

THE CABINET TUESDAY, 12 OCTOBER 2021

Present-

Councillors: Dyfrig L. Siencyn, Dafydd Meurig, Craig ab Iago, Gareth Wyn Griffith, Nia Wyn Jeffreys, Dilwyn Morgan, Gareth Thomas, Ioan Thomas, Catrin Elen Wager and Cemlyn Rees Williams

Also in attendance -

Dafydd Gibbard (Chief Executive), Morwena Edwards (Corporate Director), Iwan Evans (Head of Legal Services), Dafydd Edwards (Head of Finance Department) and Annes Siôn (Democracy Team Leader).

Item 5: Geraint Owen (Head of Corporate Support Department), Carey Cartwright (Learning and Organisational Development Manager) and Meinir Griffiths (Service Improvement Officer).

Item 6: Gareth Jones (Assistant Head of Environment Department), and Rebeca Jones (Joint Planning Policy Unit Manager).

Item 7 - 9 - Ffion Madog Evans (Senior Finance Manager).

Item 10 - Sioned Williams (Head of Economy and Community Department).

Item 11 - Geraint Owen (Head of Corporate Support Department).

1. APOLOGIES

The Cabinet Members and Officers were welcomed to the meeting.
No apologies were received.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were received.

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. SIX MONTHLY REPORT: COMPLAINTS AND SERVICE IMPROVEMENT

The item was presented by Cllr Nia Jeffreys.

DECISION

The report was accepted.

DISCUSSION

The report was presented, noting that it reported on the complaints procedure within the Council. It was explained that the Council had a specific procedure that was updated in April 2021. It was noted that when the procedure was revised, amendments had been

made and the procedure was now under the Corporate Support Department.

It was stated that the reported noted the formal complaints the Council had received together with the complaints submitted to the Ombudsman. It was emphasised that the Council used complaints to improve services and to see the trends across the departments. It was highlighted that the number of complaints had increased, and this was seen across Local Government. Although the numbers had risen, it was noted that the number of complaints to the Ombudsman had remained consistent.

It was explained that the Ombudsman had noted that the complaints figures submitted by the Council appeared to be realistic, that the procedure was working and the Council was obviously willing to learn lessons from the complaints. It was emphasised that there was room for improvement and a need to ensure the mindset that complaints were positive and a means to improve a service and central to the service's work. It was explained that training was currently being formulated on customer care jointly with the Ombudsman and will be held in October.

Attention was also drawn to the Successes Wall (Wal Llwyddiannau) that highlighted the public's appreciation and displayed services at their best.

Observations arising from the discussion

- The Head of Department added that the report highlighted the progress made, however, there was a need to continue to build upon this progress.
- It was noted that the Ombudsman's statistics included official and unofficial complaints and the number of complaints were considered to be realistic. It was stated that by presenting the figures in full that the Council was being completely open.
- It was expressed that the department had noted 41 complaints during the first five months of this year, and the number appeared to be low and it was asked if the Council caught every complaint. It was explained that the Council was eager to receive complaints and sought to be open by receiving complaints through various ways, and therefore reached a high number of individuals.
- Concerns were highlighted that the Council did not catch every complaint and it was asked if Councillors' complaints were included in these numbers. It was noted that there was a need for Cabinet Members to be drawn into complaints so that they were aware of them earlier in the process.
- It was emphasised that the Ombudsman's letter noted that this year had been a totally different one and therefore there was a need to take this into consideration when discussing this item.

6. DRAFT SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING GUIDANCE: THE SLATE LANDSCAPES OF NORTHWEST WALES, WORLD HERITAGE SITE

The item was presented by Cllr Gareth Griffith.

RESOLVED

The draft Supplementary Planning Guidance: The Slate Landscape of North West Wales was approved for public consultation, and the Assistant Head of the Environment Department was delegated the right to make any non-material revisions that may be required to the draft SPG.

DISCUSSION

The report was presented, and the resolution was noted.

It was noted that the report stated that this year the Council had successfully managed to receive the UNESCO World Heritage designation for the Slate Landscape of North West Wales in the county. It was stated that the specific area had been split into six component parts and the six were unique and this was highlighted in the Supplementary Planning Guidance. It was explained that the Guidance had been prepared jointly with Snowdonia National Park, as some planning applications were determined either by the Council or the Park. It was noted that the Guidance gave detailed information about the areas and further guidance on how to ensure that features of the site are protected and improved.

It was explained that the guidance contained 4 sections and these were highlighted. It was stressed that the department had worked closely with the National Park and there had been discussions with key stakeholders. It was noted as it was a joint Guidance between the National Park and the Council that there was a need to conduct a public consultation prior to any determination. It was highlighted that any observations made during the consultation period would be reported to the Cabinet and the amendments would be made to them.

