

THE CABINET, TUESDAY, 19 SEPTEMBER 2023

Present-

Councillors: Dyfrig Siencyn, Nia Jeffreys, Beca Brown, Berwyn Parry Jones, Dafydd Meurig, Elin Walker Jones, Dilwyn Morgan, Ioan Thomas and Menna Trenholme.

Also present-

Dafydd Gibbard (Chief Executive), Geraint Owen (Corporate Director), Iwan Evans (Head of Legal Services), Dewi Aeron Morgan (Head of Finance Department) and Rhodri Jones (Democracy Services Officer).

- Item 7: Ian Jones (Head of Corporate Support Department), John Carey Cartwright (Learning and Organisational Development Manager) and Meinir Griffiths (Service Improvement Officer).
- Item 8: Jennifer Kasina Rao and Gwenan Meleri Pritchard (Business Support Officers, Corporate Leadership Team)
- Item 9: Eleri Jones (Human Resources Advisor)
- Item 10: Delyth Gadlys Williams (Equality Advisor)
- Item 11: Steffan Jones (Head of Highways, Engineering and YGC)
- Item 12: Dafydd Wyn Williams (Head of Environment Department)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies had been received from Councillor Craig ab Iago and Huw Dylan Owen (Statutory Director of Social Services).

The Cabinet Members and Officers were welcomed to the meeting.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were received.

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

The minutes of the meetings held on 11 July 2023 and 20 July 2023 were accepted as a true record.

6. RESPONSE TO THE PUBLIC CONSULTATION OF THE NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

The report was submitted by Cllr Dyfrig Siencyn

DECISION

The content of the Council's response to the Fire and Rescue Authority's Public Consultation was approved.

DISCUSSION

It was reported that the Council's Leader and Deputy Leader had had a discussion with the Chief Fire Officer and Council members serving on the fire service board. It was reported that the consultation had been open since July 2023 and would end on 30 September.

It was explained that originally there were four options as part of the consultation. It was confirmed that one of those was to introduce an option where no change would be made, however, this option had now been disregarded. It was detailed that the other three options included having a day staffed station in Porthmadog and Dolgellau to increase and improve service provision. Attention was drawn to option 3 that included arrangements to close fire stations in Abersoch and Llanberis as they were on-call stations.

It was confirmed that the Council's draft response supported what was considered in options 1 and 2 that would improve services in Gwynedd and opposed option 3. It was also noted that the financial implications of the options was something for the Members to consider.

In response to an enquiry about the impact of the Fire and Rescue Authority's decision on the Council, the Corporate Director noted that there was an increasing cost associated with option 1 of about 14% (approx. £1.4 million). It was noted that a sum of circa £800,000 was associated with option 2. It was confirmed that the Council would need to find these sums as a contribution to the fire and rescue service, no additional funding would be provided by the Welsh Government.

Concern was expressed that the costs of the Fire and Rescue Authority do not appear on the Council tax bill details, as it was a levy that came from the Council's funds. Consideration was given to finding a method to explain to residents that the cost of the Fire and Rescue Authority was included in their bill, once the Authority had come to a decision.

The intention to support option 1 and 2 in the consultation paper was welcomed.

7. ANNUAL COMPLAINTS AND SERVICE IMPROVEMENT REPORT 2022/23

The report was submitted by Cllr Menna Trenholme.

DECISION

The report was approved and relevant comments and suggestions were offered about the Council's performance in dealing with complaints in an appropriate and timely manner.

DISCUSSION

It was explained that there was a procedure to regularly report to the Cabinet on complaints and service improvement. It was noted that the Council had just received the Ombudsman's annual letter, that had been included with the report for

the Cabinet's consideration. It was confirmed that the Ombudsman would receive correspondence that the letter had been submitted before the Cabinet for their attention.

It was explained that the number of complaints had reduced annually since 2018-19. Nevertheless, the number of complaints the Council and the Ombudsman had received had increased significantly in the year 2021-22 as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. It was reported that this was also true in other councils and the number of complaints had once more reduced.

It was detailed that the report referred to formal (valid) complaints received via the Council's complaints system and the complaints sent to the Ombudsman. It was reported that the number of formal (valid) complaints had reduced a little this year compared with 2021-22 (from 60 complaints to 54). It was also noted that complaints sent to the Ombudsman had reduced from 41 in 2021-22 to 36 in 2022-23.

It was confirmed that there was no change to the complaints response time, namely 7 days. Feedback had been received from the Ombudsman's Office that the response system for Cyngor Gwynedd complaints was realistic and already worked well and the council was willing to learn lessons from the complaints received.

