

**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, 18 December 2023**

Present: Councillor Gwyn Wigley Evans (Chairman), Councillors Shelley Childs, Gethin Davies, Rhodri Davies, Rhodri Evans, Chris James, Maldwyn Lewis, Sian Maehrlein, Ann Bowen Morgan and Carl Worrall.

Also in attendance: Councillors Euros Davies, Elizabeth Evans, Wyn Evans and Gareth Lloyd.

Cabinet Members present: Councillors Catrin M S. Davies, Clive Davies, Keith Henson and Matthew Vaux.

Officers in attendance: Rhodri Llwyd, Corporate Lead Officer, Highways and Environmental Services; Gerwyn Jones, Corporate Manager, Environmental Services; Katy Spain, Service Manager; Owen Morgan, Harbour Manager; Chay Sanders, Harbour Works Leader; Ian Williams, Project Manager; Phil Jones, Corporate Manager, Highways Services; Caroline Wride, Service Manager; Eifion Jones, Public Rights of Way Officer; Lowri Edwards, Corporate Lead Officer: Democratic Services; Lisa Evans, Standards and Scrutiny Officer and Neris Morgans, Democratic Services Officer.

(10.00am- 12.50pm)

1 Apologies

- i. Councillors Marc Davies, Meirion Davies and John Roberts apologised for their inability to attend the meeting.
- ii. Councillor Rhodri Davies apologised that he would be late in joining the meeting.

**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 Ceredigion Harbours Management Policy Review: Consultation

Councillor Keith Henson (Cabinet Member for Highways and Environmental Services and Carbon Management) provided Committee Members with an update on the outcome of the Ceredigion Harbours Management Policy Review Consultation process. The current Ceredigion Harbours Management Policy was approved by the Council on 19 October 2010 and provided a clear, useful and appropriate framework for the delivery and management of activities at the Council's Harbours at Aberaeron, Aberystwyth and New Quay. It was, however, now considered appropriate

and timely to review and update the policy to reflect relevant changes since the Policy's implementation and, to address any gaps between the Policy and current Harbour related activities which had been identified and/or arisen from experience. The proposed changes built on the current Policy which had served stakeholders well for over a decade. The changes recognised and reflected that the Harbours were multi-use, shared-use facilities and that the Council's overall intention was to strengthen the Policy so they could continue to be managed in a fair, transparent and balanced way for the benefit of all stakeholders.

A draft updated Policy was prepared and, as part of the policy change process, a consultation was undertaken that provided stakeholders with an opportunity to provide their feedback. The consultation was launched on 20 September 2023 and was open until 20 October 2023, with a total of 108 responses received through the prescribed process. Feedback from outside the prescribed process was also received and noted. An overview of the feedback received was provided. Further to the feedback received through the consultation process, amendments have been incorporated into the latest draft of the new policy. As with any consultation related to any change in policy, it was not possible to respond positively to all the feedback, suggestions and comments received and there could be a direct conflict between the aims, aspirations and expectations of the different stakeholders.

Councillor Keith Henson and Gerwyn Jones, Corporate Manager-Environmental Services explained that the intention was to have an overarching policy framework that supported and facilitated the fair, consistent and transparent management of the harbours, that recognised the variety of stakeholders that make use of the facilities. It was accepted that not everyone would approve nor agree with the details and implications, however, these were Council-operated facilities and, ultimately, it was for the Council to determine how they, and the activities undertaken therein, were best managed.

Gerwyn Jones added that there had been a misunderstanding around waiting lists which had been reflected in the feedback, and that if a boat for sale included a mooring, it could create an artificial premium. From the 108 responses, 33 had shared their views on the policy, despite stating that they had not known about its existence, therefore having a balanced approach to changes was key.

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

- Members were supportive of the removal of the transfer and inheritance rights of mooring arrangements from leisure holders from the revised policy.
- The policy did not encompass the fees and charges and would be dealt with separately during the annual budget-setting process.
- It was noted that the local authority owned the harbour infrastructure and the Crown Estate owned and held responsibility for the coast.

