

THE CABINET, TUESDAY, 7 NOVEMBER 2023

Present-

Councillors: Dyfrig Siencyn, Nia Jeffreys, Beca Brown, Berwyn Parry Jones, Craig ab Iago, 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: Huw Rowlands (Local Member) and Gwern ap Rhisiart (Assistant Head of Education: Primary)
- Item 7: Dewi Wyn Jones (The Council's Business Support Service Manager)
- Item 8: Huw Ynyr (Assistant Head of Finance and Information Technology)
- Item 9: Ian Jones (Head of Corporate Support Department) and Arwel Evans (Procurement Manager).
- Items 10-12: Ffion Madog Evans (Assistant Head of Finance Department: Accountancy and Pensions)
- Item 13: Sioned Williams (Head of Economy and Community Department)
- Item 14: Ian Jones (Head of Corporate Support Department)
- Item 15: Carys Fôn Williams (Head of Housing and Property Department)

1. APOLOGIES

No apologies were received.

Sadness and sympathy were expressed for the victims of the horrific conflict in Israel and Gaza. The Cabinet's support was noted for the proposal of the Plaid Cymru group in the Senedd to condemn this violence as it led to innocent deaths, as well as the United Nations' call for a ceasefire in order to provide humanitarian aid to the people of Israel and Palestine. It was hoped for a long-term solution to the conflict.

The Cabinet Members and Officers were welcomed to the meeting.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

A declaration of personal interest was received from Councillor Menna Trenholme on Item 6, as she was a governor at Ysgol Bontnewydd. She was not of the

opinion that it was a prejudicial interest, and did not leave the meeting during the discussion on the item.

A declaration of personal interest was received from Councillor Huw Rowlands on Item 6, as he was a governor at Ysgol Felinwnda. 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 10 October were accepted as a true record.

6. YSGOL FELINWENDA

The report was submitted by Cllr Beca Brown

DECISION

- a. To approve finally the proposal under Section 43 of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013, given through a statutory notice, to close Ysgol Felinwnda on 31 December 2023, and to transfer the current pupils to an alternative school nearby, namely Ysgol Bontnewydd or Ysgol Llandwrog, according to parents' choice, from 1 January 2024.
- b. To approve transport arrangements for the transition phase only, where free transport would be provided for those learners who are currently registered in Ysgol Felinwnda and living in the catchment area of Ysgol Felinwnda, to Ysgol Bontnewydd or Ysgol Llandwrog, for the remainder of the learner's time in either of those schools, in accordance with Cyngor Gwynedd's transport policy.
- c. To consult on the future of Ysgol Felinwnda's current catchment area to agree which school, or schools, will serve as a future catchment school for the children of Ysgol Felinwnda's current catchment area.

DISCUSSION

Members were reminded that Ysgol Felinwnda was the smallest school within the county following a PLASC (Pupil Level Annual School Census) in January 2023, with only 8 pupils attending the school. It was detailed that an item had been submitted to the Cabinet on 11 July 2023 to receive permission to issue a statutory notice of the proposal to undertake a consultation to close the school.

It was reported that an objection period had been undertaken between 5 September and 4 October and that four objections to closing the school had been received. The members were assured that these objections had been considered.

It was noted that consultations had been undertaken with pupils and staff of the school. It was summarised that some of their considerations included feeling saddened, scared to lose friends, worried about the future of the building and the support available for them in new schools. Despite this, it was also noted that they were proud of the experiences the school had provided to them and there was a sense of a close family within the school, and pupils were looking forward to making new friends.

Consideration was given to the community impact of closing the school. It was not considered that there would be a negative impact on the community should the school close as there was no community use of the building beyond educational use. It was explained that this was the situation because the community hall was located next door to the school and was used regularly. It was recognised that the local cylch meithrin used this community centre and there was a possibility that closing the school would affect the cylch. Despite this, it was reported that the figures of children attending the cylch were very healthy and this did not follow onto the school, therefore, it was considered that there would not be much impact on the cylch meithrin.

It was explained that specific consideration had been given to the community centre, ensuring that the Community Support Service would work with the centre in future, as well as the Council's Early Years Unit providing support to the cylch meithrin.

