
COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE, 30 NOVEMBER 2023

Attendance:

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

Stephen Churchman, Glyn Daniels, Elwyn Edwards, Delyth Lloyd Griffiths, Gwilym Jones, Linda Morgan, Edgar Owen, Llio Elenid Owen, Beca Roberts, Elfed P. Roberts, Peter Thomas, Rhys Tudur and Gruffydd Williams.

Officers present:

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

Present for item 5:

Councillor Dyfrig Siencyn (Council Leader), Dafydd Gibbard (Chief Executive), Bethan Richardson (Climate Change Programme Manager) and David Mark Lewis (Energy and Commercial Services Manager)

Present for item 6:

Councillor Berwyn Parry Jones (Cabinet Member for Highways, Engineering and YGC), Steffan Jones (Head of Highways, Engineering and YGC Department), Emlyn Jones (Assistant Head of Highways, Engineering and YGC Department), Rob Williams (Water and Environment Service Manager) and Rhydian Roberts (Chief Engineer).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Kim Jones, Arwyn Herald Roberts and Rob Triggs.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

There were no declarations of personal interest.

3. URGENT ITEMS

None to note.

4. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous committee meeting held on 05 October 2023 as a true record.

5. CLIMATE AND NATURE EMERGENCY PLAN: ANNUAL REPORT 2022/23

The report was submitted by the Chief Executive. Attention was drawn briefly to the following main points:

Members were reminded that the Climate and Nature Emergency Plan was one of the priorities within the Council Plan, with a Board established to support it.

Attention was drawn to the fact that the plan included two steps. It was detailed that the first phase was to implement the Council's projects to reduce the use of energy and reduce the

Council's carbon emissions and the second phase would be to look at the wider impact on the county, considering how the Council could help communities and how the county could respond to the impact of climate change.

It was explained that dealing with the climate and nature was part of the Council's work since 2005/06 and it was noted that a huge success could be seen by now. It was detailed that there were 51% less carbon emissions in the Construction field between 2005/06 and 2019 and 23% carbon emissions in the Fleet field within the same period. It was reported that the Council had managed to reduce the Council's carbon emissions by 43% within this period.

It was noted that the Council saw financial benefits when tackling the climate and nature emergency, saving around £15 million since 2010. It was emphasised that this meant that more cuts would have needed to be made as a result of the Council's current financial situation if the work on the climate change and nature emergency had not been delivered. It was recognised that new considerations needed to be considered by now, such as challenges in the scrutiny field and the fact that more of the council's workforce worked from home.

Concern was expressed regarding the method of calculating carbon emissions deriving from procurement nationally. It was explained that buying local goods was calculated in the same way as buying goods from the continent, even though there were major differences in the actual carbon emissions. It was noted that this could impact the local economy in areas as there was no encouragement to buy locally. It was explained that procurement had been refined over the past two years leading to a reduction in the Council's carbon emissions. It was noted that the consistent message conveyed to the Welsh Government was that the method of calculating in the procurement field wasn't an accurate reflection of the real situation. There was concern that it would not be possible to reach targets to become carbon neutral by 2030 if this method of calculation was not amended.

It was confirmed that the Council was ready to look at step two of the Plan, which was to look at plans for the future. It was mentioned that the first step of the plan was to reduce carbon emissions, and therefore long-term plans needed to be secured for these emission figures to remain low. It was explained that these developments were being implemented within the following main themes:

- Construction and Energy
- Moving and transporting
- Waste
- Governance
- Procurement
- Land Use
- Ecology

Details were provided on some of the themes by providing examples of associated projects. Reference was made to the solar panels project within the construction and energy field, and it was noted that this was a field that the Council had previously invested in and that £500k of savings had been created as a result of the project. It was noted that a further £2.8 million had recently been invested in the field. The plan to update the Council's fleet was reported upon, as part of the 'Moving and transport' theme for electric vehicles. It was noted that there was a mistake in Section 6 of the report that there were 16 charging points across 4 locations for the public to use, it was emphasised that these were for the Council's fleet and that several charging points were available to the public in several locations across the County. It was hoped that it would be possible to intertwine these projects together in the future.

A member noted that the report was detailed, interesting and to be commended but that there were possible improvements to be made. He gave details of his concerns regarding being over-dependent on electric energy considering the number of things that could influence this such as the pricing of public charging points compared to domestic supply, and the effectiveness of solar panels during the winter months. Reference was made to the table on page 5 of the annual report, drawing attention that there was no marked column adjacent to 'Moving and transport' to show the connection between the project and the objectives of Section 6, Environment (Wales) Act 2016. It was noted that matters including carbon emissions meant that there was a connection with the objectives of Section 6 of the Act.

