

# GWYNEDD COUNCIL CABINET



## A Report to a meeting of the Gwynedd Council Cabinet

**Date of meeting:** 12 October 2021

**Cabinet Member:** Councillor Gareth Thomas

**Contact Officer:** Sioned Williams

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**Subject:** CABINET MEMBER FOR ECONOMY AND COMMUNITY'S PERFORMANCE CHALLENGING REPORT

### THE DECISION SOUGHT

To accept and note the information in the report.

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### THE REASONS WHY A DECISION IS NEEDED

To ensure effective performance management

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### 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 Economy and Community. This will include outlining the latest developments against 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 remind you that all matters have already been the subject of discussions and were scrutinised by myself at a meeting of the Department's Senior Management Team on 14 September 2021, which also included representatives from the Scrutiny Committee.
- 1.3 Given the additional demand on the Department's services over recent months due to the impact of COVID 19, I am very satisfied with the performance of the services. Some services have been redesigned with new, more sustainable service provision models being introduced to ensure the safety of staff and service users. Some services have had to change their priorities entirely and divert staff to cope with the additional demand to support businesses and cope with the significant increase in the number of visitors to the area. I'm very supportive of these changes that have been introduced to respond to the demand but there will be a need to revise the resources to remodel and maintain services in future.



## 2. PROJECTS IN THE GWYNEDD COUNCIL PLAN 2018-2023 [Improvement Priorities]

### Project 1: Growth Vision for North Wales

- 2.1 There has been significant progress with the scheme so far during the year. The initial business plans of several schemes within the North Wales Growth Deal have been approved including some that are a priority for Gwynedd such as the Rural Economy Hub in Glynllifon and the Bangor University Digital Signal Processing Centre of Excellence. Officers and Members continue to make significant contributions to the work of the Economic Ambition Board to ensure that it delivers. [This link](#) will take you to a report that includes more details about the progress of the various growth projects.

### Project 2: Create High Value Jobs

- 2.2 The economic challenge caused by the coronavirus crisis has affected the work of this scheme during the last year with businesses delaying their plans to invest and develop. The programme includes a range of activities including working with sectors that are likely to create good jobs (such as the media / digital), developing opportunities for well-paid jobs within existing sectors and preparing Gwynedd school pupils to take advantage of the opportunities. The scheme also ensures that developments with the potential to create a large number of good jobs are able to move forward and it is heartening to note there has been important progress in this work stream in recent months, specifically:

- Welsh Government has established Cwmni Eginio to facilitate ensuring there will be further developments on the site in future.
- The continuation of investment from the Llanbedr site owners is positive despite the Government's decision to review road schemes which has caused uncertainty in terms of the proposal to improve access to the airfield – an investment that is crucial to realise the site's full potential and create good jobs for local residents.

### Project 3: Arloesi Gwynedd Wledig

- 2.3 Our efforts to ensure the prosperity of our rural areas are continuing despite the ARFOR programme coming to an end. The lessons learnt through the projects have been analysed and I'm pleased that our efforts locally to break new ground with the programme have received wide-spread recognition and have led to real outcomes. For example, the support provided through the Support for Enterprise grant will lead to the creation of 60 new jobs and the Llwyddo'n Lleol scheme has led to creating 22 new businesses by local young people in Gwynedd and Anglesey (more details about ARFOR's activity can be found here <https://bwrlwmarfor.cymru/en/>). The Council has presented its case to Welsh Government to continue to invest in the programme in future.
- 2.4 Beyond ARFOR, the Local Action Group of the LEADER programme in Gwynedd continues to innovate by implementing a range of schemes to support rural communities and businesses especially in light of the challenges deriving from the pandemic within areas such as community transport, on-line commerce and supporting the high street by introducing technology to measure town centre use across the county. More information about LEADER's work in Gwynedd is available by visiting [www.facebook.com/ArloesiGwyneddWledig](http://www.facebook.com/ArloesiGwyneddWledig) and you can receive regular updates by subscribing to their circular [here](#).



