
COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 22/02/18

PRESENT:

COUNCILLORS: Stephen Churchman, Glyn Daniels, Peter Garlick, Simon Glyn (Chair) Annwen Hughes, Aled W. Jones, Elwyn Jones, Kevin Morris Jones, Linda Morgan, Edgar Wyn Owen, Mike Stevens, Catrin Wager, Gruffydd Williams and Owain Williams.

OFFICERS: Gareth James (Members' Manager - Support and Scrutiny) and Lowri Haf Evans (Member Support Officer)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

- a) In relation to item 5 on the agenda - Dyfrig Siencyn (Council Leader), Janet Roberts (Senior Corporate Support Manager).

In relation to item 6 on the agenda - Dafydd Meurig (Cabinet Member - Environment), Dafydd Wyn Williams (Head of Environment Department) and Meirion Williams (Senior Manager - Transportation and Street Care)

In relation to item 7 on the agenda – Dafydd Meurig (Cabinet Member – Environment), Dafydd Wyn Williams (Head of Environment Department), Gareth Jones (Senior Planning and Environment Manager) and Rhun ap Gareth (Senior Solicitor)

In relation to item 8 on the agenda – Dafydd Meurig (Cabinet Member – Environment), Dafydd Wyn Williams (Head of Environment Department), Gareth Jones (Senior Planning and Environment Manager), Nia Haf Davies (Joint Planning Policy Unit Manager) and Councillor Aled Evans (working group member)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Elwyn Edwards, Berwyn Parry, Jones Keith Jones and Gethin Glyn Williams

Condolences were extended to Councillor Seimon Glyn following the recent death of his father

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

None to note

3. URGENT ITEMS

None to note

4. MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting of this committee, held on 07.12 2017, were accepted as a true record of the meeting.

5. PUBLIC SERVICE BOARD

The Council Leader presented a report, requesting that Committee Members scrutinise the content of the Gwynedd and Anglesey (Draft) Well-being Plan and submit any observations. It was explained that the Public Services Board had succeeded the Local Services Board, and that there was a desire and resolve to operate in a different manner to the previous Board to ensure its distinctness. The first step of the process was to publish a well-being plan that outlined how it was intended to improve the well-being of both County's residents. It was noted that there was a three-month statutory consultation period on the plan that broadly outlined the principles (that would end at the end of March), and that the Board would subsequently consider the responses before producing the final Well-being Plan.

The Leader, as a member of the Public Services Board, added that he looked forward to the creation of new partnerships that would be developing projects. It was accepted that there sometimes appeared to be a 'word creation' industry, but there was a will to see the outcomes by responding to the challenge of working by different methods. With the advent of these well-being areas, it would be possible to focus on specific areas - to identify the needs of different areas - and target work to the areas that required attention.

It was emphasised that Gwynedd Council was one of the partners, and that the content of the final plan would be the decision of the Public Services Board.

It was emphasised that there was an effort to create a readable document that would establish a conversation with communities by attempting to define well-being. Members were requested to encourage people to submit observations on the consultation document.

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

- The document should be welcomed, as it identified understandable issues and ambitions.
- Difficult to address and implement. Although the matters raised should be praised, there was no resource to deliver.
- A failure that no solutions had been included e.g., elements of encouraging collaboration. A good start, but need to set targets and engage effectively.
- Need to provide reasons for people to remain in Gwynedd
- The document provided a firm foundation, but was of no value unless steps were taken.
- The need for a culture change in order to act effectively
- Welcomed the good background research which set a foundation for moving forward
- Accepted that there was a need to set priorities, such as the Welsh Language, Health and Poverty, but empowering communities needed to have a central focus, and consider projects that would make savings.
- Steps taken following the Welsh Government's acts, but no resource to deliver.
- High quality jobs were crucial, but no suggestions on how to achieve this.

Anglesey's median salary was higher than the figure for the whole of Wales - why was Anglesey, a neighbouring Council, so much higher than Gwynedd? Detailed information was requested from the Corporate Support Senior Manager.

- The economy was crucially important.
- Funding was a factor that restricted the ability to deliver - need to think about different methods
- High value jobs and housing supply must be prioritised to encourage people to remain in their localities
- Suggest the creation of a Jobs Champion

In response to an observation about the economy, it was explained that the Council had identified that collaboration across North Wales was working, but in relation to community regeneration, it was accepted that insufficient attention had been given to the matter. Reference was made to the Minister's strategy, which emphasised the need for a basic economy and the fact that individual jobs were important in maintaining communities. Although the focus was on large-scale plans e.g., Growth, it was also necessary to look towards the rural areas to maintain the economy, to develop plans and target economic assistance.

It was agreed that finance was the limiting factor in relation to the ambitions and what needed to be delivered, and that consideration should be given to methods that did not need significant funding but that could have a similar impact. The Services Board's task would be to develop different methods of working.

In response to a question regarding Leisure projects and the new Leisure Board that had been established by Gwynedd, it was noted that if any project relating to leisure was being considered, it was intended to invite Leisure representation to participate in the discussions to develop relevant projects. It was intended to identify partners for individual projects.

In response to a question about when the action plan would be submitted, it was reported that the final version would be submitted to the Full Council on 3 May 2018. Subsequently it would be necessary to create a timetable for implementation. It was noted that a separate document would not be published and that it was intended to publish a timetable for each individual plan.

It was noted that the plan was a huge step in the right direction. It was accepted that the Scrutiny Committee had a statutory duty to scrutinise the content of the document as part of the process of developing the plan. The Committee's wish for the Services Board to establish a firm timetable for the plan, to be updated during the process by means of progress reports, was noted.

