

CYNGOR GWYNEDD – Report to Cyngor Gwynedd Cabinet

Title of Item:	Performance Report of the Cabinet Member for Corporate Support and Legal
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Menna Trenholme
Relevant Officer:	Ian Jones, Head of Corporate Support Department
Date of meeting:	7 November 2023

1. Decision Sought

To accept and note the information in the report.

2. The reason why the Cabinet needs to make the decision

In order to ensure effective performance management.

3. Introduction and Rationale

3.1 The purpose of this report is to update my fellow members on what has been happening in the fields within my remit as Cabinet Member for Corporate Support and Legal Departments. The report will outline what has happened to date against pledges within the Cyngor Gwynedd Plan for 2023-2028; the progress of performance measures; and the latest on the savings and cuts schemes.

3.2 I wish to remind you that all the 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 September 2023, which also included representatives from the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee.

3.3 I am satisfied that the projects being led by the Department, together with the day-to-day performance, are being undertaken within the budget. I wish to note my appreciation of the work of all the officers of the Department and recognise the key contribution they make to supporting the work of the Council.

4. Projects in the Cyngor Gwynedd Plan 2023-2028 (Priority Areas)

The Corporate Support Department is leading on six projects within various priority areas in the Council Plan for 2023-2028. I summarise what has been achieved thus far as follows:

4.1 Keeping the Benefit Local

4.1.1 The Council is responsible for procuring, or purchasing, a number of goods and services and is keen 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 stays local.

4.1.2 A project was completed recently to assess the feasibility of introducing a methodology for assessing new tenders based on the social benefits to Gwynedd. A report on the progress of the pilot projects has been produced, and the lessons learned and the barriers have been recorded. A report laying out recommendations will be presented to the Cabinet on 7 November, 2023.

- 4.1.3** A group has been established to look at and discuss the challenges associated with optimising the economic, environmental and social benefits that are attached to Food Supply and Distribution Contracts in Gwynedd. The group includes officers from the Cyngor Gwynedd procurement teams, an outside company called Social Value Portal, Larder Cymru and the service's current providers.
- 4.1.4** Extensive discussions have been held around the challenges of sourcing more Welsh produce and measuring the benefits linked to local employment, as well as reducing the service's environmental impact. These discussions have led to a better understanding of the challenges and have highlighted that acquiring more local produce, and produce that is less harmful to the environment, will increase costs. The tender process and therefore the providers will need to look at striking the right balance between the price and social value.
- 4.1.5** To try and overcome the barriers attached to measuring the benefits of local employment, providers have completed a fake tender question. The exercise has highlighted the complexity involved in calculating it and the varying methodologies and evidence that can be presented. Work is continuing on agreeing a final methodology as well as holding a further discussion to produce tender questions and revise the specification with the aim of reducing the service's environmental effect, and encouraging providers to look at promoting local economic prosperity and biodiversity.
- 4.1.6** Clauses have been included within transport and care contracts which make it a requirement for providers to produce carbon reduction plans and evidence progress on these plans as part of the contract's key performance indicators.
- 4.1.7** The national contracts regulations are currently being reviewed, with the intention of issuing the new regulations next year. Tenders cannot be awarded to local companies within the current regulations. Nevertheless, the above-mentioned methodology is a step towards awarding contracts to businesses that deliver local benefit, whether they are environmental, social or economic factors.

4.2 Women in Leadership

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

In a recent meeting of the Project Group revised Terms of Reference were agreed for the next period. It was also agreed, in line with our culture and our way of working, to not set quantitative targets but rather for the group to set an ambition to increase the number of women who apply for leadership posts (Service Manager level or above), and work is underway to gather this data at the level of Service Manager posts or above over the past three years since the project's establishment, so that we can measure progress moving forward.

- 4.2.2** The third series of the Development Programme ended on 28 June. 14 women working at various levels across the Organisation were coached, and very positive feedback was received. The fourth series will begin on 18 October.
- 4.2.3** Arrangements have been made to run a further series of the popular "Tea Time Chats" from September onwards, and notable speakers from near and far have confirmed their input.

