
COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 05 JUNE 2025

Present:

COUNCILLORS:

Beca Brown, Stephen Churchman, Robert Glyn Daniels, Elwyn Edwards, Delyth Lloyd Griffiths, Jina Gwyrfai, Elin Hywel, Annwen Hughes, Linda Morgan, Peter Thomas, Arwyn Herald Roberts, Elfed Powell Roberts, Berwyn Parry Jones and Elfed Williams

Officers present:

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

Present for Item 7:

Councillor Craig ab Iago (Cabinet Member for the Environment), Dafydd Wyn Williams (Head of Environment Department), Gareth Jones (Assistant Head of Environment Department) and Roland Thomas (Assistant Head of Environment Department).

Present for Item 8:

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 Highways, Engineering and YGC Department).

1. ELECTION OF CHAIR

RESOLVED to elect Councillor Annwen Hughes as Chair of the Committee for the year 2025/26.

2. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

RESOLVED to elect Councillor Delyth Lloyd Griffiths as Vice-chair of the Committee for the year 2025/26.

3. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Edgar Wyn Owen.

4. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were received.

5. URGENT ITEMS

None to note.

6. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee held on 20 March 2025 as a true record.

7. PERFORMANCE REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

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

It was reported that the Department led on five projects in the Council's Plan 2023-2028, namely 'Management of second homes and short-term holiday accommodation' as part of the Homely Gwynedd priority as well as a 'New Local Development Plan', 'Waste and Recycling', 'Active Travel', and 'Public Transport' as part of the Green Gwynedd priority. It was elaborated that the information presented for this meeting set out the Department's progress against the project milestones for 2024-2025 as well as data on the Department's services' performance measures.

During the debate, the following comments were made by Members:

Waste and Recycling

It was pointed out that the Department did not meet the Welsh Government's national targets of recycling 70% of all waste in the County, stating that the Council's recycling percentage for 2024-25 was 65.3%. It was asked if the Department had considered adapting the frequency of waste collections to meet this target. In response, the Assistant Head confirmed that it was hoped to carry out a consultation to ensure that there was a clear pathway for the Council to recycle 70% of all waste. However, it was emphasised that no decisions had been taken to adapt the frequency of waste collection at this time.

It was asked if any financial fines would be imposed on the Council by the Government for failing to meet this target. The Assistant Head confirmed that a £200 fine was imposed for every tonne of waste below the 70% recycling target. It was explained that the Council was approximately 3,000 tonnes below the target in the year 2024-25. It was explained that the Council was in ongoing discussions with the Welsh Government to demonstrate that action was being taken to meet the target and that this would be reflected when determining the amount of any financial penalty imposed on the Council.

In response to a further question about starting to recycle soft plastics, the Assistant Head confirmed that this was not happening now because there was no market for it. However, it was emphasised that the Welsh Government was currently piloting this type of collection in south Wales. It was added that there were plans to recycle more goods such as plastic bags and small electronic gadgets in the future. The Assistant Head elaborated that a tax was being imposed on companies on a scale that set out how easy it was to recycle any waste from their products or packaging, in the hope that this would encourage companies to ensure that their products could be recycled and to encourage buyers to do so.

Sickness levels among service staff were referenced and officers were asked how they dealt with these cases. In response, the Assistant Head confirmed that staff were more likely to be off sick as they get older due to the physical nature of the work. It was reported that sickness levels among staff in the Arfon area had decreased recently but that there had been an increase in the Dwyfor and Meirionnydd areas. It was detailed that 9% of all service staff were over the age of 60 and that more than half of those individuals were currently off work with a long-term condition. It was also mentioned that a number of staff had decided to take a holiday between Christmas and the new year in order to have the opportunity to celebrate with their families. The Head of Department emphasised that officers welcomed this because the service operated throughout the year, noting that this was an opportunity to raise staff morale, and that arrangements were in place to catch up with any missed collections once they returned to work. It was also noted that this was not mandatory and staff who wished to work had done so.

