

GWYNEDD COUNCIL CABINET

Report to a meeting of Gwynedd Council Cabinet

Date:	28 January 2020
Title of Item:	Performance Report of the Cabinet Member for Corporate Support and Legal
Purpose:	To accept and note the information in the report
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Nia Jeffreys
Contact Officer:	Dilwyn Williams, Chief Executive

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update my fellow members on what has been happening in the fields within my remit as Cabinet Member for the Corporate Support and Legal Department. This includes outlining the latest developments of pledges within the 2018-2023 Gwynedd Council Plan; the progress of performance measures; and the latest on the savings and cuts schemes.
- 1.2 I would like to remind you that all matters have already been the subject of discussions and have been scrutinised at the management team meetings of the Corporate Support Department and the Legal Service, which also included a representation from the Scrutiny Committees.
- 1.3 Here are the main matters that I would like to draw your attention to:

Equality Plan – the Cabinet published a draft of its Gwynedd Council's Strategic Equality Plan 2020-2024 following its meeting on 26 November in order to open a public consultation on the content. I would encourage every Council member and the public to respond, and you can do so online [here](#).

Information Incidents – since the number of incidents where information about an individual has been stolen/lost/sent to the wrong address has increased, I'm pleased that work is underway to look at the Council's workforce policies in order to seek an institutional solution to the situation.

Blue badges – following a review of the application process, I'm pleased that the service has succeeded in reducing the time taken by 40%. As a Council we also assisted the Welsh Government in ensuring that the whole process system is available in Welsh and English.

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Health and Safety Service – it was unfortunate that 2 safety incidences occurred within one department during this period, leading to the Health and Safety Service concentrating their efforts on this department's arrangements so as to ensure that the same situation doesn't arise again.

Legal – I wish to acknowledge that it has been a very busy period for the elections unit again, who have had to run an unprecedented number of elections during recent years.

- 1.4 I am generally satisfied with the progress of the projects within the Council Plan and the performance measures for which I am responsible.

2 THE DECISION SOUGHT

- 2.1 To accept and note the information in the report.

3 COUNCIL PLAN PROJECTS

3.1 Keeping the Benefit Local

The Procurement Unit continues to advise and encourage local businesses to apply for contracts with the Council in order to keep as much of the Council's expenditure as local as possible, for the benefit of Gwynedd's economy. Between 1 July and 30 September, 56% of **capital and revenue expenditure** was local expenditure, which is a 3% reduction compared to the same period last year. This is due to spending £1.8m on a company from Wrexham to build Ysgol y Garnedd in Bangor. Having said that, 36% of that sum has been spent on companies within 40 miles to the site through sub-contracting arrangements.

The percentage of **revenue only expenditure** has also fallen - 59% between July and September this year compared to 62% over the same period last year. This is because in the previous year, a contract valued at £1.1m was awarded to a company from Pwllheli to re-roof Ysgol Harlech following a storm – this was additional work to the routine building maintenance programme.

In order to attempt to help smaller local companies, the Unit has cut tenders into smaller lots in order to give companies every opportunity to compete for a part of the contract. The feedback from the market has been positive, and local companies are grateful of the opportunity to compete. In the Maintenance field, a new framework agreement has been in place since June this year, and I am very glad to note that the number of local suppliers who received a place on the framework has increased from 41% to 60%.

There is more to 'keeping the benefit local' than just economic benefits. I was also very glad to hear of the work the Unit is undertaking in order to attract **social benefits** from contracts, e.g. one of the Council's main suppliers contributes food packages and hygiene items every month to food banks in Gwynedd, as well as high-visibility jackets to schools for

children who undertake road safety activities. I have encouraged the Unit to continue to discover such valuable opportunities.

As part of normal arrangements of awarding contracts, the Procurement Unit is also encouraging providers to meet the needs of **the Well-being of Future Generations Act**, and assesses their environmental, community, cultural and economic contribution.

The Procurement Unit is also leading the Reduction of Single Use Plastic Group and is specifically looking at ways to **reduce the purchasing of unnecessary plastic** in Council offices and beyond. Plans are underway to reduce the use of plastic milk bottles in schools and to encourage local businesses to reduce their use of plastic packaging.

