
COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE, 28 SEPTEMBER 2022

Present:

COUNCILLORS: Elin Hywel (Chair)
Kim Jones (Vice-chair)

Stephen Churchman, Robert Glyn Daniels, Elwyn Edwards, Delyth Lloyd Griffiths, Gwilym Jones, Linda Morgan, Edgar Owen, Llio Elenid Owen, Arwyn Herald Roberts, Beca Roberts, Peter Thomas, Rob Triggs and Gruffydd Williams.

Officers present:

Bethan Adams (Scrutiny Advisor), Rhodri Jones (Democracy Services Officer) and Lowri Haf Evans (Democracy Services Officer).

Present for item 5:

Councillor Dyfrig Siencyn (Council Leader) and Sandra Lynne Thomas (Gwynedd and Anglesey Public Services Board Manager).

Present for item 6:

Councillor Berwyn Parry Jones (Cabinet Member for Highways and Municipal and Gwynedd Consultancy), Steffan Jones (Head of Highways and Municipal Services) and Gareth Roberts (Dwyfor Area Engineer).

Present for item 7:

Councillor Dafydd Meurig (Cabinet Member for the Environment), Dafydd Wyn Williams (Head of Environment Department) and Rhian Wyn Williams (Integrated Transport and Road Safety Manager).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Annwen Hughes, Elfed Powell Roberts and Rhys Tudur.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

Councillor Dafydd Meurig declared a personal interest as he was the Chair of Ogwen Partnership. He was of the opinion that it was not a prejudicial interest, and he did not withdraw from the meeting during the discussion on the item.

3. URGENT ITEMS

None to note.

4. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous committee meeting held on 10 March 2022, as a true record.

5. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE GWYNEDD AND ANGLESEY PUBLIC SERVICES BOARD

The report was presented by the Council Leader and Gwynedd and Anglesey Public Services Board Manager, and in brief drew attention to the following main points:

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- It was explained that the Board had been established under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and that the board was a joint statutory body with Anglesey.
- It was explained that the Health and fire services, colleges, Natural Resources Wales, Snowdonia National Park and housing associations were represented on the board. They recognised important areas and identified places where collaboration in partnership can have a greater impact on residents.
- It was reported that Well-being Assessments were completed every 5 years over 13 different areas. It was noted that Gwynedd had been divided into 8 areas and Anglesey divided into 5 areas. It was explained that this division had been created so that the most important matters in each area were addressed, as those matters varied from area to area.
- It was confirmed that a Well-being Plan was being prepared for the period 2023-2028 following the current Well-being Assessments.
- Reference was made to three operational sub-groups which dealt with some aspects of the Board's operation and their main priorities were identified:
 - Climate Change sub-group: focusing on developing flood prevention methods.
 - The Welsh Language sub-group: focusing on improving and facilitating the use of the Welsh Language. A pilot scheme was carried out in order to collaborate with public institutions to see why people don't use Welsh in receptions and how to increase the use of the language.
 - Integrated Health and Social Care sub-group: governs the establishment of a collaboration system in the sector, including the Community Resources Team.
- It was ensured that a draft of the Well-being Plan (2023-2028) would be presented to the Committee.

Thanks were expressed for the report.

Members were given an opportunity to ask questions and offer observations. During the discussion, the following matters were raised:

This committee's input would be useful to the Board when creating the Well-being Plan.

- In response to the query, the Council Leader explained that a report would be submitted to the Cabinet soon and how the Board was going about gathering information. The Gwynedd and Anglesey Public Services Board Programme Manager elaborated that the Well-being Plan (2023-2028) draft was on its way to this scrutiny committee as soon as possible.

It was asked if it was possible to see the action plan of the climate change sub-group as well as receive confirmation of membership of the sub-group in order to look at its effectiveness and timetable.

- In response to the query, the Gwynedd and Anglesey Public Services Board Programme Manager explained that the sub-group was led by Natural Resources Wales and members were assured that all members of the sub-group took ownership of it. It was recognized that the objectives of the sub-group had been too broad during the last 5 years and as a result it had not been as successful as hoped. Despite this, the Council Leader elaborated that flood prevention had been a main focus recently and in the new Well-being Plan. He noted that receiving comments or ideas from members was appreciated.

It was questioned how the Board responded if projects did not develop as hoped.

- In response to the query, the Council Leader explained that the Board had struggled with working in partnership in the past. In order for the Board to be successful everyone needed to work together and as such the Board would highlight exactly who would act on which projects and how they were intended to be realised effectively. He elaborated that the Board reported to others and that created accountability and encouraged partners to act on time.

It was questioned how the Board dealt with poverty. It was noted that poverty rates had increased in recent years, and that resources were needed to tackle them.

- In response to the query, the Council Leader explained that it was a very important issue and that the Council was developing plans to help tackle the problem. However, it was a complex issue as the Westminster Government was responsible for public expenditure and benefits which placed limits on what can be achieved. The Council Leader ensured that the Board was as active as possible in solving the problem of poverty as well as other problematic issues such as obesity rates among children.

