

GWYNEDD COUNCIL CABINET



Report to a meeting of the Gwynedd Council Cabinet

Date of meeting: 4 October 2022

Cabinet Member: Councillor Dyfrig Siencyn and Councillor Nia Jeffreys

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Subject: PERFORMANCE CHALLENGE REPORT - CABINET MEMBERS FOR ECONOMY AND COMMUNITY

THE DECISION SOUGHT

To accept and note the information in the report.

THE REASON WHY A DECISION IS NEEDED

In order to ensure effective performance management

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update our fellow members on developments in the fields within our remit as Cabinet Members for Economy and Community. This includes outlining the latest developments against pledges within the 2018-2023 Gwynedd Council Plan; the progress of performance measures; and the latest on the savings and cuts plans.

2. PROJECTS of the GWYNEDD COUNCIL PLAN 2018-2023 (Improvement Priorities)

Project 1: Growth Vision for North Wales

2.1 Officers and Members continue to make significant contributions to the work of the Economic Ambition Board to ensure that it delivers. There is a [Link here](#) to a quarterly report that contains further details about progress on the various growth projects at the most recent reporting point to Members. Since March, significant progress has been seen in the Bangor University Digital Signal Processing Centre scheme. The scheme was officially launched by the First Minister of Wales, Mark Drakeford MS, on 21 July 2022 and due to initial investment, 13 research jobs in Bangor have benefited and four new jobs have been created.



Project 2: Create High Value Jobs

- 2.2 The programme includes a range of activities to promote opportunities to create work that pays well and preparing Gwynedd school pupils to take advantage of the opportunities.
- 2.3 The North STEM scheme, which prepares our young people to take advantage of jobs in scientific, technological and engineering fields, has ensured an extension to its operation period until mid-2023. Among recent highlights, a week of activities under the 'Merched Medrus' banner was held for pupils in the Caernarfon catchment area and a specific workshop for Year 9 pupils in Ysgol Uwchradd Tywyn.
- 2.4 The work of protecting and creating new jobs on the Trawsfynydd and Llanbedr site has also continued. Specifically, we are pleased to report that a bid to improve access to the Llanbedr airfield has been submitted to the UK Government, a development that is crucial to the site's development and to improve the quality of life of residents in the village of Llanbedr.
- 2.5 The team has also developed and submitted an application for funding from the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority with the aim of attracting a £450,000 investment to Gwynedd to support local businesses to recover, for our residents to secure employment and to pave the way to ensure that Gwynedd residents and businesses benefit from proposed investments in Trawsfynydd and Llanbedr.
- 2.6 Over the past few months, the resources of this project team have also been directed to support efforts to draw up a system and proposals for a UK Shared Prosperity Fund investment for Gwynedd and North Wales. The work will lead to a substantial investment in Gwynedd, but it must be noted that substantial work needs to be done in the short-term to establish governance, management and administration arrangements.

Project 3: Arloesi Gwynedd Wledig

- 2.7 The programme is working to strengthen the foundations of the rural economy through a range of interventions, including developing the county's digital infrastructure, helping rural businesses to establish and grow, and support more innovation in rural Gwynedd.
- 2.8 We are pleased to see that the [Digital Platform](#) scheme, which will offer additional support for businesses in the county to make good use of technology, is now operational. It is anticipated that over fifty local businesses will benefit from the scheme over the next year, by receiving practical support to realise their aspirations.
- 2.9 The project team has also submitted a series of applications recently to the Welsh Government for resources to support the circular economy in Gwynedd, which will bring economic and environmental advantages to the county. If successful, the applications will secure a £1.7M investment for a selection of activities, which include supporting the Adra Cyf. De-carbonisation Hub in Penygroes and further support for the network of maker space - under the Ffiws banner - that was established across Gwynedd to increase the access of residents and businesses to equipment.
- 2.10 Other recent highlights include:



- Placing young people over the summer with local businesses to support them to reduce their carbon footprint.
 - Introducing a support programme to enable local businesses to use data to understand the needs of their customers and the use patterns of our towns.
 - Offering an opportunity for local businesses to trial the offer of meals on wheels using the trial kitchen located in Botwnnog.
 - Holding sessions with primary school children at the Ffiws space in Porthmadog to inspire them about the use of technology.
 - Ensuring broadband connection for Bardsey Island residents.
- 2.11 Finally, in terms of the ARFOR programme, we are pleased to report that a full proposal has now been submitted to the Welsh Government. Initial feedback to the proposal has been favourable and it is anticipated that a formal proposal will soon be accepted.

