
THE CABINET TUESDAY, 14 FEBRUARY 2023

Present-

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

Also present-

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

Item 6: Garem Jackson (Head of Education Department) and Debbie Jones (Education Corporate Services Manager).

Item 8: Ffion Madog Evans (Assistant Head - Finance Department)

Item 9: Dewi Wyn Jones (Business Support Service Manager).

Items 10 and 14: Ian Jones (Head of Corporate Support Department).

Item 11: Sioned E. Williams (Head of Economy and Community Department), Angela Jones (Eryri National Park Authority) and Sian Pennant Jones (Tourism, Marketing and Events Manager).

Item 12: Sioned E. Williams (Head of Economy and Community Department) and Esyllt Rhys Jones (Regeneration Programmes Manager).

Item 15: Carys Fôn Williams (Head of Housing and Property Department).

1. APOLOGIES

No apologies were received.

Cabinet Members and Officers were welcomed to the meeting.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

The Cabinet Member for the Environment declared a personal interest in Item 12 as he was the Chairman of Ogwen Partnership, one of the partnerships involved in the bid. He withdrew from the meeting during the discussion of this item.

3. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

There were no matters arising from overview and scrutiny.

5. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting, held on 24 January 2023 were accepted as a true record.

6. YSGOL HIRAEI

The report was submitted by Cllr Beca Brown

DECISION

- 1.1 To allow the allocation of £3,000,000 from a total of £18m from the Bangor Phase 2 budget, Sustainable Learning Communities Programme (Band B) in order to invest in Ysgol Hirael. The budget would be subject to submitting a successful business case to the Welsh Government.
- 1.2 To agree for the Cabinet to assume the review of the Assets Plan by confirming a contribution of £1,050,000 from the Assets Plan for 35% of the match funding to fulfil the Ysgol Hirael project.
- 1.3 Subject to the Cabinet's decision in 1.1 above, and following that, the support of the Welsh Government to transfer the budget for Ysgol Hirael, to approve the preparation and submission of a business case to the Welsh Government in order to release the funds required.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted, noting that Ysgol Hirael is the only primary school in the Bangor catchment area which has not received any investment as part of Band A or Band B funding. It was added that the condition and suitability of the school require attention, with accessibility elements requiring specific attention at Hirael as it currently fell into category C.

It was noted that Ysgol Hirael was a very important Education resource and that it was essential to bring the school up to the same standard as the rest of the other schools in the area. The importance of the children of Hirael receiving their education at a school which had suitable resources was expressed, and this investment would allow improving the school's learning environment.

Observations arising from the discussion

- The Chief Executive noted that there had been strong comments and support from the Local Member which could be seen in part 6.3 of the report. It was added that the Local Member had been campaigning hard for this investment for the school.
- The Department was wished well in submitting their business case to Welsh Government.

7. 2023/24 - 2024/25 SAVINGS PLAN

The report was submitted by Cllr Dyfrig Siencyn

DECISION

- To approve the efficiency savings in Appendix A (£6.4M) as the first phase of savings that can be used as a contribution towards our financial gap in 2023/24 – 2024/25.
- To commission further work to establish the next phase of savings and cuts (approximately £1.6M - £2.2M) before setting the 2024/25 budget.
- To make a provision of £1.6M to address the level of risk involved in realising the efficiency savings plan.
- To delegate the right to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member for Finance, to make adjustments to this Savings Plan as the maturity of the plans listed in Appendix A develops, within the financial totals specified below.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted and the Chief Executive and the Finance officers were thanked for their work summarising all the savings received from the Departments. It was noted that a report had been submitted to the Governance and Audit Committee the previous week and the Committee's observations were received. It was added that the Governance and Audit Committee agreed with the sum of 20% to be allocated for risk. It was stated that one comment had been made about the equality assessment that had been conducted. This comment questioned whether the geographical impact on different areas had been considered; this comment had been noted and would be considered.

