

**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 Wednesday, 19 March 2025**

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

Also in attendance: Councillors Euros Davies, Elizabeth Evans, Raymond Evans, Rhodri Evans & Gwyn James.

Cabinet Members present: Councillors Catrin M.S. Davies, Keith Henson & Wyn Thomas.

Officers in attendance: Rhodri Llwyd, Corporate Lead Officer, Highways and Environmental Services; Phil Jones, Corporate Manager, Highways Services; Russell Hughes-Pickering, Corporate Lead Officer, Economy & Regeneration; Sarah Groves-Phillips, Corporate Manager, Planning Services; Arwyn Davies, Corporate Manager, Growth and Enterprise; Duncan Hall, Corporate Lead Officer, Finance & Procurement; Lowri Edwards, Corporate Lead Officer, Democratic Services; Lisa Evans, Standards and Scrutiny Officer & Neris Morgans, Democratic Services Officer.

(10.00am- 1.41pm)

1 Apologies

- i. Councillor Clive Davies, Cabinet Member for Economy and Regeneration apologised for his inability to attend the meeting due to other Council commitments.
- 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.**

- i. Councillor Keith Henson declared a personal interest under item 5.
- ii. Councillor Meirion Davies declared a personal interest under item 7.
- iii. Councillor Gwyn Wigley Evans declared a personal interest under item 4.
- iv. Rhodri Llwyd, Corporate Lead Officer declared a personal interest under item 4, in accordance with the Code of Conduct for Local Government Employees.

3 Chair Announcements

- i. The Chair extended his best wishes to Lisa Evans, Standards and Scrutiny Officer on her role in the Legal Service and thanked her for her support on behalf of the Committee.

- ii. The Chair extended his thanks to Councillor Keith Henson for his dedication and work as a Cabinet Member since being elected in May 2022. Councillor Shelley Childs was wished well as he took on the role of Cabinet Member from April 2025 onwards. This was echoed by others in attendance.

4 Ceredigion Highways Asset Management Plan (HAMP) 2025-2030

Councillor Keith Henson (Cabinet Member for Highways and Environmental Services and Carbon Management) presented an update on the high-level strategic direction for the Highways Asset Management Plan 2025-2030 (HAMP). The report set out a 5-year plan on how Ceredigion County Council would manage and maintain the highway asset. It would replace the HAMP 2020-25 approved by Cabinet on 9 June 2020. The report formed the strategy behind how Highways Services would discharge its Local Highway Authority duties within the resources (human and fiscal) available. An overview of the background as outlined in the report was provided.

Councillor Keith Henson explained that the HAMP document presented to the Committee had been reviewed in line with current best practice, resource availability and need. The operational contents of the HAMP and recommended investment in the highway asset was intended to fulfil the statutory duties placed on the Council by the Highways Act 1980 acting as the Local Highway Authority whilst meeting the goals of the Corporate Strategy. During the life of the HAMP, the Highways Service would provide an Asset Status and Options Report (ASOR) annually to show the condition of the highway asset and how the investment was performing against the baseline set by this HAMP. The ASORs would recommend options each year on the investment required to meet the performance criteria set out in the HAMP. It was intended that the ASORs would be available to Members prior to the budget-setting process for the following financial year. In addition, the key performance indicators presented in the ASORs would be benchmarked nationally through the County Surveyors Society Wales and reported to the Welsh Government (WG) as part of the State of Nation Asset report.

Phil Jones, Corporate Manager provided an overview of the HAMP document. He explained that to an extent, the HAMP was a baseline policy document that sat in the background. He noted that the current budget was insufficient for the work that was required to be carried out.

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

- An additional £4.6m of Local Government Borrowing Initiative (LGBI) funding had been allocated by WG, on the condition the current spend on highway maintenance remained the same. 60% of the funding would be received this year, with the remaining 40% the following year. Officers explained that they would rather receive additional funding on an annual basis, rather than a sum of money every so often. Planned maintenance provided better value for money than reactive maintenance. Once the

funding and the list of works were confirmed, further details would be shared with Members.

- Concerns were raised with the networks' drainage systems. Some Members felt investment was needed in this area sooner than 2030 as was currently the case. Officers noted that weather conditions and runoff from adjacent private land impacted on the condition of roads and that they were limited to the extent of the works that could be undertaken due to budgetary constraints.
- It was noted that the service, using WDM undertook condition surveys of the highway network, and that WG were currently trialling other packages alongside WDM, but to date, the data was not as robust. The data collected yearly by WDM for the local authority provided a measurement of skid resistance and the condition of the roads and in conjunction with highway inspections indicated where work and investment needed to be prioritised. Whether a road had a complete resurface or surface dressing was an operational decision based on risk.
- Members felt many elements of the HAMP were irrelevant to rural areas, such as bus connectivity. Officers clarified that the document followed best practice and considered national policies.
- It was noted that a newer version of Insight, a system used by the local authority to manage enquiries and work on the network was due to be launched, therefore it was key to ensure the system met the needs of the service in moving forward.

