

PARTNERSHIP AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the hybrid meeting held on 15 March 2023

- PRESENT:** Councillor Dylan Rees (Chair)
Councillor Gwilym O Jones (Vice-Chair)
- Councillors Non Dafydd, Jeff M Evans, T LI Hughes MBE, John Ifan Jones, Euryrn Morris, Pip O'Neill, Derek Owen, Margaret M Roberts and Ken Taylor.
- Councillor Llinos Medi (Leader of the Council and Portfolio Member for Economic Development).
- IN ATTENDANCE:** Chief Executive,
Director of Education, Skills and Young People,
Head of Regulation and Economic Development (for item 5),
Head of Democracy (for item 4),
Policy and Welsh Language Manager (for item 4),
Economic Development Manager (for item 5),
Ynys Cybi Landscape Partnership Programme Manager (for item 5),
Scrutiny Manager (AGD),
Committee Officer (MEH).
- APOLOGIES:** Councillor Gary Pritchard (Portfolio Member for Children, Youth Housing Services);
Councillor Dafydd R Thomas (Portfolio Member for Highways, Property & Waste);
Councillor Ieuan Williams (Deputy Leader & Portfolio Member for Education and Welsh Language);
Deputy Chief Executive,
Director of Social Services,
Director of Function (Council Business)/Monitoring Officer,
Head of Adults' Services.
- Mr John Tierney – The Roman Catholic
- ALSO PRESENT:** Councillor Neville Evans (Portfolio Member for Leisure, Tourism and Maritime);
Councillor Carwyn Jones (Portfolio Member for Corporate and Customer Experience);
Councillor Alun Roberts (Portfolio Member for Adult's Services and Community Safety);
Councillor Nicola Roberts (Portfolio Member for Planning, Public Protection and Climate Change).
-

1 APOLOGIES

As noted above.

2 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor Euryrn Morris declared a personal interest in respect of Item 6 – North Wales Economic Ambition Board Q3 : 2022/2023 Progress Report.

3 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 February, 2023 were confirmed as correct.

4 ANNUAL REPORT ON EQUALITIES : 2021/2022

Submitted - the Annual Equality Report 2021/22 for consideration by the Committee.

The Leader of the Council said that under the Equality Act 2010 Statutory Duties (Wales) Regulations 2011, the Council must publish an annual report on equality. The main purpose of the report is to show how the Council meets its equality duties. She noted that the report gives examples of how the Authority promoted equality within the communities and the workforce, explaining how relevant information is collected, outlines the arrangements for carrying out impact assessments, gives an outline of progress in achieving equality objectives and identifies the priorities for the next twelve months. There is also reference within the report of the achievement of pupils in schools and the achievement of pupils who received free school meals.

In considering the Annual Report on Equalities for 2021/2022 the Committee discussed the following:-

- **What are the main challenges faced in terms of mainstreaming equality with the Council and also what are the difficulties with conscious bias?**

The Leader responded that there are data gaps, with the Authority being eager for staff to feel willing and comfortable to share their personal information. She noted that prejudice is an issue and it is found that society is finding it difficult to cope with different situations. She further said that in the next Annual Report it will demonstrate how the political representation has changed within the Council. The work undertaken to encourage people from different backgrounds to put their names forward to be Elected Members on the Council has been positive. Following the local government election last May there are younger Elected Members and more women. The Leader further referred to the pay gap between men and women and that this Authority does not pay bonuses. The gender pay cap is much lower than the average across the UK. The Policy and Welsh Language Manager referred to unconscious bias and it is recognised as a challenge. Training on unconscious bias is offered to Officers of the Council on a regular basis.

- **A new Strategic Equality Plan will need to be approved by 1st April, 2024. How do Officers intend to go about gathering relevant information in order to inform our objectives for 2024-2028?**

The Head of Democracy responded that the Equality and Human Rights Commission make it clear that the Authority must engage and consult widely to gather information as regards to equality objectives. Work will be undertaken to gather information from representatives of groups protected under the equalities act. The Authority is fortunate that there are partner organisations such as Medrwn Môn that the Council can utilise to access protected groups. He further said that the Equalities Commissions expertise and guidance will also be used to inform the Authorities engagement activities.

- **What will be the role of this Committee in the process of developing new equality objectives?**

The Policy and Welsh Language Manager responded that this Committee has a key role to contribute into any consultation on the equalities objectives within the Council. She noted that engagement will be undertaken with different protected groups to ascertain what they consider should be the Council's objectives and this Committee's input would be welcomed.