4.2.4 At the Project Group's request to extend awareness of the project's work, an Information Pack has been produced. The Pack was introduced for the first time in the Council's stall on the Eisteddfod maes, specifically on the Wednesday when the Eisteddfod placed a focus in the science village on women in STEM, and also on the Thursday before and after the '*Inspirational Women*' talk that had been arranged by the Language Team. Further work will be undertaken to raise awareness and distribute the Information Pack as a further step.

4.2.5 Recently we had the opportunity to collaborate with the Housing and Property Department and the CANFAS Project by Galeri, Caernarfon on highlighting the Project's work by announcing the intention to install the first canvas of Ellen Edwards on the gable-end of our staff car park in Doc Victoria, Caernarfon.

4.3 Ensuring Fairness for All

4.3.1 In order to put the people of Gwynedd at the centre of everything we do, we must identify any barriers that some people face when seeking employment or obtaining services from the Council.

4.3.2 In light of comments by the equality officers the WLGA has decided to change the anti-racism training for Elected Members, therefore it has not been offered yet. A pilot of the LGBTQ+ training was conducted internally, and it will be offered from the autumn onwards. Arrangements have also been made to offer training on British Sign Language and Understanding Deafness, and a pilot will be held soon.

4.3.3 The engagement period on the equality objectives for 2024-28 has ended. Almost 600 responses were received to the questionnaire. Work will now take place on analysing the results of the engagement which will be used, together with the quantitative data, to agree objectives for 2024-28.

4.3.4 An electronic form for the Equality Impact Assessment, the Socio-Economic Duty and the Welsh language is being piloted at present.

4.4 Workforce Planning

4.4.1 The work of identifying gaps and acting pro-actively is a priority that has highlighted itself more than ever recently and there is a need to respond to the staffing challenges faced by many services across the Council. A bespoke work programme and milestones have been formulated to identify short, medium and long-term gaps.

4.4.2 A draft Workforce Plan document has been prepared with the aim of setting a strategic direction for the project over the coming years.

4.4.3 The Council's new careers website was launched at the beginning of August. The general feedback about the development has been good, and further opportunities have been identified to develop the content.

4.4.4 Over the past few weeks 14 new apprentices have been appointed and 6 new trainees have been appointed on the Yfory Scheme. Excellent feedback has been received from individuals who were involved in the recruitment and assessment centres that were held in relation to the apprenticeships and trainee schemes.

4.4.5 We had various slots on recruitment issues during the Eisteddfod, which was an opportunity to publicise the careers website and the apprenticeships and trainee schemes.

4.5 Promoting use of the Welsh Language by the residents of Gwynedd

4.5.1 We will carry out specific projects that will promote the use of the Welsh language and increase the opportunities to use Welsh in the community. This will include increasing the use of the Welsh language when engaging with public and community services.

4.5.2 A draft Language Strategy for 2023-2028 has been produced, and a period of public consultation was held during April and May 2023. We had a good cross-section of responses, and the response to the contents of the draft strategy was good. The agreement rate for the work-streams in all the action areas was high. 72.3% of the respondents agreed with the intention to focus on increasing opportunities for people to use the Welsh language.

4.5.3 In terms of the common themes that emerged from the responses, ensuring adequate and suitable opportunities for people to learn Welsh and gain confidence when speaking Welsh was a theme that came up regularly, and in response to several questions. There were less positive comments too, such as that the Council should not use the Welsh language as a way of discriminating, and should not be wasting scarce resources on the language – these were themes that came up more than once.

4.5.4 Work is ongoing on monitoring and carrying out a full review of the Council's existing strategy, with the aim of presenting a full report to the Council's Language Committee in October before publishing the new strategy for approval by the full Council in December.

4.5.5 In June the first official meeting of the Gwynedd Language Forum was held. The purpose of the Forum is to provide a space for key partners to come together to discuss and plan how we can promote and increase the use of the Welsh language and give a strategic focus to the development of the Welsh language in Gwynedd in accordance with the Welsh Government's Cymraeg 2050 strategy. The forum is currently looking for an independent chair.

