
COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 10 OCTOBER 2023

Present:

COUNCILLORS: Elin Hywel (Chair)
Annwen Hughes (Vice-chair)

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

Officers in attendance:

Bethan Adams (Scrutiny Adviser), Rhodri Jones (Democracy Services Officers) and Ellie Evans (Democracy Services Administrative Assistant).

Present for Item 5:

Councillor Dafydd Meurig (Cabinet Member for the Environment), Gareth Jones (Assistant Head of Environment) and Rebeca Angharad Jones (Planning Policy Manager).

Present for item 6:

Councillor Dafydd Meurig (Cabinet Member for the Environment), Gareth Jones (Assistant Head of Environment) and Iwan ap Trefor (Traffic and Projects Service Manager).

Present for Item 7:

Councillor Berwyn Parry Jones (Cabinet Member for Highways, Engineering and YGC), Steffan Jones (Head of Highways, Engineering and YGC) and Llifon Arwyn Foulkes (Senior Engineer).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Kim Jones and Elwyn Edwards.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were received.

Councillors Elin Hywel, Stephen Churchman, Gruffydd Williams and Rhys Tudur declared, in relation to Item 5, that they were members of the Planning Policy Working Group. The Working Group had already provided their observations on the Delivery Agreement.

They did not participate in the discussion and did not vote on the item.

3. URGENT ITEMS

None to note.

4. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous committee meeting held on 13 July 2023 as a true record.

5. GWYNEDD LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN DRAFT DELIVERY AGREEMENT

The Vice-chair chaired the discussion on this item.

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

It was explained that a new Local Development Plan was being prepared following a recent review. It was further noted that the development process was technical with several statutory steps to be followed.

It was confirmed that the first step was to adopt the Delivery Agreement. It was explained that the process of developing the Local Development Plan was split into seven steps with an outline timetable and key consultation periods noted for each aspect.

It was noted that the observations of the Communities Scrutiny Committee would be taken into consideration when the Delivery Agreement was submitted to the Cabinet on 10 October 2023. The matter would be submitted to the Planning Policy Working Group in January before returning to Cabinet and submitted to the Full Council in due course.

Consideration was given to the possibility of adding 'consultation' as a risk within Appendix 5 of the Plan (Potential Risks and Response Methods). It was noted that it was evident from the document that consultation was an important part of the delivery agreement but had not been noted as a risk. Namely, the risk of not consulting was sufficient. It was further explained that as it was such an important element, it would be beneficial to include it as a risk to ensure that it received regular attention. It was accepted that the timetable to complete the Plan was challenging, and a discussion took place regarding the possibility that it would be difficult to consult effectively within this timescale with a high number of responses reaching officers, requiring time for their analysis. A question was asked on what had been learnt from the previous consultation, and whether those lessons had been learnt to feed into the forthcoming consultation.

The fact that the list of intended consultation bodies included under-represented groups and that the consultation was open for everyone was welcomed. Reference was made to the consultation methods, and concern was noted that they were the usual consultation methods. A question was asked on how to ensure responses from under-represented groups, to identify any gaps in the responses early and take action. It was noted that there was a role for councillors to support the work.

In response to these considerations, the Cabinet Member for Environment noted that it was extremely important for the Council to take ownership of this plan, by ensuring that Members encouraged anyone who was suitable to complete any consultations and participate in any discussions on the Plan when appropriate. It was explained that the Department had revised its consultation methods following past feedback, with the hope that it would lead to a higher number of responses this time.

Attention was drawn to the fact that the Plan would be submitted to the Full Council on four separate occasions. It was explained that the statutory requirement was to submit the Plan twice, and therefore Cyngor Gwynedd was making every effort to ensure that the process was inclusive and provided a number of opportunities to receive feedback on it.

The Planning Policy Manager stated that an Equality Impact Assessment had been undertaken by officers at the beginning of the process of producing a new Plan. This assessment would ensure that the voices of groups and organisations within our communities were heard. It was noted that this had been beneficial when developing Appendix 6 (List of Consultees) within the Plan. It was explained that a high number of consultees had been listed, including bodies that represented the interest of disabled people, business owners and bodies representing the interests of Welsh culture. It was acknowledged that all the potential bodies had not been listed in the Appendix, and assurance was given that this list was not exhaustive. It was confirmed that consultations with additional bodies would be delivered if the need arose.

Assurance was given that Members were provided with regular updates regarding the development of the Local Development Plan.

