

# **PARTNERSHIP AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

## **Minutes of the meeting held in the Committee Room and on Zoom on 12 September 2024**

**PRESENT:** Councillor Dylan Rees (Chair)  
Councillor Gwilym O. Jones (Vice-Chair)

Councillors Non Dafydd, Jeff Evans, John I. Jones, Derek Owen, Pip O'Neill, Ken Taylor, Sonia Williams.

### **Portfolio Members**

Councillors Neville Evans (Portfolio Member for Leisure, Tourism and Maritime), Carwyn Jones (Portfolio Member for Corporate Business and Customer Experience), Gary Pritchard (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Member for Children, Youth and Housing Services), Dafydd Roberts (Portfolio Member for Education and the Welsh Language), Robin Williams (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Member for Finance).

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Chief Executive  
Director of Social Services  
Head of Housing Services (NM)  
Head of Adults' Services (AO)  
Head of Democracy (DS)  
Scrutiny Officer (EA)  
Committee Officer (ATH)  
Webcasting Officer (FT)

**APOLOGIES:** Councillors Euryn Morris, Margaret M. Roberts, Alun Roberts (Portfolio Member for Adults' Services and Community Safety), Dafydd Rhys Thomas (Portfolio Member for Highways, Waste and Property), Mr John Tierney, Gillian Thompson, Wenda Owen (Co-opted Members), Mr Rhys H. Hughes (Deputy Chief Executive), Anwen Davies (Scrutiny Manager), Lyndsey Campbell Williams (Interim Chief Officer Medrwn Môn)

**ALSO PRESENT:** Rita Radcliffe (Môn CF), Cara Jones, Danielle Owen (Môn Citizens Advice)

### **1 APOLOGIES**

The apologies for absence were as noted above.

### **2 DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

Councillor Sonia Williams declared a personal interest only with regard to item 6 on the agenda on the basis of her having a connection with Ynys Môn Citizens Advice in the course of her work with Bwyd Da Môn.

### **3 MINUTES**

The minutes of the previous meetings of the Partnership and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee held on the following dates were presented and were confirmed as correct -

- 19 June, 2024.
- 10 July, 2024.

#### **4 STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS - MEDRWN MÔN**

This item was not considered due to the Interim Chief Officer of Medrwn Môn not being able to attend the meeting because of personal reasons.

#### **5 MÔN COMMUNITIES FORWARD**

The Director of Social Services introduced the presentations under this and the following item which were both linked to the Council's Tackling Poverty Strategic Plan 2024 to 2029. The plan is underpinned by six key priority areas for action the delivery of which will be achieved through partnership working and collaboration with amongst others, Môn CF and Citizens Advice.

The Head of Housing Services referred to tackling poverty related work within the Council of which an essential part is helping Anglesey's residents access benefits and entitlements. The Council has a Welfare Rights Team based at the J E O'Toole Centre in Holyhead which serves the whole of the Island. The centre was accessed by approximately 5,400 residents in the year from April 2023 to March 2024 of whom 1,900 were homeowners, 1,800 were Council tenants and 780 were private tenants. In terms of the age profile of those seeking the service's help and support, in the region of 60% were aged 55 and over, 10% were in the 25 to 34 age range, 13% were in the 35 to 44 age range and 14% were in the 45 to 54 age range. The centre undertakes a significant amount of work in assisting individuals to secure the benefits and support to which they may be entitled and in 2023/24 the centre successfully realised a financial gain of approximately £5.7m for those seeking its help thereby contributing towards alleviating financial hardship for those households.

Rita Radcliffe, Chief Executive of Môn Communities Forward was welcomed to the meeting by the Chair and invited to provide an overview of the organisation's work.

Ms Radcliffe outlined the background to Môn CF as a local charity owned by the community and operating on Anglesey with 45 staff currently and a turnover of £4m per annum. The charity has offices in Amlwch, Holyhead and Menai Bridge and a new office opening in Llangefni. Môn CF is funded from several sources including the Council and helps over 600 individuals on the Island at any one time with employment support, business support and training which together with schools and young people, and regenerating towns through property ownership are the organisation's strategic priorities. The organisation collaborates with and has links to a range of partners including several Council departments and is open to working with all the Council's services on projects where it deems Môn CF's input could add value. Ms Radcliffe gave an overview of the range of employment and business support which Môn CF provides along with the data as regards engagements and outcomes in 2023/24 and 2024/25 (April to August). This includes help for the unemployed to prepare them for the world of work, help for those already in work to improve their circumstances, support with driving lessons and transport and childcare costs, preparing people for work through a wide range of training courses, support for individuals wanting to start their own businesses, practical help for local employers with their recruitment processes and grants as well as involvement with job fairs. Môn CF owns 11 properties which are a mix of offices, commercial properties, and residential properties and through its property programme seeks to be a landlord with a social conscience meaning fair rents and buildings of high quality which are regularly maintained.

