

ENVIRONMENTAL SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

14 APRIL 2015

Present: County Councillor Mitchell(Chairperson)
County Councillors Chris Davis, Hyde, Lomax, McKerlich and Merry

Apologies: Councillors Clark

61 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Clark.

62 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chairperson reminded Members of their responsibility under Part III of the Members' Code of Conduct to declare any interest in general terms and to complete personal interest forms at the start of the meeting and then, prior to the commencement of the discussion of the item in question, specify whether it is a personal or prejudicial interest. If the interest is prejudicial Members would be asked to leave the meeting and if the interest is personal, Members would be invited to stay, speak and vote.

63 : MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of 10 March 2015 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairperson.

64 : CARDIFF STUDENT COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP 2015 - 2018 ACTION PLAN

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Bob Derbyshire (Cabinet Member for Environment), Councillor Daniel De'Ath (Cabinet Member for Safety, Engagement and Democracy), Tara King (Assistant Director, Environment), Will Lane (Operational Manager, Public Protection) and Jane Cherrington (Operational Manager - Strategy & Enforcement).

The purpose of this report was to enable Members to provide scrutiny to the Cardiff Student Community Partnership – 2015 to 2018 Action Plan that has been prepared to reflect on the achievements since the implementation of the original Plan (the Cardiff's Student Community Action Plan 2007-2011) and consider the proposed plans for the next three years.

Students form an integral part of the community in Cardiff and bring many benefits to the city. However, the high concentration of students residing within small geographical areas of the city can result in housing and lifestyle pressures that lead to a negative impact on communities. Issues such as waste, noise, anti-social behaviour, poor housing and feelings of 'loss of community' are all concerns that have all been widely recognised as needing attention for the benefit of students and residents alike. In recognition of the need to address these

issues, Cardiff Council and the city's universities developed Cardiff's Student Community Action Plan 2007-2011.

In their statements to the Committee, the Cabinet Members informed Members that some areas of Cardiff have high numbers of students living in them and that the Action Plan is an excellent example of collaborative working between a number of teams. It will benefit students and the population of Cardiff.

The Operational Manager gave a presentation, after which the Chairperson invited questions from the Committee.

The Committee suggested that whilst the Plan is a very good piece of work in terms of the various educational and communication initiatives contained within it, the Council could, when necessary, make more use of fines when students breach regulations, as in some cases this will be the most effective way to get people to change their behaviour.

The Committee asked how the Council ensures that the hundreds of Cardiff landlords that are trained and supported by Landlord Accreditation Wales are complying with required standards. The Committee was advised that the Council carries out property inspections to check for hazards and urgent repairs that are needed. Accredited landlords attend a one-day training course on which they gain an understanding of their obligations as landlords. Registration with Landlord Accreditation Wales is voluntary but from September 2016 the new Welsh Agent & Landlord Licensing Scheme introduces compulsory registration and a licensing scheme for private rented sector landlords and letting and management agents. Training will also be part of the new scheme.

The Committee asked whether the development of new purpose-built student accommodation in Cardiff has led to students moving away from using the types of accommodation, such as terraced houses, that they have more traditionally occupied. The Committee was advised that no evidence of this has been seen in Cardiff, although the new accommodation does offer students everything they need in one package, such as utilities, internet access, wi-fi, etc. The financial attraction of these all-inclusive packages is that students know exactly how much they will have to pay each month.

The Committee noted that to be accredited by Landlord Accreditation Wales landlords have to sign a declaration to say that they are a 'fit and proper' person' and asked how this is defined. The Committee was advised that this involves looking at things like whether or not a person has been convicted of a criminal offence and what the offence was. If a landlord's application for accreditation is rejected then that person can appeal.

The Committee suggested that what was missing from the Plan are the standards that are aspired to, information on how far the Council is from achieving them and what steps will be taken to do so. The Committee was advised that one way of measuring the success of the Plan would be data on how clean the city is, and on the property standard of rented accommodation in the city. The situation that the Plan addresses is improving but it is always a challenge as a new cohort of students arrives in the city each year. The aim is to try and pre-empt problems. Students are an important part of the community. The Welsh Agent & Landlord Licensing Scheme

should ensure that landlords will no longer be able to get away with providing a poor standard of accommodation.

