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**COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE, 13 JULY 2023**

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**Present:**

**COUNCILLORS:**

Stephen Churchman, Glyn Daniels, Elwyn Edwards, Delyth Lloyd Griffiths, Annwen Hughes, Elin Hywel, Gwilym Jones, Edgar Owen, Llio Elenid Owen, Arwyn Herald Roberts, Beca Roberts, Peter Thomas, Rhys Tudur and Gruffydd Williams.

**Officers in attendance:**

Geraint Owen (Corporate Director), Bethan Adams (Scrutiny Advisor), Rhodri Jones (Democracy Services Officer) and Ellie Evans (Democracy Services Administrative Assistant)

**Present for item 7:**

Councillor Nia Jeffreys (Deputy Council Leader) and Sandra Lynne Thomas (Gwynedd and Anglesey Public Services Board Programme Manager).

**Present for item 8:**

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. ELECTION OF CHAIR**

**To elect Councillor Elin Hywel as Chair of the Communities Scrutiny Committee for 2023/2024.**

**2. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR**

**To elect Councillor Annwen Hughes as Vice-chair of the Communities Scrutiny Committee for 2023/2024.**

**3. APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Councillors Kim Jones, Linda Morgan, and Rob Triggs.

**4. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST**

No declarations of personal interest were received.

**5. URGENT ITEMS**

None to note.

**6. MINUTES**

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee held on 9 March 2023 as a true record.

## **7. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE GWYNEDD AND ANGLESEY PUBLIC SERVICES BOARD 2022-23**

The report was submitted by the Deputy Council Leader and the Gwynedd and Anglesey Public Services Board Programme Manager. Attention was drawn briefly to the following principal points:

It was explained that this report had been presented to the Committee as Gwynedd and Anglesey Scrutiny Committees had a duty to monitor progress efforts of the Board when implementing the Well-being plan, in accordance with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

It was explained that 2022-2023 was the last year of the well-being plan adopted in 2018. It was noted that the Board had held thorough consultations by consulting with groups of stake-holders in order to develop a Well-being Plan for 2023-2028. It was noted that this plan would be launched at the Eisteddfod held in Boduan in August 2023.

It was noted that the new well-being plan reflected the lessons learnt by the Board when implementing the latest Well-being Plan in order to incorporate new procedures to become more successful.

It was reminded that members of the Board were specialists in their individual fields and were collaborating with stake-holders in order to ensure they can add worth to the objectives of the Board within the Well-being Plan. Some examples were shared where this arrangement had been successful such as the Active Travel Charter, guiding Welsh Government Members around areas of Gwynedd and Anglesey in order to emphasise the importance of social enterprises within communities and to coordinate changes to the health and care field.

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

In response to an observation on ensuring that residents were aware of the meaning of carbon zero net and how to reach it, the Gwynedd and Anglesey Public Services Board Programme Manager confirmed that workshops were currently being held in order to find the best way of introducing this Objective.

In response to a question from a member regarding the Welsh Language, the Gwynedd and Anglesey Public Services Board Programme Manager assured that the Welsh language was a permanent priority for the Board and that it would not be changed every 5 years as the Well-being Objectives of the Board and it was noted that the Sub-group had been permanently formed to discuss language matters. It was elaborated that the Welsh Language Commissioner met with the Chair of the Board on a quarterly basis and was happy with their work. It was emphasised that the wording of the final plan had been amended in order to highlight the importance of the language to the Board.

The member noted that he acknowledged the work completed by the Board in terms of the Welsh Language but that he was of the opinion that not including a specific Well-being Objective in the new Well-being Plan was a mistake. It was elaborated that if a specific Well-being Objective was included then it would have made a strong statement that the Language was at the centre of the Board's work and above all else.

It was noted that the minutes of the Board's recent meetings had not been uploaded on their website and, therefore, it was proposed to defer the discussion until the information had been shared publicly in order to ensure that the matter was scrutinised fully with all relevant information to hand. The proposal was seconded.

