

CYNGOR GWYNEDD CABINET



Report to a meeting of the Cyngor Gwynedd Cabinet

Date of meeting: 13 December, 2022

Cabinet Member: Cllr Berwyn Parry Jones

Liaison Officers: Steffan Jones, Head of Highways, Municipal and YGC Department

Contact Number: 32402

Subject: PERFORMANCE CHALLENGE REPORT BY THE CABINET MEMBER FOR HIGHWAYS, MUNICIPAL AND GWYNEDD CONSULTANCY DEPARTMENT

THE DECISION SOUGHT

To accept and note the information in the report.

THE REASONS WHY A DECISION IS NEEDED

In order to ensure effective performance management.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update my fellow members on what has taken place in the areas within my remit as Cabinet Member for Highways, Municipal and Gwynedd Consultancy.
- 1.2 As you know, changes have been implemented within the Department with the recently announced restructure. As a result, Waste Collection and Treatment Services have moved to the Environment Department and the Gwynedd Consultancy Department has now transferred to this Department.
- 1.3 I wish to note my appreciation for the work of all the officers of the Department and to recognise the key contribution they make during this period of change. Through good collaboration between the departments, Environment, Highways and Gwynedd Consultancy, it is fair to say that there was no negative impact on Gwynedd residents.
- 1.4 By now, the name of the Department needs to take into account the recent changes as the largest element of the Municipal Service, namely the Waste Collection and Treatment Service has been transferred to the Environment Department. Therefore, it is intended to re-name the Department. Following a consultation with staff, the preferred name is the Highways, Engineering and YGC Department, due to the importance of branding in the commercial world, staff felt that it was important to have YGC as part of the Department's name.

- 1.5 This report will outline the latest developments against pledges within the 2018-2023 Cyngor Gwynedd Plan; the progress of performance measures; and the latest in terms of savings and cuts schemes, and how we will respond to the overspend.
- 1.6 I wish to remind you that all matters have already been the subject of discussions and have been scrutinised by myself at a meeting of the Highways, Municipal and YGC Department's Management Team.
- 1.7 On the whole, I am comfortable with the performance of the measures being reported. The Department is facing considerable work over the next few months, which will include a review of the Street Cleaning Service and also a very detailed look at the budget.

Highways, Municipal and YGC

2. 2018-23 Council Plan Projects

The Department is leading on two of the improvement priorities, which appear in the Council Plan for this year. The two priorities are long-term and essential to the Department's performance. I summarise what has been achieved thus far as follows:

2.1 Clean and Tidy Communities

- 2.1.1 Following a period of planning, a Project Officer was appointed to establish the teams, to manage them and provide a work programme for them. The Officer is also the day-to-day contact point for Local Members, Community Councils and other stakeholders regarding any work that needs to be undertaken.
- 2.1.2 The teams themselves were subsequently appointed and there are now two teams each in Arfon and Meirionnydd and one team in Dwyfor. The type of work they undertake is as follows:
- dealing with urban weeds and overgrowth
 - cleaning street signs and street names
 - cleaning, repairing and painting street furniture such as benches, bollards etc.
 - cleaning, repairing and installing street bins and dog fouling bins
 - cleaning graffiti, stickers or posters from Council property
 - deep cleaning, namely street cleaning, removing chewing gum etc.
- 2.1.3 These are only examples of the type of minor maintenance work carried out by the teams. It is true to say that the feedback about their work from some of the areas they have already visited has been excellent.

'Thank you again to the Team for their work so far, it has already made a real difference to the area. I hope that this will continue.'

Thank you very much for this. An excellent start to this scheme.'

'I write to you as Town Councillor to inform you that I am delighted with your new team.'

- 2.1.4 The Project Officer has nearly finished drawing up a timetable to allow the teams to visit each Council ward in turn. The timetable will be presented to Local Members and Community Councils in due course. The timetable is expected to include a feature for Local Members to request work via the Members' Portal.
- 2.1.5 The teams are eager to use technology as much as possible to facilitate their work. As a result, they already have a specialist chewing gum removal machine as well as graffiti removing equipment on order. They will soon receive tablets so that they can receive work instructions remotely while in their work area. They currently use diesel vehicles to transport their equipment, materials etc. However, there are plans afoot to replace these with bespoke electric vehicles.