The Committee suggested that it would be helpful if there were some key performance indicators for the Plan, and information on the penalties that could be imposed on registered landlords who do not maintain their properties to the required standard. On encouraging the use of sustainable methods of transport, the Committee was concerned that only Cardiff Metropolitan University had linked up with Cardiff Bus to offer a bus travel scheme (the Met Rider bus pass) aimed at students. The Committee also enquired what options are available to students who have landlords that are not registered. The Committee was advised that the Cardiff Digs website is a source of information on accommodation for students, including information on recycling, sustainability, community relations, health and safety and on what to do if their accommodation is in disrepair. There is a drive to educate students on what the law is regarding housing and the standards that are expected. Landlords that are currently accredited can be de-registered and the Welsh Agent & Landlord Licensing Scheme will have greater powers to impose penalties if landlords breach the conditions of their registration. The new scheme will allow tenants to make complaints about landlords, not just about the quality of the accommodation they provide. Officers assured the Committee that when information on penalties is available, Members will be provided with it.

The Committee congratulated officers on the Plan and requested that some solid targets be developed around it.

The Chairperson thanked the Cabinet Members and officers for attending the meeting, for their presentation and for answering questions from Members.

AGREED: That the Chairperson on behalf of the Committee writes to the Cabinet Member highlighting the issues raised during the Way Forward discussion.

65 : IMPROVING SCRUTINY PROJECT

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Daniel De'Ath (Cabinet Member for Safety, Engagement and Democracy) and Paul Keeping (Operational Manager, Scrutiny Services).

The purpose of this report was to advise Scrutiny Members of the progress made to date in delivering the Council's Improving Scrutiny Project and to seek views on the timing and next steps to bring the Project to conclusion.

The Chairperson invited the Cabinet Member to make a statement. Councillor De'Ath informed the Committee that the project is being led by the Chairs of the five scrutiny committees. The project has been greatly enhanced by Cardiff Council's inclusion as one of nine case studies in a UK-wide research programme that has been developed by the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS). The project will look at how councils are changing in response to austerity, and scrutiny plays a critical function in relation to these changes. A series of Member engagement workshops is being planned. The project is a valuable way to perhaps improve scrutiny so that it works even more effectively for the Council and for the city.

The Operational Manager informed the Committee that the peer review was complimentary about scrutiny in the Council. The local authority is now undergoing significant change. It has used the five-committee scrutiny model since 2000. Now that the Council is looking at different ways of delivering services it is a good time to review the governance arrangements of the Council. The CfPS is doing some initial research. A number of Members have already contributed to the review. Comparisons with the core cities and other local authorities in Wales have been looked at. The aim is to see what needs to be strengthened and what should be kept. The intention is to offer a workshop for Members in early June 2015 and get political and executive involvement in late June. It is hoped that a draft report can be produced just before or just after the summer recess.

The Chairperson invited questions and comments from the Committee and these were as follows:

- There is a difference between what can be achieved by task and finish groups and what can be achieved by formal scrutiny, with perhaps the most effective pieces of work coming from task and finish groups.
- Formal scrutiny is better suited to checking policies and progress but has some failings when it comes to the management of and preparation for meetings. Effective chairmanship is essential.
- Sometimes Members serving on committees do not always get the time to ask all the questions they want to ask. On occasion, there might be some value in adjourning meetings and reconvening them at a later date.
- There is a need to look at training for Members. For example, training on how to read reports. However, training sessions are not always well attended and consideration could be given to how to engage with Members about the training that is on offer.
- During the project the impact of the outcome of the general election will become clearer. For example, there could be proposed changes in relation to the Williams report. Whatever shape scrutiny takes following the project, flexibility should be built-in so that there is potential to adapt to possible changes of this kind.
- Improvements could be made in the way committees look at the results of the recommendations they have made, to ensure that when recommendations have been accepted they have actually been acted on.
- All committees should link in with the Audit Committee.

The Chairperson thanked the Cabinet Member and officer for attending the meeting, for their presentation and for answering questions from Members.

AGREED: That the Chairperson on behalf of the Committee writes to the Cabinet Member highlighting the issues raised during the Way Forward discussion.

During the Way Forward discussion the Committee it was agreed that the Chairperson would, on behalf of the Committee, send to the Cabinet Members a letter drawing together the issues that had been raised during meeting.

67 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held on 19 May 2015 at 4.30pm in Committee Room 4, County Hall

The meeting closed at 5.40pm.