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THE CABINET 20/01/26

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**Present -**

Councillors: Nia Jeffreys, Menna Trenholme, Craig ab Iago, June Jones, Dilwyn Morgan, Llio Elenid Owen, Dewi Jones and Paul Rowlinson.

**Also present -**

Dafydd Gibbard (Chief Executive), Catrin Thomas (Corporate Director), Dylan Owen (Corporate Director), Iwan Evans (Monitoring Officer), Dewi Morgan (Head of Finance Department), Debbie Jones (Assistant Head of Education Services), Robert John Jones (Education Transport Manager), Gerwyn Jones (Assistant Head, Environment Department), Ian Jones (Head of Corporate Services Department), Arwel Evans (Procurement Manager), Miriam Hughes (Procurement Adviser), Eurig Williams (Human Resources Service Manager), Ffion Madog Evans (Assistant Head of Finance Department - Accountancy and Pensions).

**1. APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Councillor R Medwyn Hughes and Councillor Huw Wyn Jones.

**2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST**

Councillor Nia Jeffreys declared a personal interest in relation to item 6, and she left the meeting.

Councillor Nia Jeffreys declared an interest in relation to item 9. The member did not consider it to be a prejudicial interest, and she did not leave 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 OF THE MEETING HELD ON 16 DECEMBER**

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 December 2025 were accepted as a true

record.

## **6. EDUCATION TRANSPORT POLICY (DRAFT)**

The report was submitted by Cllr Dewi Jones.

### **DECISION**

Cabinet approval was given to hold a consultation on the Education Transport Policy (Draft).

### **DISCUSSION**

It was emphasised that this Policy was in draft form, as the purpose of bringing the item before the meeting was to seek Cabinet approval to hold a consultation. It was stated that the current Policy had been in place since 2009, and it was noted that it was therefore timely to develop a new policy.

Reference was made to the Empty Seat Scheme, explaining that an empty seat was offered to a learner who was not eligible for free transport, if a seat was available on transport. It was added that legislative requirements now made it more difficult to offer this arrangement.

It was explained that transport had been provided to faith schools in line with the statutory requirement, but that there was no reference to faith schools in the current policy. The (Draft) Policy submitted would offer clarity in terms of the transport offered.

It was highlighted that the Council provided discretionary transport to full-time post-16 learners at present, and details were provided of the (Draft) Policy proposal to provide transport to the nearest catchment area/suitable school, as well as to the nearest college site that provided the course. The proposal was elaborated upon, and it was noted that it did not restrict the learners' options in terms of the courses available to them, but it ensured that transport to the nearest site offering that course would only be offered.

It was noted that the (Draft) Policy also offered more information about dual residency, reiterating that the Authority would provide transport from the main address.

It was emphasised that there was no change to the system of transporting children with Additional Learning Needs in this (Draft) Policy, or to the process of measuring travelling distance to receive free transport.

Reference was made to the two parts in the Policy, noting that there was no change in terms of the statutory requirements to provide education transport that had to be addressed. It was acknowledged that adaptations and changes to the Policy aspects that were discretionary for the Authority, that were being proposed here.

It was stated that this (Draft) Policy would be submitted before the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee following the consultation.

Observations arising from the discussion:

- Clarity was sought on the method of measuring travelling distance and the suitability of the roads and walking paths that learners were expected to use to reach school were mentioned. It was confirmed that the distance was measured through a mapping system (GIS) and that it was therefore consistent for every learner. It was added that there was a system to assess the suitability of roads and paths also, and that transport would be provided if the path was unsuitable. Anyone facing barriers in terms of transport should respond to the consultation, so that those comments could be considered.
- Full support was expressed to the path of this (Draft) Policy, noting that it was a democratic way of adopting the document. The importance of residents responding to this consultation was emphasised.
- Assurances were given that no impacts on the cost-of-living were anticipated as a result of this (Draft) Policy.
- It was noted that the (Draft) Policy did not refer in detail to the arrangements of chaperones for ALN learners as this happened via a Panel, in line with the learners' Individual Development Plan.
- It was asked whether a discussion had been held with the Welsh Government about the Empty Seat Scheme, as it was their guidelines that was forcing the change. It was confirmed that the Government had been consulting on new education transport guidelines, and that the Council had submitted observations in response to that consultation, noting the barriers to offering flexibility in terms of facilitating travel to school. It was added that the Government had not yet reported back on the results of the consultation.

