
THE CABINET 20/02/24

Present-

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

Also present-

Dafydd Gibbard (Chief Executive), Huw Dylan Owen (Statutory Director of Social Services), Geraint Owen (Corporate Director), Iwan Evans (Head of Legal Services), Dewi Aeron Morgan (Head of Finance Department) and Annes Sion (Democracy Team Leader).

- Item 7: Gareth Jones (Assistant Head of Environment Department) and Heledd Fflur Jones (Planning Policy Team Leader)
- Item 8: Carys Fôn Williams (Head of Housing and Property Department)
- Item 9: Steffan Jones (Head of Highways, Engineering and Gwynedd Consultancy Department) and Rob Williams (Water and Environment Service Manager)
- Item 11: Dewi Wyn Jones (The Council's Business Support Service Manager)
- Item 13: Ffion Madog Evans (Assistant Head - Finance Department)
- Item 14: Sioned Williams (Head of Economy and Community Department)
- Item 15: Catrin Love (Assistant Head of Corporate Support Department)

1. APOLOGIES

The Cabinet Members and Officers were welcomed to the meeting.

An apology was received from Cllr Dafydd Meurig.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

There were no declarations of personal interest.

3. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

There were no matters arising from overview and scrutiny.

5. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 23 JANUARY 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 January 2024 were accepted as a true record.

6. SAFEGUARDING POLICY REVIEW

The report was submitted by Cllr. Menna Trenholme.

DECISION

To adopt the amended 'Policy and Guidelines for Safeguarding Children and Adults who are at risk of abuse and neglect' together with the Terms of Reference for the Safeguarding Strategic Panel.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted asking the Cabinet to adopt a revised Policy and guidance for safeguarding children and adults who are at risk of abuse and neglect along with the terms of reference for the Safeguarding Strategic Panel. It was noted that the policy sets out how the Council intends to fulfil its statutory responsibilities for safeguarding children and adults who are at risk in accordance with the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. It was explained that as the current version was an adaptation of a policy created in 2013, it was timely to prepare a new policy rather than update the document in accordance with the usual procedure.

It was highlighted that a workshop had been held in October, attended by representation of officers across the Council to discuss the new Policy and strengthen reporting and monitoring arrangements. The next steps were set out, namely that a copy would be submitted before the Full Council followed by further work to promote the revised Policy amongst all Council staff.

The Corporate Director added that the policy needed to be amended and now highlighted the difference between safeguarding and protection, and the definitions had been set out in the policy. It was noted that changes had been made to the Panel's Terms of Reference highlighting the role and membership.

Observations arising from the discussion

- The new policy was welcomed and it was stressed that it was vital that people were aware that everyone within the Council had a role to ensure the safety of children and adults who were at risk.
- The importance of the policy being submitted before the Full Council was noted, in order to highlight the importance of the role that Councillors had.

7. DELIVERY AGREEMENT, LOCAL DEVELOPMENT - RESPONSE TO THE PUBLIC CONSULTATION PERIOD

The report was submitted by Cllr. Dyfrig Siencyn

DECISION

The Cabinet agreed to:

- i. Present the amended Draft Delivery Agreement to the Full Council for approval.
- ii. Delegate the right to the Head of Department to make editorial changes for accuracy as required.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted stating that preparing and receiving approval of the Delivery Agreement was the statutory first step associated with the process of preparing a new Local Development Plan. It was noted that the Cabinet had decided to go to public consultation in October and it was noted that the report set out the results of this consultation period. It was noted that 14 individuals / organisations had responded to the consultation with a total of 37 comments.

It was made clear that there were no substantive issues arising from the comments received, and that some of the comments and suggestions had been in relation to how to amend the document and it was noted that the amendments added value and clarity to the Delivery Agreement.

It was stated that the Delivery Agreement had been submitted to the Planning Policy Working Group meeting in January. It was highlighted that the working group had enquired whether the soundness tests could be amended to consider the language. It was noted that there was no need as the requirement was addressed in the tests in their present form and by statutory requirements placed on the Council. It was explained that the Delivery Agreement would now go to the Full Council in March and it would then be possible to begin the process of formally preparing a Local Development Plan.

