

**THE CABINET 26/01/21**

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**Present-**

Councillors: Dyfrig L. Siencyn, Dafydd Meurig, Craig ab Iago, Gareth Wyn Griffith, Nia Wyn Jeffreys, Gareth Thomas, Ioan Thomas, Catrin Wager and Cemlyn Rees Williams

**Also present-**

Dilwyn Williams (Chief Executive), Morwena Edwards (Corporate Director), Iwan Evans (Head of Legal Services), Dafydd Edwards (Head of Finance Department) and Annes Siôn (Democracy Team Leader).

Item 6: Garem Jackson (Head of Education Department) and Gwern ap Rhisiart (Meirionnydd and Dwyfor Area Education Officer)

Item 7: Ian Jones (Assistant Head - Corporate Support Department), Emyr Edwards (Research and Information Manager) and Helen Mary Parry (Senior Data Protection Statutory Officer)

Item 9: Eurig Williams (Human Resources Advisory Service Manager)

Item 10 - 12: Ffion Madog Evans (Assistant Head - Finance Department)

**1. APOLOGIES**

The Cabinet Members and Officers were welcomed to the meeting.  
An apology was received from Cllr Dyfrig Siencyn and Cllr Gareth Thomas.

**2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST**

No declarations of personal interest were received. However, officers withdrew from the meeting for item 9.

**3. URGENT ITEMS**

There were no urgent items.

**4. MATTERS ARISING FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY**

There were no matters arising from overview and scrutiny.

**5. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 15 DECEMBER 2020**

The Chair accepted the minutes of the meeting held on 15 December 2020 as a true record.

## 6. NEW SCHOOL IN CRICIETH

The report was submitted by Cllr Cemlyn Williams

### **DECISION**

To approve the issue of statutory notices to increase the capacity of Ysgol Trefferthyr to 150, relocating the school to an alternative site referred to as the A497 site, on 1 September 2023, in accordance with the requirements of Section 48 of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013.

### **DISCUSSION**

The report was submitted and the pleasure of being able to submit the item was noted. It was noted that this report highlighted the responses received following a public consultation on the proposal to increase the capacity of Ysgol Trefferthyr and to relocate the school to an alternative site. It was emphasised that this scheme was in-keeping with the priorities of the department that were highlighted in the Gwynedd Education Plan.

The Education Officer highlighted the results of the consultation noting the main points. It was emphasised that the majority of responses were very supportive of the proposal and investment in Cricieth. The need for community use of the building was highlighted and it was noted that the department would collaborate with the community to offer them the best opportunity.

It was stated that the majority of observations raised concerns about the location. It was noted that the Department had looked carefully at the location and had undertaken detailed investigations before coming to a decision. It was emphasised that many observations noted concerns as it was located on a busy road and it was stated that the department would work to alleviate the traffic. It was elaborated on this noting that they would do this by examining the school's access. Attention was drawn to the lay-by near the site noting that the Highways Department was eager to retain this. It was emphasised that steps would be taken to ensure that the lay-by would not be used for the school.

Concerns were also noted regarding the trees on the site. It was stated that the department had no intention of felling any trees unnecessarily and that the School was eager to preserve the trees and use them in lessons at the school.

It was emphasised that positive responses had been received from pupils highlighting more space to play and larger classrooms. Nevertheless, it was noted that some pupils had highlighted that there would be more travelling distance to school. Attention was drawn to Estyn's response, which noted that they had no concerns and that the plan corresponded with the Council's Education Strategy.

Observations arising from the discussion

- The report was welcomed, emphasising the importance of seeing the pupils' responses. It was asked whether any adaptations had been considered for the building as a result of the Covid-19 crisis. It was noted that the design of the school had followed national guidelines but Covid-19 had highlighted the need to consider the ventilation system and access to classrooms. As a result of Covid-19, adaptations had been undertaken to ensure hand-washing stations near every access.
- It was stated that the observations received were interesting and that travelling had been highlighted as a concern. The need to ensure a safe mode of transport to school for children was noted and it was asked whether it would be possible to have a cycle path to assist with the impact on traffic. It was stated that the department was considering every possible method to ensure the safety of children on their way to school and that they would collaborate with the community to find a design that would be effective.

## **7. INFORMATION PLAN**

The report was submitted by Cllr Nia Jeffreys.