RESOLVED:

- 1. To accept the report, noting the observations made during the discussion.**
- 2. To recommend to the Cabinet that 'consultation' should be added as a potential risk to the Local Development Plan.**

6. INTRODUCTION OF PUBLIC CHARGING POINTS FOR ELECTRIC VEHICLES

The report was presented by the Cabinet Member for the Environment, the Assistant Head of Environment and the Traffic and Projects Service Manager. Attention was drawn briefly to the following main points:

It was explained that the Council was involved in a challenging and technical project to install over 100 charging points in 25 sites across Gwynedd, with 16 of those including rapid charging points. It was explained that the Department was offering its staff new training opportunities to install charging points themselves, rather than contracting the work to an external company.

It was reported that this project was split into five parts, and the installation of the charging points was the first step. It was noted that this was the only step that the Council could deliver independently and that it was dependent upon other bodies to collaborate on the other steps to complete the project. It was explained that this had caused a significant delay with the project to date, as a number of charging points had been installed but had not yet been connected to the network. Assurance was given that the Department had learnt from these challenges and was confident that the difficulties would not arise with the future implementation of the project.

It was noted that the Council had received positive responses to a recent letter regarding the availability of community charging points. It was acknowledged that it was impossible for everyone to charge their cars at home as some houses did not have a convenient parking space, or when the location of the parking space was difficult to connect. It was reported that there were plans for community charging points in the future.

Disappointment was expressed that the Government had changed its target date for banning petrol and diesel cars from 2030 to 2035.

It was confirmed that consultation was an important part of the process, as gathering feedback from the users of charging points was crucial. It was explained that the feedback already received from charging point users was positive. Feedback was

gathered when users finished using a charging point, and their responses were sent to an internal system under the Council's control.

In response to a question regarding the Council's consultations with housing associations on charging points, the Assistant Head of Environment confirmed that the main emphasis was currently on the existing 25 locations. However, it was confirmed that the Council had a close relationship with housing associations and that charging points were included as part of the Council's Housing Action Plan.

In response to a question regarding payment methods for the charging point service, the Traffic and Projects Service Manager confirmed that there were three payment methods. It was detailed that a specific card could be used for the charging points, through a mobile app, and in future it was hoped that there would be provision to pay with a normal bank card.

Concerns were shared that there were insufficient metals to produce batteries for more electric cars and concerns that electric cars would be a huge burden on the electric network. In response to these observations, it was recognised that the challenge of encouraging residents in Gwynedd to use electric cars was significant. However, the Assistant Head of Environment emphasised that this project was important as part of the climate change and nature plan's targets.

A question was asked about whether more rapid charging points could be installed in future, as they were currently very popular. It was acknowledged that using more rapid charging points was challenging for the electricity network, but the Department would provide an update to the Committee on this matter in due course.

Assurance was given that work was being undertaken to develop a business plan for the charging points. It was noted that this would enable the Council to consider how to make best use of the money collected from the use of the charging points, and the possibility of using solar panels to power them. It was confirmed that several ideas had been presented and that research was being undertaken to ensure that the best options were chosen. It was added that the Department would provide a report on the project's progress when appropriate.

It was acknowledged that this change to electric vehicles was a huge change for petrol stations. All opportunities to provide support with this change were welcomed.

RESOLVED

- 1. To accept the report, noting the observations made during the discussion.**
- 2. To ask the Cabinet Member/Environment Department to examine the provision of more rapid charging points**
- 3. To receive a progress report when timely**

7. PUBLIC TOILETS

The report was presented by the Cabinet Member for Highways, Engineering and YGC, Head of Highways, Engineering and YGC and the Senior Engineer. Reference was made to the following main points:

It was reported that there were 61 public toilets located across the county. It was recognised that the contribution of Town and Community Councils was crucial in keeping them open. It was added that there were 29 public toilets managed by communities, increasing the total number available to residents to 90 public toilets.

It was confirmed that a new Public Toilets Strategy would be introduced by November 2024 and therefore the Department was re-examining the need to charge a fee to use the public toilets. It was explained that there was a fee of 20 pence to use specific public toilets in Caernarfon, Dolgellau, Porthmadog and Pwllheli.

A member presented an analysis and information about public toilets and community toilets in the areas of Arfon, Dwyfor and Meirionnydd. The member was of the view that fees should not be charged until it was possible to pay by a contactless method. A question was asked about how many businesses were on the waiting list for the Community Grant Scheme. It was noted that improvements in the public toilets provision would be welcomed.