It was noted that the process had been followed professionally and that every Department had contributed which had resulted in a robust process and plans for the next two years.

The Chief Executive guided the Cabinet through the main matters of the report and detailed the financial gap of £12 million. It was explained that a two-year plan had been put together in order to close the financial gap; today, it was the phase one plan that was being submitted which included savings to the tune of £6.4 million. It was stressed that these were not cuts.

It was recognised that the savings would create pressure on Services and different ways of working would have to be considered. It was added that a lot of effort had been made by the Departments and that the second phase of the plan would be presented later in the year.

Observations arising from the discussion

- Members gave thanks for the report and it was believed that the process had been thorough.
- Pride was expressed about being able to make so many savings without having a substantial impact on services.
- Nevertheless, it was recognised that there would be some impact on service provision but that the list of savings included many budgets that were no longer needed and that many reasons for this was as a result of the effects of covid.

8. 2023-24 BUDGET

The report was submitted by Cllr Ioan Thomas

DECISION

To recommend to the Council (at its meeting on 2 March 2023) to:

1. Set a budget of £317,880,310 for 2023/24, to be funded by £227,842,930 of Government Grant and £90,037,380 Council Tax income (which is an increase of 4.95% on the tax of individual dwellings).
2. To set a capital programme of £67,780,150 in 2023/24, to be funded from the sources noted in Appendix 4 of the report.

DISCUSSION

The report was presented and the decision sought was noted. It was noted that the recommendation to increase council tax in a period of increasing costs of living was not an easy recommendation to make given the impact on the residents of Gwynedd. Reference was made to the financial challenges facing Local Authorities across Wales, particularly given recent inflation levels which were currently over 10%.

It was noted that Cyngor Gwynedd had received a grant increase of 7% for 2023/24 which was a significant improvement on the indicative settlement and was equivalent to an increase to the value of £14.6 million in external funding. However, it was stressed that this amount was not sufficient to meet inflation and additional pressures on services.

Reference was made to the provision for salary inflation which was £14.2 million. It was explained that salary inflation in the 2023/24 budget included an element to correct the 2022/23 deficit as the final agreement was higher than what had been budgeted for, as well as consider notional inflation for 2023/24. It was also mentioned that there was provision for other inflation of £11.1 million which included £3.3 million of inflation on electricity prices and £3 million in the care field.

It was recommended that bids to the value of £2.75 million for additional permanent resources submitted by the Council's Departments to meet unavoidable pressures on services should be approved. It was believed that these bids were necessary and were in addition to the £3 million extra added to the Homelessness budget funded from the Council Tax Premium.

It was explained that all bids submitted had been challenged thoroughly by the Leadership Team as well as considered in the Budget Seminar with all members held on 26 January 2023.

To summarise, it was noted that the Council's spending needs (before taking out savings) for 2023/24 was £323.1 million as noted in part 3 of the report. It had been noted in part 2 that the grant from Welsh Government would be £227.8 million. This

meant that there was a residual deficit of £95.2 million to be filled. It was recommended to meet the remaining deficit through Council Tax as well as using the savings; using the savings that had already been approved for 2023/24 and the new ones would create a total of £5.2 million which would be used to reduce the financial deficit. Increasing the Council Tax by 4.95% would generate a little over £90 million in income, which would be sufficient to full the financial deficit.

Attention was drawn to Appendix 4 which reflected the capital requirement, as well as funding, in order to establish an entire programme worth £67 million in 2023/24. It was noted that the Head of Finance would note the observations received from members of the Governance and Audit Committee held on 9 February 2023.

The Head of Finance added that there were no specific points by the Governance and Audit Committee for the Cabinet to consider but that he would refer to the observations received. A question had been received about the use of balances with the Head of Finance explaining why it was not use made by the Council; this response had been accepted by the Committee. A comment had been received on inflation costs on teachers' salaries as there had been mention from Welsh Government that there would by a further increase to teachers' salaries. It had been asked whether the budget would have to be adapted to address this. The Head of Finance had noted that not enough details had been received to date about this proposal but he would expect that the Welsh Government would fund the increase through an additional grant. He added that not enough information had been recieved to adapt the budget.