Observations arising from the discussion

- It was noted that a great deal of work had been undertaken to develop the Supplementary Planning Guidance and it had been developed in accordance with the evidence. Support was highlighted to go into consultation, however, there was an enquiry regarding non-material revisions that may arise and be amended as noted in the recommendation. It was noted that these were non-material revisions such as spelling and it was stressed that if a material revision was highlighted then it would come back to the Cabinet.
- It was stated that the guidance noted the role to protect the heritage of the areas together with specific features and it was asked if it was possible to go a step further. It was explained that this Guidance was part of the Management Plan and included specific policies that can be seen within the Local Development Plan, however, it was explained that the Economy Department was busy producing guidances highlighting good practice and the special features that can be seen in the areas that will be used when individuals adapt houses and gardens within the Slate Landscape area.
- It was noted that the guidance highlighted what can be seen in the Joint Planning Policy and therefore it was an outline in the supplementary plan and consequently did not add any barriers for developers but highlighted what was important. A need to strike a balance was noted between facilitating developments and protecting special features within the areas.

7. REVENUE BUDGET 2021/22 - END OF AUGUST 2021 REVIEW

The item was presented by Cllr Ioan Thomas.

RESOLVED

To accept the report on the end of August 2021 review of the Revenue Budget,

and consider the latest financial situation regarding the budgets of each department/service.

It was noted that the financial impact of Covid-19 continued in 2021/22, which was a combination of additional costs, income losses and a slippage in the savings programme, as the Council had given priority to safeguarding the health and lives of the people of Gwynedd in response to the crisis.

It was noted that the Welsh Government's Covid support system via the hardship fund was continuing, however, it did not address overspend due to a slippage in the savings programme.

It was noted that there was significant overspend in the Adults, Health and Well-being Department and the Highways and Municipal Department this year, whilst there was a significant improvement in the projections of the Children and Families Department.

The following recommendations and financial virements (as outlined in Appendix 2) were approved.

- On Corporate budgets, that:
 - An underspend of (£285k) relating to capital costs was earmarked to a fund to finance the capital programme.
 - A net underspend of (£1,957k) on Corporate budgets to go to the Financial Strategy Support Fund to assist with the financial challenges facing the Council, particularly due to the Covid crisis.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted, noting that it detailed the latest review of the Council's revenue budget, along with the projections for the end of the financial year. It was highlighted that there had been a significant financial impact on the Council as a result of Covid-19, with a combination of additional costs together with income losses. It was explained that the Council made monthly applications to reclaim costs from the Welsh Government's Hardship Fund.

Back in January it was stated that measures had been taken to draft an amended programme of savings for 2021/22, however, it was explained that a delay in realising savings continued in some areas, with a delay as a result of the crisis an evident factor.

Attention was drawn to the principal matters and it was noted that the department anticipated an overspend of £1.4 million in the Adults Department, with a failure to realise savings worth £855k being an obvious factor of the overspend. It was stated that Covid had had a substantial impact on the department and £1.3 million had already been claimed from the Welsh Government towards the additional costs for the period.

It was explained following the Council's decision to allocate £1.8 million in additional funding to the Children's Department in the 2021/22 funding cycle as well as abolish savings schemes to the value of £1.1 million it was highlighted that the current financial projections for the department were very promising. It was stated that overspending problems in the waste collection and disposal field continued in the Highways and Municipal Department. It was noted that there

had been difficulties to realise savings in a number of areas to the value of £673k and the department had also faced additional costs responding to Covid, however, the Welsh Government had already provided compensation and it was expected that they would continue to provide compensation for the rest of the year.

It was noted that corporately there were prudent projections when setting the 2021/22 budget that were responsible for additional tax outputs and contributed to the underspend on Council Tax Reductions. The decision was noted.

Observations arising from the discussion:

- The Head of the Finance Department explained that Government grant funding had not been predicted last year, however, this had been done this year, and as a result on the whole the situation was generally satisfactory.
- The Head of the Finance Department added that savings needed to be delivered, however the situation of two departments were difficult this year.
- It was stated that in terms of the Adults Department the department had been under pressure as a result of intensive care cases together with working under the conditions of Covid. It was noted that work had been undertaken last year to claim costs, together with the receipt of late grants.
- It was stated that in the Highways and Municipal field there had been an increase in the waste collected together with adaptations to the service as a result of Covid regulations. Concern was highlighted about staff sickness, together with loss of income for the department, and it was noted that work was being undertaken to find a substantial sum of money.
- Gratitude was expressed on behalf of the Children and Families Department that the End to End savings scheme had been abolished, and as a result the department's financial position was satisfactory this year.
- It was highlighted that there was concern regarding the Education Department's transport costs, and the post-16 provision needed to be looked at.

8. CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2021-22 - END OF AUGUST 2021 REVIEW

The report was presented by Cllr Ioan Thomas

RESOLVED

The report on the end of August review (position as at 31 August 2021) of the capital programme was accepted.

The revised financing as presented in part 4 of the report was approved, as follows:

- use of various sources totalling £25,837,000 to fund actual slippages from 2020/21,
- an increase of £61,000 in the use of borrowing,
- an increase of £9,959,000 in the use of grants and contributions,
- a increase of £69,000 in the use of capital receipts,
- an increase of £1,482,000 in the use of revenue contributions,
- an increase of £21,000 in the use of the capital reserve, and
- an increase of £807,000 in the use of renewal and other reserves.

DISCUSSION

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The report was submitted noting that it presented the revised capital programme and sought approval for the relevant financing sources. It was explained that there was an analysis in the report of the capital programme of £124.0 million for the next three years.

It was explained that the Council had firm schemes in place to invest approximately £71.6 million this year, with £26.1 million financed by attracting specific grants. It was stated that the impact of the Covid crisis can still be seen on the capital programme, with only 16% of the budget having been spent by the end of August, compared to 13% for the same period last year and 19% two years ago.

It was noted that £9.1m of proposed expenditure had been re-profiled from 2021/22 to 2022/23 and 2023/24 and the main schemes were highlighted which included 21st Century Schools, Schemes to Stimulate the Economy and Industrial Units and the Council's Carbon Management Schemes. Attention was drawn to the list of additional grants the Council had managed to attract since the previous review, which included grants from the Local Transport Fund, Targeted Regeneration Investment for the 'Nyth' Scheme in Bangor and Welsh Government Grants for Child Care.

Observations arising from the discussion

- It was noted that the report highlighted exciting schemes such as the Circular Economy that had several grants. Pride was expressed in the Nyth scheme that had received grants and would offer exciting and creative opportunities in Bangor.
- Finance for the industrial units was welcomed as there was a great deal of demand for the units.
- Concern was highlighted regarding the costs of building materials together with skills in the construction field. It was asked if there was any concern regarding spending the investments as a result of these concerns. It was noted that tenders received were much higher, however, it was explained that the forecasts indicated that these were temporary and some fields were holding back on schemes and prioritised as required.
- It was stated that the Council should be congratulated for the capital expenditure to establish assets for the Council. It was emphasised that the schemes in the Housing Action Plans would be a huge expenditure over the next three years.

9. SAVINGS OVERVIEW - PROGRESS REPORT ON REALISING SAVINGS SCHEMES

The report was presented by Cllr Ioan Thomas.

RESOLVED

To accept the information in the report and to note the progress towards realising the savings schemes for 2020/21, 2019/20 and previous years.

It was agreed to carry out reviews on the unrealised savings schemes together with next year's schemes to ensure that they are achievable or whether we need to look for alternative schemes.

It was noted that the impact of Covid-19 had contributed to a slippage in the savings programme, as the Council had given the utmost priority to safeguarding the health and lives of the people of Gwynedd in response to the crisis, which had meant that it was not possible to continue with the performance challenging and savings arrangements during the crisis period.

DISCUSSION

The report, which summarised the situation with the Council's savings was submitted. It was explained that since 2015/16 £35m in savings had been approved to be realised between 2015/16 - 2021/22. It was noted that by now over £32.7 million had been realised, this was 94% of the required sum over the period.

It was stated that in January this year the savings schemes were reviewed to assess which historic schemes were now unachievable, and an amended programme of savings was drawn up for 2021/22 after steps were taken to write off, for slippage and the re-profiling of the savings schemes.

It was explained that departments had focused on responding to the Covid crisis since April 2020, and the impact had contributed to the slippage in the savings programme. It was stated that from the 2021/22 savings schemes, 42% had already been realised and 22% were now on track to deliver on time by the end of the financial year.

It was emphasised that it was inevitable that realising savings to the value of £32.7m since April 2015 had been challenging. It was stated that there had been a delay with some of the savings schemes to the value of £1m, however, they were proceeding but there was a need to discuss risks to deliver schemes to the value of £0.9m.

Observations arising from the discussion:

- It was stated that Covid had affected the Highways and Municipal Department and work was being undertaken to look at future schemes. It was added that the department was continuing to pay for close circuit equipment but there would be savings once the cost had been paid. In addition, it was explained that an external study was being undertaken with the closure of the Cilgwyn Recycling Centre and there were many possible plans for the site.
- The need was noted to carry out reviews on the unrealised savings schemes together with next year's schemes to ensure that they are achievable or whether we need to look for alternative schemes.

