
COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE, 20 MARCH 2025

Attendance:

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

Elwyn Edwards, Beca Brown, Linda Morgan, Beca Roberts, Edgar Wyn Owen, Jina Gwyrfai, Robert Glyn Daniels, Peter Thomas, Gruffydd Williams, Rob Triggs, Elfed Williams and Stephen Churchman.

Officers present:

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

Present for Item 5:

Councillor Craig ab Iago (Cabinet Member for the Environment), Gerwyn Jones (Assistant Head of Environment Department (Transportation)) and Iwan ap Trefor (Traffic and Projects Service Manager)

Present for Item 6:

Councillor June Jones (Cabinet Member for Highways, Engineering and YGC), Steffan Jones (Head of Highways, Engineering and YGC Department) and Amanda Jayne Murray (Municipal Assets Manager)

Present for Item 7:

Councillor June Jones (Cabinet Member for Highways, Engineering and YGC), Steffan Jones (Head of Highways, Engineering and YGC Department) and Meirion Williams (Assistant Head of Department)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Arwyn Herald Roberts, Berwyn Parry Jones, Elfed Powell Roberts and Elin Hywel.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

A declaration of personal interest was received from Councillor Stephen Churchman, as he was the Chair of the Garndolbenmaen Village Hall Committee, which receives a grant under the Community Grant Scheme. It was noted that it was not a prejudicial interest, and he did not withdraw from the meeting for the discussion.

3. URGENT ITEMS

None to note.

4. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee held on 23 January 2025, as a true record.

5. INTRODUCTION OF PUBLIC CHARGING POINTS FOR ELECTRIC VEHICLES

The report was presented by the Cabinet Member for the Environment, the Assistant Head of Environment (Transportation) and the Traffic and Projects Service Manager.

It was reported that this field became clearer and gained a higher profile, with more electric vehicles on the road, reflecting the target for 2030 to reduce and then prevent generating petrol and diesel vehicles. It was noted that the department led on providing public charging points which was a priority project under the Green Gwynedd objective in the Council Plan 2023-28, as there was a feeling in some areas of Gwynedd that the private sector did not satisfy the need as in other areas. It was explained that the intention was to fill the gaps where there was no provision from other sectors.

Attention was drawn to the dynamic nature of the field, with developments happening often and quickly. It was explained that it was unclear where the technology would go next, but the ambition would be to have provision availability which would mean that the time it took to charge electric vehicles would be the same as the time it took to fill up a diesel or petrol car.

It was noted that work had already been done to install the charging points and there was reference in the report towards a 'Zapmap' website, which showed many new charging points across the country. It was noted that this would influence the Council's role when moving forward, as it would become increasingly difficult to coordinate and have an overview of the locations.

It was explained that the machines were now being installed in workplaces, shops, other developments and car parks that are owned by the Council near the Byw'n Iach centres. It was confirmed that work was underway to introduce more rapid charging points. It was explained that the focus over time would move from geographical availability towards how many points would be available, assuming that the demand would increase regularly.

It was noted that the Gwynedd Electric Vehicles Infrastructure Strategy was currently being developed, bearing in mind that it was not only the public charging points that required attention, but also the opportunity for people to be able to charge at home. It was explained that work was underway to look into how to enable people to charge on the street, although this could be complicated due to health and safety considerations and the Highways Act principles.

During the discussion, the following observations were made:

Thanks were expressed for the report, noting that there had been good progress towards creating an electric vehicle charging network and that the new and proposed sites had been welcomed, especially the rapid charging points. Concern was expressed that there was too much dependency on slow 7kW charging machines. It was elaborated that they were suitable for overnight charging but not for rapid charging in locations such as car parks.

The option of using bank cards to pay instead of cards or apps from specific companies such as GRIDSERVE or Tesla was welcomed. It was believed that using bank cards was a simpler way and that this was now a legislative requirement. Attention was drawn to the gaps in the network, such as Aberdaron, where the nearest rapid charging point was over 50 miles away in Porthmadog.

It was noted that it would be wise to secure at least two charging points at each site, as relying on one would lead to a risk of being stuck should a problem arise with the

machine. Committee members were reminded that creating a public charging network was essential for residents who could not install charging points at home, and for visitors. It was noted that concerns and lack of confidence regarding the distance was a barrier for people to change to electric vehicles, and that increasing the number of charging points was essential to encourage change towards net zero.

