
COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 12/01/16

PRESENT: E. Caerwyn Roberts (Vice-chairman)

COUNCILLORS: Stephen Churchman, Annwen Daniels, Annwen Hughes, Louise Hughes, Dilwyn Morgan, Eric M. Jones, Nigel Pickavance, Mike Stevens and Gruffydd Williams

OFFICERS: Arwel Ellis Jones (Corporate Commissioning Service) and Lowri Haf Evans (Member Support and Scrutiny Officer).

ALSO PRESENT:

- a) In relation to item 6 on the agenda - Councillor Ioan Thomas - Cabinet Member for Housing and Arwel W Owen (Senior Housing Manager)
- b) In relation to item 7 on the agenda - Councillor John Wynn Jones - Cabinet Member for the Environment, Gwyn Morris Jones (Head of Highways and Municipal Department) and Steffan Jones (Senior Waste and Commissioning Manager).
- c) In relation to item 8 on the agenda - Dafydd Wyn Williams (Temporary Head of Regulatory Department), Gareth Jones (Senior Planning and Environment Service Manager) and Sheryl Le Bon Jones (Executive Systems Manager - Public Protection Service)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Dilwyn Morgan, Linda Morgan, Angela Russell, Glyn Thomas and Dafydd Meurig, Cabinet Member for Planning and Regulatory (in relation to item 8).

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

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

3. URGENT ITEMS

None to note

4. MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting of this committee, held on 17 November 2015, were accepted as a true record of the meeting.

5. CABINET RESPONSE TO SCRUTINY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

- a) Submitted - the report of the Chair of the Communities Scrutiny Committee and the Senior Manager - Democracy and Delivery regarding an established procedure to improve the contact and dialogue between individual scrutiny

committees and the Cabinet to identify a follow up for scrutiny work. As part of an experiment to introduce a new arrangement, the Chair of the Communities Scrutiny Committee submitted a report noting recommendations from a recent meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Committee to the Cabinet, and it was noted that public, open and honest discussions had been held.

Three items were referred to the Cabinet's attention

- The Welsh Language and the Planning Procedure - the Cabinet Member welcomed Members' feedback on the process of creating the new Planning Policy Guidelines within the Local Development Plan
- Section 106 Agreements - again, the Cabinet Member welcomed the recommendation for a small working group to discuss possible options for the future.
- Post-16 Education Transport - a positive response was received from the Cabinet Member and it was noted that it would be re-submitted to the Scrutiny Committee to confirm the recommendations that had been realised to be implemented from September 2016.

It was noted that the experiment had ensured the Cabinet Members' public commitment to take action, and the next step would be feeding the action steps and the timetable to the Scrutiny Committee's work programme to receive assurance that action had occurred.

b) During the discussion, the following observations were made:

- In the context of Planning and the Welsh Language, a suggestion was made to consider starting to implement Technical Advice Note 20 and for the Council to update its policies. It was suggested to highlight the concerns about improved local guidelines to the Planning Department.
- In the context of Post-16 Education Transport, a concern was highlighted that the response had dragged on, and that it was necessary to push for early implementation of the recommendations to ensure that the new arrangements would be in place by September 2016. It was suggested to write to the Cabinet Member to emphasise this, drawing attention to the fact that the recommendations had been submitted 02.02.2014.

RESOLVED

- a) **To accept the report and agree to continue with the procedure of submitting the recommendations of the Communities Scrutiny Committee to improve the contact and dialogue.**
- b) **To write to the Cabinet Member for Education to emphasise the need for early implementation on the recommendations to improve the post-16 education transport service.**

6. GWYNEDD COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO THE SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS

- a) At the request of members of the Communities Scrutiny Committee, a report was submitted to the Cabinet Member for Housing, outlining the Council's arrangements to respond to the Syrian Refugee crisis. It was briefly noted that

Gwynedd was required to accept up to 40 people over a period of 4 and a half years with the intention of accepting 10 in the first instance to learn from the process.

It was highlighted that Gwynedd had received support from the beginning and was by now a part of Wedd2. With high numbers of people on waiting lists for social housing, the refugees would receive properties within the private sector and would receive full humanitarian protection for 5 years with the right to employment and benefits. Confirmation had been received from the Home Office that a financial package was available to extend support and to facilitate integration in the community, and that this financial commitment (from the Westminster Government) would last for a period of five years.

In terms of timetable, it was reported that six authorities were considering the possibility of agreeing on one date to receive the refugees and were in the process of submitting an outline of the available accommodation to the Home Office. In the meantime, the Home Office would process the applications and would undertake thorough assessments to respond to what was available.