A further question had been asked about the Corporate Joint Committee and its increasing levy. It had been explained that the Corporate Joint Committee's responsibilities continued to grow through the regional Planning and Transportation Sub-committees which were in the process of being established. It had been noted that decisions needed to be made and reference had been made to the discussions about the intention to combine the CJC's governance responsibilities with that of the Economic Ambition Board. Assurance had been given that the Finance Officers had been doing their best to keep costs down in relation to the regional work.

As well as the above, the Governance and Audit Committee had asked whether the 2024/25 financial year would be even more difficult. It had been explained that plans had been made to fill the financial deficit for the next two years but that it was difficult to anticipate what inflation levels would be by then and what the settlement would be. It was added that Committee Members had been pleased to support the bids.

Finally, a question had been asked about the use of the Premium for Homelessness purposes to deal with further expenditure but reference had been made to the specific sum of £3 million which had already been earmarked for 2023/24 for this purpose.

Observations arising from the discussion

- It was asked if the Council had not agreed to increase the Premium form 100% to 150% back in December 2022, how much more would have to be earmarked to deal with the deficit in Homelessness.
- In response, the Head of Finance noted that the deficit would be equivalent to increasing the Council Tax by 3% - 4%.
- A question was asked about the impact of increasing the Council Tax. The opportunity was taken to talk about the work of the benefits team and the

assistance offered by the Council. The Council Tax Reduction Scheme was referred to, and the residents of Gwynedd were encouraged to apply for it, and it was noted that further information was available on the Council website. It was added that some would not be eligible for the Scheme as there were strict rules imposed by the Government but that further assistance was available by the Council from various Departments such as tackling poverty to try to fill the gap. It was recognised that officers used to encourage applications for benefits and that this gap may be one that would need to be addressed in the future.

- It was recommended that anyone having difficulty paying the Council Tax should contact the Department, not only those receiving benefits, assistance would be available for all.
- It was noted that the report referred to some very positive aspects and showed the Council's ability to deal with risks. It was added that one of the Council's main risks over the year was its inability to provide enough care due to a shortage of carers. It was noted now that the Council, when setting the budget, had been able to meet this pressure by increasing carers' salaries to a competitive level which reflected their duties. It was hoped that this would allow the Council to attract more carers to do this necessary work which was a positive step.

9. CYNGOR GWYNEDD PLAN 2023-28

The report was submitted by Cllr Dyfrig Siencyn

DECISION

To approve the Cyngor Gwynedd Plan 2023-28 (the Plan) for submission to the Council on 2 March 2023.

To approve the amendment proposed to add the following sentence to Priority Field 5 in the Plan: *“Ensure access to facilities and information of a good quality in relation to leisure, culture and the arts”* in order to reflect the Cabinet's vision.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted and reference was made to the consultation and responses received. It was stated that the Council was duty-bound to prepare a Plan for the current term and that work had been carried out since the Summer on the priorities. It was noted that two consultations had been held with the Members during the Autumn and a public consultation had been held on the draft Plan following that.

It was noted that 643 responses had been received during the public consultation with the feedback very positive on the whole and a few suggestions made. A summary of the responses can be seen in appendix 5 of the report. Reference was made to the projects in the care field which had been re-packaged as three new projects, namely Local Preventative Support, Independent living and Quality specialist care.

It was added that it was an easier to read formal this year and more succinct, and it was hoped that this would encourage more people to read the Plan. It was noted that it was an important document which showed the Council's ambition and aspiration for the

people of Gwynedd over the coming year and the Council's performance could be measured against its ability to deliver matters included in the plan.

The Business Support Service Manager noted that he would appreciate any recommendations or observations from the Cabinet. It was added that the Plan would be presented to the Full Council on 2 March.