## **7. PROCUREMENT STRATEGY 2026 - 2031**

The report was submitted by Cllr Llio Elenid Owen.

### **DECISION**

To accept and approve the Procurement Strategy 2026 – 2031 (Appendix 1).

To grant the Head of Corporate Services the authority to make operational adjustments to the Strategy as the need arises to ensure compliance with statutory guidance (such as the statutory guidance of the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act).

### **DISCUSSION**

The report was submitted, detailing the Procurement process, namely the securing of goods, services or work for the Council's services. It was highlighted that it was a key part of the Council's activity.

The importance of the Council having a Procurement Strategy was stated. It was noted that this would be a statutory requirement in the near future, and it ensured that the Council got the best value for public funds and ensured the best quality for the people of Gwynedd.

It was identified that the Council spent around £200 million per year on procurement activities. The need to source the goods, services or work for the best price was emphasised, whilst also ensuring the best quality. It was also highlighted that there was a need to address other objectives, such as decarbonisation and securing social value - the Strategy set the direction and vision to enable this to happen.

Reference was made to the 7 priorities included in the Strategy, highlighting that every priority field had been identified as a key area in the context of procurement in Cyngor Gwynedd. The fields included in the report were listed.

It was confirmed that the Procurement Strategy had been submitted to the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee in October 2025, and the Scrutiny Committee had resolved to accept the Strategy and the report.

Observations arising from the discussion:

- Members gave thanks for the strategy, and it was asked how the Council measured the value of procurement. It was noted that the department had a measure in terms of the local benefit, which was measured regularly through performance challenge arrangements. It was added that the Strategy provided an opportunity to look at other fields across the Council where procurement affected them and develop measures to accompany those priorities. It was highlighted that value for money was a factor here, as well as social value, which included several further measures. It was noted that the Strategy provided an opportunity to measure the value of procurement in various fields across the Council.
- It was asked about the use of Welsh for suppliers, highlighting that this matter had been raised by the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee also. It was stated that legal advice had been received, and that this was being implemented as far as possible. The Welsh language was a requirement in several contracts, so it was noted that the intention was to follow that as far as possible.
- Reference was made to the 7 priorities, questioning whether there was a main priority from the 7 noted. It was stated that the main priority was to *"make the most of the value of the pound in Gwynedd"* as noted on the front of the Strategy, and it was mentioned that these 7 priorities were unique to Gwynedd.
- It was asked whether any tensions were arising between the priorities. It was stated that tensions were inevitable and something that the procurement category teams had to be cautious of.
- It was asked how the barriers were now being identified and reduced, moving forward. Identifying the contracts likely to be set were mentioned,

and then for the companies to be guided through the arrangements, discussing any possible barriers that were likely to arise. It was added that a review was being completed once the tendering process had been completed, in order to assess the support given to the local companies.

- Attention was drawn to the praise that had been received about this procurement process.
- It was reiterated that the main discussion of the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee were comments about the Welsh language in relation to the procurement arrangements.

## **8. WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY**

The report was submitted by Cllr Llio Elenid Owen

### **DECISION**

Resolved:

That the Cabinet adopts the amended Whistleblowing Policy for staff seen in Appendix 1.

That the Whistleblowing Policy for staff is presented to the Governance and Audit Committee at the first opportunity in order to receive observations on the recommended procedure.

To complete a review of the existing arrangements to enable Councillors to raise concerns, including independently where necessary, and that the review is carried out in partnership with the Protect organisation and in consultation with Councillors.

