

COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Committee held in Council Chamber, County Hall, Ruthin and by video conference on Thursday, 6 February 2025 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Karen Edwards, James Elson, Jon Harland, Carol Holliday, Brian Jones, Delyth Jones, Cheryl Williams, Huw Williams and Pauline Edwards

ALSO PRESENT

Lead member for Environment and Transport, Barry Mellor for business under agenda items 5 and 6 and

Lead Member for Housing and Communities, Rhys Thomas for agenda items 7 and 8

Corporate Director: Economy and Environment (TW), Head of Highways and Environmental Service (PJ), Waste Operations Manager (GW), Head of Planning, Public Protection and Countryside Service (EJ), Head of Housing & Communities Service (LG), Traffic, Parking & Road Safety Manager (MJ), Senior Officer - Strategy Planning and Housing (JA), Lead Officer - Community Housing (GD), Valuation and Estates Team Manager (RE), Service Manager - Community Support Service (NJ), Lead Officer Housing Development (MD), Scrutiny Co-ordinator (KE), Committee Administrators (ED and NH).

Observer- Councillor Andrea Tomlin

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Michelle Blakeley-Walker.

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

The Chair, Councillor Huw Williams declared a personal and prejudicial interest in agenda item 6, the Car park Investment Plan 2024/29 due to being in dispute over a Denbighshire car parking matter.

3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

None.

4 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on the 12th December 2024 were submitted.

Matters arising- Item 5 (page 7)- the Scrutiny Co-ordinator advised that the Principal Planning Compliance Officer role had been re-advertised and the team were waiting for authorisation to fulfil the Compliance Officer role.

RESOLVED- that the minutes of the meeting held on the 12th December 2024 be approved as a true and correct record of the proceedings.

5 REVIEW OF TROLLIBOCS RECYCLING SERVICE AND ASSOCIATED WASTE COLLECTION FUNCTIONS

The Lead Member for Environment and Transport introduced the report (previously circulated) and reminded the Committee that the report was an update following Cabinet's decision on 1st October 2024 - to allocate additional resources to the roll out of the new waste system.

In addition, the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs Group had received a proposal to scrutinise the decision to change collection of waste in some areas to End of Lane collection. The Lead Member acknowledged that there were still improvements to be made to the service, but progress had been made since the initial roll out in June.

The Head of Highways and Environmental Service advised that the paper predominately concerned Cabinet's decision to approve a further £1.299 million to the Service, which was achieved through grants and capital borrowing. It was advised that the Service were still awaiting confirmation from Welsh Government regarding their potential funding contribution.

Disregarding the extreme bouts of weather the County had experienced in the initial weeks of the year, the Service had stabilised and become more consistent, and things were improving on a weekly basis.

Regarding the introduction of End of Lane collection, 36 properties out of 47000 across the County had been identified and those residents notified. Some residents had raised concerns over the change to their service, but the Authority had the authorisation to implement those changes under the Environmental Protection Act 1990. Properties were assessed under the proper protocols and procedures before notifying residents of the change.

Feedback had been received that the relevant policy was ambiguous, the Head of Service advised that the policy was under review. The Head of Service also acknowledged that members were not made aware of these letters sent to residents and advised that it would be a learning point moving forward.

Members queried whether the additional hire costs of further vehicles were factored in the initial financial plan. Officers advised that the hire costs were being absorbed under the revenue/operating cost to run the Service. Every effort was being made to off hire the temporary vehicles as soon as possible.

Responding to the Committee's questions officers advised:

- There would always be an element of missed collections no matter what waste model was used – commonly due to residents forgetting to put their bin out or new drivers missing a property. Initially when the new model was

introduced the problem was not being able to identify where the missed collections were. That issue had been resolved and missed collections were picked up fairly quickly.

- There had been a back-log of communications with residents on the C360 system which had led to the implementation of the New Waste Model email address for contact purposes.
It was anticipated that in the next couple of weeks normal service would be resumed for residents to notify off missed collections through the Contact Centre or direct online.
- When identifying properties requiring End of Lane collection an officer undertook an assessment of the access, egress and turning points to those properties.
Other considerations needed to be given to the topography, risk assessments to staff and dimension of vehicles being used.
- Assessments were undertaken based on the dimensions of the usual vehicle that would be servicing a particular route.
- The Environment Protection Act allowed for the 'property' to be requested to present their waste at a specific location.
- The letter sent to affected properties did not give sufficient information to residents, it did not fully explain the rationale for the changes of service nor was there a reference to any right to appeal the decision.
- There was an appeals process whereby the property could be reassessed although that did not mean the decision would be reversed.
- Where a resident qualified for assisted collections, provision would be made to accommodate them – even if the property is designated as end of lane collection – assisted collection was allocated to the resident not the property.
- If a resident qualified for assisted collection but the vehicle that usually serviced their route was too big a bespoke service would need to be provided.
- The existing policy on end of lane collection only referred to unadopted roads. However, the reality was that some adopted roads were unsuitable for the route designated vehicle's access.
- Under normal circumstance the change to policy for End of Lane collection would be an operational change, however given the sensitivity around the situation officers gave assurance that members would be consulted going forward.
- Referring to the (unsightly) end of lane collections in the AONB, the onus was on the resident to produce and remove the Trollibocs in a timely manner to lessen the visual impact, avoid stolen or broken boxes and mitigate against adverse weather conditions.
- Whilst there were 2195 calls to the contact centre in December 2024, the figure could relate to repeat calls.
- Details of the lanes identified for End of Lane collection could not be provided to members due to GDPR, however the number of lanes in each members' ward would be provided.
- There was a commitment that Welsh Government would be providing funding towards new vehicles. The minimum anticipated funding would be for the difference in cost for acquiring two electric vehicles as opposed to diesel.

