

THE CABINET TUESDAY, 28 NOVEMBER 2023

Present -

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

Also present -

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

- Item 6: Eurig Huw Williams (Human Resources Advisory Services Manager) and Delyth Gadlys Williams (Equality Advisor).
- Item 8: Marian Parry Hughes (Head of Children and Supporting Families Department).
- Item 9: Debbie Anne Jones (Assistant Head of Education Department: Corporate Services) and Gwyn Tudur (Assistant Head of Education Department: Secondary).
- Item 10: Marian Parry Hughes (Head of Children and Supporting Families Department).
- Item 11: Alun Gwilym Williams (Senior Business Manager, Adults, Health and Well-being Department).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies had been received from Councillor Craig ab Iago.

The Cabinet Members and Officers were welcomed to the meeting.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

A declaration of personal interest was received from Councillor Elin Walker Jones for Item 9 as she was a governor at Ysgol Tryfan. She was not of the opinion that it was a prejudicial interest and she did not leave the meeting during the discussion on the item.

Declarations of personal interest were received from Councillors Beca Brown and Berwyn Parry Jones for Item 9 as they were governors at Ysgol Brynrefail. They were not of the opinion that it was a prejudicial interest and did not leave the meeting during the discussion on the item.

The Chief Executive declared a personal interest for Item 9 as he had a family connection who was a student in one of the schools being discussed. He 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 7 November 2023 were accepted as a true record.

6. EQUALITY OBJECTIVES CONSULTATION DOCUMENT 2024-28

The report was submitted by Cllr Menna Trenholme.

DECISION

It was agreed to release the consultation document on the Equality Objectives 2024-28 for public consultation in accordance with the report.

DISCUSSION

Members were reminded that this document was presented to the Cabinet every four years, in accordance with statutory requirements to review equality objectives under the Equality Act 2010. It was confirmed that engagement with the public had been carried out between April and August 2023 where approximately 600 responses to a questionnaire were received. It was explained that the purpose of the consultation was to confirm whether the public believed that the objectives used between 2024-28 needed to continue for 2024-28 or whether they needed to be amended.

It was noted that officers had been visiting several groups and events to ensure that this consultation included the voice of the young, people from the LGBT+ community and disabled people. It was explained that officers had held discussions with managers within the areas that had arisen, in order to receive help to prepare the objectives. The information received from respondents with life experience of protected characteristics was used to create the draft revised objectives.

It was reported that data gathered by the Council's research and information team was used for a document commissioned by the North Wales Public Sector Equality Network to ensure an understanding of the information on a local scale. It was confirmed that consideration had been given to the Government's operational duties in the areas of Anti-racism and LGBT+ when drawing up draft objectives.

It was emphasised that draft objectives had been set out in the document and that these may be amended following further consultation with the public. It was assured that the Equality Impact Assessment submitted with the document was a draft

version, and that it would be amended as necessary when further feedback had been obtained.

It was confirmed that the four draft objectives before further consultation were:

1. Improving the diversity of our workforce and reducing pay gaps
2. Improving our data about people with equality characteristics
3. Ensuring that the Council is an anti-discriminatory organisation, by improving our internal systems to provide better services for all
4. Improving equality within education

The officers were thanked for drawing up honed objectives by combining some previous objectives. It was noted that this enabled consideration of equality within the field of education as a new objective. This was felt to be crucial as it corresponded with the Curriculum for Wales and relationships and sexuality education.

It was highlighted that the capacity and commitment of the Council's staff and elected members in the field of equality, as well as relevant training, had not been included in this document, although it was an objective in the past. The Equality Advisor was assured that training was a point of action under a pledge to make the Council anti-discriminatory. It was emphasised that a lot of work had already been carried out in this field and therefore it had been included as a point of action rather than an objective. It was noted that this would be highlighted in the document.

It was reported that Welsh language issues had not been identified as an objective within the document. This, it was confirmed, was because the language was not a race issue as it was possible for anyone to learn it. It was emphasised, however, that the language was an issue that affected equality and was protected under the Welsh Language Act 1993. It was noted that promoting the importance of the language within the Council had been identified as a point of action within the document.