In response, it was noted that feedback from experienced users was very valuable when developing the project and the officers would take attention of the points raised.

Disappointment was expressed that charging points had not been installed yet in areas such as Dyffryn Nantlle, despite the fact that the Council's car park and the Byw'n Lach Centre were located there. A question was raised asking why connecting these points was taking so much time and whether Scottish Power was responsible. In response, it was noted that Scottish Power was not responsible for the delay. It was explained that a request for funding in September had been unsuccessful and it was not possible to move on until funding was secured by the Welsh Government.

It was asked whether there was an intention to expand on the provision to car parks in Penygroes and Talyssarn. In response, it was confirmed that the Council did not currently have specific plans beyond the ones noted within the report.

It was asked what plans were in the pipeline to expand on the provision in the future to serve all Gwynedd residents, including Gwynedd's villages, as the 'Zapmap' currently showed clear gaps. In response, it was noted that there were no specific plans beyond the current plans, but a strategy to move forward would be developed to get to grips with the challenge of ensuring provision which reaches everyone within a specific time.

There was a question regarding the charging times, expressing surprise about how long it could take, and it was asked whether it was possible to move towards rapid charging in the future. In response, it was noted that there were plans to introduce ultra-rapid charging points in Pwllheli, but this was challenging to be provided wider due to the quality of electric infrastructure in the county. It was further noted that there was a question regarding the Council's role in providing these types of points, as this could undermine the role of the private sector in the market. It was expressed that there was a need to discover the correct balance when moving forward in the future.

It was questioned whether it was possible to generate an income following the investment. In response, it was noted that there would be a better picture by next year as more rapid machines came forward. It was noted that the main challenge for the public sector related to how to maintain the service which would depend on the public use when moving forward.

Concern was expressed about the Dolgellau site, noting that one machine was out-of-order. It was asked how long it would take for the second machine to become operational. In response, it was noted that they were working closely with Scottish Power and were expecting to be able to offer a full service by the summer.

Support was expressed towards the observations raised regarding the need to expand on the provision of electric charging points in rural areas, such as Deiniolen. Concern was expressed regarding how people in rural areas would be able to cope with the change when approaching the 2030 limit when generating petrol and diesel vehicles would come to an end.

Concerns were expressed regarding how it would be possible to maintain the '*baseload*' without fossil fuels, and concerns regarding whether the current electric supply would

be sufficient to keep the system running. It was noted that more electric vehicles would lead to more pressure on the grid, and this would pose a risk of breakdown.

Considering the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, questions were raised about the impact of the development on well-being, noting that the prices of electricity were amongst the highest in the world for supply, and that net zero policies posed a risk of pushing people towards fuel poverty. Reference was made to the wider environmental impact, noting that creating batteries and the manufacturing process contributed towards carbon outputs. Wider suspicions were expressed about the net zero targets.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Environment noted that the observations related to political matters and not operational matters, and it was not the role of the Scrutiny Committee to make political decisions.

Reference was made towards an observation previously made, it was noted that there was a role for other sectors except for the Council to meet the needs in rural areas, providing an example of some areas where community councils or village halls had already installed charging points.

Support was expressed to the observations that there was a need to further expand on the provision for rural areas, such as Ganllwyd, Llanelltyd and Brithdir. Personal experience was shared of changing to hybrid vehicles, acknowledging concerns about battery sustainability but also noting that there were significant financial savings in terms of fuel costs.

It was questioned how the Council would communicate with the public when moving forward with the Green Gwynedd objective. In response, it was noted that the use figures to date had been positive and a sign that people were aware and taking advantage of the provision.

The importance of working with partners, including the grid provider, Scottish Power, was expressed, acknowledging the fact that the infrastructure in some rural areas were old, in a poor condition and insufficient to cope with the additional pressure that would arise from the net zero targets. It was noted, if nothing was done to get to grips with this, the net zero targets would not be achieved. It was emphasised that this matter deserved the attention and influence of the local authority.