3.2 **Apprenticeships Scheme**

It was planned to appoint 20 apprentices in 2019/20, and 17 of these have already been appointed to work in 10 different fields – such as civil engineering, care, child learning and development, or information technology. It is excellent news that one of our apprentices in the Gwynedd Consultancy Department has already been offered a technician job, and the vacant post of the apprentice will be refilled with a new apprentice. In planning for the future, we are looking at other ways we could benefit from appointing an apprentice, e.g. training staff to fill in the gaps of posts that are repeatedly re-advertised, identifying where staff turnover or the age profile suggest that a new cohort of staff need to be trained with competent skills.

3.3 **Women in Leadership**

The aim of this project is to boost the number of women who apply for and attain higher positions within the Council. In October, a workshop was arranged for 50 women who are already in management or team leadership roles, and further feedback was gathered in addition to what was gathered in a previous questionnaire back in 2017. A workshop was also arranged for men who work in management or leadership roles in December, in an attempt to spread awareness of what needs to be addressed, and to receive feedback from them. A detailed assessment of the feedback and workshops will be carried out in January, before drawing up a work programme for the coming 12 months.

3.4 **The Welsh Language in Public Services**

The aim of this project is to attempt to set the expected and consistent standard across the public bodies that work in Gwynedd, and encourage more use of the Welsh language in the initial contact between the citizen and these services.

The work of developing this project is associated with work under the care of the Public Services Board, but the provision mapping work has since been

completed. We will have to wait until September in order for the language standards for the health field to be set.

We have begun to assess the language skills of the Integrated Teams that work in the field of adult care, namely the local Teams of Council staff (such as social workers) and the staff of the Health Service. We will assist them to agree on operational principles in terms of the use of the Welsh language, so that Gwynedd residents receive the service in their chosen language.

3.5 Gwynedd Businesses to use the Welsh Language

The direct contact with the county's businesses is undertaken by officers within the Economy and Community Department, and they promote the use of the Welsh language amongst the private sector. Hunaniaith officers, through their community work, also encourage businesses to increase their use.

Another element of the recent work is collaborating with the other counties of west Wales, through the ARFOR project, and every business that is part of this project is offered extra support to increase their use of the Welsh language.

3.6 Promote the use of the Welsh language within the Council's services

There are two elements to this work, namely assessing and updating the language requirements of various jobs in the Council, and offering practical support for staff to learn or improve their Welsh in order to reach the required levels of fluency.

The first element is completed, and the second element is progressing very satisfactorily. Approximately 43% of the Council's workforce has now been assessed in order to measure whether their language skills reach the full requirements of their role, and this includes staff in care homes. Where there is room for improvement, we as a Council offer language improvement training for our staff, and it is offered in a variety of methods including the 'Welsh language tip of the month', on-line language improvement training, face-to-face training, and the Cyfeillion Cymraeg (Welsh Friends) scheme.

3.7 Empowering Units to Implement Ffordd Gwynedd

At its meeting on 23 July this year, the Cabinet adopted the 2019-2023 Ffordd Gwynedd scheme, which outlines the next step in our journey as a Council to change our way of working in order to ensure that the people of Gwynedd are at the centre of everything we do.

By now, the majority of managers have attended the Managers' Training Programme, with very positive feedback. Additionally, a number of Cabinet Members have taken advantage of the opportunity to attend sessions in order to develop their understanding further through a combination of formal learning, discussions and practical experiences. Here is an example of feedback from a Cabinet Member:

"I learnt a great amount by attending the Ffordd Gwynedd training. The mixture of formal and practical learning was very effective, and the good examples and stories the trainers added to the sessions created a fun atmosphere to the training. It was inspirational for me to see the Council Managers' response to the training. Everyone on the course was leaving with enthusiasm and commitment to truly put the people of Gwynedd at the centre of their work."

The future focus will be on attempting to measure how adopting the Ffordd Gwynedd way of working leads to improving our service for the people of Gwynedd. Many elements of this work has already commenced, and I will be able to report further on results in my next performance report. We have included the expected behaviours from all managers in their job descriptions, with a view to ensure an agreement on the generic expected behaviours by Heads of Departments, Assistant Heads, Team Leaders and general staff in the near future. These behaviours will be grounds to continuous evaluation discussions between a member of staff and his/her line manager.

