

**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 Monday, 23 October 2023**

**Present:** Councillor Gwyn Wigley Evans (Chairman), Councillors Marc Davies (Vice-Chair), Gethin Davies, Meirion Davies, Rhodri Davies, Rhodri Evans, Maldwyn Lewis, Sian Maehrlein, Ann Bowen Morgan & Carl Worrall.

**Also in attendance:** Councillors Ifan Davies, Endaf Edwards, Elizabeth Evans, Keith Evans, Raymond Evans, Hugh Hughes & Gareth Lloyd.

**Cabinet Members present:** Councillors Catrin M S. Davies, Clive Davies, Gareth Davies, Keith Henson & Alun Williams.

**Officers in attendance:** Rhodri Llwyd, Corporate Lead Officer, Highways and Environmental Services; Gerwyn Jones, Corporate Manager, Environmental Services; Phil Jones, Corporate Manager, Highways Services; Katy Spain, Service Manager, Transport Services; Duncan Hall, Corporate Lead Officer, Finance and Procurement; Arwyn Davies, Corporate Manager, Growth and Enterprise; Angela Sawyer, Senior Food Technologist; Lisa Evans, Standards and Scrutiny Officer & Neris Morgans, Democratic Services Officer.

(10.00am- 12.51pm)

**1 Apologies**

- i. Councillors John Roberts and Chris James apologised for their inability to attend the meeting.
- ii. Councillor Carl Worrall apologised for having to leave the meeting early.

**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.**

There were no disclosures of Personal and Prejudicial Interests (including whipping declarations) from Committee Members.

**3 Parking Proposals and Opportunities**

Councillor Keith Henson (Cabinet Member for Highways and Environmental Services and Carbon Management) explained that the purpose of the report was to provide information relating to the two recommendations made to Cabinet on 5 September 2023 as noted below:

**Recommendation 1:** That Cabinet consider undertaking a review of charging for parking along the Promenade in Aberystwyth.

**Recommendation 2:** That Cabinet consider offering 2 hours of free parking between 8am and 10am on Monday to Friday in one car park in Lampeter, Aberaeron and Cardigan.

Rhodri Llwyd, Corporate Lead Officer, Highways and Environmental Services provided a presentation to the Committee on Aberystwyth Promenade parking. The following was outlined:

- Process
- Considerations
- Stakeholder feedback

Members were provided with the opportunity to ask questions which were answered by Officers present. The main points raised were as follows:

- Concerns were raised by the Elected Members of wards in Aberystwyth of the financial impact that charging along the Promenade may have on businesses including B&Bs and residents including the elderly and disabled who had no off-street parking. Clarification was given that Blue Badge holders in vehicles granted a tax-exemption, specifically by virtue of a disability, displaying their blue badge may park for free in Ceredigion's Pay and Display car parks however, all other Blue Badge holders were required to pay. Arrangements for Blue Badge holders where on-street charging was introduced would be in keeping with legislation and policy.
- If a decision was made to charge for parking along the Promenade, Members felt that resident parking would be key. A review of resident parking charges across Wales was suggested to ensure the charges were fair. It was noted that a resident parking permit would not warrant a guaranteed parking space as on-street parking was provided on the public highway.
- It was raised that many who parked along the Promenade during the day were people who travelled to the town from outside to work. As it stood, residents who lived on the Promenade had to go and search for spaces to park in nearby streets if there were no spaces available; there were concerns that charging for parking would reduce the number of free spaces nearby as people would try and search for these spaces. In addition, given the climate change agenda, charging along with the Promenade may encourage more to travel into town by public transport.
- Members suggested that there was a need to review parking in Aberystwyth in its entirety as the availability and adequacy of parking had decreased over the years with new developments.
- Members expressed that it would be vital that any additional costs to the service (e.g. installing payment machines/ signs) should be recovered through the income generated. It was noted that signs to allow people to pay online were widely used in other locations and would be better economically. If only a section of the Promenade would be allocated to parking charges, there would be less expense, but also less income.
- At present, there were difficulties parking on the Promenade given the lack of spaces but if parking charges were presented, Members believed there would be a greater turnover.