In response to the member's observations, the Head of Highways, Engineering and YGC noted his appreciation of the analysis of the information presented: He explained that he would fully respond to the member following the receipt of the information via e-mail. He noted that there was a waiting list for the Community Grant Scheme. He explained that the funding was received annually from the Welsh Government, it did not increase, and therefore this limited the number that could participate in the scheme.

Concerns were shared about the system of charging a fee for using public toilets. It was noted that if the fee was currently 20 pence it would have to be increased to 50 pence as it was a single coin payment. In response to the observations, the Head of Highways, Engineering and YGC noted that investigations were being undertaken to introducing machines that would accept card payments (in addition to the existing cash payment machines). This would reduce the frequency of cash collections by officers and would assist with the process of considering future fees. It was also reported that consideration was being given to whether any increase was necessary in the fees, making the service free, and installing a contributions box instead of a fee.

It was highlighted that the service was considering the three following options for the future, in conjunction with the consideration of charging a fee for the use of public toilets:

1. Abolish the charging provision altogether from the existing five toilets
2. Continue with the payment doors in the five existing public toilets, and replace the payment doors with machines that accept contactless and cash payments.
3. Extend the provision of payment access doors.

It was noted that the department intended to submit a bid through the Council's bids procedure to invest in the county's public toilets.

Attention was drawn to the Community Toilets Grants scheme, where locations could apply for a grant of up to £500 to ensure the cleanliness and safety of toilets to be made available for public use with no expectation to buy products or services. It was explained that approved locations received signage from the Council to inform the public about the service. It was noted that 35 properties were currently participating in the scheme, with additional locations on the waiting list. It was acknowledged that the department had received feedback that the public were not aware of this scheme, and that work would be undertaken to promote it.

It was noted that consideration should be given to specifying operating hours for the public toilets rather than noting whether they were open on a seasonal basis or year-round. It was explained that this would ensure that residents were aware in advance if facilities would be open when they were travelling.

It was noted that better use could be made of the signs that informed users where public toilets were located. It was explained that there were some examples of unclear signage, or places where there was no sign, and it was confirmed that the department was working to ensure that there were clear signs indicating the location of each public toilet.

In response to an enquiry about vandalism, the Senior Engineer confirmed that it was a combination of general vandalism within the public toilets and vandalism due to the fees that were charged.

In response to a request to ensure that everyone was able to use the public toilets, the Head of Highways, Engineering and YGC noted that a review was being held to ensure that public toilets were available for all, and what changes were required to make them more accessible. The department's intention to hold an equality consultation on the public toilets to ensure that all users had the necessary facilities was welcomed.

Consideration was given to the need to hold further discussions with the community councils regarding public toilets that had now closed. It was explained that discussions had been held with the community councils to establish partnerships to manage public toilets. It was noted that there were some examples where these partnerships had failed and the toilets had now closed. Discussion took place on whether it would be beneficial to raise this issue with the community councils again as they had a number of new representatives since the election in 2022.

It was agreed that the department would provide an update, to include an assessment of the possible options for the fees arrangements in due course.

RESOLVED

- 1. To accept the report, noting the observations made during the discussion.**
- 2. To receive an update in due course including an assessment of the possible options for the door payment arrangements.**

8. COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD PROGRAMME 2023/24

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

Members were reminded that the Communities Committee's Forward Programme for 2023/24 had been adopted at the Committee's meeting on 13 July 2023.

It was explained that the forward programme needed to be revised for 2023/24. It was noted that the 'Governance Structure and Delivery Arrangements of the Gwynedd and Anglesey Public Services Board' item had been scheduled for this meeting, but a request had been received to re-arrange it as it was premature for scrutiny. It was noted that the Board's Programme Manager had confirmed that it would be timely to submit the report as part of the Committee's meeting on 30 November 2023.

It was confirmed that the Highways, Engineering and YGC Department would submit one report to the Committee's meeting on 30 November 2023 under the title 'Local Floods Strategy' It was ensured that this report would also address the matters in question when the 'Coastal Management' item was prioritised in the Committee's annual workshop. It was explained that the decision to merge both items allowed sufficient time to effectively scrutinise these items.

RESOLVED

To adopt the amended work programme for 2023/24.

The meeting commenced at 10.30 a.m. and concluded at 12.55 p.m.

CHAIR