
COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE, 18 SEPTEMBER 2025

Attendance:

COUNCILLORS: Annwen Hughes (Chair) and Delyth Lloyd Griffiths (Vice-chair)

Elwyn Edwards, Arwyn Herald Roberts, Beca Brown, Linda Morgan, Beca Roberts, Berwyn Parry Jones, Edgar Wyn Owen, Jina Gwyrfai, Elfed Williams, Robert Glyn Daniels, Peter Thomas, Elfed Powell Roberts and Stephen Churchman

Officers present:

Catrin Thomas (Corporate Director), Bethan Adams (Scrutiny Advisor) and Rhodri Jones (Democracy Services Officer).

Present for Item 5:

Councillor Craig ab Iago (Cabinet Member for the Environment) and Bethan Richardson (Climate Change Programme Manager).

Present for Item 6:

Councillor June Jones (Cabinet Member for Highways, Engineering and YGC), Steffan Jones (Head of Highways, Engineering and YGC Department) and Gareth Roberts (Dwyfor Area Engineer, Highways, Engineering and YGC Department).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Elin Hywel and Gruffydd Williams.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were received.

3. URGENT ITEMS

None to note.

4. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee held on 05 June 2025, as a true record.

5. CLIMATE AND NATURE EMERGENCY PLAN - ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25

The report was presented by the Cabinet Member for the Environment and the Climate Change Programme Manager.

It was reported that the Climate and Nature Emergency Plan had now completed its third year of operation. Statistics were presented on the amount of carbon being absorbed by Council lands as well as the carbon emissions, explaining that there was an 18,132,729 kgCO₂e deficit to reach a net zero carbon position. They elaborated on carbon emissions, including from procurement, during the year 2024/25 and explained that the procurement information was based on financial expenditure in accordance with the Welsh Government's requirements, rather than the actual impact of the developments. They confirmed that

discussions were taking place to ensure that the information on carbon emissions is not based on financial expenditure in future, as this led to a false impression of the true situation as the costs of goods continually increased. They also provided an update on carbon emission levels excluding the financial expenditure from procurement, as this gave a clearer and more accurate picture of the Council's actual position.

It was confirmed that all Local Authorities and public bodies in Wales used the same formula for measuring their carbon emissions. It was explained that this system had been in place since 2019 and that that year was being used as a baseline for subsequent years. They expressed pride that the Council's carbon emissions had reduced by 32% since 2019. They acknowledged that the statistics for the year 2023/24 showed an increase of 4% and explained that this increase stemmed from having to use more gas to heat the Council's buildings due to cold weather.

It was noted that work had been undertaken on several of the Council's buildings, for insulation and ensuring they contributed less to carbon emission levels. They confirmed that there was not a full year's worth of data available at present to be able to analyse the data from that work, but it was likely to be included in future reports.

During the debate, the following observations were made by the Members:-

In response to enquiries for further information on how the Council was encouraging greater biodiversity within the Land Use section of the Emergency Plan, the Programme Manager confirmed that a roadside wildflower scheme was contributing to this aim. It was elaborated that the plan to plant more wildflowers had begun during the National Eisteddfod campaign in Boduan in 2023 and they confirmed that the Council had plans to extend it to the Meirionnydd area in the future. It was ensured that the seeds for wildflowers were planted during the autumn season, and they also emphasised that no weed-killers with harmful chemicals were used. It was confirmed that analytical work was underway to measure how much carbon this project was absorbing and data on how much it contributed to biodiversity levels. In response to the comments, it was suggested that the Council look into conducting a pilot on the Foamstream weed-killer, like other authorities, as it was a chemical-free and effective herbicide.

In response to an enquiry as to whether the Council was likely to succeed in meeting the Welsh Government's target of a net zero carbon position by 2030, the Programme Manager acknowledged that this was a very challenging target to meet. It was emphasised that if procurement carbon emissions data continued to be included as part of the Council's total carbon emissions, the Council would not be able to reach the target. However, it was pointed out that several other factors affected the Council's ability to achieve this target such as technology, the costs of purchasing goods and resources, the need for a significant financial resource and the fact that a number of aspects were beyond the authority's control. They shared an example of a situation where the Council has worked to reduce carbon emissions by converting streetlights to LED lighting. However, it was noted that the Council identified levels of carbon emissions from those streetlights as the electricity used from the national grid does not come from renewable energy, which was an aspect that was beyond the Council's control. The Cabinet Member added that Cyngor Gwynedd was leading in this area, but the target remained challenging. It was noted that the Council was working with other counties to share ideas and good practice. A member suggested that it was timely to set a more realistic target.

