

# CYNGOR GWYNEDD CABINET



## Report to a meeting of the Cyngor Gwynedd Cabinet

<b>Title of item:</b>	<b>Performance Report of the Cabinet Member for Environment</b>
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	<b>Councillor Dafydd Meurig</b>
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	<b>Dafydd Wyn Williams, Head of Environment Department</b>
<b>Date of meeting:</b>	<b>19 September 2023</b>

### 1. THE DECISION SOUGHT

To accept and note the information in the report.

### 2. THE REASONS WHY A DECISION IS NEEDED

In order to ensure effective performance management.

### 3. INTRODUCTION

3.1 The purpose of this report is to update my fellow members on developments in the areas within my remit as Cabinet Member for Environment. This includes outlining what has been achieved so far against the pledges within the 2018-2023 Cyngor Gwynedd Plan; and where we are regarding the performance measures.

3.2 I would like to remind you that all matters have already been discussed between me, the Chief Executive, and a representation of senior officers within the Environment Department.

3.3 In general, I am satisfied with the progress of projects that the Department is leading on in accordance with the Council Plan and the performance measures of the Environment Department.

### 4. PRIORITIES WITHIN THE CYNGOR GWYNEDD PLAN 2023-2028

The Department leads on five priorities in the Council Plan 2023-2028. Two of the priorities are specifically in the field of Transport, and as you know a recent decision has been taken to establish an Assistant Head of Transport role that will offer an additional resource to drive work forward across this area. This is in addition to an Assistant Head role that was introduced to the Department last year with specific responsibility for Waste and Recycling matters, which is also a corporate priority in the Council Plan.

Below is a summary of what has been achieved in the five priority areas within the Council Plan:

#### 4.1 Managing second homes and short-term holiday accommodation

- 4.1.1 The Environment Department is leading on the work of preparing the Article 4 Direction notice in order to gain better control of the three new planning use classes that were introduced by Welsh Government in October 2022, namely main home, second home and short-term holiday let.
- 4.1.2 Planning policy officers have prepared a justification paper for Article 4 which was submitted to the Council Cabinet with an accompanying report on 13 June 2023 where it was approved to issue the Article 4 Direction and to implement the subsequent steps.
- 4.1.3 An Article 4 Direction Notice was issued for the Gwynedd Planning Authority Area. A public consultation period was held, and the opportunity for the public to participate was promoted, with the survey available on a dedicated page of the Council's website: [www.gwynedd.llyw.cymru/Erthygl4](http://www.gwynedd.llyw.cymru/Erthygl4) / [www.gwynedd.llyw.cymru/Article4](http://www.gwynedd.llyw.cymru/Article4) along with paper copies available from Sïop Gwynedd Caernarfon, Pwllheli, Dolgellau and the county's public libraries. Work will take place to analyse the responses that have been received, with a follow-up report to be submitted to the Cabinet as soon as possible.
- 4.1.4 As this work is unprecedented, Welsh Government has confirmed that financial support is available to the Council to implement the change (this contribution is specifically for the Dwyfor area only).
- 4.1.5 Following a recent recruitment process, a Senior Planning Officer has been appointed to supervise the work, with a Planning Support Assistant also part of the team for a temporary period until the end of March 2026.

## **4.2 Waste and Recycling**

- 4.2.1 Preparing a new waste and recycling strategy is a corporate priority, with the aim of increasing recycling levels in the county to meet the national target of 70% by 2025.
- 4.2.2 Initially, the work has concentrated on addressing the main challenges including ensuring better management of sickness procedures, working hours and related overtime costs. In addition, more resilience has been built in the back office which has enabled a better system to deal with enquiries from the public.
- 4.2.3 Progress has been positive and support has been provided to team leaders to ensure effective arrangements for returning to work, and arrangements for cascading proactive information about collections.
- 4.2.4 A health, safety and well-being officer commenced in post in June, and will assist with efforts to strengthen health, safety and well-being matters across waste and recycling.
- 4.2.5 With the expectation that every council in Wales recycles at least 70% of the waste collected by 2025, attention also turns to considering the suitability of

our waste treatment arrangements to ensure that we continue to reach the challenging national recycling targets.

