
THE CABINET, TUESDAY, 18 DECEMBER 2018

Present -

Councillors: Dyfrig L. Siencyn, Dafydd Meurig, Craig ab Iago, Gareth Wyn Griffith, Nia Wyn Jeffreys, Peredur Jenkins, Dilwyn Morgan, W. Gareth Thomas, Ioan Thomas and Gareth Thomas.

Also present-

Dilwyn Williams (Chief Executive), Morwena Edwards (Corporate Director), Iwan Evans (Monitoring Officer), Dafydd Edwards (Head of Finance Department) and Annes Siôn (Member Support Officer).

Others invited:

Item 6: Llinos Edwards (Senior Executive Officer)

Item 7: Garem Jackson (Head of Education Department)

Item 8: Robin Evans (Project Manager)

1. APOLOGIES

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

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

There were no declarations of personal interest.

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. THE MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS HELD ON 27 NOVEMBER

The Chair signed the minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 27 November, as a true record.

6. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC SAFEGUARDING PANEL

The report was submitted by Cllr Dilwyn Morgan

RESOLVED

To accept the report on the work of the Strategic Safeguarding Children and Adults Panel, and accept the amendments to the Panel's Terms of Reference.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted, noting that it was an update on what the Safeguarding Strategic Panel had achieved in 2017/18. It was added that the report summarised the work accurately and fairly, noting that it was essential for Cabinet members to be aware of the Panel's work and be able to feel satisfied that the Panel had undertaken the required work in a thorough and conscientious manner.

It was expressed that the Gwynedd Safeguarding Performance was very good, and this was emphasised in an external report recently received about the Children and Supporting Families Department recently. It was added that the Panel had recently extended its focus to include broader Safeguarding matters such as Domestic Violence and counter terrorism. Consequently, it was noted that the Panel's Terms of Reference needed to be modified in order to reflect the adjustments. It was noted that the Terms of Reference also highlighted the Panel's responsibility to monitor and challenge performance that related to Safeguarding.

The members of the Safeguarding Executive Panel were thanked for their work of ensuring day-to-day safeguarding.

Observations arising from the discussion

- Modern Slavery was discussed, noting that there had been three cases in Gwynedd, and an example of the type of cases that had arisen was requested. An example was noted of a worker at a work location who did not want to be there and was not paid for his labour. It was added that it was a field that changed frequently and that the Council needed to be aware of what was going on. It was expressed that the greatest challenge was to keep focussed and be pro-active.
- It was expressed that good work was being done in terms of safeguarding children, and the terms of reference enabled staff to be aware of which signs to keep an eye out for.
- Attention was drawn to the training on Violence against Women, domestic abuse and Sexual Violence, noting that only 50% of the training had been completed by the end of 2017. It was added that this was due to the fact that the standard of the Welsh language in the learning materials provided by Welsh Government was inadequate. It was expressed that the Government needed to give priority to the Welsh language, especially in training for such important subjects. It was added that Gwynedd Council was working with the Government in an attempt to overcome the barriers.

7. THE PRINCIPLES OF A FIT FOR PURPOSE EDUCATION SYSTEM

The item was submitted by Cllr Gareth Thomas

RESOLVED

To approve the following principles of a fit for purpose education system that

would form the basis for fulfilling the Education Department's vision, and for developing the system to ensure a high quality education for the children and young people of Gwynedd for the twenty first century, namely:

- A system of viable secondary schools
- No more than two age ranges within the same class in the primary sector
- Approximately 80% non-contact time for the Headteacher to concentrate on leadership issues in the primary sector.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted, noting that it acknowledged that a good basis for children's education was strong leadership. It was added that following the Primary Federation's report, which included Primary School Headteachers, and which raised many matters, the Education Department revisited the education conditions.

It was noted that a report had been submitted to Cabinet in July 2016, which gave permission for the Education Department to consult with school Governors and wider stakeholders on the suitability of the principles. It was expressed during the consultation that matters had arisen regarding the Leadership conditions below:

- that many of our secondary and primary schools were too small to be able to offer enough time for Headteachers, senior managers and middle managers to lead effectively;
- the requirements were incompatible for many primary Headteachers, in that they had a substantial commitment to teach classes alongside their management and leadership roles;
- difficulties in terms of recruiting senior leadership managers and middle managers at secondary schools;
- difficulties in recruiting Headteachers for primary schools;
- a lack of applicants from outside the local authority area.

Consequently, principles that supported the fit for purpose system were developed and submitted to Cabinet. It was expressed that it was difficult to make extensive changes immediately as a result of budgets, but the principles would be the basis for future changes.

