

CYNGOR GWYNEDD CABINET



Report to a meeting of the Gwynedd Council Cabinet

Date of meeting: 14 February 2023

Cabinet Member: Councillor Dyfrig Siencyn and Councillor Nia Jeffreys

Contact Officer: Sioned Williams

Contact Number: 01286 679547

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

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 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 North Wales Economic Ambition Board to ensure that it delivers its outcomes for Gwynedd. A copy of the quarterly report which includes more details on the progress made on different growth projects can be seen in **Appendix 1**.

2.2 Since October, the substantial increase in the cost of plans has affected some of the plans, with every project having to review and adapt before proceeding with their detailed plans. Good progress was seen at the Bryn Cegin Park, Bangor Scheme, namely a Joint Venture Agreement with Welsh Government being agreed for the development of the site.

2.3 However, there are three further schemes, namely the development of the Bodelwyddan site, Llysfasi development and Bangor University Energy Centre has confirmed that they will not proceed as Growth Bids projects. This means that £30 million of the fund has not been



earmarked. The Ambition Board has agreed on arrangements to identify new transformational projects that will contribute to the challenging targets that are a part of the Bid to create new jobs in the region and attract investment from the private sector.

Project 2: Create High Value Jobs

- 2.4 The programme includes a range of activities to promote opportunities to create work that pays well and prepares Gwynedd school pupils to take advantage of the opportunities.
- 2.5 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 the recent highlights, visits to the Trawsfynydd Decommissioning Site have been held for Meirionnydd school pupils to draw attention to the employment opportunities available there.
- 2.6 The work of protecting and creating new jobs on the Trawsfynydd and Llanbedr site has also continued. We must express our disappointment that our bid to the UK Government to improve access to the Llanbedr airfield failed and we will continue to hold discussions with both Governments in order to reach agreement on the way forward.
- 2.7 The project has managed to secure £450,000 grant funding to support local businesses to recover, to support residents into work and to prepare the way to ensure that the people and businesses of Gwynedd benefit from proposed investments in Trawsfynydd and Llanbedr.
- 2.8 The resources of this project team also continue to be partly directed to support efforts to establish a procedure and proposals for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund 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

- 2.9 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.
- 2.10 On 10 October 2022, Welsh Government and Plaid Cymru confirmed that £11 million will be provided for the second phase of ARFOR until the end of March 2025 (the publication can be read [here](#)). The programme will continue to be implemented across Anglesey, Gwynedd, Ceredigion, and Carmarthenshire, to support the communities which are Welsh language strongholds to thrive by means of economic interventions that will also contribute to increasing opportunities to see and use the Welsh language every day. The programme will realise five work streams to help achieve the aim and more details can be read [here](#).
- 2.11 The [Digital Platform](#) scheme is going from strength to strength, with 66 local businesses having already started to benefit from the scheme and develop their use of technology by attending specialist training sessions, and receive support from digital mentors to develop their business.
- 2.12 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 an 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.

- 2.13 The LEADER European Programme that funds Arloesi Gwynedd Wledig will end in June 2023. The Department is working closely with Menter Môn which administers LEADER in Gwynedd to investigate opportunities to continue with the work by means of sources such as the UK's Shared Prosperity Fund. Information about the range and impact of the work of Arloesi Gwynedd Wledig can be seen [here](#).

Project 4: Promotion of Town Centres

- 2.14 New arrangements have been put in place to target Welsh Government's Transforming Towns funds to develop and implement a range of town centre regeneration projects. As a result of substantial changes over the past years, there is a requirement from Welsh Government to secure town centre plans for every town. The focus of the past months has been on preparing briefs, securing a budget, and following the procurement processes to commission Town Centre Plans for Bangor, Caernarfon, Bala, Pwllheli and Porthmadog. Funding has already been secured from Welsh Government for Bangor, Caernarfon, and Bala. It is anticipated that there will be opportunities for other towns in 2023/24.
- 2.15 Cyngor Gwynedd submitted financial bids to the UK Government's Levelling Up Fund. A bid 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). Confirmation was received on 19 January that the bid, which included an investment of around £40m, was not successful. It will be required to collaborate with all partners to identify alternative possibilities to implement the plans.
- 2.16 A Regeneration Manager (Bangor Regeneration Programme) was appointed in November 2022. The role will coordinate and support regeneration efforts in Bangor, focusing on plans in the city Centre and the High Street specifically.
- 2.17 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 work is continuing to identify empty property within the County and identify a spectrum of active interventions, which include information and advice, providing technical information, financial support (grants and loans), threat of enforcement steps, debt reclamation and formal enforcement cases, which could be suitable as a solution to improve the appearance or bring the property back into use.