A tribute was paid to the residents and voluntary organisations of Gwynedd for their special campaigns to support refugees and it was noted that there was an intention to hold discussions with voluntary organisations in order to collaborate and to ensure the best use of resources and expertise. There would also be a proposal to contact with four other authorities from Wales who had already received refugees in order to learn and understand some practical elements.

- b) In response to a question regarding the 'five year period' of support, it was noted that integrating the refugees in society was the main objective and that the individuals had the right to return or stay after the period. A financial resource would be available for five years, but the hope was that the individuals would have made a full contribution to society by then. It was noted that it was likely that these would mostly be families.
- c) In response to a question regarding the type of resource which was offered by the Government, it was noted that health and child education were being addressed and that benefits were prioritised above this. It would be necessary to be careful and watchful of the need to work within the financial package and the priority at present was suitable accommodation. It was added that initial discussions had been held with Health. It was noted that discussions with colleges and communication provisions had occurred.
- d) In further response to a question regarding considering sharing the refugees across Gwynedd rather than locating the refugees in the north of the County, it was noted that the first 10 refugees would be likely to be located in the north, but that other areas of the county would be considered. It was noted that the experience was being evaluated with consideration being given to identifying opportunities for education, employment and a Syrian community.

RESOLVED: To express thanks for the report, noting that the Committee

- **Agrees and accepts the recommendation to welcome refugees to Gwynedd**
- **Supportive of the thorough preparations being undertaken**
- **Highlight the need to prepare the local community for accepting refugees to ensure integration into local society**
- **Welcome the use of private housing so that there would be no impact on**

social housing lists.**7. WASTE STRATEGY: CHANGE TO RESIDUAL WASTE COLLECTION**

- a) Submitted - the report of the Cabinet Member for the Environment reporting on the main findings of implementing a new system of collecting residual waste in the Meirionnydd Area. It was highlighted that the main objective was to increase recycling to avoid paying fines. The recycling target of 58% had to be reached by March 2016 and therefore the arrangements needed to be supported. It was explained that the targets, which were being set out by the Central Government, would continue up to 2025, whereby a recycling target of 70% would be required. It was highlighted that this was the situation facing every Council.

The changes in Meirionnydd had been introduced in June 2015 and in line with the arrangements of the Dwyfor Area, two teams had been established to be responsible for introducing the change - the Executive Team and the Engagement Team. In general, it was noted that the arrangement had been successful and that the figures appeared encouraging. One different element in Meirionnydd was the number of community points, but it was now reported that 30 of those 140 points continued to receive residual collections every two weeks.

The Cabinet Member thanked Meirionnydd residents for their cooperation and also Dwyfor residents for maintaining their performance. It was reported at the end of November that Gwynedd's performance figures (in terms of the National and Statutory measure for recycling) was 58.52% and that these changes were targeted to achieve annual programmed savings of £350k for the Council, which was in addition to not having to pay fines.

- b) During the discussion, the following observations were made:
- Thanks were expressed for the reports and it was accepted that the arrangements moved the service in the right direction.
 - The workforce was thanked for their service during the severe weather
 - Concerns were highlighted about community areas
 - Was there an increase in fly tipping?
 - Needed to continue to improve tidiness after collecting waste
 - The Assembly needed to be reminded again of the need to reduce packaging materials
 - It was frustrating that some residents refused to collaborate
 - What was a 'wash and squash' campaign?
 - Needed to focus on areas containing many houses
 - Needed to respond to areas where there was a lack of bin storage space
 - A suggestion for the Planning Department to consider 'adequate provision' of bin storage for every relevant application
 - When considering street bin recycling - emphasis on simple and clear messages
 - People needed to be educated to learn that recycling contributed to their own benefit for the future
 - Emphasis on engaging with communities with a request for the executive groups used in Dwyfor and Meirionnydd to collaborate with specific areas to improve sites
- c) In response to the above observations, the Head of the Highways and Municipal Service noted that he was very pleased with the work of the workforce and what they had achieved within difficult terms and conditions over the period of severe weather and the Christmas period.

In addition, it was noted that there was an increase in fly tipping, but that this was a pattern which had been seen across Britain and that heavy items such as fridges and construction produce were being tipped and not waste which was collected from houses. The need to implement was agreed upon and members were asked for their support to report on any occasion where fly tipping was/had happened.

In the context of dirty waste (wash and squash), it was reported that this material was being recycled, but that the condition of dirty items provided a cheaper price and the need to share this message with the public was accepted. In terms of tidiness, it was reported that Gwynedd had four new vehicles which aided the workforce and prevented materials from blowing away when they were working.

