
THE CABINET, TUESDAY, 13 OCTOBER 2020

Present -

Councillors: Dyfrig Siencyn, Dafydd Meurig, Craig ab Iago, Nia Jeffreys, Gareth Griffith, Dilwyn Morgan, Ioan Thomas, Gareth Thomas, Catrin Wager and Cemlyn Williams.

Also present-

Dilwyn Williams (Chief Executive), Morwena Edwards (Corporate Director), Iwan Evans (Head of Legal Services), Dafydd Edwards (Head of Finance Department) and Annes Siôn (Democracy Team Leader).

Item 6: Garem Jackson (Head of Education Department) and Gwern ap Rhisiart (Dwyfor/Meirionnydd Area Education Officer).

Item 7: Gareth Jones (Assistant Head of Environment Department),

Item 9: Aled Davies (Head of Adults, Health and Well-being Department) and Meilys Smith (Leader of Community Transformation Health and Care Team Programme)

Item 10, 11, 12 and 13: Ffion Madog Evans (Senior Finance Manager)

Item 15: Sion Huws (Senior Solicitor)

1. APOLOGIES

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

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were received.

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 Chair accepted the minutes of the meetings held on 8 and 15 September 2020 as a true record.

6. NEW SCHOOL IN CRICIETH

Submitted by Cllr. Cemlyn Williams

DECISION

Permission was granted to conduct a statutory consultation, in accordance with the requirements of section 48 of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013, on the proposal to increase the capacity of Ysgol Treferthyr to 150 and to relocate the school to an alternative site, referred to as the A497 site, on 1 September 2023, reporting back to the Cabinet following the completion of the consultation.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted and it was noted that the Council's Strategic Plan highlighted the need for Gwynedd pupils to receive education of the highest standard and within the best possible locations. It was highlighted that the Ysgol Treferthyr building was now unsuitable and it would be uneconomic to remain in the same building. Consequently, it was added that the decision required the school to be relocated to an alternative site.

The Head of Department noted that it was exciting to present the recommendation to invest in Cricieth and that the Council, through this scheme, would benefit from Band B funding from the 21st Century Schools Programme.

The background of the report was received from the Education Officer for Dwyfor and Meirionnydd who drew attention to the matter that Ysgol Llanystumdwy had by now withdrawn from the discussions. It was stated that a discussion had taken place regarding a suitable location for the school and attention was drawn to the favoured site. It was highlighted that it was necessary to increase the school's capacity to 150 and this was following lessons learnt in opening new schools, namely that the number of children tended to increase in the first years of a new school.

In terms of the budget, it was noted that the original application was for £4.97m; however, it was anticipated that the application would increase to £5.4m as there was a need for additional space for the ABC and Language Disorder Unit that will increase the project budget.

Observations arising from the discussion

- The report was welcomed and it was noted that the plan was exciting and was positive news for the future.
- Some of the challenges in terms of the location for wildlife were highlighted and the need to operate to retain wildlife there was emphasised. In addition, the low number of children living within the new school area was emphasised and an enquiry was made as to how the children would travel to school. It was stated that the department would commission further work to look into alternative routes to school.
- In terms of the former site, it was asked whether it would be offered to the community. It was stated that they would seek to see if the Council had use for the land prior to offering it to the community.

7. VOLUNTARY CODE FOR THE CONTROL OF TO LET SIGNS IN BANGOR

The report was presented by Cllr. Gareth Griffith.

DECISION

The information in the report was accepted confirming the outcome of the monitoring work and the success of the Voluntary Code for the management of to let signs in Bangor, adopted by the Cabinet on 16 October 2018.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted, noting that it was difficult to believe that two years had elapsed since issuing the Voluntary Code in areas of Bangor. It was expressed that the report followed a monitoring period. It was stated that the scheme had been a success and the department was continuing to respond to some companies.

Observations arising from the discussion

- The department was thanked for its work and Bangor companies were thanked for acting in accordance with the Voluntary Code. In the long term, with new companies being created, an enquiry was made as to how the department responded to these companies. It was noted that usually once the department became aware of the new company, they raised awareness of the code and worked with these companies.
- The companies were thanked for being so willing to cooperate and it was stressed that this demonstrated what can happen if a dialogue is maintained with companies.

