

THE CABINET, TUESDAY, 10 OCTOBER 2023

Present-

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

Also present-

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

Items 6 and 7: Gareth Jones (Assistant Head of Environment Department).

Item 8: Llywela Haf Owain (Senior Language and Scrutiny Advisor) and Gwenllian Mair Williams (Language Advisor).

Item 9: Catrin Love (Assistant Head of Corporate Support Department) and Eurig Huw Williams (Human Resources Advisory Services Manager).

Item 10: Catrin Love (Assistant Head of Corporate Support Department) and Gail Warrington (Health, Safety and Well-being Advisory Services Manager).

Item 11: Debbie Anne Jones (Assistant Head of Education Department: Corporate Services, Gwyn Tudur (Assistant Head of Education Department: Secondary) and Rhys Meredydd Glyn (Head of Gwynedd Immersion Education System).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Geraint Owen (Corporate Director).

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 meeting held on 19 September were accepted as a true record.

6. ANNUAL MONITORING REPORT - LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2022-23

The report was submitted by Cllr Dafydd Meurig

DECISION

Annual Monitoring Report 5 (Appendix 1) was accepted and it was agreed to present it to the Government by the end of October 2023.

DISCUSSION

Members were reminded that this was the fifth annual report that had been submitted as part of the Local Development Plan. It was noted that the current Plan would continue until 2025/26. It was detailed that there was a statutory requirement to report to the Government annually on the Plan's progress and this would happen by the end of October should the report be approved by the Cabinet.

It was reported that there had been major changes to the flow of the Plan since the last annual report. It was confirmed that the arrangement of collaborating on the Plan with Anglesey had come to an end and Cyngor Gwynedd had now established a Planning Policy Working Group of 15 members to undertake this work. It was confirmed that the observations of the Working Group had been included in the report.

It was explained that traffic light indicators were being used to monitor the effectiveness of policies and to give an overview of the Plan's performance. It was confirmed that:

- 33 policies contributed towards achieving the Plan's objectives and performed in accordance with, or better than, expectations - green indicator.
- 21 policies were not being achieved as anticipated (but this did not lead to concerns regarding policy implementation) - amber indicator.
- 5 policies did not provide expected results (and there were resulting concerns regarding policy implementation) - red indicator.

It was ensured that any policy that came under the red indicator received consideration when proceeding with the Plan. It was confirmed that 11 policies had been achieved and were not included in any indicator.

It was noted that planning permission had been granted for 315 new residential units during the 2022/23 year, and 298 of them had been completed. It was detailed that 122 of these were affordable units. It was reported that this was 41% of all units completed within the year, which was higher than the expected target. It was considered that units were given 'affordable units' status due to restrictions, size and locations and, therefore, it was inevitable that all units built by the Council would not receive this status.

It was explained that Indicator D21 set targets to address potential renewable energy resources identified in the Plan. It was reminded that it had been expected for 50% of this to be addressed by 2021. It was recognised that this target had not been met thus far due to the shortage of the number of applications received as part of this plan to date. It was also considered that several renewable energy projects had been located on Anglesey and, therefore, targets would need to be amended. It was explained that a Planning Policy Working Group had identified this deficit as a weakness and wished to restore the situation.

It was recognised that Cyngor Gwynedd had similar plans with the National Park. It was detailed that the relationship between both authorities was strong. However, it was noted that it was not possible to merge plans with the Park as it was an independent authority, as well as the fact that part of its area was located within the territory of Conwy County Borough Council.

7. DRAFT DELIVERY AGREEMENT - LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The report was submitted by Cllr Dafydd Meurig.

DECISION

1. The Delivery Agreement was accepted and observations on the content were offered.
2. It was agreed that the Delivery Agreement should go out to public consultation for six weeks.
3. The right was delegated to the Head of Environment Department to make editorial modifications to ensure accuracy before the document goes out for public consultation.

