
CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE, 16.01.14

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

Councillors:- Lesley Day, Elwyn Edwards, Trevor Edwards, Aled Evans, Gweno Glyn, Selwyn Griffiths, Jason Humphreys, Charles W.Jones, Eryl Jones-Williams, June Marshall, Dafydd Meurig, Michael Sol Owen, Mair Rowlands 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 Peredur Jenkins (Cabinet Member for Resources)
Dilwyn Williams (Corporate Director)

Present for item 4 below:-

Dyfed Edwards (Leader)
Trystan Pritchard (Senior Partnerships Manager)

Apology: Councillor Gareth Thomas.

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 14 November 2013 as a true record.

3. SAVINGS STRATEGY

Cabinet Member: Councillor Peredur Jenkins

Submitted – the report of the Cabinet Member for Resources addressing a series of matters raised by this committee in relation to the implications of the latest financial situation on the Savings Strategy.

Members were given an opportunity to ask questions and offer their observations. During the discussion the following main matters were highlighted:-

- (1) The Cabinet Member for Resources responded appropriately to a series of questions relating to the technical elements of the report, such as the credibility of the figure of £3.578m referred to in paragraph 2.3 of the report, the actual performance against the 2013/14 savings target and the financial projections.
- (2) It was noted that paragraph 3.8 of the report referred to working on a system for establishing what the Council's priorities were (in order to establish where cuts could

be made) and it was enquired who would participate in the discussions and what would be discussed. In response, the Cabinet Member for Resources noted that these discussions had not yet taken place but that a system was being established to discuss this. It was also emphasised that any potential cuts would be discussed in detail with all Gwynedd members and residents.

- (3) The importance of ensuring that the Council engaged with all cohorts of the public on any potential cuts was emphasised. It was noted that the poorest and most vulnerable people within society were those least able to bring their opinion across and they also were the ones who would suffer the most by losing Council services.
- (4) Concern was expressed by the local member that the transport service to Ysgol Gynradd Llanrug had been cut without any warning at the end of last term. The Council had not consulted with him on the matter and the Cabinet Member for the Environment was of the opinion that the cut should not have taken place until next September. The Chairman suggested that the shortcomings in the Council's consultation procedures should be aired at the end of the discussion.
- (5) It was asked whether the priority was to protect jobs within the Council or to protect services. In response, the Cabinet Member for Resources noted that the priority was to provide a service to the people of Gwynedd and that the jobs had to match those services.
- (6) It was noted that the Council was facing a situation of having to review its Financial Strategy and the very significant cuts meant that jobs were under threat and services were being compromised, and the Council's method of dealing with this was a very important consideration. There would be a need to consult with the unions should the jobs be deleted and there was a need to consult with the public also, given that some people would be harder to reach than others. All the power was currently in the hands of the chief officers and the Cabinet Members and they had to find a method of empowering the remainder of the members to be part of this procedure, also extending the procedure to include all elements of the different needs taxpayers had in the context of the services. It was essential that this committee had the opportunity to scrutinise what kind of plans would be developed during the next months in order to involve this committee and the remainder of the elected members, also including a wide range of groups and bodies within the county in a meaningful way. In response, the Cabinet Member for Resources suggested that the initial seminars that had been arranged for the members would show the way. He also expressed his hopes that the Council would be inclusive in everything it did regarding the savings regime and the cuts we were faced with. He added that it may be difficult to get the majority of the population to hold that conversation, but the groups supporting residents who needed help and the councillors themselves, as the people who were nearest to the population, had an important role in supporting the entire procedure of consulting on any savings.
- (7) It was suggested that people did not know what went on at the Council nowadays as the press no longer sent journalists to Council committees to take notes, rather, they relied on press releases, which presented the arguments from the Council's perspective only.
- (8) It was suggested that public meetings and seminars were not the best way of engaging with those people who were hard to reach. There was a need to think of creative ways of going out to the people e.g. by attending community groups, schools, speaking to young people and using social media.
- (9) It was noted that we should refrain from using communication with the public as an excuse to avoid making decisions.
- (10) It was noted that there was a danger of spending a lot of money on engagement and it should be borne in mind that people elected councillors to represent their opinion.
- (11) It was suggested that town / community councils could be used to gather information.