4.5.6 The official launch of the Gwynedd Language Initiative took place in the Eisteddfod, this is the new language initiative that will take the reins on supporting and promoting use of the Welsh language on the ground in the communities of Gwynedd. Hunaniaith – the former Gwynedd Language Initiative had been a part of Cyngor Gwynedd since 2009, but it was decided that we needed a language initiative that is more rooted in the communities of Gwynedd in order to support individuals, societies, enterprises and groups of all sorts to use more of the Welsh language. Staff will move over to work for the new initiative by the end of the financial year.

4.5.7 We led on various activities in the Cyngor Gwynedd stall on the Thursday of the National Eisteddfod, and held a very successful day under the theme 'Gwynedd Gymraeg' (Welsh-language Gwynedd). An information session was held on a map of Welsh-medium activities that are available in Gwynedd, a panel session on the link between the Welsh-language economy and community initiatives, and interesting and successful art workshops were held in the tepee.

4.6 Strategic Review of Health and Safety Management

4.6.1 This project looks at the strategic management of health and safety within the Council and the way this ties in with the Council's general governance and performance systems. It involves undertaking a full review of the management system as a whole.

- 4.6.2** One of the work-streams is the upgrading of the Health and Safety IT system. The work of assessing the market has now been completed, and there are clearly many advantages of purchasing an external system. However, there are also limitations and barriers in the communication method between an external system and the Council's other internal systems. As a result, extensive mapping work has been conducted on the Service's needs, with discussions taking place with the IT Service about the possibility of developing an internal system.
- 4.6.3** A review of team managers/leaders' health and safety training has taken place in cooperation with management teams, and it was resolved to continue with additional refresher courses until summer 2024 in order to catch up with work that was postponed during the pandemic.
- 4.6.4** A full review has been undertaken on the well-being support provision for staff. This has involved exploring different models of provision, and looking at working together with other organisations and groups. After evaluating all the options, the Service has gone out to tender on the two areas of support that are currently on offer, which are counselling and physiotherapy. There have also been national developments in this field, e.g. a Counselling Service has been launched for care workers where staff can be referred to it, and there will be further promotion of these types of national offers in conjunction with the provision of an internal service, moving forward.

5. Performance

5.1 We note below an overview of the Department's performance during the financial year to date. Not all services are referred to, but I am keen to confirm that I am satisfied with the current performance of those services not referred to here.

5.2 Human Resources

5.2.1 The Council's sickness absence level is still higher than what we would wish. The number of days lost due to sickness across the Council increased to 10.22 days per head during 2022/23, and with the exception of the first year of the pandemic, this keeps to a pattern of a constant increase in the sickness rate for several years now.

5.2.2 Attention is being given to monitoring the level of absences, and a Sickness Absences Group has been formed to monitor the situation. The group meets regularly and is focusing specifically on finding out the reasons for absences and offering support to managers within those departments where the absence rate is highest. There is a strong link here with the staff well-being programme, where a large part of it is driven by the absences data.

