

COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE. 06 NOVEMBER 2025

Present:

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

Beca Brown, Stephen Churchman, Wendy Cleaver, Dafydd Owen Davies, Elwyn Edwards, Jina Gwyrfai, Berwyn Parry Jones, Linda Morgan, Edgar Wyn Owen, Arwyn Herald Roberts, Beca Roberts, Elfed Powell Roberts, Peter Thomas, Elfed Williams and Gruffydd Williams.

Officers in attendance:

Bethan Adams (Scrutiny Advisor) and Rhodri Jones (Democracy Services Officer).

Present for Item 5:

Councillor June Jones (Cabinet Member for Highways, Engineering and YGC), Steffan Jones (Head of Highways, Engineering and YGC Department), Meirion Williams (Assistant Head of Department) and Nia Wyn Vaughan (Senior Executive Officer).

Present for Item 6:

Councillor Craig ab Iago (Cabinet Member for Environment), Dafydd Wyn Williams (Head of Environment), Gerwyn Jones (Assistant Head, Transport), Roland Thomas (Assistant Head of Waste and Recycling) and Gareth Jones (Assistant Head of Planning).

1. APOLOGIES

Councillor Elin Hywel, Former Chair of this Committee was thanked for her valuable contribution to the Committee's work over the past two years.

Councillors Dafydd Davies and Wendy Cleaver were welcomed to their first meeting.

An apology was received from Councillor Robert Glyn Daniels

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 18 September 2025, as a true record.

5. PERFORMANCE REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR HIGHWAYS, ENGINEERING AND YGC

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

All were reminded that the Department is responsible for three of the Council's 2023-28 Plan schemes and that this report was an update on their development up to the end of September 2025.

It was confirmed that the Department has received support from the Welsh Government Play Opportunities grant to improve the quality and accessibility of playgrounds. It was explained that this development was a major development in the project 'Extending play and socialising opportunities for the County's children and young people' within the Council's Plan. It was elaborated that effective collaboration had been underway with Bangor City Council as the process of handing over the Maes Tryfan playground to them continued.

An update on the 'Action on flood risks' project was provided noting that the Local Flood Strategy had been adopted and was operational.

It was reported that a cleaning circuit optimisation system had been introduced in the Arfon area as part of the 'Clean and Tidy Communities' project. It was explained that this system was part of a pilot scheme in the Arfon area and noted that it was hoped that the arrangements will be extended to Pwllheli and Porthmadog in spring 2026. It was elaborated that the purpose of the system was to reduce the service current overspend by ensuring that an effective working order is implemented.

Attention was drawn to 29 performance measures that are operational within the Department, such as 'Corporate/departmental measures', 'Highway maintenance', 'Street lighting', 'Street Scene', 'Public Toilets' and 'Gwynedd Consultancy' and there was pride that 62.1% of these measures were in green. It was explained that this was confirmation of the service's positive work and the effective performance of services. However, it was noted that 37.9% of the measures were recorded in amber, ensuring that these measures received further attention as part of the performance challenge process. Pride was expressed that no measure had been recorded in red.

Reference was made to the Department's 2025-26 Savings schemes, which amounted to £533,500. It was confirmed that the department was on track to deliver £212,500 of these Savings schemes, recognising that there was a possibility that £321,000 will not be realised. It was also highlighted that some budgets were affected by the weather as an additional budget needs to be secured to address any unpredictable severe weather.

It was updated that the numbers of the workforce that had undertaken mandatory training had increased, and that 77.4% of staff had completed the core 'Abuse' training, 72.4% had completed the 'Safeguarding' title, and pride was expressed that over 67% of the department's staff had completed all mandatory training titles. It was acknowledged that there was room for improvement to increase these numbers in the future, but challenges had emerged as there are not many frontline staff members with access to the modules as they do not have electronic equipment. However, it was confirmed that the Department was working with the Information Technology service to come to employment centres to support staff members to complete the training during the working day.

It was recognised that the Department's staff sickness numbers were high, with the average sick days per person (Full Time Equivalent) being 4.62 days. It was detailed that several staff members are off work in the long term but that the actual sickness situation was now improving, with the hope that this will continue and there will be an improvement when the department submits a similar performance challenge report in 2026.

