
CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE, 05.09.13

Present: Councillor Simon Glyn (Chairman);
Councillor Dyfrig Jones (Vice-chairman).

Councillors:- Trevor Edwards, Aled Evans, Selwyn Griffiths, Jason Humphreys, Eryl Jones-Williams, June Marshall, Gareth Thomas and Eirwyn Williams.

Officers present: Geraint George (Head of Strategic and Improvement Department), Gareth James (Member Support and Scrutiny Manager) and Eirian Roberts (Member Support and Scrutiny Officer).

Present for item 3 below:-

Councillor Ioan Thomas (Cabinet Member – Customer Care);
Gwenan Parry (Head of Customer Care Department).

Present for item 4 below:-

Councillor Peredur Jenkins (Cabinet Member for Resources);
Dafydd Edwards (Head of Finance Department).

Apologies: Councillors Lesley Day, Elwyn Edwards, Gweno Glyn, Charles W.Jones, Dafydd Meurig, Michael Sol Owen and Mair Rowlands.

1. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

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

2. MINUTES

The Chairman signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee, held on 23 May 2013 as a true record.

3. ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

Cabinet Member: Councillor Ioan Thomas

Submitted - report by the Cabinet Member for Customer Care detailing the Council's arrangements for improving engagement. The report was structured on the basis of a series of matters that the Cabinet Member had been requested to address, and the Draft Engagement Strategy as it currently stood had been attached.

The Cabinet Member set out the context and the members were then given an opportunity to ask questions and offer observations. During the discussion the following main observations were noted:-

- A member noted that she and her fellow-member representing Menai Ward, Bangor, had recently had to cancel a public meeting which had been arranged to discuss the Council's strategies and policies, as the Head of the Regulatory Department had decided not to release his officers to attend. From the

information submitted, this appeared to be contrary to the spirit of the Strategy, and the member was asked to pass on the full details to the Member Support and Scrutiny Officer to be formally presented on behalf of the Cabinet Member for Customer Care on behalf of this committee.

- It was noted that officers did not consult the Council's Calendar before determining the dates of meeting with members, and reference was made to a meeting which had clashed with the Full Council on 19 September as an example of this problem.
- Referring to the measures which were proposed to measure success, it was noted that the second bullet point, *'number of Gwynedd residents agree that it is possible for them to influence decisions in their local area'* set an impossible challenge as it was extremely difficult for elected members, let alone their constituents, to influence decisions due to the financial constraints etc. placed upon local government by central government. It was also noted that it was important for all local authorities to reach agreement on the measures in order to be able to compare one council with another.
- Referring to the same bullet point, it was suggested that the wording *'influence decisions'* suggested that the decision had been made and that a wording such as *'solve problems'* would be more appropriate. The Head of the Customer Care Department replied that the wording had been taken from the MORI poll conducted throughout Britain in order to form a comparison, but she agreed to look at this in the context of what was also being done on a national basis.
- It was suggested that there were ways of making members feel more included in the Council's decision-making procedures, and that ways of making the ratepayers feel more included to give them more ownership could be looked at.
- It was emphasised that better engagement with the members was needed, and it was noted that effective engagement with the public was impossible if the engagement with members was ineffective. It was noted that *Rhaeadr* had been one step in the right direction, but more departments needed to use it as a method of engaging with members.
- Concern was expressed that the Area Forums, with the exception of Dwyfor, were not open to the public.
- In terms of ensuring maximum value from statutory consultations, it was noted that the Council undertook the work of disseminating messages to the public, but it was questioned whether those messages were heard. As an example of this, reference was made to the practice of posting the details of a local planning application on lamp posts, and it was suggested that rather than presenting a bulk of information in fine print, that it would be more meaningful to provide a summary of the application in bold print with contact details for further information.
- Reference was made to examples of officers engaging with specific groups within an area, but not contacting the local member for that area.
- Reference was also made to a number of examples of insufficient consultation with members of the public. It was noted that this was more problematic in some departments than others, and it was emphasised that the a change in culture must be a priority. This was simply a matter of courtesy and would not incur any costs or add to an officer's workload.
- It was noted that it was important for front line members to convene to discuss the needs of members in the engagement process with the Cabinet Member or the Engagement Project / Programme Board.
- It was noted that the Democratic Services Committee had a role in this process. It was suggested that parts 5 and 6 of the report, relating to the perceived role of front line members in these new engagement arrangements, and what type of assistance and guidance would be available to Councillors, Council managers and

