
COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 13/01/22

Present: Councillor Berwyn Parry Jones (Chair)
Councillor Glyn Daniels (Vice-chair)

Councillors: Stephen Churchman, Elwyn Edwards, Annwen Hughes, Aled Wyn Jones, Elwyn Jones, Linda Morgan, Edgar Wyn Owen, Gwynfor Owen, Elfed P. Roberts, Angela Russell, Mike Stevens, Gethin Williams and Owain Williams.

Officers in attendance: Llywela Owain (Senior Language and Scrutiny Advisor), Bethan Adams (Scrutiny Advisor) and Natalie Jones (Democracy Service Officer).

Present for item 5:

Councillor Dafydd Meurig (Cabinet Member for Adults, Health and Well-being), Mannon Trappe (Senior Manager, Safeguarding, Quality Assurance and Mental Health), Daron Owens (Community Safety Operational and Projects Officer).

Present for item 6:

Steffan Jones (Head of the Highways and Municipal Department), Peter Simpson (Streetscene Manager).

Present for item 7:

Steffan Jones (Head of Highways and Municipal Department), Meirion Williams (Assistant Head of Highways and Municipal).

Present for item 8:

Dafydd Wyn Williams (Head of Environment Department), Bethan Richardson (Climate Change Programme Manager).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Simon Glyn, Kevin Morris Jones and Dafydd Owen along with Councillor Catrin Wager (Cabinet Member for Highways and Municipal).

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 4 November 2021 as a true record.

5. ANNUAL UPDATE BY THE COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP

The report was submitted by the Cabinet Member for Adults, Health and Well-being, who gave the background and context, and noted that local authorities had a statutory duty to work in partnership with the Police, the Health Service, the Probation Service and the Fire and Rescue Service, to address the local community safety agenda. He explained that a strategic assessment was undertaken to identify regional priorities, the local plans to address these priorities were before the Committee.

He handed over to the Community Safety Implementation and Projects Officer. An overview was given of the principal points within the report and it was explained that the partnership was required to formally report to the Committee annually to give an update on the partnership's work. The main milestones achieved during the latest period were noted and an overview of the work underway was given.

During the discussion, the following main points were noted by members:

- A question was asked about the five action points that had not been achieved for nearly two years. What were the next steps to be undertaken?
- Reference was made to the work of identifying appropriate buildings for the substance abuse team in Bangor and it was asked if it was possible to get further information.
- An enquiry was made about the street pastors scheme and why they were not operational as the Council had been using Zoom for eighteen months, could they not also use it?
- It was asked if work regarding modern slavery was part of the partnership.
- Disappointment was expressed that other representatives from the partnership were not present to answer questions.
- It was asked how much work the partnership undertook to work jointly to prevent crimes such as domestic abuse.
- A member noted that she was concerned about the increase in people who required mental health support, those misusing alcohol and the homelessness particularly in Gwynedd.
- It was asked if it was possible to have a meeting with the new Police and Crime Commissioner, his predecessor had been before the Full Council in the past.
- It was stated that the topics within the report were relevant to youth clubs and it was asked if youth clubs were part of the partnership.
- The idea of inviting the Police and Crime Commissioner to the Full Council was supported for all members to be able to meet him.
- A question was asked about cyber crime as problems arose on social media websites with people disclosing data by responding to general questions. There was a need to bring pressure to bear on social media companies to act when cases were reported.
- This was reiterated and it was noted that it was a problem throughout the country, the Westminster Government needed to act.

In response the officers noted:

- In terms of the five actions, it had not been possible to deliver these due to other priorities. Some would also be considered again in the future.
- In relation to the street pastors, over lockdown people did not go out as

public houses were closed, therefore they were not needed. In addition, as the restrictions were relaxed they did not feel safe to be out due to covid-19. It was added that it would be possible to re-visit this in the future.

- It was noted that the information regarding suitable buildings for the substance misuse team would be provided to the member following this Committee.
- Thus far, there had been no cases of modern slavery in Gwynedd, however, there was an awareness that this was a matter that may arise in any area.
- It was noted that the consultation on the domestic and sexual abuse strategy was open until 1 February. In terms of the education field, matters regarding healthy relationships would become part of the new curriculum for Wales.
- Agencies had been offering virtual support and support work with alcohol abuse during the pandemic.
- That it was possible for the Youth Service to feed into the partnership's work.
- Cyber crime was a matter that the Police took seriously and they held training for older people to raise awareness. The matter would be raised at the Partnership meeting and to ask what was the response received from social media companies when reporting.