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

Fleet Management

In response to an enquiry on the number of green vehicles and the increase in fuel costs, the Head of Department confirmed that 88 electric vehicles and vans are part of the fleet, with arrangements in place to introduce more vehicles as the need arises. It was acknowledged that the confidence of the workforce to use electric cars has been low as they are not used to charging cars. It was reported that electric vehicle technology was continuously evolving but there was currently no effective support for the purchase and effective charging of heavy electric vehicles. Because of this, it was confirmed that fuel costs can increase from time to time if the need arises for the use of more heavy vehicles, but it was stressed that the average figure for fuel charges decreases annually. It had been ensured that future reports from the Department to this Committee will show data over a period of years for Members to compare developments in this area.

In response to an enquiry as to whether not renewing fuel vehicles for electric ones would result in financial savings for the Council, the Head of Department confirmed that not renewing the fleet was not a consideration at this time as a depreciation plan was underway and options for the future best course of action were in place. It was elaborated that it would not be possible to buy vehicles with high carbon emissions in the near future and therefore the Council must investigate the best approaches to developing the fleet – be it hydrogen, electric or otherwise.

Lighting Services

In response to an enquiry about the observed increase in energy use of street lamps, the Head of Department explained that this derived from the fact that the Department had adopted more street lights in recent years. It was elaborated that there are around 18,000 street lights across the County and that this had increased recently following the development of the Caernarfon bypass as well as the new Dyfi bridge near Machynlleth, and the need to illuminate those roads.

Public Toilets

A request was made to receive more information about the accessibility of the public toilets to demonstrate to the public that the quality of the service was improving. In response, the Head of Department thanked the members for the comments stating that this information would be developed by the time the matter is next scrutinised by this Committee.

Sickness Rates

In response to an enquiry as to whether staff members' illness was due to workload, stress or another source, with a further enquiry on what measures are in place to ensure staff well-being, the Head of Department confirmed that they are working closely with the Human Resources service. It was explained that return-to-work panels will be held to ensure the health of staff members and receive guidance on how best to support staff on their return. It was emphasised that the levels of illness in the workforce were comparable to those of other local authorities nationally.

Water and Environment

In response to comments that a delay in the work of partners working with the Council to address flood prevention, was leading to a further delay in the Council's arrangements, the Head of Department confirmed that regular discussions were taking place with all partners. However, it was noted that the responsibilities of Natural Resources Wales and Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water were significant and that there was a permanent risk of delays to arrangements and strategies. The Assistant Head of the Department gave an assurance that this risk of delay was one that was on the Department's official risk register.

Measures

Several of the Department's performance challenge measures were considered to be amber, noting that it would be useful for Members of this scrutiny Committee to receive information on the actions and a realistic timetable to improve performance. It also

considered how the Department would proceed to measure whether the performance measures report as red, amber or green. In response to the comments, the Head of Department confirmed that consideration would be given to developing a method of scoring performance measures to receive confirmation if they report in red, amber or green. However, it was noted that the decisions on how measures currently report are based on evidence and discussions with officers. It was also noted that consideration will be given to adding a programme of work to improve the performance in the report in the future.

It was pointed out that approximately one-third of all the Department's performance challenge measures reported amber, asking whether this was acceptable and whether the Department would be able to highlight and demonstrate in future submissions to this Committee. In response to the comments, it was noted that they would look at how trends in the report could be highlighted and illustrated in the future. The Head of Department acknowledged that there was room for improvement. However, it was noted that managers and officers can be strict in reporting on measurements stating that the actual situation was better than what was reported. An example of this was shared where the numbers of highway maintenance defects were reporting amber, due to the time to resolve the defects. It had been reported that defects are resolved very quickly but that the accompanying background administrative work slowed down the process resulting in an amber colour when reporting on the measures.

Financial Savings Schemes

Concern was expressed that the Department was failing to realise around 40% of their financial savings plans this year, and it was asked how the Department was coping with its overall full budget. In response to the comments, the Head of Department noted that every effort was being made to ensure that the financial savings targets are addressed. It was confirmed that if the Department fails to address them, alternative future savings plans will need to be submitted for delivery in the next financial year. It was explained that some unforeseeable situations affect the department's budget, such as additional funding for the winter maintenance service. It was emphasised that every effort was being made to accommodate the savings plans, but it was also noted that thorough consideration was being given to ensure that quality services were delivered to the residents of Gwynedd.