#### **Project 4: Promotion of Town Centres**

- 2.5 The emphasis of this project has been diverted due to COVID, however a package of environmental improvements is being implemented at the moment in light of the success in attracting Welsh Government grants. The package also includes developing digital infrastructure in town centres to offer wi-fi; a new marketing and joint-commerce platform and a method for collecting and managing data on town centre trends. The work of developing projects as part of the Bangor City Centre Regeneration Scheme is continuing, giving consideration to new funding opportunities for the county's principal towns. Issues relating to vacant properties have also been addressed, with the intention of setting up a Cross-departmental Group to develop a specific action plan.

#### **Project 5: Implementing Gwynedd Slate Heritage**

- 2.6 I'm very proud of the Department's success in leading the work on securing the World Heritage Designation for the Slate Landscapes of North West Wales on 28 July 2021. There was exceptional coverage in the local, national and international press and excitement and pride in our communities. The activities of the LleCHI programme have continued within communities and over recent months Dyffryn Nantlle has created an anthem, murals have been painted across the area, various exhibitions held and the work of the Young Ambassadors has continued. Since the designation was announced, discussions have continued with the Heritage Lottery Fund, Welsh Government, Museum Wales and key partners on the potential funding structure for the future with a grant application being prepared for the communities through the LleCHI 2 programme.
- 2.7 Over the coming months, we will agree on a new operating structure for the Steering Board and its sub-groups, develop bids for funding to implement the Interpretation Scheme, consult on the Supplementary Planning Guidance and publish the 'Gofalu am ein Tirlun Llechi' booklet and Community Design Guidance. We will also seek to ensure the best benefits for the communities and businesses of Gwynedd in light of the designation.

#### **Project 6: Benefiting from Tourism**

- 2.8 Work has been done to agree on tourism principles for Gwynedd that will form the basis to a future management plan. An Operational Group has also been set up to consider the response to the COVID situation for the 2021 season. The arrangements have been discussed at the Scrutiny Committee and in the first quarter of this year the Cabinet agreed on a consultation document. It is intended to hold a conference before the end of the year to introduce the principles to Gwynedd communities and businesses with an opportunity to make observations before the vision and Action Plan are adopted in 2022.
- 2.9 The Plan will set a direction for policies and activities across the Council and the National Park Authority's departments in the future, and the work will need to be intertwined across departments e.g. the Review of the Local Development Plan and the Regeneration Framework.

#### **Project 7: Businesses Receiving Support to Prosper**

- 2.10 It continues to be an uncertain time for Gwynedd businesses because of COVID and Brexit despite how busy the county was during the summer period. Through this scheme we are maintaining our focus on providing support and assistance to enterprises in the county by working across Council departments. During recent months we have continued to provide



financial support to help businesses survive by offering funding to 71 businesses between June and July. We have also endeavoured to ensure that our businesses have the information they need to keep their staff and customers safe and have access to every support that is available to them. Over 4,300 businesses now receive our information bulletins.

- 2.11 The appetite to establish and develop businesses has returned recently and there will be an increased focus in our work for the coming months on ensuring that the appropriate support and advice is available to help local companies to achieve their potential and create high-quality work for the people of Gwynedd. But I must draw your attention to the service's capacity to maintain the level of support for businesses. Staff have been temporarily diverted from different services in the Department over the last year to be able to cope with the demand for support from businesses. I have asked the Department to review the staffing structure to look at how they can maintain this support in future.

### **Project 8: Gwynedd Residents Playing a Full Part in the World of Work**

- 2.12 The labour market in Gwynedd has witnessed significant changes over recent months. During the winter months, unemployment in the county was higher than it has been for years, with 4,365 claiming unemployment benefits in Gwynedd in February. By summer-time the situation had changed entirely with 2,985 claiming unemployment benefits and businesses looking for staff and reporting recruitment difficulties.
- 2.13 Throughout this time the Council's Gwaith Gwynedd team has responded quickly and with flexibility to address the need. Support was provided to workers who were losing their jobs to refine and retain their skills, including working with partners to introduce a specific scheme to support young people through the UK Government's 'Kickstart' programme. More recently, the team has been helping businesses to promote jobs and recruitment as a number have reported difficulty in finding workers (including the local Kickstart scheme). 112 people have secured work because of the help they have received from the team between April and July 2021.
- 2.14 This area of work remains a priority; there is a risk that the number of unemployed in the county will increase again after the summer months and as the furlough scheme comes to an end. There were 6,400 people on furlough in Gwynedd on 30/04/21, which accounts for 14% of the labour market. The need to ensure that local residents possess the skills to secure more of the jobs that pay in the county will continue to be a challenge during coming years.