3.8 **Developing Leadership**

In November, a follow-up session was held for the whole Cabinet on the teamwork development training. A worthwhile session was held, which revisited the team profile and the original actions as well as forming new ones in order to look to the future as a new team.

- 3.9 A large amount of the work that needed to be done with this project has already been described under the heading 'Empowering Units to Implement Ffordd Gwynedd' above; and, therefore, to avoid repetition, I will be reporting on the development of both projects jointly in future.

4 **PERFORMANCE**

- 4.1 In addition to the work described above on projects relating to the Council Plan, the remaining projects of the Corporate Support Department and Legal Service are described below. Furthermore, a full report on the performance measures associated with my portfolio can be found in **Appendix 1**.
- 4.2 The **Self-service** development on the Council website is essential to enable the residents of Gwynedd to gain access to information 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and offer a more cost effective method of contacting the Council for a service.
- 4.3 The number of self-service accounts continues to increase, with the creation of 47,000 accounts by the end of October 2019, which is 11,003 more accounts than the same period last year. The numbers logging into their accounts every month is still on the rise compared to previous years, and a substantial increase of 12,496 log-ins was recorded in September, as a result

of submitting a Request for a 16+ Travel Pass, and parents creating accounts in order to pay for on-line school payments.

- 4.4 In July, I reported that five services were now receiving more requests submitted through the self-service than over the phone, and I am glad to report that this has now increased to seven services.
- 4.5 I am glad to be able to share another exciting development, namely that we as a Council are now able to offer a 'webchat' service through our website since December. I will be able to report further on the development of this provision in my next performance report.
- 4.6 When all projects of the current financial year are completed, such as the self-service system for Council tax, the Unit will take a step back to assess whether the current self-service provision manages to provide the best service for the customer. Some examples manifest themselves where customers receive an inadequate service after submitting an on-line request, and therefore this must be addressed, and improve any shortcomings before moving forward to develop self-service across new fields.
- 4.7 The responsibility for the content of the **Council website** lies with the Council's Communication and Engagement Service. Between 1 June and 31 October, 756,644 individuals used the Council's website, which was 58,008 less than the same period last year. This relative drop can be attributed to the fact that the 'Byw'n lach' independent website (the former leisure service) went live on 1 April. Of the 637 individuals who used the feedback tool to express their views on the content of the website, 168 noted a score of less than 5 out of 5. Only 85 of these submitted a complaint or offered a suggestion to improve the content, and 83 out of the 85 complaints have since been resolved, and 88% of them were resolved within three working days.
- 4.8 Another part of the **Communication and Engagement Service's** work is sharing information about the Council's work in the press, and via social media. I have asked the Service to see whether all newspapers that serve Gwynedd carry stories on the work of the Council, and to see whether further work needs to be done in order to reach people across the whole county.
- 4.9 The purpose of the new **Research and Information Service** is to 'Help all members of staff to manage information on paper or electronically, and adhere to information Acts. Develop the ability of the Council and its partners to use information and evidence in order to make the best decisions for the people of Gwynedd.'
- 4.10 There were 10 '**information incidents**' (where information about an individual has been stolen/lost/sent to the wrong address) between 11 June and 29 November 2019. This figure includes all kinds of cases, but none of them were serious enough for us to report to the Information Commissioner's Office. This increasing number is a cause for concern, and therefore work is

ongoing to look at our policies for the workforce, and consider how we as an organisation will respond to these cases in future.

