

CYNGOR GWYNEDD CABINET



Report to a meeting of the Cyngor Gwynedd Cabinet

Date of meeting: 14 February, 2023
Cabinet Member: Councillor Menna Jones
Contact Officer: Ian Jones
Contact Number: 01286 679072
Subject: CHALLENGE PERFORMANCE REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CORPORATE SUPPORT AND LEGAL 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 been happening in the areas for which I am responsible as Cabinet Member for Corporate Support and Legal Department. 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.
- 1.2 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 Corporate Support Department's Management Team on 18 January, 2023.
- 1.3 I am satisfied that the projects being led by the Department, along with the day-to-day performance, are undertaken within the budget. I wish to note my appreciation of the work of all the officers of the Department and to recognise the key contribution they make to support the work of the Council.

CORPORATE SUPPORT

2. PROJECTS OF THE GWYNEDD COUNCIL PLAN 2018-2023 (Improvement Priorities)

The Corporate Support Department is leading on eight of the improvement priorities, which appear in the Council Plan for this year. I summarise what has been achieved thus far as follows:



2.1 KEEPING THE BENEFIT LOCAL

- 2.1.1 The Council is responsible for procuring, or purchasing, a number of goods and services and is eager to try to ensure that local businesses can compete and win these contracts in order to ensure that as much of the Council's expenditure as possible remains local.
- 2.1.2. The update on the progress of the Keeping the Benefit Local Scheme was submitted to the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee in December 2022. Encouraging feedback was received and work will be undertaken to collect examples of tenders where local companies were unsuccessful, to ask whether it is possible to purchase fuel on behalf of residents or facilitate fuel purchasing arrangements jointly with the Energy Service and to submit an update within a year on the results of a pilot scheme on the methodology of procuring social benefits.
- 2.1.3 In terms of the next steps of that particular scheme, work will continue to identify further opportunities to realise benefits by means of a framework agreement system.

2.2 WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

- 2.2.1 The aim of this project is to boost the number of women who apply for and attain senior positions within the Council by reviewing the employment conditions and the work environment to attract more women to undertake the work in future.

The project group has responded by submitting a Developing Potential Programme for women in the Council. The second series of the Development Programme was launched on 18 October 2022. There has been a keen interest in the programme along with the project's broader activity. Two further series of the Programme will be held in spring and autumn 2023.

- 2.2.2 The "teatime talks" for female Elected Members and officers within the Council continue. A series of talks was recently held with internal and external speakers sharing their experiences and further series will be held in 2023.

2.3 ENSURING FAIRNESS FOR EVERYONE

- 2.3.1 In order to put the people of Gwynedd at the centre of everything we do, we must first identify any barriers that some people face when looking for or receiving services from the Council.
- 2.3.2 Further research has been undertaken to provide specific training on equality for managers, especially in the field of Anti Racism. Work has also been carried out to establish an intranet location for resources for managers. An additional training session for Members and an expert session for staff members of the Cynllun Yfory scheme will be held before the end of January.



- 2.3.3 Work to act on the perception that refined Welsh language is needed for each Council post has commenced. There is work to be done to change this perception and the need to do so corresponds with the workforce planning project, which looks at improving how the Council can develop and improve the way it recruits.
- 2.3.4 There was some further delay to complete the work of developing a new version of the Equality Impact Assessment form, after a key staff member in the Information Technology Service left their post, but a promise was made that work would be completed as soon as possible.
- 2.3.5 The work of considering equality matters as part of a system to develop potential savings schemes has commenced.
- 2.3.6 Although 80% of office-based staff with full computer access have completed the questionnaire to note their equality characteristics, only about 30% of staff in a front-line position outside the office (e.g. school staff, care home staff and recycling staff) have done so. Discussions have taken place with some of the Departments in order to improve the situation.
- 2.3.7 The independent investigation on the Council's payroll systems has been completed, with the final report submitted late in December. The investigation was undertaken by an independent specialist. The purpose of the work was to consider whether or not there had been gender-based illegal discrimination in our pay systems. The report concludes that there are no concerns about illegal discrimination, and that the Council's equal pay defence seems robust. As a further general observation (and outside the primary focus of the investigation), the report draws attention to the fact there is a gender pay gap between women and men within the workforce.
- 2.3.8 The work of gathering and introducing information in order to receive feedback from the *Inclusive Employers* company on how inclusive we are as an employer was completed and submitted before Christmas. We are awaiting feedback from the company on how to develop further in the field in March 2023.