Project 5: Implementing the Gwynedd Slate Heritage

- 2.18 Over 18 months have now passed since Cyngor Gwynedd 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. The site's first annual meeting was held in October, and the annual report has now been published on the Welsh Slate website.

- 2.19 As a follow up to the success of the LleCHI project, the Heritage Lottery Fund has approved a bid worth £128,000 for a period of developing a new scheme. A Project Officer has been appointed to the post since December, and work is progressing to draw up priorities in the development phase and create links with partners and stakeholders. The development period will lead to an opportunity to submit a bid for over £1m to the National Heritage Lottery Fund for a scheme to develop the communities' ownership of their heritage, promote pride and culture of our slate areas and interpret our heritage for all.
- 2.20 The Council managed to secure funding of £150,000 via Cadw, the Welsh Government to implement the first steps of our Interpretation Strategy. A series of heritage itineraries are being developed, as well as a substantial interpretation plan across the main slate sites in the area. We have also distributed slate plaques stating '*proud to be part of the World Heritage Site*' to the site's main partners, and stickers stating '*proud to be support the World Heritage Site*' to businesses in the area.
- 2.21 A favourable judgement was received from the UK's Shared Prosperity Fund on 19 January. The scheme focuses on three areas of the Site - Bethesda, Dinorwig and Blaenau Ffestiniog - and it will improve links between the communities and the quarries, improve interpretation and ownership and lead to urban improvements. The value of the plan is £26m, with £18.8m of the grant coming from the UK Government. The full details of the plan will be submitted to the Council's Cabinet with the intention of drawing up the plan's governance procedures following this.
- 2.22 UNESCO is conducting a periodic review of every World Heritage Site in turn this year, the review cycle will fall on European and North American sites which means that it is necessary for us to submit a detailed questionnaire on the site's activity to the UK National Commission by the end of March, and then to UNESCO by the end of May 2023.

Project 6: Tourism - Forming a Sustainable Tourism Plan

- 2.23 Work has been ongoing for many years now to establish a Sustainable Visitor Economy Plan for Gwynedd and Eryri. 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 many 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 Eryri 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
- 2.24 An implementation structure has now been formed between the Council and Eryri 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 their meeting on 14 February 2023 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 Eryri and we are confident that our new Plan will break new ground to support a sustainable visitor economy. One of the main initial tasks will be to establish the Gwynedd and Eryri Sustainable Visitor Economy Partnership which will lead on implementing the new Plan by adopting a prioritised Action Plan as well as inclusive and relevant measures to measure the impact of the visitor economy on Gwynedd and Eryri.

Project 7: Businesses Receiving Support to Prosper

- 2.26 The county's businesses continue to be under pressure as a result of the continued increase in costs, a reduction in customer spending and the challenges of recruiting and sustaining the workforce.
- 2.27 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, giving particular attention to advice and support associated with reducing overheads. An on-line seminar was held for the purposes of sharing good practice in the field by the Department in November (material from the event is available [here](#))
- 2.28 The team is preparing to launch a new business support fund in the near future by using money from external sources such as the UK's Shared Prosperity Fund and the ARFOR programme to help our businesses to survive and develop to the future.
- 2.29 A recent structural change occurred within the business support team as a result of the retirement of the team leader - this has led to temporary reorganising and restructuring, with empty posts for periods of time, which has affected short-term ability and capacity, particularly since substantial attention and effort has been re-directed at present to ensure that appropriate arrangements are being established to implement the Shared Prosperity Fund.

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

- 2.30 Employers are continuing to report that they are facing recruitment challenges, which can hinder their ability to maximise their income. In parallel, the pressure in terms of the increase in costs puts many businesses under pressure and there is a risk that this could lead, in turn to the failure of some businesses.
- 2.31 In response, the Council's Gwaith Gwynedd team are working to ensure that as many Gwynedd people as possible are a part of the labour market and - increasingly - help residents who work to increase their skills.
- 2.32 A programme of job fairs is already in the pipeline in preparation for the spring, with 4 fairs across the county arranged and another two in the pipeline. In parallel, the work to help people to return to work has continued, with 107 securing a job as a result of the support they have



received to date this year (April to December 2022). Money has also been secured for a new post to support residents to increase their earnings.

- 2.33 It must be noted that one of the programmes that funds the work of the Gwaith Gwynedd - Communities for Work team - is ending in the near future as it was funded by European funding. There are arrangements in place to ensure that the impact of this will be reduced, including an increase in the funding being received from Welsh Government.

