
COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE, 12 SEPTEMBER 2024

Present:

COUNCILLORS: Annwen Hughes (Chair)
Llio Elenid Owen (Vice-chair)

Stephen Churchman, Robert Glyn Daniels, Jina Gwyrfai, Edgar Owen, Linda Morgan, Peter Thomas, Beca Roberts, Arwyn Herald Roberts, Elfed Powell Roberts, Rob Triggs and Gruffydd Williams.

Officers present:

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

Present for Item 5:

Councillor Dafydd Meurig (Cabinet Member for the Environment), Dafydd Williams (Head of the Environment Department), Gerwyn Jones (Assistant Head of the Environment Department – Transport) and Ceri Hughes Thomas (Parking and Street Works Manager)

Present for Item 6:

Councillor Dafydd Meurig (Cabinet Member for the Environment), Dafydd Williams (Head of the Environment Department) Gerwyn Jones (Assistant Head of the Environment Department – Transport) and Rhian Wyn Williams (Integrated Transport and Road Safety Manager).

Present for Item 7:

Councillor Dafydd Meurig (Cabinet Member for the Environment), Dafydd Williams (Head of the Environment Department) and Roland Thomas (Assistant Head of the Environment Department).

Present for item 8:

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

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Elwyn Edwards, Elin Hywel and Delyth Lloyd Griffiths.

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 16 May 2024, as a true record.

5. PARKING FEES

The report was submitted by the Cabinet Member for the Environment, the Head of Environment Department, the Assistant Head of Environment Department (Transport) and the Parking and Street Works Manager.

It was explained that the Report included revisions to parking fee arrangements to comply with the Council's savings schemes and address the overspend within the parking services. Members were reminded that two of the projects featured in the report (Increasing Pen y Gwryd parking fees and Increasing the price of an Annual Parking Permit and Local Parking Permit by £5 per annum) had already been approved by the Cabinet.

They drew attention to a scheme to Extend Parking Enforcement Hours at the Council's Short Stay Car Parks, highlighting that the current enforcement hours are between 10:00am and 4:30pm. It was planned to extend the enforcement hours to between 09:00am and 05:00pm. Members were reminded that this had been the Communities Scrutiny Committee's original recommendation in 2021.

It was noted that the fourth scheme in the report was an Adjustment to the Band 2 Long-Stay Fees Structure. The officers explained that this scheme was being introduced to address the inflation increase. They highlighted the challenge in addressing inflation increase, which was to ensure that suitable fees were introduced for anyone who wished to pay with cash without having to find lots of loose change. It was confirmed that the normal arrangement was to wait a few years before revising parking fees in line with inflation, so as to ensure that parking fees were practical for users. It was acknowledged that this led to quite a hike, but that the revisions to the pricing was implemented less frequently. It was confirmed that the revisions introduced in the report constituted an increase of around 30-40%, which ensured that they would not need to be revised further until 2028/29.

During the discussion, the following observations were noted:-

Agreed with the plans to increase parking fees in Pen y Gwryd and encouraged the department to invest in similar locations as it was being used regularly. Further information was requested about Band 1 - 3 Parking Fees for long stays.

Disagreed with the schemes to adjust car parks' enforcement hours. The member considered that this would have too much of a negative impact on local residents and business, leading to fines. It was noted that increasing the price of an annual parking permit to £145 likely meant that individuals would no longer buy it.

Attention was drawn to the fact that the permitted time within parking fees was changing in some cases. They discussed the example that £2 for 1 hour of parking would adjust to £2.50 for four hours. They wondered whether this would deter people from paying to park because they would not be using the car park for a large proportion of that time. However, the Head of Department agreed that this increase in the time for long-stay car parks had been one of the recommendations of the Communities Scrutiny Committee's task and finish group in 2019. It was explained that the group felt that this would support local businesses because people would have time and would spend money in local businesses.

It was noted that no information had been included on the matter of buses parking in car parks. It was noted that the Department would present information on this in the future, noting that bus use of car parks was increasing.

The Department was asked to reconsider their arrangements for increasing parking fees in line with inflation rates to ensure there was not such a hike in the parking costs when revising them. It was highlighted that the current arrangements led to a large increase in parking costs. In response to the observations, it was acknowledged that parking fees were increased at a higher level. The Cabinet Member elaborated that this was a challenge for the department because internal income targets increased with inflation, and these were being missed until the fees were increased. He emphasised that it was difficult to revise the prices more frequently because the parking fees would be irregular amounts, but it was anticipated that this would not be as problematic in the future and that it would be possible to increase fees annually as card or phone payments became more common. It was also highlighted that this would also reduce the number of cases of pay and display machines being vandalised, but they would always need to be cautious and ensure equal opportunity for anyone who wished to pay with cash.