The Committee expressed its appreciation of the presentation given by the Chief Executive of Môn CF and arising from the information provided, the following were points of discussion by members –

- Whether Môn CF has seen any changes in demand in the type of support which individuals need in the last few years.
- The kind of help and assistance which people who are in work most frequently ask for.
- Whether given the current economic climate and cost of living crisis, Môn CF is confident that it can continue to provide the range of support and services it provides at present or whether it envisages having to make reductions in some areas.
- Given historically there has been a perception of Môn CF as predominantly serving the Holyhead area, is the organisation able to provide assurance that it delivers support and services for people across the Island.
- What further support and services could Môn CF provide were it to have additional resources at its disposal.
- Whether the organisation has specifically tailored programmes either currently or planned for people aged 50 or 60 wanting to change careers or to retire and whether older people who seek work are doing so willingly or because they have to make ends meet.
- Where could collaboration with the Isle of Anglesey County Council and others improve.
- The criteria which Môn CF uses to assess need when individuals ask for support for example with driving lessons.
- The arrangements for supporting residents in the Aethwy ward once the new office in Llangefni is established particularly as regards non-driving individuals and given the reduction in bus services. It was noted that the move away from Menai Bridge to Llangefni will mean the loss of a source of support and assistance for the residents of this part of Anglesey.
- The arrangements for providing help and support for young people in the 18 to 25 age group any barriers to provision.
- The governance arrangements for Môn CF and whether the trustees have the expertise to scrutinise the organisation appropriately.

The Chief Executive of Môn CF in responding to the issues raised by the Committee, advised as follows –

- That whereas previously the support provided was focused on mentoring people into work and on working with jobless households and with Communities for Work, it is now more diverse and holistic with individuals being helped with many aspects. Môn CF is also more involved with training which is now very specific to individual need and with employers and work placements and the related administrative/HR tasks and it also helps facilitate an appropriate fit between the person looking for work and the employer/job. The landscape has changed and among the changes is an increase in people in work accessing the services of Môn CF.
- That people who are in work come to Môn CF for assistance in changing their circumstances be that by securing additional hours to supplement their pay, by securing a promotion, or by finding employment closer to home. Môn CF helps them find a solution to improve their circumstances including by upskilling if no inhouse training is available in their current employment. Môn CF's driving programme is an in-work support that has been much in demand in the last two years and gives those in work wanting to improve their circumstances more options including jobs that are based

further afield. Môn CF has also experienced a greater call for bespoke training which includes helping individuals obtain appropriate licences/certification.

The Committee noted the importance of Môn CF's driving programme in light of the reduction in bus services on Anglesey.

The Chief Executive in this context highlighted that a number of essential bus routes have been withdrawn on the Island leaving some communities without a bus service. While the Council is seeking to arrange a community provision in those areas there may be some individuals in the communities so affected who are finding it difficult to get to work and who might be interested in taking advantage of Môn CF's driving programme. He suggested that there could be a benefit in the Council exploring this issue further in collaboration with Môn CF.

- While Môn CF does not have plans to withdraw any of its services as there is a proven need for them, how much it can deliver depends on securing the funding to enable continued provision. The organisation's funding for its work with young people recently changed thereby curtailing its programme for 16- to 19-year-olds although an alternative source of funding was found to enable the programme to continue for a year while Môn CF sought a more permanent solution. As with other third sector organisations, Môn CF is facing financial challenges and uncertainty; the charity's Board of Trustees has committed some of its reserves to support the delivery of services while further funding and income generation options are explored.
- That the Committee could be provided with data to show where Môn CF's participants are based and the numbers attending its offices which would also illustrate the rationale for the location of those offices with the Amlwch office being the busiest. Establishing an office in Llangefni will provide an avenue into more areas. Môn CF would also like to undertake more outreach work in communities across the Island which would further improve accessibility.
- Were it to have additional resources, Môn CF would be able to help more people. Efforts are made to keep caseloads manageable but the demand is high. Additional resources would allow Môn CF to undertake more work with young people, to extend its training offer to more places along with its driving programme and to do more licensing work which has proven valuable in helping many individuals gain employment and has a high conversion rate i.e. Môn CF would do more of what it is doing already which is supporting people in a way that really helps them.
- While Môn CF does not offer specific age-related programmes it has seen a rise in the number of older people accessing its services many of whom wish to return to work to supplement their pensions. All the services which Môn CF offers are available to all clients regardless of age. Older people access Môn CF both because they are looking for additional income and/or because they want something to do that would interest them.
- That collaboration could improve were partner organisations to contact Môn CF with their ideas, programmes, or initiatives to ascertain whether it is able to provide support and assistance and whether its collaboration could add value. Representation on groups and committees would also be helpful in keeping organisations such as Môn CF informed and involved.
- That clients seeking access to the driving programme would in their first meeting demonstrate how being able to drive would help them. Their circumstances would be examined and scored. The mentor to which they are assigned would draw up a rationale and present it to the driving programme project manager. If the client meets most of the criteria and can show a commitment to gaining a driving licence and that it would improve their circumstances as a result e.g. in enabling them to obtain more hours if they are on a minimum wage, then they would be supported.