- In response to this proposal, the Gwynedd and Anglesey Public Services Board Programme Manager explained that this was an administrative problem and that work was being undertaken to ensure that the problems with the website were resolved. It was elaborated that a regional website was being developed.
- The Corporate Director noted that the minutes of the Board meetings would not usually be included as part of the annual review. It was recognised however that these minutes should be available on the website for anyone to read if they wished to do so.

A vote was taken on the proposal to defer the discussion. The proposal fell and the discussion continued.

In response to an enquiry on the decision of the Board to shift the focus from climate change to carbon Zero net, the Gwynedd and Anglesey Public Services Board Programme Manager confirmed that this change in terminology had not affected the important work of the Board to help with flood prevention. It was also explained that this change had been made in order to allow more partnerships to have an input on this work. It was noted that the Board was collaborating with the Climate Change and Nature Board on these matters.

Gratitude was expressed for the report.

**RESOLVED:**

- 1. To accept the report, noting the observations made during the discussion.**
- 2. The Gwynedd and Anglesey Public Services Board Programme Manager to circulate the minutes of recent Board meetings to Committee members as soon as possible.**

**8. UPDATE - DEVELOPMENTS IN THE PUBLIC TRANSPORT SECTOR**

The report was presented by the Cabinet Member for the Environment, the Head of Environment and the Integrated Transport and Road Safety Manager. Attention was drawn briefly to the following principal points:

It was explained that the public transport field was facing a challenging period following Covid-19. It was noted that people had moved from using public transport during the period of the Pandemic and that the figures had not increased to the level seen before Covid-19. It was explained that a financial package had been provided by the Government in order to facilitate the costs of maintaining public transport during this period but that the emergency plan had terminated. It was noted that confirmation had been confirmed that the Government, through the Bus Transition Fund would provide financial support until April 2024.

It was reported that a change in technology meant that the Council was trying to use electric buses. It was noted that the first electric buses in Gwynedd would be charged in Porthmadog. It was explained that this was a big change for bus companies and that significant risks were associated with these changes.

It was recognised that personal cars were going to be mandatory in some rural areas although it was hoped that this reliance on personal cars would be reduced in the future. Despite this, it was reported that there was an increase of over 30% in the use of the SHERPA around Yr Wyddfa area over the past year.

It was reminded that a number of organisations were responsible for the public transport sector jointly with the Council namely, North Wales Transport Commission and the North Wales Corporate Joint Committee.

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

In response to an enquiry on the electric buses charging points in Porthmadog, the Head of Environment confirmed that it was hoped for the charging points to be installed by August, with the services available to the public by September depending on a tender. Despite this, it was noted that anti-social behaviour on buses after 6pm was a cause for concern for companies and discussions were held with the police to resolve the matter. It was explained that operators were still being convinced to continue with services but that it was a challenge due to the price of running services.

A member noted that he welcomed the collaboration with Transport for Wales noting the importance of local services connecting to the strategic services. They made reference to a service in their ward that did not travel via Dolan, although it was believed it should as the number of potential passengers would increase the number of service users.

In response to an enquiry on finance, the Head of Environment confirmed that the Council was fortunate to receive annual support from Transport for Wales. Despite this, it was emphasised that there was no other body that could help the Council fund these services if the support would come to an end. It was explained that there would be a need to find revenue funding to fund the cost if this situation would arise.

It was explained that the electric buses had been purchased by Welsh Government and that their ownership would move to Cyngor Gwynedd. It was explained that the process of obtaining licences and rights for owning a bus licence was difficult, complicated and very expensive and this would not be beneficial for the Council to operate at present. It was confirmed that the buses had been guaranteed and, therefore, unlikely to incur additional costs for the Council and that continuous monitoring work was in place to ensure that the buses are kept to the best standard possible.

