

THE CABINET, TUESDAY, 24 JANUARY 2023

Present -

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

Also present -

Dafydd Gibbard (Chief Executive), Geraint Owen (Corporate Director), Huw Dylan Owen (Corporate Director), Iwan Evans (Head of Legal Services), Dewi Morgan (Head of Finance Department) and Sioned Mai Jones (Democracy Team Leader).

Item 6: Sioned E. Williams (Head of Economy and Community Department) and Dylan Griffiths (Economy Development Programmes Manager).

Item 7-9: Ffion Madog Evans (Assistant Head - Finance Department)

Item 10: Steffan Jones (Head of Highways and Municipal) and Kevin Sheret (Fleet Manager).

Item 11: Garem Jackson (Head of Education Department) and Gwern ap Rhisiart (Dwyfor/Meirionnydd Area Education Officer).

Item 13: Garem Jackson (Head of Education Department) and Debbie Jones (Education Corporate Services Manager).

1. APOLOGIES

No apologies were received.

Cabinet Members and Officers were welcomed to the meeting.

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

The minutes of the meetings held on 22 November and 13 December 2022 were accepted as a true record.

6. UK SHARED PROSPERITY FUND - GOVERNANCE AND DELIVERY ARRANGEMENT

The report was presented by the Head of Economy and Community Department.

DECISION

1. It was agreed to allow Cyngor Gwynedd to undertake the 'lead authority' role for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund in North Wales on behalf of the six North Wales counties.
2. The regional governance structures for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund in North Wales as outlined in the report were agreed.
3. The Head of Economy and Community Department was authorised - in consultation with the Head of Finance Department and the Head of Legal Services and the Chief Executive – to establish an inter-authority legal agreement and funding conditions with the other North Wales authorities to protect Cyngor Gwynedd's interests.
4. To agree to the local governance structures for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund in Gwynedd as outlined in the report.
5. To authorise the establishment of a Shared Prosperity Fund: Gwynedd Panel to include the Council Leader and Deputy Leader, Finance Cabinet Member, Chief Executive, Head of Economy and Community, Head of Finance and Head of Legal Services, with the right to appoint a deputy on the Panel, to confirm which projects will be selected to receive monies on the basis of the criteria noted in sections 3.30 and 3.31 of the report.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted and it was noted that the North Wales Regional Investment Plan had been confirmed and validated by the Welsh Government in December 2022. It was explained that the allocation would be received as a lump sum to the region and not to individual Local Authorities. Consequently a lead authority would be needed to lead on the plan in the region.

It was noted that a Memorandum of Understanding letter had already been received and offered funding up to March 2025. It was explained that a great deal of work was required to put arrangements in place. Details were given on Cyngor Gwynedd's roles regarding the management of the fund and it was noted that Cyngor Gwynedd will have three functions as noted in the report. The difference in the County and Regional role was outlined and it was noted that the county work included assessing and supporting applications and the regional work involved cross-county projects and to facilitate these together with other responsibilities.

The anticipated arrangements for the region were outlined and the intention to establish a team of five officers to undertake the work and costs such as legal and communication costs were mentioned. A system in terms of a governance structure on the regional side was suggested. In addition a resource was suggested to deliver the work in the County and the intention to establish a Shared Prosperity Fund Advisory Group as well as a Panel that will consider the Advisory Group's recommendations.

A run-through of the steps in terms of applying was given and it was hoped that the fund could be opened and to start receiving applications by the end of January. It was

highlighted that the time-table was very tight to deliver the work on behalf of the region and there were several process running in parallel.

Observations arising from the discussion

- An addition was made to point 5 of the recommendation. It was agreed to add "with the right to appoint a deputy on the Panel" as part of the decision in case this was required in the future.
- An observation was made that the system of finance deriving from Westminster was defective especially when Local Authorities were expected to create plans and spend the money in a short period.
- Frustration was expressed that the Department had to establish all the networks in such a short period. It was highlighted that the process was frustrating and it was stated that it would be good to be able to use the money to address the County's priorities rather than having to follow the Westminster lead.
- It was added that the money was open for the Authorities to prioritise but due to the time limit there was no time to organise or prioritise.
- It was stated that it was pleasing to see Gwynedd taking a lead role and the Department was thanked for its willingness to undertake this additional responsibility.
- It was explained that an application or project could be submitted across a number of Local Authorities and there would be close cooperation with the North Wales Economic Ambition Board.
- It was noted that the financial sums allocated between the Local Authorities varied and therefore it might be possible to have circumstances where perhaps 4 out of the 6 Counties of North Wales had an interest rather than the whole region. It was explained that the formula to allocate the funding involved the demography and condition of the County's economy as well as interpretations of the County's needs.

