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## THE CABINET TUESDAY, 13 DECEMBER 2022

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### Present-

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

### Also present-

Iwan Evans (Head of Legal Services), Dewi Morgan (Head of Finance Department), Geraint Owen (Corporate Director), Huw Dylan Owen (Corporate Director) and Sioned Mai Jones (Democracy Team Leader).

Item 3: Garem Jackson (Head of Education Department), Gwern ap Rhisiart (Dwyfor/Meirion Area Education Officer) and Debbie Jones (Education Corporate Services Manager).

Item 6: Dafydd Wyn Williams (Head of Environment Department) and Gareth Jones (Assistant Head of Environment Department)

Item 7: Steffan Jones (Head of Highways and Municipal Department)

## 1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from the Chief Executive, Dafydd Gibbard.

Cabinet Members and Officers were welcomed to the meeting.

## 2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were received.

## 3. URGENT ITEMS

### URGENT ITEM: YSGOL TREFERTHYR – INCREASING THE PROJECT'S CAPITAL BUDGET

The report was submitted by Cllr Beca Brown.

### DECISION

To approve increasing the budget for the development of the new Ysgol Trefferthyr to **£8,145,206**.

The transfer of **£3,261,880** from the remaining budget of the Sustainable Learning Communities Programme envelope (Band B) in order to meet a significant increase in the costs of the project was approved, accepting that it would lead to less budget available to realise other projects within Band B of the Gwynedd Sustainable Learning Communities Programme.

### DISCUSSION

The report was submitted, noting the steps that had been completed to date as part of the journey of building a new school in Cricieth, but there had been a significant increase in the school's construction costs. It was noted that the report detailed methods of addressing the financial deficit and sourcing additional funds. The steps undertaken since May 2021 were highlighted. It was noted that Welsh Government at that time had approved the funding of a total budget of £4.9 million for the construction of the School, and would contribute 65% towards the cost, with the Council contributing 35%. It was reported that the significant increase in construction costs over the past 18 months had led to an increase in the cost to just over £8 million due to factors such as the increasing cost of materials, energy and inflation.

It was reported that a bid had been submitted to Welsh Government to increase the budget for funding the School, and the Cabinet was asked to approve this increase and transfer the budget from a band B project in order to address the significant increase in this project's costs. It was added that transferring the budget would have a consequential impact on the remaining band B budget, and less budget available to deliver those projects.

#### Observations arising from the discussion

- It was also highlighted that the existing School site was unsuitable. It was noted that the solution appeared to be straightforward, although there were implications to be considered.
- Support was expressed for the request, and it was noted that other options were scarce.
- A question was asked about the specific impacts on band B.
- In response, it was noted that the impact would be £1.1 million, a 35% increase to the £3.2 million as the remainder had already been identified. This amount would be diverted from other schemes such as the Post-16 budget; this budget would be reduced in order to accommodate the additional funding for this scheme.
- The request was welcomed on behalf of the children of Cricieth, and it was believed that the community would be extremely proud of the new school. An observation was made that Ysgol Eifionydd was in dire need of investment, and that the Council should pressurise Welsh Government to improve this School's resources.
- In response, it was noted that Ysgol Eifionydd was part of the Condition and Suitability Scheme to upgrade and improve conditions and facilities, although it was not a significant amount.
- It was believed, despite the increase in the School's construction costs, that the Council was getting value for money in Cricieth. The completion of the project was eagerly awaited, and it was believed that the investment would benefit the education of children within Cricieth catchment area for many years.

#### **4. MATTERS ARISING FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY**

There were no matters arising from overview and scrutiny.

#### **5. MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 October 2022 were accepted as a true record.

## 6. ENVIRONMENT PERFORMANCE REPORT

The report was submitted by Cllr Dafydd Meurig.

### DECISION

To accept and note the information in the report.

