
COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 15/10/13

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

Councillors:- Stephen Churchman, Annwen Hughes, Linda Morgan, Caerwyn Roberts, Gruffydd Williams, Mandy Williams-Davies, 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: Representatives from Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd and Arwel Wyn Owen, (Senior Housing Officer).

APOLOGIES: Councillors Louise Hughes, Dilwyn Morgan and Mike Stevens.

1. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

- Councillor Angela Russell declared a personal interest in item 5 on the agenda, Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd

The member was of the opinion that it was a prejudicial interest, and she withdrew from the chamber during the discussion on the issue.

2. MINUTES

The Chairman signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee, held on 9 July 2013, as a true record.

3. CARTREFI CYMUNEDOL GWYNEDD

a) Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd's Annual Report was presented by the Chief Executive, Ffrancon Williams.

It was noted that the report dealt with the following areas:

- Delivery of offer document promises;
- Wales Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) investment works;
- Consultation arrangements with tenants;
- Obligations under the Agreement (Nomination and Housing Agency Agreements, Service Level Agreements and Housing Benefit Protocol);
- Elected Members' Protocol;
- Partnership working on strategically important housing items,
- Other operational matters.

b) These matters were expanded upon individually and attention was drawn to the following main issues:

- The Offer Document for tenants included 170 promises. As at 31 March 2013, 116 (69%) of the promises had been successfully delivered with the remainder on track to be delivered by 2015.
- As at 31st March 2013, 65% of the labour employed on the improvement programme lived in Gwynedd itself, and 89% lived in North Wales;

- All CCG's service providers had now bought into the concept of putting something tangible back into the community with in excess of 40 community benefit schemes having been provided by them;
- The stabilisation of CCG's service providers meant that there was far more investment works on site with a capital spend of £28.1 million compared to £16.7 million in the previous operational year.
- Despite the increase noted above, there continued to be a £4.7 million shortfall from the planned expenditure;
- The fact that tenants were unwilling for work to commence was one reason for this;
- 40 houses per week were being brought back into use;
- The recruitment to key posts on the asset and investment side had been problematic, but almost all posts had now been filled;
- Input from tenants was considered to be crucial prior to any matter being presented to CCG's Board;
- The success of a number of forums emphasised this;
- The Customer Panel offered a further method for tenants to engage with CCG;
- The junior warden scheme was an example of a scheme that provided community benefit. In this scheme, 9 - 10 year old children held interesting activities with the wardens, and were given guidance in an entertaining manner on what was, and what was not acceptable behaviour. Those who completed the 6-week scheme were awarded certificates. A positive response had been received from children and parents;
- Lessons had been learnt from the introduction of the Common Housing Register, but the situation was now under control;
- Since the transfer of 170 Council staff, Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd had increased its number of staff, with 292 being employed as at 31 March 2013. In addition, over 400 were employed by contractors;
- Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd intended to commence its first new house building scheme in 2013/14 with a development in Pwllheli. There was another planned scheme in y Felinheli for 2014/15.

c) Members were given an opportunity to ask questions, and in response to an enquiry the following main points were made:-

1. Detailed reference was made to the efforts to ensure that the standard of the improvement and maintenance works satisfied the tenants. Reference was made to the project manager, work managers and contact officers' duties, and it was noted that CCG also relied on the tenants to inform them if problems arose.
2. It was noted that to date there had been no significant impact following the changes to the benefits system. However, there was acknowledgement that some changes had affected some tenants. It was added that there was no information available regarding the Discretionary Housing Payments for next year and this was causing concern. There was no evident pattern in the areas affected by the changes.
3. It was explained that 70% of the staff employed by contractors lived in Gwynedd, and that these figures were being reviewed on a monthly basis.
4. It was noted that contractors contributed to communities and that the Community Investment fund had also been valuable. The Fund originally held £1.25 million for a period of 5 years. Possible methods of continuing with the Fund were currently under consideration.
5. A decision had been made on where there was demand for new housing, in conjunction with officers from Gwynedd Council Housing Department.

6. It was noted that the two new housing developments included four houses and two bungalows, each with two bedrooms. It was added that it was intended to provide smaller units, creating more opportunities for families who were possibly under-occupying some units to move, thereby freeing the larger units.

7. In relation to the possibility that they could be let to people from outside the area, it was explained that houses were let to those at the top of the priority list. This was specifically referred to in relation to larger houses being released as new, smaller houses were built. It was explained that all housing associations had to adhere to these arrangements when letting houses.

