

GWYNEDD COUNCIL CABINET

Report to a meeting of Gwynedd Council Cabinet

Date:	6 July 2021
Title of Item:	Performance Report of the Cabinet Member for Children and Supporting Families
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Dilwyn Morgan
Contact Officer:	Morwena Edwards, Corporate Director

THE DECISION SOUGHT

To accept and note the information in the report.

THE REASON WHY A DECISION IS NEEDED

In order to ensure effective performance management

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update my fellow members on developments in the fields within my remit as Cabinet Member for Children and Supporting Families. This includes outlining the latest developments to date in 2021-22 against the pledges within the 2018-2023 Gwynedd Council Plan; issues and the progress of performance measures; and the latest on the savings and cuts schemes.
- 1.2 I wish to remind you that all the matters have already been discussed and scrutinised in Performance Challenging meetings, which also included representatives from the Scrutiny Committee.
- 1.3 The priority projects featured in the Council Plan are progressing, and are on track to deliver against our pledges, and their purpose. A few other matters of concern have been brought to our attention through performance challenging, and I outline these below.

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2 GWYNEDD COUNCIL PLAN PROJECTS 2018-2023

2.1 Below, we note the progress that has been made to date against the Department's priority projects. These priorities address the department's main risks. In general, I feel that every project is currently moving in the right direction against the pledges that we have made in the Council Plan.

2.2 A Strategy for Keeping Families Together

I am pleased to note that the Safeguarding Children Effectively, a Ffordd Gwynedd strategy jointly between the Children and Education Department; and the development of the Strategy for Keeping Families Together, are all progressing as anticipated. I will return to the Cabinet soon to present that Strategy.

2.3 Securing a local, appropriate specialist provision for children with complex needs

Although the pandemic has delayed this transformation programme, I can note that the Department, jointly with the Health Board and Anglesey Council, has adapted and recommenced the project. The recruitment process for trialling a Multi-agency Team has progressed; and a training programme to support children with profound and complex needs has commenced since January, and brings together the workforce from education, social care and health.

2.4 Ensure that families and children with autism have access to the support they need to thrive

A project group has been established and it has completed a review of the current experiences of families with autistic children. The Group has created a draft Autism Plan, which shows what we need to do in response to the recommendations in the review. I will present this plan to the Cabinet soon, as elements of the plan seek to address the issue of raising awareness of autism and that it is everyone's business. One matter of concern in a field that I, with the support of the Corporate Director, will be escalating formally with the Health Board, is the waiting lists for Neuro-developmental assessments, and the impact of this on children and their families here in Gwynedd.

2.5 Supporting People's Well-being

The work of supporting the well-being of people over the past months has continued to focus on responding to the challenges and side-effects of the pandemic. Mainly, this work has continued around supporting the food poverty provision, establishing the Hwb Help pilot (Maesgeirchen) as a part of the North Wales recovery plan, and focusing on establishing arrangements for the work streams that have been prioritised by us as a Council. Some of those work streams are moving forward well, e.g. homelessness prevention, carers, and some of the other work streams need to be confirmed further.

3. PERFORMANCE AND MEASURES

3.1 I wish to draw your attention to the following matters, which are unrelated to the Priority Projects, but that are being addressed by the department because they are affecting the performance of services and/or causing us concern.

- 3.2 Workforce Capacity - The Department is implementing temporary arrangements in order to deal with a shortage in the required number of social workers, by redeploying employees to the Social Work Teams. The department is also continuing to attempt to recruit social workers. The Council is competing with other counties for employees, in a context of higher salaries being paid in the other counties, a general shortage in the field, and the need for Welsh speakers. The caseloads of the current workforce are increasing, and a number of those cases are complex and require more time, attention and support. The risk surrounding the capacity of the existing workforce, if we are unable to respond to it, will affect our remaining ability to deliver the priority projects and the day-to-day work; as well as being detrimental to the health and well-being of the staff themselves.
- 3.3 Failure in the information systems - We are concerned about the WCCIS system, which holds the department's records of cases and families. The issue is being discussed at a national level, jointly with other authorities, Welsh Government and the software companies; however, we are not confident at present that a robust solution is in place to safeguard that system or its flaws.
- 3.4 In terms of the department's measures, I am generally happy with their performance. I wish to draw your attention to two in particular, which illustrate the department's story during the period in question in that report.
- 3.5 The numbers contacting the Department for Information, Advice or Assistance increased to 522 in April and 575 in May, compared with 460 per month, in the same months last year. This may well be a reflection of the side effects of the pandemic and a sign of what is to come in terms of residents' need for support.
- 3.6 It is also pleasing to be able to report so early in the year about the impact of our efforts to keep families together, which, as you know, is one of the department's priority projects. With 857 children open to the department on 31 May, 45% of them are living with their parents / family / friends.

4 FINANCIAL POSITION / SAVINGS

- 4.1 The Cabinet has discussed the department's main savings scheme, the End to End Plan, in January 2021, when £1,149,000 of the target was deleted (£688,000 of the target up to 2020/21 and a further £460,000 for 2021/22). However, the department is continuing to look to achieve the amended savings target by improving the efficiency of its work arrangements.
- 4.2 At the end of the 2020/21 financial year, the Department received financial support to the tune of £1,261,000 to clear its overspend for the year, which was mainly in the out-of-county placements. For 2021/22, as part of the bids system, the Department received £1,824,000 worth of permanent bids to meet the unavoidable pressure mainly on looked-after children placements. Early forecasts this year suggest that the combination of additional resources together with deleting savings worth £1,149,000, has assisted with the Department's financial position and, therefore, based on the current situation, it is anticipated that it will be possible to stay within the budget

5 Views of the Statutory Officers:

- i. The Monitoring Officer:** *"No observations to add in relation to propriety"*

ii. Head of Finance: *“Part 4 of this performance report expands on the risks associated with the relevant savings plans. Officers from the Finance Department have collaborated with the report’s author and I am satisfied that Part 4 of the report is a fair reflection of the situation.”*

a. Views of the Local Member:

- i. Not a local matter.

b. Results of Any Consultation:

- i. None to note.
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Appendices