

**Minutes of the Meeting of Thriving Communities Overview and Scrutiny  
Committee held at the Council Chamber, Penmorfa, Aberaeron and remotely  
on Wednesday, 19 October 2022**

**PRESENT:** Councillor Gwyn Wigley Evans (Chairman), Councillors Marc Davies (Vice-Chair), Gethin Davies, Meirion Davies, Rhodri Davies, Steve Davies, Rhodri Evans, Wyn Evans, Chris James, Maldwyn Lewis, John Roberts & Carl Worrall.

**Also in attendance:** Councillors Ann Bowen Morgan, Euros Davies, Ifan Davies, Elizabeth Evans & Gareth Lloyd.

**Cabinet Members Present:** Councillors Catrin M S. Davies, Clive Davies, Keith Henson, Wyn Thomas & Alun Williams.

**Officers in attendance:** Russell Hughes Pickering, Corporate Lead Officer, Economy & Regeneration; Arwyn Davies, Corporate Manager, Growth and Enterprise; Rhodri Llwyd, Corporate Lead Officer, Highways and Environmental Services; Phil Jones, Corporate Manager, Highways Services; Norman Birch, Ash Dieback Officer; Owen Stephens, Senior Engineer; Lyndon Griffiths, Corporate Manager, Property Services; Bethan Lloyd Davies, Carbon Reduction, Energy and Asset Management Programme Manager; Allan Bailey, Programme Manager; Lisa Evans, Standards and Scrutiny Officer; Neris Morgans, Democratic Services Officer; Nia Jones, Corporate Manager, Democratic Services; Llinos Williams and Rhidian Jones, Translators.

(10.02 am - 1.15 pm)

**1 Apologies**

Councillor Sian Maehrlein apologised for her 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 Progress on delivering the Economic Strategy**

Councillor Clive Davies, Cabinet Member presented the background, the actions implemented within the strategy and the future areas of focus as outlined in the report, which included the challenges in the 4 areas (People, Places, Enterprise & Connectivity) of intervention in the Economic Strategy. It was noted that the data for the county's connectivity has improved since the report had been written.

Members asked many questions relating to their area of interest which were answered in turn by Councillor Clive Davies and Arwyn Davies. The main points raised were as follows:

- Concerns were raised around whether grant capital funding from Welsh Government (WG) would continue in the same capacity as in recent years for rural areas given the current economic climate. The Arfor Innovation Fund by WG had recently been launched but funding was yet to be released. Acknowledgement was given to Ceredigion and Powys County Council's success in securing the Full Deal Agreement for a £110m capital investment programme.
- Work continued in Lampeter and Llandysul to bring town centre assets into economic use and to enhance green infrastructures.
- The project involving pop-ups in vacant stores was deemed important for new independent businesses. Hopefully, this project would be expanded beyond Aberystwyth.
- Work needed to be carried out to develop town centres, especially Aberystwyth into multi-purpose spaces. Consideration should be given to non-domestic tax payment exceptions as a way of attracting businesses to town centres.
- The department worked hard in applying for grants, sometimes in a very short timeframe. The importance of ensuring that any grant funding was relevant to the Economic Strategy was key.
- It was noted that the Food Centre Wales' Helix programme was currently in a 2 out of a 3-year contract with WG, and it was 1 of 3 centres in Wales. An open day for the public and businesses was suggested.
- Following concerns around the county's connectivity, it was noted that 88% of properties had a broadband speed of over 30Mb yet continued to be behind other areas of Wales. WG was undertaking open market reports to understand the current situation so the rollout of fibre to the property had slowed a little. Members were welcome to contact the Cabinet Member or officers if they had any queries.
- At present, there was no one in the Towns Development Officer post.
- In response to suggestions for vinyl to be placed on empty shop windows, there were opportunities under the Transforming Places Programme to apply for grants to improve properties. Members representing towns were encouraged to contact officers to discuss.
- Concerns were shared around whether WG was committed to developing Mid-Wales. It was noted that having a clear strategy in place was key in pursuing investment opportunities such as Mid Wales Growth Deal. Officers had a good relationship with WG and there were frequent discussions to ensure policies benefitted the region.

Following questions by the Members of the Committee, members agreed to note the report and the progress on delivering the Economic Strategy.

#### **4 Ash Die Back - Update for Information**

Councillor Keith Henson, Cabinet Member referred to the purpose, to the reason scrutiny had requested the information and to the background included in the report. It was important to consider the lack of resources and

to understand the additional cost and the amount of work involved to ensure the safety of citizens.

Phil Jones explained that officers had undertaken work to explore whether the work could be done in-house and the use of byproducts for fuelling the authority's biomass. Reference was given to the three appendices included in the report. Ash Dieback was noted to be a corporate issue. The Council is dealing with the issue on a risk based prioritised basis. Since council assets had begun to be surveyed in a prioritise manner, the scale of the issue on council-owned land was not as great as initially estimated.