It was explained that socio-economic issues were not identified as a cohort that had been consulted so far when drawing up objectives. The Equality Advisor confirmed that a socio-economic duty had been adopted in Wales since 2021 and was therefore an important consideration when drawing up objectives. Assurance was given that there would be a specific question within the next consultation about socio-economic issues. It was explained that there was a close relationship between equality and socio-economic issues and that it was a very important consideration.

It was explained that the 2024-28 Equality Plan would be drawn up with the final objectives following this consultation and it would be presented to the Cabinet when timely.

7. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE NORTH WALES REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP BOARD 2022/2023

The report was submitted by Cllr Dilwyn Morgan.

DECISION

To note the work and progress made in 2022/23 in the areas of work that are brought forward regionally through the North Wales Regional Partnership Board.

DISCUSSION

Members were reminded that the submission of this annual report was a statutory requirement under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. It was elaborated that establishing and maintaining the Board was a requirement within Section 9 of that act, as was the need to promote cooperation with the Board's partners.

It was explained that the board was run by the Regional Collaboration Team and hosted by Denbighshire County Council. Mary Wimbury, Chief Executive of Care Forum Wales was thanked for her work in chairing the Board.

Members were guided through the report and the following main points were briefly highlighted:

- It was confirmed that the board's role was to collaborate to ensure the health and well-being of people of all ages in north Wales.
- A diagram of all the Board's sub-boards was provided which ensured that the Board's role was fulfilled.
- It was noted that the 'Area Plan' was available on the North Wales Collaborative's website which indicated the challenges and priorities within the Board's areas, including Gwynedd.
- Reference was made to the board's two new regional capital funds which provided money to hugely important projects across the region. It was confirmed that these funds were the 'Housing with Care Fund' and the 'Integration and Rebalancing Capital Fund'.
- Several projects within the children and young people field such as learning disabilities, mental health, early years and the 'No Wrong Door' project were reported on.
- It was explained that the board did receive money from the Regional Integration Fund established by the Government in April 2022. It was stated that this was a Fund for a period of five years.
- Information was provided about the Membership of the Board, which included representatives from the public sector, health, service users and the third sector.
- Reference was made to the Board's Annual Delivery Plan to provide information about the Board's work in the future.

It was agreed to provide Cabinet Members with a further presentation on the work of the Board.

It was recognised that there was no clear and unambiguous governance structure for work relating to children and young people. It was confirmed that the terms of reference were currently being reviewed and the Children and Young People Sub-board was prioritising this work. It was expanded that elected members were not part of the sub-board and therefore it was confirmed that the Statutory Director had contacted the Government to consider adapting membership.

It was confirmed that the Board's complicated governance structure had been provided by the Government. Despite this, it was confirmed that the Board's work was very successful as it focused on the voice of the services' users to motivate the work.

The Board and all officers were thanked for their work.

8. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CORPORATE PARENT PANEL 2022-2023

The report was submitted by Cllr Elin Walker Jones

DECISION

To accept and note the information in the report which reports on the work of the Corporate Parent Panel for the year 2022-23.

DISCUSSION

Cyngor Gwynedd and its partners have a clear responsibility to be a Corporate Parent for every child in the Council's care, and specifically to ensure effective, stable, safe and suitable care for looked after children and young people, including those who are leaving care. Section 3.1 of the forward programme was corrected to reiterate this and it was noted that the Report reported on the work that had been completed to ensure that the Council undertook this responsibility.

It was confirmed that Cyngor Gwynedd took this responsibility very seriously and it was explained that the Chief Executive was the Chair of the Corporate Parent Panel. Attention was drawn to the fact that this report detailed the work carried out between April 2022 and March 2023 and noted current information about the numbers of looked after children and the support given to those children as well as outlining the intention for the future.

It was reported that 25% of the children who came into care during the year 2022-23 were Asylum Seekers through the Home Office Transfer Scheme, as the Council accepted 15 children through the scheme.

Concern was expressed about the Home Office Transfer Scheme as the child was not placed at the centre of their processes. It was explained that there were no discussions in advance to meet the needs of the child, to assess whether Gwynedd was a suitable location for their needs. It was recognised that it was very challenging to find a suitable location for the children as they did not want to stay in Gwynedd very often, and longed to be in the big cities. It was explained that individuals over the age of 16 could be looked after in a supported accommodation setting, but if the children were under 16 they had to have a foster placement. It was updated that the Home Office expected local authorities to place the children within five working days of receiving the referral. It was emphasised that this was not possible and as a result, in one case, the child had to be placed in Kent while officers found a more suitable placement, local to Gwynedd. It was reported that these problems which arose as part of the Transfer Scheme occurred throughout Wales.