### **DISCUSSION**

It was explained that the report summarised the work that had been achieved to review the Policy and whistleblowing arrangements for Council staff. It was stated that the policy strengthened the practical arrangements for identifying the potential causes of whistleblowing and the potential pathways for dealing with those concerns.

It was reported that the next steps, should the Policy be adopted, would be to implement a comprehensive communication plan that would raise awareness of the policy amongst all of the Council's workforce.

It was confirmed that a training plan would also be put in place, which would be tailored for different cohorts of the workforce.

Attention was drawn to the fact that the Governing Bodies of every school were responsible to adopt employment policies, including the Whistleblowing Policy. It was mentioned that the Council had a role when ensuring that the County's schools had a suitable policy and arrangements in place as well.

It was highlighted that a staff Whistleblowing Policy was being submitted before the Cabinet, and reference was made to a decision at the last Response Board meeting, which was the need to look at a Whistleblowing Policy for elected members also.

The decision sought was adapted as a result of the feedback from recent Scrutiny Committees.

Observations arising from the discussion:

- This Policy was welcomed, and the adaptation was supported.
- The support from the Response Board to have separate guidelines for councillors was highlighted, and it was noted that this adaptation would strengthen the protection for councillors.
- It was stated that the Government had published a model policy for school Governors, and that the Council would ask every school to adopt that policy, which was suitable for schools.
- Whistleblowing processes in terms of the general public were mentioned, and it was explained that there was a mechanism in place to receive concerns from the public. It was added that further work was to be done to raise the public's awareness of those arrangements.
- The importance of raising awareness of the Policy was emphasised as well as foster a culture within the Council where staff felt confident to whistleblow.
- It was highlighted that this Policy would be discussed at a session with Council managers and team leaders, and that it was an opportunity to raise awareness and embed that culture.

## **9. REVENUE BUDGET 2025/26 - END OF NOVEMBER 2025 REVIEW**

The report was submitted by Cllr Nia Jeffreys.

### **DECISION**

To approve additional financial support above the contractual payment to Cwmni Byw'n lach to be funded from the transformation fund, delegating the right to the Cabinet Member for Economy in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance, the Chief Executive and the Head of Finance to agree on the amount of the final financial support above the contractual payment with Byw'n lach at the end of the financial year. Based on the current review, it is estimated that the value of the support will be £295k.

To approve a transfer of £3.365 million of underspend on corporate budgets to the Council's Financial Strategy Support Fund, to be used at the end of the financial year to fund the overspend faced by the departments.

To approve the financial virements as outlined in Appendix 3 following a review of the 2024/25 Council Tax Premium, with a transfer of £2.089 million from the Financial Strategy Support Fund to the Council Tax Premium Fund.

## DISCUSSION

It was expressed that there was a projected £6.5 million overspend in Council departments following the end of November review, which was a small increase from the August projections. It was highlighted that 76% of the overspend was in the adult and children care field, and it was added that 6 departments were overspending.

It was identified that there was an underspend on corporate budgets, which reduced the total overspend projections to £2.3 million.

Reference was made to Appendix 2, which explained the main matters and the fields with substantial differences.

Reference was then made to Appendix 3, which noted that Council tax income and the income from the second home and empty properties premium had been reviewed, following the end of the 2024/25 financial year. The result was that £2 million relevant to the 2024/25 Council Tax Premium was to be transferred from the Financial Strategy Support Fund to the Council Tax Premium Fund.

It was explained that the report had been submitted to the Governance and Audit Committee a week earlier.

### Observations arising from the discussion:

- The importance of putting the information in its context was emphasised, as well as identifying the fact that it was not possible to project much of this overspend, particularly in those departments that responded to demand. It was added that there was a need to spend according to the demand, and that the Council had a responsibility to offer these services and protect the people of Gwynedd.
- Attention was drawn to the reality of underfunding Local Government to the people of the County.
- Pride was expressed that the terminology 'budget deficit' was now used in the report instead of 'overspend', which reflected the reality. It was confirmed that work was progressing to seek to make those savings, but that doing the right thing for the people of Gwynedd was the priority.