Resolved to accept the report.

6. SUSTAINABILITY BALANCE

A report by the Head of the Environment Department had been submitted following a request from the Scrutiny Committee for further information on the Dark Sky Status. A background report was provided that highlighted the benefits of a designated dark sky status.

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

- There were obvious advantages to the status, especially its impact on the

environment and nature

- The changes to street lighting had had a positive impact
- It must be ensured that the status would be balanced against health and safety
- Consideration had to be given to the local community's concerns.
- The context must be set out when considering a dark sky designation for Llyn
- Policies should not be used to refuse applications in the context of safety
- There was a need for a management plan to measure the impact - a suggestion to set a baseline and to measure the impact of any changes on the environment, for example.

The observation on the provision of a management plan was welcomed. In response to the observations about balancing the status against health and safety, it was noted that there were a number of considerations in relation to securing dark sky status. As each case was unique, it was reiterated that the evidence would be balanced and interpreted on a case by case basis.

Resolved: The information was accepted

7. PLANNING DELEGATION PLAN

Submitted - a report by the Head of the Environment Department about the new (draft) planning delegation scheme that contained the amendments that had been approved by the Scrutiny Committee. Members were reminded that Members of the Scrutiny Committee had conducted a planning scrutiny investigation, and that the delegation scheme was one of the fields that was scrutinised. One of the recommendations of that scrutiny investigation was amending the thresholds of the delegation plan. Reference was made to the proposed delegation plan that was included with the report, and the evident and extensive benefits that would be delivered by implementing the changes.

It was emphasised that one of those benefits was that fewer applications would be referred to the Planning Committee. Based on the high percentage of applications that were currently referred, it was noted that the changes would ensure that the Committee focused on dealing solely with the matters that were of material interest. This would ensure that the best use was made of the time and expertise of the Committee members and relevant officers.

The right of the Local Member, or two other members, to call an application to committee under specific circumstances, was acknowledged and supported; this would continue as per the current situation, and was considered to be acceptable.

The Committee was requested to confirm and support the draft proposed delegation scheme prior to its submission to the Full Council on the recommendation of the Monitoring Officer as it was a constitutional matter.

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

- The number of applications that went before the Planning Committee were not excessive. The Planning Committee's purpose was to make decisions.
- Happy with the current system – need to adhere to a democratic process

- Accept that the changes would save resources and time, but would this mean that applications not referred to committee would receive less attention?
- Need to consider the nature of the objections rather than the numbers
- Consideration should be given to presenting an application to a 'would be of interest' committee - that a certain amount of correspondence would equate to 'creating an interest' even if there was only one reason for refusal / approval.
- Accept that the Local Member had the right to refer an application to Committee - this was beneficial and ensured that the local views were heard. However this could place the Local Member in a vulnerable position and open to allegations about their views.
- In order to consider the situation to date, a request was made for information from the Senior Planning Manager on the number of applications referred to the Planning Committee, how many of those applications went to an appeal, and how many of those appeals were successful.

In response to the observations, the Senior Solicitor noted that striking a balance was essential, and that the changes did not question how the Planning Committee made decisions. It was also noted that the Members had a key role in referring the applications onwards in order to ensure the local aspect. The purpose of these changes was to ensure that the applications discussed in the committee were of substance.

In response to the observations, the Senior Planning Manager noted that all the matters had been considered in detail by the members of the investigation, and that the proposed changes had already been approved by the Scrutiny Committee. In response to concerns about correspondence it was noted that there was no rationale for three or more items of correspondence - only planning matters were to be addressed. He emphasised that each item of correspondence would be given attention, and that there was an opportunity here to strengthen the role of the local member.

In response to an observation regarding how the changes would reduce risk, it was reported that the specific statutory period of eight weeks to submit an application was challenging in relation to reporting and scheduling the submission of the application to committee at the appropriate time. If the service was unable to act within the eight weeks, the Council would be open to an appeal resulting in the repayment of the applicant's fee and payment of costs. It was noted that these appeals were challenging due to work pressures, and were therefore considered as a possible risk

In response to a question regarding presenting information about the changes to Planning Committee Members, it was noted that an information sharing session had been held in December 2017.

The Cabinet Member accepted that the workload of the Planning Committee was heavy, and that it should be ensured that the applications that required attention were given a fair hearing. He added that he was acting upon the recommendations from the investigation.

Resolved to accept the report, although the decision was not unanimous.

8. PLANNING AND THE WELSH LANGUAGE SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION UPDATE

(This item was chaired by the Vice-chair of the Committee, Councillor Mike Stevens, as the Chair, Councillor Seimon Glyn was a member of the investigation).

Councillor Aled Evans, a member of the investigation, (representing the Language Committee), was welcomed to the meeting

An update was given on the scrutiny investigation into planning and the Welsh Language by the chair of the Investigation, Councillor Gruffydd Williams. Attention was drawn to the main findings, and he noted that the findings, and the Committee's observations, would be included in a report that would be submitted to the Joint Planning Policy Panel on 9.3.18.

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

- The number of Welsh speakers in Gwynedd was declining and something needed to be done to maintain the numbers
- A language assessment must be independent and transparent. This should be welcomed as a definite step forward
- It was suggested that three dwellings in a windfall development should be considered, rather than five
- There was a need to consider the cumulative effect
- Information was needed about the impact of the developments

The work to date and the next steps were supported. It was reiterated that the information should be robust and that language was an integral part of the planning system here in Gwynedd.

The meeting commenced at 10.30 am and concluded at 12.15 pm

CHAIRMAN