
COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: CRIME AND DISORDER, 22 FEBRUARY 2024

Attendance:

COUNCILLORS: Elin Hywel (Chair)

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

Officers present:

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

Present for Item 5:

Councillor Dilwyn Morgan (Cabinet Member for Adults, Health and Well-being), Dylan Owen (Statutory Director of Social Services), Mannon Trappe (Assistant Manager for Safeguarding, Quality Assurance, Mental Health and Community Safety) and Daron Owens (Gwynedd and Anglesey Community Safety Partnership Senior Operational Officer).

Present for Item 6:

Councillor Berwyn Parry Jones (Cabinet Member for Highways, Engineering and YGC), Steffan Jones (Head of Highways, Engineering and YGC Department), Rhyddian Roberts (Chief Engineer) and Rob Williams (Water and Environment 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 Meirion Williams (Assistant Head of Highways, Engineering and YGC).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Kim Jones, Annwen Hughes and Rhys Tudur.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

There were no declarations of personal interest.

3. URGENT ITEMS

None to note.

4. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee held on 30 November 2023 as a true record.

5. ANNUAL UPDATE BY THE (GWYNEDD AND ANGLESEY) COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP

The report was submitted by the Cabinet Member for Adults, Health and Well-being, the Gwynedd and Anglesey Community Safety Partnership Senior Operational Officer and the Assistant Manager for Safeguarding, Quality Assurance, Mental Health and Community Safety. Attention was drawn briefly to the following main points:

Members were reminded of the need to scrutinise the work of the Partnership in its entirety rather than focusing on any specific body or organisation.

It was explained that the partnership had been formed in line with the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 which placed a statutory duty on Local Authorities to work in partnership with the Police, Health Service, Probation Service and the Fire and Rescue Service to address the local community safety agenda. The main responsibilities of the partnership included: Crime and Disorder, Substance Misuse, Reducing Re-offending, reducing serious violence and establishing Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHR).

It was noted that the partnership did not have specific funding and relied on regional and national grants. It was explained that the only commissioning undertaken by the partnership was the Domestic Homicide Reviews. Unfortunately, it was explained that the partnership was working on 5 Domestic Homicide Reviews this year and it was noted that the work inevitably had significant and continuing implications on the partnership's resources.

It was recognised that the main challenge currently facing the partnership was the different types of crimes that occurred within our communities. It was detailed that technological developments had increased the opportunities where people could be exploited by Organised Crime Gangs. Furthermore, it was considered that the cost-of-living crisis contributed towards the figures of offences within the community safety field.

It was confirmed that the Partnership was operating in line with an annual plan, that was based on the priorities of the Safer North Wales Board Strategy. It was noted that the priorities for the 2023/24 annual plan were as follows:

- Prevent Crime and Anti-social Behaviour
- Tackle Violent Crime
- Tackle Serious Organised Crime
- Safeguard and build resilient communities and maintain public safety.

Reference was made to current crime figures noting that violence against the person offences had generally decreased in Gwynedd compared to the previous year. It was also noted that there had been an increase of 15.4% in 'Theft and handling' offences compared to last year, and it was considered that this was the result of more retail offences. It was explained that this followed the statistic that shoplifting had increased 43.2% this year in comparison to last year, with a general increase of 35% across the region. It was detailed that the cost-of-living crisis was being considered as one of the biggest driving forces behind this increase. It was recognised that retail offences were now a priority for the police and substantial work was underway to ensure that these figures improved. It was ensured that residents were informed of any support available, and local food banks where appropriate.

It was reported that several Gwynedd communities were under-reporting incidents within their communities. It was recognised that this was a challenge for the partnership

in many fields such as domestic violence, where several incidents occurred before victims sought support. It was emphasised that it was key that people reported incidents to the police by dialling 101 or completing an electronic form.

It was noted that anti-social behaviour had decreased by 12.6% this year but it was emphasised that this figure was measured on a regular basis as it was based on the number of calls that were being made to the police.

It was confirmed that focus had been placed this year on the Serious Violence Duty which had come into force in January 2023. It was explained that a regional approach had been adopted to address the expectations of understanding the local picture of serious violence in the form of a needs assessment and preparing a strategy in response. It was emphasised that these had been developed by the end of January 2023 and they were now in the hands of the Home Office. It was noted that there was a need to coordinate the operation of the strategy locally with partners. Reference was also made to the fact that the Partnership wished to use these duties to reintroduce educational programmes in schools.

Pride was expressed that the partnership had been successful in receiving funding from the Shared Prosperity Fund for the purpose of extending the CCTV system. It was explained that this coincided with one of the United Kingdom's Levelling Up Mission aims, namely that homicides, serious violence and neighbourhood crime would reduce by 2030. It was emphasised that locations had been identified where offences took place or where people did not feel safe, where additional CCTV could be introduced.

A member referred to the acquisitive crime data drawing attention to the fact that there was an increase in cases in Gwynedd, especially in the data of thefts with an increase of 60%. He highlighted that a reduction could be seen across North Wales under several headings. He suggested that the situation should be monitored with historical data in case a trend was developing. In doing so, they could examine the reasons for the increase and what could be done to prevent it from increasing further.