8. COVID-19 - PREPARATIONS FOR A SECOND WAVE

The report was submitted by Dilwyn Williams

DECISION

To accept the update on the arrangements that are in place in preparation for a possible second wave of Covid-19.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted noting that the Covid situation was one that changed quickly. It was noted that the report had dated since it was written, nearly a fortnight ago, and the number of cases in Gwynedd over the last week had risen to 114.

It was noted that the purpose of the report was to illustrate what the Council has and will do in preparation for the second wave. It was highlighted that the Government had

created the worst reasonable scenario that was the planning grounds for the worst that could happen.

In terms of Gwynedd arrangements, it was stated that the departments had noted that the lessons learnt during the first wave had now been incorporated into the work of the departments. It was stated that staff continued to work from home and this reduced the risk within the Council. It was highlighted that there had been fewer issues with personal protective equipment as the Council had a sufficient supply. It was emphasised that one concern was the potential for the virus to spread and to take hold that could cause more demand on services with staff off work ill. It was noted that the Adults' Department had created a service continuity plan that would be discussed in the next report. It was added that there were arrangements to recover the Covid Team if the need arose.

It was noted that the Test, Trace and Protect Team had been extremely active but the numbers had been low over August. It was added that the numbers were gradually increasing. In terms of the Surveillance and Prevention Group, they now met nearly every day to keep an eye on the situation. It was added that this Group was a combination of the Council and partners such as the University that discuss specific areas. It was noted that this group was central to the discussion with Welsh Government regarding Bangor cases as well as the decision to create a new Health Protection Area following the high number of cases.

Observations arising from the discussion

- Local concerns were expressed about the regulations in Bangor in terms of green areas for residents to gain access to them; in addition it was asked whether the Trace and Protect system was the same for students. It was stated that the numbers had increased as a result of a high number of students with the virus and it was added that the Council was working closely with the University; also, the Test, Trace and Protect system was the same for students and residents.
- A need was expressed to bring pressure to bear on the Welsh Government to give financial support to Bangor businesses. In addition, it was stressed that there was a need for everyone to adhere to the regulations for a quicker return to the new normal.
- It was noted that preparations for winter were difficult as staff had been working hard over the last few months. It was added that the period had highlighted that staff were willing to go the extra mile. Staff were thanked for all their work. It was added that the period had highlighted the importance and value of local government.
- Concerns were raised about the well-being of staff if they continued to work for a long period of time.

9. ADULT CARE SERVICES WORKFORCE PLAN

The report was presented by Cllr. Dafydd Meurig

DECISION

- To approve the allocation of up to £375,000 of a one-off resource (analysed in the table in section 4 of the report) to the Adults Department 2020/21 budget, together with a further one-off resource of £390,000 to the 2021/22

budget, with the exact sum of the allocations to be reviewed at the end of the relevant two financial years.

- To support the proposal to spend the above additional budget on the cost of employing the workforce beyond the normal staffing budget levels, in response to the inevitable increase in demand for a social care service to safeguard the people of Gwynedd and to fill staffing gaps that appeared as a result of Covid19.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted, noting that the application was for one-off funding of £375,000 for 2020/21 and £390,000 for 2021/22. It was stated that the previous report had given the background to the need for funding and everyone was aware of the significant challenges facing the Adults' Department. It was noted that the report was an attempt to look at the worst possible scenario. It was added that there was a need to look at this before winter as the situation would interfere with staff well-being with staff not having an opportunity to take leave, members of staff being taken ill and an increase in demand.

The Leader of Community Transformation Health and Care Team Programme added that the department had prepared a Workforce Plan which was a piece of work that looked at areas such as what had happened, staff sickness levels and the demand for a service. It was noted that this piece of work had used the best possible national work model to try and predict covid numbers and give an idea to see what might hit the department during the second wave. It was highlighted that the department had coped incredibly and staff were willing to go the extra mile and a pool of temporary workforce had been established. It was further noted that the department was in a rather different place with staff now getting tired and had not had an opportunity to take leave and was looking to re-open some services. In addition, it was added that there were signs of an increase in demand as people were discharged home from hospital with the effects of Covid.

It was stated that the department had predicted how many staff could be off work ill and the department had planned reasonably on the basis of absences between 1 and 2%. This meant that approximately £60,000 needed to be identified in order to backfill absences due to sickness. It was noted, as staff had not been taking leave, that the amount of leave not taken was equivalent to 18 persons working for 20 hours a week until the end of the financial year. Therefore, £135,000 funding would need to be identified in order to backfill for staff to take their leave.