Observations arising from the discussion

- The importance of consultation was noted, and that the principles had derived from Headteachers. It was emphasised that it was difficult in the Primary and Secondary sectors to recruit Headteachers as they were required at some schools to teach 4.5 days and, consequently, they did not have the time to carry out the work of leading the school.
- It was expressed that establishing the principles was an important step for the future that would improve conditions, which in turn would improve children's education.

8. DEALING WITH THE FUNDING GAP

The item was submitted by Cllr Peredur Jenkins

RESOLVED

To adopt the Schemes in appendices 1 to 6, subject to the results of the consultation, as the ones which the Council would have to deliver to ensure a balanced budget in 2019/20, with a consultation on the schemes in appendices 3 to 6 to be held in January.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted, noting that there was an annual requirement to balance the Council's budget. It was added that this year, the Council anticipated a significant financial deficit for 2019/20.

Since the beginning of the summer, it was expressed that the Cabinet Members, the Directors and the Heads of Departments had been considering what would need to be done in order to address the financial deficit. Every department noted how it would find 20% from its budget if there was a need to do so. It was expressed that this process had been difficult but thorough, and that it had forced every Department to dig deep for possible savings. In addition to this, it was noted that the Council had been in consultation with Gwynedd residents, to ask of the things the Council did which were most important to them.

The financial context was provided, noting that the Head of Finance Department was continuing to attempt to establish a balanced budget for 2019/20 and four workshops were held for elected members to provide an understanding of their situation now. It was explained that the Council had received another disappointing settlement from Welsh Government where the grant given to Local Government remained the same. It was added that despite this, the Council was facing enormous pressure in the fields of Education and Care and that there was a significant inflation to salaries and matters such as energy. Consequently, it was explained that this meant that the Council would be facing a funding deficit that was likely to be around £12.9m. The steps that could be taken in order to reduce the gap were explained, and it was noted that in doing so, the latest estimation brought the deficit down to approximately £6.8m.

The Chief Executive added that filling the remaining financial deficit was a mathematical process. The only other thing to do was to find more savings or increase Council Tax. It was noted, as part of the process of looking at possibilities during the period since the end of the summer, that Departments had identified further efficiency savings and that these could be seen in appendices 1 and 2 of the report. It was expressed that the efficiency savings proposed here would be savings where there would be very little change to the service to Gwynedd residents, and that a percentage of them would be back office savings. Appendices 3 to 6 then outlined the savings that were likely to have a greater impact on Gwynedd residents, but not to the same degree as many other plans that were considered.

He added that these savings would come to £2.5 million which would bring the deficit down to approximately £4.3 million. He added that if a further £0.5 could be found, this would bring the deficit down to £3.8 million, which was equivalent to a Council Tax increase of 5.5%.

It was explained that a consultation on the plans in appendices 3 to 6 would be held in January. Following this, it was added that a workshop would be held for all members so that they could give their opinion about a specific Council Tax level, the responses received through the consultation, and consider the need to bring greater savings into the equation, the impact of which would be much worse.

Observations arising from the discussion

- It was noted that the First Minister, during his time as Finance Minister, created this budget. It was expressed that the Leader had stated his disappointment and anger about the budget to Welsh Government. It was added that Welsh Government had a choice as nearly an additional billion in funding was available, but that the Government had prioritised every other department, and he added that some departments had seen an increase of nearly 14%.
- It was expressed that the settlement had been described by the Chief Executive of the Welsh Local Government Association as 'brutal', but it was added that the settlement was seriously poor and diabolical. It was expressed that every local authority had noted that there would be substantial cuts to their core services. It was noted that Welsh Government would be responsible for this following a vote that would be held this week to determine its budget. It was also noted that it was the responsibility of all Assembly Member who had voted in favour of this settlement to ultimately face their constituents.
- It was expressed that the Council wanted to squeeze every last penny out of services through efficiency savings in order to minimise the impact on residents. It was noted that back office savings were the first steps, but that these had an impact on jobs.
- It was noted that although the Council had safeguarded school budgets and added inflation for teachers' salaries etc., Welsh Government had cut its grants for schools in 'real' terms, by failing to add any inflation. It was added that the Council was attempting to safeguard education and care services, but if things continued in this way, then these departments would need to be revisited and this could undermine the safety and lives of children and young people.
- It was noted that the Council needed to find a way of informing residents that these were Welsh Government cuts, and that Gwynedd Council was responding to the challenge it was facing.
- A question was raised about the Barmouth Bridge scheme, and the Cabinet member had noted for the Highways and Municipal that discussions were under-way to see whether this saving could be realised, ensuring that the path would remain open. It was noted that this scheme was expected to be completed in April 2020, and therefore there was time to continue with discussions.

The meeting commenced at 1.00pm and concluded at 2:00pm

CHAIR