The Committee raised the promotion of the use of public transport, there are issues with the loss of bus routes and some buses not arriving on the specific time within their timetable. The Leader of the Council responded that grants are currently received from Welsh Government to maintain accessible bus routes, however, there are issues with transport routes in rural areas. During continued discussions with Welsh Government the fact that their Transport Strategy does not respond to needs and challenges of rural areas is emphasised.

- **Are there schemes in place to close the attainment gap of pupils who receive free school meals performance compared to pupils that do not receive free school meals? What will be the impact of the Welsh Government decision to offer free school meals to all primary school children?**

The Leader of the Council responded that she has concerns as to how the formula is used to measure if a child is eligible for school meals. She noted that there are families that are eligible to receive free school meals for their children who do not claim. This came apparent during the pandemic with more children qualifying for free school meals. The Leader further referred to the attainment of the gap between pupils who receive free school meals compared to pupils who do not qualify and noted that she considered that a fairer formula needs to be introduced. The Director of Education, Skills and Young People said that poverty can have a detrimental impact on performance of pupils with some families unable to afford school uniform and school trips. He noted that training for Schools and Governors are afforded to ascertain how their schools policies have an effect on children performance. A Trauma Informed Scheme is offered to schools with a number of school staff already having attained a Diploma in

Trauma Informed. He noted that the introduction of the new Curriculum for Wales will result in pupils having an individual assessment rather than monitored within groups. Pupil's attainment will be monitored and will receive support and intervention if required.

- **Reference was made that local authorities work with partner organisations. Questions were raised whether this Authority can influence partner organisations?**

The Leader of the Council responded that any partnership work undertaken by the Authority is informed by core principles. She noted that legislation supports equalities through the Local Government Act. The Chief Executive said that working with partner organisations is important but there is a need to ensure that the Authority does not compromise on its core values and to ensure that it is a joint partnership. He referred to the Council Plan which highlights 4 values; one of the 4 values refer to is 'to respect and to be respectful of others'. He noted that the Authority is committed towards equalities and to protect people who suffer social and economic disadvantage. Whilst adopting the Council Plan the Authority is committed to create a new Equality Plan next year. The Chief Executive further said that it is important that equalities is incorporated into the Council's Scorecard which is monitored on a quarterly basis; reporting on equalities could then be part of the monitoring process rather than discussed on an annual basis.

- **Reference was made to Welsh Government's Pavement Parking proposals and their proposal to give Local Authorities powers to tackle pavement parking**

The Leader of the Council responded that with the change in the legislation as regards to illegal pavement parking it will enable local authorities to collect data which has an impact on equalities as people need to be able to walk safely on pavements. She noted that internal discussions will need to be undertaken as regards to implementing the new legislation, especially enforcement capacity.

- **In terms of the Authority's impact assessment arrangements, the aim is that identifying and reducing negative effects and promoting equality becomes part of the Council's day to day work. How can this Committee contribute to making that a reality?**

The Leader of the Council responded that the Committee needs to ensure that an equality impact assessment is undertaken when a report is submitted for consideration by the Committee. She highlighted the need to consider every person within society when decisions are undertaken.

- **Questions were raised as to how many staff have agreed to afford data and whether it is sufficient to afford the Council the required information required which could add value to the Equalities Report?**

The Leader of the Council responded that the Authority needs to afford staff the confidence to share information. She noted that training will inform staff why the

Authority needs specific data and their responses will strengthen equality. The Policy and Welsh Language Manager said that data collection is a challenge and work has been undertaken to review the documentation used by staff. She further noted that staff need to be confident that the data collected is confidential.

It was RESOLVED to accept the Annual Equalities Report for 2021/2022.

ACTION : As noted above.

5 YNYS MÔN LEVELLING UP PROGRAMME

Submitted – a report by the Head of Regulation and Economic Development on the Ynys Môn Levelling Up Programme for consideration by the Committee.

The Leader of the Council said that a bid submitted by the County Council was approved in January, 2023 for a sum of £17m within the Levelling Up Fund (LUF) Round 2. She noted that out of the 529 bids that were submitted in the UK during Round 2, only 111 (20%) were successful. This demonstrates that the bid submitted by the Anglesey was of a very high standard and more than fulfilled each of UK Government's criteria and requirements. During the assessment period it became apparent that only a bid focussing upon addressing Holyhead's socio-economic needs would likely meet the UK Government's specific requirements and have any opportunity of being approved. A total of 5 projects were submitted in Holyhead which included Môn Communities First; the Town Council; the Church in Wales; Ucheldre Centre; and the Isle of Anglesey County Council – Heritage Regeneration. She noted that the timescale for delivery are challenging with the £17m to be spent by March 2025. The Leader wished to thank the staff of the Economic Development Service for their hard work in succeeding to secure the grant funding for Holyhead.