RESOLVED

- 1. To accept the report, noting the observations made during the meeting.**
- 2. To recommend to the Environment Department that there must be a minimum of two charging points at every site.**
- 3. That the Committee receives an update, including the Business Plan and information regarding the provision in Gwynedd's rural areas in a year's time.**

6. PUBLIC TOILETS

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

It was noted that Gwynedd currently had 61 public toilets and 39 toilets in businesses which took part in the Public Facilities Grant Scheme. It was emphasised that a large

part of Gwynedd was located within the Eryri National Park, and therefore the National Park and National Trust also had public toilets. It was therefore noted that a good number of facilities were available across the county.

It was explained that the report provided an update on the implementation of the Public Toilets Strategy since 2019, and included an action plan which noted the next steps and the steps that had already been achieved to improve the image of the public toilets and address the expectations of users, as well as explaining which funding sources were available to improve the provision, what the latest timetable was in terms of introducing contactless payment technology, and what the situation was in terms of income.

It was noted that various grants had been attracted through a variety of ways over the last year, including the Shared Prosperity Fund. It was emphasised that efforts had continued to get access to grants, with an application being submitted for the next round of funding by the Shared Prosperity Fund.

It was noted that the service's revenue budget was limited, and it had been under substantial pressure due to the condition of the buildings and vandalism. It was noted that most of the budget had been used for the maintenance of current facilities, leaving a small amount for restoration or improvement.

Reference was made to the grant scheme by the Welsh Government which provided funding to businesses that were happy to open their facilities to the public. It was noted that it was a requirement for the businesses to ensure appropriate signs, and that officers monitored that this was happening. It was confirmed that there were currently no businesses on the waiting list, therefore new businesses could be included should they appear. It was explained that the Council website noted the businesses which took part in the plan and that list was available for the public. It was noted that work was underway to review the cleaning arrangements, and although the standards were generally satisfactory, it was believed that there was room for improvement.

Members were reminded that there had been pressure on the Council some years ago to save money by closing public toilets, but instead of doing that, a partnership plan was established with town and community councils. It was noted that there would be a need to review this contribution this year, as inflation had not been increased on the contribution since introducing the plan.

It was noted that there were five toilets where people had to pay to use them. It was noted that a bid to renovate and install modern payment doors had been successful, but there had been a slippage in the work programme. It was expected that the new provision would be available soon, but it was not possible to report on their effectiveness yet.

During the discussion, the following observations were made:

The members thanked the officers for the presentation. Reference was made to the main objectives of the strategy when expressing concern regarding the lack of a clear method to measure them, which was essential. For example, although the objectives involved encouraging information and promotion, it was not mentioned whether the Council measured the number of visits to the website or assessed the suitability of the signs.

In response, it was noted that there was a procedure within the performance challenge process which included measuring complaints, and the types of complaints received in relation to the facilities and the cleaning procedure. In addition, it was noted that measuring existed regarding how much use was made of the website and the way that

information was conveyed to the public. However, it was acknowledged that a consultation had not been held since preparing the strategy in 2019, and it would be timely to conduct a similar practice once again to gather views and information from users.

Reference was made to the situation in terms of charging in five facilities across Gwynedd. It was enquired what was happening to the funding raised, was it being earmarked for those facilities only, for the public toilet provision across the entire county or does it go to the general fund. The opinion that income from specific facilities should be used to maintain those facilities was expressed.

In response, it was noted that there was no significant income from the provision, although an income target had been set. It was confirmed that the funding gathered within the service had been used to contribute towards the costs of running the public toilets.

A question was raised about public toilets that were already locked, such as in the car park in Penygroes, asking whether there were any plans to reopen them. It was noted that the toilets had been closed for a long time and no facility was available in the area on weekends. It was asked whether it was possible to collaborate with the local Community Council to reopen the facility, given the importance of the area as a World Heritage site.

In response, it was noted that the Council had always tried to collaborate with community councils, and in many cases, community councils had collaborated with the Council after realising the local demand. However, it was noted if the building had deteriorated over a long period of time, that it may not be possible to reopen it. It was confirmed that the Council was willing to consider every individual case.

The standard of cleanliness in the public toilets at Dinas Dinlle was praised, with specific attention to the excellent work from those responsible for maintenance.

Appreciation was expressed for the work presented under the strategy, noting that Gwynedd was in a good situation with a total of 100 public toilets, much more than many other areas. It was emphasised that the Public Facilities Grant Scheme had offered a service of standard, and the belief that expanding it would lead to significant savings to the Council by reducing the burden on the direct service. It was questioned how many businesses were on the waiting list for the scheme and when it was expected for the bid for the scheme to be successful.

