
COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 5/12/19

PRESENT: Councillor Elfed Roberts (Chairman)
Councillor Gethin Glyn Williams (Vice-chairman)

COUNCILLORS: Glyn Daniels, Berwyn Parry Jones, Elwyn Jones, Kevin Morris Jones, Dafydd Owen, Edgar Wyn Owen, Angela Russell, Owain Williams and Gruffydd Williams

OFFICERS: Bethan Adams (Scrutiny Advisor) and Lowri Haf Evans (Democratic Services Officer)

ALSO PRESENT:

In relation to item 5 on the agenda – Catherine Roberts (Senior Operational Officer for the Gwynedd and Anglesey Community Safety Partnership)

In relation to item 6 on the agenda – Council Leader – Councillor Dyfrig Siencyn and Nonn Hughes (Programme Manager – Gwynedd and Anglesey Public Services Board)

In relation to item 7 on the agenda – Councillor Catrin Wager (Cabinet Member for Highways and Municipal / Gwynedd Consultancy), Huw Williams (Head of Gwynedd Consultancy) and Steffan Jones (Head of Highways and Municipal Department), Councillor Gareth Griffith (Cabinet Member for the Environment), Dafydd Wyn Williams (Head of Environment), Dilwyn Williams (Chief Executive) and Ffion Madog Evans (Senior Finance Manager)

In relation to item 8 on the agenda – Councillor Gareth Griffiths (Cabinet Member for the Environment), Dafydd Wyn Williams (Head of Environment) and Gareth Jones (Assistant Head of Environment)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Stephen Churchman, Elwyn Edwards, Simon Glyn, Annwen Hughes, Aled W Jones, Linda Morgan and Mike Stevens

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

The following member declared a personal interest in the following item for the reason noted:

- Councillor Gethin Glyn Williams in item 8 on the agenda, as he had a relative who owned a holiday home

The Member was of the view that it was a prejudicial interest, and he withdrew from the Chamber during the discussion.

3. URGENT ITEMS

None to note

4. MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 26 September 2019 were accepted as a true record of the meeting.

5. ANNUAL UPDATE BY THE COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP (GWYNEDD AND ANGLESEY)

The Senior Operational Officer of the Gwynedd and Anglesey Community Safety Partnership presented a report which updated the Committee on the Partnership's work. It was explained that the Partnership was required to report formally to the Committee every year, presenting an overview of the Partnership's main strategic developments over the year, together with the commissioning work that sets the framework for the priorities that were based on a strategic assessment. She added that this ensured that the Partnership fulfilled its obligations in accordance with sections of the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2006, by working with the Police, the Health Service, the Probation Service and the Fire and Rescue Service. She highlighted the main messages resulting from the activities undertaken in 2018/19 together with the year's main achievements.

The main milestones for 2019 – 2020 were highlighted and the Scrutiny Committee was asked to support the priorities listed in the report together with the future direction of the work.

In response to a question regarding the 13.5% increase in victim-based offences in Gwynedd, the analysis indicated that this was due to the increased effectiveness of the process of recording offences rather than an increase in offending. It was added that changes to the recording of some cases such as stalking and harassment had contributed to the increase, as now every stage of the crime/relevant case was counted rather than it just being recorded as a single offence / case. It was also noted that the number of people coming forward to report offences had increased.

In response to a question regarding the Most Similar Groups, which were a Group of Counties that are similar in respect of offending levels, it was reported that there were eight counties in the group and that full information about the group was available from the Home Office's website. She added that the information was updated every quarter.

In response to a comment regarding the intention to try to identify a new site in Bangor for substance misuse treatment, this was corrected by the Officer who stated that the aim was for the building to be a base for the Substance Misuse services to work from, which was a plan being led by the Health Board.

In response to the status of training completed on domestic abuse in accordance with Welsh Government requirements, she added that it was a challenge to deliver the training and that every effort was being made to ensure that all Council staff completed the basic level of training. It was noted that the training was statutory and that it was delivered through the E-learning service – it was added that we should seek better ways of reaching the target and consider innovative methods of doing so. The Council would report to the Welsh Government on the number who have completed the training and the Learning and Development Unit will keep a record.