2.2 Strengthen Communication and Engagement

- 2.2.1 The Highways and Municipal Department is very visible where every resident in the County is affected by aspects of the service.
- 2.2.2 This year, emphasis was placed on mapping our processes of dealing with Street Cleaning enquiries/complaints. We have now held meetings with representation from Galw Gwynedd and IT in order to find any gaps.
- 2.2.3 This survey is timely with the restructuring changes and is an opportunity to review other similar services within the Department by discovering if it is possible to integrate them into one Street Scene Service to substantially improve cleanliness, tidiness and safety of the local built environment.
- 2.2.4 Another project that is about to start and linked to this improvement priority is our Mapping Services Project. It is intended to place the Department's different assets on a map where customers will be able to view the status of the asset and report any defect. Our street lamps have been placed on the system and we are now considering placing our salt bins in it to facilitate winter maintenance matters.

3. OTHER PROJECTS

3.1 Fleet Strategy

- 3.1.1 A Green Fleet Plan (2023-39) was drawn up and submitted to the Climate Change and Nature Board on 14 November, 2022. Three steps were noted within this plan to transform the fleet, namely Sorting, Innovation and Renewal.
- 3.1.2 In summary, sorting out must take place to identify the real size of the fleet along with the needs of the services. Once this work is completed, we feel that it is essential to design a vehicle structure, similar to a staff structure, that will be established within each Department. This will prevent managers from keeping vehicles once they have been renewed, and provide some assurance that a sufficient budget is available to renew and maintain the vehicles and to ensure that only essential vehicles to serve Gwynedd residents are in our fleet.

- 3.1.3 We can then proceed to look at how technology or changes in work arrangements can transform the fleet. Some examples of this may include establishing a corporate pool system, establishing a vehicle load procedure and renewing technology to enable the Fleet Service to report on our fuel use.
- 3.1.4 The final step of transforming our fleet will be the formulation of a policy to renew Council vehicles. By establishing a clear policy and direction, we can ensure that the changes being made will benefit the Council in the long-term. The electric, hydrogen and ULEV vehicle market is constantly changing, therefore, we must be open to trial different vehicles and technologies.
- 3.1.5 In considering Welsh Government targets, we must ensure that we set a firm renewal timetable.

4. FAIRBOURNE PROJECT

- 4.1 As a Department, we are closely collaborating with the 'Fairbourne Moving Forward' Project Group, examining flood risks in light of climate change factors. The 'Fairbourne Moving Forward' Project Board includes representation from the following bodies: Arthog Community Council (Chairing), Gwynedd Local Councillor, Cyngor Gwynedd, Scottish Power, NRW, Community Ambassador, Network Rail, the Health Board, Welsh Water and Eryri National Park.
- 4.2 Natural Resources Wales (NRW) are leading on a Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Plan. NRW are in the process of reviewing the condition of its assets and providing a Strategic Outline Case (SOC) on the way forward.

The work will take at least 18 months to complete (it commenced in October 2022), and gather and evaluate evidence in order to assess the sustainability of management options in Fairbourne and Arthog, considering the priorities of the Flood Risk Management National Policy (communities at risk) alongside broader considerations of coastal adaptation in response to sea level rise, and the conservation priorities for the Mawddach estuary.

The SOC evaluation will validate, or perhaps challenge, the current policies of the SMT for the last two periods, and will determine them in detail in terms of content, timing and presenting methods. Any plans to engage with the community will be developed jointly with the Fairbourne Moving Forward Project Board and include all partners.

- 4.3 Gwynedd is leading on the People and the Built Environment Plan by working cross-departmentally. In partnership with Public Health Wales, work to complete a Health Impact Assessment with the community has commenced since summer this year and is being completed by the Savills company.

