
COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1.10.14

PRESENT - Councillor Angela Russell (Chair)
Councillor Mandy Williams-Davies (Vice-chair).

Councillors:- Stephen Churchman, Annwen Hughes, Eric M. Jones, Llywarch Bowen Jones, Dilwyn Morgan, Linda Morgan, Caerwyn Roberts, Gruffydd Williams, Robert J. Wright and Eurig Wyn.

OFFICERS: Arwel Ellis Jones (Senior Manager - Corporate Commissioning Service) and Lowri Haf Evans (Members' Support and Scrutiny Officer).

ALSO PRESENT:

- i) In relation to item 5 on the agenda – Mr Ffrancon Williams (Chief Executive, Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd) and Mr Gethin Armstrong (Customer Services Manager CCG), Mr Arwel Owen (Senior Housing Manager, Gwynedd Council) and Mr Gareth Parri (Housing Options Team Leader).
- ii) In relation to item 7 on the agenda – Mrs Kate Thompson (Food Standards Agency), Mr Rob Wilkins (Food Standards Agency), Councillor John Wyn Williams – Cabinet Member for Planning, Mr Aled Davies (Head of Regulatory Department) and Mr John Reynolds (Senior Manager Public Protection Department).
- iii) In relation to item 8 on the agenda – Councillor Gareth Roberts - Cabinet Member for the Environment, Mr Aled Davies (Head of Regulatory Department), Mr Andrew Gregson (Finance and Growth Monitoring Officer – Transportation Service).
- iv) In relation to item 9 on the agenda – Councillor Gareth Roberts – Cabinet Member for the Environment, Mr Gwyn Morris Jones (Head of Highways and Municipal Department) and Mr Aled Davies (Head of Regulatory Department).

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES:

Everyone was welcomed to the meeting by the Chair, Angela Russell. Apologies were received from Councillors Nigel Pickavance, Gruffydd Williams, Louise Hughes, Mike Stevens and Craig ab Iago

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

Declarations of personal interest were received from Councillors Angela Russell and Llywarch Bowen Jones regarding item 5 on the agenda.

3. URGENT ITEMS

None to note.

4. MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting of this committee, held on 4 July, 2014, were accepted as a true record of the meeting.

5. CARTREFI CYMUNEDOL GWYNEDD

- a) Submitted - the Annual Report of Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd (CCG) 2013-2014. It was noted in the Transfer Agreement 'Your Home, Your Choice' that it was a requirement for CCG to note how it was delivering the pledges made to tenants in the Offer Document and how it was implementing the obligations under the Transfer Agreement.
- b) In the discussion, the following that were issues raised by members were considered:
- i. It was noted that the Elected Members' Protocol ensured a one directional flow of information with every enquiry and response appropriately recorded. It was stated that establishing one contact point provided a professional approach to the procedure and there was no intention of changing the procedure. It was reported that last year over 300 complaints had been received by Councillors, but as the improvement works were nearing completion it appeared that the number of complaints were reducing. In terms of sharing information regarding completed work, it was agreed that it was possible to improve and to fully close the enquiry cycle.
 - ii. Details were provided of the work that had been completed and it was accepted that the number of housing stock that complied with the Welsh Housing Quality Standard according to element on 31.3.14 was very commendable.
 - iii. In response to the positive effort made to recruit locally, concern was expressed regarding the Lovell company's sub-contracting arrangements. It was noted that one of the main objectives of CCG was to recruit locally and they scrutinised the statistics on a monthly basis.
 - iv. It was explained that CCG had no plans to upgrade and install electricity in the tenants' sheds as the plans of the kitchens were standard for the Welsh Housing Quality Standard.
 - v. When determining the rent levels, CCG noted that they followed Welsh Government guidelines. The rent policy had been adapted in April 2014 with an expectation that everyone complied by March 2015. A matrix would be drawn up for every housing association, along with consideration given to elements such as wages and local house prices. CCG determined in the rent policy that the same rent would be charged for the same type of house whether it was rural or urban.
 - vi. In response to 'the local demand', it was explained in detail that this was achieved by collaboration with the Council's Strategic Housing Unit, the Planning Service and the Research Unit.
In response to the proposal of holding discussions and further collaboration with Town and Community Councils, it was noted that CCG's plans on development were very recent and therefore this element had not been considered. Gwynedd Council's Senior Housing Manager noted that it would be possible for Town and Community Councils to contact the Rural Housing Facilitator and it would be possible for him to facilitate this and prepare information for the next preparatory meeting.
 - vii) A request was made for CCG to respond to the opinion that they were slow in disposing of vacant houses which over time were creating an impact on neighbouring houses and the community. It was accepted that the procedure was slow and it was explained that the processes for tenants had improved. In a situation when there was a vacant house that was not intended to be rented but sold on the open market, it was explained that the process was slow because of the agreements and decisions that needed to be implemented prior to disposing of the house.
It was agreed that CCG, along with other Housing Associations, would consider advertising the property locally within the consideration period.