The numbers of Asylum Seekers in each county in the north were confirmed (in accordance with information received in summer 2023, for a period of eight cycles) as follows:

- Wrexham County Borough Council - 2 children
- Conwy County Borough Council - 3 children
- Isle of Anglesey County Council - 4 children
- Denbighshire County Council - 7 children
- Cyngor Gwynedd - 9 children
- Flintshire County Council - 11 children

This was compared with other locations in Wales such as Carmarthenshire (12 children), Newport (1 child), Swansea (3 children) and Cardiff (1 child).

It was detailed that 26 Asylum Seekers had been in the Council's care for a period of two and a half years and that six additional children were expected before April 2024. It was explained that the children were in the Council's care once a referral was made by the Home Office. It was explained that the Council's responsibility was identical to the responsibilities for any child from Gwynedd in our care. It was confirmed that the team's capacity had recently increased to deal with the additional challenges that derived from receiving more applications.

Attention was drawn to the importance of foster parents. Members were reminded that a session had been held at the Llŷn ac Eifionydd National Eisteddfod this year by foster parents, where they discussed the challenges and satisfaction of being foster parents. Pride was expressed in the support the foster parents gave to each other and to the Council.

It was explained that the Council had a statutory responsibility following the Children Act 1989 and 2004 to keep families together where it was safe and appropriate to do so. It was explained that the Council received court orders to remove children from the homes if there was a risk to them in the home. It was reported that there was a requirement for the Council to ask if the parents had individuals within their families who could be assessed in order to keep the children within the family. It was emphasised that this was dependent on the child's age and understanding as well as on an assessment of the adults nominated. It was confirmed that the nominated individuals were registered as foster parents if suitable and were supervised by the Council in any way, even if they were outside Gwynedd.

It was reported that foster placements were not always suitable and therefore the Council provided a residential placement. It was ensured that these locations were supervised on a monthly basis. It was noted that officers went beyond the statutory requirement to ensure contact with those children. It was emphasised that Council officers went to see children in residential settings as they came from Gwynedd. It was explained that this allowed officers to share information and teaching resources in Welsh with the children as well as communicate with the children in their first language.

Many thanks were given to all foster parents in the county and to the officers who supported them.

Reference was made to several other aspects that were a part of the Panel's work such as a 'Stable Home', 'Good health', 'Good education' and 'raising awareness'. It was explained that contributions were provided cross-departmentally to support the Panel's work.

It was confirmed that the Panel's priorities for the year to come included the 'Small Group Homes' scheme which formed part of the Council's Plan 2023-28, which sought to place all looked after children from Gwynedd within Gwynedd.

Thanks were expressed to all the officers of the Department who worked hard to look after all the children in the Council's care.

9. ARFON POST-16 EDUCATION

The report was submitted by Cllr Beca Brown.

DECISION

- 1. To approve Option 2 for the project on Post-16 Education in Arfon.**
- 2. The Cabinet approved the Head of Education Department to hold discussions on revising the memorandum of understanding with the stakeholders who make up the Gwynedd and Ynys Môn Post-16 Education Consortium with the aim of strengthening the arrangements and to report back to the Cabinet with recommendations for the agreed amendments.**
- 3. The Cabinet gave its permission to redirect part of the Arfon Post-16 Education project's budget in accordance with the report, to address the financial deficit in Band B projects that cannot be progressed at present due to the insufficient budget for them as a result of increased costs.**

DISCUSSION

Members were reminded that the Cabinet had permitted the commencement of an engagement process with key stakeholders to consider the current post-16 provision, and highlight the key considerations in order to identify the direction and opportunities to strengthen the provision in Arfon, at a meeting held in March 2020. It was detailed that two working groups had been held with learners, parents, teaching staff and governors to give them the opportunity to voice their opinions and ask any questions.