Project 9: Forming a Regeneration Plan for our Areas

- 2.34 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.
- 2.35 During September and October 2022, workshops were established with local organisations in each of the 13 local regeneration areas. The purpose of the workshops was to report back on the outcomes of the engagement work, addressing local priorities. The workshops were also an opportunity to consider and discuss local projects and commence the work of drawing up action plans.
- 2.36 The next step of the process will be to prepare local regeneration plans (draft) for every individual area. This is already in progress, with the intention of having draft plans in place by the end of February / beginning of March. We will also arrange a series of further workshops in the local areas in order to consider and discuss the draft action plans.

3. PERFORMANCE OF DEPARTMENT SERVICES

- 3.1 The Department's Performance Dashboard has been reviewed regularly. In the latest Performance Challenge Meeting to the Cabinet in October, we reported on the recovery and performance of the Maritime Service, Byw'n Iach and the Libraries Service. I wish to draw the Cabinet Members' attention to matters affecting the performance of the following services this time:

Leisure Resources Service

- 3.2 As a result of complaints about the impact of over-tourism in the Y Glyn area of Padarn Country Park, it is worth noting that a bid for grant funding to resurface the car park has been successful and the work commenced there in November. The work will be completed by April 2023 and the hope is that there will be better control of the site by the summer season.
- 3.3 The level of users at Byw'n Iach Centres continues to be lower than the pre-Covid period. The performance for the latest quarter of 22,243 was better than 2021/22 but was worse than 2019/20 (71,691). Some specific matters have affected the figures, including the closure of Arfon swimming pool for 3 months to refurbish the roof, having to close the Arfon five-a-side courts before the summer and there is still no date for their reopening. We had to restrict the opening hours of Bangor pool in the mornings for 3 months due to a lack of staff. Discussions are regularly held between Byw'n Iach and the Council in order to overcome some of these barriers that are affecting the Company's income.



Hafan, Pwllheli

- 3.4 Hafan Pwllheli continues to be at capacity, and it is encouraging that over 140 are on the waiting list up to the end of December 2022. However, there is a risk at present due to the favourable offers of other marinas in the area and a lack of decision to date regarding Gwynedd's fees. A number of the waiting list are considering moving since others have more favourable terms. Usually, customer turnover of between 10% to 15% is expected every year, and therefore it is important that we attract new customers.
- 3.5 At the same time, there has been a reduction in the number of mooring customers at Pwllheli Harbour and mainly because of the changing needs of customers. It appears that some have transferred to Hafan, whilst others, including traders/fishermen, have stopped keeping a boat as a result of the increase in the cost of living.

Gwynedd Archives

- 3.6 Customer satisfaction is measured regularly by the Archives Service and the performance is consistently high. However, it is worth noting that there has been a drop in the satisfaction percentage in the last quarter, due to the fact that Caernarfon Records Office continues to be closed. The Records Office has been closed due to rewiring work and the timetable has slipped substantially, therefore we can understand that users are expressing their dissatisfaction. In addition, as a result of the slippage, the Service has lost income since it was not possible for the Conservation Officer to accept work from individuals and organisations, and as it has not been possible for the Service to receive substantial collections from organisations such as the Courts Service and Coroner's Office. There is now a timetable in place for the final part of the work, and we hope to re-open in April. Meanwhile, staff continue to respond to enquiries and give access by offering photocopies or searching on behalf of users.

Museums and Arts

- 3.7 The number of people engaging with Museums and Galleries has reduced over the last period as a result of the fact that Storiell gallery and the Lloyd George Museum have had to close without notice. Storiell had to be closed in November following an accident where the doors of a glass display cabinet collapsed. Repair work will be carried out in January, and it is hoped that it will be reopened by the beginning of February. An accident happened at Lloyd George Museum in December after a section of the ceiling collapsed after a water pipe burst in the ceiling. The building has been emptied and dried out, but it is not anticipated that it can be reopened until June after the repairs have been completed.

Neuadd Dwyfor

- 3.8 Since the new-look Neuadd Dwyfor opened in March 2022 we have asked for the opinion of our customers every month and the satisfaction rates on the whole were seen between 82% (lowest figure) to 95% (highest figure). In November we saw a figure of 88%, with 79 happy and 10 unhappy from 89 responses. Eight of the negative comments were regarding the arrangements at Tudur Owen's show - Go Brin. This was a very successful show that was being filmed by S4C and it was a sold-out show. Many lessons were learnt from this night, especially in terms of crowd flow, and we may need to open the library space in future so that the hallway is a more comfortable space. TV demands meant that we had no control over when we could open the doors, and this led to people queuing on the stairwells. Comments were also received about the



lack of staff to serve drinks; however, we did not have any more staff available for this evening since everybody who was available was working. However, the comments we are receiving is of great assistance as we seek to improve the experience for customers in the future. In December, 95% said that they were completely satisfied with the service.