2.4 NATIVE WELSH PLACE NAMES

- 2.4.1 As you are aware, there is concern that native Welsh place names are disappearing from the landscape of Gwynedd as a result of a lack of use of Welsh names and an increase in renaming places in English. The project prioritises the fields to address and also considers what could be done in terms of Council buildings, street names, place names etc.
- 2.4.2 One primary school workshop was held to promote place names using the interactive map and another visit was organised for January, and work to promote the map is ongoing among primary and secondary schools.



2.4.3 Initial research work on work to change street names is ongoing and staff training sessions and a house names session have been organised.

2.4.4 Work has already commenced to plan associated activities for the National *Eisteddfod Genedlaethol* 2023.

2.5 PROMOTING THE USE OF THE WELSH LANGUAGE WITHIN THE COUNCIL'S SERVICES

2.5.1 The Council has been prominent in terms of ensuring that services for residents are available through the medium of Welsh as we operate through the medium of Welsh internally. Promoting the use of the Welsh language within Council services is continuous work, and we are aware of the need to continue to maintain our staff's language skills.

2.5.2 Language training continues with a number of staff taking advantage of internal and external opportunities. Work to promote courses and opportunities to develop language skills is undertaken continuously. Learn Welsh courses were promoted for beginners, which start at the end of January/beginning of February and are held by Learn Welsh - North West. A meeting was held with Siwan Iorwerth, Work Welsh Scheme Manager, in order to discuss plans for the future and to obtain information about new courses and opportunities.

2.5.3 Collaboration is taking place with the Workforce Development team (Adults, Health and Well-being) to promote resources and opportunities to develop Welsh skills with staff in the field of care. A newsletter was sent to staff with information about lessons and useful apps. The resources on the internal Language Site were updated slightly.

2.5.4 Work is being undertaken with the Finance Department and the Byw'n Iach company to gather more language self-assessments from staff.

2.6 THE WELSH LANGUAGE AND PUBLIC SERVICES

2.6.1 The purpose of this project by the Welsh Language Sub-group (Public Services Board) is to encourage the people of Gwynedd to speak Welsh when they come into reception areas (at the Council and other partners). A company was commissioned to create an assessment of the public's language choice when using services in 12 traditional receptions in Gwynedd and Anglesey and to look into possible interventions in order to encourage more people to use our services through the medium of Welsh.

The focus of the project is on the use made of services available in Welsh, and not on the availability of services where they should be available by default.

2.6.2 The *Iaith Cyf.* company was appointed and observation work was carried out at the receptions in May and June. Focus groups with participating staff were held by the Iaith company in July. Recommendations have been developed to try to encourage more use of the Welsh language by the public, and a resources pack and guidelines for



staff have been completed. A consultation session was held in October with a selection of front-line managers in order to gather their opinions on the resources pack and training for staff.

The findings of the observation, recommendations, resources pack and development guidelines will be submitted to members of the Welsh Language Sub-group in due course. It is intended to trial a train the trainer training session for managers and a training resources pack, which will focus on equipping staff to encourage more use of the Welsh language in receptions.

- 2.6.3 It was agreed to start a new project that will gather information about good practice in terms of recruiting Welsh speakers and to offer support to improve language skills across public organisations in Gwynedd and Anglesey.

