

THE CABINET 15/02/22

Present-

Councillors: Dyfrig L Siencyn, Dafydd Meurig, Craig ab Iago, 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), Dewi Morgan (Head of Finance Department) and Annes Siôn (Democracy Team Leader).

Item 6: Ffion Madog Evans (Senior Finance Manager)

Item 7: Rhion Glyn (Assistant Head - Adults, Health and Well-being Department) and Hawis Jones (Adults, Health and Well-being Projects Team Manager).

Item 8: Carys Fon Williams (Head of Housing and Property Department) and Lowri Roberts (Estates Manager)

Item 9: Bethan Griffith (Education Ancillary Services Manager) and Owen Owens (Senior Schools Manager)

Item 10-12: Geraint Owen (Head of Corporate Support Department)

Item 11: Dewi Wyn Jones (The Council's Business Support Service Manager)

Item 13: Sioned Williams (Head of Economy and Community Department)

1. APOLOGIES

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

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

A declaration of personal interest was received for Item 8: Lease of Canolfan Cefnfaes to Partneriaeth Ogwen from Cllr Dafydd Meurig as he was the Chair of Partneriaeth Ogwen and Cllr Catrin Wager as she was employed by Partneriaeth Ogwen. Both were prejudicial interest and both left the meeting during the discussion.

Declarations of personal interest were received from the following Councillors and Officers for Item 9: Dyfrig Siencyn, Craig ab Iago, Nia Jeffreys, Dilwyn Morgan, Gareth Thomas, Ioan Thomas, Catrin Wager, Cemlyn Williams and Dafydd Gibbard as they had children or grandchildren receiving school meals within the county. They were not prejudicial interests and they did not need to leave the meeting for the discussion.

3. URGENT MATTERS

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 THE 18 JANUARY 2022

The Chair accepted the minutes of the meeting held on 18 January 2022 as a true record.

6. BUDGET 2022/23

The item was presented by Cllr Ioan Thomas

RESOLVED

To recommend to the Council (at its meeting on 3 March 2022):

1. To set a budget of £295,232,820 for 2022/23, to be funded by £213,210,400 of Government Grant and £82,022,420 of Council Tax income, with an increase of 2.95%.
2. To establish a capital programme of £59,074,980 in 2022/23, to be funded from the sources noted in Appendix 4 of the report.

DISCUSSION

The report was presented and the decision was noted. It was explained that Welsh Government would announce the final grant settlement for local authorities on 2 March. It was noted that the Council had received a draft grant increase for 2022/23 which was a significant increase on what had been received in previous years. It was noted that the grant increase was of 8.8%, equivalent to an £18.1m.

It was noted that, despite this year's reasonable settlement, there were a number of factors that would create additional spending pressures on services in 2022/23. It was explained that, as well as addressing inflation rate, there was an opportunity to deal with wider expenditure pressures, including getting to grips with continued costs stemming from Covid-19 and cancelling or delaying savings schemes that it was not practicable to realise in 2022/23. It was noted that additional expenditure requirements considered totalled £20.2m and attention was drawn particularly to four headings of increases.

The first was salary inflation of £8.5m, and it was noted that the budget set aside an estimated increase of 4% in the 2022/23 pay agreement for the whole workforce and it was noted that an increase of 1.25% in National Insurance contributions would become effective in April 2022. Secondly was Other Inflation, and it was explained that the amount included provision for the impact of the 'living wage' on costs and fees payable to private suppliers together with inflationary increases on fuel and energy budgets and prices following re-tendering.

The third was Pressure on Services, and it was recommended that bids worth £6.7m for additional permanent resources submitted by Council departments to meet inevitable pressures on their services were approved. In addition to the permanent bids, it was also recommended that 'one-off' bids worth £6.2m to be funded from the Transformation Fund were approved. The fourth was Covid-19 pressures of £1.4m. It was stated that, since April 2020, the Government had compensated local authorities for the additional costs of the pandemic from the Hardship Fund. However, the Government had stated unequivocally that this support would cease at the end of March 2022 and local authorities would be expected to fund any additional costs or loss of income due to the pandemic thereafter. It was not anticipated that the £1.4m would be sufficient in itself but other funds were available within the Council to assist, such as the Covid Recovery Fund established when closing the accounts in 2020/21.