viii) In response to a question regarding whether playing fields should be provided as an integral part of a housing development, rather than via a grant application, it was noted that playing fields with slides and swings for example, were not CCG's responsibility because of obvious wider implications. CCG could facilitate playing fields such as football fields as there were less wide implications but they did not promote this. Consideration was not given to playing fields under the housing budget but it could be part of the Community Fund.

ix) Mr Arwel Owen and Mr Gareth Parri from the Council's Housing Service were welcomed to respond to the options procedure and the housing points system.

The Housing Allocation Policy gave priority to five conditions with emphasis placed on the need for a house rather than a house in the local area. In the context of 'houses in the local area', it was explained that Gwynedd Council had received counsel's opinion and now the 'local' element had been maximised as far as possible in Gwynedd. It was stated that the Localism Act had strength in England but not in Wales. In terms of prioritisation given to the 'language' element, it was noted that a request had been made via the Language Committee to investigate this.

x) Of the individuals that had been homed, 98% had a local connection with Gwynedd and 74% had a connection with the community (ward) where they were receiving a property with an additional 12% having a connection with an adjacent community/ward.

It was accepted that there was a lack of appropriate stock for tenants but it was confirmed that every possible option was shared with the tenant and an effort made to respond to every situation openly and realistically.

In response to the House Swap scheme, it was reported that a tenant had a legal right to do this and that CCG as a Housing Association promoted the scheme in the context of welfare reform.

c) The work of engaging with tenants was praised and it was suggested that CCG's Mobile Surgery should include discussions with members of Community and Town Councils, Local Members, the Police and neighbours so that there was an opportunity by working together to respond and resolve local issues. The observation was noted.

ch) Members were encouraged to convey any complaints that were a cause of concern for them to the quarterly meetings. Councillor Annwen Hughes was nominated as a substitute for Councillor Stephen Churchman if he could not attend on behalf of the Committee.

Everyone was thanked for their contribution to the debate and representatives of Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd were thanked for attending the meeting. The report was accepted.

RESOLVED to accept the report emphasising the following matters:

a) the importance of gathering information about local need that will then lead to housing development plans to address the need (it was agreed to request information about this for the next preparatory meeting).

b) the arrangements of all housing associations should be improved to advertise empty properties locally.

c) to request comparative information from other counties on the number of allocations to local people in order to allay or confirm the concerns of members regarding the number of people from outside areas receiving properties under the points system.

6. HOMELESSNESS SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION BRIEF

- a) Submitted – the homelessness scrutiny investigation brief and the background of the proposal to undertake a scrutiny investigation into the matter was elaborated upon.
- b) It was explained that the investigation would start in December 2014 with a report submitted from scrutiny to the Executive in July 2015.

RESOLVED to elect the following members to be members of the lead group for the scrutiny investigation: Councillors: Stephen Churchman, Caerwyn Roberts, Angela Russell, Eric Jones and Eurig Wyn.

7. FOOD STANDARDS AGENCY FOCUSED AUDIT OF GWYNEDD COUNCIL'S ARRANGEMENTS FOR ENFORCEMENT OF THE FOOD SAFETY ACT 1990: 6TH AND 7TH MARCH 2014

- a) Submitted – the report of the Head of Regulatory Department, providing an update on the progress made by the Public Protection Service in dealing with the findings of the Food Standards Agency's Focused Audit.
- b) The Cabinet Member stated that an Action Plan had been prepared to address the failures and he outlined the planned improvements to address the deficiencies. A Task and Finish Group had been established and had been given tasks to address within a very tight schedule. A positive response had been received from members of the Task Group and they were congratulated for completing the work given to them.
- c) In response to an enquiry regarding whether Gwynedd Council had responded sufficiently to the deficiencies, Kate Thompson from the Food Standards Agency noted the background and context of the Pennington Report (March 2009), by explaining that the main focus of the audit was to evidence whether the recommendations of the Pennington Report had been implemented. There was evidence that four of the 12 recommendations had been fully implemented; three had been implemented with a few exceptions and no evidence of any action taken for five of the recommendations. It was acknowledged that the Service's response to the deficiencies had been prompt and this was welcomed.