It was assured that the collaboration with Council departments was very good. It was noted that a change had been seen in the Council's culture over the last few years, as complaints were seen as an opportunity to learn and improve services. It was recognised that there were more complaints about Council services than those in the report, however, these were resolved independently by the departments.

Members were reminded that the Council held regular training in the customer care field to use complaints as a learning tool and it was confirmed that this training was very popular. Furthermore, it was confirmed that more 'Responding to Correspondence' training had been prepared by the Council, in response to the comments that every officer did not respond to correspondence in a timely manner. It was noted that one pilot of this training had already taken place with the intention of holding another pilot during September 2023.

Attention was drawn to the Wall of Success and it was noted that it continued to grow. It was reported that seeing the comments of appreciation raised staff morale, particularly in the frontline.

8. ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT AND SELF-ASSESSMENT 2022/23

The report was submitted by Cllr Dyfrig Siencyn

DECISION

Cyngor Gwynedd's Annual Performance Report and Self-Assessment 2022/23 was approved, and to recommend its adoption by the Full Council.

DISCUSSION

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It was explained that the report provided information about the progress of the projects of the Council's Plan 2022-23 and it was noted that it had three main parts, namely:

- Performance of the Priority Projects of the Council Plan 2018-23
- The performance of the day-to-day work of departments
- Self-assessment of Cyngor Gwynedd's performance 2022-23.

Members were reminded that it was a statutory requirement for the annual self-assessment to be submitted to the Cabinet and this was the second report of this type. It was confirmed that the report had been before the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee and the report reflected their observations.

It was reported that a public consultation had been conducted on this report, in accordance with the statutory requirements, and the citizens panel, elected members, town and community councils, staff and unions were contacted.

It was confirmed that 221 responses had come to hand. It was noted that a summary of these responses could be seen in the report.

It was considered that the report was fair and honest and the use of clear language was praised.

It was confirmed that an independent panel would be established in the future to assess the Council's performance.

It was explained that all Council Members would discuss this in the next meeting of the Full Council on 28 September 2023.

9. HYBRID WORKING SCHEME

The report was submitted by Cllr Menna Trenholme

DECISION

The Hybrid Working Scheme for Cyngor Gwynedd Staff was adopted.

DISCUSSION

Members were reminded that there had been a significant change in the nature of the Council's work since the first lockdown on 23 March 2020. It was noted that trials had been completed over the last 18 months on hybrid working methods. It was reported that this included two consultations with managers, staff and unions. It was explained that this scheme derived from those trials and consultations. It was believed that the plan reflected the changes to the working arrangement and further strengthened staff safety and well-being duties.

Details were given that the scheme allowed full-time staff to work up to 3 days a week from home, where their posts allowed for hybrid working. It was confirmed that there was a requirement for full-time employees to work a minimum of 2 days a week in the office. It was explained that this promoted regular face-to-face contact for staff and sought to ensure a balance between staff well-being and service continuation. It was noted that the scheme was not rigid and therefore there was flexibility available for services to vary the working days in the office, to ensure efficiency.

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It was noted that the scheme allowed flexibility to work hours in the office on a monthly average basis when required. It was emphasised that there would be no contractual change deriving from the scheme's arrangements and the office would continue to be identified as the work centre for all employees. It was noted that this allowed employees to work more than 2 days in the office if they wished.

It was emphasised that no member of staff would be able to work in a hybrid manner if they had not completed a self-assessment of their workplace when working from home, and the Council was satisfied with their workplace. It was recognised that the scheme was not relevant for any of the Council's front-line staff. However, members were reminded that every member of staff was entitled to make an application to revise working hours, when they started and finished work, limiting working days and to make a request to work during school term only if they wished.

Assurance was given that staff who worked from home were very committed and continued to work efficiently. However, it was recognised that face-to-face interaction between members of staff was invaluable when seeking to give the best possible service to the people of Gwynedd. It was noted that there were requirements within the scheme for staff to work from the office for more than the minimum noted, when a new member of staff commenced within services. It was emphasised that this would be of assistance for staff to settle in the Council and in their workplace.

It was reported that an impact assessment had been completed for this scheme and it was assured that the scheme would not have an impact on the Council's ability to provide a service through the medium of Welsh as well as English.

It was noted that 15% of officers (approximately 276 members of staff) attended the office full time. It was detailed that this figure had increased as the hybrid arrangement proceeded and staff were welcome to attend full time if they wished.

It was explained that the requirements of the scheme would be fully implemented by 1 April 2024 at the latest.

10. 2022/23 ANNUAL REPORT, STRATEGIC EQUALITY PLAN 2020/24.

The report was submitted by Cllr Menna Trenholme

DECISION

The 2022/23 Annual Report and the Equality Plan 2020/24 were approved and the information in the report was noted.