### **Project 9: Forming a Regeneration Plan for our Areas**

- 2.15 The Council's Regeneration Board has supported the proposal of developing a New Regeneration Framework for the County, but the work had to be postponed last year due to the pandemic. Earlier this year, it was decided to proceed with the programme, and the preparatory work has been completed. The proposed Regeneration Framework will include a county-wide document along with local regeneration plans for 13 areas across Gwynedd. In July, a series of meetings were held with Local Members to offer an update on the work and the proposed arrangements.
- 2.16 Engagement and consultation work with local communities will be central to the programme. Arrangements have been prepared for the 'Our Area Engagement Plan 2035' that will also be an opportunity to intertwine various engagement exercises being planned across the Council. Assessments of individual areas have been prepared and circulated to Local Members, Town and Community Councils and local progressive groups. Initial discussions will be held with



Members and local organisations from September onwards, offering a basis for detailed engagement work during November.

### **3. PERFORMANCE**

- 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 concern. The information does not refer to each service in the department, only towards those we feel need to be brought to your attention.

#### **Maritime Service**

- 3.2 It was anticipated that there would be a significant number of visitors to the area during this year's summer season and the Service introduced new functions to the arrangements including an on-line registration provision, accepting card payments on the main slipways, increasing the number of seasonal staff and promoting beach safety messages.
- 3.3 During Q1 2021/2, the coast was exceptionally busy – with the number of visitors very likely to be the highest ever seen (data to follow). On the whole, it is considered that the arrangements have worked well, and the staff's work and commitment under challenging circumstances should be recognised. A few members of beach staff were required to self-isolate in accordance with the COVID arrangements at times placing additional pressure on the work arrangements. Unfortunately, several cases were recorded during this time where there was a threatening or aggressive attitude towards staff. The Service has also dealt with a limited number of serious accidents, which included deaths, which are subject to further work. In accordance with the usual procedure, the Service will hold an annual review of the arrangements following the summer season.
- 3.4 There was also an increase within the harbour and the number of vessels / personal water-craft on the sea. For 2021/2 there is a 35% increase in the number of annual customers at Hafan; along with an increase in the number of power boat and personal water-craft permits issued. Despite the Service's efforts, there is still a gap in the right to enforce against personal water-craft; along with concerns about cases that vessels are being launched without registering with the Council. I would also like to draw the Members' attention to the fact that the UK Government has very recently announced a consultation on the proposal to include Personal Water-craft within maritime legislation in order to manage them, and there will be an opportunity for the Council to submit observations as part of the consultation.

#### **Country Parks**

- 3.5 During this time, our Rural Parks were also busy and welcomed many visitors. At Parc Padarn, additional management arrangements were put in place including seasonal staff, signage, waste arrangements (through the Highways and Municipal Department) and appointing a security company on weekends. Whilst double yellow lines have been laid along the highway in the Glyn area, it is considered that further measures are needed in the area. It is anticipated that a parking order on Y Glyn car parks would offer enforcement powers, generating an income for the Council from the significant use made of the site. A report on the condition of the old structures of the slate industry has also been prepared with the intention of targeting external funding resources to restore and safeguard them.



## Supporting Communities

- 3.6 During 2021/2, the Service is prioritising the work of developing a new Regeneration Framework for the County's communities. During Q1, attention was given to developing the 'Our Area Engagement Plan 2035' with the Corporate Communication Unit. The Service will lead on the work of arranging and holding initial discussions with local organisations from September onwards.
- 3.7 In June, the CIST Gwynedd fund for 2021/22 was opened, and all the resources (revenue and capital) have been allocated during the first round. During this time the Service also promoted and administrated Welsh Government 'one-off' grants available for community groups to respond to special circumstances (including COVID and Brexit).