Reference was made to the possibility that pupil numbers in the school had decreased as a result of constructing the new bypass in the area recently. Despite this, it was reported that investigations to the possibility had been carried out and it appeared that the number of school pupils had begun to decrease before the bypass had come into existence.

It was recognised that it was unfavourable timing to announce that Ysgol Bontnewydd would get a new building. It was explained that this was beyond the Council's control as it had succeeded in a competition to fund a new school in this case, and the results had been shared by the organisers.

It was concluded that the most appropriate option, despite the four objections, would be to close Ysgol Felinwnda on 31 December 2023, with pupils moving to Ysgol Bontnewydd or Ysgol Llandwrog on 1 January 2024 onwards, according to parents' choice. The members were assured that reaching this conclusion had been a very sad and difficult decision. It was confirmed that the Council would provide transport to those relevant schools for the pupils. It was explained that this would cost approximately £7,600 - £22,800 for the Council, depending on the parents' choices.

It was explained that this decision would lead to staff redundancies. However, it was ensured that arrangements were being agreed with unions, and the department's officers were working closely with the Council's Human Resources department.

The Local Member added that closing the school would be a very sad occurrence as it had served the community for a century and a quarter. Despite this, he

accepted that this was the appropriate step to take because of the school numbers and forecasts. The Local Member detailed the following points:

- It was important that all perspectives raised within the consultation and objection periods were respected. Officers were thanked for their care in ensuring that this was the case.
- It was important to undertake a review of the future of the Felinwnda catchment area.
- It was important to ensure that focus was placed on small schools to protect rural and Welsh communities as the Council proceeded to consult on a new Education Strategy in future.
- It was important to ensure that strategic support was available for schools where pupil numbers were predicted to decrease in future so that schools could collaborate with the Council to increase numbers.

It was reported that several reasons had affected the decision to close the school and that the quality of the education was very important in this. It had been proven that receiving education in a larger school with more pupils of the same age and different ages supported pupils' educational experience. It was also recognised that it was a requirement to examine school numbers and cost per head when considering a school closure.

Gratitude was expressed to everyone who had contacted the officers during the statutory consultation period. The Local Member, staff and pupils were also thanked – they had worked closely with the Education department during the recent uncertain period and officers were thanked for their work.

7. LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND ELECTIONS (WALES) ACT 2021 – PANEL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

The report was submitted by Cllr Dyfrig Siencyn.

DECISION

It was agreed on the timetable for holding a Panel Performance Assessment during the autumn term of 2024, and to commission the Welsh Local Government Association to support the work.

DISCUSSION

It was noted that this item had previously been submitted to the Cabinet before being approved by the Full Council in September 2023.

It was reported that the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 placed a duty on Councils to conduct a Panel Performance Assessment once in every electoral cycle.

The Members were reminded that the Full Council had agreed to change the constitution in September 2023 to allow the Cabinet to determine who should undertake and coordinate the panel assessment, as well as the timing of the assessment. It was detailed that three statutory duties must be followed when carrying out a panel assessment, which included:

- Preparation (determine the scope, terms of reference and membership)

- Assessment (carry out the assessment and present findings)
- Follow-up (draw up the final report and the Council's response)

It was explained that the assessment would examine to what extent the Council discharged its functions effectively, used resources prudently and ensured that effective governance arrangements were in place.

It was recommended that this assessment should be undertaken in October 2024 as this would be halfway through the current electoral cycle. It was explained that it would be possible to commission the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) to support the Council by establishing a suitable panel and facilitating them throughout the process.

8. CYNGOR GWYNEDD DIGITAL PLAN 2023-28

The report was submitted by Cllr Ioan Thomas.

DECISION

To approve the proposed new Digital Plan for the period 2023-28.

DISCUSSION

It was explained that the period of the previous Digital Strategy had ended in 2018 and, therefore, the Council did not have a digital plan at present. Despite this, members were reminded that the Council had adopted the Gwynedd Schools Digital Strategy in recent years.

It was reported that a large number of projects had been included within the Digital Plan submitted to the Cabinet and that these were projects that took place on a cross-departmental level to ensure a standard resource for everyone.

