
THE CABINET TUESDAY, 11 JULY 2023

Present-

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

Also present-

Dafydd Gibbard (Chief Executive), Geraint Owen (Corporate Director), Huw Dylan Owen (Corporate Director), Iwan Evans (Head of Legal Services), Dewi Aeron Morgan (Head of Finance Department) and Rhodri Jones (Democracy Services Officer).

- Item 6: Garem Jackson (Head of Education Department), Gwern ap Rhisiart (Assistant Head of Education: Primary Sector) and Huw Llwyd Rowlands (Local Member).
- Item 8 Steffan Jones (Head of Highways, Engineering and YGC) and Meirion Williams (Assistant Head of Highways, Engineering and YGC).
- Item 9 Aled Gibbard (Senior Operational Manager, Children and Supporting Families Department - Care Resources).
- Item 10: Alun Gwilym Williams (Senior Business Manager, Adults, Health and Well-being Department).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received by Councillor Dafydd Meurig.

The Cabinet Members and Officers were welcomed to the meeting.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

A declaration of personal interest was received from Councillor Menna Trenholme for Item 6, as she was a governor at Ysgol Bontnewydd. She was not of the opinion that it was a prejudicial interest and did not leave the meeting during the discussion on the 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 13 June 2023 were accepted as a true record.

6. TO ISSUE A STATUTORY NOTICE ON THE PROPOSAL TO CLOSE YSGOL FELINWENDA ON 31 DECEMBER 2023, AND TO TRANSFER THE CURRENT PUPILS TO AN ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL NEARBY, EITHER YSGOL BONTNEWYDD OR YSGOL LLANDWROG, ACCORDING TO PARENTS' CHOICE, FROM 1 JANUARY 2024.

The report was submitted by Cllr Beca Brown.

DECISION

1. It was approved to commence the process to close Ysgol Felinwnda on 31 December 2023 under Section 43 of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013.
2. It was approved to issue a statutory notice, on the proposal to close Ysgol Felinwnda on 31 December 2023, allowing a statutory objection period of 28 days in accordance with the requirements of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 and the School Organisation Code 011/2018, and to transfer the current pupils to an alternative school nearby, namely Ysgol Bontnewydd or Ysgol Llandwrog, according to parents' choice, from 1 January 2024.
3. Transport arrangements were approved for the transition phase only, where free transport would be provided for those pupils who are currently registered in Ysgol Felinwnda and living in the catchment area of Ysgol Felinwnda, to Ysgol Bontnewydd or Ysgol Llandwrog, for the remainder of the learner's time in either of those schools, in accordance with Cyngor Gwynedd's transport policy.
4. Subject to the Cabinet's decision regarding the proposal to close Ysgol Felinwnda, to allow a consultation to be held on revising the catchment area boundaries of schools that border Ysgol Felinwnda's current catchment area.

DISCUSSION

It was reported that Ysgol Felinwnda is the smallest primary school in the County, with the number of pupils decreasing regularly. It was estimated that the number of pupils will continue to decrease in years to come.

It was detailed that 8 pupils currently attend the school and Section 48(3) of the Schools Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 notes that local authorities can follow procedures to close the school if there are fewer than 10 registered pupils.

It was explained that there is an objection period to the proposal to close the school and a further decision will have to be made by the Cabinet in November 2023, which is the end of this period.

It was confirmed that the cost per head for providing education at Ysgol Felinwnda was three times more than the county average. It was explained that the county average was £4,509 whilst the cost per head in Ysgol Felinwnda for 2022-2023 was £14,643.

Three options were evaluated for the School including:

1. Do nothing to recover the situation
2. Federalisation with a nearby school
3. Close the school and offer a place for the pupils in an alternative nearby school.

It was noted that the third option above had been chosen as the most favourable choice because it resolved the challenges of low numbers, small classes and high costs.

It was ensured that discussions were taking place with the school's staff to discuss the future of their employment. It was explained that the work would be undertaken during spring 2024 to amend nearby catchment areas.

The Local Member stated that he understood the decision to close the school, but that it was a sad event for the community as the school was 128 years old. The Cabinet was asked to consider the following points when discussing this matter:

- That priority is given to Ysgol Llandwrog when considering catchment areas because both schools share a headteacher and a similar ethos.
- The future of organisations such as the village hall and nursery group.
- That any objection is given worthy consideration.
- That a consultation is held with the community when replacing the catchment area boundaries, for the community to express their opinion.

Pride was expressed about the new education strategy that focused on the demographic of rural education community in Wales.

The whole community was thanked for their feedback and input during the engagement period.

7. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC SAFEGUARDING PANEL 2022-23.

The report was submitted by Cllr Menna Trenholme.

DECISION

The report was accepted for the 2022-23 year.

DISCUSSION

It was explained that this report provided an update on the Panel's work in accordance with the duty to provide an annual report to the Cabinet within their terms of reference.

Councillor Dilwyn Morgan, as the Panel's former Chair, and all officers were thanked for their work.

It was reported that an increase was seen in the number of referrals received following the Pandemic. It was explained that approximately 5000 applications were received annually before Covid-19, but the figure had now increased to 7,175 in the 2022-23 year.

It was stated that 281 children were in care by the end of the 2022-23 year and it was detailed that this figure was higher than what had been seen in previous years because

the Council assisted refugees from Ukraine - and therefore received more referrals from the home office.

Pride was expressed that 95% of the initial enquiries to safeguarding referrals had been completed within the statutory period of seven days despite the increase that had been seen in the number of reports in the last year.

Concern was expressed regarding the DoLS service (Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards), as some individuals were on the waiting list for up to three years. It was explained that four times more cases needed to be dealt with that couldn't be coped with at present. It was emphasised that each individual waiting for this service was waiting in a safe location and continuous work was being undertaken to amend the waiting list in accordance with risk assessments as part of the service's work.

It was reported that an Annual Safeguarding Survey was held by the Designated Lead Officer for Safeguarding in Education in March 2023 noting:

- That 87% of the Main Safeguarding Persons in schools had received specific safeguarding training over the past two years.
- That 70% of Gwynedd School's Designated Governors had also received the relevant training for their role in the last two years,
- That 97% of Gwynedd schools had introduced Basic Safeguarding Training for all staff before the end of the Winter Term,
- That 100% of Gwynedd schools noted that they were confident that all school staff and volunteers knew what to do if a child should disclose information about abuse.

A White Ribbon accreditation had been received, acknowledging the Council's effort to raise awareness of preventing domestic abuse. It was discussed that in the past, women suffered the most from domestic abuse but it was also recognised that men can also suffer as well as everyone within the LGBT+ community.

It was confirmed that there was an increase of 14.7% in cases of crimes by theft and it was assumed that this was a result of the recent cost-of-living crisis.

It was explained that an effective network of partnerships worked in this challenging field. It was stated that one partnership happened within Gwynedd and Anglesey where the Local Authorities collaborated closely with the police and experts. It was elaborated that this partnership collaborated with the North Wales partnership to share good practices and receive learning opportunities for the future.

All the staff working within this challenging field and with the recent work of welcoming refugees from Ukraine, were thanked.

8. ADOPTION OF HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE MANUAL

The report was submitted by Cllr Berwyn Parry Jones.

DECISION

To adopt the Highway Maintenance Manual enclosed in Appendix 1.

DISCUSSION

It was explained that adopting this handbook would amend the way of responding to the biggest potholes as well as amend the process of prioritising road resurfacing.

It was reported that Gwynedd had 2720 kilometres of road networks across the County to maintain. It was detailed that 1300 kilometres of these roads were unclassified, which are the essential roads in the county's rural areas. It was noted that maintenance work included resurfacing, lighting, signs, grass-cutting, painting and winter safety.

It was explained that the highways and maintenance budget was approximately £6million a year and it was noted that maintenance work over the winter normally costs approximately £1million of this budget.

It was noted that Cyngor Gwynedd already had a highways asset maintenance plan. This document had been reviewed to ensure that the department's procedures corresponded with the latest code of practice.

It was confirmed that the two main changes were reviewing a new road network hierarchy and changing the response period to safety defects from 24 hours to the end of the following work day. It was explained that these changes had been set out to ensure that the correct roads have worthy priority and that work programming could be done effectively. It was emphasised that if defects were raised on a Friday, a clause had been included in the highways handbook to allow the department to work on weekends if necessary.

It was mentioned that the department would be using risk to allocate the budget. It was ensured that a core revenue budget would be allocated on behalf of areas. Despite this, it was noted that the budget for major projects such as resurfacing would be allocated in accordance with risk.

The work completed by the department's officers within this field was praised.

9. PERFORMANCE REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN AND SUPPORTING FAMILIES

The report was submitted by Cllr Elin Walker Jones.

DECISION

To accept and note the information in the report.

DISCUSSION

It was noted that the Small Housing Group Plan and Autism Plan had been noted as the department's priority projects within the Council's Plan. It was explained that these addressed the department's main risks.