- That the feasibility study undertaken in relation to establishing an office in Llangefni showed that the numbers in Menai Bridge were low in comparison with those in Llangefni and the surrounding area. As part of the study ways in which participants could continue to access the service were considered including bus routes and it was concluded that there were sufficient ways of accessing Môn CF services either in Llangefni, Amlwch, or virtually. Office space was also a factor in establishing a presence in Llangefni.
- That Môn CF continues to work with young people 18 to 25 years old and funds work placements for them. The Chief Executive of Môn CF referred to changes to the programme and funding arrangements for the support provided for this age group and clarified current provision.
- That Môn CF's Board of Trustees comprises of members with a good mix of knowledge, skills, and expertise.

A member of the committee expressed concern and sadness about the effects of poverty on communities and individuals across the Island and acknowledged the excellent work which advice and support organisations such as Môn CF and Citizens Advice carry out in assisting those who come to them for help. He referred to the challenging economic circumstances, and ongoing cost of living crisis and specifically to the withdrawal of the winter fuel allowance for many pensioners. He raised questions about what the Council and partner organisations are doing practically to help those eligible for pension credit but who are not claiming it to access this additional financial support and he suggested that meetings should be held across the Island to spread the word, to promote the availability of the benefit and to help individuals apply for it to maximise uptake and help alleviate the hardship that many pensioners will face in the coming winter months.

Whilst the Chief Executive of Môn CF confirmed that she would be happy with other partner organisations to be involved in such an endeavour she highlighted that funding would be required to support the initiative.

The Chief Executive advised that benefits can be a complex area and that many people for different reasons are reluctant to come forward to seek help or claim extra allowances for which they may be eligible. A publicity campaign or roadshow would help some but not all pensioners, many of whom might not want to be seen publicly asking for financial help. The Chief Executive confirmed that he would discuss the issue internally initially with the Head of Housing Services and the Director of Function (Resources)/Section 151 Officer and thereafter with partner organisations to examine what can be done bearing in mind also that the Council is potentially facing a £12m budget shortfall in 2025/26. He highlighted that work has been going on to ensure that individuals realise their entitlements e.g. the use of revenue and benefit information to identify individuals at risk of going into debt because of poverty and to help them to access benefits or by other means is being considered. However, a discreet approach on an individual or household basis can sometimes be more appropriate and as effective.

Cara Jones, Môn Citizens Advice highlighted that while there is outreach provision across the Island to help with Pension Credit applications which is facilitated by the Council, many eligible pensioners do not come forward to take advantage of the help on offer.

**The Committee thanked the Chief Executive of Môn CF for her time and presentation and acknowledged the excellent work and support provided by the organisation.**

**Actions agreed –**

- **Officers in collaboration with Môn CF to investigate whether there are individuals in communities where the bus service has been withdrawn who would benefit from Môn CF's driving programme.**
- **The Chief Executive in consultation with the Director of Function (Resources)/ Section 15 Officer and the Head of Housing Services to examine ways in which**

**the Council both of itself and acting in collaboration with its partners, can further help individuals where eligible, realise pension credit and/or other entitlements.**

## **6 YNYS MÔN CITIZENS ADVICE**

The Chair introduced Cara Jones, Project Manager and Energy Supervisor, and Danielle Owen from Môn Citizens Advice and invited them to provide an overview of the services provided by the organisation.