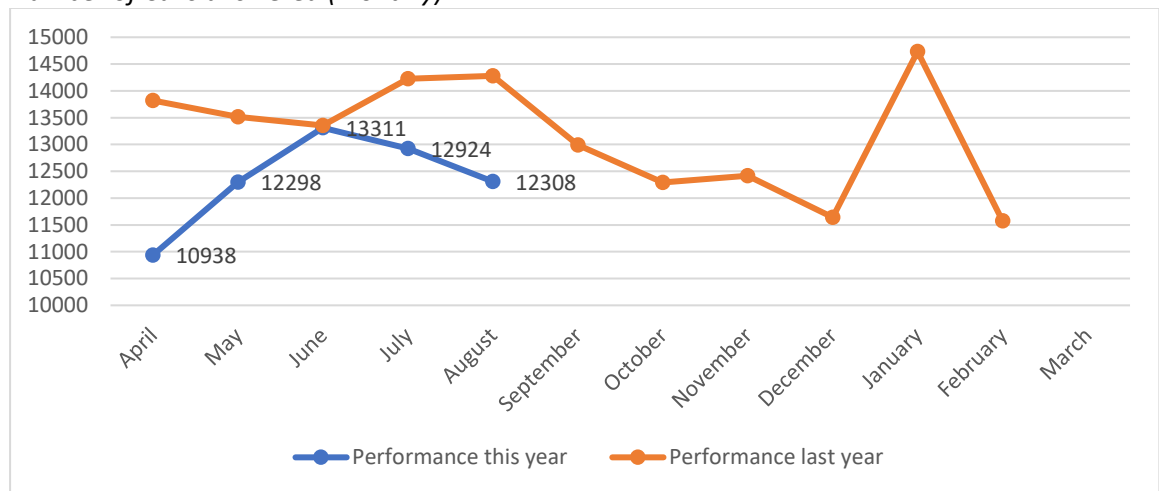
5.2.3 A meeting was held with Denbighshire Council recently to share good practice and learn from their systems. Denbighshire Council have had some of the lowest sickness levels in Wales for several years. Several action points emerged from the meeting for the Sickness Absences Group to consider, and we will give consideration to this in our next meeting. One general point that was highlighted was the need for sickness absence to be a measure that each individual department, as well as the Human Resources Advisory Service, takes ownership of as part of a business plan and to report on it as part of performance reporting arrangements.

5.3 Customer Contact and Registration

5.3.1 Over the past few years the Customer Contact and Registration Service has coped extremely well under difficult circumstances, and steps have been taken to strengthen the service's capacity.

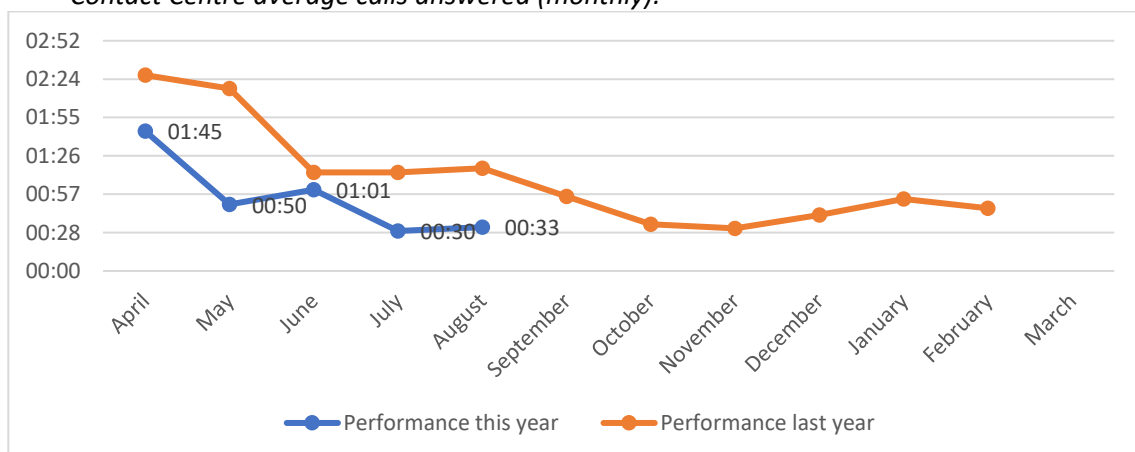
5.3.2 With regard to the number of calls that are answered monthly, 7421 fewer calls were answered this year compared with the same period last year, but 5322 fewer calls were missed too, which suggests that more calls are being answered the first time that the customer makes contact.

Number of Calls answered (monthly):



5.3.3 Casual staff were appointed in May / June to work over the summer period so as to enable staff to take annual leave. We have also seen a reduction in the number of calls coming in compared with the same period last year, and the return of staff to work following periods of sickness has contributed to the improvement in the average (monthly) call answering performance of the Contact Centre.