- (12) It was noted that it was not easy to measure the impact of realising savings, however cutting the service of a social worker / classroom assistant from three hours to an hour, for example, would suggest a reduction in service, which in turn suggested the impact. In response, the Cabinet Member for Resources noted that he would expect this work of evaluation to be done during the process of submitting the savings proposals, but this was not an easy matter. The member noted further that a way to measure the impact of cuts had to be found and suggested that receiving more complaints from members would be an indication that there was a decline in services. The Corporate Director agreed with the observation regarding the impact and noted that attempting to consider whether there had been an effect after the saving had been implemented was extremely difficult and raised questions regarding the benefit which can be set against the cost of attempting to do that (as many factors other than the input of resources could influence performance). He noted that it would be better to ensure that the implications were clear from the start and should a plan be presented before them, where the impact was not clear, that it should be sent back to the department with a request for further information.
- (13) A member suggested that some specific things could be measured, such as street cleanliness and appearance noting that she received more and more complaints regarding the bin collection service. In response, the Cabinet Member for Resources noted that the members had a responsibility to draw the relevant heads of department's attention to such problems.

4. PROGRESS REPORT FOR THE ANGLESEY AND GWYNEDD SINGLE INTEGRATED PLAN

Cabinet Member: Councillor Dyfed Edwards

Submitted – the report of the Leader outlining the progress towards establishing a Single Integrated Plan for Gwynedd and Anglesey as assurance was needed that the interests of the people of Gwynedd were protected.

The Senior Partnerships Manager provided a summary of the unit's function.

Members were given an opportunity to ask questions and offer their observations. During the discussion the following main matters were highlighted:-

- (1) It was noted that the Council had recently been criticised by the Assembly for being too introverted regarding the partnerships and that a report from Mantell Gwynedd had also been scathing regarding the way the Council dealt with third sector partnerships. The Single Integrated Plan mentioned many desirable things such as developing strong communities in Gwynedd and Anglesey and ensuring sustainable services, but where was the evidence of this? There was no reference in the report either to third sector partnerships and it was noted that some charities such as Pwllheli Youth Scheme had no relationship at all with the Council. In response, the Senior Partnerships Manager explained, in terms of the structure that existed under the Local Services Board, that there was third sector representation from that level down along with third sector representation on the thematic groups. The 'Establishing the Links' project also provided support officers for the Local Services Board in the third sector in each county. Although he shared the third sector's frustrations regarding implementing the agenda, he was confident in the liaising. In response to a further question, the Senior Partnerships Manager referred to the Citizen's Advice Bureau and Cartref Bontnewydd as examples of third sector partnerships that receive financial support or similar from the Council, and he noted that he could provide a full list for the member should he wish so. The Leader added that the links with the third sector was taking place on a Gwynedd level as an individual council also.

- (2) It was noted that paragraph 1.3 of the plan noted that the potential developments in terms of a new nuclear power station in Anglesey were '*exciting*', but that it could be argued that these developments were also '*frightening*'. In response the Leader noted that for want of a better word that the development was sure to create 'excitement', be that negative or positive excitement.
- (3) It was suggested that the joint plan with Anglesey would lose some of its value should the Government decide to merge Gwynedd and Anglesey with Conwy.
- (4) It was noted that although the philosophy and the values of the report were excellent on paper, it would be very difficult to realise the vast number of ideals contained within it. The report referred to the squeeze and talked of empowering individuals to be less dependent on the state placing the responsibility on individuals and groups to deliver their own outcomes. Referring to the work being undertaken by Gysda, it was emphasised that the report should not be used as an excuse to close a hostel for the homeless during this period of cuts without creating the mechanism to eradicate homelessness in the first place. The same principle was true in the context of other important services, such as homes for the elderly / children. In response, the Leader noted there were apparent tensions between continuing to maintain the system and going a step or two further and considering what could unlock an individual's potential. The aim at all times was to avoid creating any dependency, to unlock people's potential and to assist them in developing to become full members of society. Much work and investment was needed to do this. It would not happen overnight and there was a need to sustain people in the meantime.
- (5) It was suggested, that although closing e.g. leisure centres, was much less extreme than closing a homeless hostel, it was likely to cause less uproar, and councillors were responsible for standing up for the people who were in greatest need of Council services, rather than those who could shout the loudest. The Leader agreed with this observation and noted that the Council had a role to play to be firm and clear and to try to do what was right, not necessarily what was popular, in order to create a better society.
- (6) It was suggested that the Council did not do justice for the people of Gwynedd by entering into a local partnership with Anglesey. Reference was made to the North Wales Procurement Partnership as an example of unsuccessful collaboration and concern was expressed that the local element would be lost through collaboration across two counties. In response, the Leader noted that the Council had experienced difficulties in working in partnership on many levels and it could be a battle and could be difficult for many reasons. However, whilst the Government did encourage the Council to work in partnership, they had to make the best of the situation and endeavour to get the best possible outcome for the people of Gwynedd. In response to a further enquiry, the Leader emphasised that he was not at all uncomfortable with the partnership and that he was optimistic towards the collaboration. He added that the obstacles had to be acknowledged, but in acknowledging and understanding those obstacles, there was a greater chance of success. He noted that they should not be worried, despite the evidence of past problems. A plan had been agreed between both counties and the challenge was to build on that firm foundation and seek to undertake work that would make a difference to the people of Gwynedd and Anglesey.
- (7) A wish was expressed to see more being done to raise hopes in terms of the economy, especially in south Gwynedd. In response the Leader noted that he fully agreed with the emphasis on the economy and what a strong economy could mean for those areas. He explained that the emphasis of this plan was on the partnership work, but Gwynedd, as a county, had to address the matters affecting the rural economy, mainly in Dwyfor and Meirionnydd. Also, it was essential to ensure, in bringing Gwynedd and Anglesey together, that the needs of all communities in both areas were met. The work should be addressed in a positive and optimistic manner, and this in itself could have a positive impact on those the Council worked with. He

