
COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 9/7/13

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

Councillors:- Craig ab Iago, Annwen Hughes, Louise Hughes, Dilwyn Morgan, Linda Morgan, Nigel Pickavance, Caerwyn Roberts, Gruffydd Williams, Mandy Williams-Davies.

OFFICERS: Gareth James (Member Support and Scrutiny Manager), Ian Jones (Senior Development Manager), Cerys Humphreys (Healthy Living Development Manager), Dafydd Gibbard (Senior Corporate Property Manager), Debbie Anne Williams Jones (Acting Members' Manager – Democratic Services) and Bethan Adams (Members Support and Scrutiny Officer).

OTHERS INVITED TO THE MEETING: Councillor Paul Thomas (Cabinet Member - Healthy Gwynedd)

APOLOGIES: Councillors Stephen Churchman, Tudor Owen, Mike Stevens, Gethin Glyn Williams

WELCOME:

Councillor Nigel Pickavance was welcomed to the committee. He had not been able to attend committee meetings recently due to his daughter's illness, and the Chairman wished the member and his family well.

Bethan Adams, the Member Support and Scrutiny Officer was welcomed to her first meeting.

Debbie Anne Williams Jones, who had been appointed as Members' Manager – Democratic Services to cover Vera Jones' maternity leave was welcomed.

GOOD WISHES:

Best wishes for a speedy recovery were extended to Councillor Tudor Owen following his recent surgery.

Best wishes were extended to Ioan Hughes, Member Support and Scrutiny Officer who would be retiring next March and he was thanked for his work.

1. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

The following members declared a personal interest for the reasons noted.

- Councillor Eric Merfyn Jones in the matter for information (b) (Transport) as his eighteen year old grand-daughter received transport from Waunfawr to Ysgol Brynrefail.
- Councillor Linda Morgan in the matter for information (b) (Transport) as she worked at Coleg Meirion-Dwyfor, Dolgellau.

The members were of the opinion that they were prejudicial interests, and they withdrew from the meeting during the discussion on that matter.

2. MINUTES

The Chairman signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee, held on 14 May 2013 as a true record.

3. THE PROVISION OF GWYNEDD COUNCIL ALLOTMENTS

- a) Submitted – the report of the Cabinet Member - Healthy Gwynedd.

It was noted that there was no specific structure to the allotment provision at present and that mapping work was ongoing. At present the Property Department was undertaking the work but it would come under the Health Living unit in future. It was noted that there was a need to formalise the process and it was intended to create a page on the Council's website to promote the process and to note a contact point.

Reference was made to the recent visit of the Cabinet Member for Healthy Gwynedd and Council officers to Conwy Council where they had seen the excellent work that had been undertaken to establish allotments in Conwy. However, it was noted that revenue funding was becoming scarcer and that a long waiting list was creating problems.

- b) Members responded to the report and they highlighted the following main points:

- There was a need to encourage people to establish allotments but there was a need to look at other options e.g. people using their own gardens to grow produce;
- There was a need to highlight what grants were available to establish allotments;
- It was noted that there was a demand for allotments but it was not easy work. Needed to look at the option of bringing the Community and Town Councils into the process.
- The process of establishing allotments was long and burdensome and there was a need to make the process easier.
- Allotments should be established in schools and the local community should be included in the process in order to strengthen the community link.
- The option of collaborating with Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd should be addressed and bringing waste land back into use.
- Allotments were commendable but in the current economic climate where money was scarce, it was not a high priority and there was a need to evaluate whether the land would be put to better use as land to build houses or to create allotments.
- Care should be taken when establishing allotments to ensure that the community wanted to establish them and a partnership with other organisations and associations should be promoted.
- There was a need to identify appropriate land of good quality to establish allotments to ensure that they flourished.
- There were mental and physical benefits for people who worked on allotments.
- There was a need to initiate an interest and encourage people to establish allotments.

- (i) The local member noted that there were 12 allotments in Harlech with a waiting list. It was highlighted that the Snowdonia National Park Authority offered a grant under the CAE scheme (Sustainable Development Fund) to support projects that helped to improve quality of life in the National Park.
- (ii) The Cabinet Member noted that it was intended for the Council to provide strategic support to people establishing allotments. He referred to a scheme in Blaenau Ffestiniog, namely *O'r llechen i'r Plât* that educated people by looking at every aspect of food, including growing food, wild food and cooking. He emphasised that there was a need to look at every aspect of food in order to get the greatest benefit.
- (iii) The Healthy Living Development Manager added that a third sector organisation (under the leadership of the Food and Nutrition Forum) was submitting bids to different grant sources in order to seek to appoint a Sustainable Food Officer for the County. The purpose of this

post would be to move forward with the work of the Gwynedd Food Charter, and part of this would include encouraging individuals to grow fruit and vegetables at home.