It was noted that some of the projects, such as Dolfeurig Community Hub, Dolgellau would take some time to develop and a timetable for the project was asked for. It was also questioned if the report was correct to say that work had started when there were no obvious developments to be seen on the site.

- In response to the query, the Council Leader explained that the Dolfeurig Community Hub project was a Gwynedd Council project rather than the Board's project. To elaborate on this particular project, it was noted that there was great pressure for the project to be completed due to the condition of the building, but that there had been problems with the planning application in the past. As it was a Gwynedd Council project, the relevant departments would look into this project as soon as possible. Apologies were made that the report appeared as if work had already begun.

DECISION

To accept the report, noting the observations made during the meeting.

6. SALT BINS - WINTER MAINTENANCE SERVICE UPDATE

The report was presented by the Cabinet Member for Highways and Municipal and Gwynedd Consultancy and the Head of Highways and Municipal Services. They briefly drew attention to the following main points:

- The Cabinet Member explained that the Council had contacted town and community councils in the past to inform them that salt bins would no longer be filled by the Council, and that it would be their responsibility to finance them. Unfortunately, town and community councils were unable to cope with the costs causing the Council to receive a number of calls regarding dangerous roads. Because of this, the Highways and Municipal Department had revisited the situation.
- It was declared that around 600 salt bins were located across the County and that the Service was in the process of refilling them. The department would monitor them regularly over the winter in order to fill them when needed.
- It was explained that the locations of the salt bins as well as the roads that were being gritted by the Council would appear on Map Gwynedd for residents and Members to see.
- The Head of the Highways and Municipal Department noted that work was being done to number the salt bins. The unique number of the salt bins would make it easier for members and town and community councils to report, helping the workers to solve any problem sooner.

Members were given an opportunity to ask questions and offer observations. During the discussion, the

following matters were raised:

The department was praised for accepting that problems had arisen in the past regarding salt bins, and the idea of numbering the bins and noting their location on Map Gwynedd was praised.

It was asked where the funding to reintroduce this service came from.

- In response to the query, the Head of Department noted that the funding had accumulated since town and community councils had taken over the service. The cost of reintroducing the service was relatively similar and therefore there was no need to look for funding from anywhere else.

It was asked if the location of the salt bins was already on Map Gwynedd and if the public had access to this facility.

- In response to the query, the Head of Department confirmed that the salt bins were not visible on Map Gwynedd at the moment but the process of adding them had started. Once this process had been completed, Gwynedd residents could see them through the Council's website. The members of the Council would be informed following the completion of the work to enable them to share the information with the residents of their ward.

Concern was expressed that the Winter Maintenance Service was starting from 01.10.2022 onwards as it did not give enough time to look at the condition of the salt bins and replace them if necessary.

- In response to this statement, the Head stated that the department was working closely with the Area Engineer and was confident that the salt bins would be in good condition by the time they were needed. It was confirmed that although the service had started from 01.10.2022, that the gritting service did not normally start until the second week in November.

It was pointed out that it appeared from the report that there were more salt bins in the Arfon area compared to other areas of the County and it was asked if there was a reason for this and the process involved in determining the allocation of bins in areas.

- In response to the query, the Head of Department explained that there was no particular reason why there were more salt bins in Arfon. He noted that they were distributed as needed and that continuous assessment was carried out.

DECISION

To accept the report, noting the observations made during the meeting.

7. UPDATE- DEVELOPMENTS IN THE PUBLIC TRANSPORT SECTOR

The report was presented by the Cabinet Member for the Environment and the Integrated Transport and Road Safety Manager. They briefly drew attention to the following main points:

- The Cabinet Member for the Environment explained that powers to govern public transport had moved from the hands of private companies to the government since 2017.
- It was declared that the department had been very successful in recent months in amending the timetable of the SHERPA service in the Llanberis area. The income saved over the summer would be subsidised for the rest of the year. This means that the money was spent to help the residents of the area as well as seasonal visitors.
- Requests were invited for any detailed report on any aspect of the department's work.
- The Head of Environment Department reported that school transport for the education

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department was a big priority. The Council did not want to be dependent on large companies to operate such services.

- It was explained that in order to ensure that the best service was provided to the people of Gwynedd, the department worked together with the Government. It was noted that the Corporate Joint Committee placed a statutory requirement on the Joint Committee to produce a Regional Transport Plan by July 2023 and develop new plans every 5 years thereafter.
- It was explained that working together with TrawsCymru was very effective enabling the operation of a service that visited several rural areas in order to meet the needs of local residents.
- It was acknowledged that the transport service had overspent by £300,000.00 this year and it was noted that the department was very aware of the need to ensure that the budget would be adhered to in the future.

Members were given an opportunity to ask questions and offer observations. During the discussion, the following matters were raised:

It was asked whether there were plans to re-introduce a 10pm bus service as the need arose in rural areas, as the price of the service was cheaper for users than other means of travel.