- The collection of textiles was being reviewed in conjunction with the third part operator, Co-options.
- Since the change in services in June 2024 it is estimated that circa £750k will have been generated from recycling waste (unvalidated).
- A new system had been implemented for the reporting of fly tipping. There was nothing to suggest an increase in levels of fly tipping following implementation of the new waste service.
- The current policy on replacing broken or lost (trolley) boxes was to charge residents. There were no discretionary provisions within the policy. However, if a resident had proof that the damage was caused by an operative the fee would be waived.
In addition, occupiers of new build properties where no existing Trollibocs was provided would be responsible a £45 charge to supply them.
- Where an operative came across a contaminated box (erroneous disposal of products) a sticker should be placed on the box marked according to the contamination and recorded on the in-cab system. Where there were repeated contaminations the resident was contacted and provided with clear instructions for the relevant disposal of items.

Referring to the service change to end of lane collections being introduced Councillor Brian Jones referred to a Cabinet report on the 18th December 2018 whereby the issue the diversity of roads/lanes in the county had been addressed and assurances given that the proposed model would accommodate them. The report specifically mentioned ultra narrow lanes and it should have been known that a bespoke route would be required.

The Corporate Director: Economy and Environment clarified that the report had been based on hypothesis as the new routes had not been compiled at that stage.

Poor communication from the Service to residents and members was mentioned on several occasions throughout the discussion. Officers gave reassurances that going forward the Service were committed to improving communication.

Closing the discussion the Chair referred to the recommendations in the report and did not feel that the Committee were able to agree them. Instead, there was a proposal that a report be brought back to the Committee in May including figures on the percentage of recycling processed and WG funding provided.

RESOLVED that:

- 1. A further update report be presented to Communities Scrutiny Committee on 15th May and***
- 2. All members be consulted on proposed changes to the End of Lane Collection Policy.***

6 CAR PARK INVESTMENT PLAN 2024 - 2029

The Vice-chair, Councillor Karen Edwards took over chairing responsibilities for the item.

The Lead Member for Environment and Transport introduced the report (previously circulated) whose purpose was to provide an update on the progress of the Car Park Investment Plan.

The Traffic and Transportation Manager provided an update on the progress of work in year 1 which included:

- Introduction of a pilot scheme for motor homes/camper vans which had increased in scope from the original plans of providing overnight parking to more fuller facilities.
Once plans reached the feasibility stage the potential sites would be presented to the relevant Member Area Groups.
- Identified 10 car parks across the county for potential installation of height barriers – 3 of which were not feasible due to 3rd party access restrictions or difficulty in placing secure opening barriers.
- Upgrading the multi storey car park in Denbigh, including the fume extraction system.
- Progress on the introduction of the pay and display parking in Vicarage Lane Car Park, Rhuddlan.
- Imminent resurfacing of Post Office Lane Car Park, Denbigh.
- Remedial works at Central Car Park, Rhyl to replace existing steel hoops and netting to discourage nesting pigeons.
- Replace height barriers at Sky Tower Car Park, Rhyl
- Planned car park surface asset condition survey and assessment of remedial works required at Denbigh Multi-Storey Car Park.

The Car Park Investment Plan included proposals for Year 2, which is financial year 2025-26. There was change to the programme with the addition of the proposed resurfacing of the car park in Meliden, introduced as a precursor to potentially implementing parking charges.

Responding to members questions officers advised:

- Updated figures on actual costs would be provided for information to members at the financial year end (April 2025).
- The vacancy for Senior Engineer was due to be advertised imminently.
- Car parks within the realm of Countryside Services did not come under the umbrella of the Car Park Investment Plan.
- Recycled materials were used wherever possible when undertaking resurfacing work to minimise the use of raw aggregate.
- Car park income had increased following the introduction of new charges in 2024 but not as much as anticipated.
- Consultation was taking part with the local member, Town Council and local residents and business regarding the implementation of charges at Meliden's car park.
- There had previously been a feasibility study in a coach drop off point mid-way up Prestatyn's High Street. The proposal had not been supported by local members and businesses. If members wanted to re-open discussion it could be referred to the Member Area Group.

