

THE CABINET 21/12/21

Present-

Councillors: Dyfrig L Siencyn, Dafydd Meurig, Gareth Griffith, Nia Jeffreys, Dilwyn Morgan, Ioan Thomas, Gareth Thomas, Catrin Wager and Cemlyn Williams.

Also present-

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

Item 6: Catrin Thomas (Assistant Head of Supporting Families)

Item 8: Huw Williams (Head of Gwynedd Consultancy) and Steffan Jones (Head of Highways and Municipal Department).

1. APOLOGIES

The Cabinet Members and Officers were welcomed to the meeting.
An apology was received from Councillor Craig ab Iago and Dafydd Wyn Williams (Head of Regulatory Department).

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. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 30 NOVEMBER 2021

The Chair accepted the minutes of the meeting held on 30 November 2021 as a true record.

6. SUPPORTING PEOPLE PROGRAMME

The item was presented by Cllr. Dafydd Meurig

RESOLVED

To approve one-off resources for two years, namely £193,217 in 2022/23 and £155,990 in 2023/24 from the COVID Recovery Fund towards the Supporting People Programme.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted, noting that this was a one-off bid for funding to support the Supporting People cross-departmental programme. It was noted that the past two years of the Covid-19 crisis had been difficult and had highlighted how vulnerable some residents of Gwynedd were.

It was explained that over the past two years, the programme had dealt with matters involving fuel poverty and homelessness, but that the work being undertaken now needed to be formalised. It was noted that the programme was in place and attention was drawn to the schemes that would be prioritised such as food poverty, fuel poverty and digital inclusion.

The Corporate Director added that the report outlined the work which had been done cross-departmentally and with partners. Gratitude was expressed about the joint-working which had led to creating a programme which would make a difference in the short-term to the residents of Gwynedd. It was noted that the programme would do everything within the Council's ability to support residents whilst working on long-term schemes.

The Assistant Head - Supporting Families noted that the report summarised what had been possible to provide during the crisis. It was noted that, with the recovery period following the pandemic and an increase in the demand, there was a need for investment to ensure support for everyone. Gratitude was also expressed regarding the community efforts together with the work of the third sector over the past two years.

Observations arising from the discussion

- The report was supported, and thanks were given to the partners and the departments for working together on this programme. It was noted that poverty led to a detrimental impact on children and the need to support families that would come into the benefits system for the first time was noted.
- It was expressed that the situation was unusual, on the one hand taking pride in the fact that the Council was able to support residents but on the other hand the shame of living in a country with a Government which pushed individuals to having to use food banks in order to sustain their families.
- The food poverty projects were referred to and it was asked whether there were opportunities in terms of tackling food waste together with growing food in the community. It was proposed that this aspect of the programme could be renamed from food poverty to food resilience or Ensuring Food for All.
- It was highlighted that poverty was not a recent problem in Gwynedd and that it had been a problem for many years. It was stated that this funding was for a two-year period and it was also stated that poverty would not have disappeared by the end of this period. It was stressed that there was a need to address residents' needs and potential partners that it may be possible to work with were highlighted.
- Attention was drawn to the Schools Benefits Promoter and it was asked why they would only be funded for a year. It was noted that discussions had been held with the Education Department and it was noted that Heads had highlighted that housing and benefits support were the main needs arising within schools. As a result of this, it was added, a specific link for schools would be funded for a year in order to understand what the demand was and, in the long-term, it may be possible to refer individuals for specific services.

7. ESTABLISHING THE NORTH WALES REGION'S CORPORATE JOINT COMMITTEE

The item was presented by Cllr. Dyfrig Siencyn

RESOLVED

Agreed in principle to transfer the functions of the North Wales Economic Ambition Board via a delegation agreement to the North Wales Corporate Joint Committee, subject to;

- a. the statutory framework under development by Welsh Government allows for the delegations of the relevant operational functions to a Corporate Joint Committee,
- b. that the North Wales Corporate Joint Committee agrees to establish a Sub-committee, with membership to be agreed with the Councils, to achieve the functions of the Economic Ambition Board.

