

**Minutes of the Meeting of the Thriving Communities Overview and Scrutiny
Committee held at the Council Chamber, Neuadd Cyngor Ceredigion,
Penmorfa, Aberaeron and remotely on Thursday, 22 June 2023**

Present: Councillor Gwyn Wigley Evans (Chairman), Councillors Marc Davies (Vice-Chair), Meirion Davies, Rhodri Evans, Chris James, Ann Bowen Morgan, John Roberts and Carl Worrall.

Also in attendance: Councillors Wyn Evans, Hugh Hughes and Gareth Lloyd.

Cabinet Members present: Councillor Catrin M S. Davies, Gareth Davies and Keith Henson.

Officers from Natural Resources Wales (NRW) in attendance: Gavin Bown, Head of Mid Wales Operations; Tim England, Operations Manager- Flood and Water Management; Julian Barnes, Land and Assets Operations Manager and Matthew Jenkins, Project Manager.

Officers in attendance: Russell Hughes Pickering, Corporate Lead Officer, Economy & Regeneration; Rhodri Llwyd, Corporate Lead Officer, Highways and Environmental Services; Phil Jones, Corporate Manager, Highways Services; Beverley Hodgett, Service Manager- Local Environment Services; Lisa Evans, Standards and Scrutiny Officer and Neris Morgans, Democratic Services Officer.

(10.00am- 1.11pm)

1 Apologies

- i. Councillors Gethin Davies, Sian Maehrlein and Clive Davies, Cabinet Member for Economy and Regeneration apologised for their inability to attend the meeting.
- ii. Councillor Maldwyn Lewis apologised for his inability to attend the meeting due to other Council commitments.

**2 Disclosures of personal interest (including whipping declarations)
Members are reminded of their personal responsibility to declare any personal and prejudicial interest in respect of matters contained in this agenda in accordance with the provisions of the Local Government Act 2000, the Council's Constitution and the Members Code of Conduct. In addition, Members must declare any prohibited party whip which the Member has been given in relation to the meeting as per the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011.**

- i. Councillor Gareth Davies and Hugh Hughes declared a personal interest under item 3.
- ii. Councillor Chris James declared a personal interest under item 6, during an update on Ceredigion's bus network.
- iii. Lisa Evans, Standards and Scrutiny Officer declared a personal interest under item 6, in accordance with the Code of Conduct for Local Government Employees, during an update on Ceredigion's bus network.

3 Coastal Erosion, Flooding and Climate Change

The Chair welcomed and thanked Officers from Natural Resources Wales (NRW) for attending the meeting.

Councillor Keith Henson (Cabinet Member for Highways and Environmental Services and Carbon Management) explained that the purpose of the report was to provide an update on the development of Climate Change and Coastal Erosion/ Flooding. Climate change means we may face more frequent or severe weather events like flooding, droughts, and storms. These events bring 'physical risks' that directly impact communities and have the potential to affect the economy. Parts of Ceredigion's coastline were susceptible to coastal erosion and flooding, and some inland communities were at risk of fluvial flooding and loss of land from watercourses.

Phil Jones provided an overview of the report. He explained that the impacts of coastal erosion, flooding and climate change could be far-reaching, with stakeholders facing life-threatening or life-changing consequences, and the effects impacting on large sectors of the County/Council. In addition, failure to reduce the effects of climate change could have reputational, financial, and environmental consequences for the Council including in the form of financial penalties for failing to meet WG targets for carbon management and biodiversity. Indirect impacts would include changes to the insects, pests and diseases which would colonise and affect our environment. As well as the immediate impacts of these, the impacts on staff time and other costs dealing with these would be significant. Loss of canopy cover from Ash Dieback already had consequences for local microclimates and would exacerbate climate change impacts as well as contribute to them.

It was recognised that we must lead by example and do all we could to reduce future climate change and address and mitigate the risks associated with it. Policy initiatives and strategies to include ecosystem resilience, biodiversity enhancements and flood reduction schemes must be developed and implemented if we are to succeed in reducing our carbon footprint and reducing the risk to our major infrastructure, assets, residents and communities and landscape

A presentation was provided to the Committee outlining the following:

- Coastal Erosion and Flooding Responsibilities
 - Coastal erosion
 - Coast and Fluvial Flooding
 - Shoreline Management Plan 2
 - Beach Monitoring
- Schemes supported by the Welsh Government (WG) grants
- Latest updates- Coastal & Fluvial
- Flood & Coastal Erosion
- Carbon Management and Climate Change – Net Zero
- Net Zero Action Plan & Active Travel

Gavin Bown explained that NRW had responsibility for regulating Welsh Water, whilst Welsh Water operated and maintained water and sewerage

services. In terms of the issues raised in the presentation, he clarified that NRW were able to undertake coveted water coursework to reduce risk, but additional permission was required to carry out internal draining. In terms of the delay reported by NRW around the work required at Capel Bangor and Tal y Bont, the modelling work by WSP had not yet been received to progress the work.