### **DECISION**

The Information Plan was adopted.

### **DISCUSSION**

The report was submitted noting that the Strategy previously accepted by the Cabinet had ensured that the Council complied with the Data Protection Act. It was elaborated that this plan further examined the data, looking at how the Council could make the best use of the data it held. It was noted that the Covid-19 crisis had highlighted the need for data and statistics. It was stated that this plan would give departments an opportunity to plot information and to plan services.

It was explained that the Council shared information internally via iGwynedd and that it would evolve to share information externally. In doing so, it would be possible to follow the Council's paperless agenda, which would save costs and bring about environmental benefits.

Risks were highlighted noting that the main risk was to comply with the Act and it was noted that various Councils had a higher number of people submitting claims following data breaches. It was stated that this plan would assist to save time to find information. It was noted that more training would be held for staff, which would reduce the risk in terms of data breaches. It was explained that the plan would be reviewed annually, which would give flexibility for departments to amend it.

Observations arising from the discussion

- It was noted that when people heard about data they often felt that it was irrelevant to them. However, it was stated that it was essentially important to have the guidelines in place. Training for staff was approved as it would affect everyone.

## 8. CLIMATE CHANGE

The report was submitted by Dilwyn Williams.

### DECISION

It was resolved to establish a Climate Change Board to steer the work of formulating and acting upon a Climate Change Action Plan and provide £58,990 from the Transformation Fund in order to employ a Project Manager to co-ordinate the work.

### DISCUSSION

The report was submitted noting that the Council had declared a climate emergency at a meeting of the Full Council. Following the declaration, the Cabinet established a task group in order to respond to the crisis. It was noted that work had been undertaken in the background to draw up schemes that would make a difference, however, Covid-19 had slowed down this work.

It was stated that the task group had recently met and was ready to resume the work and to draw up an action plan for the upcoming financial year. In order to proceed with the work, it was noted that the task group had stated that a Climate Change Board would need to be established, which would operate on a cross-departmental basis. It was added that group members would be the members of this Board and that it would be possible to add members if required. In addition, it was highlighted that officers were currently very busy responding to the Covid-19 crisis and, as a result, the group was eager to employ a programme co-ordinator to drive it forward. It was added that funding to employ the Officer's post would come from the Transformation Fund.

Observations arising from the discussion

- It was stated that Covid-19 had slowed down the Climate Change work and the need to move forward was noted; although a lot of work had been undertaken, much more work needed to be done.
- The need to maximise work in this field and to appoint an officer to lead the work was supported. The importance of collaborating with communities to encourage a greener way of life was stated. The impact that climate had on communities, such as more extreme weather, was highlighted.
- It was noted that the cost of employing an officer was high but it was stated that it would not be a salary of nearly £59,000 but that it included additional costs such as pensions. It was noted that a job description had been drawn-up and had been evaluated internally. It was stated that the cost may be reduced when reviewed. Plans already in place within

departments were highlighted, but it was emphasised that some opportunities were being missed and, therefore, the officer would need to be aware of any opportunities arising.

- The decision was welcomed noting that it was a good development to respond to the field. It was highlighted that the Council had been awarded for its work in the field.

## **9. THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S RETIREMENT**

The report was submitted by Cllr Dafydd Meurig

### **DECISION**

It was resolved that there was a need to recruit and appoint a Chief Executive on a permanent basis.

### **DISCUSSION**

The report was submitted noting the need for the decision following the Chief Executive's announcement that he would retire. It was noted that the Cabinet was required to decide whether or not it was eager to fill the post and how they would do this. It was noted that the report highlighted the options and that the Leader had submitted his written opinion on some of the options.

The options were highlighted, which included not filling the post, asking another Authority to take the lead, and to appoint a Chief Executive. It was noted that the Local Government and Elections Act that would come to force this year highlighted the need to appoint a Chief Executive for these regulations. It was stated that a list was included in the report noting the requirements that would be in accordance with the Act and that they would need to be incorporated as part of the job description.

## **10. REVENUE BUDGET 2020/21 - END OF NOVEMBER 2020 REVIEW**

The report was submitted by Cllr Ioan Thomas

### **DECISION**

- The report on the end of November 2020 review of the Revenue Budget was accepted, and the latest financial situation regarding the budgets of each department / service was considered.
- The financial impact of Covid-19, which is a combination of additional costs, income losses and a slippage in the savings programme, was noted as the Council had given the utmost priority to safeguarding the health and lives of the people of Gwynedd in response to the crisis.
- It was noted that there was a significant overspend in the Adults, Health and Well-being Department and the Children and Families Department

this year. The work of gaining a better understanding of these matters is ongoing.