Members asked many questions relating to their area of interest which were answered in turn by Phil Jones, Norman Birth and Rhodri Llwyd. The main points raised were as follows:

- Initially, the project programme has been to carry out the work over 10 years to, with most of the work done between the third and sixth year. Dependent on the budget and contractor availability, hopefully, the work could be completed sooner, although dealing with the airborne disease would be ongoing.
- Most trees adjacent to and abutting highways and public rights of way are owned by the landowner, who has a responsibility to carry out inspection of their trees. If an officer during inspections deemed a tree to be unsafe on land not owned by the authority, a Section 154 Notice of the Highways Act would be issued to the landowner. As a result, landowners would need to hire contractors within 14 days. The authority would be able to assist with the process if required.
- In terms of priority, there were 4 classes of deterioration with trees in class 4 prioritized with notices. Some trees in Class 1 and 2 would gain resistance and survive, which was important to maintain the native stock.
- In the event there was a tree preservation order in place, a notice of application for the removal of a tree would need to be done.
- Concerns were raised that the agriculture sector in Ceredigion had not been consulted with helping with the work of cutting trees in exchange for the chip. There were questions around economies of scale as felling individual trees as opposed to woodland had different requirements.
- Members felt that undertaking the work in-house would not have made business sense although long-term, the equipment would have been in the authority's possession.
- To ensure everyone had an opportunity to tender for the work, members felt that transparency was key in setting the matrix. A Tree works contractor framework was in the process of being developed and a meet the contractor event would be held to assist with the online tendering process.
- NRW were the enforcement agency if more than 5 cubic metres of timber per quarter was removed without a felling licence.
- Due to public protection concerns, it was suggested that work was done to communicate the problem to the public and to emphasise that responsibility lay with landowners if affected trees were on their land. Following up on notices served was key to ensuring public safety.

Following questions by the Members of the Committee, members agreed to note the report.

## **5 Net-Zero Action Plan - Progress Update**

Councillor Keith Henson, Cabinet Member noted that the purpose of the report was to provide a progress update as to the actions set out within the Net Zero Action Plan. Reference was given to the background as outlined in the report.

Bethan Lloyd Davies explained that reports had been done as part of the Carbon Management Plan since 2017/18. In 2021/22, additional emissions sources had been added and therefore, significant work was needed to report on the emissions moving forward.

Members were provided with the opportunity to ask questions which were answered by Bethan Lloyd Davies and Rhodri Llwyd. The main points raised were as follows:

- Concerns were raised by members that the grid capacity was not sufficient to serve the county and support the authority's commitment to becoming Net Zero by 2030. It was noted that this issue was raised often in meetings and by neighbouring authorities too. National Grid and Scottish Power sat on boards working on local energy plans, however, they had limited budgets and would invest in places they deemed necessary.
- Although employees commuted less with homeworking, concerns were raised that more houses would need to be heated during the day in the winter. It was noted that home-working emissions were accounted for in WG's Emission Reporting.
- Electricity generated from solar panels installed on council buildings was used by the buildings first with the remainder exported to the grid. If installations had a feed-in tariff payment, payments were made centrally to the authority. Generally, there was a 10-year payback on investments.
- A land management review had been done on Canolfan Rheidol and Ysgol Bro Teifi by WG; the findings were yet to be received. Consideration would be given in due course to batteries to store excess energy.
- It was noted that the aim of becoming Net Zero by 2030 was ambitious considering the situation financially. At present, WG would not penalise the authority for not achieving Net Zero by 2030, but this was the aim nationally for public sector bodies.
- In terms of the authority's fleet, converting vehicles to Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO) which was more expensive would be investigated along with hydrogen. It was noted that HVO was roughly 20% better than diesel but at present, by using the methodology provided by WG, there would only be a marginal improvement in the figures.
- It was noted that tree planting would be considered long-term to offset carbon and for every tree cut on council-owned land due to Ash Dieback, 3 trees would be planted in their place. In terms of the figures, trees were accounted for under land-based emissions.

- Other local authorities used the same system to collate data for reporting purposes. Hopefully next year, WG will provide an improved methodology to enable authorities to have a better understanding of the situation as at present, the more money that was spent, the more carbon that was generated.
- The authority was only able to report on the council's land holdings. Other bodies such as NRW included land in their ownership in their reports.

Following questions by the Members of the Committee, members agreed to note the progress in relation to actions set out within the Net-Zero Action Plan.

**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 27 July 2022.

Matters arising:

- Councillor Rhodri Evans noted that he had been present at the meeting held on 27 July 2022 and asked for his name to be added to the Welsh version of the minutes.
- The Chair explained that NRW had sent a letter of response following the meeting held on 27 July 2022; a copy of the letter was sent to committee members prior to today's meeting.

**7 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:

- Follow-up meeting with NRW and Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water regarding the phosphates
- Report on the need to identify places such as unused railway lines to re-open
- Progress update of Development Control and Enforcement work (following budget meetings)

**Confirmed at the Meeting of the Thriving Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 7 December 2022**

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

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