

THE CABINET 27/09/22

Present-

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

Also present-

Dafydd Gibbard (Chief Executive), Iwan Evans (Head of Legal Services), Dewi Morgan (Head of Finance Department) and Annes Sion (Democracy Team Leader).

Item 6: Marian Parry Hughes (Head of Children and Supporting Families Department)

Item 7: Delyth G Williams (Equality Adviser)

Item 8: Vera Jones (Democracy and Language Service Manager) and Gwenllian Williams (Language Adviser)

Item 9: Eurig Williams (Human Resources Advisory Service Manager)

Item 10: Catrin Love (Health, Safety and Welfare Advisory Service Manager)

Item 11: Alun Gwilym Williams (Senior Business Manager) and Hawis Jones (Commissioning, Contracts and Projects Manager)

Item 13-15: Debbie Anne Jones (Education Corporate Services Manager) and Buddug Mair Huws (Assistant Resources Officer).

1. APOLOGIES

No apologies were received.

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 OF THE MEETING HELD ON 19 JULY 2022

The Chair accepted the minutes of the meeting held on 19 July 2022 as a true record.

6. CORPORATE PARENT ANNUAL REPORT 2021-22

The report was submitted by Cllr Elin Walker Jones

DECISION

The information in the report, which reported on the work of the Corporate Parent Panel for 2021-22, was accepted and noted.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted noting that Cabinet Members were required to be aware of the Corporate Parent Panel's work. It was explained that the report noted that the Council had a clear responsibility to be a Corporate Parent for every child in Gwynedd, and to ensure effective, safe, stable and suitable care for looked after children.

The main points in the report were highlighted, which included that there had been a reduction in the number of looked after children during 2021-22, with 46 children coming into care for the first time during the year and 54 children leaving care. It was emphasised that it appeared that the strategy for Keeping Families Together worked, with a high number of children who remained at home under supervision or placed with foster carers within their families.

Specific attention was drawn to Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers noting that the Home Office had instructed all Local Authorities to receive an allocation of asylum seekers. Between December and March, it was highlighted that the Council had received three asylum seekers, and it must be noted that finding suitable placements had been challenging due to their age, linguistic and cultural needs and very often due to the trauma they have experienced. The schemes that would be prioritised by the Panel this year were noted, which included re-examining the strategy and continuing to listen to the voices of looked after children.

The Head of Children and Supporting Families Department added that the number of asylum seekers were now ten individuals, noting that the timetable had been extremely tight with five days to find them a placement. It was explained that there was great responsibility on staff to ensure support for them and that one social worker had now been relocated to focus on this support.

Observations arising from the discussion

- Gratitude was expressed for the report and the importance of all Gwynedd councillors attending the training on their role as a Corporate Parent was noted.
- Gratitude was expressed for the amendments made to the panel this year with the Chief Executive now the Panel Chair, noting that this would ensure that all departments were aware of their responsibility in this field.

7. ANNUAL EQUALITY REPORT CYNGOR GWYNEDD 2021-22

The report was submitted by Cllr Menna Jones

DECISION

The contents of the Annual Report for 2021-22, Strategic Equality Plan 2022-24, were noted and approved.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted noting that this was the second Annual Report - Strategic Equality Plan 2020-24. It was explained that the two years in question had been unusual and difficult and had affected the field of equality. Although the service had not been able to deliver everything it had intended during the period, it was stated that preparatory work and progress had been undertaken in each of the five objectives and all of the work was expected to be completed within the Plan's lifespan.

Attention was drawn to each objective individually, noting the main achievements. In terms of objective 1: To strengthen and deepen the capacity and commitment of Cyngor Gwynedd Staff and Elected Members in the field of Equality, by ensuring that they receive the right training, it was noted that remote training had been held and that work had been undertaken on the e-module.

With objective 2: Improve the information we have from and about people with protected characteristics, it was stated that this work had taken more time than expected but they had identified that this work was something that needed to be done continuously using different methods. When highlighting objective 3: Building on the work already carried out to embed Equality Impact Assessments as a tool to ensure better decision-making, it was stated that a comprehensive impact assessment template had been created on a regional level and had been adapted for use in Gwynedd. It was highlighted that one of the main successes was the Cabinet adopting the Equality and Inclusion Policy.