It was stated in relation to savings schemes, that the Council had realised £32.8m of savings schemes since 2015/16. As a result of the flexibility that this year's settlement had offered, savings worth £1.8m, originally planned to be realised in 2022/23, would no longer contribute to closing the budgetary gap. It was noted that savings schemes worth £595,000 remained in the programme to be taken out of the 2022/23 budget rather than £2.4m.

It was noted that the Council's expenditure requirements before taking out the savings for 2022/23 was £295.8m, and it was noted that the grant from the Government would be £213.2m. After taking account of the savings of £0.6m, there was a residual gap of £82m, and it was recommended that the gap be addressed through Council Tax, which meant an increase of 2.95%.

Looking to the future, it was noted that Welsh Government, when announcing the draft settlement, had confirmed that Local Authorities would receive +3.5% in 2023/24 and then +2.4% in 2024/25. It was noted that the increase would be substantially lower than that received in 2022/23. It was noted that in taking account of inflation rates, savings schemes would have to be revisited when planning for these years.

The Head of Finance added that the settlement was a good one, but that there was a need to monitor the settlement for the subsequent two years in order to be able to deal with the additional pressures on services.

Observations arising from the discussion

- The budget was supported and pride was expressed that funds could be committed through bids to the care field, as well as climate change, of £3m. Attention was drawn to expenditure of £330 on computer licences and it was noted that the figure was high for software. It was explained that a team was looking at information technology software across the Council, but that costs would continue for the time being to ensure service continuation.
- Support was expressed to removing the Post-16 travel pass costs, which would offer more opportunities for young people and was a scheme that would really make a difference.
- It was noted that the situation was good compared to some previous years when there were regular discussions about cuts. Attention was drawn to a

billion pounds which had now been lost from European funds across Wales, and that there were no additional funds from the Westminster Government.

- It was stressed that it would have been easy not to raise the Council Tax, particularly in an election year, but it was explained that this was the responsible decision to make.

7. NORTH WALES POPULATION NEEDS ASSESSMENT DRAFT REPORT 2022

The item was presented by Cllr Dafydd Meurig

RESOLVED

To recommend to the Full Council that it approves the North Wales Population Needs Assessment 2022.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted noting that it provided an overview of the assessment for this year. It was explained that the report had been discussed at the Scrutiny Committee and it was added that it would be submitted to the Full Council in March. It was noted that the report had been created in response to the requirements of the Social Services Act (Wales 2014). It was explained that, as it was a statutory requirement, the timeframe was extremely tight and staff were thanked for their work to ensure that it was completed. It was explained that the assessment was created regionally with the six Local Authorities and the Health Board involved in the process.

It was noted that the structure of the report was a general one as it was a regional report. Nevertheless, it was stated that some specific elements were key to Gwynedd. It was noted that much work would stem from the report and that work would be done at a local level in order to create a specific assessment for Gwynedd which would be submitted in December 2022, hopefully.

The Project Team Manager added that the report was general and that the team would undertake more detailed work on the needs of Gwynedd in order to have a real understanding of people's needs in their communities. It was noted that further work of looking at the market would stem from this work in order to see whether the market had the capacity to meet the needs seen in the report.

The Assistant Head - Adults Department noted that this piece of work would be continuous and the information would need to be kept current in order to have an understanding of where the gaps were. It was noted that the timetable had been extremely challenging during the pandemic.

Observations arising from the discussion

- The member was thanked for the report and attention was drawn to the fact that the report acknowledged the high number of children with long-term illness, stressing the obesity was a major problem.

- With the Gwynedd Mental Well-being being the highest across north Wales, it was asked whether this was a good or a bad thing. It was noted that it was positive news but this highlighted the need for it to be worded more clearly.
- The staff were thanked for undertaking the work in such a challenging time, including regional staff who had brought all the information together. It was explained that the report would be used to work in fields where it was not possible to resolve matters locally.