Observations arising from the discussion

- It was noted that response numbers appeared low but the number of respondents highlighted this step – which was to set up the process rather than develop the policy itself.

8. WELSH GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION: 'WHITE PAPER ON ENDING HOMELESSNESS IN WALES'

The report was submitted by Cllr. Craig ab Iago

DECISION

The content of the draft response to the Government's consultation on ending homelessness in Wales was approved.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted stating that everyone wanted to end homelessness. But it was highlighted that, to put an end to it, it would need to be split into two parts, namely, how to deal with homelessness and what caused homelessness.

So, while this document was ambitious it was noted that the Westminster Government had increased homelessness through Brexit, a period of austerity and consequently increased poverty and homelessness. There was agreement on how to deal with the problem but it was highlighted that the root of the problem needed to be dealt with.

The Head of Housing and Property Department added that the Welsh Government had launched this consultation back in October, with a view to passing the act before the end of this Parliamentary term in 2026. It was noted that, generally, the department was happy with the recommendations but that implementation was going to be difficult as a result of the need for additional resources. The need to get the approval of the Cabinet as a result of the potential impact this white paper could have on the Council's resources and budgets was highlighted.

Observations arising from the discussion

- Thanks were given for Council's responses indicating concern about the removal of the local connection element.
- It was expressed that more work needed to be done to look at the reasons for homelessness, and that taking action was concerning particularly as a result of the current financial situation and what the Council would be facing over the next few years.

9. COLLABORATION PLAN APPROVAL (WALES COASTAL MONITORING CENTRE)

The report was submitted by Cllr. Berwyn Parry Jones

DECISION

The Cabinet agreed to:

- i. Give Gwynedd approval to continue to work with and devote resources to the Wales Coastal Monitoring Centre.
- ii. Delegate the authority to the Head of the Highways, Engineering and YGC Department in consultation with the Head of the Legal Department to approve the Collaboration Agreement.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted stating that the report asked to formalise the system that was already in place currently. It was noted that the collaboration plan would be an opportunity to attract income to Gwynedd Consultancy (YGC) into the future as there would be no need to compete for work.

The Head of Highways, Engineering and Gwynedd Consultancy Department added that the go-ahead had been received by the Welsh Government to re-establish the Wales Coastal Monitoring Centre back in 2018. It was noted that the Council had been part of the Centre since 2018, and it was noted that if YGC

did not need to compete for the work it would draw on expertise within the Council. It was explained that the data being collected is part of a long-term plan that had been feeding into national strategies. It was reiterated that the centre had a vital role in climate change plans.

10. REFORMING THE COUNCIL TAX REGIME - WELSH GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION: FAIRER COUNCIL TAX: STAGE 2

The report was submitted by Cllr. Ioan Thomas.

DECISION

The content of the draft response to the Government's consultation on reforming Council Tax in Wales was approved.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted noting that the Welsh Government had submitted the paper to a consultation setting out options for how far and how quickly there would be change in terms of Council tax reform. It was noted in terms of the pace of change that it ranged from completion by April 2025 to April 2028, and that how far the reform would go varied from very small scale to a wider reform.

It was highlighted on average that the price of properties in Wales had increased by around 150% between 2003 and 2022, however the increase across Wales had not been consistent. It was explained that Gwynedd had seen the 7th highest increase throughout Wales during the period, and as a result that an above average number could move up at least one band in Gwynedd.

It was explained that it appeared that more Gwynedd taxpayers would lose than would gain under any of the reforms proposed, it was noted in general that there was a strong possibility that around 40% of the people of Gwynedd would pay a few hundred pounds more in taxes as a result of the reforms. It was expressed that, in terms of reform, it could be argued that house prices had increased in some areas but individuals' salaries had not, which could lead to many people being unable to afford to pay their Council Tax bill.