In terms of Objective 4: Act to reduce the pay gap between the sexes and identify any pay gap based on any other characteristic, it was noted that although the number of staff members who completed the equality questionnaire had increased from 41.8% to 48%, it was explained that this increase was by no means sufficient and, as a result, work would be encouraged and work undertaken with Departments. In terms of the final objective: Take action to attract a range of applicants in order to increase the diversity of our workforce, it was noted that a pilot scheme had been undertaken in the Corporate Support department to question those leaving the Council about any barriers they had faced. It was also explained that the Council worked with Inclusive Employers in order to improve Council services for all characteristics.

The Equality Adviser added that there had been some slippage with the work as a result of the pandemic, but they were progressing and that the service was confident that it would deliver within the scheme's timetable.

Observations arising from the discussion

- Gratitude was expressed for the report and everyone was reminded that

promoting equality was a responsibility for everyone and not this service alone.

8. AMENDING THE COUNCIL'S WELSH LANGUAGE POLICY

The report was submitted by Cllr Menna Jones

DECISION

The amendments made to the Language Policy were supported and it was recommended that the Full Council adopted the amended Policy.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted, and the decision noted. It was noted that the Welsh Language Policy imposed requirements that ensured that services and officers worked in a manner that corresponded with the requirements of the Welsh Language Standards. It was also stated that it set out where the Council went beyond the requirements of the Standards by operating in a manner where it puts the Welsh language first, or raises the status of the Welsh language.

It was explained that the need for review had arisen as a result of actions that had been imposed after the Welsh Language Commissioner's investigations, and also a realisation that some things had changed in the way the Council operated and delivered services (more use of on-line services in particular). It was stated that there was a need to reflect changes in priority Projects such as Language Designations, Self-service and guidance of the Welsh Place Names Project.

The main changes seen in the report were highlighted in terms of outlining general principles at the start of each section, to provide guidance to take digital action where there was no guidance previously and to strengthen the guidance on assessing impact. It was stated that discussions had been held internally with groups of staff on these adaptations along with two discussions with members of the Language Committee.

As the next steps, it was noted that the Language and Scrutiny Unit would be drawing up a communication programme so that all departments are aware of the adaptations made to the Language Policy.

The Language Adviser added that adaptations had been made to the Language Policy following a discussion at the Language Committee, and this is to respond to observations received in the consultations undertaken.

9. ANNUAL REPORT - EMPLOYMENT

The report was submitted by Cllr Menna Jones

DECISION

The information in the Annual Report for 2021/22 was noted and approved.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted noting that it provided an overview of the main workforce matters that had been addressed last year. It was emphasised that the report also referred to the main challenges facing the Council as an employer over this year and the longer term.

Attention was drawn to the main messages in the report, firstly when coming out of the pandemic, the Council like all Councils and employers, operated within an employment context that had now changed significantly. It was stated that working practices had changed permanently and, as a result, it meant that some recruitment and staff retention problems were starting to become apparent. It was emphasised that planning the workforce effectively was more needed than ever, and to try to anticipate future challenges and prepare for the skills and people required to cope with it.

It was noted that the health and well-being of staff was absolutely vital to the Council and there were now different pressures on families with the increase in living costs and as an employer, the Council needed to be aware of how that strain could affect staff's well-being. It was stated that the Council continued to develop and experiment with 'hybrid' working arrangements for staff, and it was noted that arrangements would stabilise over the winter months and provide a better picture of what would be in place in the longer term. However, it was emphasised that the needs of services and Gwynedd residents would ultimately drive the final arrangements.

The Service Manager emphasised that the report specifically examined the workforce and themes seen in the Council over the past year. It was added that the themes highlighted continued to be important to the service and that they would remain a priority over the next period. It was noted that pressures were seen on services to recruit and retain staff across the Council and that work was being undertaken to look at this.

Observations arising from the discussion

- It was noted that the Apprenticeships scheme seen within the Council needed to be maximised and promoted and that more use should be made of the scheme.
- It was stated that it was significant that there had been a large increase in the figures of posts being re-advertised over the past few years, and it was noted that the Council needed to ensure that it examined how it advertised posts and conveyed the best image for prospective applicants. It was explained that the recruitment market had changed during the pandemic and that the Council was seeking to catch up with the times to improve the way it advertised.
- It was explained that members were aware of staff leaving the Council to work in other companies and authorities due to the ability to work from home and it was enquired whether the Council offered the same type of terms. It was noted that working flexibly and virtually provided opportunities and challenges to the Council and the need for the Council

to encourage applicants to join the workforce was highlighted.

- The need was highlighted for the Council to promote the benefits of working for a Local Authority and to show the Council's whole employment package.