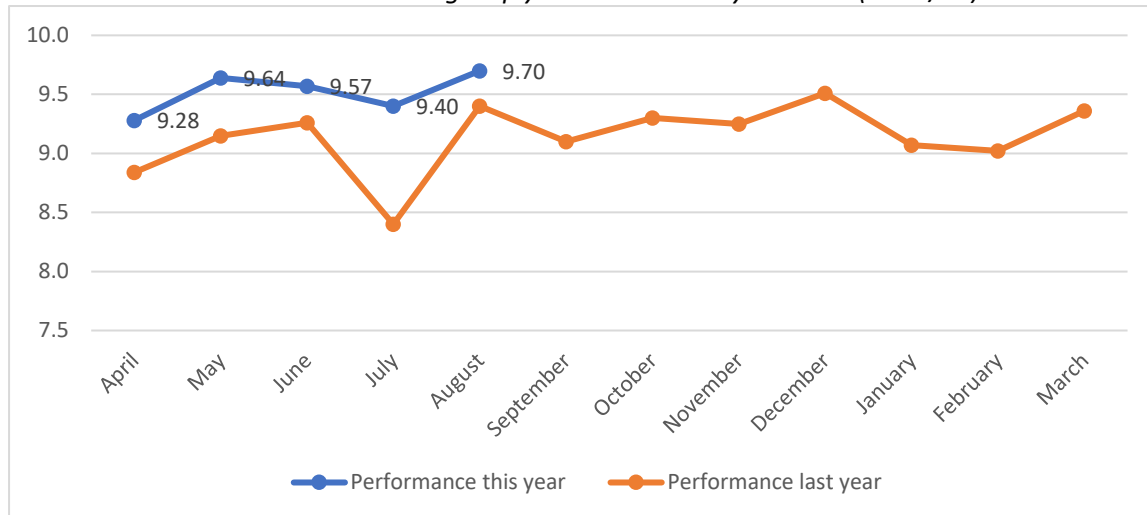
Contact Centre average calls answered (monthly):



5.4 Organisational Learning and Development

5.4.1 The Organisational Learning and Development Service collects feedback regularly regarding the extent that training helps individuals to undertake their role, and the feedback score is consistently high. The Service is continuing to develop the learning programme which is evolving to respond to the requirements of both the organisation and the people of Gwynedd.

To what extent does the training help you to undertake your role? (score/10):

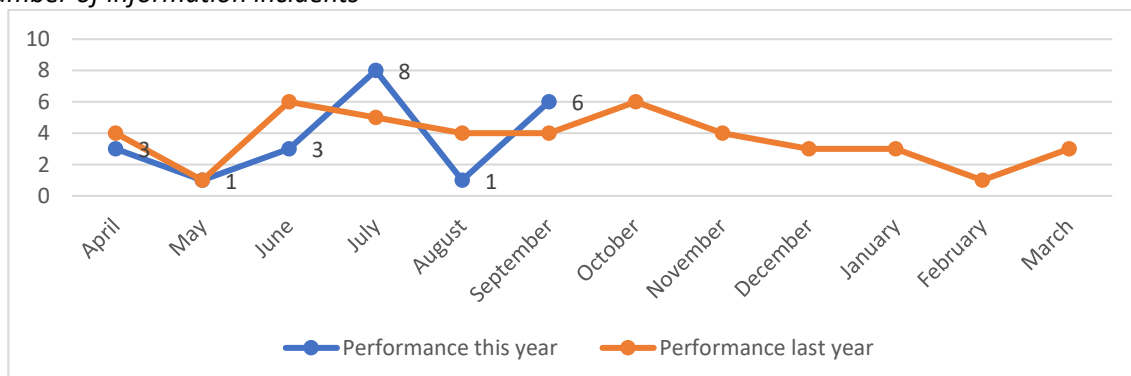


5.5 Research and Information

5.5.1 Incidents where personal information is disclosed in error, or inadvertently, continue to occur in places within the Council. The numbers vary greatly month by month, but overall the number of incidents is slightly lower than last year (16 from April – August this year, compared with 20 for the same period last year). Nonetheless, the figures are still too high: over half the incidents relate to e-mails being sent to the wrong recipient, and the pilot scheme to strengthen e-mail security has now been extended to include the entire Corporate Support Department.