- The following recommendations and financial virements (as outlined in Appendix 2) were approved.
  - On Corporate budgets, that:
    - An underspend of (£478k) relating to capital costs was transferred to the capital programme fund.
    - The net underspend of (£1,312k) on Corporate budgets will go towards the Council's general balances to assist in facing the financial challenge ahead of the Council at the end of 2020/21, especially in light of the Covid-19 crisis.

That grant receipts from the Government to compensate for additional expenditure and loss of income in relation to the Covid-19 crisis will be allocated to the relevant departments in accordance with what is noted in Appendix 1.

## DISCUSSION

The report was submitted, noting that the report detailed the latest review of the Council's revenue budget, along with the projections for the end of the financial year. It was emphasised that the report highlighted the substantial financial impact of Covid-19 on the Council, noting that it was a combination of additional costs, income losses and a slippage in the savings programme as there were other priorities during the crisis. It was stated that the Council had now received nearly £6 million from the Welsh Government's hardship fund and that monthly claims valued at over £7.1 million had been received.

In terms of the loss of income, it was noted that claims for the first half of the financial year were over £5.1 million, with £4.8 million having already been received from Welsh Government. It was explained that work on quarter 3 had just been completed and had been submitted to Welsh Government.

The pressures that had been on departments this year were highlighted, noting that problems with realising savings had become increasingly prominent this year and a factor that had contributed to the overspend in the Children, Adults and Highways and Municipal fields. Attention was drawn to the summary of the position of all departments with the projections expressed including and excluding the Government's Covid-19 grant.

Attention was drawn to the substantial difficulties in some departments, noting that the Adults Department had had a significant impact as a result of Covid-19 with the department anticipating an overspend of £3.3 million this year, with a failure to realise savings worth £1.8 million. In the Children and Adults Department, it was stated that failure to realise £668k of savings had contributed towards an overspend of £2.5 million. It was added that the latest statistics confirmed a further increase in demand for services, especially in the fields of placements and Post-16.

It was stated that overspending problems in the waste collection and disposal field continued in the Highways and Municipal Department, along with difficulties in realising savings in a number of areas to the value of £811k. It was emphasised that the department was also facing an additional cost to comply

with Covid-19 regulations. It was added that the Government had compensated the department for the initial months and it was expected that they would continue to compensate until the end of the year.

In the Corporate Department, it was noted that prudent assumptions when setting the 2021/22 budget were responsible for additional tax yields from Council Tax and that it contributed to the underspend on Council Tax Reductions.

Observations arising from the discussion

- It was noted that the Children's Department could not blame Covid entirely; however, it was noted that the department was stable. It was stated that there had been an increase in fostering placements and that fostering allowances had reduced as a result of savings. It was noted that an increase in placements was a regional and national problem. Despite the cuts, it was emphasised that the department had not undertaken any cuts on their work to ensure safeguarding matters for children and young people in the county.
- In terms of the Highways and Municipal Department, it was noted that the report had highlighted the main challenges of the department, noting that it was one of the departments that had received a number of cuts when it offered an essentially important service for Gwynedd residents. It was noted that a piece of work was currently underway to examine the real running costs of the department.
- In terms of the Environment department, it was noted that the department had achieved its work and had responded positively to the work of leading Covid-19 plans.
- The maturity of the Council was highlighted, noting that the Council could face overspend and that it highlighted the financial robustness of the Council. It was stressed that the Council could use its balances to ensure services for Gwynedd residents.
- It was noted that it was difficult to make a positive decision while the Council was continuing to undertake cuts. It was noted that Councillors and the Council were there to serve the public and not the budget. The need to maintain services was emphasised and for the Government to ensure budgets to do so.

## **11. CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2020/21 - END OF NOVEMBER REVIEW (30 NOVEMBER 2020 POSITION)**

The report was submitted by Cllr Ioan Thomas

### **DECISION**

- To accept the report on the end of November review (30 November 2020 position) of the capital programme.
- To approve the revised financing as shown in part 4 of the report, namely:
  - an increase of £2,000 in the use of borrowing,
  - an increase of £3,019,000 in the use of grants and contributions,
  - no change in the use of capital receipts,

- an increase of £313,000 in the use of revenue contributions,
- no change in the use of the capital reserve, and a decrease of £14,000 in the use of renewal and other reserves.