DISCUSSION

It was explained that the Delivery Agreement was part of the initial steps of drawing up a new Local Development Plan. It was noted that this process was lengthy and technical as there were specific steps to address on a statutory timetable.

It was explained that the delivery agreement would go out to consultation with key stakeholders should the Cabinet approve it. It was detailed that the agreement would be submitted to the Planning Policy Working Group in January, the Cabinet in February and the Full Council in March before being officially accepted.

It was reported that the Planning Policy Working Group had already considered the Delivery Agreement and that their observations had been noted in the report. It was confirmed that the Communities Scrutiny Committee had considered the Agreement. It was noted that the timetable did not allow the inclusion of their observations within the report to the Cabinet. A summary of their considerations was provided:

- It was considered that a 'consultation' was a risk within the Agreement. This was noted due to the importance of consultation within the plan and the risk of not consulting sufficiently. It was considered that including it as a risk would ensure that it would receive constant attention. It was enquired whether lessons had been learnt from previous consultations and it was considered

whether it would be possible to incorporate these changes within their consultation.

- The fact that the list of bodies that were intended to consult with included under-represented groups was welcomed and that the consultation was open for everyone to respond.
- There was concern that usual methods were used when consulting and officers were asked to ensure that alternative methods were used.
- It was accepted that there was a role for all Members to support the work and take ownership of it.

It was recognised that thorough and clear consultation was required with all relevant bodies. It was noted that there were statutory requirements for the consultation process but there was room for the Council to improve on these requirements.

It was emphasised that the timetable set by the Government to draw up a new Plan was very tight. Despite this, it was confirmed that 'consultation' was being added as a risk within the Delivery Agreement by the beginning of the public consultation. It was ensured that the Department was collaborating with the Communication service to make every effort to consult effectively and thoroughly.

It was discussed that the Department had succeeded to appoint officers following every job advertisement in the past few months. It was noted that officers' capacity was not currently deemed a risk to deliver the Agreement but it was confirmed that the situation would be monitored continuously.

8. GWYNEDD LANGUAGE STRATEGY 2023-2033

The report was submitted by Cllr Menna Trenholme.

DECISION

Adaptations made to the Language Strategy as a result of the public consultation were supported and it was recommended to the Full Council that it adopts the strategy.

DISCUSSION

It was explained that the draft strategy reflected the Council's commitment to promote the language across the county and met the statutory requirements within the Welsh Language Standards. The vision to create an inclusive strategy for the next 10 years was shared, which would increase use of the Welsh language in various contexts in Gwynedd.

It was reported that a consultation had been undertaken in April and May 2023 and that a positive response had been received. It was detailed that ensuring adequate and suitable opportunities for people to learn Welsh and gain confidence when speaking Welsh were regular themes in these responses. It was recognised that less positive responses had been received such as comments noting that the Council should not use the Welsh language as a way of discriminating, and should not be wasting scarce resources on the language.

It was recognised that it was disappointing that only 3 responses had been received to the questionnaire from individuals aged between 25 and 34. In light of this result, it was reported that focus groups had been held for individuals aged between 16 and 20. It was confirmed that undertaking consultations with young individuals was challenging and the unit was working to find new engagement methods to ensure a higher number of responses in the future.

It was confirmed that no suggestions about practical changes to the strategy derived from the consultation. It was emphasised that no major changes had been made to the strategy, only minor amendments. Attention was drawn to the following amendments:

- The strategy had been amended to include more focus on technology as it was identified as a challenge in every area of action.
- It was considered whether it would be possible to increase the presence of the Welsh language on social media when developing the work programme, as respondents noted it as a challenge.
- The strategy had been changed to address concerns about people's attitudes and the economic challenges that affected the use of the Welsh language rather than demographic challenges and the Evidence Base.

It was explained that the programme addressed the Welsh language in strategic plans such as WESP, projects such as the place names project that gave status to Welsh names and Project 15 that sought to encourage the digital use of Welsh by children and young people.