Councillor Keith Henson thanked everyone involved with the development of the document, and for securing additional funding from WG to implement the work. He reminded Members and the public to complete the consultation on the Mid Wales Regional Transport Plan.

It was AGREED to note the contents and strategies presented in the HAMP for the period 2025-2030 and to recommend to Cabinet for approval.

5 Update on Phosphates workstreams

Dr Sarah Groves-Phillips, Corporate Manager presented an update on the phosphate risk register, which had since been downgraded to a service risk and a general update on the ongoing work. In January 2021, Natural Resources Wales (NRW) released advice to planning authorities on permitting development in riverine catchments of Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) across Wales. This guidance effectively placed an embargo on most development within the river Teifi SAC catchment which encompassed over 50% of Ceredigion and 3 of the 6 main towns. Ceredigion County Council added this constraint to its corporate risk register shortly after and was forced to hold in abeyance a number of planning applications and put the Local Development Plan preparation on formal pause. An overview of the information shared at the Committee in October 2024 was provided along with an update on the work in the past few months as outlined in the report.

Nutrient Management had been on the Corporate Risk Register for some time and whilst the work of the service in monitoring, delivering improvements, leading by example had been comprehensive and had

allowed some capacity for development across the Teifi catchment alongside partner work by Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water (DCWW) and NRW. This development opportunity was still constrained and remained a critical challenge to economic growth. The potential release of Marine SAC guidance was a real risk to the economic growth of the county outside the Teifi catchment. Thus, it was important to continue to include the Nutrient risk on the register and maintain momentum and critical action on the project objectives. With that in mind, the risk register would be reviewed regularly and actions updated as projects moved forward. An overview of the current identified mitigating actions as outlined in the report was provided.

Members were provided with the opportunity to ask questions which were answered by Dr Sarah Groves-Phillips. The main points raised were as follows:

- It was not possible to directly compare Ceredigion's data on the river Teifi to NRW's data, as the method of testing was different. Citizens Science had been commissioned to undertake work, and the results would be available soon. NRW had access to Ceredigion's data and vice-versa, but it was not likely that NRW would use Ceredigion's data in their analysis.
- In response to a query related to whether there was a notable difference in the levels of phosphate in the river Teifi following the restrictions imposed on the agricultural sector in the past year, it was noted that it was too early to say, and it would possibly take up to 7 years to come to a conclusion, however, the situation would be monitored. It was acknowledged that the main source of phosphates was due to the wastewater treatment plants.
- The Nutrient Management Board (NMB) had not undertaken modelling work on how the river Teifi would look in a decade, however DCWW had done some work. Without a legislative framework in place, it was difficult to ensure actions were carried out. A part of the NMB work programme for the next year would include addressing gaps in data.
- Although the NMB had not undertaken any modelling on fish stock, NRW had done so and it appeared the fish stock had declined.
- From the Officer's understanding, legal guidance had been sought on the impact of the Marine SAC nationally prior to it being released. The Planning Service awaited confirmation on whether they had been successful in an SPF bid for additional funding to install water quality monitors in the marine environment countywide. This would allow the local authority to track nitrates in the Cardigan Bay SAC and develop mitigation strategies.
- To date, no work had been done on any other river in Ceredigion due to funding, however, West Wales Rivers Trust operated across the county. It was noted that local angling clubs had a wealth of knowledge and could be invited to a future meeting if required. In terms of mine restoration, NRW had the funding to undertake the work which was ongoing and would take time due to legacy minerals.
- From a planning perspective, connecting houses to mains sewers was the preferred method, as there could be unintended consequences of chemical dosing plants. Since 2019, Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) had been a requirement for any new housing development.

- It was key that the local authority maintained a healthy relationship with organisations such as NRW and DCWW to ensure ambitions were driven forward. When data was published by other organisations, it was a case of quality checking, and making a judgement on the data available.
- It was expected that DCWW would undertake the work required at the water treatment plant to meet the permit by the end of 2026 as outlined in their Asset Management Plan, but no planning application had been submitted to date. In response to the Chair's recommendation of writing a letter to DCWW to ask for assurance that the plants would be upgraded, the Officer confirmed she was happy to draft a letter if required.
- The nutrient calculator developed by the NMB had been recognised nationally and had been due to be released across Wales in June 2024, although this had been delayed to April 2025 to allow for data matching.
- There were no outstanding planning applications due to phosphates, although some applications that had been refused would have possibly been approved prior to the advice received by NRW in January 2021.
- The Officer noted it was difficult to score the risk until the NRW guidance on the Marine SAC was released and the outcome for Ceredigion. Once the guidance was published, Officers would be in a position to review and put a plan in place.