This transfer was proposed in order to deliver a simpler governance model, and avoid duplication. A further detailed report on the framework for action would be submitted to a subsequent meeting of the Cabinet.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted noting that the North Wales Corporate Joint Committee had now been established under Welsh Government legislation. It was noted that the six counties of North Wales were now required to establish the Corporate Joint-Committee to discuss planning and transportation matters, and that discussing Economic well-being was optional. It was explained that this report requests the transfer of the North Wales Economic Ambition Board functions to the North Wales Corporate Joint-Committee.

The Head of Finance, who had been commissioned to co-ordinate the work of establishing the Joint-Committee, guided the members through the presentation and highlighted the main points. He emphasised that as the legislation was now in place, there was a need to make the appropriate arrangements to hold the first meeting of the Joint-Committee before the end of January in order to adopt the budget for 2022/23. Nevertheless, it was noted that the initial functions of the Joint-Committee would not commence until the end of June 2022.

It was explained that there was a legal duty to deal with planning matters, together with transportation, and that there was an optional power to deal with economic well-being which was currently being dealt with through the Economic Ambition Board. It was noted that the legal requirement and duties were immediate and there was an urgency to proceed. It was emphasised that much good work had been done regionally and that the work of establishing principles had already been done. The need to avoid duplicating discussions, keeping costs down whilst seeking to ensure that decisions were made as close as appropriately possible to the people was highlighted.

It was noted that the initial functions of the Joint-Committee included preparing and amending a Strategic Development Plan together with developing a regional transportation scheme. It was stressed that the Economic Ambition Board had been doing good work and that transferring it to the Joint-Committee would avoid duplication and would simplify the arrangements. It was noted that work would need to be done on specific fields before making the full decision.

In terms of governance, it was noted that the Sub-committees would do the heavy lifting in terms of the Corporate Joint-Committee and that an Audit Sub-committee and a Standards Committee would be needed. It was explained that the membership of the Sub-boards could be deputised which would share the burden between the Cabinet Members as well as co-opt members interested in the fields to the sub-boards. It was noted that Statutory Officers would need to be appointed, and that these officers could be borrowed from local authorities to undertake the work. It was noted that there was a possibility that Gwynedd would lead on the work as the Statutory Officers had been appointed to the Economic Ambition Board.

The next steps were outlined and it was noted that the Chair of Snowdonia National Park had been elected as the Park's representative on the Joint-Committee. It was stated that arrangements would be made to hold the first meeting in January. It was noted that it was mandatory to establish it and that there was an opportunity to implement it successfully and in a way that the Council and partners were happy with.

Observations arising from the discussion

- It was noted that, in recent years, there had been no support for the Joint-Committee regionally. It was explained that there was no option but to proceed with the plan and it was noted that scrutiny arrangements would be needed.
- It was noted that it was mandatory, and consequently, the Council needed to be a part of it in order to steer the arrangements. It was added that there was also a need to ensure that the Welsh language was given prominence within the Joint-Committee.
- It was explained that there was a need to accept that it was a step towards Local Government re-organisation through the back-door by Welsh Government, as well as moving democracy further away from the residents. It was stressed that there was option but to accept it but that this solution was a pragmatic one.

8. PERFORMANCE REPORT BY THE CABINET MEMBER FOR HIGHWAYS AND MUNICIPAL AND GWYNEDD CONSULTANCY

The report was submitted by Cllr. Catrin Wager.

RESOLVED

To accept and note the information in the report.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted noting that it considered two departments, starting with the Highways and Municipal Department. Attention was drawn to the Clean and Tidy Communities project highlighting that this exciting project was one of the Council's priorities. It was stressed that there was a need to work with communities to ensure that areas looked clean and tidy. It was added that, during the previous Cabinet meeting, and investment was made in the teams to lead on this work.

It was noted that the work of de-carbonising the fleet continued and that two electric bin collection vehicles would arrive before the end of the year. It was

added that a grant of £300,000 has been received in order to invest in large vehicle charging points within the Council's locations.