- The Harbour Service engaged with stakeholders regularly, more so than what other service areas were able to sustain or offer. Engagement included monthly surgeries, a biannual newsletter 'Calm Waters' and The Harbour Users Consultative Committee that met in March and October historically. As the Committee's focus had evolved, a review of the Constitution would be required.
- Historically, dredging was undertaken at Aberaeron and New Quay harbour yearly, and every 3-5 years at Aberystwyth, where the task was much greater. Consideration needed to be given to the financial situation.
- In terms of the 'Gunning Principles', it was noted that there had been a clear explanation of why the changes to the policy had been presented.
- Concerns were raised with the removal of the transfer of commercial moorings from the policy, as it was key to ensure businesses were protected given the county's historic maritime heritage. For succession purposes, having some flexibility around the transfer of commercial moorings was key. It was noted that the transfer of moorings had been removed from the policy given feedback received over the years that there was a sense of 'closed shop' when it came to the waiting list.
- There was a specific number of moorings in each of the 3 harbours and the demand varied, but generally, there was less availability in New Quay from a leisure and commercial perspective. At present, there was a limit to the number on the waiting list for both leisure and commercial moorings, but the limit would be removed in the revised policy.
- Following a query around the admin fee linked to parking fees, it was noted that this would need to be looked into as parking permits had been removed from the mooring offer.
- During the work currently being undertaken at Aberaeron coastal defence scheme, no free-parking provision had been arranged for harbour users.
- Concerns were raised that mooring holders would attempt to change from leisure to commercial for inheritance purposes, however, it was noted that there were steps in place to prevent this.

The Chair explained that a letter had been sent by the Ceredigion Commercial Mooring Association, which Members and Officers had already had sight of. Members noted the letter and acknowledged the concerns raised related to the removal of the transfer of commercial moorings and the impact this could have on businesses and the succession of businesses.

In accordance with the Overview and Scrutiny Public Engagement Protocol, Mr Seal attended the meeting to address the Committee on behalf of the Ceredigion Harbour Users Consultative Committee (CHUCC), a separate group to the Harbour Users Consultative Meetings facilitated by the local authority. Reference was given to the concerns noted in the minutes and the open letter sent by CHUCC to the local authority following their meeting to discuss the Harbour Management Policy.

Gerwyn Jones explained that the Harbour Service was a part of the wider Highways and Environment Service, and it operated under the Council's Constitution, similar to other Council services.

Councillor Keith Henson extended his thanks to the Committee for their input, to Ceredigion Commercial Mooring Association for their letter and to Mr Seal for addressing the Committee. He also extended his best wishes to Gerwyn Jones as he leaves his role with the authority and he was thanked for his hard work over the years; the Chair echoed Councillor Keith Henson's words.

Following questions by the Committee Members, it was agreed to:

- i. Note the content of the report.
- ii. Recommend to Cabinet that the latest version of the draft Ceredigion Harbour Management Policy, incorporating the amendments included following the consultation process, is approved for subsequent implementation and that all commercial boats to include fishing boats and passenger boats are permitted to sell their boats with their moorings should it be necessary and that the right of succession is maintained.

Councillor Rhodri Evans requested that the policy included the tracked changes when it was presented to the Cabinet for ease of reference.

4 Grass Cutting

Councillor Keith Henson explained that the report detailed how the grass-cutting was managed, the rationale behind that management and the costs involved. The main verge mow reduced to one cut a season in 2014-15 was dictated by cuts made to the service following a review of Council Services in that year. Recognising this, the decision was made to cut in areas rather than according to road hierarchy, although there was some crossover.

The current regime was to undertake the 'safety/visibility' cuts first (junctions and sight lines) and then the early growth areas. Due to climatic conditions, the growth was earlier in the south and therefore, the service worked from south to north. With 70% of the network made up of Class C and Unclassified roads, getting to all the narrow lanes was a challenge. As resources were limited, it was not possible to cut all the verges at the same time, so some would be cut earlier than others, and some later, either way, there was the possibility that the timing of those cuts could attract complaints.