10. HEALTH, SAFETY AND WELLBEING ANNUAL REPORT

The report was submitted by Cllr Menna Jones

DECISION

The Annual Report was accepted.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted, and the decision noted. It was noted that this was the second consecutive challenging year for the department due to the Covid-19 situation. It was stated that challenges had been different to the first year of the pandemic with challenges involving the response to the Government's ever-changing requirements, the safe recovery of Services and getting vulnerable staff members back to work safely. It was also emphasised that this had been done when Covid figures in Gwynedd were higher than they had been in the previous year.

In terms of accidents and incidents, it was explained that 113 cases of staff catching Covid at work had been reported to the Health and Safety Executive. In terms of other accidents, it was added that manual handling of weight and slipping and tripping were the main causes of injuries. It was noted that work was being undertaken to address manual handling injuries in particular.

It was stated that Covid had affected the health of staff in general and the Occupational Health Unit had seen the highest number of referrals since the Unit was established and this was true in terms of the Medra Counselling Service and physiotherapy with stress, mental health and musculoskeletal problems the main reasons for the referrals.

The Service Manager added that this report was reporting on the situation last year, and it was noted that it was pleasing to be able to report that great progress was being made to catch up with risks that had been highlighted over the years. It was explained that there was currently a specific project on Mental Health as referrals to Occupational Health had been higher, along with training for Managers and Team Leaders on Mental Health.

Observations arising from the discussion

- It was highlighted that an event would be held in December that would be mandatory for Managers and Team Leaders specifically on Mental Health, where half the session would focus on normalising a conversation about Mental Health with Staff.
- Attention was also drawn to training in January for Councillors on identifying the deficiencies of Mental Health.

11. NORTH WALES MARKET STABILITY REPORT - DRAFT REPORT 2022

The report was submitted by Cllr Dilwyn Morgan

DECISION

The North Wales Market Stability Report for 2022 was approved and recommended for adoption by the Full Council.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted and it was noted that the North Wales Population Needs Assessment had been submitted back in March this year and that this report was a follow-up. It was explained that it was on a journey through the Scrutiny Committee, the Cabinet and the Full Council before proceeding to the Regional Partnership Board and then being submitted to the Government. It was emphasised that the report currently remained as a draft as they were awaiting up-to-date data in order to update it.

It was expressed that this report was important and would be used in order to steer the decision-making process not only in Gwynedd but also on a regional level. It was highlighted that a number of the fields highlighted in the report were matters that had already been identified by the Council.

The Senior Business Manager added that the Regional Needs Assessment listed the needs while this report was a market assessment introducing how to deliver to meet the needs. It was stressed that the findings corresponded with matters highlighted in Gwynedd such as a lack of nursing homes.

Observations arising from the discussion

- It was stated that members were often suspicious of reports that were forced on the Council but this report demonstrated interesting findings that highlighted supply patterns and an increase in demand. It was noted that the fragile situation was beyond the Council's work in terms of funding and staffing but it was enquired whether further action would be taken by the Government after receiving the report. It was explained that the Government signalled that it was attaching more importance to this type of report and that it would place an emphasis on regional partnership boards.

12. COUNCIL TAX PREMIUM ON SECOND HOMES AND LONG-TERM EMPTY PROPERTIES

The report was submitted by Cllr Ioan Thomas

DECISION

Hold a public consultation on the possible proposal to increase the Council Tax Premium on Second Homes and Long-term Empty Properties beyond 100% and

up to 300% for the 2023/24 financial year.

To delegate the right to the Head of Finance in consultation with the Head of Legal Services to prepare a public consultation pack in accordance with the report and any recommendations by the Cabinet.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted and it was noted that this report requested a public consultation. It was noted that the Full Council must make an annual decision on the rate of the Premium, and in order to comply with legal requirements, if the Premium level was to be increased, a public consultation on the proposal must be undertaken.

It was explained that the Local Government Finance Act 1992 had allowed a discretion for the Council to charge a premium of up to 100% on the Council Tax of some classes of second homes and long-term empty properties but it was noted that this maximum would increase from 1 April 2023 and that local authorities would have the power to charge a premium of up to 300%. It was stated that getting to grips with the lack of affordable housing in Gwynedd, along with the high number of second homes, was a priority for the Council and charging a Council Tax Premium was one of the tools available to deal with the situation.

