

People Scrutiny Committee 19th July 2023

Note: the following minutes focus on the challenge from members – for the full discussion, the recording of the meeting is at

www.youtube.com/watch?v=fBQzUYgfHeM&list=PLlmqn4nAaFJCbj_Cu0DbhGQkCrLYK7xM&index=2

Attendees:

Councillors: John Crook, Fay Bromfield, Penny Jones, Maureen Powell, Sue Riley, Maria Stevens, Jackie Strong, Simon Howarth, Louise Brown, Frances Taylor, Richard John, Jane Lucas, Sara Burch

Officers: Ian Bakewell, Cath Fallon, Mark Hand, Craig O' Connor, Susan Hall, Sally Meyrick, Lynne Garnett (Travelling Ahead), Rachel Lewis, Frances O'Brien, Matthew Gatehouse, Hazel Ilett, Robert McGowan

1. Apologies for Absence.

Apologies were received from Councillor Edwards and Councillor Brown was confirmed as substituting.

2. Declarations of Interest.

None.

3. Public Open Forum.

The Chair welcomed the public to the People Scrutiny Committee meeting, which would consider the Gypsy and Travellers Needs Assessment. He explained that the scrutiny committee's role was to offer views to the cabinet and make any recommendations, which the Cabinet could accept or reject as part of their future decision-making, but that Members were keen to hear from the public.

The Chair confirmed that the Committee had received a large number of written responses from members of the public providing their views, together with a petition from Mitchel Troy with many signatures, Members noting the strength of public feeling on the matter before them. He thanked the public and reassured them that all of representations received by Members would be submitted to the Cabinet Member and Officers following the meeting, to be included as part of the Cabinet's future deliberations.

There was a large public presence at the scrutiny meeting, the public highlighting key concerns relating to the suitability of the sites under discussion. The meeting was livestreamed (the recording being available on the Council's agenda page of the website), providing full details of the discussion, however, the following concerns were raised in relation to the various sites discussed:

- Village greens/common land that is currently used for recreation by communities, particularly children who may be unable to access other facilities due to health and disability and the impact of the loss of green spaces on their health and well-being.
- Accessibility for the travelling community and the following concerns;
- Road safety concerns, lack of pavements, lack of safe walking routes, no street lighting and absence of active travel routes.
- Poor links to public transport, other public services like schools, doctors.
- Environmental concerns related to biodiversity and AONB (areas of outstanding natural beauty).
- Proximity to motorways, noise and air pollution.
- Land contamination concerns.

The Chair thanked everyone for attending and speaking under the Public Open Forum to assist the Committee with their deliberations.

4. Respite Provision for adults with learning disabilities

The Chair advised that the Committee would be deferring items 4 and 6 of their agenda to a future meeting, because the Committee had received significant interest from the public in attending the Public Open Forum to speak on the Respite Provision. He explained that Members were keen to ensure that the voice of service users would be heard as part of the scrutiny process and that Members had therefore agreed to postpone their consideration of the Respite Provision report and the Home to School Transport Policy. A date had not yet been confirmed for the meeting, but the Chair reassured that anyone who had expressed an interest in contributing to the meeting would be informed of the new date.

5. Gypsy and Travellers Needs Assessment.

Cabinet Member Sara Burch and Ian Bakewell introduced the report, highlighting the process that had been followed to date, including the timeline of reports that had been tabled to the scrutiny committee, in addition to the informal scrutiny workshops that all elected Members had been invited to. The Cabinet Member answered the Members' questions with Mark Hand and Craig O'Connor.

The local Ward Members Councillors Richard John, Frances Taylor, Fay Bromfield on behalf of Jane Lucas, and John Crook spoke at length to share their concerns about the suitability of the sites identified in their wards and Councillor Richard John proposed that the Committee recommended Option 3, rejecting all of the sites under discussion.

Key points raised by the Committee Members

- Committee Members questioned whether as a Council, we are truly considering the needs of Gypsies and Travellers and whether the Council is paying due respect to their feedback, given the travelling community has stated that none of the sites would meet their requirements.
- The Scrutiny Committee expressed grave concerns around the accuracy of the RAG process and the process taken to remove sites from the list, leaving 4 sites that the Committee felt were wholly unsuitable for a wide range of reasons outlined by the public and the ward Members.
- Members questioned whether the Council is evidentially applying the Guidance on Gypsy and Traveller Sites, which states that good quality accessible roads for heavy duty traffic are required ~ this was just one example of where the Scrutiny Committee felt the guidance hadn't been applied.
- The Committee felt the process has been rushed, with Members not having sufficient notice to visit the sites and fully appraise themselves of their suitability. Members felt that the decisions are too important for Gypsy and Travellers and for existing communities to be rushed to meet the timescales of the Replacement Local Development Plan.
- Members urged the Cabinet Member and Officers to negotiate with National Resources Wales to resolve issues on existing sites, where Gypsies and Travellers are settled and have strong ties to the local area.

Formal Outcome of the Scrutiny:

The Chair thanked everyone for their patience throughout the process and the public for their attendance and valuable contribution. He also thanked Cabinet Members and Officers for their input and concluded:

- That Members rejected the four recommendations presented to the Scrutiny Committee.

- That Members recommend that a call is put to landowners to come forward with parcels of land (in line with the recommendation 2.3 in the Cabinet report for 26th July 2023) and that the selection process begin again.
- That Members recommend that existing Gypsy and Traveller Communities should be supported as far as possible, which could also assist the Council in meeting identified need.
- A formal summary would be presented by the Chair to the Cabinet to reflect the views of the Committee, together with some additional comments for the Executive to consider in their future decision-making.

6. Home to School Transport Policy

The Chair confirmed that this item had been deferred, as explained and that a Special Meeting of the People Scrutiny Committee would be arranged to consider this item, at a date to be confirmed.

7. Next meeting: 5th October 2023

The Chair confirmed the date of the next ordinary People Scrutiny Committee would be 5th October 2023, but reminded Members that the Committee would need to call a Special Meeting during August for scrutiny of Respite Provision and Home to School Transport Policy.

Meeting Close