It was asked what plans were in place for teaching and engaging with young people, considering that the newest and most innovative ideas very often came from the younger generation. It was also asked if consideration was being given to a circular economy whereby reusing, a repair café and lending schemes were normalised. In response to the comments, the Assistant Head confirmed that the Department was working with Bangor

University on these areas and recognised that more work needed to be done with schools. However, it was emphasised that there were currently only four engagement officers within the service. The Member was thanked for discussing the circular economy as it was part of the service, and the Department was working with Council departments to expand on these opportunities in the future.

Members expressed pride that the numbers of missed collections had fallen significantly over the past year and thanked the Department and employees for their continued work.

Project: Management of second homes and short-term holiday accommodation

The Department was congratulated on the recent introduction of the Article 4 Direction which added to the second homes premium as a measure to manage second homes and short-term holiday accommodation. It was asked what work was in place to monitor their impact and ensure that local people and the tourism sector were not negatively affected. In response, it was confirmed that monitoring frameworks had been established for the Article 4 Direction but that it was not timely to report on its impact at this time. It was reminded that the direction was effective since 1 September 2024 and it was hoped to analyse the monitoring data after it had been operational for 12 months. It was elaborated that monitoring work at a corporate level was being carried out in this field, sharing an example that tourism issues were a priority for the Economy and Community Department and that housing affordability was a consideration for the Housing and Property Department.

Active Travel

Positive comments were received about the Active Travel network but it was noted that a number of cyclists had reported to Members that they did not make use of them because the routes were not maintained. It was explained that stones, glass and leaves could be dangerous and cause injury to cyclists. It was highlighted that the Department stated within the report that plans were underway to develop more routes and it was asked what consideration was being given to the maintenance of these routes to ensure that they were safe for users.

In response, the Head of Department noted that the Active Travel network was used by pedestrians and cyclists and that its development was funded through Welsh Government capital funding. It was noted that there was no budget within those grants for the maintenance of the routes and that the priority to fund that within the Department's budget was low when considering the other services offered. However, it was pointed out that the Council's Highways, Engineering and YGC Department served parts of the network that were on road verges. It was emphasised that the Department did not want to refuse any opportunity for capital grant funding and was hopeful that funding would be received through the Government for the maintenance of these routes in the future. However, it was recognised that a solution to this challenge needed to be found to encourage cyclists to make use of the network.

Public Transport

Changes to the T22 bus timetables were discussed stating that the service was excellent while operational but that the timetable ended at inconvenient times for employees and there were no services to some towns on Sundays. In response, the Head of Department confirmed that bus usage data showed that there were more public transport users this year and that he would contact Members to try to find solutions to any local challenges that arose with the network.

It was asked how the Department could work to ensure that local residents were able to use the bus network to get to work, as they often worked later than the last bus to their local community. In response, the Head of Department confirmed that a review of the network was carried out relatively recently following a public consultation and that it had been generally welcomed. It was detailed that there were several considerations in developing an

effective network, such as tourism, education, medical appointments, independent living, employment and leisure, and while it was not possible to meet the needs of every individual in full an effort was made to meet the needs of the majority of people. It was also explained that budgets also hampered the Department's ability to introduce additional buses as part of the network as well as bus companies' ability to release more buses and staff to maintain the services.

The Fflecsi bus service which was being run with the Department's partners was praised and it was emphasised that it was fit for purpose and was likely to be a money saver for the Council as it was only used on request. In response to an enquiry on whether this service could be expanded in certain areas, the Head of Department confirmed that the Department was continuously working with the Welsh Government and Transport for Wales to develop the Fflecsi network but challenges could arise when considering the capacity of bus companies and the demand for the service. It was emphasised that the Department would be eager to hold further discussions with Members on the expansion of the network where possible.

The Department was thanked for submitting bus user data and pride was expressed that 37% of service users had been using cheap tickets in the last year, showing that the service was used by a wide range of users. The Department was asked what specific schemes were in place for the introduction of new electric buses within Gwynedd. In response, it was confirmed that there were no confirmed arrangements in place at the moment but that the Department was in constant discussions with the Welsh Government and Transport for Wales to ensure that these developments were underway as soon as possible.

