

THE CABINET TUESDAY, 9 NOVEMBER 2021

Present-

Councillors: Dyfrig L Siencyn, Dafydd Meurig, Craig ab Iago, Gareth Griffith, Nia Jeffreys, Dilwyn Morgan, Ioan Thomas, Gareth Thomas, Catrin Wager, Cemlyn Williams, Bethan Lawton (Chair of the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee) and Dewi Roberts (Local Member for Abersoch).

Also present-

Dafydd Gibbard (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 4: Garem Jackson (Head of Education Department), Gwern ap Rhisiart (Dwyfor/Meirion Area Education Officer) and Carys Fon Williams (Head of Housing and Property Department).

Item 6: Gareth Jones (Assistant Head of Environment Department) and Alun Fon Williams (Senior Tourism Development Officer)

Item 7: Geraint Owen (Head of Corporate Support Department)

Item 8: Carys Fon Williams (Head of Housing and Property Department)

Item 9 - 11: Garem Jackson (Head of Education Department), Gwern ap Rhisiart (Dwyfor/Meirion Area Education Officer) and Huw Ynyr (Assistant Head, Information Technology).

1. APOLOGIES

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

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

A declaration of personal interest was received from Cllr Dewi Roberts for item 4 as he was a member of the Governing Board of Ysgol Abersoch, however it was not a prejudicial interest.

A declaration of personal interest was received from Cllr Cemlyn Williams and Garem Jackson for item 11 as they were Directors of Cwmni Cynnal. It was a prejudicial interest and they left the meeting for the item.

3. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

YSGOL ABERSOCH

The item was presented by Cllr. Bethan Lawton - Chair of the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee.

DECISION

Resolved not to amend the decision made on 28 September 2021 and to finally confirm the proposal issued through statutory notice to close Ysgol Abersoch on 31 December 2021, and to provide a place for the pupils at Ysgol Sarn Bach from 1 January 2022 in accordance with Section 53 of the School Standards and Organisation Act (Wales) 2013 and the requirements of the School Organisation Code 011/2018.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted and it was noted that the matter had been called in to the Scrutiny Committee as they did not feel that the Cabinet had given adequate attention to five specific aspects when considering the matter formally after the statutory objection period.

It was explained that the Scrutiny Committee had discussed the item at its meeting on 21 October, where a discussion was held and an opportunity to scrutinise further. It was noted that many of those aspects had been answered during the meeting and the Committee resolved to refer the matter back to the Cabinet for reconsideration on the grounds that a sufficient response had not been received to the second reason for calling in, namely that the report did not take into account future Housing and Employment which will come into the village. It was stressed that the Scrutiny members were concerned that full consideration had not been given to the possible effect of the proposed developments on the projection figures for Ysgol Abersoch before any decision is made. The Cabinet was asked to reconsider its decision as a result of their concerns.

The Local Member added that the discussion in relation to Ysgol Abersoch had been a very lengthy process and that the Cabinet members needed to give specific attention to the Housing matters underway in the village. It was explained that there was mention of housing developments in the ward and beyond and, consequently, education provision will be needed for children and families moving into the area. Attention was also drawn to the fact that Ysgol Llanbedrog was over-subscribed. It was expressed that these developments and the new Hotel were good news for the area but it was stressed that there was no mention of these developments in the reports and it was also noted that there was a feeling locally that the reports were misleading and did not comply with the Well-being Act.

Members were urged not to close the School for the reasons noted today and in the past and not to close the school mid-way through the school term, and to prioritise the education of children in the area.

The Cabinet Member responded to the report, giving the background of the item. He explained that, in June, the Council had issued the statutory notice to close Ysgol Abersoch on 31 December 2021 and offer a place to pupils at Ysgol Sarn Bach. It was noted that the Cabinet, following consideration of the objections, had confirmed the decision to close the School. It was stressed that the report submitted had dealt with observations about the possible likely effect on the area and that the Cabinet had considered them prior to reaching its decision.

He noted that the proposal to the Cabinet was not to amend the decision as closing the school responded to the challenges facing the school and would lead to more consistent opportunities for the children in the catchment area, offering a good quality education, experiences, skills and confidence to be successful bilingual citizens.

The Monitoring Officer noted the constitutional procedure in accordance with the calling-in procedure and noted that the decision made today would be final and that it would not be possible to call this decision in to scrutiny.

