

GWYNEDD COUNCIL CABNET



Report to a meeting of Gwynedd Council Cabinet

Date of meeting: 12 October 2021
Cabinet Member: Councillor Nia Jeffreys
Contact Officer: Geraint Owen/ Iwan Evans
Contact Number: 01286 679072
Subject: CHALLENGE PERFORMANCE REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR THE CORPORATE SUPPORT DEPARTMENT AND LEGAL SERVICE

THE DECISION SOUGHT

To accept and note the information in the report.

THE REASONS 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 what has been happening in the fields within my remit as Cabinet Member for the Corporate Support Department and the Legal Service. 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 wish to remind you that all matters have already been the subject of discussions and have been scrutinised by myself at a meeting of the Corporate Support Department's Management Team on 15 September, which also included representatives from the Audit and Governance Committee.
- 1.3 I am satisfied that the projects being led by the Department, along with the day-to-day performance, are undertaken within the budget, with a number of examples where achievements exceed expectation under difficult circumstances. To this end, I wish to note my appreciation of the work of all the Department's and the Legal Service's officers.

CORPORATE SUPPORT DEPARTMENT

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

The Corporate Support Department is leading on 9 of the improvement priorities, which appear in the Council Plan for this year. I summarise what has been achieved thus far as follows:

2.1 KEEPING THE BENEFIT LOCAL

2.1.1 During the year, we have been trialling a new methodology to assess tenders based on social value and local impact.

2.1.2 As part of the pilot scheme, we have completed the procurement process in order to award the Adults Service Direct Payments contract using the new methodology. Undertaking the pilot has enabled us to better understand how these arrangements work on a practical level and some of the opportunities and associated risks.

2.1.3 The company that was awarded a contract valued at £200,000 has committed to:

- Employ 3 officers who live in Gwynedd
- Hold 4 training sessions for social care students
- 4 weeks of work experience for 2 students
- Offer 20 hours of voluntary time to support local charities
- 2.5 hours per week to further develop the Welsh language skills of the workforce

2.1.4 These benefits are in addition to what would have formed part of the contract with the successful company in the past.

2.1.5 Should we recommend that the Council adopts this procedure in due course, we would recommend that two other procurement pilot schemes are undertaken in different areas of work. We will gather market feedback along with feedback from procurement officers as part of the final assessment.

2.2 WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

2.2.1 The main purpose of this project is to boost the number of women who apply for and attain senior positions within the Council by reviewing the employment conditions and environment to attract more women to undertake the work in future. The project group has responded by submitting a Developing Potential Programme for women in the Council. It is aimed for the programme to respond to the development needs and aspirations of women. A mentoring programme has also been established in order for Council leaders to be mentors and the first session was held during September this year.

2.2.2 In May 2021, the project group organised discussion forums. The purpose of the discussion forums is to provide a space for women to discuss matters that can affect their career choices and aspirations. These forums are also an opportunity for women to support and encourage each other. 21 women across Council departments attended the forums. The topics discussed are receiving

further attention from the project group such as - reminding the workforce of the menopause policy, the maternity and paternity policy, development opportunities and preparing future leaders.

2.2.3 Two discussion forums were also arranged for the Council's female Elected Members. 11 Members attended. Topics such as working hours, recruiting more women to the role, social media and work-life balance were discussed.

2.2.4 The intention of all this is to offer opportunities for women to develop careers such as senior leaders through a combination of creating the appropriate working environment and supporting them on a personal level to take advantage of those opportunities.

2.3 ENSURING FAIRNESS FOR EVERYONE

2.3.1 The Equality and Inclusion Policy was adopted by the Council on 6 July (about 6 months ahead of schedule). Its intention is to help officers to ensure fairness for people with various equality characteristics. We are now working on an action and communication plan in order to implement the policy.

2.3.2 An engagement exercise (electronic survey) was completed in order to gather information about any barriers that face the people of Gwynedd when dealing with the Council. We also engaged with staff in order to help us to understand the attitudes of staff towards training and equality training in particular. The information is currently being analysed with the intention of completing the work during the autumn.