Reference was made to the mid-term priority 'Updating specialist lighting in leisure centres in order to use less energy' under the heading 'Construction and Energy'. It was asked if this had been considered for the Council's other buildings. Attention was drawn to the continuous priority 'Preventing the over-development of fossil fuel energy plans.' It was questioned why 'over-development' was noted rather than non-fossil energy plans or no fossil plans that cannot be justified.

Reference was made to the observation under the heading 'Renewable Energy' on page 23 of the annual report - 'Unfortunately, no acknowledgement is given to us as an establishment if we create electricity to export to the grid and we can't claim the carbon credit for it.' It was noted, although they acknowledged that it was a matter beyond the Council's control that there was an opportunity by generating and exporting electricity to the national grid to argue that any electricity sold to the grid should be used locally providing the opportunity for local customers to buy it at a lower rate than the general open market. It was explained that this would help individuals in fuel poverty and would help those wishing to change from using gas and coal but cannot afford this. It was noted that it would contribute to the aim of assisting the community and influencing other people beyond the Council's direct responsibility.

In response to the observations, officers noted:

- That they shared the concern regarding the over dependency on electric energy. The over dependency can affect inflation and prices.
- That moving towards electric energy with the hope that the national grid would be free from carbon in the future. This was the only way the Council could reach zero net but it was acknowledged that there were risks associated with this.
- In terms of no acknowledgement for exporting electricity to the grid, the situation was frustrating but the Welsh Government had noted that as the grid turns to be non-carbon that acknowledgement would be given when the Council would re-purchase the energy back.
- That there was an intention to update lights across all Council estates with an LED lights pilot scheme to be submitted for approval.
- They accepted the point that it was possible to add examples of how we contribute to the objectives of Section 6 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016, through projects related to travelling, specifically in terms of active travel.

Members questioned if it would be possible to use wind or water/hydro energy on Council land, such as the Council's small holdings. The Energy and Commercial Services Manager explained that the Council's solar panels were monitored regularly in order to calculate how much energy they generate but it was acknowledged that it would not be possible to generate energy on Council land unless Council buildings were close and the energy would have to be sold to the national grid. Despite this, he confirmed that the Council was continuously looking at new systems and were open to possible considerations due to the increasing demand to generate power.

A member asked about developments in the hydrogen field. In response, the Chief Executive noted that further work had been commissioned by the Nature and Climate Change Board to look at the Council's situation and at developments in this field.

A member referred to information regarding the origin of energy on a specific day on the National Grid website. He noted that fossil fuels were responsible for 62%, nuclear for 12%, Biomass for 8% and renewable energy for 13% of the electricity generated on the relevant day. It was questioned how the Council would reach zero-net by 2030 and what would be the obligations of reaching zero-net. It was noted that using more coal was the way forward, and reference was made to countries such as China, India and Germany who were increasing their use.

The importance of ensuring that appropriate officers deal with nature and climate change matters was discussed and the Climate Change Programme Manager was thanked for her work with the scheme. Emphasis was placed on the need to ensure that the work of the officers within this field was not lost as the Council faced financial cuts and that the responsibility for the plan was not passed on to officers working beyond this field, as part of their responsibilities. It was noted that there was expertise in this field within the Council and opportunities needed to be considered to offer a consultative service for other establishments and generate income as a result.

Attention was drawn to the 'What did we promise to do in 2022/23' and 'What we did' titles in sections 5-11 noting that the information could appear unclear in these parts. It was noted that consideration should be given to adapting the format of how information was displayed for clarity to the reader.

It was confirmed that the observations submitted as part of the discussion would be submitted to the Cabinet when submitting the Annual Report on 19 December. The intention to submit another annual report to this Committee in the new year was noted.

RESOLVED:

1. To accept the report and to recommend:

- (i) That information on 'Active Travel' should be added under Section 3 of the Report: 'Section 6, Environment (Wales) Act 2016'.**
- (ii) Consideration should be given to adapting the format of how information is displayed under the 'What did we promise to do in 2022/23?' and 'What we did' titles in Sections 5-11 of the Report for clarity to the reader.**

2. Recommend to the Cabinet that the staffing resource should be considered to achieve the vision of the Climate and Nature Emergency Plan.

6. LOCAL FLOOD STRATEGY

The report was submitted by the Cabinet Member for Highways and Municipal and Gwynedd Consultancy. Attention was drawn briefly to the following main points:

It was explained that the Local Flood Risk Management Strategy was one of the requirements of the Flood and Water Management Act 2021 and that it needed to be consistent with the National Strategy published last year. It was reported that there was a need to amend the Strategy to correspond with the statutory requirements by spring 2024.