RESOLVED:

- 1. To accept the content of the report and supplementary documents and note the observations, and support the priorities and direction of the work in the future.**
- 2. To contact the Chair of the Council to note the Committee's wish to extend an invitation to the Police and Crime Commissioner to a meeting of the Full Council.**
- 3. To ask the partnership to consider having other members of the partnership to be in attendance at the Communities Scrutiny Committee's Crime and Disorder meeting.**

6. STREET CLEANSING

The report was presented by the Head of the Highways and Municipal Department, who guided members through the main matters.

It was noted that the Council had a statutory responsibility to ensure that public highways and public open spaces were free of litter. It was a visible and important service especially during the period of the pandemic. It was explained that Street Services covered all the public sites and adopted roads managed by the Council.

It was highlighted that areas had been divided into zones according to their use. It was explained that the cleanliness of an area was assessed by comparison with standard, the standards ranged from Grade A to D. It was elaborated that alternative response times were allowed to clean the areas and return them to the appropriate standard.

It was noted that the Department had faced cuts in the past, and additional pressure as a result of the increase in tourism. Details were given of the Service's vision and the Committee was asked for their observations on the vision.

The Street Services Manager reiterated the observations of the Head of Service with the following points:

- He referred to the Code of Practice and noted, due to the Covid situation, that a new one would not be introduced within the year. He noted that there was legislation in England to penalise car owners throwing litter, this was not available in Wales but was being considered.
- He noted that as part of the pilot, four smart bins had been ordered and these would be solar powered. The bin would crush the litter several times before sending a signal to notify officers that the bin needed to be emptied.

During the discussion, the following main observations were made by members:

- The vision was welcomed and there was an enquiry about street recycling bins. It was noted that people placed litter accidentally or without thinking in the wrong bin and further information was requested about the collection process and staffing requirements to divide and sort materials.
- There was a question about voluntary litter collection groups and it was noted that there were regular events across the country and in Gwynedd and it was a good idea for the public to be part of the process.
- It was asked what the arrangements were with road sweeping and if this continued in rural areas. It was added that keeping roads clean was a means to avoid flooding.
- The matter of weeds on pavements, especially those used less frequently, was raised.
- Reference was made to the Clean and Tidy Communities Team and the need to inform members of the team's work.
- Complaints were received regarding green signs and with litter campaigns re-commencing with black bags left behind street bins. Could consideration be given to sweeping the cycling paths after cutting vegetation? A query was raised about arrangements to clean chewing gum.
- It was pleasing that children's education had been included as one of the next steps, however, adults could create more problems e.g. not cleaning up dog mess. A bone-shaped receptacle had been shown by fellow councillors on social media to hold dog faeces bags. Were these available to other members?
- Staff were aware of problematic areas, bins should continue to be emptied regularly rather than use smart bins.
- The need to re-visit the role of volunteers and councillors, not enough penalties were given in accordance with the regulations to keep dogs on a lead and to pick up dog mess.
- Why did the Council hand out dog mess bags to dog owners, when this was their responsibility?
- Where would the smart bins as part of the pilot be located?
- When would the campaign commence to raise awareness regarding picking up dog mess?
- Community bin sites needed to be kept tidy and the need to conduct a deep clean in town centres.

In response, the Head of Service and Street Services Manager noted the following:

- In relation to the street recycling bins, that there were 3 or 4 sections in the bin for different materials. Slight contamination of materials was seen in

the recycling bins. The message regarding recycling continued to be communicated.

- There was a need to co-ordinate volunteer group litter picking campaigns giving consideration to access to equipment and appropriate locations to leave litter for collection.
- Street sweeping in rural areas was undertaken at least once a year with sweeping in villages at least once a month. It was another team that sprayed weeds on pavements and this was undertaken at least once a year.
- A note would be sent to all Council members with information about the Clean and Tidy Communities Team.
- The team also cleaned signs. They would also be informed outside the meeting about where to leave the black bags. As part of the review, consideration would be given to sweeping the cycling paths after cutting vegetation.
- It was difficult to clean chewing gum, a new machine had been purchased via grant monies to trial its use. It was hoped that this work would become part of the Clean and Tidy Communities Team work.
- Education was essential and specific activity would be held.
- Members could contact the Street Services Manager to request the bone shape receptacle and arrangements would be made to give these to the warden in the area.
- There had been pressure on staff over the last two years, and the arrangements to empty bins would be looked at as part of the review. It was believed that there a place for smart bins particularly in remote areas.
- There was a need to look in greater detail regarding the situation with dog mess, and consideration would be given to employ more enforcement wardens.
- Following the advent of new legislation, it was not possible for volunteers to take enforcement measures, however, volunteers will be considered to distribute packs and to give advice to dog owners. They were happy to have a further discussion.
- Free sample packs used to be given as a marketing tactic, however, this did not continue.
- It was intended to locate the smart bins in busy urban locations.
- Raising awareness was an on-going matter. As part of Caru Cymru, a national campaign 'Leave only pawprints' was being promoted on social media. New signs were being trialled and small signs visible in the dark had been erected in Dolgellau. If members wanted to trial new signage they should contact the Street Services Manager.