2.3.3 A report on staff equality data was shared with the Cabinet on 6 July as part of the 2020-21 Annual Report. Efforts continue to ensure that a higher percentage of staff respond to the request to complete the questionnaire.

2.3.4 A voluntary audit is undertaken on the gender pay gap every three years and we should have undertaken the previous audit in 2020. Due to the pandemic, it was not possible to undertake it at that time, but an independent specialist is currently undertaking the review and it is anticipated that we will receive the results soon.

2.3.5 The work of identifying what needs to be done in order to reach Level 2 of the "Disability Confident" Scheme (a scheme that provides guidance to organisations on how to support disabled people within the workforce) has been completed. We will now proceed to draw up an action plan. The successful delivery of this work will be another way of showing that the Council is committed to ensure equality in the workplace and beyond.

2.4 NATIVE WELSH PLACE NAMES

2.4.1 This work has been established as a new improvement priority in the latest review of the Council Plan in order to:

- Reconcile the way the Council operates when recognising Welsh names
- Ensure that the Welsh versions of place names are given priority with external partners
- Seek to take proactive steps to protect and prevent more changes to native names

2.4.2 A project officer was appointed to act on drawing up a work programme and to deliver the key milestones. They are a combination of matters within the Council's control (principles the Council can pass) and matters that need further attention by collaborating with others. The new officer has commenced in post since the beginning of September.

2.5 PROMOTING THE USE OF THE WELSH LANGUAGE WITHIN THE COUNCIL'S SERVICES

2.5.1 This is the scheme that has already managed to ensure a specific language specification for every post in the Council and has gone to considerable lengths to verify the ability of current post-holders to meet the linguistic requirements of their posts (as well as supporting individuals who require further development to meet those requirements). This is how things stand:

- **2593** of central staff have submitted a self-assessment
- **65%** of central staff have submitted a self-assessment
- **92%** reach (or pass) the Language Specifications of their posts

2.5.2 It is good to note that the percentage of staff who reach (or mostly, pass) the Language Specification of their post is also increasing, with 672 staff members reaching the Specifications exactly, and another 1,722 with higher skills than the Language Specifications of their posts.

2.5.3 There was close collaboration with the Highways and Municipal Department to move the project forward in that Department.

- 1 service has finished the task of gathering assessments from staff
- Currently discussing recruitment and appointment arrangements in order to ensure consistency with the rest of the Council.

2.5.4 Another encouraging development, and following a specific campaign to collect assessments from the front-line workforce of the care field (Adults, Health and Well-being and the Children and Supporting Families Departments), is that it was managed to collect approximately 10 times the assessments in August compared to June this year.

2.5.5 Finally, the Language Skills System continues to be developed on a joint basis with the Information Technology Service. Recently added was the ability to track the progress of individuals by comparing all of the assessments they had completed.

2.6 THE WELSH LANGUAGE AND PUBLIC SERVICES

2.6.1 As a result of reforming the Language sub-group under the Public Services Board, an outline was submitted of the receptions project that had received support in principle by the Board in June 2021.

It is emphasised that the focus of the project (and the programme in its entirety) is on the use made of services available in Welsh, and not on the availability of services where they should be available by default.

- 2.6.2 Therefore, the aim of the project will be to understand which factors create the best possible context to encourage the use of Welsh language services. At the end of the project, the sub-group expects to
- receive a list of recommendations to address the factors that influence linguistic choices, the most effective way of implementing them, and also what weakens those influences.
 - The objective then will be to enable organisations to plan, structure and present their Welsh language services in the most effective way.
- 2.6.3 The full project brief was submitted to the Public Services Board in September, with a view to commission external resources to drive the work forward.