The Head of Regulation and Economic Development gave an insight into the preparation of the LUF bid to the UK Government. He noted that the bid included a package of projects to increase employment, improve the town centre and visitor experience, increase the footfall and spending, provide modern floor space to meet business needs, and increase access to art, culture and leisure. He further said that Holyhead has a number of commercial buildings that are empty and is increasing. The Head of Regulation and Economic Development further said that only Holyhead had enough mature projects to be put forward for the LUF funding within the specific timetable. He noted that it is the County Council's responsibility for developing, submitting, managing and monitoring the programme of developments and it will be necessary for the Council and the Island to demonstrate that it is able to deliver the projects in a timely, cost effective and compliant manner. A Partnership Board will be established to govern the delivery of the programme which will include Senior Officers of the Council and Portfolio Member for Economic Development.

In considering the report the Committee discussed the following:-

- **Reference was made that the costs of building materials is continuing to increase. Questions were raised as to what would happen if the funding**

**of £17m is insufficient to complete the 5 successful bids in Holyhead?
Questions were also raised as to where the funding would be targeted if
there were underspending within the projects?**

The Economic Development Manager responded that the risk of increasing building materials costs have been included in the programme delivery of the projects together with the increase in inflation. Contingency measures have been included within the programme. Any underspend within one project will allow for resources to be available to fund the gap within other projects. He addressed the question as to possible underspending within the programmes and said that other projects could be included as backup as long they add value to the programme.

- **Questions were raised as to whether local companies on Anglesey will be able to contract for the work resulting from the successful bids?**

The Economic Development Manager responded that local companies will be given an opportunity to contract for the work required within the successful bids. However, due to the size advertisement of the contracts will have to be on the 'Sell to Wales' website and the North Wales Construction Framework. He further said that a workshop has been put in place to ascertain the interest of constructions firms. The Chief Executive said that due to the size of the developments it is hope that local companies will be able to be successful in contracting for the work rather than one large company contracting for the whole work on the 5 projects.

- **Questions were raised as to the risks that if the projects were not completed by the completion date of March 2025?**

The Economic Development Manager responded that there are risks attached that the projects will not be completed by March 2025. He said that the County Council is in the process of designing legal agreements with the five delivery organisations ensuring roles, responsibilities, governance arrangements, monitoring, performance, claims etc., are all outlined and agreed at the outset. These will be based on the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) by the UK Government. At present a response is awaited by the UK Government to progress with these projects. The Chair proposed that a letter be sent on behalf of the Committee to the UK Government to stress that the delay in receiving the MOU was putting pressure on the deliverability of the projects as the completion dates for the projects is March 2025. The Committee agreed that a letter be sent to UK Government as noted above.

- **Questions were raised as to the economic strategy of the Council for industrial units within rural areas?**

The Leader of the Council responded that no comparable grant funding stream is available to support rural areas and funding is being targeted towards the most populated areas. She assured that continued pressure will be put on both the UK Government and Welsh Government for support for rural areas as regards to economic development.

- **Questions were raised as to what extent does the Levelling Up programme as approved enable the Local Authority to realise the Council Plan for 2023-2028?**

The Economic Development Manager responded by confirming that the Levelling Up programme does conform with the aims of the Council Plan. The LUF programme brings regeneration opportunities and hopefully it will inspire residents to learn more about the history and culture resulting from the approved projects. He further noted that climate change has been identified within each project and the Climate Change Manager has had input into every project.

- **Reference was made that the Council does not have a direct delivery role within the LUF. Questions were raised as to what arrangements are in place to manage the individual project to be successfully delivered?**

The Economic Development Manager responded that a small LUF Team has been established which includes a Programme Manager and Project Assistant together with staff within the Finance Department who have experience in working with grant funding. Resources have been included within the bid to for specialist advice. Governance frameworks have been established with the input of the 151 Finance Officer and the legal department.

- **Reference was made that a Programme Board will be created to ensure robust governance measures are in place. Questions were raised as to how it will be ensured that the representatives on the Programme Board will have the correct skills and experience to deal with the projects?**

The Leader of the Council responded that the representatives on the Programme Board will include the Chief Executive, Section 151 Officer, Monitoring Officer, and Leader of the Council together with representatives from both the UK and Welsh Governments. She noted that effective governance of the projects is essential for success.