- 4.11 Many research projects are underway, and one of them is the 'Gwynedd Areas Profile', which is a tool that holds 180 different pieces of information about 73 small areas across Gwynedd. This profiling work can be very useful in attempting to anticipate the demand for services or to submit grant applications. I have requested that the Service shares the available information with third sector organisations so that they can benefit from it.
- 4.12 One of the responsibilities of the Council's **Support Service** is to administrate the process of ensuring that any of the Council's employees or members in need of a DBS has received one, and that it is correct and up-to-date. In my previous report in July, I noted that we are in contact with the Welsh Language Commissioner to attempt to move the work forward in terms of developing a Welsh language model for the DBS on-line applications. It is good that the standard module is now available bilingually; however, the advanced module is still only available in English, and therefore we will continue to press for all on-line provision to be bilingual.
- 4.13 The **Galw Gwynedd and Siopau Gwynedd** Services provide prompt and accurate assistance for customers to access Council services by providing answers, guidance and service. Between July and October 91% of **Galw Gwynedd** phone service customers had given a score of 10 out of 10, and in order to measure why the rest of our customers are dissatisfied, the service has trialled asking the customer to leave feedback on an answering machine after ending their call, and this has given us the ability to improve our service in future.
- 4.14 The Service has reviewed the arrangements of authorising **Blue Badges** and a new way of working, which is hopefully more effective, is being trialled for six months from December onwards. An initial trial has demonstrated that it now takes 30 days to authorise an application, rather than 50 days under the former procedure. As a Council, we have also helped the Government in order to improve the bilingual provision within this new system.
- 4.15 A full review of the work arrangements of the **Occupational Health Unit** is underway in order to develop paperless arrangements and in order to save staff time. Since moving to an electronic appointments system, rather than sending letters, the number of missed appointments has reduced by approximately 75%, saving around two working days a month which leads to more appointments being offered to the staff who need them.
- 4.16 Since my last report, the **Health, Safety and Well-being Service** carried out investigations into two events in the Highways and Municipal Department, one where a member of staff lost a part of his finger whilst using a machine, and the second involving an incident with a recycling lorry that could have led to a serious accident. Staff of the Health and Safety Service have been working closely with the Department as a result of both investigations in order to ensure that no such cases will happen again.

- 4.17 Since my last performance report the **democracy, language and translation** units have merged to create one service. The Service will continue to review their performance measures in order to see if they give us the best overview of how they serve the people of Gwynedd.
- 4.18 Having challenged the performance of the **Legal Service** they continue to report that there is a relatively high level of satisfaction with the service provided. 15 satisfaction questionnaires were returned between July and the end of October, where 13 of them scored 10 out of 10 and another two scored 7. I received an acceptable explanation in terms of why a lower score was provided, namely that it involved a court case where our solicitors had to respond there and then. I am wholly satisfied that this does not reflect the standard of the Service's work in its entirety.
- 4.19 Since my last report, a new exciting development is the appointment of Katie Sutherland to the post of Assistant Coroner. She is a solicitor in the medical negligence field, and is a fluent Welsh speaker.
- 4.20 Is it evident, similarly to a number of other Council services, that the Service is under increasing work pressure, and therefore I am keeping an eye on the ability of the number of existing staff to complete the increasing number of cases. It is good news that a new trainee will commence with the Service in the near future.
- 4.21 Of course, only the main performance matters are noted above. Whilst I have held detailed discussions on various other matters within the various units, I am satisfied that the performance of those other units are within the range of expected performance. These units are the Council's Business Support and Human Resources.

5 FINANCIAL POSITION / SAVINGS

- 5.1 All the savings schemes of the Corporate Support Department for 2019/20 have already been realised, with the exception of one scheme, namely *Merging the Learning and Development Unit and the Workforce Development Unit* valued at £30,000, and this is also on track to be completed on time.
- 5.2 £443,315 worth of expenditure reduction schemes on procurement projects have been identified for the 2019/20 financial year. Of these, £179,694 have already been completed, with the rest (£263,621) underway.
- 5.3 By working with one primary school to revisit their printing machinery contract, the Procurement Unit has managed to discover a financial saving of £11,681.19 this year, which will be returned to that specific school's budget (over the period of the previous three-year contract, there would be a saving of £35,043.58). I am very glad to hear of this work and I am looking forward to reporting further as the Unit continues to work with the Education Department.

6 NEXT STEPS AND TIMETABLE

6.1 None to note.

7 ANY CONSULTATIONS UNDERTAKEN PRIOR TO RECOMMENDING THE DECISION

7.1 Views of the Statutory Officers:

i. The Monitoring Officer:

No observations to add in relation to propriety.

ii. Head of Finance:

The report is a fair reflection of the Corporate Support Department and the Legal Service's positions regarding delivering on the savings plans, with all the 2019/20 savings plans having already being delivered, or on track to be delivered on time. Finance officers will continue to assist the Cabinet Member to monitor the plans

7.2 Views of the Local Member:

7.2.1 Not a local matter.

7.3 Results of Any Consultation:

7.3.1 None to note.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Performance Measures