
CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 16/02/17

Present: Councillor Jason Humphreys (Chair);
Councillor W. Roy Owen (Vice-chair).

Councillors: Lesley Day, Elwyn Edwards, Charles W. Jones, June Marshall, Eirwyn Williams, John Wyn Williams and R. H. Wyn Williams.

Also present: Councillor Stephen Churchman (invited for item 3 below)

Officers present: Vera Jones (Democratic Services Manager) and Eirian Roberts (Member Support Officer).

Present for items 3 and 4 below:

Councillor Ioan Thomas (Cabinet Member – Customer Care)
Geraint Owen (Head of Corporate Support Department)
Joanne Parry (Galw Gwynedd, Siop Gwynedd and Registration Manager)
Eleri Williams (Self-service Project Manager)

Apologies: Councillors Anwen J. Davies, Trevor Edwards, Dyfrig Jones, Aled Wyn Jones, Michael Sol Owen and Hefin Underwood.

Councillor Stephen Churchman was welcomed to the meeting for item 3 below as the member who had originally expressed concern regarding Galw Gwynedd's performance.

Best wishes were sent to Councillor Trevor Edwards who had been unwell recently.

1. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

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

2. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee held on 20 October 2016, as a true record.

3. GALW GWYNEDD AND ANSWERING TELEPHONE CALLS

Submitted - the report of the Cabinet Member for Customer Care and the Galw Gwynedd, Siop Gwynedd and Registration Manager, which set out the background of establishing Galw Gwynedd in 2008 and responded to specific questions that were raised beforehand from the scrutinisers in relation to:

- The latest performance data for answering telephone calls from Galw Gwynedd and the Council's departments in general.
- The impact of recent changes on the performance of answering telephone calls and the service's plans to improve performance.
- Data regarding the time it took to receive a telephone response at Galw Gwynedd and the feasibility of introducing a system that would inform customers of how long the wait would be.

- Methods of coping with the busiest periods.
- The Self-service project's ability to reduce the number of calls that would come to Galw Gwynedd.

The Cabinet Member and officers expanded on the written responses in the report, and also responded to further questions / observations from the members. During the discussion:

- Galw Gwynedd staff were thanked for their hard work, and the importance of protecting those members of staff by continuing to improve the system was emphasised.
- It was noted that the steps taken so far (by securing additional resources and using Siop Gwynedd resources) had moved towards mitigating the problem and that was to be welcomed.
- The review of the method of training staff was welcomed, along with the fact that the wording and frequency of the message callers heard when waiting for their call to be answered would soon be changed.

The Chair summarised the main conclusions of the discussion as follows:

- An answering system option should be considered, e.g. a message noting the waiting time for a response to the call or offer an option to stay on the phone or referring the call on to somewhere else.
- A solution was needed for calls that were missed across the Council departments, raising officers' awareness of the numbers, and monitoring and finding solutions to that.
- Consideration could perhaps be given to responding to a recent misleading article in the Daily Post regarding Galw Gwynedd's performance.
- Arrangements should be made for members of the committee to visit Galw Gwynedd.
- Consider reporting back on the progress to the committee within six months (if the member of the committee that was part of performance monitoring meetings with the Cabinet Member saw that the problem continued).
- It would be beneficial for the residents / members to be able to see the status of any enquiries made by them, or on behalf of their electors.

4. SELF-SERVICE PROJECT

Submitted - the report of the Cabinet Member and the Self-service Project Manager, which set the background of establishing the Self-service Project and responded to specific questions that were raised beforehand from the scrutinisers in relation to:

- The aim, work programme and progress of the project thus far.
- The aim for maximising the use of self-service.
- Measuring success.
- Access to services through the medium of the digital channel thus far.
- The implications of creating a business plan for developing our own self-service system rather than buying off the shelf.
- The consequences that would likely derive from the project for the people of Gwynedd.

- Plans on how to communicate these opportunities with the public.
- Problems that had arisen with the system thus far and how they were solved.

The system on the website was shown to the members in order to ensure clear understanding of the self-service project.

The Cabinet Member and the officers expanded on the written responses in the report, and also responded to further questions / observations from the members. During the discussion:

- This project was welcomed. It had the potential to be very useful, but it was emphasised that this would be one way of communicating with the Council, and not the only way.

The Chair summarised the main conclusions of the discussion as follows:

- Consideration needed to be given to the way the service was promoted and that there was a role for Council staff and members in general to raise awareness of the system.
- The element of tracking enquiries was extremely useful and that transferring all possible services to the system was needed as soon as possible.
- Consideration needed to be given to the website's image and the location and size of the link to the personal account.
- In order to ensure the project's success, it should be ensured that the back office staff were aware of the system and were ready to act and that resources would be needed for that.
- The self-service system should incorporate simple language principles in order to facilitate the use of it.

The Cabinet Member and the officers were thanked for the discussion.

5. SIMPLE LANGUAGE

Submitted - the report of the Simple Language Scrutiny Investigation Group on the investigation's work and conclusions into how simple and easy to understand the terms that the Council used in their questionnaires were.

The investigation's members thanked Dr Llion Jones and Eleri Hughes from Canolfan Bedwyr, Bangor University for their guidance, and to the officers for their work of supporting the investigation.

During the discussion, it was noted:

- That it was hoped that this work would motivate people to use clearer language in other fields across the County, e.g. when drawing up reports for committees.
- That the definition of any acronym that was used for the first time in a document should be explained.
- That simple language was relevant to self-service also in order to ensure that people used it.
- That Hunaniaith should also be part of this in terms of the information they shared publicly.

RESOLVED to accept the recommendations of the Group, namely:

- (a) That the Communication and Engagement Unit and Canolfan Bedwyr jointly develop short guidelines (no more than two sides of A4) for staff on how to create questionnaires in simple language and that they also create a vocabulary / phrase list to avoid.**
- (b) That Canolfan Bedwyr provides input into an in-house pack of guidelines for arranging public meetings, press statements, etc. that is currently being created.**
- (c) Hold a pilot of the questionnaire guidelines with a specific Council department to see whether or not any impact has been seen following its introduction, before consideration is given to establishing a more extensive plan.**

At the end of the meeting, the Chair noted:

- In accordance with the recommendation of the Holiday Homes and Taxes Investigation, a letter was sent to the Welsh Government encouraging them to change the relevant Order so that a planning permission would be required to change the use of a 'household' to a 'self-serviced unit'.
- Lesley Griffiths, AM, the Cabinet Secretary for the Environment and Rural Affairs noted that she was considering research which had been conducted by the University of the West of England on the effectiveness of the Town and Country Planning Order (Use Classes) 1987, and it was expected that proposals for further consultation would be announced.
- It did not appear that this consultation had been launched, but the officers were aware of it, and would keep an eye out for it.

The meeting commenced at 10.30 am and concluded at 12.15 pm

CHAIRMAN