
COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 10.12.13

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

Councillors:- Annwen Hughes, Louise Hughes, Linda Morgan, Dilwyn Morgan, Tudor Owen, Gethin Glyn Williams, Eurig Wyn and Robert J. Wright.

OFFICERS: Debbie Anne Williams Jones (Democratic Services Manager) and Ioan Hughes (Member Support and Scrutiny Officer).

Also PRESENT:

i) In relation to item 5 on the agenda – North Wales Fire and Service Service – Representatives from the North Wales Fire and Rescue Service – Simon Smith (Chief Fire Officer), Dawn Docx (Deputy Chief Fire Officer) and Meirick Lloyd Davies (Chairman of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority).

ii) In relation to item 6 on the agenda – The Parking System in Gwynedd – Councillor W. Gareth Roberts – Cabinet Member for the Environment and Aled Davies (Head of Regulatory Department).

APOLOGIES: Councillors Nigel Pickavance, Caerwyn Roberts, Mike Stevens, Mandy Williams-Davies and Gruffydd Williams.

WELCOME: The representatives of the Fire Service were welcomed to the meeting and they were thanked for attending the meeting.

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 committee meeting held on 15 October 2013, as a true record.

3. NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

(a) Simon Smith (Chief Fire Officer) and Dawn Docx (Deputy Chief Fire Officer) were introduced by the chairman of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority, Meirick Lloyd Davies.

(b) The Chief Fire Officer gave a report on the work of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Service and the improvement aims for 2014-15.

(c) With the aid of a written copy and PowerPoint presentation, he noted that three improvement aims were proposed, namely:-

- Assist to keep people and communities safe by preventing deaths and injuries caused as a result of accidental fires in the home;
- Ensure that north Wales received a service of the highest standard within the financial restraints, used a variety of management methods to do the best for the fire and rescue provision in the area;

- Implement a three-year financial plan for 2014-15 to 2016-17 which financed the current level of service, but which sought to restrict the cost of doing so which equated to an additional £1 per head per annum.

(ch) He emphasised that the majority of time was earmarked for preventing fires and that this had been effective since the procedure had been studied thoroughly.

A target to complete 30,000 fire safety inspections in the home every year had been set and it was noted that this would not be possible without the collaboration of partners who had information about vulnerable people.

(d) It was noted that the response to flooding, that had been experienced in the area recently, was an example of the Service's success in relation to the emergency calls.

(dd) It was added that efficiency savings had been made and the news that confirmation had been given at a meeting of the Fire Service Authority last week that the budget would remain unchanged for the fourth consecutive year was welcomed.

(e) In response to observations and questions made by members it was noted:-

- That plans were in the pipeline to improve the standard of Tywyn fire station, although this did not create a threat to the station in Aberdyfi;
- The fire station in Tywyn would include an office for the local police officer and that such developments had proved successful elsewhere;
- That it was not possible to provide assurance regarding the future of any fire station in north Wales;
- That efforts were being made to avoid a situation where a station, such as Pwllheli, would close with the residents of rural areas without a service within reasonable reach;
- That possible situations, such as the above, underlined the value of working to prevent fires;
- That a scenario where a local community would be prepared to take responsibility for a fire station under threat was very unlikely at present. Should such a situation arise, there would be a need to consider many issues such as training, who the employer would be and who would be responsible should the support of the community cease to exist;
- That every situation had to be dealt with; however, there was no specific example in the area where difficulties had been caused because of transport problems;
- That the employees who were on strike did not receive their pay and that this could be considered as a reduction in expenditure;
- That changes in terms of the pension payments of back-up fire fighters created further costs;
- That the Service had coped well with the strikes thus far, but a decision to extend the periods would be cause for concern.

(f) The officers were thanked for the service being provided and for attending the meeting to submit the information.

In response, Meirick Lloyd Davies gave thanks for the opportunity to attend the meeting. He underlined the value of collaboration and he drew further attention to the work being done in relation to fire prevention.

4. THE PARKING SYSTEM IN GWYNEDD

(a) The Cabinet Member for the Environment and the Head of Regulatory Department were welcomed to the meeting.

(b) The report of the Cabinet Member for the Environment was submitted and responded to questions asked by members beforehand.

(c) He explained that he had asked the Regulatory Department to undertake a review relating to parking and that it was expected for the work to be completed within a few weeks.

ch) He noted that the matter covered much more than parking fees and the income deriving from them.

Although no specific plans were being considered thus far, he noted that parking fees could be varied in order to encourage some to make more use of public transport. In addition, the income deriving from parking fees could be used to support other services or prioritise local operation. The desired option could reflect the Council's priorities.

(d) The Cabinet Member called on members to submit their views regarding the Public Transport matrix.

(dd) He added that the survey had highlighted the fact that people were prepared to pay a price that reflected the value of the service received. The central shopping facilities in Bangor and beaches for tourists were examples of this. Consequently, consideration could be given to varying fees in different parts of the County and there was sufficient justification to do so.

(e) In response to an enquiry, the Cabinet Member explained that the Regulatory Department had considered parking fees on an annual basis and had decided not to increase the fees. One of the reasons for this was that the fees established in Gwynedd in 2007 had been relatively higher than in other authorities. However, by not increasing parking fees, a financial gap, which increases annually is being created. Two years ago it had been agreed that a review should be undertaken of the off street parking provision, and this was part of the broader review that had been commissioned by the Cabinet Member.

(f) The Cabinet Member and the Head of Regulatory Department responded appropriately to the members' enquiries and made the following main points:-

- That it was difficult to ensure a balance between charging acceptable fees and avoiding a situation where motorists would park outside the houses of local residents;
- That the number of annual parking tickets sold this year showed a reduction, but that there had been an increase in the income as a result of visits made to the beach car parks due to the favourable weather;
- That the traffic wardens were undertaking very praiseworthy work which is greatly appreciated within the Gwynedd communities;
- That short-stay fees were being set in town centres to ensure turnover for shoppers;
- That collaborating more with local communities was an option to consider;
- That the Cabinet would determine the fees but that the intention of the report was to provide an opportunity for Scrutiny Committee members to submit an opinion regarding how the parking system structure should be arranged;
- That research showed that the most important factor regarding the viability of town centres. Parking fees are a marginal factor.
- That administrative difficulties were certain to arise when attempting to introduce a system of local residents using parking badges;
- That season tickets were available at a very reasonable price.

It was noted that it was expected for the proposals to be available by the end of January 2014 and that the Scrutiny Committee would have an opportunity to consider the final options.

5. SPECIAL MEETING

(a) The Democratic Services Manager reported that there was a need for this Committee to scrutinise the reports of the North Wales Residual Waste Joint-committee.

Due to the strict timetable, it was noted that a meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Committee was not to be held in the required window of between 18 January and 18 February 2014.

(b) Similarly, it was reported that there was a need to consider the draft Planning Bill (Wales) and Positive Planning: Proposals to reform the planning system in Wales.

RESOLVED to hold a special meeting of this Scrutiny Committee during the first week in February 2014, so that the abovementioned items can be considered.

The meeting commenced at 10am and concluded at 12.35pm.