Condition of Roads

It was noted that 13.1% of the County's class C roads were rated red which means that their condition is poor, and that proposed maintenance works would likely be required soon. In response to the comment, the Head of Department confirmed that all Class A-C roads are scanned for their condition, but this cannot be done for unclassified roads. It was reported that the Council had received a grant of £8,000,000 to invest in the condition of roads over the next two years. However, it was noted that statistics may remain similar the next time the Department reports to this Committee, as there are several tasks that need to be completed before addressing new defects that are identified by the scanner. It was noted that the Department was working with other Local Authorities to compare road conditions and work together on county boundary roads. The Head of Department elaborated that work was being carried out to ascertain whether artificial intelligence software could be used to collect data on the condition of unclassified roads in the County, but it was trusted that their condition was similar to that reported for Class C. The Department was thanked for keeping the County's roads to a high standard.

In response to a comment that there was a delay in resolving road defects, before the road's white lines were repainted, the Head of Department confirmed that this was due to pressure on the Department's budgets. It was elaborated that the white line laying works for the Council were carried out by an external company and that pressure was placed on them to act in a timely manner and the quality of that work was assessed by the Department. It was reported that the Council was investigating the possibility of carrying out this work in-house, recognising that it would be a significant investment in machinery, staff and

resources. It was confirmed that the Department will submit a financial bid to address this issue as it would also be beneficial to other Council departments.

It was pointed out that statistics presented in the Report indicated that there are more critical road defects in the Dwyfor area than in the Meirionnydd and Arfon areas in general. In response to an enquiry as to why this was the case and if the Department manages to resolve it within their target time of two hours, the Head of Department acknowledged that responding to critical road defects in Gwynedd was a challenge. However, it was confirmed that the Department was able to access and secure the site while carrying out initial work. It was explained that in some cases officers need to come back to complete follow-up work.

The Department was thanked for ensuring that any trees that fall across roads are cleared as quickly as possible. The Department was asked to investigate methods of being able to see which trees are likely to fall so as to ensure public safety.

Ardal Ni Tidying-up Team

In response to an enquiry which indicated that the Tidying-up Team was delivering work more slowly than the target 7-day schedule, the Assistant Head of Department stated that this was due to staffing challenges in recent months. It was confirmed that these issues have now been resolved as staff turnover has stabilised and sickness numbers have decreased indicating that the service will return to the expected standard.

In response to a further query as to whether the number of requests to the Tidying-up Team had recently decreased, the Assistant Head of Department stressed that this was not the situation. It was explained that the method of recording work applications has recently changed so that the same work is not entered more than once. An assurance was given that the Team was just as busy as they have been, but the numbers of requests are less as they are not repeated.

The members expressed their thanks for the report.

RESOLVED

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

6. PERFORMANCE REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

The report was presented by the Cabinet Member for the Environment, the Head of the Environment Department and the Assistant Heads of the Environment Department.

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

Waste and Recycling

Concern was expressed that there was a financial risk to the Council if the Department fails to meet the Welsh Government's target of 70% to recycle all waste in the County. In response to the comments, the Assistant Head of Waste and Recycling confirmed that work is being done to commit to meeting this target, with the Council achieving a recycling rate of 66.6% during 2025-26 to date. It was elaborated that the Council was working with ADRA housing association to promote the benefits of recycling, as they were responsible for 7500 dwellings in the County which would have a major impact on the recycling rate. Similarly, it was pointed out that work is being done to ensure that pupils in schools in Gwynedd receive lessons on the importance of recycling and that leaflets were being prepared for distribution to every house in the County as a reminder of how to recycle correctly. It was recognised that there are only 4 members of staff in the team who teach? in relation to recycling, it was ensured that every effort was made to strive to meet the recycling target

and to ensure that any financial penalty for failing to meet the target was as small as possible.

In response to a further query as to whether the Department was confident that Gwynedd could recycle 70% of its waste, the Department's Assistant Head of Waste and Recycling confirmed that they were confident the target would be met. It was detailed that a public engagement exercise on the Waste and Recycling Strategy was currently underway and that the responses received to date had been very encouraging. It was elaborated that there had been over 700 responses to the consultation to date and that 80% of those respondents consider recycling to be an important action and agree with the need to reduce waste. They were reminded that the duty to recycle is a matter for everyone in Gwynedd and huge pressure was being placed within the department to train officers and to ensure that the act of recycling correctly is promoted with the public to ensure that everyone recycles as much as possible. It was explained that many things that can be recycled continue to be included in the residual waste bins and that work is being done to educate the public that these items can be recycled. It was ensured that delivering these actions would ensure that the Council would recycle 70% of its waste in line with the Welsh Government's target.