- In response to the query, the Head of the Environment Department noted that the lack of drivers was a major challenge to overcome. If the driver numbers situation were to improve in the future, it was hoped that more of these late services would be able to run once again as there was a social value to the journeys. He explained that due to the current situation, companies had to prioritise resources.

It was questioned if collaborations were taking place between the Council's departments in order to promote these jobs available from the bus companies.

- In response to the query, the Integrated Transport and Road Safety Manager confirmed that this was happening. In addition, the Welsh Government had ideas on how to attract more bus drivers. Despite this, unfortunately, many older workers had retired since the lockdown periods and it was difficult to stimulate interest in young people to be bus drivers.

It was acknowledged that TrawsCymru was visiting more rural areas that did not receive regular bus services in the past, but that some areas continued to miss out on the current travel route. It was asked if it was possible to change these routes. It was noted that it would be beneficial for the department to ask for the opinion of members as well as town and community councils in terms of improvements.

- In response to the query, the Head of the Environment Department stated that the department was well aware that the bus service in some areas was not sufficient. He ensured that work was being done in order to visit different areas in order to understand how much need there was for a bus service and how to change the travel routes effectively to meet needs.

Reference was made to the costs of operating this service, and it was asked if electric buses would be useful in the future in order to manage the financial situation.

- In response to the query, the Head of the Environment Department shared that the infrastructure for the T22 was currently being installed in Porthmadog. It was anticipated that electricity supply would be connected on the site in November and it would be possible to maintain and promote a low carbon service for the residents of the area following that. The timetable for this service was not available at the moment as time is needed to consider how long it would take for the buses to fully charge. The department was confident that the

electricity supply would be connected in accordance with the anticipated schedule.

Following the department's recent success in changing bus timetables, it was asked if there were plans to create electronic timetables in the future.

- In response to the query, the Head of the Environment Department noted that live timetables had been used in the past but were difficult to manage. As they were not a statutory requirement, it was decided to terminate that service. Despite this, TrawsCymru had installed electronic boards to inform passengers of the time of the next bus. This did not inform if the bus was late. The hope was to pilot electronic timetables in the future to see how the live electronic timetable would work under the new system.

Reference was made to the Sherpa Service, it was asked if there was an intention to improve connections in nearby areas.

- In response, the Head noted if there was demand we would look at improving the network with trips connecting with the Sherpa.

It was asked in terms of meeting the needs of all areas, if it would be possible to offer a flexi bus or taxi so that people could reach areas that were not on the service bus route.

- In response to the query, it was acknowledged that it was difficult for the buses to pass every household in every area. It was noted that services such as the flexi bus had been very effective in the past. Such a service would fulfil the intention of the flexi service so that it was cost effective for residents and answered the problems of travel routes.

A member noted that they had used 'Bwcabus' provision in another council area and that she had a good experience. She added that she would welcome an on-demand bus service in Gwynedd.

- In response, the Head noted that an on-demand bus was a cost-effective way to meet the need of passengers.

With older people and disabled people relying heavily on the transport service, concern was expressed at cuts in services between Bangor and Wrexham as many people relied on this service for hospital visits.

- In response to the query, the Integrated Transport and Road Safety Manager declared that they were very aware of the importance of the former services. She noted that T2 and T3 services had been amended to ensure that residents did not miss connections between services.

In response to a request from a member, the Head noted that he would share the report drawn up by Bangor University in relation to the social value of journeys with members of the Committee.

It was asked how small local bus companies could be protected when large companies were competing against them to get transport contracts from the Council in the context of the changes arising from the Government's White Paper.

- In response to the query, the Head of Department explained that the process of enfranchisement was an issue that was troubling at first sight. He noted that the department had received confirmation from the government that small companies were important to the market. He explained that local companies could provide services that larger companies could not provide. It was important to ensure value for money giving small companies a level playing field. He confirmed that consideration would be given to rural provision.

DECISION

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To accept the report, noting the observations made during the meeting.

8. COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD PROGRAMME 2022/23

The report was presented by the Scrutiny Advisor and she briefly drew attention to the following main points:

- The prioritised items for the year's committees were confirmed at the annual workshop on 06.07.2022 and it was noted that two items remained to be scheduled for this year, the 'Climate and Nature Emergency Plan' and the 'Rights of Way Improvement Plan'.
- It was explained that the Rights of Way Improvement Plan report was scheduled to be discussed in the Cabinet on 22.11.2022 and therefore it would be timely to discuss this matter at the 27.10.2022 meeting of this committee. It was confirmed that this would need to be confirmed with the relevant department in order to ensure that it would be possible for them to produce a comprehensive report within these time constraints.

In response to a query regarding the scheduling of the item 'Climate and Nature Emergency Plan'. It was noted that there would be a discussion at the committee's informal meeting, where feedback would be shared from the Climate and Nature Board.

DECISION

Adopt the work programme for 2022/23.

The meeting commenced at 10.30 a.m. and concluded at 12.35 p.m.

CHAIR