It was reported that the main messages gained from this engagement process were that:

- The main priority was the quality of education.
- ICT should be used to reiterate and support the face-to-face learning.
- Welsh and bilingual education was of integral importance (despite some comments to the contrary).
- The capital funding should be used to improve the facilities of our secondary schools in general so that all 11-18 year-old learners could benefit from the investment.
- There was general objection to any proposal to centralise the provision or have a tertiary provision.

- Many comments were received regarding the Grŵp Llandrillo Menai provision in terms of quality, medium and pastoral care.

It was acknowledged that the case for change was not as strong today as it was back in 2020. It was considered that the aspirations and needs of young people had changed as a result of the pandemic and that the Council had learned lessons about the importance of technology in education. It was noted that strong comments had come from headteachers that it was necessary to look at secondary education as a whole, rather than focusing on post-16 education only. It was reported that some other counties dealt with post-16 education as part of the secondary system, but Gwynedd chose not to do so because of strengths and positive inspections about the current arrangements.

It was acknowledged that investment in secondary schools had been lower than in primary schools. The intention to invest in secondary schools in the county was welcomed as it was sorely needed. The Assistant Head of Education Department: Corporate Services emphasised that investment in secondary schools had been less significant than for the primary sector because that sector had a significantly higher number of schools than the secondary sector. However, it was ensured that the secondary sector was addressed by the department and reference was made to a number of projects in the pipeline to assist in this.

Concern was shared about the challenges of attracting staff to teach key subjects, together with the low numbers of pupils studying some specialist subjects. In response to an enquiry, the Assistant Head of Education: Secondary confirmed that not all A Level subjects were taught in all schools at present. Despite this, it was hoped that the Gwynedd and Anglesey Education Consortium would adapt to meet the needs of pupils, such as offering hybrid courses where there was an element of face-to-face teaching and elements of remote learning.

It was explained that there were two options for the future of the project based on findings following a period of engagement with stakeholders. These options were confirmed as:

1. Investing in the existing Post-16 Education System
2. Re-directing the Arfon Post-16 Education Budget

It was reported that the Department felt that Option 2 above was the way forward since it was a means to address the actual needs of Ysgol Hiraef, Ysgol Tryfan and Ysgol Brynrefail, and made a genuine difference to the learning environment and learner experiences at these schools.

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

The report was submitted by Cllr Elin Walker Jones

DECISION

The information in the report was accepted and noted.

DISCUSSION

Members were reminded that the department put the people of Gwynedd at the centre of its services and that its success in doing this was measured through regular Performance Challenge meetings.

It was reported that the department was leading on two of the Council's Plan projects. It was stated that one of these was the 'Small Group Homes Scheme'. It was explained that the department developed 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 fully in the life of their communities. It was confirmed that property visits had taken place in order to move the project forward and a house had been considered. It was stated that a plot of land in another area of Gwynedd was being considered for building a house for the purposes of this scheme. It was explained that a project group would be established in 2024 which would include officers from the Children, Housing and Property, Education departments and the Health Service to oversee the scheme. It was ensured that an additional £50,000 had been allocated to the project recently from the RIF fund underspend.

It was reported that the second Council Plan project led by the Department was the 'Autism Plan'. It was explained that autistic children, young people and adults faced challenges in receiving the necessary specialist support. A commitment was made to improving the service, making it easier for individuals to receive services. It was confirmed that a forum had been set up to look at the referrals that reach the Council. Information was provided about the launch of the Service at this year's National Eisteddfod which had been very successful. It was reported that many Council staff had now been given the opportunity to board the Autism Reality Experience Bus which gave a similar experience to how an individual with Autism sees the world around them. It was explained that Cyngor Gwynedd staff were required to complete level 1 and 2 Autism training. Assurance was given that the department worked closely with the Neurodevelopmental Team and Derwen Team on the plan.

It was acknowledged that the department's workforce situation remained a matter of serious concern. Despite this, it was confirmed that the department was making efforts to stabilise the situation for the future through collaboration with Grŵp Llandrillo Menai and visits to Health and Care students to inform them of the employment opportunities available.