NRW prioritised their work on a flood risk basis to communities at greatest risk of flooding, which along with other factors such as recent river and coastal flooding events to establish work programmes. Due to climate change, there was higher peak flow in rivers and flash flooding, which was more difficult to manage and respond to. In addition, it was a challenge to respond to the increase in sea levels and coastal erosion, which affected coastal areas and places of significant heritage and habitats. Approximately 1 in 8 properties in Wales were currently at risk of flooding. By 2120, an estimated 22,000 people would be at risk of flooding from rivers across Mid Wales, an increase of 6000 from current figures. In addition, around 4500 people would be at risk of flooding from the sea in 2120, an increase of 2000 people.

Evidence from the UK Climate Change Risk Assessment: Summary for Wales was used by NRW to steer work and to develop a climate change risk assessment. A key step in moving forward was to develop a climate change risk assessment through Ceredigion's PSB Board. In terms of controlling the risk of flooding, flood maps were developed to guide development and to aid responders and a flood warning service was available along with live flood warnings, river and sea levels. Information about preparing and protecting communities from flooding was available on NRW's website.

Matthew Jenkins provided an update on the Dyfi Flood Risk Appraisal. The following was outlined in a presentation:

- Dyfi flood risk appraisal- Ceredigion County Council update
- Locality
- Background and update (2010-2013 EAW & Updated OBC Work)
- Present day flood risk T1000, Breaches and Summary
- Evidence Baseline Study update
- Ongoing work, Stakeholder update and Stakeholders
- Tidal Dyfi OBC: Long Listing- Timeline

Members were provided with the opportunity to ask questions which were answered by Officer in attendance and Councillor Keith Henson. The main points raised were as follows:

- Concerns were raised around whether grant funding would be lost due to the delay in NRW receiving the modelling work from WSP to progress the work. The grant was available for the financial year and there were discussions with WG to extend the report's submission date.
- If work was undertaken in one area, there were concerns that this would lead to unintended and unplanned consequences elsewhere. NRW took into consideration WG's Flood Risk Strategy which factored in climate change and was included in NRW's decision-making and plans.

- Concerns were raised with the Nitrate Vulnerable Zone (NVZs) regulations imposed by WG on the agriculture sector soon, and whether the county's estate farms would be able to meet the requirements. There would be a phased-in approach in terms of it coming into operation, and this would be reflected in how NRW regulated it.
- The quality of the water in the river Aeron in Aberaeron was raised. Both NRW and Ofwat have responsibility for the regulation of water companies and enforcement action was taken accordingly. There were yearly meetings with water companies at board levels, to recognise and drive improvements, to highlight concerns and to inform of future investment programmes. Combined sewer overflows (CSOs) were a key part of the sewerage system to prevent flooding. Water companies had remote monitoring which enable them to monitor spilling and act as required.
- NRW was involved with the Wales Better River Quality Taskforce, to deliver the LIFE Programme worth over £9 million to improve 4 Welsh rivers including the river Teifi.
- Concerns were raised that there was a lack of strategic leadership with flooding and coastal erosion and a lack of action. Published reports on flooding were dealt with nationally, considered centrally and sent through to be applied locally. Due to the lack of funding, it had to be decided nationally, regionally and locally where the priorities should be.
- It was noted that the first two phases that had been designed and constructed at Borth were a time-limited solution, and there was always a risk as the beach was dynamic. Modelling and investigation work would be done to ensure any further work would not increase the risk of flooding elsewhere.
- Due to a delay in completion of a study in relation to drainage issues in Borth, reassurance was given that the OBC grant funding remained for the current financial year.
- Carbon Management and Climate Change was an ever-changing field and officers constantly reviewed plans and actions and met with National Grid to discuss issues with capacity. It was highlighted that the journey to Net Zero was a large funding requirement, and many difficult decisions would need to be taken.
- Given that major rivers hail from the uplands, working with landowners was key to ensuring preventative measures were in place to help slow the flow and improve the quality of the river.
- Concerns were raised that the completion of the protection and prevention works guaranteed by NRW in Llanbadarn Fawr within 6 months of the severe floods that affected areas in north Ceredigion in June 2012 had not yet been completed and was currently at a standstill. This delay caused significant mental health and well-being concerns to residents, especially during periods of poor weather. Reasons for this delay included issues with landowners, capacity to complete the work and level of risk. Dependent on several factors, there could be an opportunity for NRW to ask the local authority to complete the work at Llanbadarn Fawr.

Due to technical difficulties, Tim England was unable to share a presentation of the work in Cardigan. The presentation and information on the LIFE Programme would be forwarded to share with Members.