- Concerns were raised about the number of motorcyclists on the seafront and the danger they pose to the public; it was noted that this was a matter for Dyfed-Powys Police.
- Most members agreed that there was a need for the local authority to look at how to generate income from car parking given the challenges to the budget. Many members felt that charging for parking on the Promenade in Aberystwyth was an opportunity not to be missed.
- It was noted that there had not been a park-and-ride facility in Aberystwyth for a few years. There were many car parks available within close proximity along with regular bus and train services.
- Consideration of the Active Travel agenda, SPF funding, the sea defence scheme and other strategies should be given, to ensure any changes to parking at the Promenade were done logically.

Gerwyn Jones, Corporate Manager, Environmental Services provided an overview of the financial impact of the Offer of 2 hours of free parking between 8am and 10am on Monday to Friday in one car park in Lampeter, Aberaeron and Cardigan to the Committee.

Members were provided with the opportunity to ask questions which were answered by Officers present. The main points raised were as follows:

- Members noted that the recommendation had been to consider one car park in Lampeter, Aberaeron and Cardigan; it was clarified that an overview of car parks was provided for context and to enable Members to compare data. There was a concern that if one car park was free for 2 hours, other car parks in the same town would be impacted, and subsequently, the income target and the service as a whole.
- Concerns were raised that providing free parking before 10am would not be beneficial for the elderly and given the cost-of-living crisis, the impact any increase in parking charges would have on households.
- The importance of equity across the county was raised. Although services had been withdrawn from areas such as Llandysul, there was an expectation for all residents of Ceredigion to subsidise the services that remained across the county.
- It was noted that a more holistic approach was required generally, and the Cabinet should consider the economic development of towns and gain the views of businesses before any decisions were made. In addition, the rural population who accessed services locally but had no access to public transport should be considered.

Members considered different scenarios for the Promenade, such as charging all year round or seasonally. In addition, for equity, members considered whether to propose 2 hours of free parking before 10am at all Ceredigion County Council Pay and display car parks. The Section 151 Officer (Duncan Hall, Corporate Lead Officer: Finance and Procurement) then advised the Committee that they did not have the right financial data in front of them to give their proposal proper consideration as the report only showed the estimated financial impact in relation to the car parks in Aberaeron, Lampeter and Cardigan. It was noted that car parking charges at

Tregaron and Llandysul would be considered during the budget-setting process.

Following questions by the Committee Members, it was agreed to note the content of the report and recommend that Cabinet undertake a review of charging for parking along the Promenade in Aberystwyth throughout the year and to introduce free parking before 10am in all Ceredigion County Council Pay and Display car parks. Cabinet would be required to review the financial implication of adding Aberystwyth to this proposition as the Committee would not want the changes to have a negative financial impact for the Authority.

#### **4 Food Centre Wales**

Consideration was given to the report related to Food Centre Wales built by Ceredigion County Council at Horeb, Llandysul, and opened in 1996, to provide technical support for the food industry in Ceredigion as well as Mid and South-West Wales. Its location, being accessible to rural, farming communities in Ceredigion, Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire highlights one of its key objectives, which is to support farming businesses that wished to diversify into added-value processing. Food Centre Wales provides technical services to business start-ups, SMEs and national food manufacturers.

Food Centre Wales has formed a partnership with another two food technology centres in Wales, located in Llangefni and Cardiff to provide Wales-wide support for the food industry. An overview of the current provision including a focus on the Helix project and the impact on the economy was provided. Since 2016, the Food Centre Wales team has delivered good results through the HELIX project against the targets set. It was noted that the table included in the report did not reflect the full volume of support provided as they were only able to include the first intervention provided to businesses, although many returned a few times a year.