It was explained that a Digital Transformation Board had been formed to keep an overview on the progress of the work programme. The Corporate Director was the Chair of the Board. It was elaborated that four sub-groups had been established with the guidance of different departments, which included:

- Resilience Sub-group – led by Gwyn Jones, Infrastructure Systems Manager
- Customer Contact Sub-group – led by Steffan Jones, Head of Highways, Engineering and YGC Department
- Information and Data Sub-group – led by Ian Jones, Head of Corporate Support Department
- Administration and Business Systems Sub-group – led by Huw Ynyr, Assistant Head of Finance and Information Technology

It was ensured that the priorities presented within the plan corresponded with what the Council Plan delivered. It was reported that considerations such as equality, the Welsh language and climate had been considered when drawing up the Plan.

Members were reminded that this item had been submitted before Members of the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee and their observations had been considered prior to submitting the Plan to the Cabinet.

It was confirmed that a total of 29 projects had been included within the plan and these fell into five priority areas as discussed below:

1. **Customer Contact** – it was planned to significantly develop communication methods by developing the website and phone systems as well as making use of apps such as WhatsApp and Messenger. The need to develop and promote ApGwynedd was noted along with the video kiosk in Siop Gwynedd in conjunction with ensuring consistency when paying for services via machines.
2. **Information and Data** – it was explained that several different departments and systems stored data. It was detailed that a number of these systems stored the same type of information. It was noted that this was an opportunity to ensure that data was accurate and that it was stored in one place, to ensure accuracy.
3. **Business Systems and Administration** – it was detailed that the aim of this priority area was to ensure that the Council's internal services operated efficiently, to improve digital inclusion (by reducing the use of paper) and to research how artificial intelligence could be introduced to the Council carefully and successfully.
4. **Workforce** – it was intended to introduce a digital account to every staff member. It was noted that this was necessary for staff to gain access to a number of things, which included training and pay slips. It was explained that about a third of the entire Council workforce had their own digital account at present.
5. **Resilience** – this field detailed schemes to upgrade analogue lines to digital, to ensure digital security and service continuity in every situation. It was also explained that there were plans to upgrade the broadcasting provision in the Council Chambers to continue to hold multi-location and bilingual meetings.

It was acknowledged that introducing a number of new digital schemes could cause concern to some people but it was assured that training and opportunities would be offered to everyone in order to understand any new system introduced.

It was noted that the Council and several other organisations were very reliant on the 'Microsoft' company to maintain services. It was explained that the Council used the company's systems such as 'Office' and 'Outlook' but it was also noted that other systems, such as WCCIS in the field of care, also relied on it, therefore, it would be costly to part ways with this American company.

It was accepted that artificial intelligence was an update that caused concern to some, but members were assured that the Council would make the best use of it, ensuring that it was used carefully. It was confirmed that an information booklet was being designed by the government to ensure that proper, appropriate and safe use was made of the technology.

9. SOCIAL VALUE PROCUREMENT

The report was submitted by Cllr Menna Trenholme.

DECISION

The Cabinet approved and supported the proposal to make an addition to our Sustainable Procurement Proposal and include the social value measures as part of our contract assessment arrangements.

DISCUSSION

It was explained that there was a need to revise the Council's Procurement Policy following an addition to the usual criteria that assessed contracts based on price and quality which ensured social value measures considerations.

It was reported that assessing social value measures had been trialled by undertaking pilot schemes across several fields within the Council. It was ensured that this had allowed a better understanding of the new system and it was assured that the proposed system supported the aim of buying locally by:

- Offering a transparent and quantitative way of assessing social value as a basis for awarding contracts.
- Selecting from a series of local social measures per contract.
- Reporting against the progress of realising social value proposals.

It was noted that the Welsh Government had not provided national guidance or a decision on the use of this methodology, which had been flagged as a risk within the report. It was detailed that the Future Generations Commissioner and the Government wished that Local Councils addressed the objectives of the Well-being of Future Generations Act through this methodology, but it was noted that no direction or suggested best practice had currently been demonstrated. Frustration was expressed about this barrier since lack of guidance led to inconsistency between Local Authorities. Despite this, it was considered that this lack of guidance was an opportunity for the Council to shape the controls in the best possible manner for Gwynedd.