## Regeneration Programmes

- 3.8 During 2021/2, the Service will prioritise the work of developing town centre regeneration projects and programmes. Since April of this year, the Welsh Government's New Regeneration Programme 'Transforming Towns' has become operational, with new regional arrangements in place. The Service is collaborating with several local groups to consider opportunities to attract grants from the programme. The Service has also been supporting the Bangor and Caernarfon Business Improvement Areas which has established a second term since April of this year.
- 3.9 During Q1, there was also additional work to prepare the Council's application for Barmouth, Bala and the Hirael area in Bangor for funding from the UK Government's 'Levelling Up' programme.
- 3.10 There will be a need to re-design this service in future to be able to implement regeneration schemes that are a priority for the Council in future.
- 3.11 In terms of the Department's indicators and measures, I am happy with the performance. The monthly reports I receive from the services show that the numbers using our services remain low as opposed to 2019, due to COVID. There are arrangements in place to amend the services in future in light of the experiences of the last two years and our measures will be reviewed.

## Events

- 3.12 2021-22 continues to be a challenging year for events organisers in Gwynedd. The Council has continued to provide support and advice to organisers, but has also adopted arrangements to consult with Local Members and Community Councils before supporting any events on Council lands. Arrangements for holding events on Snowdon are also being confirmed between the Council and Snowdonia National Park.
- 3.13 I wish to draw your attention to the following measures as they have shown significant change since 2019:
- **Libraries Service.** Whilst the number of loans between April and July 2021 are much lower than the historic pattern – 44,481 (not including digital items) compared with nearly 35,000 on average every month in 2019/20; the level is much higher than the previous year when only 77,641 loans were recorded over the entire year. But during the same time a new service has been introduced to respond to the demand from Gwynedd residents. 1,361 home delivery packs have been distributed between April and July 2021 and 3,899 click and



collect packages have been provided over the same time. We will consider this data when measuring performance in the future.

- **Museums and Galleries.** Although Storiell and the Lloyd George Museum have reopened, the service's ability to attract the same level of visitors has been affected due to restrictions on the numbers admitted to the buildings. This means that only 2,192 visitors have been admitted to the buildings between April and July 2021 compared with nearly 20,000 on average over the same time in 2019. But in response to the situation in 2020 the service has introduced a new digital service. Between April and July 2021, 138,727 engaged with this service. The new service has extended access to users and introduced access to a new audience. We will consider how to build on this platform in future by measuring performance.
- **Byw'n Iach.** Although the leisure centres have reopened since May, they are not able to attract the same level of users as COVID continues to limit the numbers that are able to use the space safely and there is a need to re-establish customers' patterns of use. Between May and June 2021, 54,757 used the leisure centres, which accounted for nearly 70% of the total number of visits for the whole of 2020/21. But the level remains below the pre COVID levels when an average of approximately 105,000 used the centres every month. We will continue to support Cwmni Byw'n Iach to plan to respond to the income gap in light of the reduction in the number of service users.

#### 4. FINANCIAL POSITION / SAVINGS

- 4.1 The Economy and Community Department underspent by £100k at the end of the 2020/21 financial year, mainly as there were fewer costs as a result of closing several services for significant periods of the year. A detailed review of the Department's financial situation in 2021/22 was held recently as part of a revenue review at the end of August for the entire Council. It is anticipated that the Department will underspend by £203k by the end of the 2021/22 financial year. The main reason for the underspend is the Department is exceeding on its income levels for this year, specifically in the fields of beaches and Hafan moorings. This situation will be reported as a separate item to the Cabinet on 12 October 2021.
- 4.2 I will need to discuss the budget for 2022/23 with the Department given the increase in income and the call for a larger budget to meet the demand in light of COVID once the Government grants come to an end.
- 4.3 The Department does not have a new savings scheme for 2021/22 but there are 4 plans that are carrying over from previous years with 3 awaiting approval to increase fees as part of a parking review. There are arrangements in the pipeline by the Environment Department to carry out the review and the timetable to realise the savings is reliant on this work. I hope to be able to confirm the timetable for the next meeting.

#### 5. NEXT STEPS AND TIMETABLE

I will continue to monitor the performance of the various services monthly and will submit a further report for the Cabinet's attention on re-designing the regeneration and business support service.



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## **VIEWS OF THE STATUTORY OFFICERS**

### **The Monitoring Officer:**

No observations to add in relation to propriety

### **Head of Finance Department:**

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.

The report highlights a number of ways in which the pandemic has had a significant impact on the Department's performance measures and as such has created a delay in some savings plans. However, it's positive to see an increase in users of some services, e.g. an increase in the number of users of Hafan identified in 3.4.