RESOLVED to accept the report and to note the observations received.

7. GRASS CUTTING AND ROAD VERGE MAINTENANCE

The report was presented by the Head of the Highways and Municipal Department, who gave the background and context to the report. He noted, in order to undertake these duties it was necessary to prepare and adopt a grass cutting policy for road verges, that considered the needs of road users, as well as wildlife needs. He referred to the review of grass cutting arrangements and the proposed maintenance system that was before the committee for discussion.

The Assistant Head of Highways and Municipal gave details of some of the measures being taken. He noted that the Department was working closely with the Senior

Biodiversity Officer to identify specific areas for grass collection after cutting. He referred to the 'better verges' project with the Social Farms and Gardens charity, that would be conducted in the 2022-23 financial year. He noted that Plantlife had published a document in the context of countryside road verges and had received the Welsh Government's seal of approval.

During the ensuing discussion, the following observations were made by members:

- Some supported amending the grass cutting arrangements to improve biodiversity, however, others did not support this.
- They received complaints about trees protruding into the roads, could it be possible to adapt the cutting height in some cases? A balance was needed between promoting biodiversity and road safety issues. It may be an option to cut only one side in some places. Very supportive of a full cut at the end of October to deal with overgrowth of scrub and of the opinion that grass cutting in August was too late in rural areas.
- There was a need to cut in 30mph areas. Areas were tidier when cut grass was collected. What were the considerations when reaching a conclusion about grass collection after cutting? A cut in August would be too late in his area - would it be possible to have a rota regarding which areas would be cut first?
- Certainly, narrow lanes needed attention. It was important for biodiversity that some areas were left. The Council should take photographs when wild-flowers were at their peak and use these for promotion purposes.
- Litter became evident following grass cutting and there was a need to co-ordinate arrangements. Complaints had been received regarding thorns scratching cars on narrow lanes and tractors used to cut were too wide and brought down walls. In narrow areas consideration should be given to using hedge cutting machinery.
- That attitudes were changing about grass cutting with more consideration being given to biodiversity. Supportive of not cutting if it was acceptable in terms of safety.

In response to the above observations, the officers noted that:

- There was a movement to undertaking a full cut later on in the year. There was a need to identify specific areas to promote biodiversity including planting. The use of a sprayer for weed killing would be looked at including placing more emphasis on using a sweeper in its place.
- Hedges were cut up to a height of 1 metre, any growth above this was the owner's responsibility. Consideration would be given to specific areas as part of the review.
- Attention would be given to the member's comments. In terms of the collection of all the grass following a cut, consideration needed to be given to the resources and the time involved as it would certainly entail a cost for the Council.
- The Committee was thanked for the observations, attention would be given to the matters raised and they would return to the Committee to report on what had been undertaken. It was noted that the Department was dealing with Ash Die-back work, that may be a matter for the Committee to consider in the future.

RESOLVED to accept the report and to note the observations received.

8. CLIMATE CHANGE BOARD

It was noted that following a discussion in the context of the Climate Change Board membership at a meeting of the Committee on 23 September 2021, under the item 'Climate Change', a request had been received to elect a member to represent the Committee on the Board.

It was explained that the Board had invited Councillor Angela Russell as Biodiversity Champion, and extended an invitation to the Committee to nominate another member with an interest in this field and was eager to contribute to the work.

RESOLVED to elect Councillor Mike Stevens to represent the Communities Scrutiny Committee on the Climate Change Board.

At the end of the meeting, the Chair took the opportunity to thank Natalie Lloyd Jones (Democracy Services Officer) for her work. Best wishes were extended to her in the future.

The meeting commenced at 10.40 am and concluded at 1.15 pm

CHAIRMAN