

THE COUNCIL THURSDAY, 1 DECEMBER 2022

Present: Councillor Elwyn Jones (Chair)
Councillor R. Medwyn Hughes (Vice-chair).

Councillors: Craig ab Iago, Beca Brown, Glyn Daniels, Anwen Davies, Dafydd Owen Davies, Elwyn Edwards, Elfed Wyn ap Elwyn, Alan Jones Evans, Dylan Fernley, Delyth Lloyd Griffiths, Jina Gwyrfai, Annwen Hughes, John Brynmor Hughes, Louise Hughes, Iwan Huws, Elin Hywel, Anne Lloyd Jones, Berwyn Parry Jones, Dawn Lynne Jones, Dewi Jones, Elin Walker Jones, Gwilym Jones, Gareth Tudor Jones, Huw Wyn Jones, Kim Jones, June Jones, Menna Jones, Eryl Jones-Williams, Cai Larsen, Beth Lawton, Dafydd Meurig, Dilwyn Morgan, Linda Morgan, Dewi Owen, Edgar Wyn Owen, Gwynfor Owen, Llio Elenid Owen, Gareth Coj Parry, Nigel Pickavance, John Pughe, Rheinallt Puw, Arwyn Herald Roberts, Elfed P Roberts, Gareth A. Roberts, John Pughe Roberts, Meryl Roberts, Richard Glyn Roberts, Huw Llwyd Rowlands, Paul Rowlinson, Angela Russell, Dyfrig Siencyn, Ioan Thomas, Peter Thomas, Rob Triggs, Rhys Tudur, Hefin Underwood, Einir Wyn Williams, Eirwyn Williams, Elfed Williams, Gareth Williams, Gruffydd Williams and Sasha Williams.

Officers: Dafydd Gibbard (Chief Executive), Geraint Owen (Corporate Director), Dylan Owen (Corporate Director and Statutory Director of Social Services), Dewi Morgan (Statutory Finance Officer), Iwan Evans (Monitoring Officer), Ian Jones (Head of Democracy Services), Carys Fôn Williams (Head of Housing and Property Department), Sion Huws (Propriety and Elections Manager), Vera Jones (Democracy and Language Service Manager) and Eirian Roberts (Democracy Services Officer).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Menna Baines, Stephen Churchman, Nia Jeffreys, Linda A. Jones and Beca Roberts.

2. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting of the Council held on 6 October, 2022, as a true record.

3. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

Members had received a briefing note from the Monitoring Officer in advance regarding item 7 - Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2022/23, and Item 8 - Council Tax: Discretionary Powers to Allow Discounts and / or Raise a Premium 2023/24.

(1) The following members declared a personal interest in item 7 on the agenda - Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2023/24 for the reasons noted:-

- Councillor Jina Gwyrfai as a member of the family claimed a benefit.
- Councillor Gareth A. Roberts as a close family member had received Council Tax discount.
- Councillor Dewi Jones as a member of the family received a reduction.

The members were not of the opinion that they were prejudicial interests, and they did not withdraw from the meeting during the discussion on the item.

(2) The following members declared a personal interest in item 8 on the agenda - Council Tax: Discretionary Powers to Allow Discounts and / or Raise a Premium 2023/24 for the following reasons:-

- Councillor Jina Gwyrfai as she currently owned an empty house, but was intending to rent this to a local Welsh speaking family.
- Councillor Huw Llwyd Rowlands because a close relative owned a second property in Gwynedd that was likely to be affected by any decision to increase (or reduce) the Council Tax premium during 2023/24.
- Councillor Angela Russell because she owned a second home.
- Councillor Linda Morgan because she had family and friends with second homes and empty property.
- Councillor Elfed P. Roberts because he owned property that was let and he had family who let property.
- Councillor Dewi Jones as a member of the family owned an empty property.

The members were of the opinion that they were prejudicial interests, and they withdrew from the meeting during the discussion on the item.

4. THE CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Condolences were extended to the following:-

- Councillor Dafydd Davies and his family on the loss of his father.
- Councillor Elin Walker Jones and family following the loss of her brother.
- Councillor Beth Lawton and family following the loss of her sister.
- Councillor Nia Jeffreys and her family on the passing of her uncle.

Condolences were also extended to the following:-

- The family of Godfrey Northam, who had represented the Bethesda area on this Council for several years, and one who had given years of service to his local community.
- The family of Will Roberts, who was the Council's Principal Estates Officer for many years.
- The family of John Eryl Thomas, former Principal Administrative Officer in the Education Department for many years.

It was also noted that the Council wished to sympathise with everyone in the county's communities who had recently lost loved ones.

The Council stood in silence as a mark of respect and remembrance.