The contractor had been cutting the grass for many years and attempts were made not to divert the contractor from the programmed regime as there were additional costs involved in this. However, the programme would be altered if deemed necessary for highway safety reasons. An officer investigated all requests for grass-cutting received and assessed whether there was sufficient reason to divert resources. The main cut itself usually took 6 weeks to complete. A pre-season and end-of-season briefing meeting was also held with contractors.

The county was split into 10 'beats' in total, 9 county beats with the trunk road separated into beat 10 which was managed on behalf of NMWTRA. The Authority constantly reviewed its service level standards to reflect the decreased budget allocation to the various highway maintenance activities. Future priorities were likely to lead to an approach focused more on risk and

road safety and less on the aesthetic appearance of grassed areas that it maintained.

Reference was given to the following noted in the report:

- Main Highways Cut
- Amenity Grass Cutting
- Urban Wildflower Areas
- Roadside Reserves
- Service Costs

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

- Amenity cuts were done in-house by the Grounds Maintenance team 4 times a year. Road safety was the main reason for cutting grass.
- Members raised concerns that some areas within their wards were not cut consistently; it was noted that different bodies could hold responsibility for the grassed area, such as housing associations and landowners. Officers agreed to share the details of what grassed areas the local authority held responsibility for across the county to enable Members to have a better understanding.
- Historically, the county was split into two beats but in attempts to attract more contractors, it was split into 10 beats in recent years and a meet-the-buyer session was arranged during the grass-cutting procurement exercise. Although a few contractors had initially shown an interest, only two contractors had tendered for the work. It was noted that one of the key factors in the procurement exercise was compliance with road safety.
- Concerns were raised with the grass cutting at the graveyard in Aberystwyth and the impact this had on the public. Questions were also raised related to the Ystwyth and Rheidol cycle path; it was noted that this had been brought to the service's attention and would be reviewed.
- Members asked to be kept informed of any changes to the grass-cutting programme when no political decision was required, to ensure they had the information to answer questions by the public.
- The Service was thanked for their work and their flexibility when a request was sent by a Member to cut the grass when there was a funeral in the ward.

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

5 Local Access Forum (LAF) Annual Report

Eifion Jones, Public Rights of Way Officer and the LAF Secretary provided an overview of the LAF Annual report, its work and role. The Ceredigion LAF was set up under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to advise the County Council, Natural Resources Wales and others on the way that access to the countryside was improved and managed. LAFs represented a broad spectrum of interests and members played an important role in the improvement and management of access to the County's diverse and attractive countryside.

LAF members were appointed on a three-year basis; Ceredigion County Council as the Appointing Authority appointed the current Forum in 2022 and members will sit until 2025. Not only was the Forum a statutory body encouraged to set its own agenda, but it was key to attract grants in excess of £100,000 a year and also as a partner in the management of Rights of Way and Access. The annual report had been prepared in accordance with Regulation 16 of the Countryside Access (Local Access Forums) (Wales) Regulations 2001.

Councillor Clive Davies (Cabinet Member for Economy and Regeneration) extended his thanks to Eifion Jones for producing the report. As a member of the Forum, he explained that the work including the presentations by external bodies was very interesting.

Committee Members agreed to note the information to raise awareness of the work of the Local Access Forum and the preparation of the Annual Report.

6 Feedback from the visit to Food Centre Wales

Consideration was given to the feedback following the Committee's visit to Food Centre Wales at Horeb, Llandysul. The Chair extended his thanks to Angela Sawyer, Senior Food Technologist for an informative presentation and a tour around the site.

Committee Members noted the report.

7 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 23 October 2023.

Matters arising: None.

8 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:

- Information on the availability of grants for organisations and businesses

The Chair extended his thanks to all and wished everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Confirmed at the Meeting of the Thriving Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 9 February 2024

Chairman: _____

Date: _____