This will provide information of the actual position, and extend our ability to support the community. In Fairbourne's case, the aim is to assess the impact of living under the threat of climate change in the short-term and long-term.

The next step will be to prepare and submit an Outline Business Case to the Welsh Government and, depending on its response, to undertake further work to develop a Full Business Case.

- 4.4 An independent study has been drawn up by Dr Graham Hall, which challenges the outcomes reached so far along with the date of 2054. Dr Graham Hall's body of work, along with Project Board reports, will be analysed by the external independent consultant, 'WaterCo', which is completely independent to the work so far.

The review will assess each observation made by Dr Graham Hall in relation to sections of various reports mentioned individually in review sheets. The aim is to provide an evidence-based direction throughout the review document, in order to allow cross-referencing of observations within the general review process. It is anticipated that this work will be completed by the beginning of December, 2022.

5. PERFORMANCE

In terms of the Department, I am generally happy with their performance. Nevertheless, I draw your attention to the main issues arising.

- 5.1 **Lighting Service** - The work of changing all Council street lighting (17,811) to LED technology commenced during 2016/2017. We are pleased to report that we have now completed the work of this project on target. As a result of this project, we saw a 50% reduction in our energy use and a 74% reduction in our carbon emissions per tonne at the end of 2021/22.

Any new development will include the LED technology and lighting maintenance work will still exist in accordance with existing guidelines/instructions. In addition to this, in order to ensure that we provide an energy/carbon efficient service, we are also dimming the lights within estates/villages in the county to use 25% less kwh per hour between 10:30pm and 6:00am.

After the end of this work, our electricians will play a great part in installing charging points across the county.

- 5.2 **Highway Maintenance Service** - Following Ffordd Gwynedd's review of the service, a new way of working was introduced on the 1st of April. To date, the arrangements are proving to be working well. It is also encouraging to note that the number of CAT1 defects reported by the public has decreased this year. However, we are yet to see the impact of the Winter season on our assets which may impact the situation.

The work of updating our Highway Asset Maintenance Plan, which reflects the new requirements of the Code of Practice with an emphasis on risk management is almost complete. As part of this work we have reviewed the roadside maintenance procedure. It is also a pleasure to report that the wild flower areas to promote wildlife and nature have been introduced with certain verges along the highway.

In addition to the above, preparation work for the winter season has been completed and in place.

5.3 Street Services - There has been considerable pressure on this service since the pandemic, where litter, overflowing bins and dog-fouling problems seem to have increased. We received the results of the independent 'Keep Wales Tidy' 2022/23 survey at the end of July. It is noted within this survey that 141 individual cross-sections were surveyed and grade B or higher was awarded to 95% of these streets, namely streets deemed as having an acceptable level of cleanliness by the public.

In addition to the external surveys, we will work on undertaking regular internal surveys using a digital App. By using this App, a street cleanliness methodology will be used while inputting information during our Highway surveys.

5.4 Public Toilets Service - The Council has 66 public toilets in Gwynedd and two have recently reopened at the request of our communities. To date, we have upgraded ten toilets by means of grant schemes and there may be potential to upgrade three other toilets next year via grants namely Llanbedrog, Cricieth and Y Glyn, Llanberis.

It is important to note that there has been pressure on the Service to recruit and appoint in this field and we are still endeavouring to attract staff to these essential posts. The Service is facing several challenges in terms of increased use and anti-social behaviour in some cases that have increased in recent years. In looking to the future, it is intended to examine different income generating methods via new technology with fee charging doors.

5.5 Street Cleaning - Recent changes to the organisation, namely the transfer of the Waste Collection and Treatment Services to the Environment Department and the integration of YGC to this Department, has given us an opportunity to review some of our current services, especially those responsible for looking after our public open spaces and ensuring they are clean and tidy.

As well as our recently established Ardal Ni Tidying Teams, there is potential to incorporate the Street Cleaning Service and the Street/Enforcement Services into one Street Scene Service in order to substantially improve the cleanliness, tidiness and safety of the local built environment. Such a step would allow resources and skills to be shared, to reconcile current work practices, to create efficiency savings and potentially save costs.