In addition to this, it was noted that there had been an increase in demand and the Council had a specific plan to respond to this by opening additional beds and care centres at Glan Llyn and Plas Menai. It was noted that in order to maintain services for a high number of people the equivalent of 30 additional members of staff would be required and this would be a cost of £120,000 this year and £390,000 in 2021/22. The need to recruit staff without delay was emphasised to ensure that staff were sufficiently trained.

Observations arising from the discussion

- It was stated that assessments suggested that at worst we may need over 300 additional staff for six weeks. Accepting that it was not practical to

deliver this, the solution would entail a combination of appointing a little more staff and then staff temporarily transferred and to divert staff from other council departments.

- Support for the application was highlighted and that the department was preparing as best it could.
- It was noted that the Finance Department was trying to maximise the sum that the Council claimed from the Government. It was explained that the Council would continue to spend as required in order to save lives and protect the health of Gwynedd residents, but the flexibility to claim had been reduced following the first quarter of the 2020/21 financial year, and there was no certainty of any additional funding by 2021/22. However, it was confirmed that every effort would be made to claim funding, with a need for Care officers, as well as the Council's Finance officers, to convince relevant civil servants in the context of funding this proactive Adult Care Services Workforce Plan.

10. SAVINGS OVERVIEW: PROGRESS REPORT ON REALISING SAVINGS SCHEMES

The report was presented by Cllr. Ioan Thomas

DECISION

- The information in the report was accepted and the progress towards realising the savings schemes for 2020/21, 2019/20 and previous years was noted.
- The alternative plans outlined in Section 6 and Appendix 5 to replace the historic schemes that could not be delivered were approved.
- It was noted that the impact of Covid-19 had contributed to a slippage in the savings programme, as the Council had given the utmost priority to safeguarding the health and lives of the people of Gwynedd in response to the crisis, which meant that it was not possible to continue with the performance challenging and savings arrangements during the crisis period.
- The intention of the Chief Executive and Head of Finance Department to meet with each Cabinet Member and their Heads of Department to discuss how it would be possible to re-grasp the procedure of delivering the proposed savings, so that the Council was able to proceed with a proportion of the savings programme, despite the crisis, was supported.

DISCUSSION

The report, which summarised the situation with the Council's savings was submitted. It was stated that since 2015/16, the Council had approved £36m of savings. It was noted this year that departments had focused on responding to the crisis and the impact of Covid-19 had contributed to the slippage in the savings programme. In addition, it was noted that priority had been given to safeguarding the health and lives of the people of Gwynedd that meant that it was not possible to continue with the performance challenging and savings arrangements over this period.

It was stated that realising savings was getting difficult, with further indications of difficulties to realise savings in certain fields. Attention was drawn to appendix 1, indicating that 98% of further savings in 2015/16 to 2018/19 had been achieved. The schemes with the highest risk were highlighted, including 'End to End' by the Children and Supporting Families Department.

It was noted that 76% of savings in 2019/20 had by now been achieved and the main delivery risks on schemes within the Adults Department, Environment together with the Children's Department. Looking at this year, it was stated that 16% had already been realised, and 34% were on track to be realised on time by the end of the financial year. It was emphasised that some schemes by the Highways and Municipal Department and the Housing and Property Department acknowledged that it was not possible for some schemes to be realised and alternative schemes are proposed.

It was stated that realising over £30m of savings since April 2015 had been challenging. It was added that the department had already anticipated a problem with achieving savings, a corporate provision was provided for the purpose in the 2020/21 budget, to mitigate the situation. It was stated that there was now a need to re-grasp the procedure of delivering savings, despite the crisis.

Observations arising from the discussion

- It was expressed that it was not a shock to anyone that the adults' department had not achieved savings this year. It was stated that the signs of cuts over ten years could now be clearly seen.
- It was noted that alternative schemes were to be seen to savings of the Highways and Municipal Department, but the department was assessing the way forward. It was stated that the saving was one thing; however, the sum would be different.
- It was stated that it was difficult to believe that cuts were being made in the middle of a pandemic. The importance of protecting services and the public was stated. It was stressed, with the second wave on the way that this would not be the end of the savings and it was asked when this would stop.
- It was highlighted that the past six months had shown the importance of having Council staff stepping in to fill the gaps and it was necessary to stabilise the situation further, not to make more savings.