It was confirmed that the next steps in the process would be to revise the Sustainable Procurement Policy and introduce a new Procurement Policy. It was recognised that it was possible that it would need to be amended when the implications of implementing the Social Partnership and Public Procurement Act (Wales) 2023 became clear.

It was explained that this change was an important and significant step to keep the benefit local and that adding social value considerations ensured the best decisions for Gwynedd communities via the procurement process.

10. SAVINGS OVERVIEW: PROGRESS REPORT ON REALISING SAVINGS SCHEMES

The report was submitted by Cllr Ioan Thomas.

DECISION

1. To accept the information in the report and note the progress towards realising the savings schemes for 2023/24 and previous years.
2. It was acknowledged that the situation had now changed so much that historical savings schemes totalling £2,056,430 could not be achieved, and they were removed from the budget.

3. To use the £1,956,430 savings provision to fund the removal of savings schemes, together with using a £100,000 Council Tax premium for the savings scheme relating to Homelessness.

DISCUSSION

Members were reminded that savings totalling £7.6 million needed to be achieved during 2023/24 to close the financial deficit this year. It was detailed that this was a combination of approximately one million that had previously been approved, savings of £1.1 million for schools, £3 million for Council departments and £2.4 million by reviewing the Council's capital debt repayment policy.

It was recognised that there were difficulties in realising savings in some fields. It was noted that this was most prominent within the Adults, Health and Well-being Department and in the field of Waste. It was reported that reviews of all historical schemes had been undertaken in July 2023, which formulated a programme to delete a total of £2 million worth of schemes where there were substantial risks that they would not be achieved as they were now unattainable. It was detailed that these included:

- £1.5 million in the Adults, Health and Well-being Department
- £335k in the Environment Department
- £133k in the Highways, Engineering and YGC Department
- £100k in the field of Housing.

It was reported that 98% of all historical savings schemes between the 2015/16 and 2023/24 financial years had been realised – this equated to £33.7 million.

Reference was made to the new savings schemes that had been planned for the current financial year. It was confirmed that 81% of those savings had already been realised and a further 6% were on track to be achieved on time. It was recognised that there had been a slight delay in realising a total of £700k of the savings schemes but no problem was anticipated to realise them. It was detailed that £539k of this figure included savings by schools and it was noted that this saving was slipping as schools worked within an academic year and, therefore, the savings would be realised in the next financial year.

The value of the savings schemes approved for 2024/25 was discussed. It was emphasised that further schemes for the 2024/25 financial year were under consideration by the Council and a report would be submitted soon.

It was reported that the report had been submitted to the Governance and Audit Committee on 12 October and a summary of the Committee's observations was provided, which included:

- Success in delivering 96% of the savings was noted. It was recognised that focus was placed on schemes that had not been realised.
- There was concern about a consistent historical pattern of overspending in the Adults, Health and Well-being Department. It was detailed that there had been failure to realise savings in 10 schemes within the Department and no reasons had been submitted to explain this overspend. A suggestion was made to appoint a Project Manager for some of the savings schemes and to ensure that arrangements were tightened in the future.

- A suggestion was made that external attention should be given to the savings schemes, identifying an expert to take a closer look at the Council's situation.
- It was felt that the Committee had not received sufficient information when the proposals had originally been submitted. It was noted that the Committee would benefit from additional information in light of the duty to challenge decisions thoroughly.
- The officers were congratulated for succeeding to realise 95.6% of savings.

The Governance and Audit Committee were thanked for their observations and attention was drawn to the right of any Councillor attending the Departments' performance challenge meetings, to challenge the department's financial position. It was noted that it was essential for Councillors to do this on a regular basis.

11. REVENUE BUDGET 2023/24 – END OF AUGUST REVIEW

The report was submitted by Cllr Ioan Thomas.