8. LEASE OF CANOLFAN CEFNFAES TO PARTNERIAETH OGWEN

The report was submitted by Cllr Craig ab Iago

RESOLVED

To use powers under General Disposal Consent (Wales) 2003 to lease the Canolfan Cefnfaes site directly to Partneriaeth Ogwen for less than market rent, to ensure the provision of social, economic and environmental benefits.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted noting that it asked the Cabinet to lease Canolfan Cefnfaes to Partneriaeth Ogwen. It was noted that the Partnership was undertaking innovative work and had definite plans for the use of the building. It was explained that the Partnership had received a grant to renovate the building and needed support for the first ten years.

Observations arising from the discussion

- Support was expressed for the scheme, noting the importance of supporting it. It was explained that a grant of £200,000 for the centre had been received and it was noted that they looked forward to seeing the development and to see the building rejuvenated.

9. PRIMARY, SPECIAL AND ALL-THROUGH SCHOOLS MEAL PRICE SEPTEMBER 2022

The report was submitted by Cllr Cemlyn Williams

DECISION

To agree not to raise primary, special and all-through school meal price in September 2022.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted and it was noted that the item was a straightforward one. It was explained that the Council was required to consider raising school

meal prices annually in line with inflation. It was noted that Welsh Government had confirmed that there would free meals for every pupil in the Foundation Phase as part of the plans to provide free meals for all pupils and that this needed to be considered when reaching a decision. The desire not to increase the price of school meals was noted, emphasising that this would be for Key Stage 2 only.

It was explained that there was a need to look at school meals in general and the department's desire to look specifically at quality within secondary schools. The need to create a working group including Governors, parents and pupils to look specifically at this matter, was noted.

Observations arising from the discussion

- The decision not to increase the price of school meals was welcomed, noting that many families were under pressure and that the Council had a key role in supporting families.
- It was stated that, for some pupils, the school meal was the only hot meal they would have on some days and, therefore, this step was the responsible one for the Council to take.
- The department was thanked for its work and the desire to develop a working group. The need to ensure that families who were eligible for free meals received them without shame, specifically in secondary schools. It was noted that a Free School Meals Promotion Officer would be appointed which would make it easier for families to apply.

10. THE COUNCIL'S VISION FOR WORKING IN THE FUTURE

The report was submitted by Cllr Nia Jeffreys

DECISION

To adopt the vision for Working in the Future, and not return to the pre-pandemic way of working.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted and it was noted that considerable attention was placed on the future of the world of work nationally. It was noted that Welsh Government had expressed an aim of 30% of the Welsh workforce working from home. It was explained that the Council had been planning for future working arrangements with an Offices Group meeting to discuss the matter. It was explained that the vision was part of the outcome of this group's work and was based on discussions with groups of staff and representatives of local Unions.

The vision of a workforce that can work flexibly and give their best to deliver and provide services of quality for the people of Gwynedd, was noted. Also, that the Council was a good place to work, which promoted a work-life balance for the well-being of staff and in order to retain and attract quality staff. It was explained that it would build on the experience of providing services during the pandemic. It was noted that Welsh Government statements highlighted the likelihood of further

relaxation of the rules and the time would come to implement the vision. It was added that the Chief Executive had shared an outline of the action plan with the staff and that a discussion had been held with the Governance and Audit Committee the previous week.

The Head of Corporate Support Department added that working from home would be voluntary for staff in the future and that it would not be enforced. He explained that not all jobs could be fulfilled from home and that a workforce assessment would have to be undertaken on individuals' home locations before making long-term arrangements. Attention was drawn to an incorrect figure in the report and that the staff travel cost savings was £997,499 for 2021/22.

Observations arising from the discussion

- Attention was drawn to the figure of 25% wanting to work from home in the long-term, and it was noted that this was because individuals felt more comfortable being at home.
- It was noted that working from home removed the opportunity for staff to network and meant that they lost the element of learning from each other. It was stated that it should be noted that 59% had noted a desire the work in a hybrid way, with 15% wanting to be in the office full-time. It was stressed that this period was a trial period and that staff could change their minds before making any long-term decision.
- It was stressed that there was a need to think about how Councillors would be welcomed and have fair opportunities following the election in May. It was explained that the report did not discuss Councillors but that work was being done behind the scenes to make arrangements for Councillors.
- It was explained that the conversation with staff in terms of work locations was a continuous one and that it would be possible to change as staff gained confidence, but the need to strike a good balance and to continue to prioritise the mental well-being of staff was stressed.

