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## COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 19/04/18

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### **PRESENT:**

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

**OFFICERS:** Gareth James (Member Support and Scrutiny Manager) and Lowri Haf Evans (Member Support Officer)

### **ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:**

In relation to item 5 on the agenda - Dafydd Wyn Williams (Head of Environment), Gareth Jones (Senior Manager Planning and Environment), Nia Haf Davies (Joint Planning Policy Unit Manager) and Councillor Aled Evans (Working Group member)

### **1. APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Councillors Mike Stevens, Owain Williams and Dafydd Meurig (Cabinet Member - Environment)

### **2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST**

Councillor Berwyn Parry Jones declared a personal interest in item 5 on the agenda, as he was a member of the Joint Planning Policy Committee.

### **3. URGENT ITEMS**

None to note

### **4. MINUTES**

The minutes of the previous meeting of this committee, held on 22.2.2018 were accepted as a true record of the meeting.

### **5. PLANNING AND THE WELSH LANGUAGE SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION UPDATE**

A report was submitted by the investigation's working group Chair requesting that the Scrutiny Committee recommend that the Joint Planning Policy Committee consider the recommendations and further comments of the working group, together with the responses of the Joint Planning Policy Committee, before proceeding with the Public Consultation on the Supplementary Planning Guidance.

In the presentation of the report a statement was given on the linguistic picture in Gwynedd. Members were reminded of the Council's Leader words, when he

presented the Council's Plan 8.3.18, outlining the need to prioritise the Welsh language by continuing to give guidance and promote the use of Welsh at all times. The need to operate in an innovative way was added, and he suggested that the SPG in its current form did not address this in a way that would contribute to changing the pattern and reduction of Welsh speakers in Gwynedd. It was also noted that the working group considered that the SPG had not been prepared sufficiently to conduct a Public Consultation.

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

- That the requirements of some of the recommendations were simple, and it was very disappointing that the Panel had refused the recommendations although there was strong evidence for the conclusions.
- Possibility that some recommendations were contrary to Policy PS1, however it was necessary to be more responsive to the situation
- It was necessary to consult with Language Organisations and the Language Officers at Bangor University and not just Council officers.
- That the recommendations placed 'flesh on the bones' to strengthen the guidance in accordance with the requirements of the Cabinet Member
- That the view of the officers to a statement 'that the time-schedule did not need to be extended' was difficult to understand

All the recommendations were discussed by considering the Panel's response and further observations / questions of the working group to those responses.

In response to the comments, the Officers noted the following observations:

- That the observations of the working group had been addressed by giving more information on certain elements of the Guidance
- That the Guidance was clearer as a result of some comments
- That there was more pressure on the applicant to undertake the assessment work
- That it was expected that the applicant would achieve the relevant requirements - failure to do this could affect the determination. Pressure on the applicant to act appropriately
- To consider two of the recommendations (1a and 1b) policy PS1 would have to be modified. This is not possible or appropriate to the Panel's work.
- That the recommendations had not been ignored - some amendments had been made.
- That the linguistic preparatory work had been done with the support of the language officers and the Guidance did identify the situation of the Welsh language in Wales.
- In the context of research and analysis, it was noted that the Guidance included comprehensive information that the Policy Unit has to share with the applicant when completing assessments.
- In the context of engagement and consultation, it was highlighted that the engagement principles had been considered and the engagement work had been addressed and the arrangements complied with the need. It was highlighted that the engagement plan had been considered by the Council's Engagement Officers and would be an appendix to the report submitted to the Joint Planning Policy Committee (26.4.18).
- In the context of extending the time-schedule to ensure that work of the highest possible standard was achieved, it was noted that it was the

Panel's decision that no more time was required.

In response to a question regarding how weaknesses in policies could be adapted, it was noted that it was proposed to monitor the policies annually. With the Joint Local Development adopted since July 2017, it was added that there was no evidence to justify that the policies were not working thus far.

In response to a suggestion that Gwynedd's wish was to adapt the Guidance to prioritise the Welsh Language and that it could act on its own, it was noted that this was legally possible, but practically, there would be substantial risks for the Council. It was added that the arrangement had ensured financial savings and separation would undermine the good working relationship between both Councils who had been pioneers in the field. The Chairman added that there was no evidence of a difference of opinion between Gwynedd and Anglesey.

In response to the discussion, the Head of Environment Service noted that it was expected that the Joint Policy Committee would have an opportunity to consider the observations and further questions submitted by the Working Group together with the comments of the Scrutiny Committee.

It was proposed and seconded to submit the additional observations of the Working Group and the Scrutiny Committee for consideration to the Joint Planning Policy Committee.