Parking

It was reported that 16,899 parking fine tickets had been distributed in the year 2024-25 and the Department was asked for information on where the money derived from these fines was being used. In response, the Head of Department confirmed that the money was bound by statutory requirements to be put back into the service for uses such as staff employment. It was also clarified that ticket fees for car parks not on the roadside, such as pay and display, was income that the Council could use in whatever way it saw fit.

Public Protection – Food and Safety

It was highlighted that 80% of Food Standards inspections were carried out in accordance with the work programme during 2024-25. There was concern that this meant that 1 in 5 venues that should have received an inspection this year had not received it, which could pose a risk to the public. In response to the comments, it was recognised that there were challenges in this area of work, ensuring that additional resources were introduced to meet the requirements, and that public protection was a priority for the Department. It was explained that the service had lost experienced members of staff within the last year and that recruiting individuals with the appropriate expertise as well as Welsh-language skills had been challenging. However, it was emphasised that the Department had succeeded in attracting a future planning officer and a professional trainee who would qualify to carry out inspections. The current officers were thanked for their ongoing work and for taking time to mentor and to share their knowledge.

Members pointed out that some businesses could be displaying a food hygiene rating of 0 for long periods, and asked how this could be improved and how was it possible to ensure that the public had the latest information on the food hygiene rating of the County's businesses. In response, the Assistant Head confirmed that any business that received a food hygiene rating of 1 or 0 following an inspection received a warning to put measures in place to increase the level of hygiene. It was elaborated that a further inspection would be carried out within three months to receive a higher score. However, it was noted that a number of businesses did not co-operate with the Department to ensure that this second inspection took place.

Planning Enforcement

Concern was noted that a high number of enforcement cases were open and that there was a lack of staff to do the work. In response, the Assistant Head noted that the situation had stabilised over the past eighteen months but that the workload remained high. He elaborated that two officers worked full-time and the Article 4 Team helped with specific cases and also that planning officers conducted initial inspections. He explained that the relevant enforcement action was taken when necessary, noting that nine enforcement notices had been issued in the last twelve months.

RESOLVED

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

8. PERFORMANCE REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR HIGHWAYS, ENGINEERING AND YGC

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

It was reported that the Department was leading on three projects in the Council Plan 2023-2028, namely 'Extending opportunities for play and socialising for the county's children and young people' as part of the Tomorrow's Gwynedd priority as well as 'Acting on Flood Risks' and 'Clean and Tidy Communities' as part of the Green Gwynedd priority. It was elaborated that the information presented for this meeting set out the Department's progress against the projects' milestones for 2024-2025 as well as data on the Department's services' performance measures.

During the debate, the following comments were made by Members:

Highway Maintenance - Condition of Roads

The Department was thanked for submitting data on pothole inspections and were asked for more information on response times to public enquiries about the condition of roads. In response, the Head of Department apologised that this data on response time statistics had not been included in the Report, explaining that this was due to a problem with the software. It was explained that this data would be included when reporting to this Committee in the future. It was explained that inspectors immediately assessed calls concerning the condition of roads and it was noted that work was carried out on a road within two hours if it was assessed to be a critical problem. It was reported that other enquiries were resolved by the end of the following working day in order to be able to schedule and package work effectively. Confidence was expressed by the Department that it was able to meet these timetables.

Some Members expressed frustration that road resurfacing after reporting a pothole did not last in the long term. In response, the Head of Department explained that every effort was made to cut out a larger section of the road in order to be able to better fill the hole and to a high standard, but this was not possible on all occasions, therefore staff resurfaced the road using tar from buckets. It was recognised that this could have an impact on the quality of the road and the Department would consider the comments further. It was elaborated that the Department had received grant funding of £8 million over a two-year period to deal with road condition issues, noting that reporting on response rates to reports of potholes and finding ways to prevent them from appearing was key to the application.