It was confirmed that the 5 main Objectives of this amended Strategy were:

1. Aim to reduce the level of risk of flooding and coastal erosion for Gwynedd residents.
2. Developing further understanding of flood risk to Gwynedd and the impacts of climate change.
3. Continue to work with all relevant bodies to ensure appropriate and sustainable development in Gwynedd.
4. Raising awareness of local flood and coastal erosion risk
5. Work collaboratively with all other Risk Management Authorities and relevant groups/bodies to ensure a coordinated response to flooding and coastal erosion incidents.

It was explained that currently the entire Strategy had not been drafted but that the Report and the Appendices displayed the types of information that the plan will include. It was confirmed that the Objectives had been formulated in response to the challenges seen in Gwynedd. A request was made for the Committee to consider scrutinising the full Strategy following a period of statutory consultation.

A Member noted his support to consult with communities in areas where the risks of flooding was high but that there was also a need to include communities in areas with a secondary flooding risk. It was acknowledged that there was a need for all residents to be aware of the Strategy and how to respond when flooding occurred as some areas become isolated as flooding closes roads, leading to medical care difficulties, access to shops and several other problems. It was emphasised that there was an invitation for everyone to participate in the statutory consultation to ensure that as much information as possible was fed into the final document, and that systems were in place to share information and keep Gwynedd residents safe.

In response to an enquiry on the use of soft terminology such as 'aiming' within the report documentation, it was confirmed that the language was used due to restrictions on the Council. It was confirmed that some elements within the field were the responsibility of bodies beyond the Council, and under the Government's control and therefore it was difficult to currently use robust wording without an understanding of the Government's aspirations.

It was acknowledged that specifying responsibilities amongst partners had been challenging in the past, but an understanding had been reached as the relationship between them developed. It was emphasised that the full strategy would highlight the responsibilities of all partners in the future. It was explained that the partners go beyond their responsibilities in emergency situations.

In response to a question by a member, it was noted that the emergency planning meetings were held regularly and that there was an intention to hold a exercise to ensure the resilience of the plans to respond to flooding incidents.

A member enquired about the arrangements to fund work in the flooding field. In response, it was noted that the work that could be achieved was dependent on grants. It was elaborated that changing from the method of specific grant funding to be included in the revenue support grant would mean that there would be an impact on attracting other grants in the future.

All members were encouraged to attend the consultation meetings and to encourage residents in their wards to voice their opinions. The officers were thanked for their work.

RESOLVED

1. To accept the report and to recommend:

- (i) that information about the risk in terms of roads flooding, as well as the risk to property, should be included in the Local Flood Strategy;**
- (ii) that awareness should be raised amongst all residents of how to prepare for flooding.**

2. That the Committee scrutinises the Local Flood Strategy following the public consultation at its meeting on 22 February 2024.

7. COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD PROGRAMME 2023/24

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

Members were reminded that the Communities Committee's amended Forward Programme for 2023/24 had been adopted at the Committee's meeting on 5 October 2023.

It was explained that the forward programme needed to be revised further for 2023/24. Attention was drawn to the 'Governance Structure and Delivery Arrangements of the Gwynedd and Anglesey Public Services Board' item that had been scheduled for this meeting, but it wasn't timely to be considered. It was noted that confirmation was received by the Gwynedd and Anglesey Public Services Board Programme Manager that it would be timely to present this item to the Committee meeting on 18 April 2024. Reassurance was provided that this would meet the need to scrutinise the work of the Board twice within the Council year.

It was reported that the 'Waste Collection and Recycling Service' item had been programmed for the meeting on 18 April 2024 during the annual workshop this year. An update was given at a meeting between the Chair and Vice-chair of the Committee, Cabinet Member for Environment, and the Head of the Environment Department that it would not be timely to scrutinise this item during this meeting. It was considered that scrutinising the item later in the year would allow work streams in this field to develop further. It was suggested that re-scheduling the item and consider prioritising it at the 2024/24 Annual Workshop for the first meeting of 2024/25 would allow the Committee to add value by scrutinising it in a timely manner.

Members were reminded that the Committee, in the previous item, had resolved to scrutinise the 'Local Flood Strategy' at its meeting on 22 February 2024.

It was noted that confirmation was received following the publication of the meeting agenda, that it would not be possible to submit the 'Article 4 Direction - Public Consultation' report to the Committee meeting on 22 February 2024. It was explained that this was due to significant work that needed to be done following receiving 3,900 responses to the public consultation.

It was anticipated that it would be possible to report to the Committee at its meeting on 18 April 2024. It was suggested to facilitate this, that it would be an option to remove the 'Public Protection Service' item from the forward programme for 2023/24 as there was no specific concern regarding performance in this field. It was added that consideration could be given to prioritising the item for 2024/25 at the Annual Workshop.

Support was noted for the intention to prioritise the items in accordance with the above.

RESOLVED

To adopt the amended work programme for 2023/24.

The meeting commenced at 10.30 a.m. and concluded at 12.15 p.m.

CHAIR