In response, it was confirmed that no business was currently on the waiting list. It was noted that the annual grant from the Welsh Government was slowly increasing every year with inflation, meaning that it would be possible to add at least four new businesses to the scheme. It was explained that an officer was conducting annual investigations to ensure that signs were in place, that facilities were open to the public and met a specific standard. In addition, it was noted that further work would happen this year to note areas where they do not have further facilities but where local businesses were willing to join the scheme.

It was asked whether councillors could now encourage businesses to apply for the scheme. In response, it was confirmed that this was possible as funding was available.

Support was expressed for the community toilets scheme and its value was emphasised, as well as noting the satisfaction that three changing places were already underway. It was asked whether there was any further statutory requirement which meant that

changing places had to be included in any new provision. Views were expressed that this should be mandatory.

In response, it was confirmed that it was not a statutory requirement to include changing places in any new scheme. It was explained that there had been opportunities to note possible locations for such facilities, and the Council would consider every opportunity when moving forward, especially if a grant was received to develop new facilities and that it had been included in the strategy's action plan.

Concern was expressed that the biggest difficulty with changing places facilities was that they needed to be located within sites with staff to avoid concerns about vandalism. It was noted that locating them in buildings which were already staffed, such as libraries, community centres or museums, was a more viable option.

It was asked whether there was an opportunity to work with businesses which were part of the community toilet scheme to provide changing places. Reference was made to a particular example of the Royal Ship Hotel in Dolgellau, where staff were available all day, suggesting that an agreement could be offered to ensure the provision for a longer period. In response, it was agreed that this was a good idea, but the challenge of attracting grants continued to be a significant challenge.

It was noted that approximately 27 of the current community toilets offered baby changing facilities and this was positive news. It was noted that many of these facilities were in similar businesses and cafés, where the owners were willing to provide the facilities.

Pride was expressed about the high standard of cleanliness in the public toilets, including those within Eryri National Park. Information about the process of reopening closed public toilets was sought, including the cost and the steps that the community council could take to work with the Council. It was noted that one community council was considering reopening public toilets in their area, and it was possible for others to do this if they understood the process. In response, it was confirmed that detailed information would be sent to the Member.

It was suggested to promote the toilets available by using social media such as Facebook. It was elaborated that this was a quick, easy and free way to provide details about facilities to the public. It was noted that this could be beneficial to individuals who needed to plan trips because of health matters. It was suggested that councillors could contribute to this by sharing the information in their communities.

In response, it was noted that the Department's business unit, which has expertise in communication and e-development fields, would undertake the work to implement the suggestion.

It was asked whether a grant application has been submitted to create new public toilets in Dyffryn Ardudwy, noting that the previous block was now being vandalised. It was confirmed that the community council was happy to collaborate and willing to contribute financially. In response, it was explained that the current block had deteriorated too much to be reopened, and that a decision needed to be made regarding its demolition and building a new facility in its place. It was agreed that officers would contact the Member to discuss the matter in more detail.

It was asked whether the payment system for using the public toilets included the choice between cash and card. It was confirmed that the new payment doors would offer both options.

RESOLVED to accept the report, noting the observations made during the meeting.

7. GRASS CUTTING AND MAINTENANCE OF COUNTY ROAD VERGES

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

It was explained that there was a statutory duty on local authorities to maintain and improve biodiversity, but there was also a moral duty on the Council to implement positively. It was noted that the Council had a responsibility as significant landowners to set an example and strengthen the resilience of ecosystems in the area. It was expressed that the work done here was a positive first step and a step on the road towards achieving these ambitions.

It was confirmed that the current figures in the report showed how the service has adapted the grass cutting arrangements, creating more surface for wildflowers to grow and encourage pollinators. It was explained that the hope, after completing the trials, was that significant areas of verges can be excluded from the current contract and included in a new arrangement of grass cutting and collecting.

However, it was noted that there would be a need to consider several factors before implementing this, including financial viability, as the Council was under significant financial pressure and was unable to afford increasing costs when implementing new arrangements. It was noted that there was a need to decide who will be delivering the work, whether the Council's internal workforce with the necessary expertise, or external contractors.