2.7 ENSURING THAT MANAGERS PRACTICE THEIR HEALTH AND SAFETY ROLE EFFECTIVELY

- 2.7.1 There are several reasons why there are more pressures than ever on organisations to have robust health and safety management arrangements in place. Much stricter sentencing guidelines have come into force in recent years in relation to health and safety and, indeed, this is a sufficient driver in itself. Additionally, there was a significant increase last year in the excess on the Council's insurance policy, which means that the Council would now pay the first £75k of any personal injury claim that cannot be defended. However, in addition to the financial implications, the pandemic has brought home the importance of health and safety to everyone, with well-being a hot topic on a national level in particular. It is an area that has become the focus of the arrangements of every organisation almost overnight. Changes in social and political patterns have also seen social expectations rise, with public organisations required to demonstrate the highest standards and the best practice. It is now a field that is under constant scrutiny.
- 2.7.2 The project will respect the principles of Ffordd Gwynedd with an emphasis on the four 'C's' - namely
- Consistency (Cysondeb) - across the Departments
 - Proportionate (Cymesur) - rational risk management where risk measures are proportionate to the level of risk
 - Collaboration (Cydweithio) - not only internally but with partners and stakeholders in order to push standards across the supply chain
 - Robustness (Cadernid) - robust systems based on reliable data
- 2.7.3 The work will examine 6 elements, and there will be specific objectives for the 6 elements that will, when combined, be integral to the framework of managing health and safety effectively, namely:
- Clear and visible leadership on health and safety matters
 - Systems: Have effective and proportionate systems where live and rational data can be produced to support the management of health and safety and to support innovation
 - Competence: Get the workforce (on all levels) informed and competent for their roles and trained in the risks they face at work, ensuring availability of timely competent advice to advise on particular risks/latest developments in the field.
 - Community: Create a network, structures and a community to consult, communicate and make decisions on health and safety matters, not only

internally, but also among stakeholders such as the third sector, contractors and suppliers.

- Quality assurance: An effective procedure to monitor, learn from mistakes, and develop and evolve on a continuous basis.

2.8 WORKFORCE PLANNING

2.8.1 The work of identifying gaps and acting pro-actively, which has commenced with the Adults, Health and Well-being Department, will be disseminated to the rest of the Council during the current year while there is a further commitment to extend the number of current apprentices and trainees, across an increasing number of services across the Council.

2.8.2 In this regard, the Cabinet approved a total investment of £1.1 million at its meeting on 18 May in order to ensure the continuation of the Programme to attract and develop talent over the next three years. This investment is a combination of £600,000 for the Apprenticeships Scheme and £500,000 towards the Leaders and Experts of Tomorrow Scheme (the Council's graduate schemes).

29 apprentices have been recruited since the Apprenticeships Scheme commenced in 2019 (17 in 2019 and then 12 so far this year) with another 8 apprentices to be appointed during the autumn - a total of 37 apprentices, which has been achieved with the Cabinet's original investment of £300,000 in 2019. Of the 17 appointed in 2019, 9 of them have already been appointed to posts with the Council.

We will start investing the £600,000 approved in May after appointing to each of the 37 apprenticeships that have already been established.

Furthermore, 7 trainees were appointed on the Managers and Experts of Tomorrow Scheme this year with a projection, based on the development of trainees in the past, that the Council will benefit from their appointment in the longer term.

2.8.3 The Apprenticeships Scheme specifically offers additional value by attracting and recruiting women to posts traditionally associated with men and also attracts men to apply for and be appointed to posts traditionally undertaken by women. Furthermore, the work undertaken to try to ensure that the formal training is delivered through the medium of Welsh has borne fruit, which was part of the comprehensive Plan that has been developed over the past two years.

2.8.4 It is fair to note that the success of the project places additional pressures on the team's capacity to provide support of the proper quality to the Apprentices. This is being addressed and is likely to lead to adding to the current capacity before preparations get under-way to recruit the next cohort of apprentices.

2.8.5 In terms of the existing workforce, we will extend the Developing Potential Programme, which has already been a great success within the Corporate Support Department, to the rest of the Council, and preparations to do this in the Highways and Municipal Department are already under-way.