Observations arising from the discussion

- It was noted that the possibilities of opening a hotel need not be discussed as the company, hopefully, would appoint local individuals and therefore people would not need to move into the area. It was asked if the housing developments are realised, whether Ysgol Sarn Bach would have the capacity to take more children. It was explained that there would be capacity in the school.
- It was noted that initial discussions had been held to discuss and respond to the need for housing in the area but that no decision had been confirmed and, consequently there was a desire not to raise expectations in the area.
- It was stressed that much of the analysis had already been done, and it was noted that if houses would be built, they would be houses for local people in the area and not for people outside the area, and therefore would not increase the number of children. It was noted in terms of the Penrhos site that the priority would be for care provision, with a small number available for families. It was noted that these would not lead to much change in the school's projections.
- It was explained that, even if there is development, there would be capacity at Ysgol Sarn Bach for the number of pupils.

5. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 28 SEPTEMBER AND 12 OCTOBER 2021

The Chair accepted the minutes of the meetings held on 28 September and 12 October 2021 as an accurate record.

6. RESEARCH TO THE MOTOR HOMES SITUATION IN GWYNEDD

The item was presented by Cllr. Gareth Griffith.

RESOLVED

The report was accepted and the following was approved:

- I. To authorise the Head of Environment Department, in consultation with the Head of Education and Community to hold a pilot project to use up to six of the Council's parking sites (or part of the sites) within the Gwynedd Planning Authority Area, to provide facilities for motor homes to stay overnight, including the designation of the locations, but subject to securing capital funding and necessary permissions.
- II. That a further report on the outcomes of the pilot are submitted to the Cabinet within three years.
- III. Give consideration to and take enforcement measures to accompany the above.
- IV. Present the research to the Welsh Government and ask them to review the Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted noting that it was research into motor homes in Gwynedd. The decision was read.

The Assistant Head - Environment Department explained that this research had been produced jointly between the Environment Department and the Economy and Community Department. It was noted that the purpose of the report was to explain what the motor homes situation was in Gwynedd and whether there was a need for better control of them and any lessons to be learned from other locations in Britain and Europe. Attention was drawn to the fact that the Planning and Licensing legislation dated back to the 1960s and it was asked if it was fit for purpose by now.

It was noted that three questionnaires had been used - one for owners of Caravan and Camping sites in Gwynedd, one for owners of motor homes and one for the residents of Gwynedd. It was highlighted that an overview of the findings was provided noting that the sector is one that is developing significantly and that the needs of motor home users were different to those of traditional caravan and camping users. It was noted that users favoured locations within a walking distance of places of interest and town centres and tended to travel throughout the year.

It was noted that there were examples in Scotland and England where councils had trialled car parks as places to stay overnight with the necessary facilities and it was explained that this trend is also seen in Europe. It was noted that owners had noted in the questionnaire that they would use them and the public had also expressed support for the piloting.

It was noted that the report highlighted the need for better control of the sector but that support was needed to trial the overnight facilities but that they needed to be accompanied with more enforcement. It was explained that the report requested permission to pilot such facilities in up to 6 locations within the Gwynedd Planning Authority. It was noted that investment would be needed to create the purpose-built facilities.

Observations arising from the discussion

- It was noted that motor homes had become a major problem across the county and thanks were given for the significant work that had gone into creating this report. Support was expressed for the scheme, and it was noted that there was a need to move swiftly.
- It was noted that the report highlighted excellent collaboration between the two departments, and it was added that there was a need to be central to lead growth in the economy in order sustain jobs.
- The report was welcomed specifically in terms of control and reference was made to specific locations to try to deal with the situation. A question was asked as to if it would be possible to push the programme forward and possibly have the sites earlier rather than later.
- The report was supported and it was highlighted that the needs of the group were different to those of the users of traditional camping sites, and that they supported local businesses. Concern was highlighted about the six locations only as they could cause a rush in the six locations and in doing so not reflect what the scheme could do more widely. It was explained that these locations were owned by the local communities in other countries and that there may be a need for a discussion with the whole community so that a proportion of the funding would benefit these communities.
- It was noted that, in an ideal world, there would be a network of locations across the county but that six was a practical number to pilot and on Council-controlled land. It was expressed that the report was a basis for evidence which would, possibly, give an opportunity for other sectors to open this type of location.
- It was stressed that this report noted that the Council was eager to control this situation and not develop it further. The need for open dialogue with the Park was noted, in order to ensure that they also control and not develop the sector. It was noted that it had not been possible to include the National Park as part of the pilot because of its specific planning rules.
- It was noted that the department would examine ways of pushing the plan forward.