Observations arising from the discussion

- It was noted that option 3 which was a wider reform led to the creation of a fairer system, with more bands available.
- It was highlighted that any overall increase in the Council's taxation base would mean a reduction in the grant received from the Government. However, it was stressed that the reforms were not intended to raise more tax as the national total would remain the same, but would be fairer.

11. CYNGOR GWYNEDD PLAN 2023 - 2028 - 2024/25 REVIEW

The report was submitted by Cllr. Dyfrig Siencyn

DECISION

The Cabinet approved the Cyngor Gwynedd Plan 2023-2028 – 2024/25 Review (the Plan) to be submitted to Council on 7 March 2024.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted stating that there was a requirement to undertake a review of the Cyngor Gwynedd Plan even though it had only been a year since it had been passed. It was noted that the report highlighted the amendments that can be seen.

The Council's Business Support Service Manager highlighted that a light review had been carried out to ensure the plan remained up to date. It was emphasised that the priority areas, which aligned with the well-being objectives as a result of the act and the Council's list of ambitions remained as they were.

It was highlighted that adaptations had been made to projects such as Free School Meals in the Education Department section as this scheme was now part of the day-to-day work of the department. Another scheme taken out was reviewing the Language Policy as it had been accepted by Full Council at its meeting before Christmas. It was noted that work had been undertaken to repackage the Adults Care project to simplify the description and to combine projects.

Observations arising from the discussion

- It was noted that modifying and reviewing the document highlighted that this was a live document and had been a very good exercise in seeing what had been achieved.
- It was emphasised that no change had been made to the objectives of the repackaged schemes in the Adults department, but rather made it easier to be able to create milestones and as a result it would be possible to report on those.

12. 2024/25 SAVINGS PLAN

The report was presented by Dafydd Gibbard.

DECISION

The Cabinet agreed to:

- a) Approve the savings and cuts listed in Appendix A (£4.4M) to be used as a contribution towards our 2024/25 financial deficit, and commission the Departments to move forward to implement the plans taking note of the issues highlighted in the report.

- b) Set a balanced budget in 2024/25, to approve the value of the cuts and savings listed in Appendix B (£0.8M) and note that further steps will be required before a final decision can be reached to implement them, as outlined in 2.13, and use reserves to bridge the savings that could not be realised in 24/25.
- c) Make provision of £0.52M to meet the risk level involved in realising this cuts plan.
- d) Delegate the right to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member for Finance, to make adjustments to this Savings Plan as the maturity of the schemes listed in Appendix A and B develops, within the financial totals.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted with sadness that it was now normal to have to discuss an item about savings before it was possible to set the budget. It was stressed that as a result of the financial crisis facing local authorities, it was an essential item. It explained that the Council would receive an increase of 2.3% from the Local Government Grant, but that it was significantly below the level of inflation and below what would be needed to maintain the existing level of services. It was explained as a result the Council would need to cope with a funding deficit of almost £15m.

It was expressed that in order to do this the budget would need to include a combination of having to increase Council tax and delivering budget cuts across the Council. It was explained that, in October, workshops had been held for all elected members to prioritise savings plans for 2024/25. It was noted that the bids had a total value of approximately £8m. An impact assessment had been carried out on each proposal together with a legal and financial assessment to ensure they were schemes that were deliverable.

The conclusions of the workshops had been that around £5m of schemes could be implemented, and the list of cuts and savings had been presented in two parts. It was explained that list A contained plans that could be moved forward to be implemented by the Department. The schemes were highlighted under the headings such as efficiencies, increasing income and using other sources for funding.

It was noted that list B reflected schemes that were subject to statutory action or further decisions before they could be confirmed. It was highlighted that the Governance and Audit Committee had scrutinised the process, but raised concern about the level of reserve for savings schemes as it had been reduced from 20% to 10%. Despite this, it was noted that they were satisfied and that the process had been comprehensive and thorough.

It was explained that the Government grant would be reducing over the coming years, and a new round of savings would need to be initiated immediately, looking at how to cope and possibly re-defining what the Council would be able to offer.