Observations arising from the discussion

- Anyone listening was encouraged to read the Plan.
- The comment that the Plan was easier to read was echoed and it was believed that it was an innovative and ambitious Plan.
- It was believed that there was something missing in terms of the Cabinet's vision about the importance of leisure time and being active as well as the importance of culture and the arts and the positive difference made by these activities to the well-being of residents. It was formally proposed to add a sentence to Priority Field 5 noting "*Ensure access to facilities and information of a good quality in relation to leisure, culture and the arts*" in order to reflect this vision.
- Support was expressed for the amendment and it was believed that it was a valuable addition. It was believed that it was easy to forget how important the arts field is and the pleasure that can be derived from seeing and listening to the arts. Including it was proposed and accepted as an amendment to the Decision.
- The opportunity was taken to express the Cabinet's condolences to the First Minister, Mark Drakeford, for his recent loss. Best wishes were sent to the First Minister.

10. PARTICIPATION STRATEGY - LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND ELECTIONS (WALES) ACT 2021

The report was submitted by Cllr Menna Jones

DECISION

To recommend the draft Participation Strategy to the Full Council meeting on 02/03/2023 for adoption.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted, noting that there was a duty on the Council to encourage participation by the public as it made decisions. It was noted that this was a requirement under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. It was explained that further to this requirement, there was also a requirement to create and publish a Participation Strategy; the purpose of the Strategy would be to note the ways that local people would be encouraged to participate in the Council's decision-making process.

It was noted that there were specific requirement regarding what needed to be included in the Strategy, which could be seen in the second paragraph in point 4 of the report.

It was noted that in order to respond to the requirements of the act, Cyngor Gwynedd's first Participation Strategy had been created. It was explained that a public consultation

had been held in January on the content of the draft Strategy, which had given the public an opportunity to voice their opinion on the content. 89 responses had been received to the consultation.

It was added that the responses had been positive on the whole. Some comments and suggestions had been received; it was noted that the report explained how the draft Strategy had been adapted after receiving the relevant observations from the consultation.

It was asked whether the Cabinet believed that there had been sufficient response to the observations arising from the public consultation and whether the Cabinet was satisfied with the content of the draft Strategy. It was noted that the Strategy would develop over the coming years but that this was a strong starting point.

It was noted that the draft Participation Strategy would be recommended to the Full Council meeting on 2 March for adoption. It was added that the final design would be ready by the time the Strategy would be presented to the full Council.

Observations arising from the discussion

- The importance of including the residents of Gwynedd in the Council's Democratic processes was noted, and it was also stated that this was not always easy but that this Strategy was a step forward in trying to improve this.
- It was believed that the work of the Council needed to be conveyed to the County's residents.

11. GWYNEDD AND ERYRI SUSTAINABLE VISITOR ECONOMY PLAN

The report was submitted by Cllr Dyfrig Siencyn

DECISION

- To approve the Gwynedd and Eryri 2035 Strategic Plan as our Strategic Plan for the Visitor Economy in the area.
- To approve the establishment of the Gwynedd and Eryri 2035 Partnership in addition to the relevant structures that will be needed to develop, implement and monitor the Strategic Plan, The Gwynedd and Eryri 2035 Action Plan and its relevant indicators.
- To agree to add that there is a need to delegate the right to the Leader, in consultation with the Chief Executive, to confirm the terms of reference of both bodies.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted noting that the work had started since before the Covid period and that discussions with partners had been happening regularly since then. Appreciation was expressed about the close collaboration that had been happening between the Council and Eryri National Park and that the same vision and basic principles had been shared. It was believed that the report was an important step to try

to steer the visitor industry to be more sustainable and more accountable to the communities.

The background of the report was provided by the Head of Economy and Community and she noted that the plan was in place and the vision for the future had been set and the main objectives for the future had been identified. It was noted that there was a significant change seen in this work by placing the community at the centre which would ensure benefits for Gwynedd as a result of the developments in this field in the future.

