COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1/10/26

Present:

COUNCILLORS:

Elwyn Edwards, Beca Roberts, Berwyn Parry Jones, Delyth Lloyd Griffiths, Edgar Wyn Owen, Jina Gwyrfai, Elfed Williams, Arwyn Herald Roberts, Wendy Cleaver, Elfed Powell Roberts, Gruffydd Williams, Peter Thomas, Annwen Hughes and Stephen Churchman.

Officers present:

Bethan Adams (Scrutiny Advisor) and Annes Sion (Democracy Team Leader).

Present for Item 5:
Councillor Craig ab Iago (Cabinet Member for Environment), Bethan Richardson (Climate Change Programme 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 Gareth Roberts (Dwyfor Area Engineer).

Present for Item 7:
Councillor Craig ab Iago (Cabinet Member for Environment), Gerwyn Jones (Assistant Head of Environment Department) and Ceri Hughes Thomas (Parking and Street Works Manager).

1. APOLOGIES

An apology was received from Councillor Dafydd Davies.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were received.

3. URGENT ITEMS

None to note.

4. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee held on 11 June 2026, as a true record.

5. CLIMATE AND NATURE EMERGENCY PLAN ANNUAL REPORT 2025/26

The report was presented by the Climate Change Programme Manager stating that it

reported on work undertaken in 2025/26 and under the original Climate and Nature Emergency plan, which had now been updated and adopted by the Cabinet in summer 2026.

It was expressed that the Council had been reporting on Carbon emissions to the Welsh Government for four years now. It was explained that this provided a firm foundation to see whether progress was going in the right direction. It was also noted that figures were presented 'including procurement' and 'excluding procurement' measures, as the methodology was not entirely accurate with procurement as it was expenditure-based. It was explained that both pictures showed that they were on the right track. It was detailed that carbon emissions were falling and carbon absorption levels had remained unchanged because they had used 2024/25 statistics, but the gap was closing. It was added that there were explanations for this in the report, but they included a work investment on reducing emissions from buildings' energy use, the installation of fleet charging points and that the waste strategy was now operational. It was emphasised that the picture was broad and complex but that they were on the right track.

During the discussion, the following observations were made:

Members thanked the officer for the report and attention was drawn to calculating carbon emissions from the procurement system, noting that if it was solely expenditure-based then how could net zero be reached. With rising costs, it would not be achievable as it was a constantly moving target. It was added that with increased fuel costs, emissions would rise through this measure. It was noted that it was absurd to count carbon footprint through procurement as no one could reach net zero. He stressed that he was aware that this was a Welsh Government measure but it did not reflect the situation and that it really needed to be questioned. The response was that they fully agreed with the observations but that the Council had taken one positive step by looking at procurement processes. It was explained that a lot of time had been spent supporting suppliers and helping them to develop their own carbon management plans. In doing so, it was explained that it had led to a reduction in carbon levels within the companies and enabled them to provide accurate carbon data which was fed back to the Welsh Government. They elaborated by noting that a higher percentage of the data was accurate as a result of the support provided, but if we wanted to see this type of project across Wales then much more resources would be needed. It was added that the Cabinet Member had asked the new Government for a further discussion on this measure.

Attention was drawn to the Carbon Absorption chart by the Council's land assets, and it was asked why there had been a large reduction in the first two years of the plan followed by a gradual increase, with 2025/26 numbers higher than they were in 2021/22. The response given was that the methodology used in the first two years differed to that used in the subsequent three years. It was noted that, to obtain the full picture, the context to accompany the chart was needed. It was added that there had been little change in land use and therefore that 2024/25 data had been used for this year and that discussions were underway between the Welsh Government and the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) to find the right approach to measuring carbon absorption levels.

It was expressed that the gap to net zero was still high after it had initially fallen in 2020/21. They responded by noting that the gap had narrowed since the baseline year in 2019, but that it came back to the fact that carbon absorption levels by land assets was much lower in 2020/21 compared to the subsequent year. It was expressed that there would be an improvement this year, but this could be confirmed when there were new measurement arrangements for measuring the absorption level.

The staff who worked so hard in this area were thanked, and it was noted that miraculous work was being done with so little budget. It was emphasised that these schemes were savings hundreds of thousands of pounds for the Council which helped with the savings that the Council needed to make every year. It was highlighted that the ECO4 initiative was coming to an end this year, which involved working with the Government to help Gwynedd residents to reduce energy costs. It was asked what would happen next, and if there was room for the Scrutiny Committee to support the Cabinet Member to query the Government about the next steps in relation to the ECO4 initiative. The response given was that there would be a discussion about procurement with the Government and that the ECO4 initiative could be brought up as part of that discussion.