Concern was expressed on behalf of the partnership that domestic violence numbers were increasing and that frustrations arose when attempting to provide necessary support. It was explained that such support was funded under the mobile support work stream of the Housing Support Grant but its rates had not been amended to reflect inflation. It was confirmed that this matter was being prioritised by partnership boards and that regional and national discussions were being held about the matter.

It was explained that the Trading Standards service collaborated with North Wales Police on a project to prevent cold-callers for individuals who had been identified as potential targets or victims of cold-calling by leasing call blockers. It was recognised that approximately 10 victims had currently received call blockers but it was hoped that this support would increase in future.

In response to an enquiry, reference was made to a Private Leasing Scheme that was being developed by the Homelessness Team in the Housing and Property Department. It was detailed that the aim of the scheme was to bring in more private landlords to let their houses as an option to re-house those who were homeless and to reduce the use of Bed & Breakfast accommodation and the associated costs.

In response to an enquiry about the use of data gathered by rural insurance organisations, it was confirmed that the partnership did not receive this information. It was recognised that theft and rural matters were a priority for the partnership. It was agreed to provide the contacts of the Police's Rural Crime Team to members.

A member highlighted the need to differentiate between recent and historical sexual violence data in the report.

It was ensured that officers would contact the police to obtain more information about the following before reporting back to Members, after making enquiries:

- Whether the police compared the data of the number of anti-social offences with incidents under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- Provide detailed figures for different areas in Gwynedd, if they were available.
- Receive information about the cross-section of offenders' ages in Gwynedd.

It was confirmed that this information would be included in next year's report.

RESOLVED:

- 1. To accept the report and the supporting documents, noting the observations made during the meeting.**
- 2. To support the priorities and the future direction of the work.**

6. LOCAL FLOOD STRATEGY

The report was presented by the Cabinet Member for Highways, Engineering and YGC, Steffan Jones (Head of Highways, Engineering and YGC Department), Rhydian Roberts (Chief Engineer) and Rob Williams (Water and Environment Service Manager). Attention was drawn briefly to the following main points:

Members were reminded that parts of the draft local flood strategy had been submitted to the Committee meeting on 30 November 2023. In response to the Committee's observations where it had been suggested that a risk from highway flooding could have a substantial impact on our communities and that the Strategy needed to address these risks sufficiently, attention was drawn to the fact that a new action had been added to the strategy, namely Action 2.3A. It was confirmed that a public consultation would be held on the Strategy for a six-week period, commencing on 26 February 2024. It was ensured that the department was in contact with the Communication service to ensure that as many people as possible responded to the consultation, in order to share local knowledge via a questionnaire or phone call. It was hoped that residents would see the consultation being advertised in their local newspaper and on social media; it would also be uploaded on the Members' website for them to share it with their electors.

It was explained that developing a Local Flood Strategy was one of the requirements of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010. It was also detailed that the strategy had to be consistent with the National Flood Strategy published by Welsh Government in 2023.

Members were reminded that the department had submitted the proposal of considering inland and coastal flood risks separately within the new Strategy, at the Committee meeting on 27 October 2022. It was explained that they were being considered separately due to:

- The nature of the risk and the ability to mitigate them.
- Difference in statutory and passive roles/responsibilities
- Policies and strategies along with differences in the project funding structure by Welsh Government.

Members were guided through the Strategy and attention was drawn to historical matters, area plans, the division of public bodies' responsibilities, actions, financial matters and the strategic objectives of improving understanding and awareness of flood risks.

It was reported that maintaining culverts and gullies was crucial to manage water levels near roads and properties. It was confirmed that it had been programmed to empty the culverts at least once a year with additional attention to locations where difficulties had appeared regularly in the past. It was detailed that culverts with flood risk management, located beyond highway areas, received attention every fortnight in winter and every 4 weeks in the summer. It was updated that two of the culverts were being monitored by installed cameras, which sent messages when water levels were raised and allowed them to receive timely attention. It was elaborated that this enabled the department to take timely and more specific action.

It was explained that the department had a specific e-mail address and a useful app to draw the department's attention to any problems relating to culverts and gullies locally. Consideration was given to the possibility of updating locations where the department had recently been working on a specific map on the Members' website, allowing them to see whether the problems in their areas had been resolved. It was noted that this had been developed for other services such as salt bin locations and the department would investigate to see if it would be possible to update it with this work. It was confirmed that the Department would share the culvert and gully cleaning work programme with the members.

In response to an enquiry, the Head of Highways, Engineering and YGC confirmed that a change would be made to sections 4.1.4 and 4.1.5 of the Local Flood Risk Management Strategy (Draft) to refer to the 'Current Plan' rather than specific local development plans to ensure that the report was up-to-date.

It was reported that the Department was collaborating with the Information Technology service on a sensors trial scheme. It was noted that there were currently five sensors in operation which monitored the change in water levels. It was confirmed that this allowed the Department to resolve problems as they arose, and that red dots appeared on a map when incidents were afoot. Pride was expressed that the Department had recently received a national award for this innovative scheme.