Project 4: Promotion of Town Centres

- 2.12 During the past year, new arrangements were established to target the Welsh Government's Transforming Towns funds in order to develop and implement a range of town centre regeneration projects. By the end of March, it was managed to claim grants worth £2m for projects in Gwynedd and implementation and monitoring work continues.
- 2.13 During Q1 of 2022/23, priority was given to preparing financial applications for the UK Government's Levelling Up Fund. An application was developed and submitted for Bangor city centre, incorporating developments such as a Health and Well-being Centre, Hirael Bay Bank Improvements and green links and the development of a North Wales Medical School (Phase 1). The application pack includes an investment of approximately £40m, and decisions on Levelling Up Fund applications are expected in the autumn.
- 2.14 A Cross-departmental Empty Property Group has been established, which brings together different Services that deal with empty properties. An Action Plan has been prepared, along with an empty properties priority list. The Group is also developing a spectrum of operational interventions - which include information and advice, provision of technical information, financial support (grants and loans, enforcement action threat, debt recovery and formal enforcement cases).

Project 5: Implementing the Gwynedd Slate Heritage

- 2.15 Over a year has now passed since Gwynedd Council and its partners secured the Slate Landscape of North-west Wales World Heritage Site designation. The priority for the Council and its partners now is to ensure the most benefits for communities and businesses and inclusive control of the World Heritage Site. Over the past few months, a new implementation structure has been agreed and put into place so that every partner, community and wider stakeholder contributes towards the implementation and development of our Site.
- 2.16 Although activities of the LleCHI project have now come to an end, a subsequent application has been approved by the Heritage Lottery Fund worth £128,000, which will engage and collaborate with communities of the designation and our stakeholders in order to develop a subsequent application valued at over £1m. The aim of the second part of our application, if successful, will be to develop the ownership of communities of their heritage, to promote the pride and culture of our slate areas and to interpret our heritage for all. The Council looks



forward to this developing period in order to create a project that will contribute towards the pride of an area and the contribution of our area to the world.

- 2.17 The Council managed to secure funding of £150,000 via Cadw, the Welsh Government to implement the first steps of our Interpretation Strategy. We have been engaging with stakeholders and landowners when developing new interpretation panels that will be installed over the next few months in order to create a unified story for our slate industry.
- 2.18 The Council has also submitted an application to the Welsh Government's Levelling Up Fund in August and a decision on the application is expected in the autumn. This application focuses on three areas of the Site - Bethesda, Parc Padarn and Blaenau Ffestiniog - and it will improve links between the communities and the quarries, improve interpretation and ownership and lead to urban improvements. This application was valued at £26m.
- 2.19 Supplementary Planning Guidance has been approved by the Council and Snowdonia National Park in order to ensure sustainable development of the site in future. Design Guidance has also been issued in order to encourage communities and owners of historical features to protect and safeguard the historical features and character of our local towns and villages.

Project 6: Tourism - Forming a Sustainable Tourism Plan

- 2.20 Work has been ongoing for many years now to establish a Sustainable Visitor Economy Plan for Gwynedd and Snowdonia. We have scrutinised good practice from other areas in Europe and internationally in their Sustainable Visitor Economy Plans, including how to measure impact. We also received guidance from international experts in sustainable tourism.

Following a large number of consultation and engagement sessions with stakeholders, councillors, local members, businesses and communities, the following was achieved:

- Reached over 250 representatives
 - Attracted over 1,500 observations by attendees
 - Engaged with 14 areas of Gwynedd and Snowdonia National Park
 - Reached over 100 public organisations, bodies or individual businesses
 - Over 4,490 received information and an invitation to contribute at the events via the Gwynedd Council Business Bulletin
- 2.21 An implementation structure has now been formed between the Council and Snowdonia National Park in order to develop and implement the Sustainable Visitor Economy Plan. This includes a Partnership Board and Action Group. A Task and Finish Group was also established with key stakeholders from the tourism sector, Gwynedd communities and the public sector and education in order to receive observations on the Plan's progress. Conwy Council also attends our meetings. A Strategic Plan, Implementation Plan and draft Impact Indicators are all now in place.
 - 2.22 It is intended to submit all documents to the Cabinet for a decision during winter 2022 in order to formally launch the Plan in spring 2023. No other area in Wales is developing a Plan to the same extent as the one undertaken in Gwynedd and Snowdonia and we are confident that our new Plan will break new ground to support a sustainable visitor economy.



Project 7: Businesses Receiving Support to Prosper

- 2.23 The uncertainty for Gwynedd businesses is intensifying. On top of the challenge to recover after the pandemic and cope with the side-effects of Brexit, they now face the impact of inflation with the cost of their overheads and their supplies substantially increasing at a time when customers are cutting their spending. With the threat of recession on the horizon, our local enterprises need to be supported more than ever.
- 2.24 In response, the Council has increased its resources to help local enterprises by employing two additional officers within the Business Support team.
- 2.25 We are maintaining our focus on ensuring that our businesses have the information they need and are aware of the support available from the Council and other organisations. We have also completed an exercise to identify the needs of our businesses today and for the future and to draw up a framework for us to receive their feedback continuously in order to identify problems and respond quickly.
- 2.26 We are also planning to secure funding from external sources such as the UK's Shared Prosperity Fund and the ARFOR programme to help our businesses to overcome and develop in future.