Committee Members extended their thanks to Dr Sarah Groves-Phillips and the team for their work.

It was AGREED to note the report.

6 Delivery of Economic Strategy

Arwyn Davies, Corporate Manager provided an update on the progress of the delivery of the Economic Strategy for Ceredigion County Council for 2020-2035. He explained that Ceredigion County Council had long championed the development and growth of its local economy as a key corporate ambition. This had been shown through continual prioritisation throughout successive political administrations with Boosting the Economy, Supporting Businesses and Enabling Employment remaining its first corporate priority.

An overview of the vision and key priorities (People, Place, Enterprise, and Connectivity) as outlined in the report was provided. The strategy aimed to leverage Ceredigion's strengths and address challenges to foster a thriving, inclusive economy. There continued to be a challenge in the economy and there was a particular focus on areas where there remained significant challenges.

Arwyn Davies provided a presentation to the Committee outlining the following:

- Population, Employment, Qualifications & Earnings
- Key Challenge
- Business Births/ Deaths in Ceredigion
- Active enterprises in Ceredigion

- Businesses 5-year Survival
- Tourism in Ceredigion
- Tourism Performance 2012 vs 2023
- UK Shared Prosperity Funding (2022-2025) / Arfor – Enterprising Communities (2022-2025) / Transforming Towns (2022-2025)
- Economic Strategy (People, Place, Enterprise, Connectivity)
- Considerations

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

- Concerns were raised that the economy continued to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic. In terms of the impact of the Arfor and SPF programmes, it would be possible to assess and monitor the impact on a micro and macro level. There were many positives from both programmes and it was key to learn and build for the future.
- In relation to the SPF programme, 2025/26 was a transition year and there were ongoing discussions between the UK Government and WG on the future of the programme from 2026 onwards.
- Members congratulated all involved with the success of Arfor and the opportunities it had presented to so many people across Ceredigion. It was noted that Arfor in its current form would come to an end at the end of March 2025, and no confirmation had been received to date on its future.
- Strategic harbour investment was a part of the Growing Mid Wales growth deal and had received support from the Board at the Strategic Outline Business Case stage. Due to factors outside the local authority's control, the private business partner no longer operated. Discussions and a review of the proposals continued, with a view to re-submit the plans in the next 4-5 months.
- Although 275 out of a target of 300 new businesses had been created, it was important to set an aim and continue with the ambition of having more businesses start than end. In addition, the number of businesses that employed 50+ members of staff in Ceredigion compared to the level nationally was very low, therefore there was an aspiration to improve this.
- Due to the level of detail involved with the agenda item, it was suggested that the Committee had a separate meeting to discuss and focus on different elements of the Economic Strategy.

It was AGREED to note the content of the paper and its appendix, to review the information provided in the presentation at the meeting, and to provide reflections on the impact of the economic strategy as part of the wider review of its impact.

7 Oversight of in year financial matters

Duncan Hall, Corporate Lead Officer provided an overview of the 24/25 Controllable Revenue Budget - Financial Performance - Quarter 3 presented to the Cabinet on 11.03.25. At the time of writing the report, a projected underspend was forecast for the year of £97k on the Controllable Budget i.e. a balanced position was now expected to be achieved for the 24/25 financial year.

An overview of the following as outlined in the report was provided:

- Budget Performance - Headline In Year Challenges
- Budget Performance - Key Benefits
- Budget Performance - Budget Savings
- Budget Performance – Council Tax (including Premiums)

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

- In relation to the reduction of empty homes, it was noted that this was due to several factors, such as properties being categorised as exempt due to work carried out or being advertised for sale or rent.
- It was noted that the threshold for non-domestic rates for self-catering properties in Wales was set in legislation by WG.
- Committee Members were urged to contact the Overview and Scrutiny Officer or the Chair if there were any specific service areas they wished to request further information on such as budgetary pressures not covered in the quarterly financial reports presented to the Committee.
- Matters related to the recruitment and retention of staff in social care would be presented at the Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee on 27.03.25.
- In relation to the additional £4.6m of LGBTI funding allocated to highways services by WG, it would increase the capital budget but would be time-limited for 2 years and cost-neutral for the Council.

It was AGREED to note the report and for the Committee to scrutinise the information provided as it deems appropriate and relevant to the areas under its remit.

8 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 7 February 2025.

Matters arising: None.

9 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:

- Further details on the Economic Strategy

Confirmed at the Meeting of the Thriving Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 17 June 2025

Chairman: _____

Date: _____