8. Officers did not anticipate that it would be reasonable to note a bedroom as a 'box room' or cupboard in order to avoid the 'bedroom tax'. In addition, consideration would have to be given to the cost of demolishing walls in order to combine two bedrooms.

9. Tenants could not be forced to accept improvements to their houses apart from occasions when health and safety matters were a consideration.

10. It was accepted that it could be beneficial to couple the Community Investment Fund with methods of ensuring the continuation of the apprentices' employment.

11. The same opportunities had been provided to all Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd employees, and there were no differences between various parts of the County.

12. Different areas had been targeted to participate in the Junior Warden Scheme, and it was intended to contact different areas each year.

13. There was no intention to reduce the community warden resource. However, the overall warden arrangements were under consideration and trials had been undertaken with some wardens not residing within the specific sites of flats.

14. It was noted that CCG were now more familiar with their stock and intended to make better use of it. As a result, effort would be made not to dispose of provision that could be useful.

15. It was confirmed that no companies had received contracts without having tendered for the work.

The Chairman thanked the representatives from Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd for their work and for attending the meeting.

4. ELECT NOMINEE – CARTREFI CYMUNEDOL GWYNEDD

a) It was noted that a request had been received for this Scrutiny Committee to elect a member to attend Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd's meetings held every six months.

b) Councillor Stephen Churchman expressed his willingness to attend the meetings.

RESOLVED to elect Councillor Stephen Churchman to attend Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd meetings on behalf of this Scrutiny Committee.

5. SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION – SCOPING SUMMARY

a) The Democratic Services Manager presented the Scope of the Scrutiny Investigation - Post-16 Further Education Transport.

b) She expanded on the background of the proposed scrutiny investigation and the draft scope was discussed further.

The main questions that the investigation would aim to answer were listed, and it was noted that two questions had been omitted from the Welsh version:

- What would be the outcome of changing the Post-16 Further Education Transport Policy?
- What is the outlook for Post-16 Education Transport?

c) It was explained that the investigation would start in December 2013 with a report submitted from scrutiny to the Executive in July 2014.

ch) The importance of the investigation was highlighted by a number of members, and the need to complete the investigation within a tight timescale was emphasised, so that any changes could be recommended in time for the next academic year.

d) It was confirmed that Debbie A. W. Jones (Democratic Services Manager) would act as Lead Officer for this scrutiny investigation.

RESOLVED to elect the following members to be members of the lead group for the scrutiny investigation: -

Councillors - Stephen Churchman, Craig ap Iago, Caerwyn Roberts, Angela Russell, Gethin Glyn Williams and Gruffydd Williams.

6. SCRUTINY FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2013-14

a) The most recent version of this Scrutiny Committee's work programme was presented, and the Democratic Services Manager noted that the matters listed were open-ended and that it would be beneficial to note what the members wished to scrutinise in more detail. The members agreed, and it was decided to give the matter further consideration at the next Preparatory Meeting.

Following this, it was hoped that it would be possible to note what members wished to pursue when dealing with each individual matter.

b) It was confirmed that 'Marine Conservation Zones' and 'Antur Aelhaearn' were not now included in the work programme.

c) It was decided to change the wording of the second matter on the work programme to read: 'Control of caravans parking without permission on Council property and other land'.

ch) It was emphasised that the matters in the forward work programme had not been listed according to priority. Specific attention was drawn to 'parking fees' and it was agreed to request a report on the matter at the next meeting of this Scrutiny Committee which would be held on 10 December 2013.

7. CRIME AND DISORDER MEETING

In accordance with the resolution made in the Preparatory Meeting of this Scrutiny Committee on 12 September 2013, enquiries were made in relation to arranging presentations from the North Wales Police and Crime Commissioner and the Head of North Wales Police Communications Centre at the next meeting of this Scrutiny Committee, in its capacity as the Communities Scrutiny Committee (Crime and Disorder).

Unfortunately, it was not convenient for either to attend.

RESOLVED to invite the North Wales Police and Crime Commissioner and the Head of North Wales Police Communications Centre to attend a meeting of this

Committee on 4 March 2014, acting in its capacity as the Communities Scrutiny Committee (Crime and Disorder).

8. CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

The Chairman noted that the renovations to Siambr Hywel Dda had now been completed and that it would be preferable for this Scrutiny Committee to meet there. He accepted that Ystafell Dwryd Penrhyndeudraeth was suitable for the Preparatory Meetings. This was accepted by the other members.

Furthermore, the Chairman requested that members send their apologies beforehand if they did not intend to attend Committee meetings. He added that this would be of particular value bearing in mind that the translators travelled to meetings only to find that their service was not required.

The meeting commenced at 10am and concluded at 12:05pm.