Project 8: Gwynedd Residents Playing a Full Part in the World of Work

- 2.27 It was previously reported that employers reported that they were finding it difficult to recruit sufficient staff; these problems continue and intensify across sectors in the county.
- 2.28 In response, the Council's Gwaith Gwynedd team has deepened its efforts to support businesses by promoting opportunities and holding a series of job fairs across the county to facilitate the process of bringing together employers and job-seeking individuals.
- 2.29 Alongside this, a substantial effort is made by Gwaith Gwynedd to target working-age individuals who are idle but not looking for employment and to attract them back to the workforce. This work is intense and involves working with individuals over a period of time to resolve a selection of challenges that prevent them from working. However, in the period between April and August 2022, 61 Gwynedd residents had been supported to secure jobs from the Gwaith Gwynedd team.

Project 9: Forming a Regeneration Plan for our Areas

- 2.30 The work of developing a new Regeneration Framework for Gwynedd continues. Between February and July this year, the Council arranged a programme of 'Our Area 2035' engagement sessions to seek the opinions of residents on local priorities. Over 3,600 questionnaires were received, which have been recorded and analysed. Reports for each of the 13 local regeneration areas have been prepared in order to summarise the observations received.
- 2.31 The next step of the process will involve a series of events in each area in order to report back, and to commence the work of drawing up local action plans. Considerable work has been undertaken to prepare for these events, which will be held across the county in September and October.



3. PERFORMANCE

- 3.1 The Department is in the process of reviewing its performance measures with new arrangements for collecting data in place. When reviewing the Department's Performance Dashboard, it is clear that there is an increase in the number of service users compared to 2020/21, but numbers continue to follow a very different pattern to the pre-COVID situation. I would like to draw attention to two specific service fields:

Leisure Resources - Byw'n Iach Company

Quarter 1 2021/22 Performance: 54,757

Quarter 1 2022/23 Performance: 187,495

- 3.2 You will note that the total number of visits in Quarter 1 2022/23 is 132,738 higher than 2021/22. The number of visits is substantially higher as there were COVID restrictions in quarter 1 2021/22. However, compared to a normal pre-COVID year, the number of visits is slightly lower. This was to be expected due to losses suffered in the number of individuals paying for Direct Debit packages during the lockdown periods.
- 3.3 It is anticipated that second quarter data will show that the company is now operating on pre-pandemic levels, although the financial situation will remain vulnerable in light of substantial increases in costs and users' cost of living. As a result, we are eager to hold a more detailed discussion with the Cabinet in the next few weeks about the position of the Byw'n Iach Company and their agreement to provide services for Gwynedd Council from 2023/24 onwards.

Maritime Service - Use of Hafan and Harbours

Number of Hafan, Pwllheli customers: 406

Number of other harbours' customers: 372

- 3.4 The summer season has again been very busy along the Gwynedd coast. Hafan Pwllheli is full with 406 annual customers. There was also a total of 372 annual customers at the Porthmadog, Pwllheli, Barmouth, Aberdyfi and Victoria Dock harbours. In addition, 2,380 had registered power boats / personal watercrafts this year compared to 2,434 last year.
- 3.5 No Blue Flag beach awards were obtained this year due to the change in requirements. Nevertheless, very busy periods were seen on our beaches. A new beach safety campaign was arranged by the Service in order to promote safety on the beach. The Service will undertake a review of this year's arrangements in the autumn, and it is very encouraging to report that there were no fatalities on our beaches this year.

4. THE SAVINGS POSITION

- 4.1 The Department has a new plan which was supposed to generate savings in 2022/23, namely the £70,000 Neuadd Dwyfor remodelling scheme. The COVID-19 crisis led to a delay in realising the development work in the Neuadd. With the restoration work continuing, it is difficult at present to see the long-term impact on the numbers visiting the Neuadd. It is clear that the crisis and increase in living costs, along with other factors such as the new form of watching films, with a large number of people awaiting the release of films on the internet/television, raises a concern in terms of the ability to fully implement the savings.



- 4.2 There are 3 schemes that have continued from previous years (a total of £105,000), with all 3 subject to permission to raise fees as part of the parking review. Arrangements are in place by the Environment Department to carry out the review and therefore the timetable to realise the savings is dependent on this work. The timetable is currently unknown.

5. NEXT STEPS AND TIMETABLE

- 5.1 We will continue to monitor the performance of the various services on a monthly basis and a special meeting of the Department's Management Team has been arranged for 21 October where representatives from the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee will be in attendance.

VIEWS OF THE STATUTORY OFFICERS

The Monitoring Officer:

No observations to add in relation to propriety

Head of Finance Department:

"I am satisfied that the report is a fair reflection of the financial situation of the Economy and Community Department."