It was reiterated that the Council Tax (Prescribed Classes of Dwellings) Regulations (Wales) 1998 noted that 'second homes' had been categorised into two classes, namely

classes A and B, whilst class C referred to empty property:

- Class A - An unoccupied dwelling, which is substantially furnished, where the occupation of which is prohibited by law for a continuous period of at least 28 days in the relevant year.
- Class B - An unoccupied dwelling, which is substantially furnished, where there is no legal restriction on its occupation.
- Class C - An unoccupied dwelling which is not substantially furnished.

On 13 July, it was noted that over 4600 houses were subject to the Premium on second homes (Class B), 200 of them did not pay the premium as they were subject to exceptions and 760 within Class A where occupation was prohibited for a period of at least 28 days in the relevant year. Since the Premium was introduced, it was stated that the Council had determined annually to charge the same level of premium on long-term empty properties and second homes, but it was possible to charge different levels if local circumstances justified it.

In terms of legal requirements, it was explained that the decision was made annually by the Full Council and that an Impact Assessment on Equality Characteristics, the Welsh Language and the Socio-Economic Disadvantage needed to be submitted to the Cabinet and the Full Council. It was added that it was required to hold a consultation and engage with stakeholders before charging any premium and it was noted that the department intended to hold it for 28 days in October. Following this, it was added that a report would be submitted to the Cabinet in November before it would be discussed at the Full Council

meeting in December. It was emphasised that the matter would also be scrutinised by the Governance and Audit Committee.

The Monitoring Officer added that any Cabinet decision was subject to a Scrutiny call-in period, but it was explained that the Cabinet under section 7 of the Constitution had the right to make an Urgent Decision in discussion with the Chair of the Council. The Cabinet was asked to treat it as an urgent decision so that the department could proceed immediately, noting that this would be reported at the Full Council.

Observations arising from the discussion

- Support was noted to proceed to consultation and the urgent need for the decision to be made was understood.
- The need was stated to send a letter to the Welsh Government to enquire about the exceptions for those who paid the Premium.

13. REVIEW OF THE GWYNEDD STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (SACRE) CONSTITUTION

The report was submitted by Cllr Beca Brown

DECISION

The recommendation of the Education Department and Gwynedd SACRE Committee

to change the membership of Group B as noted, was approved:

- Group A - Christianity and other Beliefs
- Group B - representation of Teachers and Headteachers - keep the number of seats at 5

The seats would be allocated as follows:

- 3 seats to be divided between the Teaching Unions recognised by Cyngor Gwynedd (NAS/UWT; UCAC; NEU; ASCL and NAHT - to be determined by the Gwynedd Teaching Unions Forum)
- 1 seat to be filled by the Primary and Special Catchment Area Advisory Group (GYDCA)
- 1 seat to be filled by the Gwynedd Secondary Headteachers Group (GSCU)
- Group C - Elected Members - keep at 7
- Co-opted - SACRE Committee to retain the right to co-opt members

(3 votes, which is 1 for each Group; Co-opted members do not have a vote).

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted noting that the report was a request to review the constitution of Gwynedd SACRE. It was explained that the Council had not considered the constitution since 2019, and there had been a change to the unions since then. It was stated that the Constitution needed to be revised in order to strengthen the representation of teachers on the Committee.

The Assistant Resources Officer added that SACRE had been created from three groups - the first was Christianity and Other Beliefs, which was the subject of the review back in 2019, the second group was Representation of Teachers and Headteachers and then the final group, namely Elected Members. It was explained that there was a request here to revise the second group, as one of the unions now did not exist and, as a result, seats needed to be revised. It was requested for the five seats to be divided as follows:

- 3 seats to be divided between the Teaching Unions recognised by Cyngor Gwynedd (NAS/UWT; UCAC; NEU; ASCL and NAHT - to be determined by the Gwynedd Teaching Unions Forum)
- 1 seat to be filled by the Primary and Special Catchment Area Advisory Group (GYDCA)
- 1 seat to be filled by the Gwynedd Secondary Headteachers Group (GSCU)

14. TO APPROVE AND ADOPT THE GWYNEDD COUNCIL AGREED SYLLABUS FOR RELIGION, VALUES AND ETHICS

The report was submitted by Cllr Beca Brown

DECISION

The Agreed Syllabus for Religion, Values and Ethics was approved and adopted in accordance with the recommendation of the Education Department and the Gwynedd Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) and the Welsh Government's Guidance.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted noting that this report highlighted the change in the syllabus, which will change the traditional Religious Education into Religion, Values and Ethics Education. It was explained that the new syllabus would include non-religious philosophical viewpoints in addition to religion. This change was welcomed highlighting that it was an opportunity for young people to identify what everyone had in common and for interesting discussions about differences that would promote respect for all.