11. REVENUE BUDGET 2020/21 - END OF AUGUST 2020 REVIEW

The report was presented by Cllr Ioan Thomas

DECISION

- The report on the end of August 2020 review of the Revenue Budget was accepted, and consideration was given the latest financial situation regarding the budgets of each department/service.
- The financial impact of Covid-19 was noted, which was a combination of additional costs, income losses and slippage in the savings programme, as the Council had given the utmost priority to safeguarding the health and lives of the people of Gwynedd in response to the crisis, which meant that it was not possible to continue with the performance challenging and savings arrangements during the crisis period.

- The intention of the Chief Executive and Head of Finance Department to meet with each Cabinet Member and their Heads of Department, to discuss how it would be possible to re-grasp the procedure of delivering the proposed savings, so that the Council could proceed with a proportion of the savings programme, despite the crisis, was supported.
- It was noted that there was significant overspend by the Adults, Health and Well-being Department this year, as complex details need to be clarified in Adult care; the Chief Executive had already commissioned work to obtain a better understanding of the matters and a clear response programme.
- It was noted that the Chief Executive had commissioned the Children's Budget Taskforce to address serious financial matters within the Children and Families Department to get to the root of the Department's overspend, with the intention of submitting a report to the Cabinet detailing the response plan.
- The following recommendations and financial virements (as outlined in Appendix 2) were approved.
 - On Corporate budgets, that:
 - (£250k) relating to capital costs had been transferred to the capital programme fund.
 - the net underspend of (£1,127k) on Corporate budgets would go towards the Council's general balances to assist in facing the financial challenge ahead of the Council, especially in light of the Covid-19 emergency.
- That grant receipts from the Government to compensate for additional expenditure and loss of income in relation to the Covid-19 crisis would be allocated to the relevant departments in accordance with what is noted in Appendix 1.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted, noting that it highlighted the latest review of the Council's revenue budget, along with the projections for the end of the financial year. It was stated that the figures in the end of August review highlighted the financial impact of Covid-19 on the figures, that were a combination of additional costs, income losses and a slippage in the savings programme.

It was noted that the Welsh Government had established a hardship fund to compensate for costs and loss of income of Local Authorities. In Gwynedd, monthly applications of over £4.5 million had been submitted to Welsh Government to compensate the Council for the period up to the end of August, with £3.6 million having already been received. In terms of the loss of income, an application for the first quarter of the financial year was nearly £3.7 million, with £3.3 million having already been received.

It was stressed that the pressure on departments had been evident this year and problems with realising savings had become increasingly prominent this year and contributed to the overspend reported in the Children, Adults and Highways and Municipal fields. The main matters in some of the sections were highlighted as the impact of Covid19 had had a significant repercussion on the Adults, Health and Well-being department this year, with £2.2 million spent up to the end of August. It was noted that £1.722 million had already been received from Welsh Government

and even without the impact of Covid, it was anticipated that there would be £1.8 million of over-expenditure to realise savings of the value of £1.7 million.

Although £1.8 million of additional funding was allocated to the Children and Families Department in 2020/21 an overspend of £2.8 million was anticipated as well as the failure to realise £688k savings that require a solution. It was stated that the latest statistics confirmed a further increase in demand for services, especially in the placements and Post-16 fields. It was emphasised that the situation was a matter of concern although it was not unique to Gwynedd.

It was highlighted that problems continued this year in the field of waste collection and disposal and the department faced additional costs relating to Covid; however, it was hoped that Welsh Government would compensate us for the additional costs.

Observations arising from the discussion

- Staff were thanked for their work and commitment during the last few months.
- Gratitude was expressed to Council's front-line staff. In terms of the Education Department, it was added that cleaning and catering costs had risen significantly as a result of Covid, and it was asked if these types of costs would be compensated by the Government. It was noted that this type of costs would be funded as it was a cost as a result of the virus.

12. CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2020/21 - END OF AUGUST 2020 REVIEW

The report was presented by Cllr. Ioan Thomas

DECISION

- To accept the report on the end of August review (31 August 2020 position) of the capital programme.
- To approve funding the revisions as shown in part 4 of the report, namely:
 - use of various sources, worth a total of £3,646,000, to fund actual slippages from 2019/20
 - a reduction of £558,000 in the use of borrowing,
 - an increase of £7,105,000 in the use of grants and contributions,
 - no change in the use of capital receipts,
 - an increase of £53,000 in the use of revenue contributions,
 - no change in the use of the capital reserve, and
 - an increase of £283,000 in the use of renewal funds and others.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted, noting that its main purpose was to present the capital programme and to approve the relevant funding sources. It was added that the impact of Covid was to be seen on the capital programme with only 13% of the budget spent up to the end of August.