Observations arising from the discussion

- Attention was drawn to the equality impact assessment and noted that it looked at the savings as a whole. It was suggested that a further report may be needed to make sure the schemes created them as vulnerable groups would be hit.

13. BUDGET 2024/25

The report was submitted by Cllr. Ioan Thomas

DECISION

- 1) To set a budget of £330,590,040 and any additional funding received in the final settlement for 2024/25, to be funded by £232,092,110, of government grant and any increase in the grant received in the final settlement, and £98,497,930 of Council Tax income (which is an increase of 9.54%).
- 2) To establish a capital programme of £85,224,800 in 2024/25 to be funded from the sources set out in Appendix 4 of the report.
- 3) That the final additional Government Grant received above £232,092,110 - estimated to be approximately £969,000 - be used to reduce the use of £2m shortfall that has not been met in our financial schemes in 2024/25 and must be bridged from funds for this year as referred to in paragraph 5.4.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted stating that the Minister for Finance and Local Government had pledged additional funding to Welsh authorities as a result of additional funding recently allocated to English councils. It was estimated that the Council would receive an additional figure in the region of £969,000. In addition, it was noted that the department had informed them at the end of the previous week of certain grants that would be transferred to the settlement, and which would also have an impact on the final figures. It explained that the figures would be finalized by the Full Council meeting on March 7.

It was noted that the resolution sought was to recommend to the Council at its meeting on 7 March 2024 that a budget of £331 million should be established together with any additional money received in the final settlement for 2024/25 to be funded through a Government Grant of £232 million adding any increase in grant received in the final settlement and £98 million of income from Council Tax (representing a 9.54% increase on individual dwelling tax). Also, establish an £85 million capital programme in 2024/25 to be funded from the sources set out in Appendix 4 to the report.

It was added that the estimated final additional Government Grant would be around £969k higher than what was in the draft settlement and additional funding (in the final grant above the draft settlement) would be used to reduce the use of £2m of the Council's reserves. It was emphasised that the budget was being

recommended at a time when Welsh local authorities were facing significant financial challenges. It was highlighted that the Council had received a grant increase for 2024/25 which was among the lowest in Wales. It was explained that this amount was not sufficient to meet inflation, let alone additional pressure on services.

A salary inflation provision of £15.1m was highlighted. It was expressed that this figure was in line with most other local authorities. It was noted that the Council had planned prudently in 2023/24 for a 6% increase, but the final agreement was higher, and therefore as a result salary inflation in the 2024/25 budget would include an element to correct this gap as well as taking into account notional inflation of 5% for the whole workforce. It was highlighted that the budget provided for other inflation of £6.8m, and it was explained that this was a net amount which included provision for a wide range of changes depending on the scale of inflation of particular areas, such as £4m in care.

It was noted that there was a requirement to recommend approval of £5.1m of bids for additional permanent resources brought in by the departments to meet inevitable pressures on their services. It was explained that the items had been thoroughly challenged before being recommended for Cabinet approval.

In summary, it was expressed that the Council's spending needs before taking out savings for 2024/25 were £340m, and that a grant from the Welsh Government was to be around £232m. This highlighted that a residual gap needed to be filled and the previous item highlighted the savings that would need to be made. It was noted that it would be necessary to recommend meeting the remaining gap through Council Tax, and to increase it by 9.54%.

The Head of Finance added that appendix 10 highlighted that risk assessments had been undertaken and that hard work had been done by the department to ensure that the estimates were robust. It was stressed that the year was going to be extremely challenging, and the biggest challenge would be to ensure that savings would be realised.

Observations arising from the discussion

- It was stressed that no Councillor wanted to raise Council tax but there was no other option available. It was noted that a number of individuals were willing to judge but without understanding how much of the Council worked, and that the money received was not sufficient.
- It was expressed that there were only two options for having a balanced budget namely to raise council tax or cut more services, it was reiterated that trying to get the balance here was very difficult.

14. PERFORMANCE REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR THE ECONOMY

The report was submitted by Cllr. Nia Jeffreys

DECISION

To accept and note the information in the report.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted, expressing pride in seeing progress with projects across the department, and the wide range of services the department offered. It was added that these services were vital to the people of Gwynedd and the staff were thanked for their work.