It was emphasised that it was a live work programme that was adapted as the need arose. It was explained that there was no specific budget to implement the language strategy and, therefore, there was a need to ensure that a sufficient budget was available to implement the projects of the work programme by submitting funding bids through the Council's corporate bid system as the need arose.

It was confirmed that the Language and Scrutiny Unit would update the Cabinet on the progress of the work programme and the implementation of the Strategy as part of their annual report about the field of language. It was also detailed that all departments would also explain their contributions to implement the strategy as part of their annual reports to the Language Committee, as well as share data with the Language and Scrutiny Unit at the end of the financial year.

Reference was made to the Gwynedd Language Initiative and it was noted that a work programme was being agreed with them to see how collaboration could be undertaken on different parts of the strategy. It was explained that this collaboration occurred naturally as they were part of the Gwynedd Language Forum.

9. ANNUAL REPORT - EMPLOYMENT

The report was submitted by Cllr Menna Trenholme.

DECISION

The annual report for 2022/23 was approved.

DISCUSSION

It was reported that Council workforce numbers were on the increase as a total of 5,995 people worked for the Council by the end of March this year, compared to 5,908 last year. It was noted that the increase in the number of staff was contrary to what was expected in a period where cuts were required to meet the Council budget. It was explained that staff was the Council's main assets and, therefore, every effort was being made to ensure that any cuts to Council services were undertaken without reducing workforce numbers. It was also detailed that a number of staff members were being funded through grants that did not derive from the Council budget.

Attention was drawn to the statistic that 71.2% of the Council's workforce were women and that this figure had been stable in recent years. It was noted that more women worked part-time rather than full-time.

It was noted that 65% of the Council's workforce were over 50 years old and that 40% were older than 50 years old. It was acknowledged that this was deemed as a risk due to the possibility of losing years of experience and knowledge in a short period in future. Assurance was given that every effort was being made to ensure that this loss would not occur as workforce planning was a corporate priority for this Council, through apprenticeships, professional trainees and other programmes to modernise the Council's recruitment processes. Details were also shared that measuring staff turnover and gaining an understanding of the reasons behind this was key and complex and, therefore, an arrangement was in place to undertake exit questionnaires and interviews for individuals.

Pride was taken in the fact that 38.4% of staff had not been off sick at all during the 2022/23 period. It was recognised that this figure was lower than 43% in 2021/22 which caused concern that the sickness numbers were on the increase. It was noted that a percentage of staff off work due to sickness fell under the 'Other' category, i.e. they were not sick as a result of reasons such as infection, back/neck, musculo-skeletal issues, stress or another specific category, and therefore it was difficult to support those staff members. Despite this, it was emphasised that the Health, Safety and Well-being service provided a wide range of services to support any staff member who was ill, noting that more sickness could be seen in some departments than others.

It was noted that work was being undertaken to inform the workforce of noting the correct category as the reason they were off work, to ensure that the right support was provided to them. It was confirmed that it was hoped that the sickness reporting process would be simplified over the coming year, which would include a simple system as part of the Staff Self-service resource.

It was assured that case conferences were held with departments and the human resources services to discuss cases of long-term absences in order to ascertain methods of supporting staff back to work.

It was confirmed that an independent audit had been carried out in 2022/23 on the Council's pay and salary structure. It was concluded that the Council's pay systems dealt equally with salaries.

Attention was drawn to the fact that matters included within the report were long-term challenges and, as a result, they were matters that were discussed annually. It was detailed that the main challenges facing the Council as an employer had to be included, namely:

- Planning the workforce for the future;
- Continuing to promote and support the physical and mental well-being of our workforce;
- Establishing a working for the future scheme.

10. ANNUAL REPORT OF HEALTH, SAFETY AND WELLBEING

The report was submitted by Cllr Menna Trenholme.

DECISION

The report was accepted and the Cabinet's satisfaction with the report was stated.