Following questions by the Committee Members, it was agreed to note the progress being made in relation to the development of Fluvial and Coastal Defence Schemes, and mitigation to address the risks posed by Climate Change.

4 Creation of a Waste Services Working Group

Rhodri Llwyd provided an overview of the background and the current situation related to Ceredigion's Waste Management Strategy. A new strategy was now required to set out the future direction of the service, with specific regard to the county's household waste sites, next kerbside collection model and waste transfer station arrangements

The proposal was to create a Waste Services Working Group to oversee the development of the Ceredigion Waste Strategy, which would report back to the Thriving Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee at appropriate intervals, and the Committee's approval was therefore sought to:

- (i) create a Waste Service Working Group, to assist with bringing reasonable options into the democratic system.
- (ii) request that the Thriving Communities Overviews and Scrutiny Committee nominate 5 Members to represent the Committee on the Working Group and that consideration was given to an appropriate political balance and urban/rural split within the Group.

Following questions by the Committee Members, it was agreed to create a Waste Service Working Group.

The following names were agreed to represent the Committee on the Working Group:

1 Independent Member (Chair of the Thriving Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee- currently Councillor Gwyn Wigley Evans), 3 Plaid Cymru Members (Councillors Ann Bowen Morgan, Chris James and Carl Worrall) and 1 Liberal Democrats Member (John Roberts).

Members praised the Waste Collection Service for the improvements made following the Special Meeting held on 21 March 2023.

5 Development Management Service

Russell Hughes-Pickering provided members with an update on the planning and enforcement caseloads. In December 2022, a report was presented to the Committee on the Development Management Service. The report centred on a 2021 Audit Wales review of the Planning Service in Ceredigion and set out 10 recommendations relating to governance arrangements and to improving service capacity. In response to those recommendations relating to governance arrangements, it was reported that significant changes to the Constitution had been agreed including new Terms of Reference, Operational Procedures, Codes of Practice and Delegated Powers. In response to performance issues, it was necessary to look at

tackling issues in four main areas of the development management process – validation, consultee delays, phosphates and staff capacity to deal with cases. An update on the current position of the four main areas was provided.

A presentation was provided to the Committee outlining the following:

- Introduction
- Planning applications
 - Caseload- last 24 months
 - Number of cases determined
 - Speed of decision making
 - Current planning application caseload
 - Future targets
- Planning enforcement
 - Enforcement cases- new by year
 - Breakdown of caseload
 - Outstanding enforcement cases
 - Future targets
- Staff update

Members were provided with the opportunity to ask questions which were answered by Russell Hughes-Pickering. The main points raised were as follows:

- The utilization of Capita which had several branches will end soon once the backlog had been dealt with and the department had the capacity to deal with cases. Despite Capita being slightly cheaper, there were benefits of employing internal staff such as familiarization with the area and policies.
- The same decision-making process was used by internal staff and Capita.
- Advertising the success of the enforcement team was suggested to highlight that action was taken where required. Enforcement issues and the response to this varied case by case, and the process was lengthy.
- There was scope to look at how employees wished to work. With flexible hours. As there was an 8-week target to process cases in development management, it could be challenging to achieve this if working part-time.
- It was suggested that communication between officers and agencies could be improved. Given the workload of officers, there were time constraints but there was an aspiration to improve communication and the quality of applications.
- There were no issues between the local authority and CADW, however, decisions could take time. This was partly due to the local authority no longer having a speciality heritage officer but following the appointment of a Specialist Development Management Officer, this would hopefully improve, and delegated powers would be given.
- When the Council's Constitution changed, it was agreed that Members would be informed by e-mail when an application in their ward was received, which enabled them to be involved from the onset. The onus was on Members to keep updated with each application. Members and

officers were encouraged to discuss cases, particularly if the application was controversial to ensure all were aware of the situation.

Following questions by the Committee Members, it was agreed to note the report.

6 To confirm the Minutes of the previous Meeting and to consider any matters arising from those Minutes

It was agreed to confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 5 April 2023.

Matters arising: In response to a query around Ceredigion's bus network, Councillor Keith Henson explained that Lee Waters MS, Deputy for Climate Change had published a £46 million Bus Transition Fund recently. In addition, a procurement process was currently underway within the local authority.

7 To consider the Overview and Scrutiny Forward Work Programme

It was agreed to note the contents of the Forward Work Programme presented.

8 Any other business

- i. The Chair stated he was pleased that Officers from NRW had accepted the invitation to attend today's meeting. Hopefully, representatives from Welsh Water would accept the invitation to attend the meeting arranged in July.
- ii. Members expressed their dissatisfaction with the hybrid system, which led to missing parts of the discussion. It was noted that ICT Officers had been informed of the issues during the meeting.

Confirmed at the Meeting of the Thriving Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 31 July 2023

Chairman: _____

Date: _____