5.5.2 In terms of the remaining incidents, although no obvious pattern is evident in these, meetings have been arranged with services where more than one incident occurred, to look at what happened and what can be done to strengthen arrangements.

Number of information incidents



5.2.3 The Research and Information Service monitors and reports regularly on the percentage of freedom of information requests that were responded to within 20 working days. The performance in this area is still causing some concern, and the statistics for Q1 per Department / Service were shared with Heads of Department, and we also spoke with some managers to see how arrangements could be improved. This is also being addressed in the Information

Workshops that are currently being provided for the managers and team leaders of every Department.

6. Financial Situation / Savings

- 6.1** Following a review of the 2023/24 Revenue Budget, end of August 2023 position, an overspend position of £62k is anticipated at the end of the year. There are a combination of reasons contributing to the overspend – minor overspend in some areas, increasing pressure on the staff counselling budget, and a forecast income shortage for the Printhouse.
- 6.2** As part of the process of establishing the 2023/24 Budget, the Department made efficiency savings worth £275,250 to contribute towards closing the financial gap during 2023/24. Those savings are on track to be realised.

7. Views of the Statutory Officers

7.1 Chief Finance Officer

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

7.2 Monitoring Officer

No comments to add from a propriety perspective.

LEGAL SERVICES

LEGAL

We will continue to prioritise the recruitment of the Legal Team.

The Legal Team's recruitment situation has changed positively. Almost all relevant posts except the Position of Housing and Project Solicitor have now been filled including the Legal Manager. We continue to use a locum arrangement in the above particular post to maintain and meet the service requirements. It is intended to keep this arrangement under review.

We will jointly procure new case management software for Legal Service with partners in North Wales

In collaboration with 3 other Councils through a procurement process have appointed a company, Civica to provide a new case management system. The current system which key to the Legal Tim has reached the end of its life in terms of support and development. This system although slightly more expensive in terms of annual costs will be a significant step forward in terms of online accessibility, agility and ability to mesh with systems such as iGwynedd, Microsoft Office and pdf. It will also open the door to other ways of working e.g for departments to be able to log in for first-hand information about cases and progress on them. The process of transferring data, training to get the system live has started. Project management support is part of the partnership. Due to IT requirements the installation and go live date has been moved forward to 1 December 2023.

We will review and secure adequate resources for supporting requirements on the Service arising from regional work

Resolving our recruitment situation means that it is now possible to move forward to plan how the regional requirements can be better addressed. As the North Wales Corporate Joint Committee becomes operational there is an increase across the board in terms of resources. This remains a challenge but an issue that is recognised within the project. We will be working as part of the Joint Committee's management team and with Corporate Support Services specifically to identify resources necessary to maintain the new body. There is a risk in terms of ensuring adequate resources and creating the appropriate capacity to sustain the establishment of the Joint Committee. The functions of the North Wales Economic Ambition Board are intended to transfer to the Corporate Joint Committee by 1 April 2024. The resource will be identified and developed as part of this project.

PROPRIETY

We will continue to support and advise on the functions of the Council in terms of ensuring constitutional, legal, and administrative propriety.

This work is constant but specifically a series of “Good Decisions “seminars” are planned for officers. The objective of the courses is to explain the basics of decision making in public bodies together with the constitutional and regulatory framework regarding this area. A pilot has been undertaken and responded positively and dates will be arranged by the end of the year. This work is part of the Council's governance arrangements which receive the oversight of the Governance Group

We will work with the Standards Committee, Political Group Leaders and Members together with relevant officials to maintain and support high standards of behaviour among councillors.