It was asked what projects completed in 2025/26 had had a measurable impact on reducing the gap to net zero, and which projects had not reduced emissions and how much of the progress was as a result of grants rather than sustainable changes to reduce expenditure from the core budget. The response was that several building and energy schemes had received many grants and that some would result in financial savings due to the reduction in energy costs. In terms of saving money, it was expressed that some schemes had reached neutrality where there was no increase or decrease.

It was pointed out that the gap to net zero excluding procurement remained at 16,937,946 kgCO2e at the rate, and it was asked how many years it would take to reach net zero and why there was a need to keep to the 2030 target which continued to look unrealistic. It was added that the carbon absorption level had remained stagnant, and it was asked whether it therefore indicated that the ecological strategy had failed so far or whether there was a wider explanation. It was expressed how Cyngor Gwynedd's carbon emissions contributed at all to global climate change when they were so small, when several countries were now abandoning the Paris Agreement as a result of scientific evidence highlighting a negative impact on the economy. The response given was that the latest Climate and Nature Emergency Plan adopted by the Cabinet in July provided more information in relation to the 2030 target, emphasising that it was challenging. It was noted that this had been reinforced by the Welsh Government who had mentioned that it was a target to be met in 2040. It was emphasised that this was currently an active discussion between a number of organisations.

It was asked what the real estimated cost was to close the gap by 2030 and where would the money come from if grants stopped – would the Council be prepared to change the target or what services would suffer due to the focus and expenditure on this plan. It was elaborated that grant funding came from the taxpayer's pocket and therefore needed to be spent carefully. The response was that there was nothing free in the society we lived in, but the Council needed to make the most of the grants that were being offered. It was noted that the Council had a Carbon plan back in 2005 and it was therefore part of the Council's culture to continue with the work as it saved money for the Council and the taxpayer and ensured that services were delivered as effectively as possible.

RESOLVED

1. **To accept the report, noting the observations made during the discussion.**
2. **To welcome the intention to discuss with Welsh Government Ministers the methodology of calculating carbon emissions in the area of Procurement, along with a successor to the EC04 scheme which is ending.**

6. HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE - INSTALLATION OF ROAD MARKINGS

The report was presented, stating that the department was currently looking at steps to

improve the service. The current working arrangements were noted which involved an external contractor carrying out road marking works, except for a single manual road marking machine in the south of the county. It was emphasised that there were only two contractors working across North Wales, so the waiting time to get the works done could be long. Attention was drawn to the steps to improve the service, as set out in the report. It was noted that step two was to invest in an additional manual road marking machine, along with training staff to use it, for use in the north of the county.

It was explained that step 3 involved developing a business plan to invest in a bespoke road marking vehicle, submitting an invest-to-save bid. It was added that this would ensure that works were done faster and that there would be an opportunity to offer work to neighbouring counties and generate income. It was added that operating it internally would make it much easier to manage the situation.

During the discussion, the following observations were made:

It was noted that the fact that there were only two contractors available to carry out the work, highlighted the need to support this case. However, it was expressed that it would be useful to see the financial case for that as well, perhaps when presenting to the Cabinet to see the picture over 5-10 years in terms of staffing and maintenance costs along with the additional income. The response given was that these figures were essential to submit the bid, but this stage had not been reached yet. It was noted that the cost would be around £200k investment-wise to purchase the machine. It was explained that initial talks had begun with the Trunk Roads Agency, which had noted support and work if going down the investment avenue. It was elaborated that there had been an initial discussion with nearby counties. It was expressed that it was not only the financial element that was crucial but also the Council's reputation, of providing a timely and rapid response. It was noted that an investment had been made for step 2, which was a step in the right direction.

It was asked how the success of the service could be defined, as road markings were important for traffic and safety whilst also being necessary for pedestrians and cyclists. It was asked how the system considered different users when prioritising road markings, and how performance measures allowed us to see the scale and location of works, and what needs were being met. The response given was that prioritisation came down to risk assessment and that road safety was part of the road inspector's job, taking into account the entire road including the road markings. It was explained that measures came into the performance challenge system and that examples would be considered when reporting.

Attention was drawn to road markings following re-surfacing works. It was explained that a period of 6 or more weeks sometimes lapsed before they were replaced which was concerning as accidents could happen and that safety problems could arise in front of schools. It was asked whether there was a period of time where it was not possible to install road markings after re-surfacing works. The response given was that they were aware of the risks when there were delays and specifically for those unfamiliar with the area. It was explained that remarking lines was part of contractors' agreement when carrying out resurfacing works which tended to happen quite close to the end of the period. However, it was emphasised that only two contractors had the machinery to paint road markings for large spaces – for example centre line road marking works. As a result, the Council was at the mercy of the contractor and often had to get a large package of work for them to come to the county. In terms of marking in front of schools, it was explained that it scored high in terms of prioritisation and that the department was able to use the manual machine to do the work in-house.