The Parking and Street Works Manager explained that app users were charged a fee of 5p to pay for parking. She elaborated that this was a general fee for using the app. She confirmed that users could receive a message to confirm payment, or to warn them that the parking period was about to run out and confirmed that these were additional costs for anyone who chose to accept them. It was emphasised that there would be no increase in these fees as the parking fees were adjusted. Furthermore, in response to comments that the app cannot be used at times, she confirmed that officers and the app's operators receive a message when any site experiences difficulties. It was explained that boxes could be installed to improve Wi-Fi in some areas to ensure that the app worked. It was confirmed that the Department worked with the company regularly to ensure that the difficulties were resolved as soon as possible.

In response to a question regarding the public's use of free-of-charge parking spaces in shops and centres, it was confirmed that this was being considered closely by the Department, so as to ensure that anyone who needed a parking space to be able to use those facilities could do so easily.

Many observations were made about trying to ensure that the public were not overly affected by these adjustments, and to make the most of visitor expenditure. The Head of Department emphasised that this was being considered, but it was a very challenging process because a number of locations were being used constantly by visitors and local residents. However, it was considered that some areas were using parking spaces because it was not possible to park outside houses, and such situations would receive careful consideration.

It was considered that the Department's observations on compliance with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 were not as thorough as other Council departments. The department was asked to provide more detail in this information in future to ensure that individuals from different socio-economic groups were protected and supported. In response to the observations, it was acknowledged that this was a matter that could be better reported in future.

In response to an enquiry about the 'Arosfan' scheme which offered overnight parking spaces and facilities for motorhomes, it was confirmed that these fee revisions would not affect the scheme. It was explained that it was currently a pilot scheme, offering a service for £16.50 a night through a standard pay and display machine (with cash or card/mobile phone payment). It was elaborated that there had been mixed comments about the pilot scheme to date, and that additional income could be received if additional parking areas were established in future. The members were updated that there were two 'Arosfan' locations in use in Dwyfor and Arfon at present, and the Department was searching for a suitable location in Meirionnydd to trial the scheme there too.

RESOLVED to recommend to the Cabinet:

- **Increasing parking fees on an annual or biennial basis should be considered with the inflation situation taken into account;**
- **Enforcement arrangements in the short-stay car parks should not be revised due to the impact on the local economy.**
- **Further increase of the fees should be considered in car parks in certain tourist areas such as Pen y Gwryd.**
- **Consideration should be given to increasing the fees of Arosfan sites annually.**

6. DEVELOPMENTS IN PUBLIC TRANSPORT

The report was presented by the Cabinet Member for the Environment, the Head of Environment Department, the Assistant Head of Environment Department (Transport) and the Integrated Transport and Road Safety Manager.

It was explained that there had been constant change in the field of public transport for many years due to legislative changes and the evolving priorities of the Council, Transport for Wales and the Welsh Government. It was elaborated that the Department had been commended by the Welsh Government for the work completed in the field. Officers were pleased that a high standard of work had been achieved and that residents saw the benefits of using public transport.

They drew attention to the complex nature of the County's landscape, explaining that there were seven different types of public transport services available here with different funding processes. They explained that the Council's management of these projects varied according to the contracts with partners. It was recognised that the reliance on funding beyond the Council's control was a risk for the service.

It was emphasised that a 'Public transport network that meets the various needs of the communities of Gwynedd' had been identified as a 'Green Gwynedd' priority as part of the Council Plan 2023-28. It was noted that the department was continually working to revise internal procedures to fulfil this priority. It was explained that public transport services contracts had been updated in every area over the past few years, with new services in place. Services for Caernarfon and Dyffryn Nantlle had been updated in July 2023, Meirionnydd had been updated in February 2024 and the services for Bangor and Dyffryn Ogwen had been updated in early June 2024.

During the discussion, the following observations were noted:-

Members welcomed the opportunity to engage with the Department as they considered the network and arrangements in Dwyfor for the future. In response to an enquiry as to how the Department monitored use when considering changing services, the Integrated Transport and Road Safety Manager confirmed that there was a machine on every bus that monitored the number of people using the specific services, and to where they travelled. She elaborated that Officers were able to use this information when considering any change to the service's routes.