Attention was drawn to the public's response to the new arrangements, referring to the 'Nature is not neat' campaign and the fact that individuals had different views about tidiness. The need to ensure that the changes did not lead to complaints from the public was noted.

It was explained that cutting urban verges was also part of the work, not only for safety reasons but also to improve the image of communities. In these places, grass is cut between three and five times a year, and that this was done lower to the ground. It was noted that community and town councils must pay the Council to cut grass more often, but others are eager to earmark land for wildflowers, working with the Council or asking them to do the work on their behalf.

Reference was made to the trial in Dwyfor and the work in Meirionnydd, where a report was received by a local ecologist before commencing the work with the team acting in accordance with the report. It was explained that the experience was generally positive, but problems had arisen, such as when a contractor mistakenly cut a site, leaving grass on the surface of the land, or when Welsh Water excavated over work which had previously been completed before signs could be installed. It was noted that steps had been taken to rectify the situation and lessons were being learnt.

They looked forward to the next steps of the plan, including investigations to sites in Arfon and expanding on the trials the next year, if funding was available. It was noted that collaboration took place between the Environment Department and the Biodiversity Team, in the hope that they would receive funding to add more sites.

It was explained that the Land Maintenance Service had started to conduct cutting and collecting trials themselves on some of the land that they are responsible for maintaining, such as Cerrig yr Orsedd in Caernarfon. It was noted that a grant from the Gwynedd Nature Partnership had allowed the Council to purchase specialist equipment, such as a tractor, a collection machine and a baler so the Land Maintenance Service could complete this type of work itself in the future and gain expertise in the field.

During the discussion, the following observations were made:

Gratitude was expressed for the report and for the work being done by the service and its workers.

Concern was expressed regarding the lack of information in the report relating to how the success of the trials were measured and their impact on biodiversity. It was noted that the methodology was being outlined, e.g. purchasing equipment, preparing the soil and sowing seeds, but the methods of measuring the results of these steps had not been included in the report. It was emphasised that it was insufficient to act without being able to prove the results. It was asked for assurance that detailed information about measuring success will be included in reports in the future.

In response, it was noted that sites were being assessed by an ecologist before any trials commenced, including an assessment of the current species, the number of species and standard of the soil. It was noted that this information formed a baseline to be used as a basis to compare at the end of the period, and if there was no change in the data, that a conclusion could be drawn that the trial had been unsuccessful. It was reiterated that meant that the question as to whether it was worth continuing in the area could be answered, and if the answer was positive, that it provided stronger justification to expand on the plan and support requests for additional funding.

Concern was expressed about the safety of unclassified roads, as they were not cut regularly. It was elaborated that this could be a safety risk due to the risk to visibility caused by trees and overgrowth on these roads, which are often narrow and winding. Concern was expressed, should there be an accident, that the Council could face a claim due to lack of maintenance.

In response, it was confirmed that safety review arrangements existed for every road, and that the findings of the investigations were being recorded. It was explained that if a situation was considered dangerous, the work was included in the programme immediately or for treatment based on priority. It was confirmed that complaints received direct attention during the growth period, and that area engineers kept a list of those locations which received a high number of complaints. It was expected that those would be included in the cutting service carried out once in the spring. Members were reminded that all these roads were being cut in the autumn.

Concern was expressed about people parking on grass verges, causing damage to the soil and the grass, and preventing the contractors' work. It was asked whether the Council could collaborate internally to address this. In response, it was confirmed that this was a growing problem, especially in rural areas that were popular amongst visitors. It was noted that the damage caused maintenance problems, safety risks and hindered the public use of verges as paths where there were no pavements.

The possibility of installing barriers or parking restrictions was discussed, but doubts were expressed about their effectiveness. It was explained that no parking enforcement had been established for these sites, and that some people argued that they were eligible to

park there. It was advised that this could be discussed with the police if it was considered to be an obstruction to other users.

A positive example was given of installing bollards in Talysarn, near the playground, ensuring children's safety, and appreciation was expressed about the Council's intervention in this case.

RESOLVED

- 1. To accept the report, noting the observations made during the discussion.**
- 2. That the Committee supports the Highways, Engineering and YGC Department's intention to extend the grass cutting and collection trial to the Arfon area.**

The meeting commenced at 10:30am and concluded at 13:00pm

CHAIR