Best wishes were extended to Councillors Anne Lloyd Jones and Louise Hughes, who had recently undergone surgery and also to Councillor Rob Triggs, who was currently undergoing surgery and to anyone else who had recently undergone surgery.

Congratulations were extended to Rhun ap Gareth, former deputy Monitoring Officer at this Council, on his recent appointment as Chief Executive of Conwy County Borough Council.

In addition, congratulations were extended to Ian Jones on his appointment as the Head of Corporate Support and Head of Democracy Services.

The following were also congratulated:-

- Mared Jones from Dinas Mawddwy Young Farmers' Club for winning the Crown at the Wales Young Farmers' Eisteddfod.
- Dinas Mawddwy Young Farmers' Club for winning the Meirionnydd Young Farmers' Eisteddfod.
- Osian Pryce on winning the British Championship in rallying.

It was noted that CND Cymru had recently organised a 7-day journey from Trawsfynydd Nuclear Power-station to the Wylfa Nuclear Power-station. The Deputy Leader met them when they arrived in Caernarfon, and they presented her with a statement. It was noted that this statement was available to anyone who wished to see it.

5. URGENT ITEMS

None to note.

6. QUESTIONS

(The Cabinet Members' written responses to the questions had been published in advance.)

(A) A question from a Member of the public

Question from Mr Paul D.Gill (address provided in accordance with the requirements of the Constitution)

Why is the Council imposing an increase in the Council Tax Premium in an area which is very dependent on the tourist industry and tourist spending locally without independent research and a report thereon to the Council on the effect of such a policy on the local economy bearing in mind that the imposition of the increase will reduce local tourist expenditure putting local jobs and businesses in jeopardy especially at a time of high inflation and energy bills?

Response by the Cabinet Member for Finance, Councillor Ioan Thomas

By empowering councils to charge a Premium on Council Tax for second homes and long-term empty dwellings, the Welsh Government has published statutory guidance for the administration of the Premium, namely the Guidance on the Implementation of the Council Tax Premiums on Long-Term Empty Homes and Second Homes in Wales.

The Statutory Guidance outline the kind of factors that can be helpful for a local authority to consider when proposing the introduction of a Premium. Each time Cabinet and the full Council considers the Premium it considers this guidance.

As the Statutory Guidance sets out, the discretion given to local authorities to charge a premium is intended to be a tool to help local authorities to bring long-term empty homes back into use to provide safe, secure and affordable homes, and support local authorities in increasing the supply of affordable housing and enhancing the sustainability of local communities.

The aim of the Premium is to assist the housing field, and the commitment of the Housing Action Plan is evidence of this.

The premium is a sincere attempt of trying to strike a fair balance between the impact of second homes and empty properties on our communities and maintaining the visitor economy. The Cabinet is well aware of the importance of the tourism industry. On the other hand, we must have sustainable tourism and that will be the subject of a separate study in due course. But most of all, we believe that the basis of a sound economy is an economy where the people of Gwynedd have homes and contribute to the local economy. We can't ignore a situation where it is estimated that 1,400 individuals will have presented themselves as homeless by the end of this year – double the number presenting before Covid-19. As a Council we will be accommodating over 600 people in

temporary accommodation this year, where the figure was around 200 before the Covid-19 period. This is not the foundation of a robust, sustainable economy.

Raising and increasing the premium is not an easy matter and Cyngor Gwynedd has never claimed it is a simple choice. Members are required to weigh-up a number of factors before reaching a decision today, including the impact of the premium on the visitor economy. This is one of the messages coming from the outcome of the public consultation and which is addressed in the studies that are referenced in the comprehensive report members will consider today.

Supplementary Question from Mr Paul D.Gill

What do you say to local people who have local businesses, like some of the people here today, many of whom will face significant detriment to those businesses, including the like of the Ffestiniog and Welsh Highland Railways, as part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site? If you impose any further premium you must be the only council anywhere that would endanger the existence of part of the World Heritage Site. There are some businesses that will even face bankruptcy as a direct result of the further premium. And please don't tell me that it wouldn't do that, because it will, as the Council would know if it had undertaken a proper economic assessment.

Response – Cabinet Member for Finance, Councillor Ioan Thomas

As a member of the Council who represents a ward in Caernarfon, which is a World Heritage Site, I am very aware of the importance of securing and safeguarding this status. I accept that it is possible that some businesses will be affected, however I think that you are too extreme when you talk of companies becoming bankrupt etc., and I think that this increase is very reasonable.

(B) Questions by Elected Members

(1) A question by Councillor Delyth Lloyd Griffiths

Precisely what percentage of the food that is used by the Council in schools, care settings and other centres, is grown or processed in Gwynedd? Since there is a need to protect the local food chain because of current global costs and problems, I ask the Cabinet Member to ensure that all of the food purchased is sourced locally or processed locally. Accepting that the Council buys a high percentage of food from local distributors, can I have a guarantee that the food originates from Gwynedd or nearby counties?