In reply to an enquiry, the Environment Manager confirmed that the department's main challenge with this field was raising the confidence of Gwynedd residents to use the services. An example was shared where one of the Blaenau Ffestiniog area services had to stop, which had forced residents to use personal vehicles. It was recognised that the reliance on personal vehicles would not stop unless Gwynedd residents were confident that the services in place were going to continue and were convenient for them.

A member referred to matters that had been raised in his ward recently and noted that there was a need to ensure provision in the rural areas. In response, the Head of Environment noted that providing services in the rural areas were more costly with a low number of users meaning a higher cost per head.

A member noted the importance of receiving input from users and those who did not use the services when revising/re-structuring services.

In response to a query on not using buses that run on fossil fuels, the Head of Environment explained that the department was researching hydrogen buses as well as electric ones.

In response to an observation from a member, the Integrated Transport and Road Safety Manager noted that services in the Arfon area had been tendered and it was intended to tender services in the Meirionnydd area in the next two months.

A member questioned how the use of electric buses could be expanded to rural areas without the Council having to subsidise them. In response, the Head of Environment noted that it was expected that the technology would improve and the purchase price would reduce.

In response to a question from a member in relation to explaining the rural situation to Welsh Government so they had a better understanding, the Cabinet Member for the Environment noted that he was conveying the challenges and the situation in discussions and that he had recently represented the Council at a conference in London discussing transport.

The idea of trying to include more popular tourism areas in the service's routes to give everyone an opportunity to visit the sites was welcomed.

A member questioned when it would be timely for the Committee to receive an update. In response, the Head of Environment noted that it would be timely after March 2024. He elaborated that discussions were held on the services with specific members in the meantime. A member noted that it would be useful to receive information on the use of electric buses after establishing the new service as part of the update.

Gratitude was expressed for the report.

## **RESOLVED**

**To accept the report, noting the observations made during the discussion.**

## **9. COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD PROGRAMME 2023/24**

The report was presented by the Scrutiny Advisor noting the following main points:

It was noted that a draft forward programme had been drawn-up at the committee's annual workshop on 10 May 2023. It was elaborated that members of the Committee had been asked to respond to an on-line question in terms of their five main priorities from the list of possible items provided before the workshop. Attention was drawn to the five main priorities that became evident from the responses to the question, namely:

- Developments in the Public Transport field
- Grass Cutting and Land Maintenance
- Waste Collection and Recycling Services
- Public Protection Service
- Public Toilets

It was noted that the Members had requested to ensure that no more than 3 items were to be discussed at every Committee meeting in order to ensure that every item that is scrutinised received due attention. Despite this, it was noted that this was not always possible.

It was explained that the committee's forward programme was a live document, that was reviewed regularly throughout the year in order to ensure that the correct matters received timely attention.

It was explained that a request had been received from the Highways, Engineering and YGC Department (Gwynedd Consultancy) following the workshop to move an item. It was noted that the Highways Manual had been considered and approved by the Cabinet on 11 July 2023 and, therefore, it would not be timely to scrutinise it at this meeting. The Head of Department and Cabinet Member had suggested it would be timely to scrutinise it at the meeting on 22 February 2024, moving the Public Toilets item to the 5 October 2023 meeting. This meant that two meetings during the year would include 4 items to scrutinise.

A date was considered to receive a further update on the developments in the public transport field. It was explained it would be possible for the Chair and Vice-chair of the Committee to discuss the most suitable time for the item to return to committee at their contact meetings with the Head and Cabinet Member.

## **RESOLVED**

**To adopt the Committee's work programme for 2023/24, noting the following amendments:**

- **Move the Public Toilets item from the 22.02.2024 meeting to the 05.10.2023 meeting**
- **Add the Highways Maintenance Manual to the 22.02.2024 meeting**
- **Schedule an update on Developments in Public Transport as appropriate.**

The meeting commenced at 10.30 and concluded at 13:05.

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CHAIR