Street Services

It was pointed out that only 23 Fixed Penalty Notices were paid during 2023-24 for cases of dog owners not clearing up after their dog. In response, the Head of Department shared his frustration with this challenge, explaining that these figures were low because enforcement officers had to witness the dog fouling and the owner not clearing it up. He explained that this was very challenging and added that there were not a lot of enforcement officers employed within the service. However, it was emphasised that the Department did target areas of concern and worked to educate dog owners about the importance of safely disposing of the mess. It was elaborated that patterns indicated that this was not such a big problem during the summer season but that more reports of dog fouling were received during the winter.

A case in the Dolgellau area was described where defects had been seen on a narrow pavement for some time, causing a risk to the public and visitors as they had to step into the road instead of using the pavement. The Cabinet Member and Head of Department confirmed that they would be contacting the Member further to endeavour to find a solution to this situation.

Project: Extending opportunities for play and socialising for the county's children and young people

The Department was praised for introducing improvements to playgrounds, asking what work was underway to ensure funding was allocated to playgrounds outside the County's main towns. In response, the Head of Department confirmed that work was underway to ensure that the funds were allocated in line with the use made of the playgrounds. Council Members were urged to work with the Department to ensure that investment in the playgrounds was prioritised to the right locations. It was explained that there was only one playgrounds officer in the Department and that he went around the playgrounds to assess their condition and assess the use made of them.

Ardal Ni Tidying-up Team

Members expressed their gratitude for the work of this Team, reporting that they responded to incidents and enquiries quickly and effectively. They were thanked for their ongoing work.

Fleet Service

It was asked if there was a reason why 38 diesel and petrol vehicles remained part of the fleet when electric or hybrid vehicles had been purchased in their place. In response, the Head of Department confirmed that a large part of the fleet now consisted of electric or hybrid cars. However, it was noted that the Department received comments expressing concern that electric vehicles were still not fit for purpose because it was necessary to travel far within the county and then drive extra miles in order to complete services, posing a risk that a convenient charging point was not available on all occasions, and therefore diesel and petrol vehicles continued to be used in some cases rather than accumulating vehicle hire costs. However, it was emphasised that the confidence of the workforce in the fleet of electric and hybrid cars was growing and the introduction of more charging points in the future would also lead to resolving this problem.

It was challenged that the number of miles the electric and hybrid vehicles could travel before having to recharge should not be a problem if the right vehicles were purchased. It was also considered whether the charging points were in the correct locations if they were not suitable for Council services. In response, the Head of Department gave assurance that the Council was purchasing the right vehicles following thorough research. It was explained that electric and hybrid vehicle developments remained relatively new, especially for vans and other industrial vehicles, and that the range of miles they could travel before recharging remained low. However, it was confirmed that newer cars were able to travel more miles before recharging and it was thought that the vehicles would continue to develop in this way in the future. It was elaborated that the Department was also working to introduce rapid

charging points across the County to support staff until they were confident to use electric and hybrid cars without worrying excessively about the need to recharge.

It was noted that the Council's new strategy stated that officers had to have a manager's support before purchasing a new vehicle for the fleet and that the Fleet Manager had the final say on the matter. The Department was asked if the other Departments worked together to ensure that this was the relevant arrangement. In response, the Head of Department explained that the Departments' fleet budgets remained within the control of the individual Departments rather than within an independent fleet budget. It was emphasised that discussions were taking place within the Council to find the best system to budget the fleet for the future.

Structure Maintenance Service

It was pointed out that the report stated that there were 22 bridges in Gwynedd which had a 'poor' BCI (Bridge Condition Indicator) and another 10 bridges with a 'very poor' BCI. The Head of Department explained that inspectors conducted inspections of bridges (whether steel, concrete or stone) and assessed different parts of them in order to achieve a BCI score. It was elaborated that the BCIs of all parts of the bridges were combined to produce an average before prioritising which bridges needed to be worked on within the strategy for the coming year.

RESOLVED

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

The meeting started at 10.40 a.m. and ended at 13.00 p.m.

CHAIR