DISCUSSION

It was explained that the report noted the progress of the 2020/24 strategic equality plan for the year 2022/23. It was noted that a great deal of the plan's work had been delivered, as we were three quarters of the way through its period.

It was reported that specific updates within the plan included:

- Establishing an Equality Training Framework and work was being done to add titles to it.
- Receiving a Salary Audit which showed that officers receive fair pay.
- Working with Inclusive Employers to identify ways to improve the diversity of our workforce.

It was explained that it was timely to look at a new equality plan for 2024/28. It was confirmed that officers had completed an engagement period for the new plan and a report

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with the details of the plan would be submitted to the Cabinet in due course. It was recognised that the themes of the current plan were long term and therefore the new plan would include some of the same themes that were currently being dealt with.

It was noted that detailed consultation was on-going when designing the new plan for 2024/28. It was confirmed that over 600 responses had been received for the relevant questionnaire and discussions were being held with various groups. It was noted that further discussions would be held with departments to ensure an input from all parts of the Council. It was hoped that this would ensure that individuals and departments would take ownership of the plan.

It was noted that the Socio-Economic Duty would impact a large percentage of Gwynedd residents. Assurance was given that these requirements would be included when designing a new plan.

Gwynedd employment details were shared regarding several fields such as gender, nationality, race and others and it was considered whether the relevant percentages within the Council's workforce were similar to the County's general population percentages. It was recognised that the percentages within the workforce were lower than the average of Gwynedd communities however the aim was to improve the situation. It was noted that this area was an aim included in the existing equality plan and was likely to also be an aim in the 2024/28 plan.

The Equality Advisor and service staff were thanked for their work.

11. PERFORMANCE REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR HIGHWAYS, ENGINEERING AND YGC

The report was submitted by Cllr Berwyn Parry Jones

DECISION

The information in the report was accepted and noted.

DISCUSSION

Members were reminded that the Department led on two of the projects in the Council Plan namely 'Clean and Tidy Communities' and 'Strengthening Communication and Engagement'.

It was noted that the Clean and Tidy Communities project had led to the establishment of the Ardal Ni teams, which had been very successful. However, it was recognised that there was a need to promote more of the project as some areas were not aware of them. Members were reminded that it was possible to send a request for work in several ways, including via an online form or the Gwynedd App.

It was explained that a Communications and Engagement Officer had been appointed as part of the 'Strengthening Communication and Engagement' project. It was noted that a new newsletter shared stories with staff every quarter, as well as raising awareness of the services' work through social media.

It was confirmed that work was underway to include details of salt bins on the Gwynedd Map so residents were aware of their location and report when they needed to be replenished.

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It was reported that the department would lead on three priorities within the Council's Plan 2023/28 namely:

- Clean and Tidy Communities
- Acting on Flood Risks (Inland and Coastal)
- Extending play/socialisation opportunities for the County's children and young people (Working jointly with the Education Department).

It was recognised that there had been a turnover in the workforce of clean and tidy communities' projects. However, any gap that had been created as a result had been filled.

Members were reminded that the department had adopted a Green Fleet Plan since 24 January 2023 and the progress of the plan was regularly reported to the Climate and Nature Board. However, it was acknowledged that there had been some challenges within this plan such as a lack of resources within the fleet service, the timetable for introducing charging points and the costs of purchasing electric vehicles. An update was shared that the department was in discussions with other departments to work together to ensure the charging points were delivered as quickly as possible.

It has been announced that the installation of LED lamps on 17,000 Gwynedd street lamps had been carried out within the Lighting Service. It was noted that there was a 45% reduction in energy consumption and a 70% reduction in carbon emissions per tonne at the end of 2022/23. It was also explained that 25% less energy was used between 10:30pm and 6:00am as the lights were dimmed during this time.

It was explained that Gwynedd Consultancy had met their 2022/23 income target and continued to steadily develop staff. Attention was drawn to some of the projects the service had undertaken recently such as flood risk management plans.

It was announced that the Department had met their financial savings target.

12. PERFORMANCE REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

The report was submitted by Cllr Dafydd Meurig

DECISION

The information in the report was accepted and noted.

DISCUSSION

It was reported that the department was leading on five projects which were part of the Council's Plan 2023-2028. The following were noted as an update on those projects:

- **Management of second homes and short-term holiday lets** - It was clarified that the consultation period on the Council's intention to introduce an Article 4 direction had closed on 13 September. It was pleasing that a few thousand responses had been received and officers were now analysing those responses before submitting a timely report to update the Communities Scrutiny Committee and the Cabinet.

