

CABINET CYNGOR GWYNEDD

Report to a meeting of the Cyngor Gwynedd Cabinet

Date:	28 November 2023
Title of Item:	Performance Report of the Cabinet Member for Children and Supporting Families
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Elin Walker-Jones
Contact Officer:	Marian Parry Hughes, Head of Children and Supporting Families 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 developments in the fields within my remit as Cabinet Member for Children and Supporting Families. This includes outlining what has happened to date in 2023-24 against the pledges within the Council Plan; an outline of where the department has reached in terms of performance measures; and the latest on the savings and cuts schemes.
- 1.2 The purpose of the Children and Supporting Families Department is to ensure that we do the best we can to place the people of Gwynedd at the centre of our services. This will be measured through Performance Challenge and Support. It is important for the Department that the voices and experiences of individuals from Gwynedd who use our services ensure that the best experiences are given to the people of Gwynedd.
- 1.3 The priority projects featured in the Council Plan are progressing, namely the Autism Plan and the Small Group Homes Scheme.

2 CYNGOR GWYNEDD PLAN PROJECTS

2.1 Below, we note the progress that has been made to date against the Department's priority projects. These priorities address the department's main risks. Overall, I feel that all projects are making progress against the pledges we have made in the Council Plan.

2.2 Small Group Homes Scheme

We wish to improve the experiences of children with profound and complex needs in the Council's care, who currently have to leave the county or Wales in order to get suitable provision. We will develop registered residential homes for small groups of up to two children, which will allow them to receive care in Gwynedd, attend local schools, and fully participate in the lives of their communities. By now, property visits have taken place in order to move the project forward and a house is being considered. In addition to this, a plot of land in another area of Gwynedd is being considered for building a house for the purposes of the Small Group Homes Scheme. A project group will be established in the new year which will include the Children, Housing and Property and Education Departments and the Health Service. An additional £50,000 has been allocated to the project recently from the RIF fund underspend. A Statement of Purpose will have to be created by the end of the year and a registration request prepared.

2.3 Autism Plan

Children, young people and adults with autism find it difficult to obtain the specialist support they require. Therefore, we will improve our provision and make it easier for individuals and their families to transfer between different services. The team is now complete, with a Practitioner, Social Worker and four Key Workers. A forum has been established in order to look at the referrals coming in. Multi-agency collaboration is happening regularly with the Neurodevelopmental Team about the referral pathway to the team. As well as working with Health and Derwen Team arrange events for the parents of children with autism, who are waiting for a diagnosis or who have additional needs but not open to any specialist services i.e. Derwen. There was also information about the launch of the Service at the National Eisteddfod with several autistic individuals, parents and carers asking questions about what the team offers. Many Council staff have now been given the opportunity to go on the Autism Reality Experience Bus which gives a similar experience to how an individual with Autism sees the world around them. With training courses, Cyngor Gwynedd staff are required to complete level 1 and 2 Autism training.

3. PERFORMANCE AND MEASURES

3.1 I wish to draw your attention to the following matters, which are unrelated to the Priority Projects, but that are being addressed by the department because they are affecting the performance of services and/or causing us concern.

3.2 Workforce Capacity - The workforce situation remains a matter of serious concern. Through the Workforce Planning Project and WeCare Wales, we have started to put targeted recruitment campaigns in place. As the concerns are serious, work is underway to try to stabilise the situation for the future. The Department is collaborating with Grŵp

Llandrillo Menai by attending freshers' week events in Dolgellau and Pwllheli. Also, visits with Health and Care students will be held to talk about opportunities in the Care field and also to promote the offer of work experience established last year. 70 work experience placements were arranged following changes to the package across the Children and Adults Departments. 50 have already been for work experience and out of them 10 have had casual jobs with the Departments. A presentation was given to Councillors about the Care sector and recruiting to the sector specifically. This was in order to highlight some of the obstacles, what is already happening, what schemes are underway for the future and what Councillors can do to help as we move forward.

- 3.3 The demand for the type of support - The department is still seeing that the nature of the cases supported show that children's needs are complex and are intensifying, and therefore wide, comprehensive and very specialist support packages and care packages are needed. Numbers open to teams have increased. Numbers open to the Post-16 Teams are at their highest ever, namely 210 cases. The number of calls and support based on homelessness has increased. Therefore, the department is collaborating with the Homelessness Team, however, finding suitable accommodation is difficult. The number of asylum seekers has increased significantly. At present, there are 26 young people in the care of Cyngor Gwynedd who are asylum seekers. Recently, the referrals we have received for children under 16 years old that need to be accommodated in foster care has increased and this is proving to be a very difficult challenge for the Department to find suitable accommodation for them.
- 3.4 The numbers who contact for Information, Advice and Support continue to be substantially higher than before the pandemic. 1,894 came into contact with us between July and September 2023. We are of the opinion that the effects of the pandemic continue to drive the demand, as well as the cost-of-living crisis and the resulting strain on families is contributing to the need for support.
- 3.5 We have been a part of the Maethu Cymru national campaign to attract more people to consider fostering. These campaigns are one way that we are trying to address the need of sufficient care placements locally for children should they need to come into care. Fostering stalls have been at the Royal Welsh Show and the Eisteddfod in Pen Llŷn over the summer. A 'Friendly Employers' Panel was held with the Deputy Minister for Social Services, Julie Morgan, Councillor Elin Walker Jones, Llŷr Roberts, Chief Executive of Menter a Busnes and two foster carers from Gwynedd who discussed their experiences of combining fostering and working as part of our campaign to attract more employers to be 'fostering-friendly'. Also, a *Sgwrs o'r Galon* talk was held as part of the 'Caring Gwynedd' day at the Eisteddfod with 2 Gwynedd councillors and 5 foster carers from Gwynedd who shared their personal experiences of fostering honestly and openly in front of a live audience. Several local businesses in Pwllheli displayed the Maethu Cymru Gwynedd posters and banners and helped us to spread the message about fostering whilst the Eisteddfod was being held. In September, the Care Friends App Launch was held, namely a new referral programme ("suggest a friend") which rewards our foster carers when they share information about fostering with their contacts and encourage them along their journey to be foster carers. There is an opportunity for them to collect points every time they refer someone to us with the points transferred to cash to help them with everyday costs.

3.6 In terms of the department's measures, I am generally happy with their performance. There are no measures which currently cause me any concern but I will be working with the Head of Department through the usual performance challenge arrangements.

4. FINANCIAL SITUATION / SAVINGS

4.1 The total of Savings Schemes 2023-24 for the department is £44,010, all of which has been realised.

4.3 For 2023/24, as part of the bids process, the Department has received £130,000 as one-off bids towards continuing to employ 3 social care practitioners. The jobs have been evaluated and appointments made and officers are in place. A bid to make the posts permanent has been submitted for 24/25. In addition, 5 other bids have been submitted for 2024/25 and the outcome of these will be known by the end of January.

5. Views of the Statutory Officers:

i. The Monitoring Officer:

No observations to add in relation to propriety.

ii. Head of Finance Department:

I am satisfied that the report is a fair reflection of the financial situation of the Children and Supporting Families Department.

a. Views of the Local Member:

i. Not a local matter.

b. Results of Any Consultation:

i. None to note.