- It was an aspiration to add further Electric Vehicle charging points in the County's car parks.
- Electric Vehicle charging points were managed by the Fleet team. Enquiries would be made into the usage figures with a view to updating MAGs on a bi-annual basis.
- The Authority actively pursued re-imbusement for costs for damage incurred to overhead barriers caused by high topped vehicles via a rechargeable work order through the driver's insurance.

Members were reminded that an update report on car park charges was being presented to Performance Scrutiny Committee on 13th March.

RESOLVED- That the Car Park Investment Plan 2024-2029 be noted.

7 DENBIGHSHIRE'S HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY ACTION PLAN

The Lead Member for Housing and Communities introduced the report (previously circulated). The themes in the report related to providing more homes and affordable housing; to alleviate homelessness and improve the quality of social housing.

The Head of Housing & Communities Service reminded the Committee that the report had been approved by full Council in 2020. The Council were taking a One Council approach to addressing homelessness with many services working together to achieve the ambitions towards housing across the County. It was acknowledged that the report was very detailed. The Committee were asked to submit a scrutiny proposal for any particular area in the report that they would like to consider in more depth.

Responding to members questions officers responded:

- Private housing rentals were used where there was no option of social housing availability – typically housing availability was limited for single individuals and larger families in particular.
- There had been occasions when larger houses had been bought and brought into the Council's housing stock and council houses had been adapted to accommodate larger families.
- The Homelessness Service had always carried portfolio of leased properties – Registered Social Landlords, Community property and Private rented sector.
- Traditionally the private sector had been happy to agree short terms leases. This was mutually beneficial to the Council as it provided more suitable accommodation than a Bed and Breakfast facility, plus the full housing benefit could be recovered.
- There was a WG funded Private Rented Sector Leasing Scheme which had a longer term lease available for between 5 and 20 years - which often becomes a homeless person's forever home.

- The Rented Homes Wales Act increased pressure on landlords which led to numerous No Fault Evictions and many private landlords leaving the housing market. Those figures were now decreasing.
- The Service would consider purchasing ex council houses when they were on the open market. The houses underwent condition surveys to establish what the cost of purchase and bringing up to Welsh Housing Quality Standards would be.
It was usually in the Authority's interest to purchase, particularly if the residence is half of a semi detached property or an apartment in a block of flats already owned by the Authority, as it made the management of the wider building more economical.
- Local estate agents' were aware of the Authority's interest in ex council housing stock and members were encouraged to identify houses that came onto the market in their area. 19 properties had been purchased since 2022, approximately 6 per year.

RESOLVED- that the Housing & Homelessness Strategy Action Plan be received and approved by the Committee.

8 COUNCIL HOUSING DISPOSAL PROCESS

The Lead Member for Housing and Communities introduced the report (previously circulated), explaining the reasons behind the decision to dispose of a council house within the housing portfolio. It was noted that such instances were very rare.

Lead Officer – Community Housing explained that whilst the Service were reluctant to dispose of property in their portfolio, if the property was in an area with low demand for housing or required significant investment to bring it up to Welsh Housing Quality Standards it made economical sense to sell it. The decision to sell a property was only made once all the options to keep it had be exhausted.

Referring to appendix 2 of the report the Committee heard that the process could often be long and showed the various steps taken from identifying the property as surplus to requirements through to completion of the sale. Local Members were included in the process invited to view a property declared surplus in their ward.

All properties being considered for disposal (appendix 3) were surveyed to establish the best open market value. Once the decision had been made to sell the property the process needed to be completed efficiently as the Authority were responsible for the empty homes' council tax.

Where condition of properties were deemed uneconomical to bring up to Welsh Housing Quality Standards it was usually due to lack of modern facilities within. There was a balance to be met between the Authority's duty to provide safe homes – e.g. gas appliance inspection and maintenance – and the willingness of the tenant for the Authority to have access to make other alterations they may not want.

Income generated from the disposal of a property, the capital receipt, was re-invested into potential purchase of more housing stock in higher demand areas.

The Committee thanked officers for their report and approved the process undertaken to dispose of uneconomical properties to re-invest in the purchase of housing in areas of higher demand.

RESOLVED- that the Council Housing Disposal Process report be received by the committee.

9 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator introduced the forward work programme that could be seen in appendix 1.a.

The Committee were advised that due to a clerical error the agenda in the pack for Communities Scrutiny Committee on 27th March was not showing the report on Rhyl Regeneration Programme and Governance. The oversight had been corrected. The Scrutiny Coordinator confirmed that the item was still to be discussed at march's meeting.

The agenda for 27th March had 4 items on it, three of them to be substantial in detail. The Committee were asked to defer the item on Emergency Heating Provision to the following meeting (15th May) to accommodate the other items' full consideration.

RESOLVED- that subject to the above changes, the forward work programme be agreed.

10 FEEDBACK FROM COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES

There was no feedback received.

The meeting concluded at 12:30 pm.