In response to a question regarding concerns about the influence of gangs on local communities, it was reported that the Police were working hard to tackle County Lines. It was suggested that it would be useful for the Police to present information on this work to the Members.

RESOLVED:

- **to accept the report**
- **to support the priorities and the Partnership's direction of work to the future.**

6. GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE AND DELIVERY ARRANGEMENTS OF THE GWYNEDD AND ANGLESEY PUBLIC SERVICES BOARD

A report was presented by the Cabinet Member Dyfrig Siencyn, outlining what the Gwynedd and Anglesey Public Services Board had achieved over the past six months. The members were reminded that the Board had agreed priority fields which would improve economic, environmental and cultural well-being in both counties. The Board had also established sub-groups to discharge its functions.

It was reported that the Board accepted the need to focus on what could be achieved in the current climate since the public body's resources were strained and it faced further threats of having to make savings. Despite this, by working together the Board could capitalise on and identify opportunities to work in alternative ways and introduce innovative methods of operating.

A short update was provided on the developments within the six priority fields.

During the ensuing discussion, the following points were highlighted by individual Members:

- Poverty – the member expressed disappointment and concern that there was no sub-group leading on the work at present
- A suggestion to review the rent totals for social housing
- That support for families / carers should be included in the Health and Care of Adults work field
- Climate Change – the scale of its effect. More support needed. Was the Government responding to what the Board was trying to implement?
- Climate Change was a global matter, but in the context of flooding could people be educated about the impact / to slow down climate change rather than just accept that this was happening?
- Considering the underachievement by Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, it should be ensured that the priorities of the Health Sub-group are led effectively by a representative of the Health Board

In response to a comment with regard to ensuring effective leadership on the health aspects, it was noted that the sub-group was addressing two priorities and that the Health Board and both Counties were working together particularly well. It was added that the role of the Local Authorities and the Health Board was to provide an effective service and that the role of the Public Services Board was to add value to what was already being undertaken by the public bodies individually.

In response to a comment regarding the lack of work with poverty, it was noted

that these situations of poverty were caused by the Westminster Government's benefits system and their budgetary capacity, and that the Local Authority only had limited ability to identify a piece of work / a specific project to make a difference in this area. The member accepted the comment that work needs to be done to identify an area of work / find projects that could deliver and make a difference. With regard to the Public Services Board it was agreed to consider the work that was already ongoing by the Local Authorities in the context of poverty before considering what the Board could do to add value to that work. The Local Authorities would provide a presentation on progress within poverty during the next meeting of the Board in March.

In response to a comment regarding the actual effect of Climate Change, it was noted that Gwynedd Consultancy had already undertaken good work locally and those duties increased as the problem enhanced. It was suggested that the Welsh Government by working with Natural Resources Wales had changed attitudes towards the problems nationally. It was added that the solutions to some problems were substantial and beyond the ability of any local authority to deliver them on its own.

The suggestion of 'educating people' was accepted as an area of work that could be adopted, as opposed to only responding to the situation.

In response to a question regarding who monitored the work of the sub-groups, it was reported that the Public Services Board's Support Team ensured that the sub-groups made progress in their work, and progress reports would also be challenged at the quarterly meetings of the Board. In response to a question regarding risks and how could they expect a report on poverty to be submitted in December 2019 if there was no sub-group leading on the work, it was noted that a risk register would be submitted to the next meeting of the Board. The Local Authorities would also provide an update on their poverty plans.

RESOLVED to accept the report.

7. THE ENVIRONMENT DEPARTMENT, THE HIGHWAYS AND MUNICIPAL DEPARTMENT AND THE CONSULTANCY DEPARTMENT'S SAVINGS PROPOSALS TO MEET THEIR SHARE OF THE POTENTIAL £2M BUDGET GAP FOR 2020/21.

A report was presented providing details of savings proposals that would contribute to the potential financial gap in the 2020/21 budget. The Members were reminded that the annual grant received by the Welsh Government had not been sufficient for the last 12 years, and this had subsequently led to a situation where the Council had to plan to plug the financial gap. For 2020/21 it had been resolved to plan for a £2m gap and ask all the departments to find their contribution towards this amount. The Committee was asked to consider the proposals of the Environment Department, the Highways and Municipal Department and the Consultancy Department together with their implications.

