
COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE, 18 APRIL 2024

Attendance:

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

Stephen Churchman, Elwyn Edwards, Delyth Lloyd Griffiths, Jina Gwyrfai, Linda Morgan, Edgar 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:

Sandra Lynne Thomas (Programme Manager - Gwynedd and Anglesey Public Services Board).

Present for Item 6:

Councillor Berwyn Parry Jones (Cabinet Member for Highways, Engineering and YGC), Steffan Jones (Head of Highways, Engineering and YGC Department) and Gareth Roberts (Dwyfor Area Engineer, Highways, Engineering and YGC Department).

Present for Item 7:

Councillor Berwyn Parry Jones (Cabinet Member for Highways, Engineering and YGC), Steffan Jones (Head of Highways, Engineering and YGC Department), Peter John Simpson (Street Services Manager, Highways, Engineering and YGC Department) and Sara Marged Jones (Projects Manager, Highways, Engineering and YGC Department).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Kim Jones, Llio Elenid Owen, Rhys Tudur, Robert Glyn Daniels and Councillor Dyfrig Siencyn (Council Leader).

Councillor Gwilym Jones was thanked for his contribution to the Committee over the past two years. Councillor Jina Gwyrfai was welcomed as a new Member of the Committee.

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 committee meeting held on 22 February 2024 as a true record.

5. GWYNEDD AND ANGLESEY PUBLIC SERVICES BOARD DELIVERY ARRANGEMENTS

The report was submitted by the Corporate Director (in the Council Leader's absence) and the Gwynedd and Anglesey Public Services Board Programme Manager. Reference was made to the following main points:

It was explained that the report presented the delivery arrangements of the Gwynedd and Anglesey Public Services Board for 2024-2025 based on the Gwynedd and Anglesey Well-being Plan 2023-2028. It was detailed that there were three specific Well-being Objectives within the plan, namely:

- Working to mitigate the effect of poverty on the well-being of our communities.
- Working to improve the well-being and success of our children and young people to enable them to realise their full potential.
- Working to support our services and communities to shift towards net zero carbon.

It was added that 'Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales', the Welsh Government's long-term strategy to prevent and reduce obesity in Wales, had been adopted by the Board as a golden thread and it would be a central consideration for the Board's operation. It was considered how the Board would monitor this golden thread bearing in mind that the Welsh language was also a golden thread through the Board's operation.

It was acknowledged that the Welsh language was not clearly seen as being central to the Board's work, as mentioned in discussions about the work of the Board at this Committee. It was emphasised that a change had been presented by the Board to ensure that the commitment to the Welsh language was now much clearer. It was ensured that all Board partners operated with the Welsh language central to their considerations.

It was confirmed that several sub-groups of the Board had now ended and were treated as task and finish groups where officers from each partnership contributed on an operational level to realise objectives. It was noted that many of these groups were already in place such as the 'benefit claiming promotion group' and the 'travel charter group', to assist with mitigating the impact of poverty on our communities. Details were shared about the travel charter group noting that it considered a number of factors in addition to public transport, such as staff modes of travel, vehicle charging and people working from home.

It was emphasised that the Welsh Language Sub-group continued to be operational, with a representative from each partnership being a part of it and collaborating with the Welsh Language Commissioner. It was reported that this sub-group had been working on a project to respond to recruitment challenges in the area and the results would be published soon.

It was reported on high-level delivery procedures that the Board intended to achieve over the next two years. It was explained that procedures for two years had been noted so far, although the well-being plan was for five years. It was confirmed that the Board had only established procedures for the next two years in order to ensure the strong foundations of operational matters. It was recognised that one of the challenges facing the Board was adding value to communities without duplicating the work already being done by partners themselves.

In response to an enquiry, attention was drawn to two of the high-level delivery procedures submitted. It was explained that the 'becoming a Trauma Informed Board'

procedure was a requirement by the Government and that Board members were currently receiving detailed training about the subject. It was confirmed that the intention of this procedure was to ensure that the Board and its partners were aware of service user situations and took their experiences into consideration when providing services. It was elaborated that 'Supporting families and reconciling the rights of children' had also been noted as a procedure for the Well-being Plan to ensure that children's rights received consideration as the Board accomplished its work.

Gratitude was expressed for the thorough information in the officers' oral presentation but disappointment was expressed by committee Members about the lack of written information in the report. It was noted that this had led to difficulties when trying to prepare to scrutinise the Board's arrangements efficiently during the discussion.