It was confirmed that a public consultation on the strategy was about to start and the responses of the consultation would be submitted to the Cabinet, along with the Committee's observations. It was ensured that Members would receive further information about local problems as the Department attended the Area Forums over the next few weeks.

RESOLVED

To accept the report and to recommend:

- **That more information is required about the maintenance work programme for gullies and culverts in the Strategy.**
- **Consideration should be given to adapting the document so that only the current information is noted about the Local Development Plans under points 4.1.4 and 4.1.5.**

7. GRASS CUTTING AND MAINTENANCE OF COUNTY ROAD VERGES

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

Members were reminded that current arrangements were in place for grass cutting and maintenance of county road verges twice a year. It was noted that the Department operated in any area with a road restriction of up to 30mph and that external contractors operated in other areas of the county. It was detailed that this external contract would end within the year and the Department would be looking into renewing it.

Attention was drawn to several statutory duties to maintain and improve biodiversity and promote the resilience of ecosystems, noting the need for public authorities in Wales to meet them. Section 6 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 was mentioned, which placed a duty on public authorities to make biodiversity a natural and integral part of policies and projects. It was explained that the Department exceeded these requirements in ensuring that it sowed as part of biodiversity trials, as there was no requirement to do so.

It was reported that the Department had been collaborating with the Biodiversity Service to undertake trials along the A499 and A497 road verges in Dwyfor since October 2022. It was explained that the trials would continue in this area for three years to collect data. It was confirmed that the purpose of the trials was to ensure that changes were being made to encourage vegetation and biodiversity and to promote wildlife in the area. It was explained that the eight locations had been selected as they were straight, wide and long and that it was possible to receive and analyse rational data from the trials. It was assured that the results received so far were encouraging as well as the fact that the Department was receiving positive feedback from the public. It was emphasised that health and safety was a priority for the Department and, therefore, there would be no delay in grass cutting near any access or junction due to the trials as trial areas had been restricted to long, straight and wide roads. Members were invited to contact the department if concerns arose regarding any access or junction that needed to be cut more frequently than the current arrangement of twice a year.

It was confirmed that the trials continued to be held and they were growing. It was detailed that other areas in Gwynedd had been identified to extend the trials to Meirionnydd. Attention was drawn to the fact that other bodies adopted the same principles to comply with the statutory duties.

In response to an enquiry about the public's awareness of new risks that could arise such as ticks, it was confirmed that this was beyond the Department's remit but officers would contact the Public Protection Service for additional information.

It was recognised that litter thrown onto road verges continued to be a challenge. It was noted that arrangements were in place to ensure that the grass cutting teams shared their work programmes with the cleaning teams to ensure that litter was picked up as soon as possible. It was elaborated that the department was collaborating with the street cleaning service to try to prevent people from throwing litter from their vehicles.

A member suggested that collaboration should be undertaken with community centres and examine the possibility of creating wildlife meadows.

The officers were thanked for their work noting that it improved the morale of public transport users as well as improving the environment.

RESOLVED

- 1. To accept the report, noting the observations made during the discussion.**
- 2. That the Committee receives an update in a year's time.**

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 Scrutiny Committee's Amended Forward Programme for 2023/24 had been adopted at the Committee's meeting on 30 November 2023.

It was detailed that the 'Article 4 Direction - Public Consultation' item had been programmed for the 18 April 2024 meeting. It was emphasised that it was necessary to consider what was intended to be scrutinised as the meeting would be held during the period prior to the election of Police and Crime Commissioner, which would be held on 2 May 2024. It was confirmed that the Monitoring Officer had given guidance that the matter should not be scrutinised during the period prior to the election due to the nature of the discussion in relation to introducing an Article 4 Direction.

It was explained that a date had been noted within the draft 2024/25 committees' calendar, which would provide an opportunity for timely scrutiny before the Cabinet reached a decision on the matter. It was noted that it was intended to hold the meeting on 16 May 2024, but it was explained that this depended on the Full Council's decision at its meeting on 7 March 2024, when Members would consider the committees calendar.

As a result of this change, it was confirmed that the Scrutiny Adviser had consulted with the Chair to reprogramme the 'Highway Maintenance Manual' item from this meeting (22 February 2024), to the meeting that would be held on 18 April. It was explained that this would provide an opportunity to give fair attention to the items as three items had been programmed for each meeting.

Due to the lack of time between meetings on 18 April and 16 May 2024, it was proposed that the Chair and Vice-chair identified items for discussion as well as the 'Article 4 Direction - Public Consultation' item at the meeting in May, at their contact meetings with the relevant Heads of Department and Cabinet Members. It was explained that this would ensure sufficient time for the Departments to prepare the reports. It was noted that a report would be submitted to the Committee on 18 April 2024, to confirm the items to be scrutinised in the May meeting.

Members were reminded of the opportunity to prioritise items to be scrutinised for the remaining meetings in 2024/25 at the Committee's Annual Workshop.

RESOLVED

- 1. To adopt an amended work programme for 2023/24.**
- 2. Confirm arrangements to identify items to be discussed at the Committee meeting in May 2024.**

The meeting commenced at 10.30am and concluded at 12.45pm.

CHAIR