A member asked if the Council could set an alternative target for achieving net zero carbon rather than sticking to what had been set by the Welsh Government. In response, the Programme Manager confirmed that the net zero carbon target had been set for the public sector as a whole and that a national discussion would be needed to be able to address and revise the target.

Project 3 within the Plan's Movement and Transport section was considered, and it was enquired whether the charging point provision was sufficient for the needs of the fleet. In response to the enquiries, the Programme Manager stated that the work of setting up charging points was being undertaken in conjunction with the development of the fleet. It was confirmed that these corresponding developments were undergoing ongoing review to meet the needs of the Council. The Cabinet Member added that the Council faced a number of challenges in installing charging points for the fleet and the public as the Council had no authority to ask electricity providers to power them. It was noted that this had been a challenge for some years and there was currently no obvious solution to it.

In response to a comment that only 43% of the fleet's vehicles had been upgraded to electric vehicles, the Programme Manager confirmed that this resulted from the lack of suitable electric vehicles available for heavy machinery. It was recognised that the Council could not significantly increase this percentage until the technology for heavy machinery had been developed and made available in a way that made sense financially for the Council. However, the members were assured that the fleet's vans and cars were upgraded to electric vehicles when the existing vehicles reached the end of their life and that a difference could be seen in the fleet's carbon emission levels thanks to the changes that had already been implemented. In response to an enquiry as to whether hydrogen was an option being considered to power heavy vehicles, the Programme Manager confirmed that Ambition North Wales was currently developing a hydrogen project in Deeside and that the Council was keen to monitor the project in order to consider hydrogen as a means of powering heavy vehicles into the future. The Cabinet Member added that it would be beneficial to look at different projects relating to hydrogen at a national level in order to consider whether hydrogen could be an option for future use in Gwynedd.

The Cabinet Member was asked what his plans were for the future of the Climate Change and Nature Board and what considerations for public transport were underway in order to reduce carbon emissions. In response, the Cabinet Member confirmed that he considered the Council to be performing well in responding to climate change. However, he stated that he hoped to see a change in the board's work in the future so that the Plan's priorities became focal to all Council departments' work, so that responding to climate change became part of the authority's culture. In response to the enquiry on public transport, the Cabinet Member reported that he was involved in discussions with the North Wales Corporate Joint Committee on these issues but that there were significant challenges associated with the field due to a lack of funding to support green public transport projects.

In response to an enquiry on whether there were any plans to expand the Fflecsi buses provision to other areas of Gwynedd, the Programme Manager confirmed that they had been very effective in those communities that had benefited from them to date. However, she emphasised that the needs of the residents of each community varied, and detailed consideration would be required before introducing fflecsi buses to other areas of Gwynedd to ensure that the service was used and that the financial investment was cost-effective.

It was noted that the Council had managed to attract a grant of £1.7million through the Welsh Government's Low Carbon Heat grant scheme for upgrading the Plas Ogwen residential home in Bethesda to EnerPHit standard. They asked if consideration was being given to upgrading other residential homes to reduce their carbon emissions. In response, the Programme Manager noted that this project at Plas Ogwen was the first of its kind in Britain. She elaborated that it would be encouraging if the scheme could be extended to other settings within the county as an 80% saving in carbon emissions was expected from this project. She assured the committee that officers were applying for relevant grants in order to expand the project as it would enable the Council to save money and energy in the future.

It was noted that the possibility of developing solar farms had been presented to this Committee in the past, and an update was requested on the matter. In response, the Programme Manager confirmed that this option was no longer being considered by the Council at this time. She explained that the latest data suggested that there would be no financial benefit or reduction in carbon emission rates for the Council because any energy generated through the solar panels would be transported back to the national grid. However, she noted that such plans had not been ruled out entirely, and confirmed that their development would be reconsidered if it was effective for the Council to do so in the future.

At the end of the discussion, the Committee considered whether a specific recommendation should be made to the Cabinet Member in terms of revisiting the Council's ambition to be net-zero carbon by 2030.

The members expressed their thanks for the report.

RESOLVED

- 1. To accept the report, noting the observations made during the discussion.**
- 2. To recommend to the Cabinet Member for the Environment that there is a need to revisit the Council's ambition to be net zero by 2030 and that consideration should be given to setting a realistic target for reducing carbon emissions.**

6. GRITTING ARRANGEMENTS AND SALT BINS

The report was presented by the Cabinet Member for Highways, Engineering and YGC, along with the Head of Department of Highways, Engineering and YGC and the Dwyfor Area Engineer.

