

THE CABINET TUESDAY, 17 SEPTEMBER 2024

Present-

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

Also present-

Dafydd Gibbard (Chief Executive), Huw Dylan Owen (Statutory Director of Social Services), Sion Huws (Propriety and Elections Manager), Dewi Aeron Morgan (Head of Finance Department) and Sioned Mai Jones (Democracy Team Leader).

Items 6 and 7: Dewi Wyn Jones (The Council's Business Support Service Manager)
Item 8: Gwern ap Rhsiart (Head of Education Department)

1. APOLOGIES

Cabinet Members and Officers were welcomed to the meeting.

Apologies were received from Iwan Evans (Monitoring Officer) and Geraint Owen (Corporate Director).

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

Item 8: Councillors Dafydd Meurig and Elin Walker Jones declared that they were Governors at Ysgol Friars. This was not a prejudicial interest and therefore they did not withdraw from the meeting.

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 16 July 2024 were accepted as a true record.

6. ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT AND SELF-ASSESSMENT 2023/24

The report was submitted by Cllr. Nia Jeffreys

DECISION

Cyngor Gwynedd's Annual Performance Report and Self-Assessment 2023/24 was approved, and it was recommended that it be adopted by the Full Council.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted to Cabinet for approval before being presented to the Full Council in October. It was explained that the report provided information on the progress against that set out in the Cyngor Gwynedd Plan 2023-2028 during the year 2023/24. It was also explained that the report looked back at the Council's performance in 2023/34 and all Council employees were thanked for their work over the year.

It was reported that the recent period had been a very difficult one for Local Government with demand rising on several priority areas as well as having to cope with a reduced budget. It was noted that there were two parts to the report with the first part, the annual performance report focusing on Council Plan projects and the day-to-day work. It was explained that the second part which was the self-assessment of the Council's performance was a new statutory requirement under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

It was explained that the draft self-assessment had been reviewed by the Governance and Audit Committee on 5 September and generally received positive comments. Some suggestions were received to improve the procedure such as Members' desire to be included sooner in the process of producing the report. Further comments were received on the impact the priority projects within the Council Plan were having on the residents of the county and that more attention needed to be paid to this element.

It was noted that the report was full of figures and statistics but behind the statistics were encouraging stories of the experiences of the people of Gwynedd and the support they had been given. Reference was made to an example under the A Prosperous Gwynedd priority area of how the work of officers in this area had changed the lives of the people of Gwynedd for the better. A local man who had been unemployed and homeless was mentioned and details were given of the support he had received from Gwaith Gwynedd such as help securing an interview, benefit support and support to buy clothes suitable for his new job. The Gwaith Gwynedd team were thanked for the support, and it was noted that the person in question was now in a full-time job, had a home and felt financially stable. It was noted that there were a range of similar examples under the priority areas of the Council Plan.

It was emphasised that it was important to recognise success and all Council staff were thanked for their work. It was recognised that there was a long journey to reach the goal in all priority areas. The Council's Business Support Service Manager added that there was some further design work to be done before formally submitting the document to Full Council on 3 October. Reference was made to the comments of the Governance and Audit Committee and the suggestion to consider the consultation arrangements for the self-assessment part. It was explained that that was something that had been addressed and appropriate steps would be put in place to ensure appropriate feedback to feed into the self-assessments in the future.

Observations arising from the discussion

- Members gave thanks for the work to produce the report and members of the Governance and Audit Committee were thanked for their constructive comments. The comment about measuring impact was highlighted as a

comment that would be implemented but it was recognised that it was difficult to see an impact in a year.

- The intertwining between the ambition of the Council's Plaid Cymru Group for the Council Plan to act and now to report on progress was welcomed.
- It was noted that the report was not too lengthy and easy for the people of Gwynedd to follow. The design and the way the information had been laid out was welcomed.
- The Deputy Leader was thanked for recognising the work of the Council staff and it was noted that this message of thanks would be passed on to staff.
- Attention was drawn to the serious financial situation that posed a threat to the Council's core services and highlighted that a £14 million funding gap was forecast for next year. It was added that this may require a second look at the Council Plan to reflect what the Council's ability to deliver would be. It was hoped that the financial outlook would improve so that efforts could be put into achieving the ambition for the good of the people of Gwynedd without having to worry about maintaining the Council's basic services.

7. PANEL ASSESSMENT REPORT

The report was submitted by Cllr. Dyfrig Siencyn

DECISION

1. To approve the content of the draft Panel Performance Assessment Scope Document and the areas identified for the Panel to address.
2. To delegate the right to decide on the Panel's membership, whilst considering the advice of the WLGA to the Leader, in consultation with the Chief Executive.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted stating that there was a new requirement for the Council under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act to carry out a Performance Assessment by a Panel once within an election cycle. It was explained that the external Panel, independent of the Council would look at the Council's work and the Council was expected to prepare a scoping document identifying the areas it wanted the Panel to be looking at.