Reference was made to the Gwynedd and Eryri National Park Visitor Economy and the objectives included in part 3 of the report. It would need to be ensured that there was a clear action plan in place in order to realise the vision. A new structure was proposed for implementation which included the Gwynedd and Eryri Sustainable Visitor Economy Partnership, Gwynedd and Eryri Sustainable Visitor Economy Steering Board as well as the Gwynedd and Eryri Sustainable Visitor Economy Operational Group. Details about these implementation arrangements could be seen in part 4 of the report.

The next steps and timetable for completing them were explained. The importance of collaborating across sectors in order to fulfil the vision was recognised. It was noted that consultations had been held but that there was more to do and that it was the beginning of a new period of implementing the Plan and collaborating with the Visitor Economy sector.

The Officer from Eryri National Park added that she was pleased to announce that the authority had adopted this Strategic Plan the previous week and was very proud of the arrangements and collaboration. Council officers were thanked for their work.

The Deputy Leader received observations from the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee in which a very useful discussion had been held and constructive suggestions made, for example, extending the membership of the partnership to include the emergency services, the farmers' unions and other representatives of landowners. It was noted that these Bodies would be invited to join the partnership in due course.

It was explained that a discussion had been held about the impact of tourism on the Welsh language and the Police, comments regarding parking and some questions to the Park; the Officer from the National Park had responded directly to the Scrutiny Committee about Eryri National Park matters. The Deputy Leader noted that she had already discussed with Officers and that she would ensure that the matters raised would be given priority.

Reference was made to the importance of measuring progress and setting measures for the Visitor Economy Plan and that this had been mentioned by the Scrutiny Committee. It was explained that the Scrutiny Committee had made a suggestion to amend the vision slightly, it was noted that this suggestion had been considered in full but that there was a feeling that the current vision was clear and simple. The Scrutiny Committee was thanked for its observations.

Observations arising from the discussion

- The benefits of the Visitor Economy were recognised but also an awareness of the problems that can arise from it and pride was expressed that this Strategy attempted to address the balance.
- The mindset of the Visitor Economy Plan was praised, and that a clear vision existed about the importance of a Visitor Economy which was fair for all.
- Council Officer and Eryri National Park Officers were thanked for their work and pride was expressed about the collaboration between the Council and the Park.
- The Plan was welcomed; a comment was made that it was an attempt to turn the tourism industry on its head.
- Pride was expressed about the name used in Welsh and English and it was believed that this was an important step by the Park.
- It was agreed to add that there was a need to delegate the right to the Leader, in consultation with the Chief Executive, to confirm the terms of reference of both bodies to the Decision. The addition was accepted.

12. LEVELLING UP FUND - LLEWYRCH O'R LLECHI SCHEME

The report was submitted by Cllr Nia Jeffreys

DECISION

- To accept an offer letter for funding from the UK Government's Levelling Up Fund, to implement the Llewyrch o'r Llechi scheme jointly with partners within the Slate Valleys.
- To authorise the Head of Economy and Community Department, in consultation with the Head of Finance Department and Head of Legal Services, to agree on the contractual and operational arrangements and the complete financial package with partners.

DISCUSSION

The report was presented noting that three substantial bids had been submitted by the Economy and Community Department and the Environment Department to the Levelling Up Fund, UK Government. The Bywiogi Bangor and the Ardudwy Green Corridor bids had been unsuccessful but the Llewyrch o'r Llechi bid was a success. It was explained that confirmation had been received of a £18.8m investment to be spent before the end of March 2025.

It was noted that the Llewyrch o'r Llechi scheme was a package worth approximately £27 million in plans across the slate valleys of Gwynedd that respond to the theme of 'investing in culture'. It was reported that it was a scheme that offered opportunities and developments that contribute towards the regeneration of these communities. It was noted that the details of what the package included had been noted in part 2.2 of the report.

The Head of Economy and Community added that discussions had been held with the communities and that the most mature projects needed to be focused on in order to be able to complete the work within the timeframe. It was added that this had been a factor

when identifying projects. It was noted that interpretation work needed to be commissioned as part of the Scheme.