RESOLVED:

To accept the report:

- **Ask that future reports include more detail about the delivery arrangements and how progress is measured in order to realise the objectives of the Well-being Plan.**
- **Recommend to the Public Services Board that the annual report contains information about:**
 - **how the Welsh language is promoted according to each well-being objective**
 - **how the Whole System Thinking and Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales methodology is a golden thread throughout the work.**

6. HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE MANUAL

The report was presented by the Cabinet Member for Highways, Engineering and YGC, Head of Highways, Engineering and YGC Department and the Dwyfor Area Engineer. Attention was drawn briefly to the following main points:

Members were reminded that the Highway Maintenance Manual had been approved by the Cabinet in July 2023 and that it was now operational. Attention was drawn to the main objectives of the manual's implementation, namely ensuring that:

- the Council's highway asset maintenance procedures comply with current national guidelines;
- the Council provides a safe and well-maintained highway network;
- that appropriate maintenance standards are implemented consistently throughout Gwynedd;
- that the Council's standards and approach to implementation are consistent with other highway authorities within Wales;
- that the Council will continue to be able to defend third-party claims and legal action by individuals;
- that future highway maintenance budget allocations are influenced by risk rather than by other factors.

It was confirmed that the manual had been developed to plan how the Council complied with the specific duty under the Highways Act 1980, as well as a number of national codes of practice, to maintain the roads adopted by the Council. It was detailed that the manual was based on the Highways Asset Management Plan (July 2010),

which itself had been influenced by the 'Code of Practice for Highways Maintenance Management 2005'.

It was noted that the Department was operating based on the Dwyfor, Arfon and Meirionnydd areas, due to the size of the county. It was explained that this was an effective system to respond to road maintenance enquiries on a timely basis, ensuring that the same arrangements and procedures were in place for all areas.

It was confirmed that the manual was used as a daily guide on how to maintain county roads and protected the Council from third party claims and court proceedings. It was emphasised that the Council had received 343 third party claims between 1 April 2016 and 1 April 2024 and that the Council had managed to defend 294 of them. It was detailed that this was a success rate of nearly 86%.

It was explained that every local authority in Wales complied with a new code of practice published in 2016, namely 'Well-managed Highway Infrastructure: A Code of Practice'. It was elaborated that the County Surveyor's Society Wales consulted with local authorities to formulate nationally consistent schemes to ensure that there were no changes to road conditions when passengers moved from one county to another. It was emphasised that local authorities were establishing a network hierarchy, inspection arrangements, repair system as well as using risk to influence how the budget was allocated, to ensure that there were no major changes among counties.

Specific attention was drawn to clause 7.1 of the manual which noted that road defects were categorised as critical defect, safety defect or maintenance defect. It was noted that the service inspected roads on a regular basis, every month or 3 or 6 months depending on the road class and its usage.

It was explained that the service responded to any complaints and enquiries about road conditions from the public, community councils and Elected Members as soon as possible and, in doing so, it considered other potential defects nearby when appropriate. It was reported that the department's asset system allowed workers to view the history of road defects as they visited new defects, to see if those defects remained a problem or if they had been resolved. It was explained that they would send reports to the WDM system, namely the main system to monitor work. It was confirmed that the WDM system sent a weekly report to officers about defects that had been attended to and to see if they had been resolved in a timely manner.

In response to the above, a member suggested that it would be beneficial for members to receive a confirmation when a reported problem had been resolved.

It was explained that past arrangements required workers to respond to any safety defects within 24 hours resolving any defects or scheduling its resolution. It was acknowledged that this placed great pressure on service employees and it was often not a good use of time. It was noted that this arrangement had now been changed so that workers tended to safety defects by the end of the following working day after it was reported, which allowed flexibility on weekends and bank holidays. It was explained that this allowed workers to programme work more effectively and create packages of work to ensure that defects were dealt with in a timely manner while ensuring that workers did not waste time travelling. It was confirmed that concerns had not been noted since this change had been introduced but the Department would continue to monitor the situation.

A member noted his support to the manual which noted the expectations making it measurable in terms of performance. He enquired whether inspectors were required to

examine previous inspection reports and if there was a system in place to review inspection reports.

In response, it was noted that inspections were not reviewed at present. It was noted that consideration was given to undertake ad-hoc visits as part of the new arrangements. It was explained that road inspectors had access to historical inspections on the tablet used. It was noted that establishing a system to review inspections from external officers was something to consider.

