

Communities Scrutiny Committee 22 April 2021

Attendance:

COUNCILLORS: Stephen Churchman, Simon Glyn, Annwen Hughes, Aled Wyn Jones, Berwyn Parry Jones, Elwyn Jones, Dafydd Owen, Edgar Wyn Owen, Elfed Roberts, Angela Russell, Gethin Williams and Mike Stevens.

Officers present:

Vera Jones (Democracy and Language Service Manager), Bethan Adams (Scrutiny Advisor), Eirian Roberts and Natalie Jones (Democracy Services Officers).

Present for item 5:

Councillor Dafydd Meurig (Deputy Leader) and Nonn Gwenllian Hughes (Programme Manager - Gwynedd and Anglesey Public Services Board (PSB)).

Present for item 6:

Councillor Gareth Griffith (Cabinet Member for the Environment), Dafydd Wyn Williams (Head of Environment Department), Gareth Jones (Assistant Head of Environment Department) and Andrew Parry (Public Protection Manager (Trading Standards, Markets and Fairs)).

Present for item 7:

Councillor Gareth Griffith (Cabinet Member for the Environment), Dafydd Wyn Williams (Head of Environment Department) and Gareth Jones (Assistant Head of Environment Department).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Kevin Morris Jones, Linda Morgan, Glyn Daniels, Owain Williams and Elwyn Edwards.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were made.

3. URGENT ITEMS

None to note.

4. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee held on 25 February 2021 as a true record.

5. PUBLIC SERVICES BOARD - PROGRESS ON REALISING THE WELL-BEING PLAN

Submitted - the report of the Programme Manager - Public Services Board to update the members on the progress of the work streams. It was added that this was a statutory requirement under the Well-being of Future Generations Act. It was noted that the pandemic had created challenges, nevertheless, there had been progress in some areas.

It was reported that the sub-groups had gone back to their work plans and that the Board was advising them to consider their original brief and consider what had been achieved and what needed to be done.

Members were guided through the report in detail and the main points that would be of interest for the Committee members were highlighted as follows:

- It was noted that there was collaboration to increase the use of the Welsh language within public bodies, such as in receptions
- There was mention of the work that coincided with the housing strategy to secure more affordable homes in Gwynedd. It was noted that they were sharing information and collaborating in order to avoid duplicating work that had already taken place.
- There had been correspondence with Welsh Government to reiterate the importance of the availability of housing in contributing to the well-being of communities.
- Reference was made to work on climate change, and that the Sub-group had met with Natural Resources Wales and shared their area statements.

During the discussion, the following observations were made by members:-

- The Programme Manager - Public Services Board was thanked for the report in question.
- Attention was drawn to a section of the report that referred to the Board's seven operating principles and the manager was asked if it was possible to note them in the next report along with the five ways of working, to remind the Committee of what needed to be done.
- It was asked whether appraising sites for housing for local people was a task for the Planning Department.
- It was suggested that the priority should be to look at schemes and evaluate affordability and policies in order to avoid duplication.
- In relation to Climate Change, reference was made to residents who had received advice on protecting their properties from further flood damage. It was asked whether it would be possible to share additional information with residents in areas at risk of flooding.

In response to the comments, the Programme Manager - Public Services Board noted the following points:-

- It was noted that the brief of the Sub-group with the affordable housing was to look at joint development, for example, looking at dormant sites to see if there was scope to develop them.
- An additional technical group had considered this.
- She thanked for the comments on the Climate Change stream and the comments would be fed back before engagement.

RESOLVED

To accept the report, noting the observations made during the meeting.

6. CONTROL OF FIREWORK DISPLAYS

The Assistant Head of Environment Department submitted the report concisely to explain the procedures associated with fireworks.

The Cabinet Member reiterated this by noting that the purpose of the report was to respond to a notice of motion that had been adopted by the Full Council at its meeting on 3 December 2020.

It was explained that there were statutory requirements relating to the sale and storage of fireworks, what types were permitted as well as noise restrictions and sale periods.

In relation to regulation, it was noted that the Council had statutory powers relating to noise, but there was a need to gather evidence over a period of time. It was noted that the type of concerns arising from fireworks was the antisocial use which was a matter referred to the attention of the police, rather than noise in general.

The role of the Council in solving this was discussed, namely to hold campaigns to raise awareness on responsible use, working with the Fire Service, preparing press releases, using social media to promote good use (the example in appendix 2 was referenced). It was explained that the law restricted the Council's ability to change regulations regarding fireworks.