## DISCUSSION

The report was submitted noting that it presented the amended capital programme and sought approval for relevant funding sources. It was stated that the impact of the Covid-19 crisis and lockdown period had had an impact on the capital programme, with only 31% of the budget spent up to the end of November, compared with over 51% in the same period last year.

It was noted that there had been a net increase of approximately £3.3 million since the last review. It was noted that the Council had firm plans in place to invest approximately £42.3 million this year, with £18.9 million of it funded by attracting specific grants. It was highlighted that an additional £4.8 million would slip from this year to the subsequent, stressing that no financial loss would be incurred.

Attention was drawn to additional grants the Council had managed to attract since the previous review, which included £1.7 million towards the Land Drainage Scheme in Rhostryfan and £0.5 million towards improvements in the recycling and waste prevention field.

Observations arising from the discussion

- It was stated that exciting plans were included in the report, highlighting the recycling and waste prevention improvement plan. It was noted that the schemes would include converting a section of the Bangor recycling centre into a shop and schemes to prevent food from going into the waste stream, along with establishing Repair Cafés, which would work to develop skills and reduce waste across the county.

## 12. THE SAVINGS POSITION

The report was submitted by Cllr Ioan Thomas

### DECISION

- To accept the conclusions of the Chief Executive on the individual schemes as noted in Appendix 1 and 2.
- In accordance with what was noted in Appendix 1, to move the delivery profile for schemes valued at £1,012,750 to 2022/23 and to recognise that the situation had now changed so much that it was not possible to deliver savings schemes valued at £848,040 and to eliminate them from the budget.
- To use the £1.6m provision set aside in the 2020/21 budget in order to do so, and to achieve the residual gap with the first use of savings planned for



2021/22.

- iv. When preparing the 2021/22 budget, to agree that the delivery profile for schemes valued at £511,250 should be moved to 2022/23 and to recognise that the situation had now changed so much that it was not possible to deliver savings schemes valued at £595,450 and that £705,930 in savings should be used for the budget as noted in Appendix 2.

## DISCUSSION

The annual report was submitted, noting that over £30 million of savings had been realised since 2015/16 but it was noted that the report back in October had highlighted concerns about risks to schemes valued at £3.4 million this year as a result of Covid-19. Since then, it was added that the Chief Executive and the Head of Finance Department had discussed the departmental savings with the Heads of Department and Cabinet Members.

The recommendations that derived from these meetings were highlighted. It was emphasised that Covid-19 restrictions had impaired the opportunity for departments to address a number of the savings schemes, and it was noted that this was a matter of timing with schemes valued at £1.7m that could be delivered in 2021/22. However, it was recommended to re-profile schemes valued at £1m that would need more time to be realised, and to recognise that the situation had now changed so much that it was not possible to deliver savings schemes valued at £850k, and to eliminate them from the budget.

When preparing the 2020/21 budget in February 2020, it was noted that the budget provided £1.6m to recognise the likelihood of failure to achieve some savings. It was highlighted that re-profiling and eliminating would have an impact of £1.86m on the budget, but by using the £1.6m provision an extra £260k would be required when preparing the 2021/22 budget. In doing so, it was noted that it would bring the budget closer to the reality of the Council's position.

Attention was drawn to Appendix 2, which noted the savings that had been planned for 2021/22. From the £1.9m already planned for delivery, schemes valued at £511k would take longer to deliver and there was a real doubt whether or not the savings valued at £595k would be realised. As a result, it was recommended to re-profile £511k and eliminate £595k of savings, whilst accepting that just over £700k in net savings would be available to support the 2021/22 budget.

The Chief Executive explained the logic behind the recommendations, emphasising that some schemes would take longer to realise as a result of the Covid-19 crisis, while others would need to be eliminated completely such as the Improve efficiency of field workers Scheme by the Adults Department, as discussions had highlighted the unlikelihood of realising the scheme as a result of the need for the resource to implement other savings schemes within the department.

The meeting commenced at 13:00 and concluded at 14:50

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**CHAIRMAN**