11. GWYNEDD COUNCIL PLAN 2018-2023 - 2022/23 REVIEW

The report was submitted by Cllr Dyfrig Siencyn

DECISION

To approve the Gwynedd Council Plan 2018-23 - 2022/23 Review for submission to the Council on 3 March 2022.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted noting that this was the final review of the 2018-23 Council Plan. It was noted that a new Plan would be developed by the new Council. It was noted that there were no major changes to the Plan this year, but that it provided a clear picture of the Council's responsibilities, together with the responsibility of Gwynedd Councillors in supporting the lives of the county's residents.

The Council's Business Support Service Manager added that the review stated

what the council's priorities would be for the coming year. It was noted that there was a need to add the Leader's foreword before it would be submitted to the Full Council in March.

12. PERFORMANCE REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CORPORATE SUPPORT AND THE LEGAL SERVICE

The report was submitted by Cllr Nia Jeffreys

DECISION

To accept and note the information in the report.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted and it was noted that the Legal Service has experienced a challenging time with a number of vacancies but that the service had continued. It was explained that the department had been looking at ways of appointing staff and that the recruitment process was now underway.

The Corporate Support Department was leading on nine of the priority projects, which appeared in the Council Plan. It was noted, in relation to the Keeping the Benefit Local Project, that the service was nearing the end of the pilot scheme and that the Third Sector Group had given its support to the work. It was explained that the Place Names scheme had been underway for six months and that much research had been undertaken. It was noted that a further report would be presented shortly. It was explained that the ten fields performed consistently well and that there was a continued desire to improve the provision.

The Health, Safety and Well-being Team was thanked for the support they had provided to support front-line services over the past two years. It was noted that the Customer Care and Registration Service had been under pressure due to vacancies as well as absences but that action had been taken to sustain the service. It was explained that there was a need to continue to monitor the average time taken to answer telephone calls and this was highlighted as a problem across the Council.

Attention was drawn to the Research and Information Service which had been key in collecting and analysing information during the pandemic and had given a firm basis for the Council's decisions. It was noted that, following the Cabinet's decision to appoint a Principal Language Officer, the service hoped to appoint at the beginning of March in order to start the work of establishing Hunaniaith as an independent entity.

Observations arising from the discussion

- It was stressed that working for the Council was a good and honourable job with many opportunities to develop further.
- Appreciation of the department was expressed as it was central to the work of other departments.
- Attention was drawn to the scheme to register 16+ young people to vote, enquiring whether it was possible to move this work forward. It was explained that an individual had been appointed to the post and that the original plans had been affected by the pandemic but that the plan was moving forward.

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

The report was submitted by Cllr Gareth Thomas

DECISION

To accept and note the information in the report.

DISCUSSION

The report was presented, and it was noted that the department's schemes that featured in the Gwynedd Council Plan would be outlined. In relation to the North Wales Growth Vision Plan, that significant progress had been made with the Rural Economy Centre in Glynllifon project and the Digital Signal Processing Centre project in Bangor University. In relation to the High Value Jobs project, it was noted that supported for the STEM project had been extended to mid-2023 and that work had been commissioned in order to create research jointly with the Education Department to assist schools to understand the skills needs of local businesses. It was also noted that officers had been recruited to the Egin company that had been established to facilitate the attraction of further investment to the Trawsfynydd Power Station site.

Disappointment was expressed regarding the decision by Welsh Government to suspend the development of the new access road to Llanbedr airfield. It was noted that the decision had already led to losing £7.5m of European funding together with significant private investment. Pride was expressed in relation to the Arloesi Gwynedd Wledig Programme and the fact that the Government had allocated £4m for ARFOR in the draft budget following the success of the scheme.

It was noted that the department's performance was generally good and it was good to note that the Neuadd Dwyfor Library had now re-opened. It was noted that further work needed to be done on the theatre.

Observations arising from the discussion

- The department was thanked for its work in leading on innovative schemes that made a difference to the residents of Gwynedd. Also, staff were thanked for their work supporting Gwynedd businesses, specifically during the pandemic.

The meeting commenced at 1pm and concluded at 3pm

CHAIRMAN