

Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Thriving Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at the Council Chamber, Neuadd Cyngor Ceredigion, Penmorfa, Aberaeron and remotely on Tuesday, 21 March 2023

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

Also in attendance: Councillors Euros Davies, Amanda Edwards, Elizabeth Evans, Eryl Evans, Keith Evans, Wyn Evans, Geraint Wyn Hughes, Gareth Lloyd and Ceris Jones.

Cabinet Members present: Councillor Keith Henson.

Officers in attendance: Eifion Evans, Chief Executive; Barry Rees, Corporate Director; James Starbuck, Corporate Director; Lowri Edwards, Corporate Lead Officer, Democratic Services; Rhodri Llwyd, Corporate Lead Officer, Highways and Environmental Services; Gerwyn Jones, Corporate Manager, Environmental Services; Beverley Hodgett, Service Manager- Local Environment Services; Simon Edwards, Waste Manager; Lisa Evans, Standards and Scrutiny Officer and Neris Morgans, Democratic Services Officer.

(1.30pm-3.52pm)

1 Apologies

Councillor Bryan Davies, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Democratic Services, Policy, Performance and People and Organisation apologised for his inability to attend 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 Waste Collection Service

The Chair explained that the purpose of the meeting was to listen to the reasons why the disruption to the Waste Collection Service occurred in December 2022, and to try and find a way forward to resolve the issues impacting the service.

Eifion Evans, Chief Executive thanked the Chair and the Committee for their patience in allowing officers to focus on the budget before arranging today's meeting. It was acknowledged there had been a disruption to the service in December 2022, which created a sense of disagreement among the public. The Waste Collection Service provided an excellent service, and the staff

were praised for their willingness to continue to collect waste during the Covid-19 outbreak. Several factors contributed to the disruption in December 2022 and the context of what happened would be outlined in due course along with several options to try and resolve the issues, but it was important to note that staff were not at fault. Officers have been challenged consistently by elected members, who have been challenged by members of the public regarding the matter and several discussions have taken place between officers and political party leaders.

In terms of the Waste Collection Service, approximately 28 staff were employed at each of the 2 operational depots, and due to the nature of their contracts, a maximum of 4 members of staff would be allowed to be on leave at any one time, not taking staff sickness into account. As Bank and 'company' holidays (three fixed leave days between Christmas and New Year) were currently worked on a voluntary overtime basis, officers had been unable to adequately cover the service during these periods. Historically, there was greater resilience in the service but in the past decade, there had been a loss of £72 million of core funding from the Welsh Government (WG) and 750 jobs across Council services. When there were no issues, the service ran effectively and efficiently with a very high level of reliability, but the ability to respond to emergencies proved challenging. Senior Officers emphasised continually that unless an individual had the appropriate training, qualifications and experience, a member of staff could not undertake a role such as driving or loading a Refuse Collection Vehicle (RCV).

Barry Rees, Corporate Director explained that three separate episodes accounted for the disruption in December 2022:

1. The severe weather, where officers prioritised the gritting as opposed to the waste collection in order to ensure the health and safety of the public. At the same time, support was provided to Welsh Water to distribute water during the water outage, particularly in the south of the County.
2. Collections during Christmas/ New Year's were impacted due to the nature of contracts in place and 3 fixed leave days to which staff were entitled, resulting in staff shortage.
3. The third episode of disruption was again due to the impact of the severe weather.

Although it was possible to plan for poor weather, it was not possible to foresee when it would happen, as opposed to bank holidays. It was vital to remember that no one was in danger when the waste collection was disrupted, but the difficulties and the inconvenience to Ceredigion's residents were acknowledged.

Rhodri Llwyd, Corporate Lead Officer, Highways and Environmental Services outlined the following:

- Key Matters to Explore
 - Staffing Levels
 - Contractual Arrangements

- Waste Collection Budget
- Potential Outsourcing
- Fleet Maintenance
- Communication
- Household Waste Sites
- Clic Enquiries
- Work Currently in Progress
- Potential Future Options
 - Explore opportunities for digital solution
 - Review of operational staff contracts (9-12 months)
 - Review of alternative delivery options
 - Decrease resource and budgetary pressures on the service
 - Increase budget provision for waste collection

Rhodri Llwyd explained that some measures were already in place, and some would take longer to achieve, but incremental changes within could improve the service's provision. Staff sickness and emergencies such as extreme weather would remain, but hopefully, the measures proposed would on the whole create a more consistent and resilient service.