In response to an enquiry as to whether the Department had been too late in developing the Waste and Recycling Strategy, the Head of Department disagreed stating that the service had only been under the Department's management for 3 years and extended work had been completed to ensure that officers familiarise themselves with the service and develop a future work programme. It was clarified that the Council did not have any waste strategy in the past. It had been ensured that the council recycled around 64-65% annually and this was steadily increasing, and it was confirmed that the work of the service was going in the right direction.

In response to a question if the Department was going to introduce recycling bags in the future, rather than the recycling cart that is currently used, the Department's Assistant Head of Waste and Recycling confirmed that trials had already taken place in parts of Gwynedd. It was detailed that 78% of people who had taken part in the trials said they would be happy to use the recycling bags in the future rather than boxes and 'cartgylchu'. It was noted that this was because they are purpose-built bags with a little weight included at the bottom to ensure they are not blown away by the wind. However, it was acknowledged that the trials had not led to an increase in the number of things being recycled. It was assured that this was an option being considered by the Department to reduce the future costs of the Waste and Recycling service.

The Department was congratulated on improving this service following a challenging period when the service became part of the responsibilities of the Environment Department.

Public Transport

Reference was made to the current review underway for public transport services and it was asked whether it considered transport poverty and the diverse needs of communities. In response to the enquiry, the Assistant Head of Transport explained that the Department had shared information with Council Members at recent meetings of the Area Forums, including sharing a briefing note provided by the Welsh Government on this review. It was explained that the Government was in the process of franchising the public transport system by 2027-28 – which meant that a uniform system would be used nationally instead of reforming the regional arrangements. It was noted that it is not possible to confirm that arrangements will not change from community to community at this time, but it was likely that there would be consistency nationally in public transport ticket prices. It was recognised that it would be considered unlikely that there would be more services in the evenings and at weekends than what was offered on the current routes.

Similarly, it was highlighted that some communities in Gwynedd were at a disadvantage as they do not receive public transport services in the evenings or at weekends. In response to an enquiry if the Department was challenging the decision to withdraw these services from communities, the Department's Assistant Head of Transport confirmed that the Council was promoting the best possible service in line with the funding budget. It was assured that the wish was for these communities to receive all the services they need, recognising that there was nothing the Council could currently do to resolve the situation without an additional budget from the Welsh Government and the support of Transport for Wales. The Cabinet Member elaborated that this frustration was shared at several regional meetings but that it was difficult to find accountability between partners to ensure that additional services were scheduled.

It was pointed out that Ysbyty Gwynedd serves a very wide area and was a service that was currently under pressure. Given the numbers of people using the hospital, it was asked if any considerations are being given so that visitors to the hospital can use a shuttle bus service in the future. In response, the Department's Assistant Head of Transport acknowledged that there were currently no plans to start a shuttle bus service for the hospital, but that it would be possible to investigate the possibility of developing this. However, it was highlighted that several existing services on the public transport framework were already transporting people to hospital, and it was noted that this is not convenient for all visitors and patients at the moment. It was stressed that this balance between offering a valuable service and services that attract many users was key, noting that work needs to be done to ensure a change of mindset to attract more public transport users.

Similarly, the service was asked to investigate methods of advertising the various bus services available at the hospital. It was considered that it would be beneficial for public transport service users to have the opportunity to look at the timetables of the various journeys while they are in hospital, without having to rely on the need to get on-line or leave the building, as there was no assurance that they will be able to do so safely.

Supporting the Workforce

It was highlighted that 214 members of the Department's Staff have not currently undertaken core safeguarding training, and it was asked what work the Department was doing to ensure that all members of staff undertake the training. In response to the enquiry, the Head of Department acknowledged that this shortcoming with the training derived from the fact that frontline staff do not have access to the training as they are not provided with electronic equipment due to their job. However, it was noted that the Department was in discussions with the Corporate Services Department to address this challenge and was also in discussions with the Highways, Engineering and YGC Department to share their good practices of how they have succeeded in ensuring that their frontline staff members managed to complete the core training. It was confirmed that one option currently being discussed was for training sessions to be held at the end of working periods and adapted to ensure they are interactive and fit for purpose.

It was pointed out that several staff members were on long-term absences within the Waste and Recycling service, with assurances that two of those staff members will not return to work. Recognising that sickness rates are higher within the service as staff are unable to work from home if they are suffering from a mild illness, they were asked what support was available for staff to cope with the physical nature of work as they return to work. In response to the comments, the Department's Assistant Head of Waste and Recycling confirmed that every effort was being made to ensure that the support available to staff members while away from work, and when returning to the workplace was adequate. It was added that clear communication was being made with those individuals to understand the nature of the support they need and to ensure effective and healthy return-to-work arrangements.