The Assistant Resources Officer added that the report was being submitted in light of establishing the Curriculum for Wales. It was noted that every authority in Wales had a legal duty to hold an Agreed Syllabus Conference to review the syllabus and it was held by Gwynedd on 15 February 2022. The unanimous decision of the Conference was to adopt the Welsh Government's Guidance on Religion, Values and Ethics.

15. PERFORMANCE REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR EDUCATION

The report was submitted by Cllr Beca Brown

DECISION

To accept and note the information in the report.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted, noting that it had been a busy period for the department and that the report highlighted a range of work that was being undertaken. Although there was an attempt to bring everything together, it was stated that one theme could be seen throughout the report, namely well-being, attainment and inclusion. It was explained that this field had always been important but the pandemic had highlighted the challenges facing the county's children and young people. In light of all the challenges, it was emphasised that the Cabinet Member had been amazed at the resilience of young people and that the department was seeking to mitigate the challenges and to support the children and young people to reach their full potential.

Attention was drawn to some schemes as follows, it was noted that all schools implemented an Accelerated Learning programme as a result of the pandemic and that exceptional work was being undertaken to target the pre-school and post-16 learning period. It was emphasised that the work of transforming the Additional Learning Needs service continued and that a preparedness pre-survey showed very strong progress across the county in terms of preparations that had already been made.

There was pride in the work that had been undertaken on the Digital Strategy with an electronic device now provided to every child from years 3 to 11 in order to reduce the inequality between children, who had the freedom to take the device home with them. In terms of the Free School Meals scheme, it was stated that the county was ahead of schedule and proud that it was working.

Pride was highlighted in the Immersion Education system as several financial sources had enabled the department to commission work to create a virtual town, which would provide children with an opportunity to speak Welsh virtually before venturing to use it in the 'real world'. It was explained that this made the work of teaching the language more similar to a game rather than a lesson.

Observations arising from the discussion

- The county's young people were congratulated on their GCSE and A Level results.
- In terms of the Digital Education Strategy, it was enquired whether every child had now received their devices. It was confirmed that they had shared the final supply over the past few weeks.
- If the devices were part of the Digital Strategy, it was asked whether pupils were allowed to take them home. It was stated that the right to take them home was crucial for the scheme to ensure that every child received the same opportunity and had the opportunity to do their homework without any challenges.
- It was enquired how the Catering and Cleaning department coped with the additional requirements in terms of providing school meals across the county. It was noted that there was substantially higher demand but

considerable work had been undertaken to secure the right equipment and facilities. In terms of staffing, it was noted that the department had been able to cope with demand thus far but it was excellent to see families taking advantage of the opportunity.

16. PERFORMANCE REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE

The report was submitted by Cllr Ioan Thomas

DECISION

To accept and note the information in the report.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted and it was noted that the member was on the whole proud to note that the performance of the department was generally good. Attention was drawn to some headings, starting with Delivering Savings. It was explained that this part of the report did not mention savings within the Finance Department but savings across the Council, and it was noted that some departments could not deliver £0.5 million of savings that were expected this year. It was stated that the settlement for 2023/24 from the Government was expected to be lower and that it was increasingly likely that it would not be possible to slip schemes in order to get a balanced financial plan. It was noted that a further report would be submitted over the next few months.

In terms of the Internal Audit Service, it was noted that capacity pressures had been an issue, but over the first few months of the year the service had been carrying out internal audits on approximately 70 Community Councils. Attention was drawn to the good work undertaken by the Taxation Service ensuring the distribution of £150 to households across the county, and it had managed to deliver it to 99% of households by the end of June. It was noted that this was the best figure in Wales. It was stated that the Council's draft Statement of Accounts had been submitted in June this year and the department's ability to complete it within such a short period of time had been astounding.

Observations arising from the discussion

- The success of the department in ensuring payments of £150 to households across the county was highlighted and that the service also deserved praise following the delivery of payments during the Covid period.
- It was stated there had been a reduction in the benefits processing period and it was enquired how long it took to process claims. It was noted that it took 13.5 days for a new claim and 5.5 days to process amendments.

The meeting commenced at 1.00 pm and concluded at 2.50 pm

CHAIRMAN