It was noted that it had been three years since the management arrangements for salt bins had been scrutinised, as part of the Winter Support Service. The members were reminded that the winter maintenance period ran from 1 October to 30 April annually, confirming that the services included the gritting of first and second priority routes as well as the provision of salt bins. It was highlighted that there was flexibility with this timetable as it was possible to continue gritting later in the year, and the service's arrangements were reviewed following the winter period to see if there were lessons to be learned and to respond to any challenges that had emerged over the winter.

They updated the Members that the Service had adopted a Gritting Vehicle Monitoring System since November 2024 to record the routes. It was explained that this technology was key to ensuring that all roads on the circuits were gritted and for ensuring the safety of the drivers of the gritters as they could be tracked live and the service could see if any vehicle had gotten into difficulties. They emphasised that the workforce was doubled for those periods where snow was forecast because the work was carried out in the dark and in potentially dangerous circumstances. It was reported that positive feedback had been received from staff about this technology and it was hoped that similar technology could be used to support the Council's other areas of work.

It was elaborated that the first priority when planning the circuits was given to those routes where the roads were used by school buses. It was added that a number of factors were taken into account when designating roads as first priority for gritting, such as high traffic, providing at least one access to the emergency response centres, emergency admissions, or roads that were class 2 or 3 county roads with approximately one access to towns and villages.

It was explained that the Council, as the Highways Authority, was responsible for providing a winter service on all public highways adopted by the County. It was elaborated that the Council also treated the County's trunk roads on behalf of the North and Mid Wales Trunk Road Agency. As well as the part of the A55 managed by UK Highways A55 Ltd.

It was reported that all salt bins in the county had now been numbered and that work was underway to ensure that their location was visible on Map Gwynedd on the Council's website, so that residents and Community Councils could report the number and location of a particular salt bin if a problem arose.

It was confirmed that the Council received a winter weather forecast provision and advisory services from MetDesk. It was elaborated that this service ran for 24 hours a day from 1 October to 20 April. It was confirmed that this allowed all area offices to act on the latest information and respond to the winter weather in a timely manner through work planning.

Data was provided on the number of tonnes of salt being sorted at stores in Caernarfon, Chwilog, Dolgellau, Bala, Blaenau Ffestiniog and Llandygai. It was noted that the total tonnage available depended on the weather forecast for the season. The budget for winter maintenance was reported to be around 17.5% of the Council's road maintenance budget, and they confirmed that this equated to £1,127,770. The officers pointed out that the cost of winter maintenance could be much higher than the amount committed in the budget if the weather varied from what had been forecast over the winter period, and they noted that officers respond to this as required.

A video of the service's work was shared, and they stated that it would be shared with the public on the Council's social media very soon.

During the debate, the following observations were made by the Members:-

In response to an enquiry whether the Department intended to allow farmers to grit rural roads to save money for the Council, the Head of Department confirmed that this was being considered. He elaborated that discussions had taken place with Ceredigion Council that had a similar arrangement, and their system appeared to be working. However, he emphasised that no such arrangements were currently in place in Gwynedd and that detailed considerations were being made to ensure that it was a safe arrangement and that effective risk assessments were being developed.

In response to an enquiry for further information on including salt bins on the Map Gwynedd provision, the Head of Department confirmed that this information was only available internally at present. He explained that the location of each bin was being registered and that the Department was working with the Council's Information Technology officers so that the information appeared on Map Gwynedd on the Council's website. He explained that the hope was that if residents were unable to locate their nearest salt bin, or reported a problem with any bin, they could specify the exact location using the map as they reported the problem. It was acknowledged that there was no timetable for when the information would be available to the public but they wished for it to be ready as soon as possible.

The department was congratulated for their work in ensuring that first and second priority routes were gritted on time over the past winter, noting that there had been no need for Members to contact the Department to request this service, as it had already been completed. In response, it was confirmed that this resulted from the fact that smaller gritter trucks were used for second priority routes when temperatures are low for a period of 3 days, ensuring that this was done during the day rather than at night. It was explained that this allowed the other routes to carry on as usual and there was less chance that other roads would be left without being gritted.