2.9 IMPLEMENTING FFORDD GWYNEDD

- 2.9.1 A report was submitted to the Audit and Governance Committee on 16 July reporting on the contents of a letter by the Wales Audit Office regarding the progress of Ffordd Gwynedd across the Council, along with the reflections of the Council's Management Team on the observations made. The Chief Executive had already stated his desire to carry out a progress review in the form of a further self-assessment in the autumn and Committee members agreed to collaborate with him to this end by establishing a Task and Finish Group in order to assess to what extent the principles of Ffordd Gwynedd had embedded in the Council. Cabinet Members would clearly have a significant part to play in the review as well.
- 2.9.2 In the meantime, it can be reported that training, in virtual form, remains to be offered and undertaken while Service reviews that were delayed during the lockdown periods are slowly restarting as the situation returns to some sort of normality.
- 2.9.3 The new performance challenge procedure has been introduced with monthly performance reports being submitted, and challenged, on a monthly basis by Cabinet members, while the historical performance challenge meetings, with representation from amongst the membership of the relevant Scrutiny Committee, are now held twice a year as part of the preparations to submit the performance reports to the Cabinet.

2.10 OTHER PROJECTS

2.10.1 Human Resources Systems Project

This project has slipped slightly during the past 6 months as a result of the Council's other priorities. However, it is aimed to introduce modules involved with enabling managers to advertise, appoint and terminate the employment of staff within the current financial year. In addition, it is aimed to release a module to record staff absences via the self-service portal by the end of the calendar year.

2.10.2 Public Self-Service Project

During 2020-21, there has been a substantial increase in the use of on-line services because of the pandemic, and by now, over 50% of the requests in half of those services are submitted via self-service.

The pandemic has led to the introduction of on-line services in fields where there were previously none, and has led to an increase in requests for on-line services generally. This has raised staff awareness of how self-service could be beneficial to their services. Consequently, many staff have been in contact with requests to develop new on-line services. This is greatly welcomed, and poses another challenge to prioritise all the requests in a way that brings benefits to our customers and the services in question.

The latest service to be added to the on-line provision is Gwynedd school admission applications. Initial feedback since its introduction shows that this is

a development that is welcomed by parents and it also facilitates the work of officers.

3. PERFORMANCE

3.1 An overview of the Department's performance during the first five months of the current financial year is noted below. Not all services are referred to but I am eager to confirm that I am satisfied with the current performance of those services.

3.2 Health, Safety and Well-being Service

3.2.1 The Gold Level of the Corporate Health Standard (The Workplace Health Standard established by Welsh Government) was awarded for the fourth time since 2011. The Assessor noted,

"I acknowledge and appreciate that an organisation such as a local authority has been under considerable strain over the past twelve months and that this has had implications for the well-being of your staff.

The information and details in your Organisation Summary were comprehensive and show, even in this difficult period, that Gwynedd Council has continued to maintain its well-being and health provision, as well as develop and introduce new initiatives".

3.2.2 Officers in this Service continue to be central to our arrangements to cope with the COVID situation, with the guidance and operating guidelines constantly changing. All of this has meant that some of the other responsibilities usually undertaken, such as undertaking health and safety monitoring exercises, have slipped. However, by implementing the "Ensuring that Managers Practice their Health and Safety Role" project (as noted earlier in the report), I am quietly confident that we will soon be able to restart these aspects of daily work.

3.3 Customer Contact and Registration

3.3.1 The Cabinet approved a bid for £84k in order to fund the cost of adaptations to the Galw Gwynedd Centre in Penrhyndeudraeth at its meeting on 27 July this year. Realising these adaptations will allow us to provide a comprehensive customer contact service on a face-to-face basis, and on the phone, for the residents of Gwynedd in addition to what is currently being provided in Pwllheli, Dolgellau and Caernarfon.