DISCUSSION

It was reported that the impacts of Covid-19 were still seen within this field as the normal, day-to-day work had accumulated over the pandemic period. It was detailed that service officers had been focusing on government guidance during the Covid period, as well as supporting managers when adapting to the new normal with their teams.

It was elaborated that several Council employees continued to work from home and the Council had a duty of care to ensure that they did this safely. It was reported that 2063 questionnaires had been circulated to the workforce to assess their workstations. It was confirmed that 73% of the workforce had responded to the questionnaires leading to 239 further assessments by the service.

It was reminded that there was a legal requirement to report accidents that met RIDDOR regulations (Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013) to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

It was confirmed that there was no need to report on Covid cases and it was noted that the numbers reported under the RIDDOR system had reduced slightly lower than what had been seen in 2019.

It was stated that the levels of accidents were similar to pre-pandemic levels. It was noted that trends in terms of pattern remained internally within the Council and on a national level as manual handling and slipping and tripping were the two main causes of accidents. It was detailed that other cases of accidents varied from specific health conditions caused by the work, attacks and vehicle accidents.

It was reported that HSE had undertaken inspection visits with the Council during the past year. It was noted that they had visited two schools in the county for asbestos control as well as a visit to the Coed Ffridd Arw site in Dolgellau on waste management matters. It was confirmed that the result of these visits meant that inspectors were satisfied but the Council received a follow-up letter on minor issues which had involved an intervention fee of approximately £600. It was assured that HSE recommendations had been shared with the Property service to ensure that other schools in the county complied and to prevent similar fees.

It was explained that a number of training courses had been held by the service. It was noted that these included a Safe Leadership course for the Senior Management Team to aim towards integrating the health, safety and well-being industry into all aspects of the Council. It was detailed that Health, Safety and Well-being training had been held as well as IAct courses to assist managers to deal with mental health matters. It was explained that 93 managers had taken advantage of this training so far and that the department had received positive feedback about its content. It was mentioned that the department gathered data to see how many managers were yet to complete the training.

It was confirmed that a Health Surveillance programme within occupational health services had restarted, in accordance with statutory requirements.

Attention was drawn to the number of referrals that had reached the service over the past five years. It was reported that the number of referrals had increased in November 2022 and March 2023. It was confirmed that mental health and musculo-skeletal issues continued to be the main causes of sickness absences within the Council workforce. It was considered that these were the main causes due to public awareness of the issues and what the Council had available for its staff to deal with these issues, if they dealt with them. It was also noted that the fact the Health Board was currently dealing with problems that there was a possibility for staff to refer to the Council for support as it was quicker. It was confirmed that this created challenges within the service and that intense intervention was required.

11. CABINET MEMBER FOR EDUCATION PERFORMANCE REPORT

The report was submitted by Cllr Beca Brown.

DECISION

The information in the report was accepted and noted.

DISCUSSION

The county's students were congratulated on their examination results this year following a very challenging academic period during Covid. Gratitude was expressed to the youth service for its work, especially to Andrew Owen, Youth Support Worker, who had recently received an excellence award as an Exceptional Youth Worker.

Reference was made to a positive report recently received from ESTYN following an inspection. It was detailed that observations about the immersion system and the Welsh language were very promising. Nevertheless, it was noted that challenges

remained with pupils' attendance as rates had been lower than desired since the pandemic. It was confirmed that the department had a number of programmes to meet this challenge. It was noted that no long-term plans had currently been announced by the Welsh Government but it was recognised that attendance was a priority for the authority, which was supported by marketing the importance of attending school every day and attempting to not go on holiday during the academic term.

It was reported that the department focused on matters relating to well-being, as well-being matters were a significant factor in reasons why pupils did not attend school. It was detailed that work was being undertaken to research the costs of taking children to school through questionnaires to see the full and hidden costs, of which the department were unaware, as this affected the well-being of families.

It was noted that work was being completed in the field of equality to ensure that everyone was happy to go to school and were respected for being themselves.

Attention was drawn to several other matters that had recently been achieved by the department such as the work of modernising education and the free school meals scheme.

The Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee that had been conducting the Gwynedd Category 3 Secondary Schools Scrutiny Investigation was thanked and it was noted that recommendations deriving from the investigation would be submitted to the Cabinet in due course.

Best wishes were extended to Garem Jackson who had recently resigned from his role as the Head of Education Department. He was thanked for his work and commitment to the department and he was wished all the best for the future.

12. PERFORMANCE REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE

The report was submitted by Cllr Ioan Thomas.

DECISION

The information in the report was accepted and noted.

DISCUSSION

It was explained that the report was slightly dated as the performance challenge meeting had been held since July.

It was confirmed that Cyngor Gwynedd had realised over £39.1m in savings schemes since 2015/16. It was detailed that a formal review of Council departments' budgetary position in 2023/24 would be undertaken at the end of August 2023 and a report from that review was on the agenda of the Governance and Audit Committee on 12 October 2023.

Attention was drawn to the 2023-28 Digital Plan as several developments had taken place as part of the 2023-28 Cyngor Gwynedd Plan. It was confirmed that a further

report on the Digital Plan would be submitted to the Cabinet on 7 November 2023 and that the matter had already been scrutinised by the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee in September. The observations of that committee would be incorporated in the version that would be submitted to the Cabinet.

Members were reminded that the Department was responsible for operating the system of paying invoices submitted to the Council. It was explained that invoices were arranged to be paid as soon as possible, rather than using a 30 day system. The performance of the Department in the period up to the end of June was to pay local invoices within 16 days and any other invoice within 26 days. It was emphasised that this field received regular attention as part of the Department's performance challenge meetings and it was a key delivery measure.

An update was shared about the performance of some of the department's services, which included:

- Digital Learning Service (which was under the Council's control since the Cynnal company ended). It was noted that the team's capacity to support schools had been lower than expected in the period in question due to staff absences but it was expected for this to improve over the next few months. It was recognised that the department had been dealing with the challenges of attracting applicants to the Council's information technology posts, due to their specialist nature, but that the situation had now been resolved.
- Investment and Treasury Management: It was confirmed that the performance of the Gwynedd Pension Fund was within the highest quarter of local government pension funds in the United Kingdom. Based on a three-year performance, it was noted that the Fund was in the 3rd position out of nearly 100 funds and had been in the 7th position for over 5 years. It was confirmed that this showed that the performance of the Fund had been very strong.
- Pensions Service: It was reported that the service had visited the Pensions Service stand at the National Eisteddfod this year and a large number of people had taken advantage of the opportunity to understand their pension and receive support.
- Payroll Service: It was acknowledged that there had been a number of challenges, which included dealing with unconsolidated payments to teachers. Due to a lack of guidance from the Welsh Government, salaries had to be calculated individually and fed into the payroll system. The officers were thanked for their work and to ensure that there was no delay in Council staff payments.
- Taxation Service: It was confirmed that telephone lines were now open until 5pm. Members were reminded that telephone lines had been closing at 2pm in the past as a result of staff capacity. It was hoped that this would increase the quality of the service.
- Insurance and Risk Management Service: There had been a concern that reports from Council departments did not reach the service on time, and without sufficient details included in them, which prevented the service from operating effectively. It was considered that this process needed to be amended to improve the situation.
- Finance and Accounting/Payments Service: It was confirmed that six full sets of accounts had been prepared and Audit Wales would report back on these in

November. Gratitude was expressed to the department's staff who had been interviewed as part of the ESTYN inspection.

It was confirmed that the Department had delivered all its savings schemes for the period between 2015/16 and 2022/23.

It was noted that one savings scheme remained in the 2022/23 programme, namely 'Attract additional income via an Internal Collection Agency'. It was recognised that this scheme would not realise its savings target of £25,000, therefore, the Department was continuing to look for an alternative scheme.

The meeting commenced at 1.00pm and concluded at 2.50pm

CHAIR