

## **Communities Scrutiny Committee 23 September 2021**

---

### **Present:**

**COUNCILLORS:** Stephen Churchman, Glyn Daniels, Elwyn Edwards, Annwen Hughes, Aled Wyn Jones, Berwyn Parry Jones, Elwyn Jones, Kevin M Jones, Linda Morgan, Dafydd Owen, Edgar Wyn Owen, Gwynfor Owen, Angela Russell, Mike Stevens, Gethin Williams and Owain Williams.

### **Officers present:**

Vera Jones (Democracy and Language Service Manager), Bethan Adams (Scrutiny Advisor), and Natalie Jones (Democracy Services Officers).

### **Present for item 5:**

Councillor Dyfrig Siencyn (Council Leader), Councillor Gareth Griffith (Cabinet Member for the Environment), Dafydd Wyn Williams (Head of Environment Department) and Sophie Tyne Hughes (Climate Change Programme Manager).

### **Present for item 6:**

Councillor Catrin Wager (Cabinet Member for Highways and Municipal) and Huw Williams (Head of YGC), Dafydd Wyn Williams (Head of Environment Department).

### **Present for item 7:**

Councillor Catrin Wager (Cabinet Member for Highways and Municipal), Huw Williams (Head of YGC), Dafydd Wyn Williams (Head of Environment Department).

## **1. APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Councillors Simon Glyn, Elfed Roberts, Linda Morgan and Kevin M Jones.

## **2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST**

No declarations of personal interest or relevant dispensations were received.

## **3. URGENT ITEMS**

There were no urgent items to note.

## **4. MINUTES**

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous committee meeting held on 13 July 2021 as a true record.

## **5. CLIMATE CHANGE**

### **DECISION**

**To accept the report and note the observations received.**

As an introduction, the Council Leader set out the background to the report, and emphasised the importance of providing an opportunity for the Committee to discuss the issue of Climate Change.

He explained that the Climate Change Board had now been established to offer a corporate overview of the work happening within the Council to find solutions. He discussed the Council's commitment to reduce its carbon emissions as a method of reaching net zero carbon by 2030, which was the target set by Welsh Government for Local Authorities. The Climate Change Manager, appointed to lead the corporate aspects of this work and coordinate cross-departmental work, was welcomed to the meeting.

Submitted - the report of the Climate Change Manager, referring to the work that had happened to date, including:

- Production of an action plan for the proposed work
- The steps to be taken in order to reduce the Council's environmental impact and its carbon footprint
- An explanation of how the Council's intended work, and what it has already done, to respond to the effects of Climate Change
- Note that the report summarises the main examples of the work

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

- The Programme Manager was welcomed to her new role.
- A member asked how the Climate Change Board had been established, and enquired about its membership. It was noted that some members had expertise in this field, and it was proposed that the Board should take advantage of this expertise.
- A request was made for information about the contact point within the Council if members became aware of an issue that related to climate change.
- A member referred to the report, in particular point 2.6, and asked whether the Council was taking advantage of re-using the waste produced, for example in road maintenance works.
- In relation to reaching net zero carbon, a request was made to clarify the methods to reach this target.
- A further explanation was requested about the impact of work schemes such as the Llanbedr by-pass, work on the sea-wall etc., on the Council's ability to reach net zero Carbon. It was noted that as part of the aim of reaching the target, there should be no restrictions imposed on the construction of important infrastructure.
- A question was asked about the work to deal with Ash Dieback, and how the Council intended to solve the problem, as trees were needed to deal with carbon emissions.
- 

In response to the observations it was noted:-

- The Climate Change Board included a representation of heads of department and members, and had been established as a board to give status to this field. It was added that consideration could be given to expanding its membership to other areas of expertise.
- It was suggested to the member that the Programme Manager should be the contact point if any matters arose, and that the purpose of the Scrutiny Committee was reinforced by means of the opportunity for members to draw the attention of officers to matters that arose within their wards.

- It was explained that the definition of net zero was an organisation's use of emissions in the justification of its Carbon Footprint.
- It was explained that the roadworks mentioned by the member were schemes run by the Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales, that would not affect the Council's carbon footprint.
- The member was thanked for her work as the Biodiversity champion, and it was suggested that messages about the Council's work in the field of Climate Change needed to be promoted.
- It was noted that there was a work scheme to deal with Ash Dieback, to identify the number of affected trees so that trees with similar biodiversity could be planted to replace them. It was added that the trees played a significant role in Carbon absorption.
- It was noted that a bid for funding would be required to extend the post of Programme Manager for Climate Change. It was added that the role is important to co-ordinate and ensure cross-department understanding.