The Department was thanked for a convenient and reliable service in the Dyffryn Nantlle area. In response to an enquiry about card payments using the 'Tap On/Tap Off' technology, the Integrated Transport and Road Safety Manager confirmed that this was possible. She elaborated that the minimum cost for using this technology was £2.20 up to a maximum of £6.50 a day if the service has been used.

In response to an example of a situation where the service timetable was inconvenient to some users, the Cabinet Member for the Environment acknowledged that these challenges did come up in some circumstances but that the service worked for a high percentage of service users.

In response to an enquiry regarding consideration of students' use of the public transport services, it was emphasised that the network was very complex. The Assistant Head of Environment Department thanked Transport for Wales for their cooperation in ensuring a usable network for the rural areas of the County. He added that several partners and networks formed part of the public transport service and that maintaining an on-going discussion with them was crucial to the success of the service.

Examples were shared of some areas where it was felt that the standard of service had deteriorated following amendments to the service. It was felt that inadequate engagement with service users had led to the frequency of the service being cut, leaving some communities without public transport at times, for example after 5pm or on Sundays. In response to the concerns, it was acknowledged that they needed to improve the current engagement arrangements to ensure that service users and Elected Members had input into potential amendments to public transport timetables. In response, it was emphasised that changing services was not a straightforward process due to the complexity of the network and the partners linked to it. The members were assured that most residents and service users felt that the service had generally improved in recent months.

The Assistant Head of Environment Department (Transport) detailed the engagement arrangements that were currently being used, stating that many barriers had arisen. He stated that they needed to assess aspirations locally and further afield when engaging on services – with some users taking advantage of the entire route and others only travelling on a part of it. He noted that we needed to carefully balance any consultation with ensuring that services were financially viable and made the best sense environmentally. It was recognised that there was no way to ensure that every individual's wishes were fulfilled. However, they had ensured that communities that were not on the routes were not disregarded, and it had been arranged to hold a conversation to consider those communities, with Elected Members sharing their input.

The department was congratulated for introducing TrawsCymru and Flexi services. It was elaborated that these services were believed to have several users and that they filled the gaps arising from the traditional bus service. It was shared that residents who benefited from these services believed that it was very convenient and a great help for individuals with mobile difficulties and physical conditions to get to appointments. In response to these comments, the Cabinet Member thanked all partners for ensuring quality services for the residents of Gwynedd and hoped that residents would continue to make more use of them rather than personal cars in the future.

In response to a query about extending Flexi services, it was confirmed that this was possible, depending on future grants. The Assistant Head of Department confirmed that the desire would be to use this service to fill the gaps in the routes.

In response to a question about challenges in ensuring that services went out to tender, the Assistant Head confirmed that this was very challenging as public transport companies had faced several challenges in recent years such as a decrease in service users and rising costs. Despite this, pride was expressed that all services on the network were currently being maintained.

Concerns were expressed about additional costs for the Department as it invested in new technology to meet targets to reduce carbon emissions. In response, the Head of Department acknowledged that the investment in technology was significant as it was new but assumed that costs would decrease in the future as the technology was used more consistently. Further, he confirmed that the Department had received grants for operating electric buses, and work was underway to monitor the costs of operating in comparison with the costs of fuel buses. He shared an example of a saving the Council was currently making by gradually updating the car fleet to electric motors, noting that electric cars were around £350 cheaper to operate each month.

In response to enquiries about updates in the Arfon area, the Assistant Head confirmed that contracts had been agreed recently and that discussions about modifications would take place within the contractual period of up to four years. Consultation was an important element of this, but he explained that large firms dominated the field, and ultimately they determined the arrangements.

RESOLVED

- (i) To accept the report, noting the observations made during the discussion.**
- (ii) To recommend to the Environment Department:**
 - **that Local Members should be included as soon as possible when considering changes to bus services;**
 - **that consultation with communities needs to be strengthened.**

7. WASTE AND RECYCLING SERVICES

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

The members were reminded that this service had transferred from the Highways, Engineering and YGC Department back in October 2022 and that major changes had been implemented to improve the running of the service within the Environment Department. It was acknowledged that several challenges had arisen during the transfer period, which had led to difficulties with collection on routes, but they believed that the service had now stabilised.

They referred to the Welsh Government targets of ensuring that Local Authorities recycled 70% of all waste by March 2025. They emphasised that this was an incredibly challenging target and that work was being carried out to try to reach this target. They explained that the Council was managing to reach the Government's current target of recycling 64% of waste and were confident that the Department's frameworks would lead to increasing this percentage. They highlighted the fact that discussions with the Welsh Government had suggested that Local Authorities could be penalised financially if they failed to reach the 70% target.