It was explained that the Department was in the process of providing a work programme based on several structural maintenance categories to reflect the real priority of roads that required attention on an all-Gwynedd basis. It was acknowledged that there were substantial pressures on the Road Maintenance budget and, therefore, it was detailed that the categories considered when prioritising work were:

- Hierarchy
- Scanner data
- Visual condition
- Local area and network priorities
- Defect levels
- Construction age

If the prioritised roads did not receive attention within the current year, assurance was given that every effort was being made to ensure that they were high priority roads in the following year. However, it was acknowledged that some elements influenced the work programme's prioritisation system such as rapid deterioration in the condition of other roads or a landslide. It was emphasised that the Department's intention was to develop a work programme over three years instead of annual programmes in order to note the priorities of the work programme and to list any reasons why any road had slipped from the priority list.

It was explained that street lighting received consideration in the highway maintenance manual and that they were assessed on their visual condition and electrical safety. It was detailed that a programme had been developed to undertake structural tests on light columns via an external contractor. It was noted that these tests scored the columns into 'red' (needs to be disposed in 4 hours), 'amber' (need to retest the column within 6 months) or 'green' (need to retest the column within 5 years) categories. An observation was received stating that street lighting could be too dark in some areas, which caused concerns to pedestrians in the evenings. It was recognised that some locations needed to be revisited to assess the situation and adapt the 'dimming' settings of lighting in the evenings as required.

Gratitude was expressed for the report.

RESOLVED

To accept the report and to note the observations, and recommend that the Highways, Engineering and YGC Department:

- **puts arrangements in place to notify councillors when a reported problem has been resolved.**
- **looks at establishing arrangements to review the standard of inspections.**

7. STREETSCENE SERVICE

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

Following the transfer of the Waste and Recycling Collection Service to the Environment Department, it was noted that an opportunity had been taken to reorganise some services in the Department. It was explained that the Street Cleaning and Street Enforcement services, along with the Ardal Ni Tidying-up Teams, had been merged to create one new service named 'Streetscene Service' under one manager. It was emphasised that the aim of the Streetscene Service was to try to reach the Council's objective of realising Clean and Tidy Communities throughout Gwynedd for the well-being of residents, visitors and the local economy.

It was noted that the Street Cleaning team acted on statutory requirements to ensure that streets in the county were clean, while the Street Enforcement team focussed on penalising people for polluting, tipping or for not picking up dog faeces. It was explained that the Ardal Ni Tidying-up Team was a relatively new team that contributed to improving the appearance and image of our streets and our environment.

It was reported that a detailed review of the Street Cleaning service had been completed and that an improvement plan had been developed based on that review. It was noted that the improvement plan focused on the quality and effectiveness of the service, information technology and green fleet development. It was emphasised that reviewing the circuits was a priority following the review. It was recognised that systems to arrange circuits and collections had now dated and created a challenge when seeking to deliver services. It was confirmed that the Department was investing in a new system to optimise circuits hoping that this would be a resource to ensure a modern and efficient service which contributed towards the county's image, and also support to meet current savings' targets. It was explained that the system could draw up new circuits to ensure that time was better managed and also offered improvements to the fleet.

There was pride that the Department had been successful in receiving a financial bid to establish Urban Cleaners. It was detailed that it was hoped that workers would use an electric waste cart and cleaner in towns in all areas of Gwynedd. It was noted that it was intended to change working hours in urban areas (including villages) from 5am to 1pm so that they worked from 8am to 4pm whilst continuing to comply with the code of practice on sufficient street cleanliness by 8am where appropriate. It was hoped that this would ensure that the teams were visible for the public and kindle an appreciation for their work.

It was reported that the Department had managed to appoint more officers to the Street Enforcement service following a challenging period. It was confirmed that the number of penalties issued had recently increased as a result of this. It was noted that a further update was being prepared for the press for residents to be aware of the work of this service in future. It was explained that the service collaborated closely with Fly-tipping Action Wales and had identified the advantages of using the 'Flymapper' tool in busy areas to tackle the problem. It was recognised that Bangor was an area where fly-tipping was a problem and that officers were developing a plan for the area to remind residents of waste disposal rules. If this campaign was a success, it was noted that it would be developed to be shared throughout the whole of Wales. Attention was drawn to Welsh Government plans to release a National Litter and Fly-tipping Prevention Plan and its publication would lead to the Department adapting its Code of Practice.

