
COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 17.09.15

PRESENT - Councillor Angela Russell (Chair)
Councillor Caerwyn Roberts (Vice-chairman)

Councillors:- Stephen Churchman, Annwen Daniels, Annwen Hughes, Eric M Jones, Dilwyn Morgan, W Tudor Owen, Mike Stevens, Gruffydd Williams and Eurig Wyn

OFFICERS: Arwel Ellis Jones (Senior Manager - Democracy and Delivery) and Lowri Haf Evans (Members' Support and Scrutiny Officer)

ALSO PRESENT:

- i) In relation to item 5 on the agenda - Ffrancon Williams (Chief Executive, CCG), Llinos Iorwerth (Head of Communications, CCG), Gethin Armstrong (Customer Services Manager, CCG) and Enid Roberts (Customers and Communities Assistant Director, CCG).
- ii) In relation to item 6 on the agenda - Councillor John Wynn Jones - Cabinet Member for the Environment and Mr Peter Simpson (Street Services Manager).
- iii) In relation to item 7 on the agenda - Dafydd Wyn Williams (Head of Regulatory Department) and Cara Owen (Development Control Manager).
- iv) In relation to item 8 on the agenda - Councillor Ioan Thomas (Cabinet Member for Housing), Arwel W Owen (Senior Housing Manager), Catrin Roberts (Housing Development Strategic Officer).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Annwen Davies, Louise Hughes, Linda Morgan, Robert J Wright.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

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

3. URGENT ITEMS

None to note.

4. MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting of this committee, held on 21 May 2015, were accepted as a true record of the meeting. It was reported that discussions about the attendance of one of Plaid Cymru's representatives on the Fire Authority had been held.

5. CARTREFI CYMUNEDOL GWYNEDD

- (a) The Annual Report of Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd (CCG) for 2014-2015 was submitted. Reference was made to the Transfer Agreement, and it was noted that it was required for them to note how they had realised the promises made to tenants in the Offer Document and implemented the obligations under the Transfer Agreement. Attention was drawn to some specific matters:

- 167 (98.8%) of the promises within the "Your Home, Your Choice" Offer Document had been successfully delivered since the end of March 2015. It was noted that CCG continued to prioritise local jobs ensuring that the expenditure was circulated locally. At the end of March 2015, 257 were employed on the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) improvement programme across all service providers. As WHQS' work flow and improvement programme drew to a close, it was noted that Service Provider staffing levels were decreasing and as a result the number of apprentices and trainees was reducing.
- CCG had previously won the Association of Consultant Architects Innovation and Partnering award (2013), and the Outstanding Contribution award in the National Procurement Awards (2014). Following that, it had been praised for the way that local businesses and people had benefitted from the jobs and apprenticeships created. In 2015, it received an award from Wales National Procurement.
- Since CCG's inception and up to March 2015, 180 community projects had benefited from grants (a total of £975,699) through CCG's Community Investment Fund with additional investment of £5.6M secured through match funding.
- CCG's emphasis was changing. Over the past five years, the emphasis had been on ensuring that the association's stock complied with the standard, and this remained a definite commitment. By now, the business' direction was changing, and the Corporate Plan 2015/20 had been formed outlining the strategy and aspirations for the next five years. Welfare reform would affect tenants, and consideration had to be given to the provision that would be offered.
- The business continued to grow in order to ensure long-term viability - new developments in Maesgeirchen and Pwllheli together with achieving the target in the provision of affordable homes and investigating new sources of income. Although the expenditure would reduce from this year onwards, CCG would continue to invest and circulate funding within the County.
- Elements of collaboration with large companies and sub-contracting arrangements caused some concerns, but CCG continued to work through this.
- Continued to consult with tenants to include customers in everything it did.
- As a result of the change in emphasis, the relationship with the Council was changing from a monitoring perspective.

(b) During the discussion, the following observations were made:

- i. CCG was congratulated on its success in receiving a Wales National Procurement award and on its positive report. It was thanked for the success of the community fund and its willingness to improve the mixed property estates.
- ii. New developments were approved, but it was necessary to secure more units for older people as well as one-bedroom units. In response, it was noted that CCG was aware of the increase in the number of older people and of the clear statistics which evidenced the emphasis on keeping older people in their homes - the matter had already been discussed at the Housing Partnership and therefore the housing associations were collaborating to respond to the demand and to ensure that the developments were in the right locations.