It was noted that this package contributed to the wider vision noted in part 2.3 of the report namely to 'Protect, preserve, improve and convey the area's important features to reinforce the cultural distinctiveness and strengthen the Welsh language, and become an important catalyst for economic regeneration and social inclusion.' It was believed that the Scheme was very ambitious and a long-term programme and it was hoped that this would lead to further opportunities in these communities.

To close, it was noted that Cyngor Gwynedd would lead on the bid but that it would be working in partnership with the three areas that are a part of the bid essentially in order to realise the various projects. It was noted that there would be a need to agree on a legal agreement between Cyngor Gwynedd and the partners in the community in order to realise the projects and deliver. It was added that work had commenced in terms of discussions with the Heads of Finance and the Head of Legal Services therefore it was hoped that it would be possible to move ahead and confirm the arrangements with partners.

Observations arising from the discussion

- The investment and opportunities stemming from the Scheme were welcomed.
- A question was asked about the joint-funding sources noted in the report on pages 264 and 265 and that they are noted as 'possible'. It was asked how certain the Economy and Community Department was that the amounts noted would reach us.
- In response, the Regeneration Programmes Manager noted that she was certain of this as initial meetings had been held for example with Museum Wales and that they were a part of wider schemes with them. It was added that there was a low risk of the schemes not going ahead, it was reported that Cyngor Gwynedd had now received assurance of the developmental phase by the Lottery Heritage Fund.

13. PERFORMANCE REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR ECONOMY AND COMMUNITY

The report was submitted by Cllr Dyfrig Siencyn and Cllr Nia Jeffreys

DECISION

To accept and note the information in the report.

DISCUSSION

The report was presented by the Leader who referred to the regional matters included in the report. Reference was made to the North Wales Growth Deal, noting that some projects had been withdrawn for various reasons which had left a sum of £30 million remaining. It was reported that bids for projects had been invited for this sum. It was noted that the projects would be for a period of 15 years and would be funded by both Governments.

It was added that project costs had increased which had had an impact on other projects as well as putting pressure on staffing resources. It was noted that this was one of the main risks identified and that work continued to respond to the risks.

The Deputy Leader referred to the performance of the Department's services which included Byw'n lach and the level of Centre users which continued to be lower than pre-covid. Reference was made to specific matters which had had an impact on figures such as the temporary closure of the Arfon swimming pool for 3 months in order to renovate it and restricting the opening hours of Bangor swimming pool due to staff shortages. It was reported that discussions were regularly held between Byw'n lach and the Council in order to overcome some of these barriers that were affecting the Company's income.

It was reported that the number of people engaging with Museums and Galleries had reduced over the last period as a result of the fact that Storiell gallery and the Lloyd George Museum had had to close without notice following accidents at the building and repair works that needed to be completed before being able to re-open. The opportunity was taken to thank the Museum and Volunteering Co-ordinator for her work during these incidents.

To close, attention was drawn to the supporting communities work, noting that 121 groups and enterprises had been supported between October and December 2022 noting that these were projects on the ground close the hearts of the residents of Gwynedd, and pride was expressed about this.

The Head of Economy and Community added that the Department had not had a lot of opportunity to make progress on the projects contained in the Council Plan because of the need to divert staff from working on strategic projects to help with the regional schemes that the Council was leading on.

To close, reference was made to the shared prosperity fund, noting that the closing date for submitting bids for projects was 24 February. It was noted that a job had been advertised to manage the fund in Gwynedd, but no applications had been received.

Observations arising from the discussion

- Members gave thanks for the report.
- Concern was expressed about the situation of vacancies and the difficulties filling them, generally across the Council. It was believed that there was room to try to attract candidates and promote the vacancies and opportunities available in the Council.

14. PERFORMANCE REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CORPORATE SUPPORT AND LEGAL

The report was submitted by Cllr Menna Jones

DECISION

To accept and note the information in the report.

