

THE RURAL AGENDA

Submitted: The 'Community Energy Survey' report provided for Ynni Llŷn by Gritten Management.

The Members' Support and Scrutiny Manager reported that during workshops for the three Scrutiny Committees that took place in May 2012, namely at the start of the new Council's term, the above matter was raised in two of the Scrutiny Committees. It was noted that the theme was fairly complex in terms of scope, and following a discussion at the recent Corporate Scrutiny Committee preparatory meeting, it was suggested that the above matter be submitted to the three Area Committees to seek their views regarding areas that would be suitable for further investigation.

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

- (a) that there was an opportunity for villages and communities to generate energy in the form of wind turbines and in turn money would be reinvested in the Communities. However, the main difficulty in this area was to secure planning permission within the National Park. The need to support rural villages was stressed, to retain the population living there and to ensure prosperity and the retention of the Welsh Language.
- (b) The above observations were supported by several Members and the need to invest in infrastructure was emphasised, especially to maximise the broadband network particularly in rural communities.
- (c) It was understood that Gwynedd Community Housing had installed solar energy panels on houses and it would be beneficial to know what they did with the surplus energy.
- (d) In response to the above, and considering that the majority of Meirionnydd was within the National Park, a Member noted that care should be taken when investing in solar panels as it was the manufacturing companies that profited and it was added that there should be investment in the latest fast broadband network which was vitally important to businesses. The Council should be proactive regarding this.
- (e) That the cost of living in rural areas was much higher than the national average due to high fuel prices, heating systems etc.
- (f) That the report was very useful and it was evident that communities could benefit. It was understood that the Welsh Government NEST fuel poverty scheme aimed to reducing the number of households in fuel poverty and to make homes warmer and use fuel more efficiently. This scheme should be promoted in every Community as it had made a huge difference to residents that had already benefited from the scheme having had a connection to gas, insulation packages etc.
- (g) Whilst the rural agenda as a whole responded to the needs of some communities, it was necessary to define what a rural area was, bearing in mind that some communities had deteriorated significantly. It was felt perhaps that Gwynedd Council did not have the power to take the relevant measures and that it had to use its influence to impress on the government and companies to invest in infrastructure in order to create employment locally and give life to rural villages and support schools.
- (h) It was necessary to discuss what type of work could be attracted into the area and certainly to promote proposed schemes such as the Trawsfynydd Enterprise Zone/Re-open Llanbedr airfield to create work

locally. The previous idea mentioned the possibility of building a suitably sized prison on the former Tonfannau site, Tywyn.

- (i) It was stressed that the Council itself had to ensure that posts were filled in the Area Offices when they became vacant. A request had been made in the past to relocate a whole department to the Area Office at Cae Penarlâg, as well as a request regarding how many members of staff had left the Area Office since the reorganisation of local government in 1996.
- (j) That hydro schemes, such as those operational in Maentwrog and Blaenau Ffestiniog should be promoted in the area rather than wind turbine schemes and this would be a means to create permanent jobs.
- (k) That consideration should be given to elements discussed by the Working Group that had been included in the Meirionnydd Employment Plan.

Resolved: To accept and note the contents of the report and request that the Members' Support and Scrutiny Manager conveys the above observations as part of the direction for the scrutiny investigation into the Rural Agenda.