3.3.2 The Registration Service has coped well under genuinely difficult circumstances over the past eighteen months but officers are still under immense pressures in light of vacant posts and absences. Steps have already been taken to strengthen managerial and specialist capacity within the Unit but more work is needed to allow the Service to be at its very best. However, the rate of deaths and births registered within five days compares well with corresponding services across the authorities.

3.3.3 The average time taken to respond to telephone enquiries has increased during the year so far. This is a combination of staff turnover and also increasing evidence of calls that reach us as the first request/enquiry was not responded

to by other services within the Council. This is understandable on one hand, given the pressures that have been placed on a number of those services during the pandemic, but there is room here to consider what we can do as a Council to improve performance in general. In my opinion, addressing this would be an important contribution in turn to improve the performance of the Customer Contact Service.

3.4 Democracy and Language

3.4.1 The Cabinet approved a bid for £130k in order to fund the cost of adapting meeting rooms across the Council, at its meeting on 27 July. These adaptations would facilitate the requirement for us to be able to hold virtual/hybrid meetings in future in accordance with the requirements of the Local Government Act 2021 and in accordance with the wishes of all Members. It is anticipated that this work will be completed during the autumn and it will be possible to trial the undertaking of meetings with the new provision before the New Year.

3.5 Learning and Organisational Development

3.5.1 The Staff Benefits Scheme is going from strength to strength and 214 businesses in the County have now joined. This is an increase of 30 businesses during the pandemic, with regular positive feedback from staff and businesses showing an appreciation of what the Scheme has meant to them.

3.5.2 I am also very proud to have the opportunity to report that the feedback from Council officers on the internal training provision is the best it has ever been, with the average score out of 10 varying between 9.1 and 9.5 from one month to the next by staff who have taken advantage of what has been offered. This is in response to a question that asks, "to what extent does the training help you to undertake your role?" This is very encouraging given that the vast majority of the training provided was presented on a virtual basis.

3.6 Human Resources

3.6.1 Very positive observations were received from applicants and Members regarding the process undertaken to recruit and appoint a new Chief Executive and Head of Housing and Property. This is a reflection of how a comprehensive employment package was put together, and the care taken with applicants in order to guide them through the virtual arrangements to assess and appoint.

3.6.2 One of the Human Resources Advisers has been seconded for the next eighteen months in order to focus on coordinating the Council's future working arrangements. A consultation has already been held with post-holders where it was agreed that it was practical for them to undertake their duties from home, emphasising that anyone who wished to work from home, or partially from home, would do so on a voluntary basis. There will be more to report on this in light of the work that has been programmed for delivery between now and the end of December.

3.6.3 The Service has come to a service level agreement with the Snowdonia National Park to provide advice and support in the employment field until the end of the current financial year in the first instance.

4. FINANCIAL POSITION/SAVINGS

- 4.1 The Corporate Support Department underspent £100k during the previous financial year, which was mainly as a result of a combination of additional income and posts that were vacant for periods of time during the year. The position for 2021/22 is reviewed regularly and there is no specific concern regarding the ability of the Department to operate within its budget again this year.
- 4.2 Since its inception in 2015, the Department has identified £2.5 million in savings ensuring a total of £195,500 in savings in 2020/21 with a further amount of £117,750 to be realised during the current year. £17,250 has already been realised and the remaining £100,500 is to be achieved in full between the Human Resources Service and the Learning and Organisational Development Service by the end of the current financial year. Part of the saving by the Learning and Organisational Development Service will be realised by an alternative scheme to the original intention. The intention to delete two posts within the Service will be reduced to one by implementing the alternative scheme which involves tax savings on Additional Voluntary Contributions in relation to Council workers' pension. This is a scheme which we are able to realise with the co-operation of the Pensions and the Salaries' Services in the Finance Department with the saving being shared between the three Services. The saving will contribute £28,000 towards the total saving to be realised by the Learning and Organisational Development Service during the current Financial year. On this basis, I am completely satisfied that the schemes are in place by both Services in order to realise the savings in full.