DISCUSSION

The report was presented noting satisfaction that the projects being led by the Department, along with the day-to-day performance, had been undertaken within the budget. Appreciation of the work of all the officers of the Department was noted and recognition of the key contribution they made to support the work of the Council.

Attention was drawn to the Women in Leadership project which had received particularly good feedback as well as the successful Mental Health Conference held recently. Reference was made to the improvements in the Customer Care service where a reduction in the time taken to answer calls had been seen, as well as a reduction in the percentage of calls missed.

Reference was made to the staffing and recruitment challenges in the Legal service and the steps being taken to address these risks. Reference was also made to the performance and progress in the work of the Elections service and the Coroner's service.

The Head of Corporate Support echoed the appreciation of the Department's staff for their co-operation and work. He noted that a lot of good work was being done in a challenging time and that good progress was being made on projects.

No further observations were received.

15. PERFORMANCE REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING AND PROPERTY

The report was submitted by Cllr Craig ab Iago

DECISION

To accept and note the information in the report.

DISCUSSION

The report was presented with reference to the number of people who were homeless in the County and the increase in the numbers presenting as homeless as a result of receiving a 'section 21 notice' from landlords (notice that their tenancy will end). It was noted that, during 2022, 169 notices had been issued and 78% of the reasons given by landlords for issuing the notice was because they were selling the property. Reference was made to what the Department was trying to do to try to offer solutions to this situation, for example offering support packages to private landlords.

Reference was made to House purchase and Land purchase schemes, noting that 8 houses had been bought and another 5 were either close to completion or with the purchase agreement in the hands of the solicitors. Reference was also made to the Gwynedd Homebuy Scheme, noting that equity loans to the value of £13m were available to give even more of an opportunity for people to buy a home on the open market in their local community.

The new Energy service that had been established was mentioned, noting that over 570 persons had received help with their energy bills by receiving energy vouchers. It was noted that this was a success but that the original problem had been created by the Government with the Council having to try to solve it. Reference was made to the One-Stop-Shop developments, noting that staff had already been appointed and that the Department was currently looking for a new name for the 'One-Stop-Shop'.

Observations arising from the discussion

- Attention was drawn to the number of social housing developed in order to try to reach the ambition of 500 by 2026, noting that 160 had been developed to date. It was asked how easy would it be to reach the ambition.
- In response, it was noted that the target was not an easy one but that funds had been committed for the next two years and the Department would be looking at the needs right across the County. It was noted that a scheme would be in place over the next three years.
- The Homebuy Scheme was praised, noting that the main challenge was finding out that it existed in the first place. In response, it was noted that a video had been created and that the Department had visited community councils in Dwyfor. It was added that the Department would appreciate any further suggestions in terms of engagement.
- It was questioned if the figure of buying 8 houses was low and it was asked if the Council could do anything to help speed up the process.
- In response, it was noted that it was very difficult to find suitable housing as the Department cannot compete with local people wanting to buy houses, staff challenges and the need to make the most out of the money that existed. It was added that there were many obstacles in terms of the standard of houses such as fire requirements and size of rooms which meant that many houses were unsuitable. It was noted that the Department had visited over 100 houses but because of the reasons noted above, it had only been possible to buy 8 to date.
- Concern was expressed about the situation in the private housing sector with fewer private landlords letting property in the future. It was acknowledged that this was a risk.
- Reference was made to the situation in Ukraine and the refugees and the significant risk that needed to be highlighted and the concerns that many would be presenting as homeless. It was noted that the Council was trying to obtain information from the Government and was currently in the dark regarding the Council's duties. It was added that a system was needed to support the refugees. It was noted that discussions were currently ongoing with the Government. The Chief Executive added that a statement would be made in the Senedd today and it was hoped that an update would be forthcoming following that; it was hoped that there would be better support for the refugees.

The meeting commenced at 1:00pm and concluded at 3:15pm

CHAIR