### DISCUSSION

The report was presented, noting what had happened to date in relation to the priorities within the current Council Plan. An update was provided on the situation regarding second homes and short-term holiday accommodation in the County, noting that the Department was leading on the work of preparing an Article 4 Direction to give planning authorities the right to control second homes. It was noted that this work would continue with the intention of bringing a report to the Cabinet in the new year.

Reference was made to some challenges facing the Department, including the planning service and staffing challenges, specifically within the planning enforcement service. It was reported that there were 740 open applications at the end of June, which had reduced to 586 open applications by the end of October. The huge work that had been achieved was praised, while acknowledging that there were challenges that remained, but the Department was doing its best to address the demand on the service.

Similarly, a report was provided on the work to clear the backlog in the field of Land Charges, and to reduce the average time taken to process those applications. It was noted that interim staff had been appointed and that the service was in the process of transferring to a new computer system in the hope that it would speed up the process once the system was in place.

In conclusion, the successes within the Department were noted, including 90% of the work in the field of Street Works being carried out by contractors within the original timetable.

#### Observations arising from the discussion

- It was noted that the work completed by the Department was huge and that it played a major part in the priorities within the Council Plan. It was considered that they deserved praise for their achievements.
- Pride was expressed in the fact that the time taken to process Land Charges times was reducing and the work of the Department in dealing with these issues was acknowledged. It was obvious that the Department was trying its best, and was succeeding to tackle the workload, and it was suggested that the Department could share these efforts and solutions in an effort to change perceptions.
- The Department was wished well in the work of taking over some aspects of Highways and Municipal services.
- A question was raised about the control of motorhomes, and whether the timetable noted in the report was realistic in relation to capacity and the planning application timetable.
- In response, the Assistant Head of Department noted that there were challenges such as the identification of suitable sites, which had been challenging due to

planning restrictions. It was noted that planning applications should have been submitted for the sites before Christmas, which demonstrated that the timetable had slipped. It was confirmed that discussion was continuing in relation to funding matters with Visit Wales, led by the Economy and Community Department. It was hoped that decisions would be made swiftly on the planning applications in order for the development phase to move forward.

- An update was requested on the 20 miles per hour scheme in villages. It was highlighted that was an element of confusion regarding who was leading the scheme.
- In response, it was noted that Welsh Government was eager to change the speed limit from 30 mph to 20 mph in villages. It was believed that this would improve air quality and make villages safer. It was reported that this was a Welsh Government decision, and discussions had taken place with Local Authorities with the intention of implementing it by April 2023. It was noted that there were some situations where the speed limit would remain at 30, consultants would be appointed to examine the exceptions and consultation would take place soon with Community Councils. It was reported that the information would be updated on the Members' Portal to ensure that Councillors were aware of the campaign. This was timely as awareness needed to be raised about the consultation period with Community Councils. Exceptions would be considered, but on the whole, everywhere with a 30mph speed limit currently within villages / street light systems would soon change to 20mph.
- A further observation was made that a number of Councils objected to this change, with questions arising about the practicality of the scheme. It was reported that a request to defer the scheme had been made to Welsh Government due to the current financial crisis as it appeared to be an expensive project.
- A question was asked about public transport issues, with a request for an update on the discussion regarding bus arrangements throughout Wales. Concern was expressed about the practicality of this in rural locations.
- In response it was noted that a report had been submitted to the Communities Scrutiny Committee some weeks ago about public transport. It was noted that Transport for Wales and Welsh Government provided support to Local Authorities to examine the networks and improve them. It was acknowledged that this was challenging in rural areas. It was reported that improvements were evident in some services, and that re-designing a service had led to benefits to local communities. Having said this, it was noted that the partnerships were struggling to meet the additional costs. Reference was made to the innovative electric bus scheme, and the provision to charge electric buses in Porthmadog. This meant that the Council would be requested to contribute towards this work. It was noted that improvements had been made in the public transport provision, but the transportation service had overspent by over £300,000 this year, and therefore it was a difficult situation in attempting to improve provision while contributing to the improvement.