It was noted that one of the priorities of the Street Enforcement service during the winter was dealing with dog fouling. It was emphasised that this problem was an ongoing priority for the service and that officers had been restoring signs and bins during the winter. In response to an enquiry, as more dogs were in the area over recent years, it was noted that the Department was trying to find a balance in terms of purchasing more dog fouling bins. It was recognised that this was a challenge for the Department due to financial challenges and adding bins to empty on circuits affected workers' ability to empty them in a timely manner. Despite this, it was recognised that a change in regulations allowed dog owners to dispose of dog fouling in any public residual bin provided by the Council. It was mentioned that Public Spaces Protection Orders were currently being reviewed in accordance with statutory requirements to update them. It was confirmed that a consultation on the order would take place over the next few weeks and this would be an opportunity to voice an opinion about dog fouling problems in their areas among other associated matters.

It was explained that the Ardal Ni Tidying-up Team was very busy with a wide range of responsibilities. It was noted that this service was more visible to Gwynedd residents and the Department received positive feedback about their work on a regular basis. It was explained that the nature of the team's work was changing as it developed noting that considerable emphasis had recently been placed on town centre campaigns. It was confirmed that the workers were now experts on the equipment used to carry out the work. There was pride that Carmarthenshire County Council had recently launched tidying-up team campaigns, following a number of processes developed by Cyngor Gwynedd.

A member enquired whether it would be possible to disseminate the use of arrangements to make a request to the Ardal Ni Teams to other services. In response, the Head of Highways, Engineering and YGC Department noted that he would raise the matter at a meeting of the Corporate Management Team to discuss the possibility of disseminating the model.

It was confirmed that five smart bins had been installed in busy locations across the county. It was explained that the bins were powered by solar energy to compress the litter so that the frequent need to empty them would be reduced. It was noted that a message was sent by the bin to the service's systems informing them that it needed to be emptied before it overflowed and caused a mess. There was pride that the Department had succeeded to attract grant funding this year to invest in town centre infrastructure. It was explained that a proportion of the funding would be allocated to invest in more smart bins and smart benches. It was noted that smart bins were expensive and, therefore, the Department was collaborating with the Council's Information Technology Department to try to develop similar technology to use on bins in Gwynedd for a cheaper price rather than purchasing them.

In response to an enquiry, it was confirmed that it was intended to add more public recycling bins across the county. Despite this, it was noted that recycling bins that had already been located were being misused and, therefore, there was a need to resolve this problem before adding more of them. It was explained that the contents of residual bins and smart bins were not sorted as the contents were being incinerated.

Gratitude was expressed for the report.

RESOLVED

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

8. ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING

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

It was reported that it had been agreed at the Committee meeting on 22 February 2024, that the Chair and Vice-chair at their contact meetings with the Heads of Department and relevant Cabinet Members, would identify items for discussion along with the 'Article 4 Direction - Public Consultation' item at the meeting on 16 May 2024.

It was confirmed that an additional item had been identified at the contact meeting of the Chair and Vice-chair with Heads of Department and relevant Cabinet Members as a potential matter for scrutiny, namely 'Ash Die-back Disease'. It was explained that the matter had been included on the risk register of the Highways, Engineering and YGC Department and it was noted that the Council had a work programme to identify the disease in trees and to treat this. It was detailed that the scale of the problem could be scrutinised along with the progress made in terms of dealing with the disease, as well as the cost of dealing with the disease thus far and the future anticipated costs. The Committee was asked to confirm if they wished to scrutinise this item as well as 'Article 4 - Public Consultation' at the meeting held on 16 May 2024.

Members were reminded that there would be an opportunity for them to prioritise items for scrutiny for the other four meetings during the 2024/25 period at the Annual Workshop held over the next few weeks.

In response to observations from members, it was explained that it would be timely to scrutinise the 'Article 4 Direction - Public Consultation' item at the meeting on 16 May 2024 to ensure that the input of Committee Members was received before Cabinet Members discussed the item in the following months. Members were reminded that the timetable to discuss this item had slipped as the Committee had decided at its last meeting to move it from this meeting to the meeting on 16 May 2024 as a result of the pre-electoral period of the Police and Crime Commissioner election between 25 March and 2 May 2024. It was emphasised that scrutinising the item at the 16 May meeting would be timely and an opportunity for the Committee to make recommendations to the Cabinet.

RESOLVED

To confirm that the following items will be scrutinised at the Committee meeting on 16 May 2024:

- **Article 4 Direction - Public Consultation**
- **Ash Die-back Disease**

The meeting commenced at 10:40am and concluded at 1:00pm

CHAIR