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

- All staff had permanent contracts and could volunteer to work on weekends and bank holidays. Changing contracts would need to be considered corporately, would take up to 12 months and would need to follow a formal consultation process. A change in contracts such as a rolling shift pattern would allow managers greater flexibility to ensure there was adequate staffing during difficult periods.
- The collection of trade waste was a broad issue and businesses have received a letter to explain that they have a legal duty to deal with their waste correctly. At present, RCVs had cameras to track the routes and the collection of waste but further exploration and investment in technology would enable closer monitoring of trade waste, which would benefit other Council services too.
- In response to suggestions to cancel collections over the Christmas period, the service would prefer to avoid this as it would lead to problems in the following weeks. Since Covid-19, the volume of waste collected had increased by 10%-15% and the nature of the waste varied weekly and by route.
- Communication with the public was reviewed regularly and it was acknowledged that clearer communication related to collections and disruptions could be investigated. Details were available via Clic (Customer Service Centre) and the authority was the first in Wales to share detailed updates online. With the development of 'My Account', residents would be able to receive updates in a variety of ways.
- Staff were encouraged to undertake HGV licence courses continually. Some staff employed as loaders and who had the required training/ qualifications were able to step up when required to drive HGVs including RCVs. Due to legal compliance considerations and the technology

involved, involving individuals who were unfamiliar with the work would be dangerous.

- WG's Blueprint for waste collection was deemed ineffective for rural areas and the previous administration had raised concerns that flexibility was required to provide a cost-efficient service to the county.
- The service had trialled an electric RCV and it had worked well but there were concerns should all vehicles use green energy given the inadequate grid capacity within the county. A combination of green hydrogen and electrical systems was deemed more suitable and needed to be considered by WG policymakers.
- The service was commended for their professionalism in ensuring the fleet was fit for purpose and complied with legislation, for the safety of the workforce and the public.
- When there was an adequate supply of staff, the service ran smoothly, but it proved challenging during emergencies hence the disruptions. To create more resilience by increasing capacity, further funding would be required.
- The provision of waste transfer stations at Penrhos was being considered corporately. In addition, discussions need to be undertaken with Household Waste Sites and private recycling sites to ask whether they would consider placing skips on sites to collect recycling bags.
- Collections brought forward to Saturday before a Bank Holiday Monday was favoured and would continue to be trialled.
- Waste was unloaded at Lampeter and Beulah following the procurement of new Transfer Station contracts.
- To impose restrictions on the number of black bags per household, a political decision would be required following consultation. This would hopefully encourage more recycling.

Eifion Evans thanked the Committee again for their patience in dealing with the matter. Several exciting and innovative ideas had been suggested and the aim was to provide a consistent service, which would be measured particularly during bank holidays and the Christmas period. Officers and elected members were praised for their maturity during discussions. There was a desire by all to solve the challenges acknowledged in the system.

Councillor Keith Henson, Cabinet Member noted that the service's good work was acknowledged nationally, as they were considered in the top 5 recyclers in Wales. The current fleet was working well, but investment was required to ensure the service ran efficiently. He expressed his thanks to the officers in attendance and the front-line staff for their work and hopefully with the introduction of 20mph speed limits, a safer working environment would be created.

The Chair stated that today's meeting had been beneficial and explained that the Committee would be happy to discuss further should the need arise. He suggested that staff were often aware of problems along with the solutions, therefore it was important to allow staff the opportunity to share their views.

Rhodri Llwyd also expressed his thanks to all present, and for the Committee's willingness to scrutinise in moving forward. From a staffing perspective, officers held 'toolbox talks' with staff regularly to discuss and share information and 'On the Job', an information leaflet was circulated to staff to update them on any corporate and health and safety developments.

Following questions by the Committee Members, it was agreed to note the response to the report and make appropriate recommendations to Cabinet if deemed necessary.

4 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 10 February 2023.

Matters arising: None.

Confirmed at the Meeting of the Thriving Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 5 April 2023

Chairman: _____

Date: _____