In terms of the future, Ceredigion County Council purchased a further 5 acres of land adjacent to the current estate in 2019 at Horeb to facilitate future growth plans. Two projects were currently being developed and assessed for inclusion in the Growth Deal programme for Mid Wales:

- i. The establishment of a Food Manufacturing Innovation Centre would bring state-of-the-art, industrial-scale pilot facilities aimed at enabling the growth of more mid-sized food manufacturing businesses in Mid Wales.
- ii. The provision of grow-on food manufacturing facilities, building on the current incubator units at Food Centre Wales.

These developments would further enhance the provision of services for the agri-food sector in Ceredigion, which was key to its economic well-being and would help to future-proof the facility and its long-term relevance and viability. There were also exciting developments by other projects in the Growing Mid Wales Growth Deal namely AberInnovation and Tir Glas, which would complement Food Centre Wales. The Centre had been awarded a 2-year extension of core budget, but there was no certainty following this.

Members were provided with the opportunity to ask questions which were answered by the Officers present. The main points raised were as follows:

- It was noted that the Centre were able to support businesses from outside Wales commercially, but only businesses from Wales were able to benefit from the Helix project, which was the focus at present.
- Most businesses who accessed support were based in Mid and South-West Wales. Rachel's Diary and other businesses that had received support early on in their journey continued to access support as they grew. As businesses expanded, there was greater demand for expertise rather than generic support. In addition, due to the current economic climate, businesses were exploring ways to reduce costs and rather than testing any changes in processes at their base, preferred to do so at the Centre to avoid disruptions to production.
- Many from the dairy sector had diversified and sold milk directly, with some businesses starting their journey at the Centre. Given the current financial challenges, more dairy farmers may decide to add value to their product. By utilizing the support from the Centre, they would be able to explore options without investing too much initially, before deciding whether or not it was the best option for them.
- Members raised concerns that only 2 years of funding had been provided at present. Officers clarified that the Helix project had been delivered through the European Union initially for 5 years and the Welsh Government had provided one extension of core funding followed by the latest 2-year extension. Regular discussions were held with Officers and Ministers and the Centre delivered against the targets set which was positive. Plans were being developed in the event no further funding would be provided. In addition, the Centre's focus would have to be more commercial in nature, which may impact smaller businesses as there would be a greater focus on maximising income.
- It was noted that Cardiff Metropolitan University was one of Food Innovation Wales's partners. There was an aspiration to work with students who were eager to develop a career in the sector, and this would be an area of improvement in moving forward.
- Concerns were raised that successful businesses had relocated from Ceredigion to other parts of the country due to tax purposes and recruitment challenges in the past. It was noted that the Centre had an ambition to work with businesses of all sizes to understand more and one business in particular had been central to the development of Food Centre Wales and their vision for the future.
- Currently, there was not enough space at the Centre for businesses to develop on-site and it was challenging at times. Businesses tended to move to farm buildings or industrial estates, but usually, work needed to be carried out to ensure the facilities were suitable for food production. One of the key elements of the Growth Deal was to expand on the provision available to meet the demand to enable businesses to develop.
- Design and marketing were considered key for businesses. Food Centre Wales worked closely with Business Wales and marketing specialist Cywain, a project run by Menter and Busnes. Welcoming sessions were arranged jointly between the three projects regularly for new businesses. In terms of business credibility, checks were carried out and work was

undertaken to ensure products were viable and there was a market before further work was done.

Following questions by the Committee Members, it was agreed to note the report and to undertake a site visit to further review the site's work and its future plans.

**5 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 31 July 2023.

Matters arising: None.

**6 To consider the Overview and Scrutiny Forward Work Programme**

It was agreed to note the contents of the Forward Work Programme presented subject to the following:

- Update on Ceredigion's fleet (December 2023 if possible)

**Confirmed at the Meeting of the Thriving Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 18 December 2023**

**Chairman:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_