- **Reference was made that the town centres have seen deterioration due to out of town shops and people shopping on-line and there is a need for town centres to be vibrant for people to return to shop in the town centres.**

The Leader of the Council said that it is important to change the town centres to address the needs of society. She referred to the project bids and it is hoped that the needs of the younger population can be addressed with a dance school proposed at the old HSBC building together with an extension to the Empire Building for children's play activities. The Director of Education, Skills and Young People said that it is important that the voice of children and young people are important when such developments are proposed. He noted that each school has a Schools Council and they discuss issues that are important to them.

It was RESOLVED:-

- **To note the progress in the development of the Levelling Up Fund bid;**
- **To recognise the role of the Council in the development and submitted bid;**
- **To support the delivery of the Levelling Up Fund (in line with agreed timescales, outputs etc.)**

ACTION : As noted above.

6 NORTH WALES ECONOMIC AMBITION BOARD Q3 : 2022/2023 PROGRESS REPORT

Submitted – a report by the Chief Executive on the North Wales Economic Ambition Board Q3 : 2022/2023 Progress Report for consideration by the Committee.

The Leader of the Council said that the progress reports of the North Wales Economic Ambition Board are submitted on a regular basis to this Committee. She noted that as reported at the last meeting the Llysfasi Net Zero Farm has now been withdrawn from the Growth Deal, the Economic Ambition Board made some key decisions regarding the reallocation of the funding within the deal. She noted that some projects have not progress as anticipated and some business plans have been submitted to the Board. The Board has met with Ministers from the UK and Welsh Governments to highlight the challenges in achievements of the projects with regards to regulation and planning together with the challenges faced by the region as regards to the business sector and attracting private investment.

The Chief Executive reported on the projects that have progress since the last quarterly report, namely:-

- The Bangor University - Low Carbon Energy Centre of Excellence (Egni) which will be located at a second building at MSparc in Gaerwen and it is hoped that the project will progress through the formal processes in the coming weeks and funding should be secured, with outline planning permission agreed in;
- Innovative Local Energy – a fund for green energy projects that has been approved by the North Wales Economic Ambition Board;
- Breakwater, Holyhead – Welsh Government has received £20m addition funding following the recent Westminster budget to repair the Breakwater in Holyhead. It is understood that Welsh Government will also afford additional funding, whilst Stena Line the owners of the Breakwater will also be contributing substantial investment. This will allow the Holyhead Growth Bid to progress.

The Chief Executive further reported that significant investments will be in Holyhead over the coming years due to the Breakwater project, Growth Bid, Holyhead Port project, LUF project and the Free Port Bid. The investment could total £150m.

In considering the report the Committee discussed the following:-

- **Questions were raised as to the capacity within the Economic Development Department to deal with all the projects on the Island?**

The Chief Executive responded that it is a continuous challenge as additional resources is required to deliver the schemes on the Island. The Executive has agreed to afford additional resources within the Economic Development Service. The Service also has a framework agreement with external specialist companies i.e. Architects, Economists, Project Manager.

- **Questions were raised as to whether the North Wales Economic Ambition Board will transfer under the Corporate Joint Committee (CJC) and also who will be scrutinising the work of the CJC's?**

The Leader of the Council responded that it is the intention that the North Wales Economic Ambition Board will transfer under the CJC's and the current scrutiny process will continue within the local authorities. She said that the scrutiny process will be more extensive due to the Transport Strategy for North Wales and the Strategic Development Plan. At present the work of the Scrutiny Committee is to report back to the Executive and therefore the scrutiny process has an influence on the policies of the Council, however, it will be a challenge to scrutinise the CJC's. The Chief Executive said that it is misleading to call the CJC's a Committee as it is an external body that charges a levy and he considered that discussions should be undertaken between the North Wales Local Authorities whether it would be advantages to have one Scrutiny Committee across the region to scrutinise all the external bodies.

- **Reference was made within the report that the Environmental Biotechnology Centre is located at the Mona Industrial Estate and that another location were sought for the project. Questions were raised as to whether the other location will be on the Island?**

The Chief Executive responded that discussions are being undertaken. He noted that the building at Mona has been funded by European funding and has now come to an end. The LUF and SPF funding available is much less than the previous European funding.

It was RESOLVED to note the progress made during Quarter 3 : 2022/2023.

ACTION : As noted above.

7 FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The report of the Scrutiny Manager setting out the Partnership and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee's indicative Forward Work Programme for 2022/23 was presented for consideration.

It was RESOLVED:-

- **To agree the current version of the forward work programme for 2022/2023;**
- **To note the progress thus far in implementing the forward work programme.**

The meeting concluded at 4.10 pm

**COUNCILLOR DYLAN REES
CHAIR**