Active Travel

In response to a question as to whether there are any community or environmental benefits to be seen following the recent development of several active travel routes in the County, the Department's Assistant Head of Transport confirmed that it was difficult to confirm the specific benefits of the scheme. It was elaborated that there were no specific measures to assess these factors at this time, but that work needs to be done to promote the use of the paths within communities so that greater use was made in the future. In response to a further enquiry to see if it would be possible to introduce sensitivity pads on the paths to be able to identify how much use was being made of the paths, the Department's Assistant Head of Transport noted that this had been a method to measure path use in the National Park in the past and it was intended to be used in the future on parts of the Coastal Path. It was confirmed that there were no arrangements to introduce such measures on the active travel routes, but it can be considered to collect statistics of use.

In response to comments that additional active travel routes continue to be developed without a budget to maintain them, the department's Assistant Head of Transport stated that this stems from the fact that the routes are funded by capital funding from the Welsh Government. It was specified that no additional funds are currently being provided for the maintenance of those routes. However, it was considered that it did not make financial sense to refuse any funding as there was a possibility that additional funding will be provided by the Welsh Government in the future for the maintenance of those routes. The challenge of not being able to fund maintenance work on the routes was a national challenge, and it was confirmed that regular discussions were being held to campaign for a budget for their maintenance.

Public Protection – Trading Standards and Licensing

Concern was expressed that only 27% of Trading Standards Regulations inspections have been carried out within the work programme since the start of the current financial year, and it was asked whether the department was confident that these numbers would increase. In response, the department's Assistant Head of Planning confirmed that the service was on track to deliver 100% of their inspections on time. It was explained that the figure of completed inspections was very low but that was due to their seasonal nature, stressing that most inspections are carried out within the second half of the year in to undertake them in the most effective manner for issues such as fireworks storage and animal welfare.

In response to an enquiry about the Public Protection service's workforce to complete Trading Standards Regulations inspections, the Department's Assistant Head of Planning confirmed that staff numbers were increasing. The Committee was reminded that workforce numbers had decreased in recent years, but pride was expressed that the Department had attracted new officers, as well as trainees as part of the Council's Cynllun Yfory scheme who would receive specialist training to carry out inspections. Similarly, it was noted that the Department was researching new technology, such as iPads, which would facilitate the work in the future.

Management of Holiday Accommodation and Second Homes

It was considered that several Gwynedd residents were paying a premium on second homes as they were in the process of renovating a new home before moving into it and selling their previous home, rather than owning two houses. In response to an enquiry as to whether a premium dispensation could be received in this situation, the Department's Assistant Head of Planning confirmed that the management of the premium was shared by several Council departments, and it was noted that the Finance department was the appropriate department to contact in cases similar to those described in this discussion.

Planning Enforcement

In response to comments acknowledging that the numbers of residents breaching planning conditions and being referred to the enforcement service had recently been on the rise, the

Department's Assistant Head of Planning Matters acknowledged that this was very challenging. It was explained that officer numbers within the service had been variable recently and that there had been staff changes. It was confirmed that discussions were underway to ensure that the Department's processes remained in place and were very robust to ensure that all planning conditions set were adhered to.

The members expressed their thanks for the report.

RESOLVED

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

7. COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD PROGRAMME 2025/26

The report was presented by the Scrutiny Advisor.

Members were reminded that the Community Scrutiny Committee's Forward Programme for 2025/26 had been adopted by the Committee at the meeting held on 18 September 2025.

It was explained that an item 'Review of the Climate and Nature Emergency Plan' had originally been scheduled for this meeting (06 November 2025). It was noted that a request to reschedule it to the meeting of 22 January 2026 was received to ensure that further work is completed before it is submitted to this Committee.

It was pointed out that a request had been received from a member of the public for this Committee to scrutinise issues relating to funding issues associated with the Climate and Nature Emergency Plan. It was confirmed that the Chair and Vice-chair had considered this request, and it was considered timely for consideration at the meeting of 22 January 2026 when the Committee would consider a Review of the Plan. It was highlighted that there would be four items to be discussed at that meeting if the Committee adopted the amended Work Programme.

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

It was agreed to extend an invitation to the member of the public to attend the Committee meeting on 22 January 2026. It was confirmed that the member of the public will have up to 3 minutes to elaborate on their request if they wish to do so.

RESOLVED

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

The meeting commenced at 10:30am and concluded at 1:15pm

CHAIR