## **7. HIGHWAYS, MUNICIPAL AND GWYNEDD CONSULTANCY PERFORMANCE REPORT**

The report was submitted by Cllr Berwyn Parry Jones.

## **DECISION**

To accept and note the information in the report.

## **DISCUSSION**

The report was submitted, conveying appreciation in the first place for the employees working in difficult and busy circumstances gritting roads during the recent cold weather, and they were thanked for their work. It was reported that the Waste Collection and Treatment Services had been transferred to the Environment Department, and Gwynedd Consultancy Department had now moved to the Highways and Municipal Department. The Cabinet Member wished to note his appreciation for the work of all the Department's officers, and to recognise their key contribution during this period. The intention to change the Department's name following the recent changes was noted. The preferred name following consultation with staff was the Highways, Engineering and YGC Department.

It was noted that there was a significant amount of work facing the Department over the coming months, including a review of the Street Cleaning Service and also a very detailed examination of the budget. A report was provided on the projects in the current Council Plan which included the Clean and Tidy Communities project, Strengthen Communication and Engagement and the Service Mapping project. As part of this project it was intended to place the Department's different assets on a map where customers would be able to view the status of the asset and report any defects such as street lamps or grit bins.

Attention was drawn to the Fleet Strategy, and the opportunity was taken to emphasise the decision made by the Climate Change Board, that no manager should renew or dispose of any vehicle without prior discussion with the Fleet Manager. It was explained that this was crucial to the success of the Fleet Strategy. This was due to a perception that there had been excessive purchasing of vehicles on an ad-hoc basis in the past. It was believed that this guidance would soon be shared with the Departments.

Reference was made to other projects in the report, such as the Fairbourne project, before moving on to report on the Department's performance, noting that performance was satisfactory. Reference was made to replacing all the Council's street lights to LED technology, in addition to the street cleaning work, highways maintenance and the public toilets service.

In conclusion, reference was made to the work of Gwynedd Consultancy Department (YGC), a service which generated a significant income for the Council, whilst also undertaking statutory functions in water and flood management, before referring to the Department's financial position. It was noted that there was currently an overspend of £600,000 within the existing Highways and Municipal Department following the transfer of some services to the Environment Department, but there was work in the pipeline to understand the reasons for the overspend and to take steps to reconcile the situation. It was reported that YGC were underspending by nearly £30,000.

Observations arising from the discussion

- The members expressed their thanks for the report, and the change to the Department's name was welcomed.
- There was some uncertainty about which Department held responsibilities and executive functions, and that there was an element of complexity.
- The appreciation of the Department's work in the recent cold weather was echoed, and it was added that drivers and pedestrians should consider whether their journeys were necessary as the Council was unfortunately unable to grit everywhere.
- It was suggested that the procedure for prioritising road gritting should be conveyed to all Council Members so that they were clear about the arrangements. It was added that there were arrangements to grit class one routes, and that the Department was under pressure to respond to all locations. It was agreed that the procedure should be brought to the attention of Council Members, possibly through a reference in the Leader's bulletin or a note from the Head of Department. Reference was made to App Gwynedd that listed which roads were gritted.
- It was reiterated that the report contained much good and positive news. It was considered that there were robust and realistic plans in place to address the overspend in future.
- In relation to the income generated by Gwynedd Consultancy service, a question was asked about whether there was a target income. The Head of Department confirmed that there was a target, although he did not have the exact figure to hand. It was explained that there was an intention to bring a report to the Leadership Team on YGC in the new year, and the report could refer to the income element.
- A question was asked about whether lights could be dimmed, particularly in the middle of the night. It was noted that this would be included in the savings scheme.
- Reference was made to the charging points that had been installed, and whether they generated an income. It was confirmed that the charging points in car parks were the responsibility of the Environment Department.

At the end of the meeting, the County's residents, fellow members and Council Officials were wished a Merry Christmas.

The meeting commenced at 1.00pm and concluded at 2.05pm.

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**CHAIR**