## **6. CLIMATE CHANGE - LOCAL FLOOD STRATEGY**

### **DECISION**

**To accept the report and note the observations received.**

The Cabinet Member for the Environment provided an introduction noting that flooding was one of the most prominent characteristics that showed us how Climate Change affected local communities. It was acknowledged that the impacts were already seen, in relation to extreme weather and flooding that destroyed our communities.

Emphasis was placed on the importance of flood prevention as the best way to safeguard residents in the face of Climate Change challenges.

The report was submitted noting that the strategy was a living document, and that it could be extended as developments arose. Members were guided through the report, which offered an explanation on the work of identifying the source of water in incidents of flooding.

It was added that engagement work was also taking place, and discussions with other departments to ensure that the messages reached the communities.

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

- Gratitude was expressed for the report, which provided a detailed illustration of the problems within the catchment areas. Reference was made to a problem in Cwm Pennant in relation to a property that had suffered as a result of flooding. It was suggested that locations under threat should be examined, as it was possible that they would suffer in future.
- A member asked whether there was a risk register to deal with problems, so that they could be mapped to anticipate where was at greatest risk of damage.
- Concern was expressed that floods occurred to an extent due to a lack of maintenance of rivers and streams, and it was suggested that modern construction methods should be considered in order to protect properties from future flooding.
- The Committee's attention was drawn to the recent staff turnover within the Council's departments, and that a wealth of local knowledge had been lost as staff left their posts.
- It was explained that there were gaps in the data on maps used by Natural Resources

- Wales as not all the water courses could be seen on them.
- The importance of including Councillors as part of any discussions, as there were flooding problems in numerous wards, was noted.
  - Clarification was sought on who was responsible for ensuring that the sea-wall in Talsarnau was safe, so that the local community was not at risk from any damage.

In response to the members' observations, the Head of Environment Department noted the following:-

- It was explained that people needed to be encouraged to declare whether their properties suffered from flooding so that a list could be created, and it was added that a number of people refused due to concern about the value of their properties.
- It was agreed that consideration should be given to methods of adapting the construction of houses so that they could be future-proofed to protect them from flooding.
- Sympathy was expressed with the member's concerns that local knowledge was being lost with the loss of staff, however, assurance was provided that the working relationship between the Council and other organisations was improving with everyone sharing the same information.
- It was noted that there was a scheme to educate people on methods to reduce the risk of flooding to their properties and the wider community as part of the preventative work.
- It was noted that Natural Resources Wales was responsible for the sea-wall, and it was agreed to arrange a conversation with them on this matter.

## **7. CLIMATE CHANGE - GWYNEDD FLOOD PREVENTION ASSETS**

### **DECISION**

#### **To accept the report and note the observations received.**

The report was submitted by the Head of Gwynedd Consultancy, and provided an overview of the situation in relation to the Council's assets. It was added that the Council had Land drainage and Coastal assets and their condition was inspected once, and in some cases, twice a year.

Members' attention was drawn to the categories used to identify the condition of the assets, in order to ascertain which required maintenance work as they were showing signs of strain.

The department's work programme was outlined, which included an examination of all the assets to ensure that they were in a safe condition, and members received an update on the situation.

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

- The members expressed their thanks for the comprehensive report, and expressed confidence that the Council was prepared for inclement weather and flooding due to the work that had been completed.
- Questions were asked about the inspection arrangements, how decisions about monitoring were made, and what was the timetable for delivering the work. A further question was asked about how rigid the arrangements were, and whether they could be amended if an asset was damaged.
- The department was thanked for its work in Penisarwaun and Rhiwlas since 2017, and its work there was praised.
- The Head of YGC and the Cabinet Member were thanked for their work.

- A question was asked about the Council's definition of an asset, as Canolfan Tregarth was facing damage due to flooding, and it was noted that the Council was eager for the community to be responsible for the pipes.

In response to the above observations, the following was noted:-

- It was explained that if there was concern that an asset not listed in the scheme required attention, one or more visits could be arranged and there was also a mechanism to undertake emergency works if necessary.
- In relation to Climate Change, increasing sea levels meant that further assets requiring possible maintenance work would be identified.
- In relation to defining 'assets' in this way, it was noted that consideration was given to any asset that protected communities from flooding.
- Assurance was given that the Head of Department would raise the matter with the Head of Highways and Municipal Department before reporting back to the councillor in relation to his question.

The meeting commenced at 10.30am and concluded at 12.15pm.

Chair