suggested that there was a role for the scrutiny committee to monitor the work and he referred to projects in the care field and the environment field as examples of successful collaboration on a county level in the past.

- (8) Concern was expressed that Westminster Government intended to put the work of decommissioning of the Trawsfynydd Nuclear Powerstation to one side between 2012 and 2021. It was noted that the hundreds of local workers employed on the site would be likely to leave the area rather than wait for the work to return in five years' time and it was enquired what pressure could be applied between Gwynedd and Anglesey to try to keep the site open. In response, the Leader noted that the Council was in regular discussions with the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority, and that they did seek to apply pressure for the work to continue and also to maximise the Trawsfynydd site as an important employment site, not only for the south of the county, but also the whole of the county.

5. THE COMMITTEE'S FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2013-14

Submitted – the latest version of the work programme.

Referring to item A6 – Planning Committee Arrangements, the Member Support and Scrutiny Manager noted that a special meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Committee had been convened on 7 February to look at the new requirements that were being introduced in terms of the planning arrangements across Wales and that members of this committee would be welcome to attend as observers. It was noted that the meeting date conflicted with an urgent meeting of the Cambrian Railway Conference.

In relation to item A13 – Registering second homes as businesses, the Member Support and Scrutiny Manager suggested that the Head of Finance Department provide the members with further guidance on this matter in a seminar to be arranged for 31 March.

The shortcomings in the Council's procedure of consulting with members in light of the local member's observation that the transport service to Ysgol Gynradd Llanrug had been cut without any warning at the end of last term were discussed. Many members referred to similar shortcomings in their wards. Some members were in favour of setting the matter on the agenda of the next committee meeting and to invite the Head of Customer Care Department and the Cabinet Member for Customer Care there to expand on the arrangements that could be put in place to ensure that this type of situation would not arise again. Other members were not of the opinion that this was a committee matter, and it was in fact an operational matter. The committee had already had the opportunity to ask the Head of Customer Care Department and the Cabinet Member regarding the Council's Engagement Strategy last September and they were of the opinion that there was no point in placing the matter back on the agenda every time a problem arose. The Member Support and Scrutiny Manager noted it was timely for the committee to track the implementation of the recommendations submitted to the Cabinet Member for Customer Care following the discussion on the Engagement Strategy at the committee meeting in September, especially having been given to understand that the Cabinet was considering the strategy at its meeting on 28 January.

RESOLVED to track the Council and the Public – Engagement item at the next preparatory meeting on 18 February by:-

- **Looking at the content of the strategy being introduced;**
- **Looking at what the response has been to date from the Cabinet Member;**
- **Consider whether the Head of Customer Care Department / Cabinet Member for Customer Care should be invited to address some specific matters at the next meeting of the committee on 27 March.**

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