2.7 ENSURING THAT MANAGERS PRACTISE THEIR HEALTH AND SAFETY ROLE EFFECTIVELY

- 2.7.1 This project has been identified as a corporate priority for the first time in this year's Council Plan.
- 2.7.2 The Health, Safety and Well-being field is now scrutinised in a way that has never been seen before, and for several reasons. Clearly, the pandemic brought our safety to the forefront of all our minds and keeping everyone safe is one of the Council's most fundamental expectations by the people of Gwynedd.
- 2.7.3 Dates have been set in February 2023 for a training session on 'Safe Leadership' for the Council's Management Team. Training for Elected Members has been reviewed to include an element on their personal safety as members. A number of IOSH courses (more than usual) have been arranged to meet the needs of specific Departments e.g. two IOSH courses for school Headteachers will be held before the end of March (one at the end of January and one in March) and another course in January specifically for Care Managers.
- 2.7.4 Officers have collaborated with the Systems Project Officer of the Human Resources Department to map the processes of the accident reporting system to the Health and Safety Unit. This is about being clear of our needs as a Council to go out to procure purpose-built external systems. A clear brief has been agreed upon in terms of a health and safety system and is therefore ready to go out to market for prices.
- 2.7.5 A Mental Well-being Conference has been arranged for 6.2.23.

2.8 WORKFORCE PLANNING



- 2.8.1 The work of identifying gaps and acting pro-actively is a priority that has emerged more than ever recently and there is a need to respond to the staffing challenges facing many services across the Council. A specific work programme and milestones have been formulated to identify short, medium and long-term gaps.
- 2.8.2 Work is continuing on creating content for a bespoke Careers website and it is intended for the website to be live in February. The website will be used as the main hub to attract applicants for jobs, and also provide information about different career pathways within the Council in due course.
- 2.8.3 The Apprenticeships Scheme and the graduate scheme continue to make good progress and are recognised across the Council and beyond. The Talent and Apprenticeships Team has started the latest cycle of attracting apprentices to Council services.
- 2.8.4 In terms of developing and obtaining order and understanding of the nature of recruitment problems in the Council at present, substantial work has been achieved. It is proposed to submit a brief report to the Council's Leadership Team on the main findings at the end of January.
- 2.8.5 A series of meetings are in place in January to drive forward the pilot scheme that is being carried out by the Planning Service to develop long-term workforce planning practices.
- 2.8.6 There has been a slight delay in the ability to deliver two specific developments across the Council, namely the procedure of conducting exit interviews and providing the ability for job applicants to use a simpler application form during the recruitment process. The delay on both pieces of work derives from the same source, namely the fact that there is a series of requirements on the information technology team that undertakes the work on our behalf, and that they need to prioritise that particular workload.
- 2.8.7 Initial work has been achieved on developing a new work experience scheme - to be discussed further at the Project Group over the next few months.
- 2.8.8 Three job fairs were held jointly with the Economy and Regeneration Department during November and December. These fairs focused on posts that were currently vacant. More development work needs to be done on this aspect over the next few months.

3. PERFORMANCE -



3.1 An overview of the Department's performance during the financial year to date is noted below. Not all services are referred to but I am eager to confirm that I am satisfied with the current performance of those services not referred to here.

3.2 **Support**

3.2.1 The Support Service has a new indicator since September 2022 that measures the number of days between sending an application and receiving a DBS check result. In December, the Support Service submitted 187 applications to the Disclosure and Barring Service. The result of processing applications during that particular month was 3 days, which is an excellent performance.

3.3 **Communication and Engagement**

3.3.1 In recent years, a great deal of work has been done on developing the self-service provision, which is on the Council's corporate website - www.gwynedd.llyw.cymru, for the use of Gwynedd residents. The Communication and Engagement Service monitors the number of service applications that are submitted on-line.

3.3.2 Performance in November 2022 has followed the usual pattern with the number of applications slightly higher than the previous year. However, in December a reduction of 2,746 applications were seen compared to the previous year. This is mainly as there was no need to book a Recycling Centre slot from 28 December 2022 until the beginning of January. 4,093 fewer recycling slots were booked in December 2022 compared to December 2021.