It was emphasised that the Council had firm plans in place to invest approximately £44m this year with £17m funded by attracting specific grants. It was stated that it

was anticipated that there would be slippage of £9.4 million this year to the following year; however, there would be no financial loss. The additional grants that had been attracted were noted and these included £2.3m in Phase II Homelessness Grant, £2.2m 21st Century Schools Grant and £1.3m in Grants from the Local Transport Fund and Active Travel Fund.

Observations arising from the discussion

- Attention was drawn to the Schools Grant and it was stated that this funding was to renovate one of the county's secondary schools. The importance of such projects was stressed to ensure support for young people.
- It was highlighted that £100m capital funding over the three financial years 2020/21 - 2022/23 was significant and it was expected that there would be slippage this year. It was noted that there was pride that there was so much investment within the county.

13. FINANCIAL PLANNING

The report was presented by Cllr. Ioan Thomas

DECISION

Approved - the procedure and timetable to produce the 2021/22 Budget, while noting that financial planning was extremely challenging, and therefore if there was a funding gap to balance the 2021/22 budget, that the Council would use contingencies and reserves to mitigate resource losses in the short-term.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted noting that it outlined the procedure to produce the 2021/22 budget in this year's unprecedented context. It was stated that the department was currently identifying 2021/22 expenditure needs and bids for additional resources would come before the Cabinet soon.

Since the agenda for this meeting was published, it was stated that it had become apparent that the UK Government would not publish an autumn 'Budget'; however, the Treasury was to hold a one-year Comprehensive Spending Review. It was noted that the Welsh Government intended to publish the local authorities' draft settlement in December, with the final settlement in March. It was added that this was a challenging schedule for local authorities, with an extended period of financial uncertainty. However, it was stated that Gwynedd Council would be starting from a relatively robust financial base.

The 'devilish dozen' list of uncertain financial issues faced by the Council was outlined, including the impact of Covid, Brexit and the trends of price inflation. It was stated that financial planning would be extremely challenging and it was elaborated that the gap in the budget could be up to £8m; however, Gwynedd's firm budgetary base should allow us to 'bridge' in the short-term.

It was suggested that the Council was anxious to avoid giving unnecessary consideration to lists of savings and cuts during a second wave of the pandemic and if there is a funding gap to balance the 2021/22 budget for now. It was recommended for the Council to consider using contingency budgets and funds to alleviate the loss of resources and to increase the Council Tax by 3.5%.

In the longer term, the contingency funds would need to be replenished, so that they were available in the future. It was stated that when there was less uncertainty it would be possible to establish plans for the medium term. The schedule of reports to the Cabinet was highlighted and it was noted that a series of member consultation seminars would be held virtually in January. The time-schedule to set the budget was outlined.

Observations arising from the discussion

- It was stated that it was an uncertain period to budget for the future.
- The importance of January seminars for members was highlighted, as it was an opportunity for members to give their views on the budget.
- It was noted that the Council was in a comparatively strong position, due to the firm base, to buy time.
- The finance team were thanked for their work.

14. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Resolved to exclude the press and public from the meeting during the discussion on the following item due to the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 12 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 - Information regarding a specific individual.

This paragraph is relevant as the report includes information about a specific individual who has a right to privacy during the appointment procedure. There is no public interest that calls for disclosing personal information about these individuals which would outweigh the rights of these individuals at this point. Consequently, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

15. APPOINTMENT OF SENIOR OPERATIONAL CORONER

The report was presented by Cllr. Nia Jeffreys

DECISION

1. To authorise the Head of Legal Services, subject to the confirmation of the Chief Coroner and the Lord Chancellor, to determine conditions and to appoint Kate Sutherland, the existing Assistant Coroner of the North West Wales Area to act as a Senior Coroner until the authority had addressed the question of merging areas and until a permanent Senior Coroner had been appointed.
2. To authorise the Head of Legal Services to hold a review to consider the propriety of merging the North West Wales Coroner area with other areas, including commencing discussions with the North Wales Councils, along with any other relevant stakeholders, the Chief Coroner and the Ministry of Justice, and to emphasise the importance of having a Senior Coroner who could maintain the service through the medium of Welsh and await a report back on the findings and the way forward.

DISCUSSION

The report was discussed.

The meeting commenced at 1.00pm and concluded at 4.00pm.

CHAIR