staff, could form a brief for the Chair of the Democratic Services Committee to work on, and the Cabinet Member agreed to contact her.

- The importance of conveying correct information to members was stressed, and it was noted that errors in Council reports etc. were unacceptable.
- It was noted that members and officers had become distanced from each other and that an opportunity was needed for both sides to re-introduce themselves to each other from the perspective of their daily work.
- An enquiry was made whether the Engagement Project / Management Board could be extended to include front line members, such as champions, a representative from the Democratic Services Committee. The observation was noted by the Cabinet Member.
- Overall support for the direction of the strategy was expressed, but the importance of ensuring that the timescales were as realistic as possible was stressed.
- It was suggested that this subject should be revisited again during the lifespan of this committee to review progress.

Members were requested to contact the Member Support and Scrutiny Officer if they wished to receive a copy of the Engagement Handbook.

4. SAVINGS STRATEGY

Cabinet Member: Councillor Peredur Jenkins

Submitted - a report from the Cabinet Member for Resources detailing the developments in the area of finance and specifically, the impact of these savings on the residents of Gwynedd. The report was structured on the basis of a number of issues which the Cabinet Member had been asked to address.

The Cabinet Member set out the context and the members were then given an opportunity to ask questions and offer observations. During the discussion the following main observations were noted:-

- The decision in the Preparatory Meeting was noted, that this meeting should also look at the capital and revenue budget, the Assets Plan and the impact of the loss of the Rural Development Plan funding, but as this had not yet been conveyed to the Cabinet Member, the committee could possibly revisit those elements in future.
- It was noted that the Cabinet Member's observation that the cuts had not affected the public could not be accepted, and examples were referred to, such as the cuts in bus services in Meirionnydd, to reinforce this point. Reference was also made to the practice of repairing pot holes rather than resurfacing, but the Head of the Finance Department confirmed that there had been no decrease in the roads maintenance budget as a result of the corporate savings programme.
- Again, in reference to the transport service in Meirionnydd, it was noted that there had been no engagement with the public, and it was stressed that the members should be an integral part of the savings strategy from the outset.
- It was noted that everyone should be responsible in ensuring that the process of implementing the savings and cutting services, when it had to happen, was undertaken in the most painless method possible.
- Concern was expressed that the financial crisis in the field of health would lead to the transfer of additional responsibilities and the associated costs, to the county councils.
- Emphasis was placed on the need for the departments to discuss efficiency savings with staff at the lower levels, and that staff should be requested not to fall

back on easy answers such as "corporate savings" where there was a failure to spend due to departmental priorities.

- The importance of investing to save was stressed, and members were asked to refer any ideas for savings to the Cabinet Member for Resources, or the Head of the Strategic and Improvement Department, or the Head of the Finance Department.
- It was noted that a decision should be made in the next Preparatory Meeting on how best to follow up this discussion.

5. SCRUTINY FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2013-14

Submitted – the latest version of the work programme.

RESOLVED to approve the work programme.

6. SUSTAINABLE PROCUREMENT SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION

Submitted - a request to extend the period of the investigation to December 2013 and to submit the report to the attention of this committee in January 2014.

RESOLVED

- (a) **To approve the request to ensure sufficient time to complete the work in a thorough manner.**
- (b) **Add the clause '*Promote a fully bilingual service*' to the purpose of the investigation, in accordance with this committee's previous decision.**

The meeting commenced at 10.00am and concluded at 12.40pm.