Despite the reduction in this particular service, figures show that a number of other services have seen an increase in applications compared to December 2022, e.g. paying for garden waste collections, informing the Council about uncollected bins, dog fouling problems, flooding/blocked gully issues, ice and snow issues, taxi licence applications.

3.4 **Customer Contact and Registration**

3.4.1 Over the past two years, the Customer Contact and Registration Service has coped well under difficult circumstances. Action has been taken to strengthen service capacity and staffing levels now correspond to what has been identified for the service structure.

3.4.2 The average performance of responding to calls in the Contact Centre has improved since reaching service structure staffing levels, with the number of missed calls remaining low.

3.4.4 With 3 members of staff trained to respond to web chat enquiries, use of the provision is increasing. In November 2022, 35 web chat enquiries received a response and 13 in mid-December 2022.



- 3.4.5 The percentage of deaths registered within five days (without referring to the coroner) has reduced compared to last year. Improved performance is not anticipated as problems remain between hospital doctors and medical examiners. The procedure of referring each death to the office of medical examiners will become statutory this year and, therefore, it is likely that new guidelines and implementation rules will be received in the near future in terms of performance targets etc.
- 3.3.6 In terms of the number of days taken to reach a decision on an individual's eligibility for a blue badge, the service is specifically examining the average number of days an applicant has to wait before receiving a decision about their application. The average is 10.41 working days, down from 11.22 days since the autumn. Some applications are approved immediately, but in some circumstances, individuals may wait up to 51.56 days usually before receiving a decision, again this figure is down from 55.30 days, which is a reduction of 3.74 days since the autumn. In the majority of cases where someone has to wait a long time for a response, the delay is due to a lack of information submitted with the original application or the individual has appealed the decision and is awaiting a further assessment by the independent assessment company.

3.4 Organisational Learning and Development

- 3.4.1 The Organisational Learning and Development Service gathers feedback on a regular basis regarding to what extent does training help individuals to undertake their role and the feedback score is consistent. There was a smaller sample than usual this time due to a limited number of events in December 2022. The service continues to collaborate with the Support and Information Technology Services in order to improve the accuracy of reports.
- 3.4.2 Very positive feedback was received about the Supporting and Mentoring Workshop for Apprentices that was held recently. There was also positive feedback about the Data Protection training and the Customer Care training.
- 3.4.3 Over the next few weeks, two new e-modules have been placed on the e-learning hub, namely Fire Awareness and Cyber Security. Also, work has commenced on creating a MANAGERS' RESOURCE for every Manager but with additional elements for New Managers.
- 3.4.4 The Success Wall, which has been developed to display messages received from the public thanking and praising staff for their work continues. 1107 comments of gratitude and praise have now been received across Council services.
- 3.4.5 The staff benefits scheme is going from strength to strength with 2483 now signed up to the *Vectis Scheme*, this is an increase of 1249 since March 2019. There are now 249 businesses in the local business promotion scheme with 182 expressing that they see a value to the scheme. In terms of the bicycle scheme, 43 individuals have received a bicycle since April 2022.

4. FINANCIAL POSITION/SAVINGS

4.1.1 An underspend position of (£19k) is anticipated by the Department by the end of the year. A number of factors contribute towards the underspend, such as staff turnover in a number of services and underspend on a number of other headings within the Department. The underspend is reduced by forecasts of an income shortfall by the Printroom. The Department has now succeeded to realise all of its savings schemes.

LEGAL SERVICES

Purpose

“Provide legal services to the Council which enables it to work effectively for the benefit of Gwynedd’s people”

In addition to carrying out a range of legal work we also support the Council's main priorities in particular implementation of the Housing Strategy, School Modernisation and the new legislation around second homes. Recruitment remains challenging but we are appointing although some posts are more difficult. Proactive steps are being taken to address this risk. We are focused on ensuring that support is available for the Council and its services using locum and external provision to bridge.