Tourism, Marketing and Events

- 3.9 The Gwynedd Ambassadors Scheme was developed to embed the new visitor principles and to be a source of information for residents, businesses and students who wish to learn more about the area. To date 186 have registered, with 73% of those individuals born and bred in Gwynedd. 90 have reached bronze level and have completed three or more modules in full.
- 3.10 Since April 2022, the service has supported 23 events in Gwynedd, however, 2 of these events were cancelled. 100% of the 21 event organisers have noted that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the service and support received from Cyngor Gwynedd. To date, it is reported that the benefit to the area from these events will be approximately £5,834,862 million. 99,625 attended the events and 16,544 participated / competed at the events. The post-event reports of the organisers show that 270 companies from Gwynedd directly benefited from the activities arranged. Up to mid-January 2023, the Service has responded to 47 enquiries from event organisers for the coming year.

Economic Development

- 3.11 To date, 66 businesses have received direct support in 2022/23, an increase of 34 since the last challenge meeting. The number reflects the financial funds that are currently available.
- 3.12 To date, 107 Gwynedd people have gained employment after receiving direct support in 2022/23, with 28 added to the total in the period since the last challenge meeting. The total reflects the resource available and the target group for the work.
- 3.13 Substantial effort and attention by the Service is currently directed towards establishing county arrangements for the administration of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) in Gwynedd as well as manage the fund for the North Wales region on behalf of the six counties (see report to Cabinet dated 24 January 2023 - [here](#)). This, in turn, has restricted the resources available to address other issues within the Service.
- 3.14 There is an important opportunity for Cyngor Gwynedd to apply to the UKSPF and this will be a priority for the Service - and the Department more broadly - in the coming months.
- 3.15 There has also been considerable structural change within the Service, with one key senior officer retiring and another seconded for the time being to lead on the ARFOR programme regionally. This has resulted in the temporary reorganisation and restructuring of the Service, with posts remaining empty for a time. Again, this disrupts the Service's capacity.

Regeneration Programmes

- 3.16 Work to prepare cross-departmental town centre regeneration plans continues, in order to reflect the priorities of the Regeneration Framework.
- 3.17 Developmental funding has been secured through the Welsh Government's Town Transformation programme in order to draw up a Town Centre Plan for Bala, with a bid also



submitted to update the Bangor plan so that it corresponds to the requirements of Welsh Government.

- 3.18 The Bangor Vibrancy Plan did not receive approval from the British Government for the Levelling Up Fund. We will meet with partners soon in order to identify the options and opportunities as we move forward with the work streams in the city in the future.
- 3.19 The Llewyrch o'r Llechi Plan submitted to the UK Government's Levelling Up Fund has been successful. The package is worth over £26m and strong aspects of the bid will contribute towards regenerating the town centres of Llanberis, Bethesda and Blaenau Ffestiniog.

Supporting Communities

- 3.20 Between October and December, 121 groups and enterprises were supported, including advice to Garndolbenmaen community hall to identify funding sources to upgrade the centre, advice to a community group to develop Trefor playing field, initial advice, and support to a crew from the community of Bethel who are eager to develop a community café and shop for the benefit of the local community, advice to the Braich Goch Corris community group on potential heritage projects grants.
- 3.21 The number of projects that have received support with their development during October - December 2022 is higher than the figures for the months in quarters 1 and 2. A number of the funds that are open are suitable for the purposes of the project and can influence the number of projects we are supporting from month to month. The figures reported upon during October, November and December include the number of groups / enterprises that have received money through the CRF fund to develop projects. All projects were completed by the end of December. A total of 33 groups and community enterprises from across Gwynedd benefited from the fund with £357,313 allocated as support in order to develop the projects. The figures also include a number of groups that have benefited from the grant for food schemes/establishing warm welcome locations. During the period from October-December, 15 community enterprises / groups have received money to support food/warm welcome projects administered via Cist Gwynedd. Examples of the projects that have received support to develop include Caernarfon Rugby Club in order to attract various grants via Welsh Government, the Welsh Rugby Union and Cist Gwynedd to upgrade Tŷ'r Clwb and improvements to the Nefyn Siop Siarad Building.

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 Three schemes continue from previous years (a total of £105,000) with the three subject to permission to increase fees as part of a parking review. There are arrangements in the pipeline by the Environment Department to undertake the review and, therefore, the timetable to realise the savings is reliant on this work. The timetable is not known at present.



5. NEXT STEPS AND TIMETABLE

- 5.1 We will continue to monitor the performance of the different services every month and a special meeting of the Departmental Management Team is being arranged for 16 February 2023, with representatives from the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee 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."

