

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, 15 May 2025 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Karen Edwards (Chair), James Elson, Carol Holliday and Merfyn Parry.

Lead Member for Housing and Communities, Councillor Rhys Thomas for business item 6.

ALSO PRESENT

Corporate Director: Economy & Environment (TW), Head of Housing and Community Service (LG), Lead Officer: Community Housing (GD), Lead Officer: Housing Property (MC), Senior Committee Administrator – Web Host (KJ) and Scrutiny Coordinator (KE)

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Michelle Blakeley-Walker, Hugh Evans, Jon Harland, Brian Jones and Cheryl Evans.

The Scrutiny Coordinator advised that the Committee was inquorate and therefore any business on the agenda could not be ratified.

The Chair advised that a decision had been made to defer items that required agreement from the Committee and proceed only with reports being presented for information only.

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

None.

3 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR

The appointment of Vice-chair of the Communities Scrutiny Committee was deferred until their next meeting on 26th June 2025.

4 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

There were no urgent matters.

5 MINUTES

The ratification of the minutes of Communities Scrutiny Committee held on 27th April 2025 were deferred until their next meeting on 26th June 2025.

6 EMERGENCY RESPONSE TO HEATING LOSS FOR VULNERABLE TENANTS

The Lead Member for Housing and Communities introduced the report (previously circulated) apologising for any potential repetition as the question on emergency response to heating loss for vulnerable tenants had been raised under different reports presented to Communities Scrutiny Committee by Housing Services previously.

The Head of Housing and Communities Services explained that the report covered how the Service specifically supported vulnerable tenants in the event of a power outage where electricity was their primary source of heating along with a more general overview on emergency responses within Community Housing as part of the corporate emergency planning service.

Lead Officer: Community Housing explained that the Community Housing staff were in their residents' homes daily and regularly dealt with them in times of crisis. They supported tenants through a variety of emergencies including fire, flooding and not least the Pandemic.

The most common occurrence of a potential major, emergency event was flooding in St Asaph which directly impacted on Llys Y Felin, a scheme for older people close to the River Elwy. Continued monitoring of the risk of flooding at this location was undertaken before and during periods of adverse weather and storms. That included having staff available to attend and support residents with individual flood defences and also to prepare in case evacuation.

The responsibility for leading recovery specifically on power outages, laid with the utility network and providers. The "Widespread Electricity & Utilities Outage Plan" dealt with the response. The Plan was owned by the North Wales Resilience Forum (NWRF) and managed by the NWRF Infrastructure and Logistical Preparedness Group.

The plan outlined the responsibility of Scottish Power for the electricity infrastructure and to restore power as quickly as possible. The plan also included contingency plans for supporting communities and communication. Organisations such as the British Red Cross were partners in the plan and would be engaged in the event of widespread and extended power failure.

Their customers who may need extra care and support during a power cut were able to self-register with the Priority Services Register (PSR). Community Housing have shared a list of addresses with the Regional Emergency Planning service based on schemes specifically for older people.

Should there be a prolonged power outage within Denbighshire's housing stock that was localised i.e. affecting just a scheme or street, emergency planning procedures would be implemented to open a rest centre as close as possible, to provide a warm place and access to hot drinks and food.

Referring to the types of heating systems installed in Community Housing stock the majority were still run on gas, however use of all electric heating such as Air Source Heat Pumps would increase in order to become less reliant on fossil fuels and to increase the use of renewable forms of fuel.

It was stressed that moving to electric heating did not make the tenant any more vulnerable than those with gas heating in event of power failure – as a gas boiler required electricity to work.

It was acknowledged that solid fuel fires were the most resilient form of heating in a power outage and that they had been removed from some properties during renovations. However, the upgrade and improvements to insulation of the properties meant that they would be protected from heat loss and cold ingress for much longer than previously.

Responding to members questions the Committee were advised:

- Generally forecasts for heavy snow were given several days in advance which enabled the service to contact vulnerable tenants to advise them and avoid an emergency situation.
- There was a wider corporate response plan to keep communities safe in the event of extreme weather conditions.
- Issues around previous Out of Hours contact had been addressed with the introduction of more telephone lines.
- There were robust structures and plans in place via the Strategic Emergency Management Team, supported by a Regional Emergency Planning Team.
- Housing officers proactively share information on properties with vulnerable tenants to power companies for their Priority Services Register.
- There were approximately 100 properties fitted with solar panel battery storage. However, they were not standard installations during retrofit of properties due to their cost.
- The Authority did not have any control over properties owned by other Registered Social Landlords in respect of loss of heating. However, RSL have their equivalent emergency response procedures.
- Where tenants requested the retention of their solid fuel fireplaces they were left in situ.

It was suggested that Town and Community Councils be engaged in emergency recovery plans as they were literally best placed to support their communities.

The Chair thanked officers for their report.

RESOLVED that the Emergency response to heating loss for vulnerable tenants report be noted.

7 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator (SC) introduced the Committee's forward work programme (previously circulated) that could be seen in appendix 1a.

The SC advised that the Lead Officer due to report on the Tourism Signage Strategy at that meeting had requested a deferral. Work on the project had been put on hold due to the vacant Senior Engineer Role and other workload priorities such as Levelling Up Fund projects and the 20mph review. The report would be added to Future Items on the forward work programme with a specific date allocated once the role had been filled and project resumed.

The item on the Waste Recycling Service had also been delayed due to the unavailability of verified data at that time. The report would be added to the agenda of next meeting on 26th June 2025.

The meeting of Communities Scrutiny Committee on 26th June had the following items scheduled:

- I. Review of the Second Home/Long term Empty Council Tax Premium
- II. Parking Enforcement (examining the criteria and policies in place for designating parking restrictions across the county)
- III. *Waste Recycling Service – (To provide an update on figures for income generated by the recycling service and proposes to change some service to End of Lane Collections).*

The next Scrutiny Chair and Vice-chair meeting would be 30th June 2025 for submission of Scrutiny Proposal requests - Scrutiny Proposal Requests forms were circulated in the agenda pack (app 3).

RESOLVED that the Communities Scrutiny Committee forward work programme be noted.

8 FEEDBACK FROM COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES

None.

Meeting concluded at 10:45am