LEGAL SERVICE

1. PERFORMANCE

Indicators

The Legal Services record one quantitative performance indicator. Feedback is gathered in the form of a case questionnaire that is sent to officers who receive the legal services at the conclusion of a case. A benchmark is set against a satisfaction level that gives a mark out of 10/10.

A full legal service is provided to all Council departments. This includes specialised fields such as employment, commercial property, child protection, litigation and planning, as well as traffic orders and debt collection. This reflects the majority of the Council's work, including substantial Gwynedd and regional projects. This is mainly done through the internal team, drawing in specific external expertise at times to support work and ensure appropriate legal risk management. We receive regular positive feedback.

For 2020/2021, it was reported that the percentage of cases that graded the service at 10/10 was 87%.

For the first half of 2021/2022, the percentage of responses received was 100%.

2. COUNCIL PLAN MATTERS

Propriety

Collaborate locally and regionally to plan and respond to changes to governance and to the Constitution that will derive from the introduction of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill 2020.

Status

We have led and supported a work programme to respond to the introduction of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. A work programme was established, as well as a project team under the supervision of the Audit and Governance Committee. The work is progressing in accordance with the programme, with reports submitted as requested to the Council, Cabinet and other Committees. Work is also being undertaken on a regional level and we are contributing towards national work with the government and other authorities on the Act.

Elections

Respond and extend and amend the voting rights, specifically for electors aged between 16 and 18 years as a result of the Senedd and Elections (Wales) Bill 2019 and the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill 2020 by promoting registration and participation in relevant elections.

Respond to the impact and implications of Covid-19 on elections and by-elections that could be affected by planning arrangements that ensure that effective and proper elections are conducted.

Status

A work programme has been established and a project officer has been appointed by using a Welsh Government grant. However, it must be acknowledged that the impact of lockdowns, particularly on educational establishments, has impacted our ability to move this work forward during 2020/21. With the appointment of a marketing Officer, a work programme of engagement and creation of materials and events to promote understanding and participation in the electoral process is progressing as we move forwards to May 2022.

Senedd and Police and Crime Commissioner elections, as well as By-elections, were held following the easing of the emergency regulations. These processes were conducted successfully under COVID-19 restrictions, whilst adhering to the quite substantial safety requirements in force at the time across two electoral wards, including 136 polling stations and two counting centres. Unfortunately, a problem occurred with one ballot paper in Anglesey and Gwynedd for the Senedd's regional election in North Wales and a detailed review has been conducted with the Electoral Commission. However, the magnitude of the additional requirements in terms of arranging and providing safe locations was substantial, despite the ready support and assistance received specifically from the Health and Safety Team, but we managed to conduct the elections nonetheless.

Coroner

Deal with the arrangements for appointing a Senior Coroner for the area which could involve holding a review of the current Coroner area.

Status

A discussion has commenced with the Ministry of Justice regarding these processes. However, the number of stakeholders to the review process means that scheduling and scope is an ongoing discussion. As a lead authority on behalf of Gwynedd and Anglesey, we have a central role in this. There is an operational Senior Coroner in post in the North West Wales Coroner Area, which means that the Service is seamlessly maintained. There are savings associated with this review, but it is acknowledged that the Coroner area review is a process that requires regional consensus regarding the principle and form of the outcome.

3. FINANCIAL POSITION/SAVINGS

The Legal Service underspent by £47k during the previous financial year, mainly due to income, and a contribution from a vacant post. The position for 2021/22 is reviewed regularly and there is no specific concern regarding the ability of the Service to operate within its budget again this year.

VIEWS OF THE STATUTORY OFFICERS

The Monitoring Officer:

No issues in relation to propriety

Head of Finance Department:

I confirm the accuracy of the financial aspects in the report of the Cabinet Member for Corporate Support and Legal. In particular, I confirm the content of the report which states that the savings plans are on track to be delivered by the end of the financial year.