It was explained that two factors had led to overspending within the service recently. It was detailed that these included the workforce sickness levels as well as overtime. They explained that a combination of short-term and long-term sickness had led to this, and they ensured that the service worked with the Byw'n Iach company to promote employees' well-being. The workforce was thanked for their positive response to the call for change in the way of working to ensure that services were delivered within the budget. All service staff were also thanked for their positive attitude and their readiness to undertake work to a high standard for the benefit of the County's residents.

During the discussion, the following observations were noted:-

In response to concerns surrounding the fines by the Welsh Government should we fail to recycle 70% of waste, the Assistant Head of Department assured the members that no Local Authority had been fined to date, despite some having failed to reach the targets. They stressed that no definite confirmation of this fine had been announced and believed that the Government would be looking at Local Authorities' targets over the years to see whether an effort had been made to reach the requested targets. It was pointed out that Gwynedd had consistently reached the Government's targets over the years and worked closely with officers, therefore they did not anticipate that Gwynedd would be fined if it failed to hit the 70% recycling target.

A member enquired about the Department's plans to charge for disposing of some waste items such as tyres, rubble and asbestos and whether this was likely to lead to more instances of fly-tipping. In response, the Assistant Head explained that around 80 tonnes of tyres reached the recycling centres annually, which costs around £20,000 to process. He emphasised that there were procedures in place within the Highways, Municipal and YGC Department to deal with cases of fly-tipping, and should these charges be introduced, work would be undertaken to monitor the effect they would have on those processes – recognising that an increase in fly-tipping numbers was an associated risk.

Reference was made to plans that had been discussed at a previous meeting, of introducing hessian sacks to hold recycling waste rather than the current plastic carts. In response, the Assistant Head of Department confirmed that the Department was keen to trial these sacks in some areas because they had a larger capacity whilst also taking up less space and were cleaner. It was confirmed that the Department had already considered trialling them, but this had not happened because of the recent general election. The Department was still keen to trial this and were in the process of finding a suitable area to do so.

It was explained that the report referred to new software that had recently been installed in the lorries, and the Department was asked what kind of response there had been from the workers to the use of cameras within the lorries. In response, the Assistant Head of Department confirmed that the workers had been focal to the conversation, and he noted that the cameras were a means of assisting the workers rather than monitoring them. He emphasised that the purpose of the cameras was to verify where the lorries had been during the routes. He added that the cameras could be re-examined if a query or complaint was made, in order to assess the situation – this enabled them to confirm whether a complainant had placed their recycling trolleys in a suitable location etc. He acknowledged that there had been a negative response to the cameras by the workers initially, but they now supported them because they could see the benefit of the cameras to the efficiency of the service and allowed them to deal with enquiries more easily.

In response to an enquiry about the recycling arrangements for businesses, it was acknowledged that more could have been done to raise awareness of the necessary recycling arrangements that the Welsh Government had introduced for businesses. It was explained that the Department had not been fully ready for these new regulations, but work was now underway to support businesses.

A member asked whether enough recyclables were being collected to make a profit to contribute towards the Council's costs? It was enquired whether green waste was composted and offered back to residents for their use? In response, the Assistant Head of Department confirmed that the Department relied on the market to see how much money was paid for the materials. Although, he noted that, in general, not enough was being collected to create adequate profit. He explained that the Department was investing in new processing centres in Ffridd Rasus, Harlech and Caergyfchu, Caernarfon to improve the quality of the materials in the hope that they would be

purchased by outside companies for more profit in future. Similarly, he confirmed that a partnership had been established with the Isle of Anglesey County Council for composting garden waste. It was also noted that a private provider received a portion of it. He explained that it was a matter for the provider regarding what was done with the compost.

It was confirmed that the cost of residual waste disposal was currently around £4 million. Attention was drawn to the fact that a new tax on carbon emissions was likely to be introduced by 2028 which would lead to an increase in costs of £0.6 million - £1.5 million to the Council. In response to an enquiry on how this cost increase would be met, the Assistant Head of Department explained that the Council was in a long-term partnership with Parc Adfer. He emphasised that the best approach to reducing this financial risk was to ensure that we had robust recycling arrangements in place to reduce the amount of residual waste in the green bins.

The Head of Department added that work needed to be done to change people's mindset and educate residents on recycling issues. It was reported that 57% of the waste seen in the green residual bin were materials that could be recycled.

