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| Meeting: | Education & Economy Scrutiny Committee   |
| Date:    | 20 September 2018  |
| Title:   | <b>Gwynedd Council's activity in relation to Brexit</b>  |
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| Member:  | Councillor Dyfrig Siencyn<br>Leader of the Council (lead Member for Brexit)<br><br>Councillor Ioan Thomas<br>Cabinet Member for Economic Development |

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1. This report is presented at the request of the Scrutiny Committee to outline the Council's activity in response to the UK's decision to leave the European Union (Brexit).
- 1.2. There will be a presentation and an opportunity to discuss at the Committee meeting on 20 September. The information below is presented to summarise the current situation and to outline the Council's work to date in relation to Brexit. .

## 2. Background

- 2.1. On 23 June 2016 51.9% of the UK electorate voted to leave the European Union (58.1% of Gwynedd's voters were in favour of remaining in the Union).
- 2.2. On 29 March 2017 the Westminster Government formally notified the European Union of the UK's intention to leave the Union, triggering the procedure outlined in Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty. The UK will leave the Union on 29 March 2019.
- 2.3. Discussions between the UK Government and the European Union which aim to agree the arrangements once the UK leaves the Union are ongoing. If there is an agreement there will be a transition / implementation period of up to two years after the UK formally leaves the Union to establish and embed the new arrangements.
- 2.4. IF there is no agreement, with regard to trade, the relationship between the UK and the European Union will be governed by World Trade Organisation rules.

2.5. In parallel, the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 has been passed by Westminster. In essence the Act abolishes the European Union Act 1972 and transfers all European Union law to UK law post Brexit.

### 3. Preparing for Brexit.

3.1. Significant work is continuing on the European, UK and Wales levels to try and foresee the impact of Brexit and to prepare, including consideration of the implications if there is not an agreement between the UK and the EU (the No Deal scenario).

3.2. The Welsh Government's work is being led by the First Minister with support from a 'European Advisory Group' which includes representatives from a range of fields. There is also a specific 'Roundtable Group' (along with a number of sub-groups) which has been established by the Cabinet Secretary for the Environment and Rural Affairs for stakeholders from across the portfolio to discuss Brexit.

3.3. In relation to local government, the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) and the UK Local Government Association are active. The WLGA are a member of the European Advisory Group and the Cabinet Secretary for the Environment and Rural Affairs' Roundtable Group and a number of its sub-groups. The Association is also active in Brussels, London and Cardiff to ensure local government maintains its voice in the discussions.

3.4. Recently, the WLGA has secured funding to establish a 'Brexit Transition Support Programme for Welsh Local Authorities'. Activities under the support programme will include the organisation of events (national and regional), the production of toolkits and other resources, and the commissioning of research, on issues where Brexit will have a significant impact for local government.

### 4. Gwynedd Council activity in relation to Brexit

4.1. As the UK has been a member of the European Union for over forty years, European policies, rules and legislation have been widely integrated into the daily activities of Gwynedd's inhabitants and organisations, from conserving the environment to human rights and from the economy to trading standards.

4.2. Since the referendum, the Council has been maintaining an overview of developments associated with Brexit and making the most of every opportunity to influence on behalf of the needs of Gwynedd's residents and businesses and to raise awareness of the County's particular circumstances and needs. To this end, an informal group which meets as required has been established including the Leader of the Council, the Deputy Leader and the Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Senior Officers.

- 4.3. In terms of influencing and lobbying, the Council works closely with the WLGA. The Council provides information and Gwynedd Council's opinion in writing and via meetings and events which, in turn, is fed into their discussions. In this, the Council Leader's role as the Association's Joint Spokesperson on Rural Affairs is invaluable.
- 4.4. The Council also takes advantage of every opportunity to influence directly by responding to consultations and calls for evidence, etc.; including the UK Government's consultation on the future of farming and the Welsh Government's consultation on the future of investment to support economic development post Brexit.
- 4.5. As Brexit nears, some practical needs are also coming to the fore and discussions within specific fields commencing, again working primarily with the WLGA. The Corporate Support Department is already researching into the number of EU citizens from other countries which are employed by the Council and events focused on the workforce, the environment and public protection have been arranged by the WLGA to bring relevant officers together
- 4.6. In relation to reducing and mitigating the impact of Brexit on Gwynedd businesses and the local economy, we continue to be an energetic partner in the North Wales Economic Ambition Board. Implementing the Board's programmes to achieve inclusive growth and develop the local economy will be critical in supporting businesses to overcome the impact of leaving the single market.

## 5. Conclusions

- 5.1. It is unlikely that there will be certainty regarding an agreement between the UK Government and the EU before the end of the year; and, despite all the discussion and forecasting, the true impact implications of Brexit won't be known for some time.
- 5.2. In this regard, the limitations of the Council's influence and our ability to prepare must be recognised and that it is through contributing positively to the WLGA and North Wales Economic Ambition Boards' fora Gwynedd Council can maximise its influence. However, given the significance of Brexit we would be grateful of the opportunity to discuss and receive the comments of the Scrutiny Committee's Members.