### **4.3 Active Travel**

- 4.3.1 As a strategic priority, the Department is responsible for developing and maintaining a network of active travel routes to promote walking and cycling.
- 4.3.2 Introducing improvements to the network is costly and therefore the Council is very reliant on attracting grant funding to deliver any substantial changes.
- 4.3.3 After submitting three bids to the Welsh Government for Active Travel funding for three separate schemes, we succeeded to attract £1.2 million to construct the Ffordd Penrhos path near Bangor. An engagement exercise was undertaken on the options and the preparatory work has been completed and it is expected for work to commence on the site during October for the first phase of the improvements.
- 4.3. The Council has also secured £280,000 from the Safe Routes in Communities fund to improve walking and cycling provision near Ysgol Godre'r Berwyn in Bala. Work is ongoing to plan these improvements that will need to be completed within this financial year.
- 4.3.5 Officers are discussing how we can strengthen other plans with Transport for Wales to seek to ensure funding for the future. Officers are using a proportion of the £500,000 Active Travel core funding that has been received to develop schemes in other areas, with the intention of being able to submit grant applications to realise schemes in the coming years.
- 4.3.6 At this time, the key schemes in development are Afonwen to Chwilog, Tywyn to Aberdyfi and Llanrug to Caernarfon, with attention also given to the second phase of the Ffordd Penrhos scheme.
- 4.3.7 It should also be noted that the Council has secured £1.8 million from the Levelling Up fund to introduce improvements to Lôn Las Ogwen, with work to improve the route commencing very soon.

### **4.4 Public Transport**

- 4.4.1 Reviewing the public transport provision is one of the strategic projects within the Council's Plan for the next five years, with the aim of developing a convenient, reliable and reasonably priced network for the residents of Gwynedd to be able to travel with convenience throughout the week.
- 4.4.2 The department's staff have been working closely with Transport for Wales over the last few months to develop a new network of services offering standard timetables for areas such as Dyffryn Nantlle in the first place. The area has experienced a significant reduction in provision since a local operator went out of business and new services have started since July 2023. The response has so far been positive, and we will continue to work on other areas over the next months.

- 4.4.3 The Sherpa'r Wyddfa service has been tendered for a five year period to commence from 1 April 2023 until 31 March 2028, with an extension to the service, and we are monitoring its development and performance.
- 4.4.4 To date, the response has been very positive, and shows an increase of 29% in the number of those using the service compared with the same period last year.
- 4.4.5 It is expected that the new T22 service will operate during the autumn and will serve Blaenau Ffestiniog - Caernarfon via Porthmadog with four new electric buses that will operate from a purpose-built site in Porthmadog.
- 4.4.6 This is an exciting development for the network in Gwynedd and we will monitor the electric buses and consider how we can make use of similar buses in other parts of the network in future.
- 4.4.7 Due to the financial situation and a lack of competition from operators, it is possible that the cost of maintaining the services will be higher than existing services on the route.
- 4.4.8 Following an unprecedented period of support from Welsh Government for the industry during the pandemic, Council officers continue to hold regular meetings with Transport for Wales and the Welsh Government to influence the financial package beyond April 2024, and are forward planning for the next period.

#### **4.5 New Local Development Plan**

- 4.5.1 Producing a new Local Development Plan for the Gwynedd planning authority area has been identified as a priority with the aim of addressing the housing, employment, social and environmental needs of the county over the next 15 years.
- 4.5.2 A report on Governance Arrangements for the new Local Development Plan was considered and supported by the Council Cabinet in June. It was agreed to establish a Planning Policy Working Group of 15 members along with Terms of Reference to support the work of preparing the New Local Development Plan.
- 4.5.3 In the meantime, work is proceeding to create the new Planning Policy Working Group with a view to holding its first meeting at the beginning of September.
- 4.5.4 A draft Delivery Agreement will be submitted to a meeting of the Cabinet in October for a decision on moving to a period of public consultation.

### **5. PERFORMANCE**

Below, I outline the main matters that have derived from the department's performance since the beginning of April 2023. The information does not refer to

each service in the department, only towards those we feel that need to be brought to your attention.