Response – Cabinet Member for Corporate Support, Councillor Menna Jones

1. The Council held a tendering process in autumn 2019 to establish contracts for supplying and distributing food to the Schools and Residential Homes of Cyngor Gwynedd.
2. As part of the work to encourage small providers to compete, the contract was split into food categories and geographical areas within Gwynedd. In addition, early engagement was carried out with the market (18 months prior to the tender being published) and one-to-one tendering support was provided through Business Wales.
3. Following this, we see that 71% of the produce we buy is distributed by companies who are based in Gwynedd. Following efforts by our wholesalers to source local and Welsh produce wherever possible, we see that 100% of the cheese we buy is produced in Gwynedd, and we

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source 40% of the potatoes we need from Gwynedd. 100% of the Beef, 80% of the Lamb and 100% of the Milk originates from Wales.

4. In terms of the source of all food that is supplied by our wholesalers, it is not possible to provide this information to the level of detail requested by the Member at present. This is because of the substantial range of ingredients and foods that are supplied and also the nature of the supply chain.
5. It must also be acknowledged that buying produce from Gwynedd is difficult, and the main barriers to this include:
 - The produce is not available locally i.e. the climate and landscape in Gwynedd and Wales limit what can be produced.
 - Local producers cannot provide what is needed in the required quantities, or the price is not competitive.
 - With regard to meat specifically, in order for the slaughter-houses to agree to provide the resource to guarantee that the meat comes from Gwynedd, we would be required to buy large amounts and pay a substantial premium for the meat.
 - The majority of milk from Gwynedd farms goes to South Caernarfon Creameries to make cheese and other dairy products, they do not sell milk.
 - The supply chain for many of the produce required is international and not local.
 - It must also be recognised that we cannot insist that the produce must originate from Gwynedd as this is contrary to national legal regulations.
6. To try and increase the proportion of produce from Gwynedd and Wales, the Council:
 - works with and through our wholesalers with organisations such as the NFU, Young Farmers, Larder Cymru and others to raise awareness of opportunities that are relevant to the public sector.
 - reviews the menu in schools to see whether changes can be made which would promote more Welsh produce.
 - continuously reviews our purchasing arrangements in order to give local suppliers the best chance to compete in the market.
7. The Council will re-tender the Food Contract in the autumn of 2023, and we will continue to support the local market in order to encourage local suppliers to compete and win contracts.

Supplementary Question by Councillor Delyth Lloyd Griffiths

I ask the Cabinet Member to look into the clause *'It must also be recognised that we cannot insist that the produce must originate from Gwynedd as this is contrary to national legal regulations'* and look if this obstacle is something we can overcome in the future in order to buy more locally.

Response – Cabinet Member for Corporate Support, Councillor Menna Jones

Procurement regulations are in place to ensure free and fair competition for every applicant. This means that we cannot insist that produce must originate from a specific location or ask for a specific brand as this would restrict competition and possibly give unfair advantage to specific providers. Although we cannot insist that produce originates from Gwynedd, we are in the process of trialling procurement processes that will award the efforts of

producers to maximise the local, economic, social and environmental benefits associated with the contract for the local area, and I will be looking into this further.

(2) Question from Councillor Richard Glyn Roberts

What arrangements have been made to prepare a *thorough* assessment of the linguistic impact of increasing the council tax premium, in line with paragraph 10.5 of the Gwynedd Language Policy, and in particular the impact on 'the numbers or percentage of Welsh speakers in communities'?

Response – Cabinet Member for Finance, Councillor Ioan Thomas

My colleagues will be aware that they need to consider the report on the Council Tax Premium later this afternoon, in item 8 on the meeting agenda.

The report that will be presented to you extends to 30 pages, contains three appendices, and has links to a number of studies. Some of these studies have been carried out by external bodies or individuals, others have been carried out in-house by the Council. Taken together these studies consider the impact of the Premium on local communities, as well as the impact of second homes and empty properties on these communities. There is clear evidence in the report presented that the impact of the Premium, second homes and empty properties on the language has been addressed at every stage.

I note that not all of the studies referred to in the report reach the same conclusion about the impact of different policies on the language, but we take note of the risks highlighted in them all, particularly those relating to the Welsh language. No separate academic study has been commissioned while preparing the report.

I emphasise that consideration of the messages of these studies, and the risks highlighted in them to the Welsh language and to our communities, is a key part of Cabinet's consideration not to recommend a Premium above 150% on second homes at this time, although the Act allows for a higher Premium to be charged.

In the public consultation, the views of respondents was that raising the Premium would not have an impact on the language.