DECISION

1. The Cabinet accepted the report at the end of August 2023 review of the Revenue Budget, and considered the latest financial position regarding the budgets of each department / service.
2. It was noted that the Adults, Health and Well-being Department, the Education Department, Engineering and YGC and the Environment Department had significant overspend projections this year, and in light of the exceptional overspend projections by the Adults, Health and Well-being Department, the Cabinet supported the Chief Executive's decision who had already commissioned work to explain the complex details of the Adult care picture, in order to obtain a better understanding of the issues and a clear response programme. The work will be led by the Statutory Director of Social Services.
3. A transfer of £3,275k of underspend on corporate budgets to the Council's Financial Strategy Reserve was approved.

DISCUSSION

It was explained that the report detailed the latest review of the Council's revenue budget for 2023/24, and the outlook towards the end of the financial year.

It was reported that forecasts of the review suggested that nine out of the ten Departments would overspend by the end of the year, with significant overspending by the Adults, Health and Well-being Department, Education Department, Highways, Engineering and YGC and the Environment Department.

It was confirmed that the main matters and fields could be seen in Appendix 2, and that there were substantial differences. It was detailed that the main matters for 2023/24 included:

- **Adults, Health and Well-being Department** – It was noted that the latest forecasts suggested that there would be £6.6 million of overspend within the Department. It was detailed that this was a combination of several factors, which included pressures on learning disabilities' supported

accommodation. It was elaborated that there were higher staffing costs and rates of non-contact hours in the social care field, which had a negative impact on the recovered income. It was explained that higher fees by private providers, as well as a reduction in residents' contributions, was a factor in older people's services.

- **Education Department** – It was highlighted that increasing pressures on the school taxi and bus budget this year led to a predicted overspend of £1.5m. It was suggested that work was needed on the transport field to try to reduce this overspending and take advantage of efficiency opportunities.
- **Byw'n Iach** – It was confirmed that financial support for the Byw'n Iach Company had reduced to £375k this year. Compared with £550k provided to the company by the Council during the 2022/23 financial year, it was explained that this was because of a lack of income for the company during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- **Highways, Engineering and YGC Department** – It was reported that a reduction in work being commissioned by external agencies had led to an overspend of approximately £1m within the highway services. It was noted that a combination of challenges affected the municipal aspects of the department, which included additional pressures on the budgets of street cleaning and cleaning public toilets, as well as loss of income in the fields of ground maintenance and public toilets.
- **Environment Department** – It was noted that the annual trend of overspend in the waste collection and recycling field continued. It was explained that additional circuits had resulted in overspending on employment and fleet costs. It was elaborated that there were also additional costs when hiring vehicles. It was recognised that sickness levels and overtime hours were a problem within the service.
- **Housing and Property Department** – It was noted that there was a significant trend to place intense pressures on homelessness temporary accommodation services. It was reported that £3m of council tax premium, as well as £1.4m one-off corporate Covid provision, had been allocated to address the additional costs this year.
- **Corporate Budgets** – It was explained that the effect of the recent increase in interest rates had led to interest receipts worth an additional £1.8 million. It was noted that underspend on budgets assisted to alleviate the additional pressures anticipated in terms of the national increase to the salaries of Local Government employees, which would soon be confirmed.

It was confirmed that it was anticipated that use would need to be made of the Council's reserves to fund the £5.9m financial deficit anticipated for 2023/24.

It was noted that this report had been submitted to the Governance and Audit Committee and it was noted by Committee members that they were eager for the Cabinet to examine a specific action plan for the Education Department to deal with transport issues due to the historical nature of the overspend. It was elaborated that the Committee had proposed that consideration should be given to the risk in a reduction in pupil numbers in Gwynedd schools as it could lead to a reduction in future funding. The Committee's attention had also been drawn to the need to resolve problems in the waste collection and recycling services.

It was noted that inflation affected budgets, and this was not within the Council's control. The Chief Executive elaborated that additional demand for services and less funding to deliver was challenging and that difficult decisions were on the

horizon. It was confirmed that the Corporate Director was leading on transport matters of the Education Department and that the Social Services Statutory Director was leading on assisting the Adults, Health and Well-being Department to reduce its overspend. It was reported that the Council's permanent bid applications would soon be submitted to the Cabinet and that £9m worth of bids had been received thus far where only a £3m budget was available to fund them.

Assurance was given that officers were aware that the needs of Gwynedd residents were the focus of all services. Despite this, it was recognised that financial matters needed to be examined robustly to be able to resolve overspending issues openly when managing to offer services of the highest standard.

12. CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2023/24 – END OF AUGUST REVIEW (31 AUGUST 2023 POSITION)

The report was submitted by Cllr Ioan Thomas.

DECISION

1. To accept the report on the end of August review (31 August 2023 position) of the capital programme.
2. To approve the revised financing as shown in part 3.2.3 of the report, namely:
 - Use of various sources, worth a total of £17,421,000, to fund actual slippages from 2022/23
 - A decrease of £1,836,000 in the use of borrowing
 - An increase of £61,991,000 in the use of grants and contributions
 - A decrease of £9,000 in the use of capital receipts
 - An increase of £991,000 in the use of revenue contributions
 - An increase of £194,000 in the use of renewal and other reserves

DISCUSSION

It was explained that the main aim of the report was to submit the revised capital programme (31 August 2023 position) and it was noted that the report included an analysis per Department of the capital programme, which was £178.6 million for the 3 financial years between 2023/24 and 2025/26.

It was concluded that the Council had firm plans in place to invest approximately £107.3 million in 2023/24 on capital schemes (with £42.8 million (40%) funded by specific grants).

It was reported that the impact of recent financial challenges continued on the capital programme, with £311.5m (11%) of the budget spent up to the end of August this year. This was compared to 11% of the budget spent within the same period last year and 16% two years ago.

It was confirmed that a further £312.5m of proposed expenditure had been re-profiled from 2023/24 to 2024/25 and 2025/26. It was detailed that the main schemes included:

- £5.7 million – Schools Schemes (Sustainable Learning Communities and Others)
- £2.8 million – Carbon Management and Solar Panels Schemes
- £1.5m – Penygroes Health and Care Hub
- £1.4m – Residential Organisations, day care and others in the Adults field
- £0.9m – Flood Prevention Schemes.

It was noted that the Council had managed to attract a number of grants since the original budget, which included:

- £36.9m – Shared Prosperity Fund Grant from the UK Government, to be distributed across the counties of North Wales.
- £16.7m – Levelling Up Fund Grant from the UK Government.
- £3.0m – Grants from the Local Transport Fund (LTF) and Active Travel Fund (ATF) from the Welsh Government.
- £1.3m – Sustainable Learning Communities Grant – Schools Community Use 2023-2025.

It was explained that this report had recently been submitted to the Governance and Audit Committee where members had noted that construction costs had recently increased significantly and, therefore, there was a possibility that those projects were now more costly. Officers had reported to the Committee that there had been an intentional delay to projects while prices and inflation were high and that this had been reflected in the slippages.

Pride was expressed in the Council's ability to attract grants to improve resources and services while investing for the future.

13. CHALLENGE PERFORMANCE REPORT - CABINET MEMBERS FOR ECONOMY AND COMMUNITY

The report was submitted by Cllr Dyfrig Siencyn and Cllr Nia Jeffreys.

DECISION

The information in the report was accepted and noted.

DISCUSSION

It was reported that the department had recently been allocated £4.8m from the SPF Shared Prosperity Fund. It was elaborated that the application process had opened and that several businesses and campaigns had benefited from the fund so far. It was added that it was hoped that more funding would be released to support more projects in the future. Officers from the department were thanked for their work with this fund, especially in light of the challenges and delays by the British Government.

It was noted that a Tourism Plan had been launched in September. It was explained that this had been the culmination of 6 years of work and the department was now focussing on an action plan.

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It was confirmed that the Cyngor Gwynedd stall at the National Eisteddfod in Boduan had been very successful and the Head of Department was thanked for her work in coordinating the week's events. It was considered that it was now possible to see the legacy of the Eisteddfod having an impact on the county's communities and an example of this was reported when considering the waiting list for Welsh language lessons in the Botwnnog area.

It was explained that engagement work with businesses in the county was still taking place, with recent visits to South Caernarfon Creameries, CK Tools, Penmaen Uchaf Hotel and the Oren food company.

It was explained that there had been an increase in the county's library users and that people were realising that a number of events were held there, and that it was a safe and warm place to visit if anyone had difficulties heating their homes.