### **Waste and Recycling**

- 5.1 With a challenging target of recycling 70% of the waste collected by March 2025, it is heartening to report that the performance for April to June this year shows that 67% of waste has been re-used, recycled or composted.
- 5.2 Additionally, the latest data shows that the total residual waste collected from domestic routes in the county for the first months of 2023/24 (4,100 tonnes) is lower than that of the same period last year (4,228 tonnes).
- 5.3 Nevertheless, it is clear there is a significant effort to ensure that we reach the next national target from 2025.
- 5.4 Recycling figures are currently reported nationally every quarter, and we are working to modernise our arrangements to ensure that data will be more accessible to us in future. This will enable the Waste and Recycling Service to take proactive steps to respond to any obvious patterns.

### **Food and Safety**

- 5.5 The Food and Safety Service ensures that food and drink that is sold is safe for public consumption and that it complies with constitutional and labelling requirements. The latest reported figures shows that the vast majority of food businesses in Gwynedd continue to reach the expected food hygiene standards.
- 5.6 Of the 2,098 food businesses that are subject to the scoring procedure, 99% met the satisfactory or higher food hygiene standard (score of 3 or above), and 23 did not meet the standard (1%). It is important to note that the Service revisits every property that receives a score of 2 or lower within 3 months of the original inspection to ensure that standards have improved.
- 5.7 Along with the work of conducting standards and food hygiene inspections, the Service also deals with requests for service, some of which can be dealt with directly and others that take some months to be resolved. Whilst monitoring will continue for the cumulative number of requests that are open, the latest figures show that 82% of the requests received so far this year have been closed.

### **Trading Standards**

- 5.8 The Service works to protect users and animal health and welfare matters. Inspections are scheduled according to priority and focus on high risk businesses. They succeeded in completing each of the 49 inspections last year and this year the number of high-risk inspections that need to be completed has reduced from 49 to 40. This is evidence of the fact that businesses that were identified as a high risk category in the past have succeeded in improving their efforts.

- 5.9 Of course, the work of Trading Standards officers can also lead to enforcement steps if business owners do not comply with the requirements. Officers make every effort to advise however in some serious cases they are required to take further steps and in serious cases where there is no other option but to prosecute as seen in some recent cases.

### **Pollution and Licensing**

- 5.10 This Service ensures that licenced activities relating to taxis, alcohol, gambling and entertainment are provided in a way that protects the public and supports businesses.
- 5.11 Over the last year, the Service has succeeded to extend the opportunities for taxi licence applications to be submitted on-line via a self-service system. As this is a new system for a number of applicants, there could be a processing delay in some cases with incomplete or incorrect documents being uploaded with the application.
- 5.12 Two temporary licensing officers were appointed to fill a vacant post and cover maternity leave in March, and the Public Protection trainee has been contributing to the work. Although the officers were at the start of their training period, the average processing time over recent months has fallen, with an average of 11 days taken to process a taxi licence application.

### **Planning**

- 5.13 During the first months of the year, 258 new planning applications were received and 264 received a decision (88% within the statutory timeline). The time it took for planning applications to be determined was 88 days on average, compared to an average of 92 days in 2022/23, and 103 days in 2021/22.
- 5.14 This improvement reflects a positive increase by the Service and indeed recent national figures have shown that Gwynedd's performance is the fifth best among Planning Authorities in terms of the determination period.
- 5.15 The service has a role to investigate and take enforcement steps on developments that have not received planning consent. For the period in question, 58 new cases were received and 26 cases were closed. Work is taking place to deal with the backlog of historical cases that remained open on the system, however it is acknowledged that the situation remains challenging.
- 5.16 It is good to report that the Planning Service has been successful in employing two professional planning trainees for three years. Whilst the officers continue to carry out the duties and familiarise themselves with the field, the Service is confident that these additional new staff will offer key support in future.

### **Planning Policy**

- 5.17 The staff of this Service provide policy guidance on planning applications and pre-application requests. The latest performance shows that each of the 39 responses provided by the Service on the consultations on planning application and pre-application advice requests were submitted within 10 days.
- 5.18 It is a statutory requirement to prepare an Annual Monitoring Report, which reports on the performance of the Local Development Plan and submit it to the Welsh Government by 31 October every year. Work has commenced on the 2022/23 report by gathering and analysing information and as already noted, the Service also prepares the new Local Development Plan which is of course a priority for the Council.