7. REVENUE BUDGET 2022/23 - END OF NOVEMBER 2022 REVIEW

The report was submitted by Cllr Ioan Thomas

DECISION

- To accept the report on the end of November 2022 review of the Revenue Budget, and consider the latest financial position regarding the budgets of each department / service.
- To approve the transfer of £3.188 million of underspend on Corporate budgets to the Council's Financial Strategy Reserve.
- To recommend that the procedure in terms of using funds to finance the financial deficit at the time will be:
 - firstly, use School Balances to fund the additional costs of inflation on the salaries of teachers, assistants, administrative staff and electricity which is above the budget level in the schools.
 - secondly, use the Council Tax Premium Fund to fund the additional pressure in the Homelessness field.
 - finally, use the post-Covid recovery arrangements fund established to fund the associated financial challenges that face the Council.

DISCUSSION

The report was presented detailing the latest review of the Council's revenue budget for 2022/23, and the projections for the end of the financial year. It was explained that current projections suggested that the Departments of Adults, Health and Well-being, Children and Families, Education, Economy and Community, Highways and Municipal and Housing and Property would overspend by the end of the year. It was added that there was significant overspend by five of the six Departments, while the other Council Departments were operating within their budget.

Although the impact was not as substantial in 2022/23 compared to the previous two years, additional costs, income losses and a slippage in the savings programme as a result of Covid continued in some fields. It was also added that there was also a delay to achieve savings that had contributed to some of the Departments overspending. Attention was drawn to the main fields where there were substantial differences.

An overspend of over £2.2 million was anticipated this year in the Adults, Health and Well-being Department, this being a combination of factors, including a failure to realise savings to the value of £930,000. This year it was highlighted that there were pressures on supported accommodation and direct payment packages in Older People's Services while staffing above the budget level and an income shortfall were issues in Community Care.

Details were given of the overspend of £1.6m anticipated in the Education Department as a result of the additional cost of inflation on the salaries of teachers, assistants, administrative staff which was £1,031,000 above the budget this year. It was also anticipated that the impact of higher electricity costs on the schools for the first six months from October 2022 onwards would be £614,000. It was expressed that it was appropriate to use school balances to fund the additional pressures this year considering that the schools had already benefited from almost a million in energy savings which had derived from Covid and the associated lockdowns.

Attention was drawn to the ongoing overspend problems in the field of Waste and Recycling and the difficulties the Highways and Municipal Department were having to realise savings worth £608,000. It was also noted that the Byw'n Iach Company was overspending due to higher electricity prices and as the impact of Covid was continuing in 2022/23 and was disrupting the Company's ability to generate income. Reference was made to the pressure in the Homelessness field due to the implications of new legislation relating to Homelessness; a net overspend of £2.7 million was anticipated this year within the Housing and Property Department.

Corporately, it was noted that there were prudent projections when setting the 2022/23 budget and a change to taxation legislation were factors that contribute to the additional tax outputs. It was anticipated at the end of the year that use must be made of Schools and Council reserves to fund the financial gap of £7.4 million projected for 2022/23.

Observations arising from the discussion

- Members thanked the department for the report and it was expressed that the Council was in safe hands and they had complete trust in the Finance team's work.

8. SAVINGS OVERVIEW - PROGRESS REPORT ON REALISING SAVINGS SCHEMES

The report was submitted by Cllr Ioan Thomas

DECISION

To accept the information in the report and to note the progress towards realising the savings schemes for 2022/23 and previous years.

DISCUSSION

The report which summarised the situation with the Council's savings was submitted. It was explained that since 2015/16 £35.4m in savings had been approved to be realised for the period 2015/16 - 2022/23. It was noted that a total of £33.5 million of savings had been realised since 2015/16, which was 95% of the required amount over the period.