RESOLVED to recommend the following to the Cabinet Member for Healthy Gwynedd:

- a) **To undertake mapping work of suitable locations urgently and to include an assessment of land ratings as part of the work.**
- b) **That the Healthy Living Manager:**
 - i) **Promotes information about the contact person who supports allotments within the Council**
 - ii) **The contact person to deal with the Property Unit on behalf of the Customer (external group) and to keep the process simple for the group**
 - iii) **The Cabinet Member to keep an overview to ensure the smooth running of applications and prompt processing of applications.**
- c) **To promote and support opportunities to encourage individuals, families and groups to ‘do the small things’ such as growing some vegetables in small locations which become available.**
- ch) **Work with Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd and other partners to support tenants and community groups to develop possible plots to grow vegetables.**

4. FREE SWIMMING SCHEME

- a) Submitted – the report of the Cabinet Member for Healthy Gwynedd and the Senior Development Manager was also present.

It was noted that the Council received a grant of £149,441 from the Welsh Government each year in order to provide the Free Swimming Scheme to children and adults over 60 years old. The provision that was available in Gwynedd was highlighted and reference was made to the fact that the number of free swimming sessions was decreasing.

The Council had been innovative in 2004/05 offering free entry to the parents of children under eight years old to the free swimming sessions, the only Council in Wales to offer this. However this provision had been withdrawn in 2008/09 as part of the £16 million savings plan as the scheme cost £30,000.

- b) An opportunity was given to members to make observations and ask questions. The Cabinet Member and the officer responded appropriately and the following main points were made:
 - A member expressed concern that less fortunate people were being deprived of the scheme as a result of the change in the policy.
 - It was noted that the Government’s free swimming scheme did not address factors relating to income or disability and the current fees policy did not take this into consideration either.
 - The fees structure policies should be addressed in the context of the income of parents and disability.
 - It was noted that a national discussion was ongoing regarding changing the focus, therefore, rather than placing an emphasis on the number of swimming sessions emphasis should be placed on the impact on the child thus making the best use of the funding. It was added that some councils wanted to reduce the free provision for adults over 60 years old in order to target parents.
 - Reference was made to the graph which showed a decline in the number of children participating in free swimming sessions. The Senior Development Manager noted that there had been overprovision in the past which had meant that income was not being reclaimed and despite the decrease the Council was providing more than the minimum and more than other counties.

- The purpose of the scheme was to improve children's swimming ability and the structured lessons targeted the children who needed the most support.
- It was noted that in 2006/07 50% of children could swim and that the Council had a target of 83% being able to swim this year and a target of 100% being able to swim by 2020.
- A variety of activities were being offered, including snorkelling and kayaking and the children were encouraged to participate in these activities outdoors also.
- In terms of the structured sessions, it was noted that more children attended when a fee of £1 was charged rather than the free structured swimming sessions and that there was a need to address this.
- There was a need to look at the free swimming provision as some children were not happy to attend the structured lessons and wanted to attend open swimming sessions.
- Consideration should be given to using some of the free swimming funding to reduce the price of swimming across the board in order to enable more children to take advantage of the provision.

- (i) A member asked if there was a target for those areas in which there was no swimming pool nearby.

In response, the Senior Development Manager noted that schools received funding to provide swimming lessons but that they could not claim travelling expenses. He referred to the idea of looking at using mobile swimming pools and that a scheme was in the pipeline to look at how cost effective they would be to use.

- (ii) A member asked whether or not the strategic review into the leisure provision would have an impact on the target of 100% of children being able to swim by 2020.

In response, the Cabinet Member said that the financial situation was having an impact, but the aim was to change the current provision in order to keep the leisure centres open. He emphasised that the strategic review was ongoing.

RESOLVED to accept the report.

MATTERS FOR INFORMATION

a) PLAY OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHILDREN

The Cabinet Member for Healthy Gwynedd provided some background to the matter. He noted that it was a new matter and that a Play Officer had been appointed during the previous two weeks.

b) TRANSPORT

The above-mentioned item was chaired by the Vice-chair.

It was agreed that Councillors Louise Hughes, Caerwyn Roberts, Angela Russell and Gruffydd Williams would meet the relevant Cabinet Member to discuss further matters in relation to post-16 education transport.

NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED to hold the next meeting on 15 October 2013 in Ystafell Dwyrdd, Contact Centre, Penrhyndeudraeth.

The meeting commenced at 10.30am and concluded at 12.10pm