The Council has a Housing Action Plan in place, which is specifically intended to introduce measures to strengthen Gwynedd's communities and make the Housing Strategy a reality. Stable, sustainable communities alongside with other measures will undoubtedly be a step in our vision to strengthen the use of Welsh in our communities.

The Equality Impact Assessment being presented with today's report reminds us that a number of characteristics and aspects as well as socio-economic impact need to be considered when reaching a policy decision, as well as the impact on the Language.

Supplementary Question from Councillor Richard Glyn Roberts

Does the Cabinet Member really think that three sentences in an equality impact assessment of 15 pages equates to a language impact assessment?

Response – Cabinet Member for Finance, Councillor Ioan Thomas

As I have mentioned before, there are a number of studies, that include the impact on the Welsh language.

7. COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME 2023-24

The Cabinet Member for Finance, Councillor Ioan Thomas, submitted a report asking the Council to confirm the continuation of the current Local Scheme to provide assistance towards paying Council Tax for the year commencing 1 April 2023.

On a general matter, the Leader of the Independent Group noted that it would be beneficial for the opposition and the people of Gwynedd to know in advance which items on the meeting agenda where Plaid Cymru had placed a whip on members. In response, the Cabinet Member for Finance confirmed that no whip had been placed for any item on the agenda.

RESOLVED

1. **To continue to operate the Council's Local Scheme for the year commencing 1 April 2023 as it was in 2022/23. Therefore, the following conditions (a - c below) regarding the continuation of the discretionary elements would apply:**
 - a) **To apply a 100% disregard for war disablement pensions, war widows' pensions and war widowers' pensions, for both pensioners and working age claimants.**
 - b) **Not to increase the extended reduction periods for pensioners and working age claimants from the standard four weeks in the Prescribed Scheme.**
 - c) **Not to increase the backdate period for pensioners and working age claimants from the standard three months contained within the Prescribed Scheme.**
2. **Where appropriate, to delegate powers to the Head of Finance Department, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance, to make minor amendments to the scheme for 2023/24, provided that it will not change the substance of the scheme.**

8. COUNCIL TAX: DISCRETIONARY POWERS TO ALLOW DISCOUNTS AND / OR RAISE A PREMIUM

The Cabinet Member for Finance, Councillor Ioan Thomas, presented a report asking the Council for formal ratification for 2023/24, of previous decisions not to allow any discounts for second homes and to disallow discounts on empty properties, and to raise a Premium of 150% or 100% on such relevant properties. The Head of Finance gave an outline of the principal points of the public consultation, and he thanked the Communication and Engagement Team and the Research and Information Team for their invaluable work preparing the consultation and analysing the results.

He also thanked his colleagues in the Finance Department who had assisted with the work.

Members were given an opportunity to make observations and ask questions.

A member noted:-

- That he welcomed the additions to what had been before the Governance and Audit Committee, however he was not convinced that the additions, and

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specifically the reference to Simon Brookes' report on second homes, had not been considered deeply enough.

- The impact of a holiday home on an area's language profile was less than the impact of a non-Welsh speaking residential dwelling, and the report did not entirely consider the likely impact of increasing the Premium on the percentage of the population who speak Welsh in those areas, nor the direct impact that is likely to be on the native population.
- There was a risk for the proposal, as it stood, to deliver unintentional and deviant results, namely to motivate native people to sell property to outsiders and motivate holiday home owners to transform them into residential households.
- He did not believe that the report gave consideration to the possibility of working from home, the impacts of the pandemic or the arrival of the Bontnewydd Bypass, that all facilitated the demographic shift.
- There was not a never-ending population of Welsh speakers in these areas or a matching demand for houses compared to the number of holiday homes we have in these areas. The demographic/linguistic situation in these areas was extremely fragile, and the Brookes report referred to the catastrophic results of moving too quickly to reduce the number of holiday homes.

Based on these arguments, the member proposed the following amendment, and it was seconded:-

That the Premium should not be increased for the 2023/24 financial year, and a comprehensive linguistic impact assessment should be received of the likely impacts of increasing the Premium, clarity regarding exceptions, and to also give full consideration to the other measures to control holiday homes.

A member noted that it would be better if the Council voted on the three clauses of the recommendation separately, as there were some matters that he would support and others that he would object.