It was proposed and seconded to accept the recommendations

**RESOLVED:**

- **To submit the additional observations of the Working Group and the Scrutiny Committee for consideration to the Joint Planning Policy Committee.**
- **To accept the recommendations and submit them to the Joint Planning Policy Committee.**
- **To request the policy officers for the panel's full response to the engagement principles.**

## **6. GRASS CUTTING OF THE COUNCIL'S OPEN SPACES**

A report was submitted by the Cabinet Member seeking the views of the Scrutiny Committee on the need to make a further saving within the service. It was highlighted that the Gwynedd Challenge cuts had been achieved, however, £50k of the efficiency savings had not been completed (2017/2018). The Committee was asked to consider measures such as, reducing grass cutting frequency from three cuts to two annually on the outskirts of villages and towns and to provide fewer flower areas.

A Cabinet Member felt that the Department had gone as far as it could and he stated that further cuts would be likely to cause more problems. He asked the Committee for guidance to try and identify further financial cuts that would be likely to have an impact on the appearance of the County's villages and towns.

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

- It was necessary to consider and prepare balanced plans
- An opportunity to be innovative and create community partnerships to maintain flower areas and cemeteries.

- To consider sponsoring companies to adopt roundabouts and flower areas
- To consider alternative schemes - try to get community groups to adopt grounds
- Conduct a competition between villages / towns / communities
- Consider joint working with the Health Board and encourage well-being projects
- Consider using Community Service orders (if legally possible)
- Consider the implications of not cutting the grass and hedgerows in the context of Health and Safety. There might be an increase in the number of insurance claims, that would have a significant impact on the saving?
- The grass cutting time-schedule had to be correct
- It was suggested that Community Councils could assist with this work.
- That it was possible to consider students following horticultural courses at Coleg Menai
- Consider using artificial grass on road verges within 30mph zones

It was proposed and seconded to change the frequency of grass cutting in play areas and cemeteries from 6 to 5.

In response, the Head of Highways and Municipal Services noted that reducing the frequency of grass cutting from 8 to 6 had received many complaints and therefore the implications of a further reduction in this proposal needed to be considered carefully.

It was proposed and seconded to accept the comment of the Head of Department that there was a risk in making further grass cutting savings and to look at realising a saving of £29k by spending less on flower beds. It was suggested that the Department should investigate alternative ideas further.

An amendment to the proposal was proposed and seconded to seek to achieve a saving of £29k by spending less on flower beds. It was suggested that the Department should investigate alternative ideas further and in the long term to establish partnerships and consider a sponsorship scheme.

**RESOLVED:**

- **Achieve a £29k saving by spending less on flower beds.**
- **It was suggested that the Department should investigate alternative ideas further and in the long term to establish partnerships and consider a sponsorship scheme.**

## **7. STREET ENFORCEMENT TRIAL**

The Cabinet Member's report was submitted asking the Scrutiny Committee to recommend a way forward in order to try and improve the provision to improve the cleanliness and appearance of the County's streets. In accordance with the recommendation of the Communities Scrutiny Committee 22.9.16, for the Council to look at outsourcing elements of the enforcement team's work to support the work of the internal team, an external company was commissioned to conduct a year's trial. The trial commenced in February this year, however, after a few days the company's request for the contact to end was agreed. Following the trial's failure, a possible list of options were looked at that and the Committee needed to consider these in order to get to grips with street enforcement.

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

- Suggestion to use and expand the responsibilities and powers of maritime officers, beach and harbour assistants as well as traffic enforcement officers
- An opportunity to retain work within the Council and use the existing provision
- Proposal to review fines
- Need to consider additional work pressure

4) It was suggested that interdepartmental collaboration should be extended (option

It was suggested that the existing provision should be considered (option 3)  
Collaboration with other Counties was suggested (option 2)

In response to a question regarding the reasons why the contract with the external company had ended, it was noted that problems had arisen with the recruitment and retainment of bilingual staff in accordance with the Council's policies. It was added that the trial had been much too short to be able to measure its impact.

In response to a question regarding the fine totals, it was noted that a fine was £100 and if it was paid within 10 days then this would be reduced to £75. It was added that the number of fines were reported to the Welsh Government, but there was a significant difference between the totals of Authorities with and without private companies. In response to a following question regarding reviewing the fine totals by considering each situation in turn, the Cabinet Member expressed his intention that the Enforcement Officers should have an advisory role rather than merely handing out fines. The Head of Service added that the fines were reviewed annually.

It was proposed and seconded to combine three possible options to seek solutions.

## **RESOLVED**

- (i) To collaborate with other neighbouring Counties to improve the provision.**
- (ii) Reconsider the existing staffing level in the Street Enforcement Unit.**
- (iii) To extend the interdepartmental collaboration where staff from other Council departments receive delegated street enforcement rights.**

The meeting commenced at 10.30 am and concluded at 12.40 pm

**CHAIRMAN**