In response to an enquiry about who had responsibility for salt bins, the Head of Department confirmed that they were the Council's assets. He noted that this meant that the Council was responsible for filling the bins and for the general maintenance. It was highlighted that some of the members had reported that salt bins in their areas had broken and the Head of Department stated that the Council should be contacted to arrange for them to be removed and have a replacement bin. He indicated that salt bins were inspected as part of the routine road inspections programme and were further inspected at the beginning of winter to ensure they were of adequate quality and were full.

In response to enquiries about how to get a new salt bin, the Head of Department explained that this would be agreed with the Community Council. It was noted that the winter maintenance service would first look at relocating an existing salt bin rather than adding a new bin. It was reported that the number of salt bins around the county were at their highest and that it was difficult to approve any application for a new or additional bin without support from the Community Councils. He also mentioned that Community Councils were able to make the decision to buy a new salt bin, but he explained that Cyngor Gwynedd held the responsibility for replenishing the salt. He stressed that these applications would be considered on a case-by-case basis taking into account:

- Was the location on a current first priority or second priority gritting route?
- Would the gritter be able to navigate the road if the need arose?
- Is there another salt bin nearby – if so, that bin will be used
- Altitude of the location – elevated or coastal land
- Is the road steep or uneven?
- Do water problems exist there?

The Members noted that there was uncertainty among community councils about salt bin arrangements. In response, the Head of Department confirmed that the Area Engineers would be writing to all Community Councils explaining the processes ahead of the winter period, and would provide copies of that letter to the Elected Members for information. He elaborated that this letter would specify the cost of ordering a new salt bin, which was in the region of £300-£350.

In response to an enquiry on whether car parks and school grounds were gritted to ensure schools remained open during wintry weather, the Dwyfor Area Engineer explained that this was not generally the case in the county at present. However, he clarified that this could be done on the Ysgol Eifionydd site. Other members cited examples relating to schools in their wards. In response, it was noted that these arrangements would be assessed and reviewed to see if a similar arrangement can be reached. It was elaborated that additional work was being carried out as part of the service to ensure that footpaths by schools and hospitals were gritted in a timely manner.

The members expressed their thanks for the report.

RESOLVED

- 1. To accept the report, noting the observations made during the discussion.**
- 2. To support the Highways, Engineering and YGC Department's proposal to send a letter to Community and Town Councils to confirm salt bin arrangements and to send a copy to County Councillors.**
- 3. To recommend to the Highways, Engineering and YGC Department that safe access to school grounds in inclement weather should be considered as a part of the review of the gritting routes.**

7. COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD PROGRAMME 2025/26

The report was presented by the Scrutiny Advisor.

She reminded the committee that all Council members, co-opted members, Cabinet Members, Heads of Department and the public had been invited to suggest potential items for scrutiny during the year 2025/26.

The members were updated that the potential items for scrutiny that had been received following this invitation had been discussed during an informal meeting of this Committee on 10 July 2025. She highlighted that some of these items had been suggested at the Chair and Vice-Chair's liaison meetings with the relevant Heads of Department and Cabinet Members, items that required follow-up following recent scrutiny as well as some annual items. She noted that two items had been suggested by Council members.

She explained that every effort had been made to prioritise a maximum of three items for each meeting when drawing up the draft forward programme for 2025/26, to ensure that there was sufficient time to scrutinise all matters and to add value. However, she acknowledged that this had not been possible on all occasions as four items had been scheduled for one meeting. The Members were asked to ensure their availability to be present for all items. It was confirmed that the item 'New Local Development Plan - Preferred Strategy' had been identified as a reserve item.

It was reported that this Committee had a role to scrutinise the work of the Gwynedd and Anglesey Public Services Board. It was noted that two items had been scheduled to be scrutinised, namely:

- Annual Report 2024/25 – Gwynedd and Anglesey Public Services Board (18 September 2025)
- Gwynedd and Anglesey Public Services Board Progress Report (19 March 2026)

It was noted that it was not possible to present the 2024/25 Annual Report to this meeting as scheduled as it would not be presented to the Board until December 2025. It was explained that if one of the items that had been scheduled for the January 2026 meeting were to slip, the Progress Report could be scrutinised at that time rather than in the March 2026 meeting which would free up more time to scrutinise the other items during the March 2026 meeting.

She drew attention to the Committee's draft work programme which had been included as part of the documentation for the meeting. She emphasised that it was a live programme that would be reviewed continually to ensure that the right issues were being addressed.

RESOLVED

To adopt the Communities Scrutiny Committee's work programme for 2025/26.

The meeting commenced at 10:45am and concluded at 12:40pm

CHAIR