The performance of the Service is monitored by seeking feedback from the Departments which we serve. As of October 2022, the team has created a new and simpler system for seeking feedback. Opinion is now provided against a scale of 1-5 (5= Very Satisfied down to 1= Totally Unsatisfied), Thus far this year the scoring has been 100% level 5 but the system needs to be developed to increase the sample.

PROPRIETY

Our priorities for 2022/23

Contribute to the work of establishing the North Wales Corporate Joint Committee (“CJC”)

The Monitoring Officer acts as the Monitoring officer of the CJC which includes functions akin to that of the Head of Democratic Services. This has involved implementing and providing specialist support on the arrangements and the constitution of the CJC. Constitutional documents have been prepared and this work is continuing as well as attending meetings to advise. Although elements of the establishment work are continuing the work on bringing the functions into operation is also in hand. Part of the following work will involve ensuring that capacity is developed to support this work in partnership with the other constituent councils.



Working with the Standards Committee to respond to the review of the ethical framework stemming from the report of Mr Richard Penn.

Following the publication of the Richard Penn report the response of the Government to the recommendations which include local resolution arrangements, training and the inter relationship with Town and Community Councils is awaited. The steps which the Government intends to take in response will be key to establish how to go forwards It is anticipated that the consultation on the regulations will commence in the next few weeks and the Council will have an opportunity to respond to this consultation.

In the meantime, the Standards Committee has received a report on research carried out by the Chair and Town and Community Councils member into their needs. It has been requested that an action plan be prepared in response.

On a national level steps have been taken with the assistance of the WLGA to establish a Standards Committee Forum based substantially on the model developed in North Wales. The Forum met for the first time on the 27th of January

Providing induction arrangements and training Council and Town and Community Councils on the Code of Conduct following the local elections.

Training on the Code of Conduct was provided as part of the induction sessions and 65 members received that initial training. This work continues with a more detailed course being provided on two occasions. It is intended to hold more sessions to meet demand. A training course has been prepared for Town and Community Councils which can be provided remotely, and it is intended to imitate a programme as soon as resources permit. This ties in with the work of the Standards Committee in understanding the needs of Community Councils

ELECTIONS

Supporting the Returning Officer to arrange the Local Elections in May 2022

Local Elections were held in May 2022 and the Electoral Commission provided positive feedback as to the arrangements. A review of the arrangements and a work plan will be prepared and the performance in this election has underlined the value of this approach.

Responding to the extension and amendment of the franchise, specifically for electors aged 16-18 which came into effect following the Elections and Senedd (Wales) Act 2019 and the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021



During 2021-2022 by investing in staff and a programme of direct communication we succeeded in securing the registration of circa 70% of 16-18 electors for the May elections. This included working with Schools, Colleges and the Youth Service and other bodies to promote registration as well as a campaign of direct communication. In addition, this enabled us to gain an understanding and information about what worked and communication methods as well as contacts in establishments which can be developed and used in future. It is difficult to access comparative information for the period up to the end of April 2022. We are in the process of creating a permanent post which will include in it's duties the continuation of the registration promotion work particularly around this group of electors. This comes on the back of developments in electoral work at an UK level such as voter identification and postal votes. Welsh Government has also published a white paper on the development and amendment of devolved elections. A work programme will be prepared as part of the Service Plan for 2023/24

CORONER

Deal with the appointment of a Senior Coroner for the area as well as establishing the area on a sustainable basis.

By now the interviews have been held and advice of the panel provided to the Lord Chancellor. It is anticipated that the service can start on a permanent basis and there will be collaboration with the Senior Coroner to establish the long-term arrangements.

VIEWS OF THE STATUTORY OFFICERS

OBSERVATIONS - MONITORING OFFICER

No comments to add from a propriety perspective.

OBSERVATIONS - HEAD OF FINANCE

I am satisfied that the report is a fair reflection of the financial situation of the Corporate Support Department.