The Head of Department highlighted the department's main issues which included grants the Council offered to businesses across Gwynedd as part of the Council's priority - A Prosperous Gwynedd. It was explained that, through the ARFOR programme, the Welsh Government's Transforming Town Centres Fund and the UK Government's Shared Prosperity Fund that a package of different funds had been put in place. It was expressed that there had been a significant response to the funds with applications valued at £13.26m and the budget was only worth £3.46m. The department continued to work with the businesses that had been unsuccessful to offer further feedback and advice.

It was expressed that recovery continued for Byw'n Iach with the number of visits in December 2023 exceeding the December 2019 figure. It was explained that work continued to encourage the use of the centres and that they hoped to fully restore the situation. At the Maritime Service it was noted that upgrades to the Dinas Dinlle car park were ongoing and that they hoped it would be completed by March 2024. It was expressed that there had been a 4% increase in customer numbers and mooring agreements in the county's harbours and that the outlook for 2024 was very encouraging. However, it was highlighted that there had been a decrease in Pwllheli Marina figures as a result of an increase in the cost of living. Despite this, it was noted that the waiting list remained strong at present.

It was expressed that upgrades to the Lloyd George Museum were ongoing and would report further on the project in the future.

Observations arising from the discussion

- Attention was drawn to the Boardmaker Picture Communication Symbols scheme, a resource for families of children who were unable to communicate verbally, which was now available in three libraries in Gwynedd.

15. PERFORMANCE REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CORPORATE SUPPORT AND LEGAL SERVICES

The report was submitted by Cllr. Menna Trenholme

DECISION

To accept and note the information in the report.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted stating that she would start with the Corporate Support Department's performance report. It was noted that the report outlined what had happened so far against the promises of the Cyngor Gwynedd Plan. Attention was drawn to some schemes in particular, such as Women in Leadership. It was noted that over 40 women had now been following the developmental programme with 33% of attendees having accepted a senior position since completing the Programme. It was added that a pilot scheme was underway to avoid unconscious bias and ensure equality by submitting anonymous application forms for Team Leader level posts and above.

As part of the Council's Language programme it was highlighted that the Language Strategy had been adopted in December. It was noted that as a result of the further research on changing street names in two pilot areas, a number of complexities had been highlighted and therefore it had not been feasible to proceed with this aspect at present. As a result, it was explained that the service was focusing on the sign installation scheme on settlements, bridges and district boundaries and increase the visibility of the project.

It was highlighted that the department anticipated that it would be overspending by the end of the financial year. It was explained that there was a combination of reasons for the likely overspending, such as increased pressure on a particular budget, e.g. increased demand on counselling and not meeting the income target for a range of services.

In terms of the Legal Service it was noted that the Cabinet Member was pleased with the day-to-day performance of the department. It was emphasised that the recruitment position was now in a healthy place with staff appointed. It was explained in terms of Propriety that a programme of seminars would be held with bodies explaining the basics of decisions in public bodies together with the constitutional and regulatory framework.

It was noted that the department had been working to support the Returning Officer and the Election Registration Officer in order to respond to new constituency boundaries of UK elections, the Elections Act 2022 and prepare for the Welsh Parliament Electoral changes. It was explained that arrangements for elections were now in place with Conwy Council and Denbighshire Council where constituency boundaries crossed county boundaries.

Observations arising from the discussion

- It was noted that work had begun to resume seeking level 2 certification of the Disability Confident scheme, and that it was hoped that it would be completed by the end of March 2024. It was explained that the department was ambitious and keen to reach level 3.
- It was highlighted with Prosiect 15, which was part of the Promoting Use of the Welsh language scheme, that extremely good work had been done, and thanks were conveyed to the young person who had been developing and creating original Welsh language content for social media.
- It was noted that the Women in Leadership work was innovative and

mentioned often externally as well.

The meeting commenced at 1.00 pm and concluded at 3.05 pm

CHAIRMAN