It was noted that the Pwllheli harbour dock was currently full but owners had been in touch to confirm that they were cancelling their agreement for next year due to the cost-of-living crisis. Reference was also made to Neuadd Dwyfor in Pwllheli, which had recently reopened, noting that the satisfaction rate among visitors was between 78-88%.

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

The report was submitted by Cllr Menna Trenholme.

DECISION

The information in the report was accepted and noted.

DISCUSSION

Members were reminded that the report provided an overview of the Department's performance during the current financial year and placed a specific emphasis on the six Council Plan projects that were under the care of the department, which included:

- Keeping the Benefit Local
- Women in Leadership
- Ensuring Fairness for Everyone
- Workforce Planning
- Promoting the Use of the Welsh Language by Gwynedd Residents
- Strategic Review on Health and Safety Management

It was ensured that work was underway to identify gaps in the Workforce Planning field and it was noted that proactive action was a priority. It was detailed that a draft Workforce Plan had been prepared with the aim of setting a strategic direction for the project.

It was noted that the Council's new careers website had been launched at the beginning of August, and that 14 new apprentices had recently been appointed as well as six new trainees on Yfory Scheme.

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It was explained that specific projects would be undertaken to promote the use of the Welsh language and to increase the opportunities to use Welsh in the community. Members were reminded that a draft Language Strategy 2023-2028 had recently been submitted to the Cabinet and it was hoped that it would be approved by the Full Council in December.

It was reported that the Council's sickness rates were higher than desired and, therefore, work was being carried out to monitor the situation. It was elaborated that a Sickness Absences Group had also been established to focus on this challenge.

It was confirmed that the Customer Contact Service had coped especially well under difficult circumstances. It was detailed that the latest data suggested that more calls were being answered the first time that the customer contacted the Council.

It was explained that the Organisational Learning and Development service gathered feedback on a regular basis and the results of this work were consistently high.

15. PERFORMANCE REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING AND PROPERTY

The report was submitted by Cllr Craig ab Iago.

DECISION

The information in the report was accepted and noted.

DISCUSSION

It was reported that innovative pods for the homeless in Caernarfon (Caertref) had recently been completed and 4 individuals currently called them home. It was explained that this was part of the Housing Action Plan, which aimed to construct at least 38 supported accommodation units across the county. Pride was expressed in the fact that this development had recently been nominated for the 'Best Supported Housing Development - Rural / Suburban' award in the Inside Housing awards.

It was confirmed that there were 3843 opportunities for people to receive support to live in a house locally through a number of schemes such as the Buy to Let, Buying a Home, building Social Housing through Gwynedd's Social Housing Programme Development Plan, giving additional Council Tax exemption for individuals that own and renovate empty houses, interest-free loans to improve the condition of homes and grants to make houses suitable homes for individuals with disabilities.

It was elaborated that increasing the opportunities that local people have to live locally was one of the Department's priorities. It was explained that the department was collaborating with Housing Associations within the Social Housing Development Programme across the county in accordance with local needs. It was confirmed that 179 affordable houses had been built in Gwynedd, with another 150 in the pipeline.

It was explained that the department offered an energy voucher to help people in fuel poverty, and 2603 of these had been distributed in recent months. It was detailed that this was equivalent to £100,000. Sadness was expressed that the need for fuel vouchers existed in the county but it was a good example of how the Council worked at its best to try to solve national problems. It was confirmed that Gwynedd had provided more energy vouchers than any other county in Wales.

It was confirmed that the Department was aware of problems that individuals experienced when trying to find accommodation after leaving care. It was ensured that the Department was collaborating with associations such as GISDA and the Council's Children and Families Department to try to fill this gap. An invitation was shared to Members to visit 'Lle Da' in Caernarfon, namely a project where flats had been developed to deal with this problem.

It was acknowledged that the Department had experienced challenges with the buy to let project as there was a need to ensure value for money when buying the houses and to consider additional building standard requirements.

It was noted that the press had recently reported that there were more empty houses in Gwynedd than in any other county in Wales. It was assured that this was untrue and that the research was based on the rate of empty buildings and population numbers. It was considered that this was a misleading method of estimation.

The meeting commenced at 1.00pm and concluded at 3.20pm.

CHAIR