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- **Waste and Recycling** - It was noted that the department had set a target of recycling 70% of the County's waste by 2025. It was acknowledged that achieving this target would be challenging but the department was hopeful it would succeed by following a new internal restructuring arrangement.
- **Active Travel**- It was confirmed that the Department had successfully received a grant in this area for the next period. It was noted that two additional applications had been made for grants but these had been unsuccessful.
- **Public Transport** - It was announced that the SHERPA'r Wyddfa service has been short-listed for this year's British Transport Awards (UK Transport Awards) following its restructure in recent years.
- **New Local Development Plan** - It was explained that a governance arrangement for the scheme had been accepted. It was detailed that a Planning Policy Working Group of 15 members had been established and met for the first time recently. It was noted that the working group had dealt with the initial work and planned to meet regularly.

Members were updated on three of the Department's services which had seen progress recently.

These included:

- **Planning** - It was confirmed that the service had successfully responded to 88% of planning applications within the statutory time limit at the start of this year. This was noted as an improvement over recent years. It was announced that the service had recently successfully appointed two new planning trainees. It was explained this would be a great help with capacity issues within the service. It was noted that attracting staff to service posts had been a challenge in the past, but it was hoped that these appointments were a positive sign.
- **Planning Enforcement** - It was reported that capacity problems were still affecting the planning enforcement service. It was explained that this was a challenge because officers strove to deal with new cases as well as historical cases that remained open on systems.
- **Land charges** - It was explained that the land charges services had now been upgraded to a new computer system. As such, this service was performing well. It was noted that officers had to stop dealing with land charges applications for a period of time while the system was being upgraded, due to a lack of capacity. It was confirmed that this problem had now been sorted as the new system was in place and the applications were being dealt with effectively.
- **Traffic, Projects and Footpaths** - It was reported that priority has been given to ensuring everything was in place for the 20mph restriction regulations that had recently come into force. It was explained that a great deal of planning and preparation had been undertaken to ensure this update. Unfortunately, this meant that some of the other service projects had not been prioritised but the

officers were now working diligently on them once more.

In response to a query on the financial position in the field of public transport, it was acknowledged that the situation did not look positive for the next financial year. It was explained that the government had not currently submitted information on potential grants and therefore it was hoped that the situation would improve when approaching a new financial year in April. The Head of Environment Department elaborated that the Department was undertaking a comprehensive review within this area and ensured that all efforts were being made to ensure that public transport services did not cease.

It was noted that the Transportation service was overspending. Despite this, the service benefitted from receiving funding from Transport for Wales. It was explained that this was annual funding and therefore risks arose if Transport for Wales did not provide funds to support services. It was assured that the department was aware of the risks within the field and every effort was being made to address them.

In light of recent difficulties within the waste collection and recycling service, the need to educate residents on the importance of recycling was considered when the restructuring had been completed and the service was running smoothly within the Department. It was recognised that behaviour towards recycling needed to change within the county and getting officers to work on this was necessary to meet the 70% target for recycling waste by 2025.

Comments were shared that residents were frustrated that recycling collections were not consistent and that correspondence was not being shared to confirm that collection was not happening. In response to these comments, the Head of Environment Department identified this issue as the main focus of the department's next performance challenge meeting. It was noted that better communication was taking place in the Arfon area than in Meirionnydd, as the hub had now been effectively established, but there was a commitment to improving the service. It was also explained that a recent strike had also affected services in recent weeks. It was recognised that there was room for improvement in this service but that the service was heading in the right direction.

In response to a query regarding the conduct of the waste collection and recycling service workforce, the Head of Environment Department stressed that no shortcomings in the service arose from the conduct of the workforce. It was explained that some areas within the County such as Harlech, Dwyfor and Arfon worked well together in their areas as one team and therefore the service ran smoothly there. It was acknowledged that staffing issues had arisen in Meirionnydd and that officer locations and staff sickness had affected the service. It was detailed that a focus was being placed on the southern areas of the County to ensure that the waste collection and recycling service improved there in the near future. It was ensured that collectors worked hard across the County to strive to ensure the continuity of service on a regular basis.

In response to a query about the safety of active travel users, the Cabinet Member for the Environment noted that problems arose with the purchase of land to maintain these paths and challenges arose when applying for grants due to the nature of the application forms being more favourable to urban rather than rural areas. The Head of Environment Department elaborated that there was design work and environmental inspections for the paths and that this scheme was being completed section by section. It was ensured that the department strove to provide fit-for-purpose infrastructure so that new paths could be created in the next financial year.

The department was thanked for all their work.

13. THE CABINET'S FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The report was submitted by Cllr Dyfrig Siencyn

DECISION

The Cabinet's Forward Work Programme for meetings held between September 2023 and March 2024 was adopted.

DISCUSSION

Consideration was given to the items noted for the Cabinet's meetings between September 2023 and March 2024.

The meeting commenced at 1.00pm and concluded at 3.00pm

CHAIR