Work has already commenced to research this with a review of how the Street Cleaning Service completes its work. A similar exercise will be undertaken in other services over the next few months.

5.6 Ash Dieback - A team was established to deal specifically with the disease last September. The remit of the team includes conducting surveys of ash trees on Council land and roads, assessing their condition and drawing up a work programme to deal with those who pose a risk to public safety. The team issues private landowners with legal notices if their trees pose a safety risk to users of Council land and they offer advice to all Council departments on general trees matters.

This year, the team has re-examined sites already inspected by specialist contractors to determine if the trees designated as red (high risk) at the time have got worse and also if nearby trees previously designated as amber (moderate risk) have deteriorated. The team has followed a recognised tree risk assessment to deliver this and they have used the results to form a tree felling programme for this financial year.

Trees absorb carbon and store it whilst releasing oxygen back into the atmosphere. As a result, our tree cutting programme can have an impact on the Council's ability to deliver its target of becoming carbon neutral by 2030. To this end, the team is working very closely with the Countryside Service in the Environment Department to look into ways of compensating for this and to try and partner with other authorities and organisations to prepare plans to grow and re-plant trees that have been felled.

5.7 YGC - Ymgynghoriaeth Gwynedd Consultancy (YGC) acts as:

- A service that brings substantial income to the Council.
- Undertakes statutory functions in the field of water and flood management.

5.8 Commercial Work

5.8.1 The income and structure of the commercial work - The commercial work is achieved by bringing together all of the engineering, technical and scientific expertise and skills to meet the needs of the client by forming project teams. The projects call for expertise in many work fields, because projects are different in nature, and an action plan is being provided for each project. Also, the intention is for each plan to be measured in terms of customer satisfaction.

The four services are:

- Water and Environment
- Building and Infrastructure
- Business and Project Delivery
- Technical

Staff hours are measured as well as the progress of projects against the agreed fee. YGC's financial performance is managed by closely collaborating with finance officers.

Although this year is challenging, a robust work programme is in place, but as usual the balance of work may change during the year.

In terms of financial measures, I am happy with their performance, which is important bearing in mind that a vast majority of YGC officers work on contract awarding work, which brings an income of over £7.35 million to the Council per year.

The work pattern for the first and second quarter follows the same work pattern as last year. The main clients that YGC works for in 2022/23 are:

- Isle of Anglesey County Council
- Housing and Property Department
- Ceredigion County Council
- Welsh Government / North and Mid Wales Trunk Road Agent
- Environment Department
- Highways Department
- Powys County Council
- Denbighshire County Council

Some of YGC's other clients: -

- Alun Griffiths (Network Rail)
- Cadnant Planning
- UK Highways
- Conwy County Council
- RSPB
- Groundwork Wales
- TACP Architects

- 5.8.2 Environmental and sustainability matters influence all types of developments. The environmental team works on a number of schemes. They conduct environmental assessments on a number of schemes to ensure that natural habitats and species are protected, and provide environmental improvement measures. In addition, the team is taking advantage of opportunities to add elements that increase biodiversity to the schemes.
- 5.8.3 YGC continues to develop local employment through the structure, which are quality jobs. Due to opportunities in the market, YGC added nine posts to the structure last year, with a plan to redesign some functions to correspond with opportunities, but challenges to retain competent staff remain.
- 5.8.4 YGC gives high priority to staff training and is the regional lead on the North Wales Regional Professional Training Agreement on engineering work via the Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE). This will enable the officers to develop their skills and to work on more challenging schemes. Also, encouragement and investment is crucial to encourage staff to successfully seek other professional membership, which include the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) and the Chartered Institution of Water and Environment Management (CIWEM). Staff are also aware that professional qualifications are key to attracting and winning work, and this is why such a high percentage of YGC staff are members of professional bodies.
- 5.8.5 Beyond professional qualifications, YGC also invest in academic opportunities by funding requests from staff to attend appropriate courses on the basis of a business case. At present, two staff members are studying degree courses, with three studying other educational course (HNC/BTech).