10. PERFORMANCE REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR ECONOMY AND COMMUNITY

The report was presented by Cllr Gareth Thomas

RESOLVED

To note and accept the information in the report.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted noting that the department had been forced to adapt their way of working over the last year and staff were thanked for their flexibility over the Covid period. Attention was drawn to some specific fields such as Creating High Value Jobs and that Cwmni Eginio had now established in Trawsfynydd to facilitate ensuring further developments on the site in the future. It was explained that the Government's decision to review road schemes had caused uncertainty in terms of the Llanbedr site, however, the continuation of investment from the owners was heartening.

In terms of Implementing Gwynedd Slate Heritage scheme it was explained that the department had been successful to secure the World Heritage Designation for the Slate Landscapes of North West Wales. It was explained that there was a need now to implement the plans.

Attention was drawn to Forming a Regeneration Plan for our Areas project and it was noted that engagement and consultation work with communities was central to the programme and detailed engagement would be conducted during November.

In terms of the Department's performance, it was expressed that the Maritime Service had been extremely busy as a result of the high number of visitors during the summer. The staff were thanked for their hard work. It was explained that it had been a highly challenging year for the events department, however, the department had continued to offer support to organisers. It was clarified that the service had adopted arrangements to consult with Local Members and Community Councils before supporting any events on Council lands.

It was highlighted that the department anticipated an underspend of £203k by the end of the financial year. It was explained that the Department had exceeded its income levels for this year, specifically with beaches and Hafan moorings. It was stated that there was a need to discuss the 2022/23 budget in light of the increase in income and the demand for a higher budget to meet the demand as a result of Covid, once the Government grants end.

Observations arising from the discussion:

- It was noted that the Business Support service had been working diligently throughout the period and many staff had been transferred to undertake this work. It was explained that significant work had been undertaken to ensure regular communication between the Council and businesses. The need to consider how the Council supports business was noted to ensure high quality jobs.
- The department was thanked for its work and congratulations were expressed for securing the UNESCO World Heritage Site designation that will assist to transform areas.

11. PERFORMANCE REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CORPORATE SUPPORT AND LEGAL DEPARTMENT

The report was presented by Cllr Nia Jeffreys

RESOLVED

The information noted in the report was accepted, and the alternative savings scheme was supported.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted noting that the Cabinet Member wanted to draw attention to some specific plans. It was noted that work was being undertaken on the Keeping the Benefit Local project and the department had been trialling a new methodology to assess tenders based on social value and local impact. It was stated that undertaking the pilot had enabled the department to understand how arrangements work on a practical level and the opportunities and associated risks.

It was explained that the Women in Leadership scheme continued to attract more women to apply for and attain higher positions within the Council by reviewing work conditions and the work environment. It was highlighted that there had been progress in the Ensuring Fairness for Everyone project. It was noted that there was a great deal to

be achieved, however, it was noted that awareness and passion made a difference.

In terms of planning the future workforce it was highlighted that an investment had been made to continue with the programme's work to attract and develop talent via the Apprenticeships Scheme and the Cynllun Yfory Scheme for Managers and Experts. It was explained that there was a need to undertake additional work to try and retain staff within the Council and to ensure service continuation.

Attention was drawn to the department's day-to-day work, and it was highlighted that the Corporate Support Department had managed to retain the Corporate Health Standard's Gold Level. It was highlighted that adaptations would be made to the Galw Gwynedd Centre at Penrhyndeudraeth in order to provide a new comprehensive face-to-face customer contact service in the area. The important work undertaken by the Registration Service was highlighted and they had coped extremely well under genuinely difficult circumstances.

It was stated that in terms of savings, since 2015 the department had identified £2.5 million of savings, this was equivalent to a quarter of the department's budget to maintain and extend the service. In terms of savings to be realised by the department that alternative schemes had been identified.

Observations arising from the discussion

- Pride was noted that a Project Officer had been appointed for the Native Welsh Place Names Scheme and the need to work with other organisations such as the Post Office was noted to have a more Welsh aspect in day-to-day activities.
- It was stated that Keeping the Benefit Local was an exciting and far-reaching scheme.
- In terms of workforce recruitment and retainment, there was a need to highlight the issues seen to appoint staff in the care field together with retaining professional staff in other fields. The schemes seen within the Council were highlighted including the Developing Potential scheme that develops officers and expertise in order to retain individuals within the Council.

The meeting commenced at 1pm and concluded at 3.10pm

CHAIRMAN