

NAME OF SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	Communities Scrutiny Committee
DATE OF MEETING	10 March 2022
TITLE	Update - Parking Review
AUTHOR	Dafydd Wyn Williams, Head of Environment Department
CABINET MEMBER	Councillor Gareth W Griffith
PURPOSE	To update the Committee on the progress to date in terms of managing vehicles and powers in relation to motorists who park illegally.

1. BACKGROUND

1.1. Councillors who were part of the Parking Task Group:

Councillors: Angela Russell; Annwen Hughes; Kevin Morris Jones; Gethin Glyn Williams

Officers supporting the Task Group: Dafydd Williams (Head of Environment Department); Ceri Hughes Thomas (Parking and Street Works Manager); Gwenan Huws Tomos (Parking Team Leader).

1.2 The group was established in July 2019 to undertake a comprehensive review of the current operational parking strategy and consider its suitability and relevance to the Council's requirements and the requirements of Communities today.

1.3 Gwynedd Council's parking policies and procedures had remained more or less the same since 2015, therefore advantage was taken of the opportunity to recommend improvements that are in keeping with the situation of the local economy and to maximise the use of software which is now available. Reviewing the arrangements was also inevitable in terms of financial sustainability in relation to the authority's budgets to ensure that our practical management arrangements are effective and efficient.

1.4 A comprehensive report was submitted to the Communities Scrutiny Committee in December 2020 proposing appropriate recommendations for resolving most of the matters. Subsequently to this, a final report was presented before the Cabinet Members in February 2021. The Council Members approved the recommendations below;

- Adopt a new Parking Fees Structure
- Review the parking proposal over the Christmas period
- No changes to the Blue Badge Scheme
- No changes to the Resident Parking Scheme
- Strengthen the Parking Enforcement Team

1.5 The Author wishes to confirm that the recommendations deriving from the review have been implemented.

1.6 It was also recognised that a number of changes had taken place during the previous few years, which had a considerable impact on our communities in the context of parking. It was identified that the main changes were more electric vehicles, a reduction in cash use, events held in the County, increase in the use of houses and holiday homes for holiday accommodation and an increase in the use of motorhomes. Officers from the Department have been busy looking into these subjects.

2. UPDATE

- 2.1 The Author wished to update the reader on two relevant subjects, which were motorhomes and the powers of towing vehicles away.

MOTORHOMES

- 2.2. In Gwynedd, concerns have risen in a number of communities across the County, as an increasing number of motorhome owners decided to stay in locations and on 'public' land, where there was no lawful right to sleep in a vehicle overnight. This was a historical pattern but is one that had become more evident since the pandemic with travelling abroad restrictions encouraging this.

- 2.3 In order to understand the real situation in Gwynedd, it was agreed that it would be useful to conduct research work and this work included engaging with the operators of caravan sites in Gwynedd, the motorhome sector as well as communities across the County. The research work was completed last year and it included evidence that highlighted the need for measures to manage the motorhome sector in the County better. The research work was reported to the Cabinet in November 2021, and the Cabinet resolved:

- i. To authorise the Head of Environment Department, in consultation with the Head of Economy and Community to hold a pilot project to use up to six of the Council's parking sites (or part of the sites) within the Gwynedd Planning Authority Area, to provide facilities for motor homes to stay overnight, including the designation of the locations, but subject to securing capital funding and necessary permissions.
- ii. That a further report on the outcomes of the pilot were submitted to the Cabinet within three years.
- iii. Give consideration to, and take enforcement measures to accompany the above.
- iv. Present the research to the Welsh Government and ask them to review the Caravans and Development Control Act 1960.

- 2.4 A cross-departmental Motorhome Project Board has been established by now in order to implement the Cabinet's decision, with the work undertaken to identify suitable sites for the pilot project, designing the sites in terms of their layouts and any associated services, and submit applications for planning permission. Consideration will also need to be given to site management and compliance. The current timetable (dependent on the planning permission) is for the first pilot to be operational before the end of March 2023. The objective is that any additional enforcement measures will accompany the provision of the sites for the facilities for motorhomes to stay overnight.

- 2.5 The Council continues to collaborate with the National Park in terms of matters relating to the motorhome sector generally, with preparations such as renewing signage and communication plans in the pipeline for the spring term.

POWERS OF TOWING VEHICLES

Overview of the problem

- 2.6 Motorists who park illegally and inconsiderately by creating dangers to other users are a general problem throughout Gwynedd and beyond.
- 2.7 Unfortunately, the side effect of Covid-19 has maximised parking problems across the County, due to a significant increase in the number of visitors and the lack of parking locations.

- 2.8 Huge problems were experienced as hundreds of motorists travelled in the direction of Pen y Pass with the intention to roam the mountains, and decided to park on the highway after realising that the car park was full.
- 2.9 Pen y Pass is being governed by parking restrictions in the form of a clearway. As you know, the road in question is narrow with a daily, heavy traffic flow, including cyclists and a local bus service that uses the road often. Vehicles were parking illegally and were creating a significant risk for pedestrians too as they had to walk along the highway.

Way Forward

- 2.10 Parking illegally is very problematic, and despite the efforts of the Council's Parking Enforcement Officers to fine motorists, this effort unfortunately did not dispose of the dangers straight away.
- 2.11 Some of the motorists even welcomed the fine and believed that £35 was reasonable for a day out in such a beautiful location. Of course, this is totally unacceptable.
- 2.12 The Council had collaborated closely with North Wales Police and Snowdonia National Park in order to take suitable steps to tackle the problem in Pen y Pass and along the A4086 by sharing resources to closely monitor and use the powers of the Police to tow vehicles away. Through strong publicity, regular monitoring and a no-nonsense approach, the problem was brought under control.
- 2.13 Strong publicity and regular monitoring have proven to be successful methods but even though the situation had improved significantly, it was premature to think that the problem had completely disappeared.
- 2.14 The willingness of North Wales Police to assist the Council with towing vehicles away had been invaluable, despite this, it became clear that it wasn't reasonably practical for these arrangements to continue in the long term due to the lack of Police Officers on weekends and the need to deal with other priorities.
- 2.15 Therefore, it was timely for the Council to adopt their own appropriate powers in order to deal with vehicles that park illegally and cause obstructions or dangers for other highway users, without having to depend on the emergency services' resources. These powers were approved in September 2021.

Additional Measures

- 2.16 Adopting the powers was certainly a sensible step. Despite this, the Author would like to emphasise that only under extreme circumstances, where there's a direct risk or danger to members of the public, are these powers to be used.
- 2.17 It is proposed to install additional signs in the more problematic locations to highlight the message '*Parking is Prohibited - Towing zone*', making it entirely clear for motorists. Additionally, we will ensure that there is plenty of publicity on the matter.
- 2.18 We are hopeful that the powers will be put to little or no use. Should the need arise, the costs associated with collecting and keeping the vehicle in a safe compound by Gwalia company will be transferred to the owners.