- d) In response to a question regarding the need for an incinerator in Deeside given that there would be a possible decrease in the input, it was noted that the incinerator, when active, contributed 7% to the aim.
- e) In response to a question regarding more frequent collections in student and holiday home areas, it was noted that very successful campaigns had been held with students and that there was good collaboration with the Abersoch Holiday Home Agency on establishing a plan for holiday homes in the area. It was also reported that specific work had been undertaken with Commercial Waste and that there was a significant improvement as a result to a change in arrangements, provision and introducing differential fees to retailers.
- f) It was accepted that the challenge for the future was a difficult one and it was therefore important to have accurate preparations in place. It was reiterated that the intention was to respond to every community challenge and that it was ongoing work. The current efforts were appreciated and a continuation in good collaboration was encouraged in order to respond to problems/challenges. The observations were appreciated.

RESOLVED

- a) **that the Committee is pleased to see an increase in the waste collection and recycling arrangements and that it was eager to record its appreciation of the staff's hard work, especially during the severe weather**
- b) **that the Committee viewed the need to address some matters as the work was progressing:**
 - **that the Cabinet Member needed to continue to pressurise the Government to do something about reducing the packaging material of goods**
 - **Information should be shared with the Members in general regarding the 'wash and squash' developments to improve the hygiene of the materials being collected**
 - **the Members hoped to see a further improvement in the tidiness when collecting, and were confident that the new machines would facilitate this**
 - **That creative solutions should continue to be sought to the challenges of collecting in populated areas through developing community bins**
 - **That a further increase should be ensured in the engagement and dialogue with residents in order to further improve recycling.**
 - **Need to ensure that on-street recycling arrangements moved on with an emphasis on having simple and easy to read messages for the public on those arrangements**

CHRISTMAS AND BOXING DAY ARRANGEMENTS

- a) It was noted that Christmas and the severe weather had maximised problems and therefore steps had been identified to progress. In general, it was noted that the service had been very good under very difficult circumstances in Meirionnydd and Dwyfor, with some confusion during the changes in Arfon. Despite observations in the press, during Christmas it was confirmed that Arfon's arrangements had been good, and that there was now an opportunity to learn lessons and to move on.

8. PEST CONTROL SERVICES

- a) Submitted - the report of the Cabinet Member for Planning and Regulatory for the Committee to consider possible options for the provision of the pest control service. An explanation was provided on the nature of the service and it was highlighted that the service was within the Regulatory Department's efficiency savings programme for 2015-2018 - a saving of £67,000. By now, it was confirmed that one officer had left and that by now, the figure to achieve the saving should the unit be abolished was £28,440.

It was added that a lack of income remained within the service, but that the Head of the Regulatory Department was eager to consider possible options;

- Abolish the pest control service
- Review and increase the number of management and pest control contracts by improving marketing
- Raise pest control fees to be self-sufficient
- Raise pest control fees to meet the saving of abolishing the service (It was suggested that raising the fees would be too much inflation and therefore the service could become too expensive)

The Committee was requested to provide the department with 6 months to identify improvements, a new fees structure and realistic income targets to seek a self-sufficient service. The Senior Service Manager noted that there were possible opportunities, such as increasing the numbers of stable contracts and looking at increasing the number of contracts in the Arfon area.

- b) During the discussion, the following observations were made:
- Welcome the opportunity to maintain a self-sufficient service - the service was necessary for the public
 - Preferred a neutral cost rather than abolishing
 - Abolishing the service would be likely to lead to an increase in the costs of private companies and therefore it was important to keep the service within the Council to safeguard prices for the public
 - Important service although it was not statutory
 - Welcome the need to market and to look at the fees of competitors / private companies
 - The health and safety implications also needed to be considered and not only financial matters
 - The posts within the service were responsible and specialist
 - Encouraged collaboration with the recycling department
 - Several internal services depended on the service - if the service was abolished, where and what would the cost of external / private companies come from and be?

- c) In response to the above observations the Head of Service noted that he appreciated Members' support and that he was confident that it was possible to address the deficit.

In response to a question regarding using external / private companies, as the Council's pest control service was not a statutory one, it was noted that it was difficult to find the fees of private companies to note a comparison. The need for fair and consistent fees levels was highlighted and the opportunity to further research the possible opportunities was appreciated.

It was confirmed that efficiency savings were in question and that the service was not on the Council's cuts list.

RESOLVED to accept the report and that a period of 6 months should be permitted to submit a new fees structure and realistic income targets for the pest control service to become self-sufficient.

The meeting commenced at 10.00 am and concluded at 12.00 pm

CHAIRMAN