Cara Jones outlined the work of Môn Citizens Advice in providing free, confidential, and impartial advice to people regarding their rights and entitlements. The organisation aims to help people whatever their problems and to improve policies and practices that affect people's lives. Advice on a wide range of issues is provided including on benefits, debt, budgeting, housing, employment, community care and migration, many of which are linked to poverty, to poverty prevention and to helping people improve their circumstances. Although Môn Citizens Advice is available to everyone it recognises that some groups and communities are more at risk of poverty than others and focuses its efforts in these areas. Môn Citizens Advice's priority groups include carers and people with long-term disability and health issues including mental health, addictions, learning difficulties and autism. The organisation also helps children and young people, military veterans, homeless people, older people, and victims of domestic abuse. The Council contributes towards the organisation's core funding which is essential to Môn Citizens Advice as a charity. Cara Jones also referred to other funding contributions which Môn Citizens Advice has received for specific work and projects. She explained the staff structure and governance arrangements overseen by a Board of Trustees which also sets the organisation's strategic direction. Môn Citizens Advice works in partnership with many organisations on a number of projects including the Council with which it collaborates in several areas including on multi-disciplinary groups such as the Tackling Poverty group. In 2023/24 Môn Citizens Advice helped 2,069 clients with 15,680 issues across 19,532 activities. In the region of £1.734m of benefits and entitlements was realised for clients along with £177k in debt resolution. Seventy-seven clients were further helped following the closure of the 2 sisters factory in Llangefni after initial on site support was provided when all affected employees were offered an interview.

Demand for the services of Môn Citizens Advice continues to grow leading to waiting times and challenges as regards resolving issues within timescales. The rising cost of living and energy costs means that more people are finding it difficult to meet basic needs placing them at increased risk of poverty and debt. More people are also accessing the service for legal advice because they cannot obtain legal aid or afford legal representation. Despite the challenges, Môn Citizens Advice will continue to work with partners to provide support and to share information about how best to help those most in need.

The following were points of discussion by the committee –

- The staffing capacity of Môn Citizens Advice to be able to meet the requests for support
- Areas where collaboration with the Isle of Anglesey County Council and others could improve
- Whether Môn Citizens Advice has seen any major changes in the post Covid period
- The ways in which the Council might be able to help Môn Citizens Advice achieve more especially in terms of securing funding. Members asked for clarification of the funding position.

In response to the issues raised, the representatives of Môn Citizens Advice advised as follows –

- That there is a currently waiting list for support from Môn Citizens Advice; the length of the wait depends on the project/issue but is on average 2 to 3 weeks with energy related issues being the shortest. The period leading up to Christmas is historically busy and is expected to be especially so this year due to the withdrawal of the winter fuel allowance. While the organisation will respond to people seeking its help, it will be a challenge. Additional funding would enable Môn Citizens Advice to employ more advisors.
- That Môn Citizens Advice has been part of successful collaboration with the Council based on close and regular contact with an example being in housing and specifically an energy improvement project in a village on the Island. Establishing regular contact with all the Council's services would facilitate collaboration.
- That the post Covid period saw the resumption of face-to-face contact as well as a significant increase in the demand for Môn Citizens Advice services. The Covid pandemic also brought a change in the way contact is made and has enabled the organisation to access more people through channels that better suits them. Cases have also become more complex and can sometimes take a long time and the input of multiple specialists to resolve.
- That finances are likely to be challenging going forward as more people seek the organisation's help. Collaboration has been a key part of the most successful projects along with working together in a holistic way. Should the Council become aware of the availability of additional funding it might consider inviting Môn Citizens Advice to be part of it. Replacing funding streams that are coming to an end is a challenge and a concern particularly with regard to outreach and legal work some of which is being funded from reserves.

The Chief Executive highlighted that collaboration is among the Council's core values and is an area that is constantly evolving. The Council's Tackling Poverty Strategic Plan is a Council wide document which is underpinned by structures which bring services together. It incorporates a cost-of-living dashboard which provides at a glance real time information about the cost-of-living position and enables any trends to be identified and analysed. The Council deems it important that decisions with regard to tackling poverty are data driven and informed. He thanked Môn Citizens Advice both for their presentation and as an important partner of the Council, and he hoped that the meeting had given members assurance that the Council is collaborating effectively in order to tackle poverty and to improve outcomes for the Island's residents.

**The Committee thanked the Cara Jones and Danielle Owen from Môn Citizens Advice their time and presentation and for the organisation's valuable work in providing advice and support for Anglesey's residents.**

**There were no additional actions.**

## **7 FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2024/2025**

The report of the Scrutiny Manager incorporating the Committee's Forward Work Programme to April, 2025 was presented for consideration.

**It was resolved –**

- **To agree the current version of the Forward Work Programme for 2024/25.**
- **To note the progress thus far in implementing the Forward Work Programme.**

**COUNCILLOR DYLAN REES  
CHAIR**