The current financial year had been looked at and it was stated that 22% of 2022/23 savings had already been achieved and a further 2% were on track to be delivered on time. Reference was made to the Departments with the highest value of schemes that were yet to be achieved namely the Highways and Municipal Department and the Adults, Health and Well-being Department.

To conclude, the value of the savings that had already been approved for 2023/24 onwards were mentioned and it was noted that additional savings schemes and cuts for 2023/24 were already under consideration by the Council.

Observations arising from the discussion

- It was stated that it had to be borne in mind that realising the savings would entail a direct impact on the County's residents as a result of the reduction in the standard of some services. It was explained that it was important to deliver the savings, however, they derived from the Government's austerity policies and not from Cyngor Gwynedd.
- Reference was also made to the impact of all the savings over the years on Council staff.
- It was deemed that a certain amount of savings had to be made annually to be efficient and this was part of the Ffordd Gwynedd principles, however, having to realise so many savings over the years had been difficult.

9. CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2022/23 - END OF NOVEMBER 2022 REVIEW

The report was submitted by Cllr Ioan Thomas

DECISION

- To accept the report on the end of November review (30 November 2022 position) of the capital programme.
- To approve the revised financing as shown in part 4 of the report, namely:
 - an increase of £30,000 in the use of borrowing
 - an increase of £2,947,000 in the use of grants and contributions
 - an increase of £101,000 in the use of capital receipts
 - an increase of £20,000 in the use of revenue contributions
 - an increase of £1,167,000 in the use of renewal and other reserves

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted, noting that its main purpose was to present the amended capital programme and to approve the relevant funding sources. It was expressed that the report noted an analysis per department of the capital programme of £140.6 million for a three-year period from 2022/23 - 2024/25.

Reference was made to the sources to fund the net increase, which was approximately £4.3 million since the last review. It was expressed that the Council had definitive plans in place to invest around £53 million this year, with £20 million funded through specific grants.

It was explained that the recent financial impact would continue on the capital programme with 40% of the budget having been spent by the end of November this year, compared to 37% for the same period last year; 31% two years ago and 51% in 2019/20 prior to Covid. It was noted that £28.7m of proposed expenditure had been re-profiled from 2022/23 to 2023/24 and 2024/25 with the main schemes including, £11.4 million for Housing Strategy Schemes, £5.5 million on Schools Schemes and £4.1 million Vehicle Renewals.

Attention was drawn to the additional grants the Council had managed to attract since the previous review which included a £2 million Sustainable Learning Communities Grant, £0.9 million Additional Learning Needs Capital Grant and £0.4 million Welsh Government Grant towards Rural Planning (Improving Access).

Observations arising from the discussion

- It was noted that the field was complex, however, the news appeared to be positive.

10. GREEN FLEET PLAN 2023-29

The report was submitted by Cllr Berwyn Parry Jones

DECISION

The Green Fleet Plan 2023-28 (seen in Appendix 1) was adopted and it was agreed:

- that the Council's Departments are not to buy, renew, or dispose of any vehicle before first discussing its needs with the Fleet Manager, and obtaining his consent;

- that it is necessary to create a corporate pool system instead of Departmental ones;
- that the Fleet Manager is to lead the work of weeding out the existing stock of Council vehicles and creating a vehicle structure for each Department.

DISCUSSION

The report was presented with reference to the Council's Climate Change Emergency announcement in March 2019 that led to the publication of the Climate and Nature Emergency Plan by the Cabinet in March 2022 which set a target that the Council would be net-zero carbon by 2023. It was noted that the Green Fleet Plan included several projects to assist to realise this objective by reducing carbon emissions deriving from using the Council's Fleet. It was noted that there was an associated cost but a much higher cost would derive from doing nothing.

This Plan regarding the vision of the Fleet Service was submitted to the Climate Change and Nature Board in November 2022, and it was agreed that the Plan would be submitted to the Cabinet for approval. It was reported that a considerable amount of work needed to be achieved and any delay may affect the work programme to achieve the aim.