- iii. The standard of kitchens, for example, was likely to decline at the same time and therefore it was foreseen that further investment would be needed in approximately 15 years. In response, it was noted that this had been considered in the business plan.
- iv. Request to strengthen the local members' and the District Council's links with local wardens in terms of sharing information. In response, it was noted that the Elected Member Protocol ensured the flow of information in one direction, with every enquiry and response being appropriately recorded. It was stated that establishing one point of contact had provided professional aspect to the procedure. In terms of contacting wardens, it was highlighted that this was not effective as the warden tended to be out in the field all day. It was also highlighted that a Members Champion had been purposefully appointed to share information. Members were reminded that the member protocol was effective and Gethin and the team were congratulated on their timely information and responses.
- v. In terms of housing sales it was noted that the average had reduced to between 5 and 7 houses being sold annually. It was noted that the Government had an intention to reduce the discount from £16,000 to £8,000 which would make the process less appealing for the tenant. The 'Right to Buy' initiative was ongoing, with an eligibility period of having lived in the property for two years prior to making an application. According to the Westminster Government, it was an aspiration, for every house sold that another should be built in its place, but it appeared as though Welsh Government had made a robust commitment to abolish the 'Right to Buy' project.
- vi. In response to a Member's request for information to share with tenants in terms of who received priority, it was noted that requests were managed by the Housing Options Team with good collaboration with the Housing Services. It was also highlighted that Information Security had to be respected, and therefore information on tenants could not be shared. The work that members did to mitigate situations was appreciated.
- vii. In response to a comment noting disappointment that CCG had appointed two non-Welsh speaking senior officers and the ill-feeling that had been created as a result, it was highlighted that it was not an easy decision. It was noted that there had been recruitment problems and that they had sought to respond to the situation. CCG's work towards the Welsh language continued, but as a business it was necessary to ensure that the right people were in the right posts and therefore this was a priority.
- viii. In response to an observation regarding improving collaboration arrangements in terms of the Empty Housing situation, it was noted that empty housing was a financial problem for CCG and therefore if local members could support CCG by promoting empty housing it would be very grateful.
- ix. In terms of land ownership, it was highlighted that CCG would contact local members.
- x. In terms of a changing relationship, it was highlighted that the members would like to see the relationship continuing between the Council and CCG as the collaboration was beneficial. An initial suggestion was made that it would be possible to hold an annual discussion at the Communities Scrutiny Committee to discuss / scrutinise the work of all housing associations that provided houses in Gwynedd.

Everyone was thanked for their contribution to the debate and representatives from Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd were thanked for attending the meeting. The report was accepted.

6. USE OF ENFORCEMENT RIGHTS

- a) An initial brief was submitted for a Scrutiny Investigation into the use of on-street enforcement. It was highlighted that Gwynedd Council's Street Service was a comparatively small team working within a net budget of £300k. The service was responsible for raising awareness and teaching the public about ensuring a clean and safe environment, operating policies on graffiti, needles and lanterns, monitoring the performance of street hygiene and maintaining and assisting in a range of relevant campaigns. The scrutiny investigation would run for a period of six months with the intention of forming clear recommendations based on evidence to be considered by the Cabinet Member.
- b) During the discussion, the following observations were made:
- The dog fouling problem was an obvious one for the man on the street, but it must be remembered that this was not only an investigation into dog fouling - the brief must be considered in its entirety.
 - It needed to be ensured that every area in the County was focussed upon and not the busy areas only.
 - The investigation was not seeking to scrutinise the work of the department, rather to support the department's work and to seek to expand the scope of the work the department did.
 - Multipurpose bins were being trialled in Tywyn - very successful but awareness needed to be raised.
 - Clear and specific training and publicity were required
 - Confirmation of service arrangements was required – who was collecting? Who placed the bins?
 - Needed to consider chewing gum - there was potential to collaborate with schools on this.
- c) **RESOLVED** to accept the brief and nominate the following Members to serve on the investigation. Councillors Dilwyn Morgan, Mike Stevens, Tudor Owen, Annwen Hughes, Annwen Daniels and Angela Russell to serve on the investigation.