## **10. CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2025/26 - END OF NOVEMBER REVIEW (30 NOVEMBER 2025 POSITION)**

The report was submitted by Cllr Nia Jeffreys.

## DECISION

To accept the report on the end of November review (30 November 2025 position) of the capital programme.

To approve the following revision to the Capital Budget, approved on 6 March

2025 and revised on 11 November 2025, from the programme's financing perspective (as shown in part 3.2.3 of the report), that is:

- a decrease of £7,544,000 in the use of borrowing,
- an increase of £2,660,000 in the use of grants and contributions,
- an increase of £103,000 in the use of revenue contributions,
- a decrease of £2,387,000 in the use of the capital reserve
- an increase of £6,364,000 in the use of renewal and other reserves.

## **DISCUSSION**

The report was submitted, noting that it presented the revised capital programme (situation as at 30 November 2025), and to approve adjustments to the relevant financing sources.

Reference was made to part 3.2.2 of the report, which offered an analysis per Department of the £152 million capital programme for the 3 years from 2025/26 - 2027/28.

It was stated that definitive plans were in place to invest £93.7 million in 2025/26 on capital schemes, with £48.2 million, 51% of it, funded through specific grants. It was added that an additional £6 million of proposed spending had been re-profiled from 2025/26 to 2026/27 and 2027/28. It was mentioned that Appendix 2 included the main plans that had slipped since the original budget.

Reference was made to the additional grants that the Council had managed to attract since the last review, which could be seen in part 3.2.4 of the report.

It was mentioned that information about the Council's Capital Prudential Indicators could be seen in Appendix 4, which was a reporting requirement in the CIPFA Prudential Code. It was explained that the Council had complied with its policy on borrowing for capital purposes.

It was highlighted that the report had been submitted to the Governance and Audit Committee a week earlier.

### Observations arising from the discussion:

- Attention was drawn to the reliance on grants, and it was noted that it highlighted the shortfall from the Welsh Government in funding Local Government.
- Frustration was expressed that calls for multi-year settlements had not been responded to, and that there was no way of planning ahead as a result of that.

## **11. SAVINGS OVERVIEW: PROGRESS REPORT ON REALISING SAVINGS SCHEMES**



The report was submitted by Cllr Nia Jeffreys.

## **DECISION**

To accept the information in the report and to note the progress towards realising the savings schemes for 2025/26 and previous years.

## **DISCUSSION**

In the 2025/26 Budget report to the Full Council on 6 March 2025, it was reported that £3.5 million worth of savings were profiled for the 2025/26 budget. It was highlighted that this was a combination of £100k in newly-approved savings in 2025, and £3.4 million approved in previous years.

It was identified that there were difficulties to realise savings in some fields. It was stated that the new savings had been separated from the previous savings, therefore the savings relevant to 2025/26 were in Appendix 1 and in Appendix 2.

It was reported that 98% of the historical savings, for the period from the 2015/16 financial year up to the 2025/26 financial year, had been realised. It was noted that this was £33.8 million of the £34.3 million of savings.

It was highlighted that plans to the value of £590,000 remained undelivered, and the majority of them were in the Adults, Health and Well-being Department.

Reference was made to Appendix 2 which shows that new savings schemes to the value of £15.6 million and 81% of the savings had already been realised, and a further 3% were on track to be delivered on time.

It was stated that there were obvious risks to delivering the savings in some fields, particularly in the Adults, Health and Well-being Department and the Environment Department.

It was explained that the value of the savings already approved for 2026/27 onwards was noted in Appendix 3.

Following the announcement that there was a 4.1% floor for the financial settlement to Local Government, it was explained that there was no need to rush to implement savings for 2026/27. It was emphasised that there would be a need to continue to identify savings for the coming years, and this was likely to be challenging.

It was highlighted that the report had been submitted to the Governance and Audit Committee a week earlier.

### Observations arising from the discussion:

- The Cabinet Member expressed astonishment about the savings figure that had been made by the Council to date.

The meeting commenced at 1:00p.m. and concluded at 2:30p.m.

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CHAIRMAN