Gratitude was noted for the work done, highlighting that they had been very proactive in

his ward. The steps to improve the service were supported and it was asked what was now being used to install the road markings, as there had been a change to use more environmentally friendly material. It was asked whether it was hard-wearing. The response was that the department had been using material that was not as high-spec compared to what was available on the open market. It was added that locations had been identified where a lot of wear and tear occurred in order to trial very durable material to compare the lifespan of the markings.

Support was declared for the investment, and it was highlighted that there was pioneering machinery coming from China, and it was asked if there was any intention to invest in smaller machinery. The response was that they were investing in a second manual kit to be based in the north of the county, and that step 3 was for a larger vehicle.

It was expressed that the current arrangements were not working and that more work needed to be done in-house. A question was asked about the external contractors, whether the Council paid them to stay overnight, and in terms of the business plan regarding whether it would be necessary to invest in more staff. The response given was that the Business Plan would highlight the need for an additional workforce as it would be unavoidable. It was explained that the Council did not pay contractors to stay overnight which could be challenging as travel time needed to be scheduled in as well.

When discussing the road markings, more than one member asked if the lines were applied with paint or by burning and if different machines were needed for the different colours. It was explained that hot application of markings was used and that the same procedure was used for the manual equipment in the south of the county. It was explained that both colours were on the same vehicle and worked independently of each other.

It was asked if another authority was thinking of going down the same path and investing. The response was that discussions had taken place and there was no intention of doing this but obviously the situation could change over time.

It was expressed that the department was fortunate to have taken steps to try to resolve the problem. But it was asked what they would do if the business bid was unsuccessful. The response was that they had already invested in step two which would make some improvement, but that step 3 was specifically for the large schemes where the Council was required to use external contractors. As a result, without any investment, the situation would continue as it was.

RESOLVED

1. **To accept the report, noting the observations made during the discussion.**
2. **To declare support for developing a business plan for investment to enable the service to undertake a high percentage of road-marking work internally.**
3. **To recommend to the Highways, Engineering and YGC Department that a performance measure should be developed with regard to prioritising road marking and the safety of all road users, including pedestrians and cyclists.**

7. EMERGENCY ROAD CLOSURES

The report was presented, stating that emergency road closures were one part of the work of the Street Works unit on county roads. It was expressed that in accordance with

the legislation, they were responsible for enabling statutory undertakers to carry out works on the roads. It was added that there were different processes to follow when emergency works arose compared to scheduled works. It was noted that, in an emergency, engagement was not possible as they could not predict where and when they would happen across such a wide county network. It was explained that the unit coordinated work in the area, but aimed to minimise disruption to communities while bearing in mind the need for urgent or emergency works to be carried out by statutory contractors. It was expressed that, in an age of communication, it was easy to get information out in an emergency which could be helpful but also work against them when a high amount of information was shared or if the time period was short which could create confusion that was difficult to retract.

During the discussion, the following observations were made:

Specific issues with road closures in one area were highlighted, citing a lack of communication between the Council and those carrying out the work. It was explained that the Councillor had contacted the Council on many occasions to note that the road was closed as the Council was not aware of the work, particularly by Dŵr Cymru/Welsh Water. It was asked if better cooperation with the road closure companies was possible. It was explained that Dŵr Cymru had commissioned a company from Cheshire to close roads, but the works had not taken place and the residents had consequently reopened the road themselves. It was added that the road had been closed following this unbeknownst to anyone, therefore this had led to public transport problems.

The response given was that they fully sympathised with and understood the frustration and that they aimed to have a healthy relationship with the statutory contractors and that it was expected of them to share information. While he did not have specific details about the case in question, it was expressed that cases could change following an inspection and seeing the extent of the work. It was noted that the system was not perfect but that they were keen to work together to improve it. It was stressed that it was essential to receive examples, and that they had regular meetings with the undertakers to see improvement. It was noted that Dŵr Cymru had experienced difficulties following appointing a new traffic management company but they had now seen an improvement. It was added that they fined if a road was closed without warning.

When asked about traffic arrangements, it was asked who sent the maps for traffic diversions. It was noted that these were very useful to share with residents. An example of a diversion following a road closure by Dŵr Cymru was highlighted which went much further than what residents regarded as being necessary as there were several junctions. The response was that if a road had to be closed then the diversion had to be on a similar class road or higher to ensure that they could accommodate heavy vehicles such as buses. It was explained that when work needed to be done, it was essential in order to maintain services and that there were protocols to follow – as a result, some diversions could be extended depending on where the road closure was. It was added that the alternative plans were presented by the statutory undertakers, but the Council had a role to challenge and to use local knowledge to adapt them where necessary in accordance with the act.