It was confirmed that the aim of the Small Housing Group Plan's was to improve the experiences of children with profound and complex needs in the Council's care. It was explained that these children currently had to leave the County to receive appropriate

provision but the department hoped to develop registered residential homes for small groups of up to two children, which would allow them to receive care in Gwynedd, attend local schools and participate in our communities. It was confirmed that the department collaborated with the Housing and Property Department to identify appropriate buildings to consider before appointing a Project Manager and protecting financial investment.

It was mentioned that the Autism Plan was now in its second year, with a comprehensive training programme for employees, to ensure that autistic children, young people and adults received necessary specialist support. It was noted that this project is run jointly with the Adults, Health and Well-being Department.

Attention was drawn to several matters receiving attention from the department because they caused concern and affected services' performance, including:

- Workforce Capacity - the department has started recruitment campaigns.
- The demand for the type of support - children's needs are complex and are intensifying, and therefore a wide, comprehensive and specialist support package is needed.
- It was noted that the numbers who contact for information, advice and support continued to be substantially higher than before the pandemic.
- That the department was a part of the Maethu Cymru campaign to attract more people to consider fostering.

It was confirmed that the department had reached their proposals worth £44,010 of savings for the year 2023-24. It was elaborated that the Department had received a one-off bid of £130,000 to employ three social care practitioners.

10. PERFORMANCE REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR ADULTS, HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

The report was submitted by Cllr Dilwyn Morgan.

DECISION

The information in the report was accepted and noted.

DISCUSSION

It was confirmed that a planning application for Dolfeurig had been submitted to the National Park as part of Local Preventative support. It was noted that engagement activities were held locally in the area and the department had received very positive responses overall from service users and their families as well as staff and the area's residents. A resource on manager level was emphasised to ensure that communities were included effectively when developing this type of services across the county.

Reference was made to work that had been completed for the website to revise, update and simplify it to ensure that information was found easily. It was hoped that this website would go live in September.

The members were reminded that work had commenced to receive an 'Age-Friendly Community' accreditation with the Cabinet's support and it is hoped to put a work programme in place soon.

Unfortunately, it was confirmed that there was substantial delay on the building work of independent living units on the Fron Deg site, Pwllheli, but the department had been in discussions with Adra to discuss matters further.

It was noted that plans were successfully going ahead to develop suitable accommodation options for individuals with learning needs. It is intended to expand on this project in Llŷn and Meirionnydd in the future.

It was explained that the work of preparing for a digital transformation by 2025 had been progressing well. It was elaborated that the department had piloted specific alternative technology for the first time in Gwynedd by testing new telecare equipment that would be available by 2025.

It was reported that a Dementia unit in Llan Ffestiniog remained closed due to recruitment problems. It was also noted that there was slowness on building work on other projects within the field and the department was in contact with the Housing and Property Department to understand the obstacles that they face.

It was confirmed that a strategic business case had been submitted to the Welsh Government to receive confirmation of their contribution towards the innovative scheme in Penyberth, near Pwllheli. It was noted that the Department had attended meetings with groups that objected to some parts of the plan as well as attending Dwyfor Area Committee's meeting to share information with members.

It was reported that recruitment remained challenging. Despite this, it was confirmed that the Social Services Statutory Director was leading a task and finish group to look at options relating to professional salaries in the field.

Attention was drawn to several matters being addressed by the department because they caused concern and affected various services' performance, including:

- Older People, Physical and Sensory Disabilities Service - there are substantial waiting lists for receiving an occupational therapy assessment, and that 42 individuals are on this waiting list for more than 90 days. It was emphasised that cases are being prioritised based on risk.
- Domiciliary care - that there was a drop in the percentage of hours that had not been met. It was noted that this was a step in the right direction but the waiting list remained high.
- Adult safeguarding - that there was a decline in the number of cases where enquiries had been completed within the statutory seven working days.
- Residential homes - that the rate of filling internal beds remained a concern. It was reported that 80% of beds were being used in April 2023, and that was because there was not enough staff to accept more patients.

It was confirmed that the department had overspent £3.9million in the 2022-23 year. It was explained that the first financial review of 2023-24 would take place during August

2023 and it was emphasised that the area's projections for this financial year remained challenging.

It was noted that the department had received a RIF (Regional Integration Fund) grant by the Welsh Government and this grant was committed for 3-5 years. It was noted that this money would be invested to provide services in different ways jointly with the Health Board and partnerships. It was explained that the department was looking forward to planning how this grant would be used over the next few years.

All the department and necessary partnerships' staff were thanked for their hard work within this challenging field.

The meeting commenced at 1.00pm and concluded at 2.35pm

CHAIR