It was confirmed that the department continued to see profound and complex matters coming to the Council's attention and that the number of open cases was increasing. It was stated that the numbers of cases open to the Post-16 Team were at their highest ever, with 210 cases being dealt with. It was considered that this went hand in hand with an increase in homelessness contributions and therefore the department was working with the Homelessness Team to try to find suitable accommodation. It was acknowledged that this was an immense challenge.

It was noted that the effects of the pandemic, the costs crisis and stress led to higher numbers of people contacting the department for information and support. It was explained that 1,894 people came into contact with the department between July and September 2023, which was a significantly higher figure than was witnessed prior to the pandemic.

It was emphasised that this department was a part of the 'Maethu Cymru' national campaign to attract people to consider fostering. It was noted that the campaign had been very active over the summer by attending several events including the Royal Welsh Show and the National Eisteddfod where a 'Friendly Employer Panel' and a 'From the heart' conversation were held on the topic. It was elaborated that a number of businesses had been very supportive by displaying banners and posters. It was confirmed that the Care Friends app had been launched in September which rewarded foster carers when they shared information about fostering with their contacts and encouraged them along their journey to be foster carers. It was explained that every time users referred someone to the department, they would collect points which could be converted into cash to help them with everyday costs.

It was confirmed that the department had realised its total Savings Plans of £44,010 for the year 2023-24. It was expanded that the Department had received £130,000 as a one-off bid towards continuing to employ three social care practitioners. It was explained that a bid had been completed to make the position permanent for 2024-25 and it was hoped to hear the outcome of that bid in January 2024.

11. 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

The report was submitted, noting that it provided an update on the department's work, outlining what had happened against the Council Plan's pledges, reporting on the department's performance and the financial situation.

It was confirmed that a planning application for Dolfeurig had been accepted by the National Park, as part of the Local Preventative Support project which was part of the Council's Plan. It was detailed that it was hoped to start construction work on the site during the summer 2024 following a design and contracting process.

Assurance was given that significant work was underway to improve accessibility to information and to events across the county through pages on the Council's website which were constantly reviewed.

The 'Independent Living' project which was also part of the Council's Plan was detailed, confirming that Extra Care Light Housing in Pwllheli opened on 27 November. Pride was expressed that similar projects were in the pipeline in the areas of Groeslon, Nefyn, Tywyn, Penrhyndeudraeth and beyond. Assurance was given that the department was working to identify suitable individuals to use the site. Concern was expressed at the lack of development on the work of identifying a similar site in Dolgellau. It was explained that settings were assessed according to the needs of the individuals and that difficulties had arisen when trying to find a central location for the

site, but that this was a priority for the Department. It was emphasised that the Cabinet Member would be requesting an update at the department's next performance challenge meeting.

It was emphasised that the department was preparing for a digital transformation by 2025, looking at new technology while also taking into account the use of digital resources for users in rural areas. It was acknowledged that this work was new and constantly changing. Likewise, it was confirmed that the Department was focusing on direct payment models as this service would soon be transferred to new providers.

It was reported that waiting lists to receive an occupational therapy assessment had increased at an alarming rate, forcing the department to prioritise on the basis of risk. Reference was made to another challenge facing the department, namely domiciliary care hours that were not met. It was noted that this percentage had recently increased from 12.1% to 14%. This meant that 154 new individuals were awaiting domiciliary care by the end of September 2023, compared to 137 at the end of May 2023.

Attention was drawn to the alarming numbers of referrals reaching the Mental Health Team. It was confirmed that the department received between 450 and 500 in recent months. It was recognised that this raised concerns about the department's capacity to deal with the demand for support, but there was pride in the fact that 40% of these applications had received a care package provided for them.

Reference was made to safeguarding issues, confirming that the department had succeeded to manage the risk in 100% of recent referrals. There was concern, however, that 306 individuals were awaiting a Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) assessment at the end of September 2023. It was explained that this problem appeared in a large number of local authorities.

The Department's financial situation was discussed, as it was anticipated that the department had overspent by approximately £6.5 million on the 2023-24 budget. It was explained that this derived from the pressure on the department and that officers were fully aware of it, and the impact this overspend was having on other Council departments. It was confirmed that the Cabinet Member had requested more information from the department on overspending in the fields of Domiciliary Care, Residential and Nursing Settings and the Learning Disabilities Service.

The meeting commenced at 1.00 pm and concluded at 3.00 pm.

CHAIR