Some of the aspects of the plan were highlighted by the Head of Highways and Municipal. Reference was made to the targets set by the Welsh Government and the requirement to change the system in terms of how the Council purchases vehicles. By 2030 there was an expectation that any small vehicles the Council buys have low emissions.

There was mention of the size of the Council's Fleet which comprises around 550 vehicles across the County that include a wide range of different vehicles. Reference was made to the steps that will be followed by the Service including weeding out work in terms of reviewing vehicles and challenging if there was an actual need for the vehicle in the first place. Innovative work would then follow by revisiting the technology available and then renovation work that will include setting out the direction the Council wishes to follow with the Fleet Plan.

It was noted that the Service work programme was included in the report. Reference was made to other developments being undertaken such as trialling and joint developments such as the Hydrogen Use Plan led by Flintshire County Council for heavy vehicles.

Observations arising from the discussion

- There were no observations apart from wishing the Department and Fleet Service all the best and it was stated that it was important work in terms of the Council's efforts to reduce emissions.

11. YSGOL CHWILOG STATUTORY CONSULTATION REPORT AND AN UPDATE FROM THE WELSH-MEDIUM EDUCATION CAPITAL GRANT

The report was submitted by Cllr Beca Brown

DECISION

The Cabinet considered the observations received during the statutory consultation conducted on increasing the capacity of Ysgol Chwilog and the response to those observations, and it was resolved:

- To approve the publication of a statutory notice and conduct an objection period, in accordance with the requirements of Section 48 of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013, on the proposal to increase the capacity of Ysgol Chwilog to 95 from 1 September 2023, namely an increase of over 25% to the existing capacity.

DISCUSSION

This positive report was submitted that considered the responses received to the statutory consultation to increase the capacity of Ysgol Chwilog to 95, an increase of over 25%. It was noted that this was finance from the Welsh language capital grant and was an attempt to try and address some of the requirements of those communities with over 70% of the population who can speak Welsh.

It was stated that there was clear support to be seen when considering the response to the consultation and the children of the area also believed that it will be a positive step for Ysgol Chwilog. The report indicated the Education Department's desire to support the Welsh language for all the County's children and specifically to strengthen the language in the Chwilog area.

Apart from the support shown it was noted that a few comments had been received regarding the School hall and the staff room that indicates that some had used the consultation as an opportunity to convey other messages.

There were no further observations only support from the Cabinet.

12. PERFORMANCE REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE

The report was submitted by Cllr Ioan Thomas

DECISION

To accept and note the information in the report.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted to update members on what had been achieved in the Finance field over the last few months. It was noted that there was good performance in the Department and satisfactory progress with the relevant priority project within the Council Plan.

Reference was made to several services such as the Internal Audit Service and the Benefits Service. It was noted that the Benefits Service continued to perform against its core delivery measures, however, the average time taken to process a new benefit application had increased from 20.7 days in November 2021 to 24.1 days in November 2022. It was explained that this was a combination of job vacancies and sickness as well as an increase in the work as a result of winter fuel payments. It was reported that there was enthusiasm within the Service and they were participating in two corporate schemes, namely the Workforce Development Scheme and the Talent Nurturing Scheme.

It was noted that the same staffing problems existed within other Services such as the Taxation Service where staff recruitment and retention was an increasing problem. The frustration within the Finance and Accounting Services was highlighted regarding receiving invoices in a timely manner from the rest of the Council's Departments for processing. It was believed that there was a responsibility on all Cabinet members to try and ensure that the Departments sent out invoices without delay.

It was noted that the IT Service had managed in their latest efforts to fill vacant posts following a period of being unable to appoint. A wish was expressed for more feedback to be given to the IT Support Service from across all Council Departments. It was mentioned that the feedback received was on the whole very positive, however this feedback was scarce. To conclude, reference was made to the IT Digital Learning Service that was a new service and a considerable amount of work had been achieved thus far.

Observations arising from the discussion

- A recent letter received from Minister Julie James was mentioned regarding the Welsh Government's winter fuel payments scheme. The letter noted that on average 72% of the payments had been paid across Wales, however Gwynedd had paid 95% and was continuing to look for the other 5%. This was high praise for the Department's work. The Head of Finance was requested to convey this praise to the Service.
- It was reported that the Department had been looking for different ways of undertaking this work by using the Post Office and this had been very successful.