5.9 Undertaking statutory functions relating to water and flood management

- 5.9.1 Ymgynghoriaeth Gwynedd Consultancy (YGC) operates commercially and also undertakes statutory functions in water and flood management. The Service specialises in identifying and developing flood risk management schemes, which is an essentially important field when considering climate change impacts.
- 5.9.2 During this financial year, the Service has been working on developing a number of flood risk management schemes, including the Viaduct Gardens - Barmouth, North Promenade - Barmouth, Hirael - Bangor, Ogwen Catchment Scheme, Gwyrfai and Clynog Fawr Catchment Scheme. As well as a series of smaller scale schemes in the Bethesda and Pencaenewydd areas.
- 5.9.3. Construction work has commenced on a flood risk and coastal erosion scheme in Porthdinllaen and Aberdyfi Quay, and it is intended to complete both schemes by the end of this financial year.
- 5.9.4. The Service is monitoring the work programme on a monthly basis, and the work of submitting bids for investment from the Welsh Government in the 2023/24 work programme are already in the pipeline. Usually, a water and flood grant condition from the Welsh Government requires a minimum of 15% in match funding from the Council for any construction work. This means that investing Council funding attracts a substantial value in grants to realise schemes and to invest in our infrastructure.
- 5.9.5. Surveys of our coastal and land drainage assets have been completed for the 2022/23 period, since August this year. This enables us to identify the condition of our assets and to programme maintenance work as required. Work to repair some defective assets has been scheduled and the Department continues to monitor the assets in the meantime.
- 5.9.6. There is a duty upon us to investigate flooding incidents under the Flood and Water Management Act. To date, in the 2022/23 financial year, we are aware of 32 properties that have subject to internal flooding. Investigating and recording these incidents is essential to support applications for capital funding in order to develop business cases for flood risk management schemes.
- 5.9.7. Work to approve Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) applications is continuing and the number of applications is increasing, so we have now increased resources within the team. We also provide an advisory service on SuDS applications to the Isle of Anglesey County Council.

6. ACCREDITATIONS

6.1 Investors In People (IIP) Accreditations - In 2021, the YGC Service received an "Investors in People" accreditation for the fourth time. The IIP report and action plan will tie into the Service's business plan for 2022/23.

6.2 Highways BSi Accreditations

The Department has been successful in transferring from Accreditation 18001 (BSi) and reaching the requirements of 45001 which we were required to complete. This means that we are meeting high requirements in terms of service delivery, with management systems and Health and Safety arrangements that are monitored by the BSI for the accreditation. The Department has also got the following accreditations, namely - BSi 14001 - Environment and BSi 9001 - Standard. The procedure in terms of the audit is that BSi inspectors visit the Department twice a year in order to conduct a detailed audit of our arrangements.

7. FINANCIAL SITUATION

7.1 Highways and Municipal

The August revenue review report was submitted to the Governance and Audit Committee on 13/10/22 and then to the Cabinet on 25 October, 2022. The report highlighted an estimated overspend of £1.8m (which includes Waste and Recycling) within the Highways and Municipal Department up to the end of the 2022/23 financial year. £1.2m of the overspend is attributed to waste services. Since September this year, this Service is under the management of the Environment Department and it will be fully transferred by 2023/24.

Therefore, it is estimated that services that remain within the Highways and Municipal Department will overspend by £0.6m. The main problems can be seen within the fields of toilet cleaning, street cleaning and land maintenance. A couple of historical savings schemes continue to be problematic for the Department to realise and this is a factor in the overspend.

The Department is undertaking a review of the following services, street cleansing, public convenience and ground maintenance in order to that they may identify route causes to the projected overspend.

7.2 Gwynedd Consultancy

The August review estimated an underspend of £29,100. The Department has achieved its historical efficiency savings schemes.

The Service anticipated meeting the profit target this year by means of a quality performance. The scheduled work profile is consistent with the previous years' profiles and sufficient work is available by our clients for the rest of the year.

8. 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 Highways, Engineering and YGC Department.