The amendment was supported by a number of members. It was noted that:-

- If a public consultation was conducted, then the results should not be disregarded, and 75% of the respondents objected increasing the Premium for linguistic and economic reasons.
- The owners of second homes spent locally, and increasing the Premium would have an adverse impact on the area's businesses, such as shops, restaurants and public houses, builders, plumbers and electricians, as more and more second homes would be placed on the market.
- As the Welsh Government had agreed at last to differentiate between a home and a holiday home, and had issued Article 4, for the local authority to be able to determine which thresholds are acceptable in any community, there was a risk that increasing the Premium currently would undermine that process, that was already fragile, in the sense that a reaction to this decision could be far-reaching.
- That increasing the Premium would not make houses more affordable for local people, and it was the lack of quality jobs and low wages in the area that were responsible for the fact that people could not afford housing, or even to become homeless.
- That it was not possible for local families in the tourism industry to pay more Premium, and what about those people who inherit a house that had been in the family for generations?
- It was asked why couldn't the Council buy some of the houses on the market in Aberdyfi, and renovate them for local people to buy or rent, e.g. 3 floor houses could be converted into 3 flats. In response to the comment, the Cabinet Member for Housing noted that there was a plan within the Housing Action Plan, and the

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Department was very busy buying houses that come up for sale throughout the county, including Aberdyfi, for rent or sale to local people.

- It was believed that a Premium of 150% would cause more harm than good to the community.
- A great deal of finance had already been raised through the Premium, however it was not being spent.

The amendment was objected by a number of other members. It was noted that:-

- Although the Welsh Government had proposed some solutions to the situation regarding holiday homes, this was not tantamount to a Property Act, and those solutions were not comprehensive that would get to the root of the problem.
- The most vulnerable people in our community are the victims in this situation, and not the owners of second homes, and over 3,000 people facing homelessness and on the waiting lists for housing did not get an opportunity to be part of the discussion.
- Having a comfortable and safe home was one of our most fundamental needs, and hearing that 1,400 people will be homeless by the end of the year was frightening. Also, the figures regarding the additional cost to the Council to deliver its statutory duty to home people was alarming, with expenditure of over £4.7m gross over this year's budget, and £6m over next year's budget.
- That increasing the Premium to 300% overnight would be unfair and unreasonable, and the consequences could be very harmful. On the other hand, should the amendment to remain at 100% be accepted, the Council would lose the £3m needed to get to grips with the homelessness crisis, and the only way to address the gap then would be by cutting the Housing Action Plan, the Premium was assisting to fund. It was believed that this would be a major error and it would mean breaching the long-term plans to prevent homelessness and to assist young people into the local market.
- It would not be an increase in the Premium that would close local business, but rather the policies of both Governments over the last 12 years - austerity measures, inflation and wars.
- Over 800 of the county's population were homeless, more than 200 living in bed and breakfast establishments/hotels, 3,000 had to wait for over 3 years to get social housing and 60% of the people of Gwynedd could not afford one house, not to mention two.
- That we need planning / housing tools and resources to create the type of communities that are needed, and although the fact that the Government now recognised the fact that it was a crisis, those tools were not received quickly enough, if at all.
- There were plans in the Housing Action Plan to assist local people that had inherited housing to rent those houses to local families, rather than sell them.
- More and more people saw their houses as a business opportunity and bought the stock to be let as Airbnbs in Gwynedd. However, by increasing the Premium to 150%, the Council had the opportunity today to send out a message that we are not for sale, and to take a break to re-visit the situation.
- It was not unreasonable to expect the owners of second homes to pay a little more than others, bearing in mind of course that they have the option to pay monthly.
- Hotels were suffering as nobody were staying there, and it would be better if the money raised would go to assisting these small hotels to support themselves.
- The proposal was supported on condition that more affordable houses would be built and that the money would go towards ensuring that the homeless would have a home in Gwynedd.
- Sustainable tourism that could be managed in the right place and of the right size was supported, however tourism was not under consideration here, but houses bought from the housing stock that remained vacant for the majority of the year.

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Also, it was not believed that the argument regarding the impact on local businesses held water as those people who live here throughout the year use those services.

- There was much talk about the impact of increasing the Premium on native people, however those people who stay in temporary accommodation are also native people. A great deal of homelessness was hidden - it was not always people sleeping on the street, and the hidden element meant that we did not notice or turned a blind eye.
- It was not believed that the 106 Section clause was a barrier anymore to get a mortgage, and the use of this clause should be encouraged on new housing development.
- There was a perception that there were no jobs available in Gwynedd, however, there were plenty of jobs available. There was a scarcity of carers, social workers, health workers, teachers, classroom assistants, doctors etc., here and a hope was expressed that local people would apply for these jobs, and would also apply for a place in the new Medical School that will come to Bangor, and remain in the area to work in due course.

There was a request for a registered vote on the amendment not to increase the Premium for the 2023/24 financial year, and to get a comprehensive linguistic impact assessment of the likely impacts of increasing the Premium, clarity regarding exceptions, and to also give full consideration to the other measures to control holiday homes.