Another example was highlighted where Dŵr Cymru had closed the road due to a burst pipe on a hill. A notice had been received that the works would be carried out in 3 weeks which meant surface water for 5 weeks. The Councillor had contacted the Council, and the works were carried out within 24 hours. Using this example, officers were asked if they could assess the need for works before sharing the notice as it might be escalated to an emergency. The response was that the status of the works could change over time. It was explained that the service had three officers across the county to inspect work and to see if works had been completed to a high standard. It was stressed that the number

of road closure requests was high and in addition to the duties of these officers, so the work was very wide-ranging.

Members expressed their understanding that the law had to be followed but a road closure on a single access corridor was pointed out, and it was noted that there was a need to assess the risk of the impact on communities and balance whether the work really needed to be done. A specific instance was highlighted which was not an emergency but urgent works, and the diversion had been over 40 miles with a major impact on several communities. It was noted that the report set out next steps that were vague and there were no measurable targets to ensure that this did not happen again. The response was that no one wanted this to happen, but the service was trying its best and it could prove challenging when emergency works arose out of hours without the extent of the works being known. The need to keep in touch with the Council to obtain accurate information from the official channels was emphasised, but it was noted that the line of communication could be long. It was noted that officers would arrange to visit the Councillor to discuss the problems in her area and to highlight the work being done to alleviate problems.

It was noted that some roads required different protocols, which had a major impact on communities such as a single access corridor road, to fully understand the impact. It was enquired if there could be one contact person for emergencies. It was noted that the number of officers was low but the office could be contacted, and they would share a dedicated direct number and officer.

It was highlighted that one statutory undertaker had been highlighted during this meeting, namely Dŵr Cymru, and it was noted that this may need to be relayed to them.

It was asked whether more data could be obtained in terms of how many road closures happened, how many were emergency or urgent works, how many took more time than scheduled, and where the works were in terms of their distribution. It was also asked if there was a discussion about works arising in the same place with the same provider repeatedly. The response given was that this data could be provided following the committee as some elements were part of the Performance Challenge system.

It was noted that the report had several references to continuous improvement and a request was made for examples and how the service had changed. The response was that many of the improvements were in team dynamics in terms of experiences and were not documented. But a clear element was communication, the need and desire to inform everyone in a timely manner, and to keep in touch with Councillors.

It was asked who was responsible for informing the emergency services of road closures. It was responded that the Council took the role of informing the emergency services, Councillors and Community Council of road closures.

RESOLVED

1. **To accept the report, noting the observations made during the discussion.**
2. **To ask the Environment Department to share data including the number of road closures in urgent or emergency circumstances, the distribution across areas, and works that take longer than expected.**

8. COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD PROGRAMME 2026/27

The report was presented by the Scrutiny Advisor.

She explained that the Committee's annual workshop had been held on 19 May, where possible items for scrutiny during 2026/27 had been considered. In the workshop, items had been prioritised bearing in mind the purpose of scrutiny in Gwynedd, namely "To contribute to driving improvement in services for the people of Gwynedd".

It was explained that, following the workshop, some matters had been raised and it was decided that they would be given consideration. It was decided to move some items on the draft work programme and to note "Bereavement Service" as a reserve item. It was emphasised that the forward programme was a working programme which was constantly under review to ensure that the right matters were being addressed.

During the discussion, the following observations were made:

It was suggested that a report should be received on the pilot of using hessian bags for recycling in some areas. It was explained that this update would be seen and raised when discussing the Environment Department's Performance Challenge report.

It was expressed that roadside vegetation was a constant problem on rural roads. It was noted that it was an issue to be discussed in performance scrutiny and to possibly keep in mind for future scrutiny.

RESOLVED

To adopt the work programme for 2026/27.

9. PERFORMANCE CHALLENGE MEETINGS

The report was presented by the Scrutiny Advisor.

It was expressed following a discussion in the Scrutiny Forum and a call by members of the scrutiny committee, that there was an intention to pilot inviting two representatives from each scrutiny committee to attend the internal performance challenge meetings of one department. It was explained that the Scrutiny Forum had recommended for a representative from this committee to attend the Environment Department's performance challenge meeting. Those nominated to attend were asked to keep in mind that there was a form to complete after the meeting to be able to report back to the committee.

Councillors Stephen Churchman and Arwyn Herald Roberts were nominated and seconded to represent the Committee, with Councillor Beca Roberts in reserve should the need arise.

RESOLVED
To nominate the following members to represent the committee in the Environment Department's performance challenge meetings:

- **Councillors Stephen Churchman and Arwyn Herald Roberts (with Councillor Beca Roberts in reserve)**

The meeting commenced at 10:30am and concluded at 12:55pm

CHAIRMAN