The Playing Fields scheme was highlighted, emphasising that Playing Fields had an important role within society. It was explained that the department would recommence the scheme of contacting Community Council or community groups in order to give them an opportunity to look after and run the children's playing fields. It was noted that the department would submit a bid to the transformation fund to build on the work undertaken until March 2020.

In terms of the performance of the Highways Department, it was noted that there had been a reduction in the recycling rates across the county. The need to remind individuals to recycle was outlined, and that the service would continue over the Christmas period. It was noted that there had been an overspend in the Waste field and that this was a result of grant uncertainty, and it was explained that the department had commissioned reviews by WRAP to look in detail at the service and it was hoped to be able to report to the Cabinet shortly.

It was noted that the main priority of the Gwynedd Consultancy department was Managing Flood Risks in order to keep the residents of Gwynedd safe. Attention was drawn to the Wnion scheme in the Meirionnydd area where the department was collaborating with Snowdonia National Park and neighbouring farms to see how it could be possible to prevent flooding through natural control methods and promoting biodiversity in doing so.

A budgetary concern was highlighted within the Consultancy department as the income figure had reduced after Welsh Government had withdrawn from the Llanbedr By-pass scheme. Despite this, it was stated that the staff were busy seeking to recover the income through alternative schemes.

Observations arising from the discussion

- The report was welcomed and it was asked with the Wnion scheme in the Dolgellau area whether discussions would be held with the Local Members. It was noted that local discussions would be arranged in January.
- Attention was drawn to the recycling rates and it was outlined that there was a tendency for more recycling to occur over the summer months as opposed to the winter months. It was explained that the situation was seasonal historically and that tourism affected the flow of residual waste being collected. It was noted that the department faced a challenging period and that a specific scheme would be needed to move ahead to recycle 70% of waste by March 2023.
- It was highlighted that there was no mention of the departments' financial situation in the performance reports and the need for the information to be included in future was noted.
- Support was expressed for the Playing Fields scheme which was such an important matter for Gwynedd residents. Compared with other counties, it was noted that there had clearly been a lack of investment in playing fields in Gwynedd and that the department recognised the need to review and push ahead with the scheme.
- It was agreed that there was a need to prioritise the flood prevention work

as climate change was a concern for communities. It was added that development work was currently being done to identify priorities as there were clear risks on the coast and inland as well.

9. PERFORMANCE REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

The report was submitted by Cllr Gareth Griffith

DECISION

To accept and note the information in the report.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted noting that this was the department's second report under the new regime. It was explained that, in September, the department's situation was quite bleak, specifically the Public Protection Service. It was noted that the situation across the department had improved and that several bids for funding had been made in order to improve the department's situation. It was noted that the problem of appointing staff to the Public Protection Service had been highlighted nationally and that the department was looking at how to deal with this.

Observations arising from the discussion

- It was noted that, having been a part of the Performance Challenging Meeting, the report was a fair reflection of the department's performance. It was noted that the department had been under considerable pressure as a result of the pandemic, but that several services had improved in recent months.
- It was explained that there was a lack of detail about the savings situation within the department, but that it had been under increasing pressure.
- In terms of the Test, Trace and Protect service, it was asked whether there had been a recruitment problem as staff were appointed via another county. It was noted that the staff had been working extremely hard over the past year, but that the public's attitude towards them had changed in recent months. Nevertheless, with changes in the way the team worked, it had been easier for them to receive the information from individuals.

10. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The report was submitted by Cllr Dyfrig Siencyn

DECISION

To approve the Forward Work Programme included with the meeting papers.

Before closing the meeting, the Chair noted his thanks and appreciation of Gareth Williams, who had been a democracy correspondent in recent years and

who was leaving his post at the end of the week.

It was noted that Welsh Government had started to release information about the settlement and it was explained that the settlement was better than had been seen over the past decade. It was noted that this highlighted the appreciation of Central Government of the work undertaken by Local Government during the pandemic.

The meeting commenced at 1.00 pm and concluded at 2.25 pm

CHAIRMAN