During the discussion, the following observations were submitted by members:-

- The member welcomed the report and suggested that the fireworks code needed to be amended or restrictions imposed on the licences of retailers and further guidelines given to them to avoid anti-social use.
- A concern was raised that there was an impact on farm animals which led at times to property damage when cattle were frightened.
- It was asked whether it would be possible to tighten restrictions on retailers to mitigate the harm done to farm animals and properties.
- It was reiterated that the majority of residents followed the rules and that it was only a minority who were anti-social and setting them off from the middle of October onwards, not just on Guy Fawkes night.
- It was asked how it was intended to proceed with this, and whether an additional report would be brought back to the Committee. A suggestion was made to establish a sub-group to discuss the contents including the Councillor who proposed the notice of motion.
- One member disagreed that this was a problematic issue, and reiterated that people merely needed to be tolerant for a few weeks every year when Guy Fawkes Night happened.
- It was reiterated that fireworks brought a lot of fun for children and adults and there were several possible solutions for the pet owners such as keeping them in the house or using medication.
- There was disagreement with the above-mentioned comment explaining that fireworks had not developed to be much noisier and that they had a greater impact on people.

In response to the members' observations, it was noted:

- That advising consumers before events was something the officers had been doing for a while. To improve, it was noted that improvements were possible in terms of highlighting the guidelines and also by continuing to maintain a good working relationship with the retailers.

- To proceed with the report, it was agreed to continue to raise awareness and highlight good practice and to discuss with the Councillor who had proposed the notice of motion.
- It was possible to highlight and share good practice with retailers and consumers as a way forward.

RESOLVED

To accept the report, noting the observations made during the meeting.

7. PUBLIC PROTECTION SERVICE

The Cabinet Member for the Environment provided an introduction noting that this was a report to outline the important work of the Public Protection department during the pandemic. It was reiterated that a substantial amount of work was happening behind the scenes and it was not often that everyone heard about this work which was an important part of the council.

Submitted – the report of the Head of the Environment Department who reiterated the Cabinet Member's gratitude to all the staff in the department. He went on to note that officers and staff were still busy working on Covid-29 matters in addition to their usual duties which would recommence in the next phase. He emphasised that staff were undertaking these responsibilities despite working with lower staffing numbers due to a decade of cuts.

He reiterated that the cuts had now led to a lack of resilience within the department. He drew attention to the type of cuts that had been made, for example in 2011/12 there were 63 officers within the department and that number had now fallen to 42. He continued to explain the impact of the cuts namely that there was a great demand for officers with the necessary expertise who met the requirements of the post.

He discussed another element which reiterated the lack of resilience within the department, namely there was inconsistency in the salary levels of the posts across the north Wales counties. It was explained that Gwynedd Council paid lower salaries than nearby counties and there was concern that officers would be lost as some had already moved to posts in other counties.

He referred to the solutions to the pressures on the service including appointing new officers using funding from the hardships fund. He went on to discuss their initial duties namely to engage with communities, school and local businesses. It was explained that these new officers would have the opportunity to continue as permanent technicians or officers for the department in future.

During the discussion, the following observations were made by members:

- The members expressed their thanks for the report especially in light of the information about the new Covid-19 variants that were emerging. It was reiterated that Covid-19 would be here for a while and there was a need to plan for the long term.
- In relation to matters regarding salaries, it was asked whether the jobs were being appraised to reflect a reduction in the number of departments and the additional workload. It was reiterated that there was a need to strengthen the department as there were new developments with the pandemic.

- It was agreed that there was a real need to revise the salary scale if talented officers were being lost to counties who were paying more for the same work.
- Concern was raised about mobile food trucks which were increasing during this time and whether they had received the correct authorisation to operate, in relation to food hygiene.
- It was stated that the job cuts had gone too far within the department, and consequently there was a genuine need to recruit staff. It was noted in terms of staff retention there was a need to ensure fair salaries.
- It was asked who was responsible for employing new track and trace staff in light of the high numbers that were required.
- It was acknowledged that Gwynedd Council was lower in terms of salary scale compared with adjacent counties and there was a need to act on this to retain staff. It was reiterated that there was a need to refer the matter of salary scales to the cabinet's attention.
- In light of easing restrictions, everyone was reminded of the need to support Gwynedd businesses that were reopening after a very difficult time.

In response to the above observations, the following was noted:-

- The Head of Environment Department thanked the members for their comments and their support with the report and to recommend the need to amend the salary scales.
- It was added that the jobs had been appraised and that recognition had been made for officers who were undertaking a number of additional duties.
- In relation to the new food trucks that were appearing, it was assured that everyone require a food hygiene permit and every business needed was required to display its hygiene score on the site.
- It was noted that there was no specific procedure for licensing locations at the moment in Gwynedd.
- It was agreed that there was a need to look at new food trucks in order to ensure safety and appropriate behaviour.
- It was confirmed that Welsh Government paid the salaries of track and trace officers and that Flintshire received the money and allocated it. It was noted that Gwynedd officers were employed by Flintshire. It was explained that this happened to avoid inconsistency in the job evaluation and to ensure consistency of salaries.

RESOLVED

- (a) To accept the report, noting the observations made during the meeting.**
- (b) To recommend that the Cabinet consider looking at staff salary scales across the Council and how they compare with the salaries of neighbouring councils.**

The meeting commenced at 10.30am and concluded at 11:50am.