We will take the focus in the second and third quarters of the year to establish practical steps to support the new duty on Leaders of Political Groups regarding the conduct of members. In addition, reflecting a requirement highlighted by induction sessions further Code of Conduct courses are planned for Council members in the last quarter of 23/24 and earlier if resources allow. A meeting between members of the Standards Committee and the Leaders of Political Groups to establish practical arrangements regarding the duty and reporting in accordance with the statutory requirements is to take place on the 6th of November.

We will complete the implementation project for the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 and in particular consideration on the local election voting system options.

The main elements of this project have now been implemented and are in operation. Progress was regularly reported to a Governance and Audit Committee. The final amendments to the Constitution in this regard were adopted by the Full Council in September. However, it is necessary to address the choice of voting systems for council elections in the Act. A report on the arrangements was provided to the Business Group and discussions will be held on the appropriate route for consideration of the options contained in the Act. A statutory timetable means a decision would have to be reached by November 2024 if the move to an alternative system is to be made.

We will undertake a review of the Constitution during the year to ensure that it remains current and fit for purpose.

There are two elements to this, updates resulting from statutory changes and modifications that address the needs of the current Council and potential improvements. The path to a decision will vary according to the context and a report was submitted to the Full Council in September. However, the Scrutiny Committees element will need to be delayed to provide an opportunity to review in response to the Audit Wales report. It is anticipated that the Staff Section will also need to be reviewed along with updates to: Delegation Scheme for completion. While maintaining the Constitution is a continuing requirement the completion of this work is anticipated in the March 2024 Council.

ELECTIONS AND ELECTORAL REGISTRATION

We will work in support of the Returning Officer and the Electoral Registration Officer in particular addressing:

- 1. Responding to the new boundaries of UK elections**
- 2. Elections Act 2022**
- 3. Preparing for Welsh Parliament Electoral changes**

We have put in place arrangements for UK elections with Conwy and Denbigh Councils where constituency boundaries cross county boundaries. The arrangements for ID cards are in place and the arrangements for postal voting (UK) are being put in place. We have responded to the Government's White paper on the Welsh Parliament's electoral arrangements and are waiting on next steps. A comprehensive programme of work has been prepared across these areas along with risk assessment arrangements which are subject to constant monitoring. We have appointed an additional full-time officer using our grant resources to support this work. We are also starting initial work for the 2024 election(s) specifically but the work programme extends across the Council term

We will begin the process of determining a need to conduct a Statutory Community Survey collecting data, conducting initial engagements.

This is a statutory review of the arrangements of the County Town and Community Councils that must be undertaken. Initial information gathering and engagement has been carried out. Having received the information we will evaluate it with a view to reporting to the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee and then the Full Council in March with proposed terms of reference for the review. It is also planned undertake a parallel Town and Community Council electoral review. The process which will extend into the next financial year. The scope of the review will be defined as part of this process It is intended to report the first part of the project to Full Council in March 2024 and commence the review in June 2024 .

We will be conducting a Polling Districts Review.

This is a comprehensive statutory review of the County's polling place arrangements. This is of course ongoing work in the wake of every election, but this particular exercise has to be undertaken. Initial information gathering and engagement has begun, including sending out questionnaires to assess the suitability of each polling station. We will be collating the information and seeking expert advice through the Equality Officer on accessibility. The statutory consultation process will commence in June 2024 with a report to Full Council in December 2024 to approve the outcome of the review.

CORONER'S SUPPORT

Establish the Senior Coroner post on a permanent basis and ensure a sustainable basis.

The Council has a statutory duty to provide staff and office resources along with accommodation for this service. It was confirmed by the Ministry of Justice in 2022 that there would be no review of the North Wales Coroners Areas and as a result a Senior Coroner was appointed on a permanent basis for the Area in March 2023 . This has allowed discussions to be held with the Senior Coroner to identify the requirements for the function and possible responses. This will include a review of the funding regime and in particular also the costs of a long inquests which can be significant. With the permanent appointment the Coroner can also establish procedures for the future. It is planned to be in a position to complete this work by December 31.