The Cabinet Members and the Heads of Departments elaborated on the content of the report, and responded to questions / observations from the Members. The Cabinet Members thanked the Departments for finding further savings that would not impact directly on the residents of Gwynedd.

The Savings of the Consultancy Department

The committee welcomed the practice of increasing the resources within Gwynedd Consultancy Units to enable the Department to increase income which as a result would keep people employed in high-skilled jobs within the County through the medium of Welsh.

The Savings of the Highways and Municipal Department

In response to a suggestion regarding reducing / cutting down on external contracting costs so that smaller / local companies could compete for the work (below the threshold) it was accepted that more could be done to keep the benefit local and provide opportunities for local businesses to bid for the work.

In response to a request for information about the cost and arrangements for commercial waste, it was explained that the Department served over 2,000 businesses across Gwynedd by providing a unique offer to recycle or dispose of their residual waste. The service would sort out waste that could be recycled in Parc Adfer in the Deeside Enterprise Zone. It was added that this gave the Department the opportunity to improve the service by attracting and encouraging more companies to stay. It was also noted that a new act would be emerging which would require Local Authorities to recycle more, and the current arrangement of recycling commercial waste would be advantageous for Gwynedd. The aim was to offer a green / responsible service and look to develop this service further.

The Savings of the Environment Department

In response to the sentence which read 'the impact on residents will be reduced through closer collaboration with the Highways and Municipal Department', and that this should be the natural way of working regardless, it was noted that the Departments were conducting cross-departmental discussions to try to identify opportunities to collaborate within common areas so as to avoid duplication of work.

General observations:

- Consider making savings by using local consultants rather than external consultants
- Impose a fine for breaching planning conditions – this was an opportunity to generate income.

RESOLVED to accept the report and approve the departments' proposals to meet their share of the relevant savings.

8. HOLIDAY HOMES AND PLANNING

A report was submitted by the Assistant Head of Environment updating the Committee on the detailed research that the Cabinet had agreed for the Department to conduct in relation to holiday homes. The objective of the work was to seek to address how we could limit the number of houses that can be used for holiday purposes, looking at measures that are being implemented in other places and how could planning legislations be changed for implementing in Wales.

It was noted that there had been concerns for several years in Gwynedd regarding the number of holiday homes and their impact on the County's

communities. It was noted that the tourism industry had evolved significantly over the past few years, especially in the provision of short-term holiday lets.

It was highlighted that the aim was to appoint a multi-disciplinary team to conduct the research and applicants had been invited to submit a tender in October 2019. Although no-one had applied for the tender, the department had decided to proceed with the research and undertake the work in partnership with Cardiff Council and the Royal Town Planning Institute. It was added that the Planning Department was in the process of drawing up a plan and programme for the research work and that the Scrutiny Committee would be updated as the work progressed.

A formal presentation was given to the Committee explaining the context for the work.

Observations arising from the ensuing discussion from individual Members:

- They welcomed the research – they greatly hoped that the Welsh Government would give consideration to the recommendations / findings
- That concerns had been highlighted for years and by now, the impact highlighted the need to take action
- That rules and processes were needed in place to better manage the situation
- A member suggested the introduction of a registration or licence system for holiday homes – this could be potential income
- Introduce a procedure of heavy fines if planning conditions were breached
- An opportunity to discuss the use / management of holiday homes / an opportunity to work with housing associations / purchase holiday market housing to keep them local
- Holiday homes had a negative impact on local residents
- Welcomed the idea of setting a cap on the number of holiday homes in specified areas
- Consideration should also be given to the number of 'second homes' which also impacted on the County's housing stock
- Accepted the need to gather evidence in order to press for change

In response, the Assistant Head of Environment noted that he agreed with the comments and noted the need to develop new policies and establish joint legislations (such as rates and planning) so that the definitions used within them were consistent for the avoidance of doubt.

RESOLVED to accept the report, to welcome the research and to receive an update as the work progressed.

The meeting commenced at 10.15 am and concluded at 12.30 pm

CHAIRMAN