In response to concerns that holiday homes, holiday lets and AirBnBs led to waste being left for days before the collection day, the Assistant Head of Department confirmed that these were charged fees as commercial waste. He encouraged any Member to get in touch with the service if there were such difficulties in their wards.

The service was congratulated for its work, and it was confirmed that the work was of high quality and that Local Members no longer received any negative comments about it. All the workers were thanked for their hard work. The office staff were also thanked for responding promptly and meaningfully to e-mails about concerns.

RESOLVED

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

8. PUBLIC SPACES PROTECTION ORDER (PSPO) (DOG CONTROL)

The report was presented by the Cabinet Member for Highways, Engineering and YGC, the Head of Highways, Engineering and YGC Department and the Street Services Manager.

It was explained that a dog control order had been in force since 2013 and that it had now been extended until August 2027. They elaborated that the order related to a failure to clear or pick up dog waste, allowing a dog to enter land where dogs are prohibited, and not controlling and keeping a dog on a lead when a person is asked to do so by an authorised officer.

It was confirmed that the Department was aware that these issues were important to the residents of Gwynedd, stating that a public consultation had been carried out recently, in accordance with the statutory requirement to renew the order every three years. It was emphasised that 1,100 responses had been received to this consultation, compared with 75 responses to the Department's consultation on a flooding strategy recently.

It was explained that enforcement within this service had been challenging in recent years, following the sudden death of a key member of staff. The committee sympathised with the workers on their loss. It was explained that staffing issues had now improved

and that the number of penalties was increasing, and the team's presence was more visible as they dealt with several enforcement aspects such as graffiti and dog fouling.

The members were reminded that the Department had combined three services to establish a Streetscene Service. These included the enforcement, street cleaning and Ardal Ni tidying up teams. It was noted that the teams worked closely and effectively together to educate residents, install dog mess bins, signs and to tidy the streets. They elaborated that educating and running campaigns was a consistent feature of dog control work and referred to several projects such as the red signs seen in communities in recent years. It was reported that the focus of the services changed every season – they had worked with the maritime services over the summer to ensure that visitors were aware of the dog regulations, and were preparing to shift the emphasis to streets and parking over the winter.

It was reported that the Department would look at the dog control situation more widely in the future to determine how they could work together across departments, regionally and nationally to tackle the matter. Reference was made to new plans currently being developed by the Welsh Government which would provide guidance to the Local Authorities soon.

During the discussion, the following observations were noted:-

In response to a query, the Street Services Manager confirmed that the service was working with vets. It was noted that the service provides information packs and posters for them and that it was an important element of sharing information with dog owners about the regulations that were in force. The vets were thanked for their willingness to work alongside the service.

The Street Services Manager explained that small packs of dog waste bags were available to Elected Members and encouraged them to get in touch with the service if they wished to receive them for use within their communities. Examples were shared by a Member who received these kits from the Department and they were being used regularly by dog owners in their ward. The members noted that the breach of dog regulations was not always deliberate and that giving these bags to owners helped them comply if they had forgotten to bring the bags with them. It was pointed out that ensuring the dog waste bins were emptied on a regular basis was an important part of this cooperation.

A member requested more information about how the service adapted the locations it targeted over the winter and what campaigns would be in place. The Street Services Manager confirmed there would be several campaigns over the winter including posters, collaboration with the press and providing information on social media up to twice a week over the next few months. He added that they were placing emphasis on the penalties that could be incurred through non-compliance with regulations. He reported that the service was constantly looking for new solutions such as working with schools, and red signs to attract attention. Anyone who had ideas on how they could further raise awareness was encouraged to get in touch with the service.

RESOLVED

- **To accept the report, noting the observations made during the discussion.**
- **To recommend that the Highways, Engineering and YGC Department contact Councillors to offer a supply of the dog waste bags kits to be used in their communities.**

9. COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD PROGRAMME

The report was presented by the Scrutiny Advisor.

The advisor provided an update on the matters to be scrutinised. She noted that after receiving a request for the Committee to scrutinise 'Parking Fees' at this meeting, the relevant departments had been contacted to identify an item to re-schedule. She explained that the Chair was consulted after receiving responses from the departments.

It was suggested that the item on 'Introducing public charging points for electric vehicles' should be rescheduled to the 20 March 2025 meeting. She noted that re-scheduling the item to the March meeting would provide an opportunity for this workstream to develop further, giving more scope for scrutiny to add value.

RESOLVED to adopt the Communities Scrutiny Committee's revised work programme for 2024/25.

The meeting commenced at 10:30am and concluded at 15:00pm

CHAIR