The Council's Business Support Service Manager added that there had been an agreement in October last year to carry out the Panel Assessment this year. He noted that the Service was working with the Welsh Local Government Association along with discussions to create the scoping document and that a draft of the document had been included with the report. It was reiterated that work to identify potential members for the Panel was currently underway. It was detailed that the Panel would likely consist of an independent Chair, counterparts from the broader public, private or voluntary sectors, Senior Local Government Officer who was currently in post and a Senior Elected Member from outside the Council.

It was explained that the Panel would look at the work of the Council and the Council was expected to provide background information for the Panel and also identify the areas that the Council was keen for the Panel to be looking at as set out on page 76 of the report. It was noted that these areas had been discussed with the Governance and Audit Committee in May as well as the Corporate

Management Team and their suggestions were accepted. The timetable was confirmed, and it was indicated that the assessment would likely take place at the end of November.

The Chief Executive highlighted that the assessment was welcome, and it was hoped that the process would be valuable, thorough and constructive as well as providing a challenge to the Council so that there would be an opportunity to learn and improve.

Observations arising from the discussion

- The process was welcomed. It was asked whether there was scope for the Panel to identify other areas to look at in addition to the areas that had been suggested by the Council.
- In response it was clarified that part 3.2 of the report set out the specific areas the Panel would look at together with a core set of questions that would be asked. It was highlighted that the Council was invited to submit additional areas and these were set out on page 76 of the report.
- It was noted that the guiding principles were broad in nature. It was added that there was no restriction on anything and that the Panel was entitled to pay more attention to a particular area.

8. 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 presented, and the County's young people were congratulated on their GCSE and A level results, and it was added that exam grades was only one area of a person's ability. The hard work of the young people in the County over the exam period as well as that of the teachers was recognised and every single young person in the County was wished well on their next steps.

It was reported that the work of extending the childcare provision for two-year olds to new areas was almost complete, with 22 providers now offering Flying Start extended childcare. Attention was drawn to the fact that the admissions policy for Gwynedd schools would change from next September and that children attending Nursery class would be expected to be fully toilet-trained before they started.

Pride was expressed that the ALN&I service had managed to improve waiting times for counselling and noted that it was gratifying to see the work of adapting classes at Ysgol Pendalar continue. It was added that it was great to see Ysgol Treforthyr opening its doors at the beginning of the month and reference was also made to the exciting building modernisation taking place across Bangor Schools with several schools included.

School attendance levels were highlighted, and it was noted that the levels needed to improve. Concern was raised that attendance levels had not returned to what they had been before the pandemic. Reference was also made to the increase in

the numbers of specific and permanent exclusions as a result of challenging behaviour within the schools and it was noted that this matter had been addressed over the past year. It was noted that a detailed survey had been commissioned in November/December 2023 on the Inclusion Service and recommendations had been made on how to strengthen provision.

It was noted that there was great pride in the appointment of Meirion Prys Jones as a freelance consultant to work with the Department to revisit the Education Language Policy and it was explained that the work of holding an evaluation of the Immersion System was currently underway.

In conclusion, there was acknowledgement of the challenges and pain experienced during the year in the wake of Neil Foden's crimes and that Council's thoughts remained with the victims. It was added that the Council had committed to co-operating fully with the independent review in line with Child Practice Review national guidance. Also, the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee's intention to conduct a scrutiny investigation into the safeguarding field was welcomed and the Education Department's willingness to co-operate fully with the investigation was noted.

Observations arising from the discussion

- Members gave thanks for the report and were pleased that so much good news had been included.
- It was asked what support was available for parents to toilet-train children before going to Nursery School, particularly children with additional needs. It was asked how rigid the rule was given the fact that Derwen had a waiting list for some of their services.
- In response, the reasons for the change to the policy were explained which was to avoid diverting the attention of teachers and classroom assistants from the rest of the class while they spent time outside of class changing nappies. It was added that as part of looking at the early years area the emphasis was shifting to parents toilet-training. It was stressed that Schools would not turn children away if they had not been toilet-trained, but rather that the expectation would be conveyed from now on. It was noted that there would be a promotional campaign and training could be delivered in a timely manner with a view to making things easier for parents.
- Pride was expressed that a detailed survey had been commissioned on additional learning needs and inclusion. Further questions were asked about this policy and whether children with neuro-developmental needs were included in this strategy. It was also noted that the exclusion figures were a concern.
- In response it was noted that this strategy included a full range of children's needs and included children with neuro-developmental needs. It was explained in terms of the behavioural side that a report had been commissioned as well as a Project Group looking at this element over the summer term and had visited other Counties to see what provisions were available and what the best practice was. It was noted that, at present, the Department was modelling the support they would like to give but it was recognised that further investment was difficult under the current financial climate. It was noted that in the past more focus had been placed on more emotional rather than behavioural aspects and that there was a challenge in structuring the provision so that both aspects could be addressed.

9. THE CABINET'S FORWARD PROGRAMME

The report was submitted by Cllr. Dyfrig Siencyn

DECISION

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

The meeting commenced at 1.00pm and concluded at 1.50pm.

CHAIR