7. COMMITTEE FRAMEWORK

The item was presented by Cllr. Nia Jeffreys

RESOLVED

Resolved to adopt the arrangements for Cabinet meetings in the future with the start date to be determined by the Leader in consultation with the Head of Democracy Services and Monitoring Officer, and after the current restrictions are lifted.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted and it was noted that the framework set guidance on the way forward for future meetings. It was noted that remote attendance of

meetings offered many advantages such as diversity in democracy, travel costs and time for Councillors and Officers. It was stressed that the pandemic had highlighted that remote attendance had worked well. It was noted that the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 noted the need to formally announce the arrangement for future Committees.

It was explained that the Cabinet had the right to adopt its own arrangements and that the Full Council decided on the arrangements for other committees across the Council. It was noted that the framework had been created based on public interest in the items that were seen in various committees and that holding the Cabinet in a hybrid manner was consistent with this procedure.

8. PERFORMANCE REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING AND PROPERTY

The report was submitted by Cllr. Craig ab Iago.

RESOLVED

To accept and note the information in the report.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted noting that there was a good and bad news. It was noted that three specific schemes outlined the positive work that the department did. It was explained that the Housing Action Plan was now operational and worked to ensure housing for local people in their communities. It was noted that there were innovative schemes across the county and that several grants had been received to respond to plans such as homelessness.

It was noted that schemes were underway to build housing within the county and that discussions were being held with bodies across Gwynedd to build housing on Council land. Attention was drawn to the One-Stop-Shop scheme which would be available to assist individuals to ensure that they received the support and were aware of any available opportunities. It was noted that the social housing letting scheme for local people which had been started a year ago was taking large strides forward and were continuing to develop although many problems had arisen along the way. Nevertheless, it was emphasised that the department had succeeded to house a high number of people in their communities.

It was explained that, although the schemes were ambitious, the pandemic had slowed many schemes down with the Housing Action Plan. It was stressed that steps were in place to tackle homelessness which had been a crisis prior to the pandemic but that the situation had worsened over the past eighteen months. It was noted that the pandemic had had an impact on the resources that were available together with the capacity to respond. However, with the new performance challenging regime, it was possible to respond quickly to the challenges and tackle problems immediately.

On the whole, it was noted that the department was succeeding and that receiving four National Awards was testament to this success. It was explained that the Cabinet Member would visit every regeneration area over the coming months to explain to Councillors what the Department hoped to do in every area.

Observations arising from the discussion

- Attention was drawn to hidden homelessness which seemed to be on the increase across the county. The schemes within the Housing Action Plan were welcomed, and it was highlighted that it had been operational for a mere seven months. It was asked if it would be possible to have information for every ward. It was noted that a discussion regarding hidden homelessness was extremely important as the success of the scheme to get individuals off the street had reduced the housing available to tackle the increase in hidden homelessness.
- It was explained that homelessness was at its highest level ever and this was the case across Wales. It was explained that the Council was looking at buying six sites and was continuing to seek to buy houses in order to offer lettings for individuals locally.
- It was explained that the money for homelessness would come from the Council's Hardship Fund but it was noted that the Minister had emphasised that the money would not be available in the next financial year. It was explained that if it continued, money would be needed to fund it and assurance would be needed that the money was in the settlement received from the Government.
- It was noted that the report was clear, concise and to the point and was very positive. It was noted that homelessness figures were astoundingly high although there was no shortage of housing, but that a high number of houses were used seasonally at present. The Government was asked that if they were withdrawing the funds, support would be needed with second homes.

9. EDUCATION DIGITAL STRATEGY

The report was submitted by Cllr Cemlyn Williams.

DECISION

- I. The Education Digital Strategy was approved in its entirety.
- II. It was agreed to joint-fund up to half the cost of renewing the devices by committing £2 million from Council balances, with an expectation for schools to pay the other half.
- III. It was agreed that Gwynedd schools will receive technical support from the Authority's Information Technology service from April 2022 onwards.
- IV. It was agreed to fund £145,000 in order to offer technical support up to April 2022, in order to speed-up the timetable of delivering the devices to schools.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted and the pleasure of being able to submit this innovative strategy was noted. It was stressed that this had been a cross-departmental scheme between the Education Department and Information Technology and appreciation of the close collaboration that had occurred to create the Strategy was noted. It was noted that the purpose of the Strategy was to use the best digital provision to support pupils and school staff to ensure consistent opportunities across the county. It was explained that this proposal highlighted the ambition that existed to use information technology to improve education and escalate the use to all parts of the curriculum.