13. PERFORMANCE REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR EDUCATION

The report was submitted by Cllr Beca Brown

DECISION

To accept and note the information in the report.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted and pride was expressed in the Department's performance and the good work that was happening within Gwynedd Schools. Reference was made to the new school to be built in Cricieth to improve the learning environment and

ensure the best resources in order for learners and the pride that existed as a result of the development. It was explained that there had been a delay over the last year to present the new vision for post-16 education, however the Department was now in a position to be able to proceed with this project. Mention was made of the Condition and Suitability project that had experienced challenges at times. Nevertheless, it was reported that the investment in the condition and suitability of Ysgol Bethel, Ysgol Glan-y-môr and Ysgol Cymerau had been completed during the year with work continuing on the sites of other Schools across the County.

It was reported that the Covid period had highlighted the vulnerability of children in the age groups 0-5 and 16-24 and the well-being and attainment gap by now was one of the main priorities of the Education Department. It was reported that there was inconsistency across the County in terms of the range and availability of services in the early years sector; the project groups will agree on specific work streams and had prioritised undertaking an assessment.

Pride was expressed in the new curriculum for Wales and reference was made to the public attention given to certain aspects of the curriculum such as Relationships and Sexuality Education. The opportunity was taken to express an appreciation of the professionalism, support and commitment of the Schools and every trust was expressed in the Headteachers and teachers to be able to interpret and convey this code in an age-appropriate and developmental appropriate way to each child.

Reference was made to the Education Immersion System that was a new vision and it was noted that the immersion support system was available to every School in the County. The exciting and innovative work that had happened in Gwynedd was mentioned such as the new immersion scheme written and developed in Gwynedd that will be shared nationally. The school categorisation system that came into force in September 2022 was reported on and the Education Department will work with each School that falls into category 3 in the County to ensure appropriate progress.

To close, gratitude was expressed to the Education Department and particularly to the teachers and all school staff in Gwynedd for their tireless work in a challenging time to ensure the best education for the County's children by caring for their health, safety and welfare and to deliver a huge range of work.

Observations arising from the discussion

- There was a wish to congratulate the Department for their work maximising the welfare of children and young people across the County.
- An enquiry was made about the GwE Service and if the Cabinet was likely to receive feedback from the performance of GwE. It was stated that there was a reference to GwE in the report, however, GwE was part of the annual Education Department item in the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee and there would be a report on their performance at that Committee.
- It was added that it was proposed over the next 12 months to review how GwE had operated up to now and to forward plan the future direction. This would be submitted to the Cabinet next year and there would be an opportunity to offer guidance and observations.
- Reference was made to the finance received from the Government towards the cost of providing free school meals and it was asked if this

finance was sufficient to compensate the Council. It was also asked whether there had been an increase in the numbers who receive free school meals.

- In response it was noted that the picture had been mixed across the County and the demand had not been as high as envisaged. It was noted that there was a need to review why the picture was so varied especially from area to area. It was noted that the capital funding received had addressed Gwynedd's needs regarding the costs thus far.

- It was added that there were two elements to the funding, the capital element and the cost element of providing a dinner based on a specific rate from the Welsh Government. It was reported that it was not possible to provide a dinner for this cost and would lead to a financial deficit. This would be considered in a revenue bid of a quarter million that would be submitted to the Cabinet in the near future.

- Following a question regarding the immersion system it was noted that two phases of capital funding had been received of 1.1 million each. There was an investment in 3 sites with the first phase of the funding and 2 out of these 3 centres in the new locations had by now opened. It was reported that there had been difficulties with the third site in Tywyn and therefore the language centre would be located temporarily at the Ysgol Bro Idris site in order to have an additional presence in Meirionnydd. It was hoped to be able to open the site in Tywyn by September. In terms of the second phase of funding it was proposed to submit a business case to the Welsh Government by March to release this money.

14. THE CABINET'S FORWARD PROGRAMME

Submitted for information the Cabinet's Forward Programme.

DECISION

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

The meeting commenced at 1.00pm and concluded at 2.20pm.

CHAIR