It was stated that there had been effective collaboration with the Food Standards Agency since the Task Group had been established and there was a willingness for this to continue. The Food Standards Agency was thanked for its support with a very positive solution.

- ch) It was decided to send a message to thank the staff for responding to the deficiencies and confirmation for the public that there were no further deficiencies in the service. The status quo had been restored and there was a need for this to continue and everyone needed to be clear of what was expected.

RESOLVED: to receive a further progress report in six months' time (to be submitted to the preparatory meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Committee) to check whether the action has brought the service back to where it should be.

8. THE PARKING SYSTEM IN GWYNEDD

- a) Submitted – the report by the Head of Regulatory Department, inviting observations by the Committee on the proposed options and to make proposals along with suggestions for alternative plans for parking management in Gwynedd. It was highlighted that Gwynedd Council's parking systems and policies had not changed since 2007. It was further noted

that they needed to be reviewed by assessing whether the current management arrangements met the needs of the Council and the Communities. For information also, the comparative costs of neighbouring authorities (2014) were shared.

- b) The proposal that Community and Town Councils or local businesses could manage some car parks was welcomed, however it was emphasised that before agreeing to this there was a need to look carefully at ownership of the land and other aspects. The observation was accepted and it was stated that it would be possible to collaborate with communities to discuss contributions and consider charging higher fees in some areas in agreement with Community and Town Councils and any additional income derived would be given to the local community.
- c) In response to an enquiry regarding the number of free car parks, it was agreed that there was a need to scrutinise the list of their location in more detail. In certain circumstances there was no justification for not charging a fee, whilst in other car parks the cost of installing a machine would be greater than the income that could be raised. It was accepted that it would be possible for Community and Town Councils or local businesses to manage some of these car parks with an emphasis on holding local discussions to ensure that the community was ready to take the responsibility.
- ch) In response to the option for Blue Badge holders, the idea was supported of adopting a system of payment for annual permits with any revenue generated used for improving access facilities in general on streets and within car parks.
- d) Additional options were suggested, such as parking permits for local residents of the area, adopting a procedure for Council staff to pay for parking spaces, looking at the possibility of making improvements and charging a fee for parking on the side of the road in Abersoch and how to go about 24 hour enforcement. A request was made also for the Cabinet to consider comparing the parking fees of nearby areas before coming to a decision on the appropriate fee structure for Gwynedd.
- dd) The Cabinet Member stated that he welcomed that the Scrutiny Committee was satisfied with the principles and the recommendations submitted in the paper and he was happy that this was a basis to move forward to submit the matter to the Cabinet. Members were thanked for their input.

RESOLVED: to express satisfaction with the proposals of the review conditional on the following:

- i) **There is a need to encourage active collaboration with local communities on the management of car parks.**
- ii) **The number of free car parks to be scrutinised locally after discussing the matter with local members.**
- iii) **Although welcoming the idea of charging for parking in 'blue badge spaces', there is a need to ensure that any income derived is used to improve the facilities for users.**
- iv) **The Cabinet should, when considering the proposals formally, receive comparative information especially from neighbouring councils.**

9. BANGOR PRIDE SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION REPORT

- a) Submitted - the progress report on the recommendations of the Scrutiny Investigation which was accepted. It was acknowledged that six months was not a sufficient period for demonstrating progress from the perspective of some recommendations and it was

agreed that there was a need to hold further discussions with Bangor City Council to establish what their intention was with Bangor Pride.

- b) It was reported that exciting work by the Students Union had been a much anticipated development in terms of prioritising the work of Bangor Pride and operating under the Love Bangor campaign.
- c) The Chair of the Scrutiny Investigation noted that there was a need to ensure that the basic wishes of any community was crucial to any action.
- ch) Whilst acknowledging that houses in multiple occupation was an issue that needed continued monitoring in Bangor, the Committee expressed its satisfaction that considerable effort had been made by Council services to collaborate with local members and representatives from the community to promote understanding and raise awareness of the Council's powers in terms of control of such housing.

RESOLVED: to request a progress report and to allow time to hold discussions with the community and provide an opportunity for the situation to mature.

10. SCRUTINY FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2014 - 2015

- a) Submitted - an amended forward work programme and members were reminded that a preparatory meeting would be held on 6 November.

Everyone was thanked for their contribution.

The meeting commenced at 10.00am and concluded at 1.10pm