The Head of Education Department added that the pandemic had highlighted the need to ensure that pupils could use technology confidently. It was stressed that the work on the strategy had started prior to the lockdown but that the pandemic had pushed the scheme forward.

The Dwyfor / Meirion Area Education Officer guided the members through the report and noted that digital skills were now at the same level as literacy and numeracy and therefore there was a need to ensure that pupils had the required digital skills. It was explained that Welsh Government had provided funds to improve the provision and had placed the responsibility on the local authorities to lead and the work of ensuring collaboration between the schools.

It was explained that, currently, many devices were dated and schools were using a variety of different systems. It was noted that the strategy would ensure consistency across schools. It was emphasised that lockdown had highlighted the lack of suitable devices and that it was striking how many households that did not have suitable devices. It was noted that almost 2000 devices had been shared during lockdown but that there had been a need to share more because many families were sharing devices rather than having one for each pupil. It was noted that the strategy ensured that every pupil and teacher had a device, and that they would be chosen in accordance with the age of the pupils and would be set to Welsh across the county.

Attention was drawn to the costs and renewing these as several thousand devices were on the way to the pupils with a lifespan of approximately five years. It was explained that £3.9million would be needed to renew them. It was stressed that the devices would need to be maintained effectively in order to ensure that not one pupil would miss education. The current procedure to support pupils was highlighted and it was noted that, in the short-term, the support would be drawn in to the Council's information technology service while the department ensures the long-term support system.

Observations arising from the discussion:

- It was noted that the scheme was an ambitious one and gave opportunities and the best and most consistent experiences across the county. It was noted that they would work extremely well in the schools but it was asked what support would be available for individuals without internet connection. It was explained that the pandemic had highlighted problems but that schools had assisted by providing internet boxes from the schools but some continued to have problems because some houses did not have a phone signal. In order to respond to this, the department would look at every possible option and schools would be available to apply for grants.

- After the five-year period, the devices would be upgraded and therefore it was asked how the devices would be recycled or could they be reused. In terms of the devices, specifically at the end of secondary school, an offer would be made for the pupils to keep their devices at the end of the five-year period, but it was explained that other devices would be recycled in Britain.
- In terms of equality, it was noted that consideration would need to be given to the pupils that were placed out of county. Discussions were held to ensure that these children, together with children with profound disabilities, would be a part of the scheme.
- Attention was also drawn to pupils that are home-educated as there was an increase in these numbers as a result of the pandemic. It was explained that support was available for those families through the welfare team.
- The financial context was provided and it was stressed that the Council had received grant funding but that renewal costs would have to be funded. It was noted that, subject to schools funding half the costs, £2million would need to be committed from the Council's balances to renew the devices in five years' time.

10. 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 14, Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 - information about the financial or business transactions of any specific person (including the authority that retains that information) and Paragraph 16, Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 - information in respect of which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained in legal proceedings.

There is an acknowledged public interest in openness in relation to the use of public resources and related financial issues. It is also acknowledged that there are occasions, in order to protect the financial and commercial interests that matters related to such information need to be discussed without being publicised. The report deals specifically with financial and business matter and related discussions. Publishing commercially sensitive information of this type could be detrimental to the interests of the bodies and the Council. It also includes legal advice received in relation to determining the way forward. The ability to receive and discuss such information is protected by legal privilege. Publishing this information would be contrary to the wider public interest of securing the best overall outcome.

11. SCHOOLS INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY STRATEGY AND CWMNI CYNNAL

The report was submitted by Cllr Ioan Thomas

DECISION

- I. The proposed way forward in relation to the future of Cwmni Cynnal was approved.
- II. Delegated powers were granted to the Head of Finance Department in consultation with the Head of Legal Service to negotiate such contracts that are reasonably required to facilitate the procedure.

- III. A request was made for a follow-up report to the Cabinet to approve the distribution and transfer matters agreed upon.

DISCUSSION

The report was discussed.

The meeting commenced at 1pm and concluded at 3:40pm

CHAIR