### **Building Control**

- 5.19 The Building Control Service works with the public and partners so that our communities have safe buildings, are energy-efficient, provide access and facilities to people with disabilities, and meet the necessary requirements of the Building Regulations.
- 5.20 During the period in question, the Service determined 96% of building control applications within the statutory period, and on average, responded to notices of dangerous buildings and structures, ensuring that they are made safe within 24 hours of being notified. Although the buildings/structures have been made safe, a number of significantly complex cases continue to take up a great deal of the team's time and resources.
- 5.21 Attention should be drawn to the recent Audit Wales report: ['Cracks in the Foundations' – Building Safety in Wales](#), which raises a number of concerns about the provision of a construction management service in Wales, and highlights the need to comply with the new Building Safety Act which will come into effect next year, which stems from the Grenfell disaster.

### **Land Charges**

- 5.22 Gwynedd's Local Land Charges Unit provides searches information to anyone who wishes to purchase property or land within Gwynedd. Following an extremely challenging period with an increase in the number of applications and enquiries and transferring to a new national computer system, it is pleasing to report that performance is improving.
- 5.23 Now that most of the work related to transferring to the new system to deal with searches is complete, it has been possible to release additional capacity to help with searches and respond to enquiries promptly. Consequently, the average processing time for the period in question has improved to 24 days, which compares to an average of 38 processing days for 2022/23.

### **Parking and Street Works**

- 5.24 As part of the Service's work to ensure safe management of the highway, parking enforcement officers operate across the county, and the service is operational seven days a week.
- 5.25 The service receives complaints daily about all aspects relating to parking, and this indicator shows the time taken to respond to complaints about vehicles that are illegally parked on parking restrictions. For the period in question, 31 complaints were received, with staff visiting each site in question within three days, with an average processing time of 1 day.
- 5.26 Penalties are issued to vehicles that park in breach of the restriction on-street and off-street (car parks). This indicator relates to the percentage of successful appeals lodged against parking tickets. Of all the tickets submitted during this time, 7% of them were revoked and the majority of the successful appeals were from individuals who had not displayed valid tickets for a variety of reasons (ticket fallen from sight etc.) Every appeal is considered in full and if there is robust evidence that a genuine mistake has occurred, the penalty is revoked. In cases where an appeal is refused, there is a right to transfer to an independent adjudicator for consideration and it can be reported that no such cases were upheld against the Council in the period in question.
- 5.27 The service's street inspectors are responsible for all activities carried out by the statutory operators (electric, gas, water etc.) on the public highways network by seeking to avoid situations where areas are disrupted for long periods of time.
- 5.28 Of the 533 works carried out by statutory operators during the first months of the year, 88% were completed within the original timetable. A set of specific conditions are imposed to seek to manage impact on the network, and in some circumstances there is no option for operators to extend the period.

### **Traffic, Projects and Paths**

- 5.29 This Service has experienced a challenging time due to additional pressure when implementing the new national speed scheme of 20mph. Nevertheless, every effort is made to ensure that enquiries are dealt with on time and work has been ongoing to filter historical cases that can be closed.
- 5.30 The increase in the work related to the national 20mph project has had an impact on the team's capacity to respond to general enquiries in the period in question. The demand in light of the national project will continue as the change comes into effect, however the service is hopeful that it will be possible to re-prioritise afterwards and give due attention to enquiries and weed out any backlog.
- 5.31 The footpaths team has also introduced a new measure in recent months relating to enquiries about rights of way, the coastal path and the Lôn Las routes. The work is still being embedded and training on the new system is being provided, however the level of enquiries is high and there will be a need to keep an eye on this over coming months.



## **6. FINANCIAL POSITION/SAVINGS**

- 6.1 The Final Accounts 2022/23 - Revenue Out-turn report that was considered by the Cabinet on 13 June 2023 showed a continuation of the annual trend of overspend in the waste collection and recycling field.
- 6.2 Responsibility has transferred to the Environment Department and a comprehensive review has identified ways to improve the service with steps to respond to the situation to be implemented during the year to bring expenditure under control. However, this is a long-term project and should be noted that it will not be possible to reach a semi-neutral position within 12 months.
- 6.3 The savings schemes target for the Department for 2023/24 is £319,188. Work is ongoing on these schemes, which have either been realised or are on track to be realised by the end of the financial year.

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### **Views of the statutory officers**

#### **The Monitoring Officer:**

No observations to add in relation to propriety.

#### **Head of Finance Department:**

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