In accordance with Procedural Rules, the following vote was recorded on the amendment:-

In favour	21	Concillors Glyn Daniels, Anwen Davies, Dylan Fernley, John Brynmor Hughes, Louise Hughes, Anne Lloyd Jones, Gwilym Jones, Eryl Jones-Williams, Beth Lawton, Dewi Owen, Gareth Coj Parry, Nigel Pickavance, John Pughe, John Pughe Roberts, Richard Glyn Roberts, Peter Thomas, Rob Triggs, Hefin Underwood, Eirwyn Williams, Gareth Williams and Gruffydd Williams
Against	37	Councillors Craig ab Iago, Beca Brown, Dafydd Owen Davies, Elwyn Edwards, Elfed Wyn ap Elwyn, Alan Jones Evans, Delyth Lloyd Griffiths, Annwen Hughes, R. Medwyn Hughes, Iwan Huws, Elin Hywel, Elwyn Jones, Berwyn Parry Jones, Dawn Lynne Jones, Elin Walker Jones, Gareth Tudor Jones, Huw Wyn Jones, Kim Jones, June Jones, Menna Jones, Cai Larsen, Dafydd Meurig, Dilwyn Morgan, Edgar Wyn Owen, Gwynfor Owen, Llio Elenid Owen, Rheinallt Puw, Arwyn Herald Roberts, Gareth A. Roberts, Meryl Roberts, Paul Rowlinson, Dyfrig Siencyn, Ioan Thomas, Rhys Tudur, Einir Wyn Williams, Elfed Williams and Sasha Williams.
Abstentions	0	

In his closing comments, the Cabinet Member noted:-

- There was no guarantee that some of the developments that the Welsh Government have in the pipeline would occur tomorrow, and they would take a considerable amount of time to realise these.
- Regarding the pilot in Dwyfor, there were 2,138 second homes and 2,110 applications open for a social house in the area.
- He believed that raising the Premium to 150% was reasonable.

A member noted that the report did not include data that was thorough enough to measure the impact on communities and individual wards, in terms of how many houses were moving, etc., and the proposer was asked to consider an addition to the proposal

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that the impact of the Premium on communities would be monitored seasonally, so that the impact could be seen from month to month. In response, the Chief Executive explained that there was no need to add to the proposal as impact monitoring work would take place anyway, and the Council would consider this matter again next year.

The Leader noted that he believed that the point raised was fair, and the Cabinet Member should be asked if he was willing to accept the addition to the proposal. In response, the Monitoring Officer noted that he did not think that it was appropriate to change the wording of the proposal at this point as the matter had not been considered as part of the discussion. Also, assurance had been given that the work would be undertaken anyway.

RESOLVED for the 2023/24 financial year, that Cyngor Gwynedd:

- **Allows NO discount on class A second homes, in accordance with Section 12 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (i.e. no change from 2022/23).**
- **Allows NO discount and CHARGES A PREMIUM OF 150% on class B second homes in accordance with Section 12B of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (i.e. increase from 100% to 150%).**
- **Allows NO discount on homes that have been empty for 6 months or more and CHARGES A PREMIUM of 100% on homes that have been empty for 12 months or more, in accordance with Section 12A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (i.e. no change from 2022/23).**

9. THE COUNCIL'S ANNUAL SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT

Submitted - a report by the Leader inviting the Council to approve and adopt the first Cyngor Gwynedd Self-assessment Report, looking back at 2021/22. It was explained that the report was a new statutory requirement under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

RESOLVED to approve and adopt Cyngor Gwynedd's Self-assessment report for 2021/22.

10. APPOINTMENT OF MEMBERS TO THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

The Monitoring Officer submitted a report recommending the Council to appoint Mr Mark Jones as an Independent Member of the Standards Committee for a period of 6 years.

On behalf of the members of the Standards Committee, Dr Einir Young was thanked for her work chairing and leading the committee over the years.

In response to a question, it was explained that it was difficult to get external persons to serve as independent members of the Standards Committee, and also as lay-members on the Governance and Audit Committee and this was a general problem, and the Monitoring Officer would make this observation when he would be talking next with Government officers.

RESOLVED to appoint Mr Mark Jones as an Independent Member of the Standards Committee for a period of 6 years.

11. RECOMMENDATION OF THE INTERVIEW PANEL - APPOINTMENT OF LAY MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

The Chair of the Interview Panel, Councillor Ioan Thomas, submitted a report recommending the Council to appoint Mrs Carys Edwards as a Lay Member of the Governance and Audit Committee for a period of 5 years.

RESOLVED to appoint Mrs Carys Edwards as a Lay Member of the Governance and Audit Committee for a period of 5 years.

12. PETITIONS SCHEME

The Cabinet Member for Corporate Support, Councillor Menna Jones, submitted a report requesting the Council to adopt a Petitions Scheme, in accordance with the requirements in Part 3 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

RESOLVED to adopt the Petitions Scheme.

