the ‘cleaning manager’ should be part of the scrutiny investigation programme.
- f) It was confirmed that the Leading Members of the Scrutiny Investigation Group would be Councillors:
Eric M. Jones, Mandy Williams–Davies, Gwynfor Edwards, Nigel Pickavance, Dilwyn Morgan and Gruffydd Williams.
- ff) The Member Support and Scrutiny Manager emphasised that the Scrutiny Investigation involved a significant time commitment and he wanted the Group members to be aware of this.

5. ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME

- a) Submitted – a version of the Annual Work Programme.
- b) It was noted that the Noddfa Centre, Deiniolen and the Car Hire Scheme had been added to the programme at the members’ request.
- c) Members were given an opportunity to submit additional items to include on the work programme and concern was expressed with regard to ‘using empty properties’ and second homes.
- ch) Concern was expressed in relation to observations that had been made during the meeting about the Council’s failure to engage with the public. It was confirmed that the Corporate Scrutiny Committee was considering the matter and the information would be transferred to them.

RESOLVED to add the following two matters to the annual work programme:

- **Using Empty Properties;**

- **Second Homes.**

The meeting commenced at 10.15am and concluded at 12.40pm