7. PLANNING AND THE WELSH LANGUAGE

- a) Submitted - the report of the Senior Manager - Democracy and Delivery responding to two concerns amongst Councillors and members of the public regarding the Planning and the Welsh Language procedure. The first concern was the Council's internal arrangements when dealing with linguistic impact assessments in planning committees. The second concern was a broader one regarding the status of the Welsh language in the Planning System.

It was reported that the first matter, following a discussion with officers from the Planning Service and Councillor Elwyn Edwards, had been solved with a link on the agenda referring to the relevant plans and background information.

- b) In terms of the status of the Welsh Language in the Planning Procedure (national and local level), it was highlighted that it was intended to schedule a purposeful item for the next meeting of this Committee on 17 November to discuss in full. In considering fields for the discussion, initial observations were submitted with a request for members to expand on them;
- Set the statutory context in terms of the Planning Bill etc.
 - Explain the National Planning Policy (TAN 20)
 - Explain the Current Local Planning Policy (The Unitary Development Plan and the Supplementary Planning Guidance: Planning and the Welsh Language)
 - Explain how the Service operates within the current policy context

- Provide information regarding the Joint Local Development Plan (Draft)
 - Explain how, in the context of the requirements of TAN 20, we would be required to deal with the Welsh language when deciding on planning applications after the Joint Local Development Plan would be adopted and how the Service sought to respond to this.
- c) In response to the initial observations to hold the discussion, the Planning officers highlighted;
- in the context of TAN 20, that there were new draft guidelines for linguistic and community assessments, but that there was no intention to implement them until the next election - the Planning committee therefore continued with the current policies
 - that appeal inspectors specialised in relevant planning fields and not solely in the Welsh language
 - Gwynedd Council went beyond what was required in the context of guidelines.
- ch) During the discussion, the following observations were made:
- Accepted that the link was a good and effective idea
 - Needed a definition of the 'Planning Instruction' term
 - Needed to ensure that the linguistic assessment was addressed by appropriate officers - need the inspections to be completed by officers who understood the linguistic and community situations
 - Carl Sargeant encouraged consideration for the Welsh language, therefore why was it not possible to consider the Welsh language before the election

RESOLVED to accept that the procedures in terms of the papers of the Planning Committee had improved adequately and agree to seek a report for the next meeting of the committee as outlined, but to add the following elements to it;

- **Linguistic assessment guidelines and who conducts them**
- **Address the role of the planning inspectorate**
- **Need a definition of the 'Planning Instruction' term**

8. SUBMITTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE HOMELESSNESS SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION

- a) Submitted - the report of the Homelessness scrutiny investigation to the Cabinet Member, Ioan Thomas. Everyone was reminded by the chair of the investigation, Councillor Eric Jones, of the background of the brief and a summary of the work undertaken was provided. It was proven that the investigation had been extremely valuable, an insight into a challenging and difficult field which dealt with individuals and families across the community. It was outlined that excellent work was being undertaken, but recommendations had been identified where there was room for improvement. It was noted that this was not a criticism of the officers in the field, but rather a matter in which some adaptations could improve the provision. The members of the investigation were thanked for their commitment, and to Councillor Stephen Churchman for attending every hostel visit in order to ensure consistency of opinion and the officers were thanked for their work, especially Susan Griffith (Homelessness and Supportive Housing Manager) and Catrin Roberts (Housing Strategic Development Officer).
- b) The Cabinet Member reiterated his thanks to the members for their commitment to the investigation which had provided a valuable scrutiny role in a challenging field. It was outlined that due to the financial challenge it was difficult to accept every recommendation, but the hope was to implement most of them. The Senior Housing Manager reiterated his appreciation for the work and the valuable insight provided into the field. He highlighted that

some recommendations had already been realised or prioritised (with financial limitations to others). Each member was encouraged to visit a Hostel.

c) During the discussion, the following observations were made:

- It was important to collaborate to get the best for the Homelessness service - the service provided was essential
- Early intervention must be ensured and a focus on preventative services
- The report was congratulated and a request was made for an update in 6-9 months

RESOLVED to accept the report, adopt the recommendations in it and that the Cabinet Member reports back within 6-9 months on what has been achieved as a result of the recommendations.

The meeting commenced at 10.00am and concluded at 12.05pm.