13. SUPPORT FOR COUNCILLORS - REPORTING BACK ON THE FINDINGS OF THE COUNCILLORS' QUESTIONNAIRE

The Cabinet Member for Corporate Support, Councillor Menna Jones, submitted a report on the results of the questionnaire sent to all the councillors in October 2022, seeking their views on the timing of the Council's meetings, satisfaction with the service from the Democracy Team and communicating with councillors.

A member noted that moving Planning Committee meetings to 10am would entail that site visits would have to be held on the previous Friday, leading to additional unnecessary costs. In response, it was explained that the report was for information on the results of the questionnaire, and further consideration would have to be given to these results alongside the practicality / implications of changing the time when proceeding to organising the committees calendar for next year.

RESOLVED to accept the information and ask the Head of Democracy Services to use the results as a basis to establish the committees calendar for 2023/24 in line with the guidance of the relevant statutory Guidance.

14. NOTICES OF MOTION

(A) Submitted - the following notice of motion by Councillor Huw Rowlands in accordance with Section 4.20 of the Constitution, and it was seconded:-

I propose that Cyngor Gwynedd writes to the Governments and the relevant train companies, expressing dissatisfaction regarding the standard of train service provided by Avanti West Coast and Transport for Wales in Gwynedd, and the negative effect of this on the County's residents and economy.

The member set out the context to his motion, noting that:-

- The prices charged for tickets were totally incommensurate with the standard of service, with trains late, cancelled, crowded and dirty, no guarantee of a seat, although it could cost up to £100 to travel one-way from Bangor to Cardiff on some services.
- People who travelled to work in Gwynedd, who were dependent on the train service to do so, were often late to work following the cancellation of trains without any notice, or having to stand throughout the journey.
- There were plenty of examples of crowded trains going to Cardiff on international rugby and football days, with the trains full leaving Bangor even, with only two carriages, despite the fact that Transport for Wales knew about the games months in advance.
- All this had an adverse impact on the economy and the well-being of the people of Gwynedd, and also on our international image to overseas visitors.
- That £100bn was being invested in England to create the HS2 service, and this was with ratepayers money, including the ratepayers of Wales, namely finance that we in Gwynedd do not get any benefit from.

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- The direct service from Bangor to London had been reduced substantially since Covid, with no specific date for when these services would be re-commenced to the previous level, if at all. It must also be borne in mind that the service from Bangor to London linked the principal cities of Dublin and London, and it was not a track to one place.
- A significant reduction had also been seen in the number of trains that run directly from Bangor to Cardiff.
- Why should Gwynedd residents be second-class citizens and have to change in Crewe to catch a train from Manchester to London?
- There was also concern regarding the standard of customer service and the lack of availability of some types of tickets.
- The train service in Gwynedd had got worse, not improved, over the last few years, and the people of Gwynedd deserved better than to accept without question a service that was amongst the worse in Europe.

Members were given an opportunity to make observations and ask questions. It was noted that:-

- It was important not to compare Avanti West Coast with the Cambrian Railway and the line between Aberystwyth and Shrewsbury, as the Cambrian listened to complaints and had invested substantially in the railway.
- There was a need for a much clearer, easier and regular connection to the world from Pwllheli.

RESOLVED to adopt the motion, namely:-

That Cyngor Gwynedd writes to the relevant Governments and train companies, expressing discontent about the quality of the train services provided by Avanti West Coast and Transport for Wales in Gwynedd, and the negative impact of that on the County's residents and economy.

(B) Submitted - the following notice of motion by Councillor Llio Elenid Owen in accordance with Section 4.20 of the Constitution, and it was seconded:-

That Cyngor Gwynedd calls on the Wales Air Ambulance and relevant bodies to retain the centres at Dinas Dinlle and Welshpool, and builds on the services in their current locations.

The member set out the context to her motion, noting that:-

- We as councillors were eager to clearly state our support and gratitude, as local people, to the Wales Air Ambulance charity. The work they did in order to provide emergency care in our communities was totally invaluable. The Wales Air Ambulance had an important role to play here in Gwynedd, it was one of the charities that was closest to people's hearts, particularly in my local community in the Dinas Dinlle area.
- The Wales Air Ambulance (WAA) is a vital emergency medical service and it is totally essential for the residents of Gwynedd. The rural nature and road networks means that saving lives in Gwynedd is challenging at the best of times. Relocating the service to north-east Wales would without a doubt mean even more of a challenge to the area.
- It was understood that this was not entirely in the hands of the charity. The Emergency Medical Retrieval and Transfer Service (EMRTS Cymru) and the Emergency Ambulance Service Committee played a part in this proposal and plans, and the opportunity to meet with the Air Ambulance Chief Executive was welcomed to understand their view and position.
- Challenges already faced the Wales Ambulance Service, and there were whole communities here in Gwynedd that are totally reliant on the charity in an

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emergency. How will changes to the Air Ambulance impact the service provided to the residents of Gwynedd? Will this mean slowing down the emergency response? Will there be a risk of losing lives? Was there certainty that there will be no adverse impact to reach residents?

- The Emergency Medical Retrieval and Transfer Service notes that the changes to the service will reduce the geographical unfairness to patients with critical care needs, however it was not understood how exactly relocation would achieve this, and it was difficult to see how this could lead to nothing more than a longer waiting time for emergency care in some areas.
- The relocation proposal notes that it will be possible to respond to the demand and go out 580 times more a year, however there were real misgivings regarding the reliability of the data used to try and justify this. This had been reiterated by our Members of Parliament, and there were too many unanswered questions. To this end, the Plaid Cymru Members in the Senedd had called on the First Minister to commission an independent analysis themselves of this data.
- The whole purpose of the Air Ambulance was to serve the most rural areas, and there was no sense at all to move the service from Dinas Dinlle, or from Welshpool, on the outskirts of some of the most far-reaching and rural areas in Wales, and to move it to a more populated area near the A55 dual carriageway in the north-east.
- The lives of our residents in the countryside are just as important as the lives of residents in the towns of Wales, and there should be no change to the service that will compromise this.
- There was very strong local support to retain these sites in their current locations and all the residents that have attended recent public meetings, and all who have discussed and sent message of concern, are witness to this.

Several members expressed their support to the proposal. It was noted that:-

- The ambulance often had to go round Dolgellau to reach patients in the Llanbedr area, because of the lack of a by-pass to the village, and it was therefore essential that the helicopter could go there.
- The relocation proposal notes that it will be possible for the helicopter to go out 580 times more in a year, however, the figure was bound to be higher as the service will be located in a more populated area.
- It was sad to hear the First Minister of Wales stating, in response to Mabon ap Gwynfor MS, that this was a matter for the charity, however, if this was a matter related to the Government in any way, they should state clearly that they would bring pressure to bear.

The Leader noted:-

- That there was a very positive meeting with the Chief Executive of the Air Ambulance and another officer, the Cabinet Member for Adults, Health and Well-being and Councillor Llio Elenid Owen.
- It was evident from that discussion that there was a serious lack of communication, and there was a more complex background to the arrangement than what was initially thought.
- The decision was not entirely in the hands of the Air Ambulance Service itself, and there was a need to establish the facts, get the data out clearly and assess the situation, i.e. if there was a need for change to improve the service, this should occur on the grounds of robust and clear evidence.
- There was a risk that the charity itself would suffer because of all the arguments surrounding the service, and he was eager to collaborate as much as possible with them to convey the correct messages.

RESOLVED to adopt the motion, namely:-

That Cyngor Gwynedd calls on the Wales Air Ambulance and relevant bodies to retain the centres at Dinas Dinlle and Welshpool, and builds on the services in their current locations.

(C) Submitted - the following notice of motion by Councillor Elfed Wyn ap Elwyn in accordance with Section 4.20 of the Constitution, and it was seconded:-

That the Council supports the Welsh Government's aim to re-open the railways of Wales, to create a railway through west Wales, and to call on them for a scoping/feasibility study of the line between Afon wen and Bangor.

The member set out the context to his motion, noting that:-

- The Beeching cuts had been very painful to our nation in the 1960s. Hundreds of miles of train lines were torn from the ground, leaving only scars on land where the lines used to cross for over a century.
- Once the trains disappeared, the communities around the old line were now further from each other, and the car did not bind these rural communities as the train had done. As well as giving assurance to residents of being able to travel from one place to another, the trains meant less pressure on the roads, and offered an alternative option to travel by car to the far reaches of the country.
- That it was mad that it was taking so much time for us to reach our own capital city, and we were forced to go through another country to get to Cardiff.
- It was essential that Wales had a railway line that links our communities once more.
- The line in its new guise would not only link our nation internally, but would give a huge boost to our economy, creating new jobs, opportunities for new economic developments and would be a catalyst for the scattered communities throughout the county.
- A railway from the south to the north, would not only be a modern backbone to our national transport system, but would also reinforce our confidence as a nation.

Several members expressed their support to the proposal.

A member noted the importance of ensuring that no plans to re-open railways would affect green lanes, such as Lôn Eifion.

RESOLVED to adopt the motion, namely:-

That the Council supports the Welsh Government's aim to re-open the railways of Wales, to create a railway through west Wales, and to call on them for a scoping/feasibility study of the line between Afon wen and Bangor.

15. RESPONSES TO PREVIOUS NOTICES OF MOTION

Submitted, for information - a letter from the Welsh Government in response to Councillor Elfed Wyn ap Elwyn's notice of motion to a Council meeting on 6 March, 2022, regarding the title of the Prince of Wales.

The meeting commenced at 1.00 pm and concluded at 5.05 pm

CHAIR