

GWYNEDD COUNCIL CABINET

Report to a meeting of Gwynedd Council Cabinet

Date:	30 November 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 efficiency schemes.
- 1.2 I wish to remind you that all the matters have already been discussed and scrutinised in Performance 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.

2 GWYNEDD COUNCIL PLAN PROJECTS 2018-2023

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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 Keeping Families Together Strategy

I am pleased to note that the Safeguarding Children Effectively, and the Ffordd Gwynedd joint review between the Children and Education Departments; and the development of the Keeping Families Together Strategy, are all progressing as anticipated. However I draw your attention to the ongoing staffing challenges faced by the Department's services and their potential impact on our ability to realise the vision of this 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 Multi-agency Team is in place since September; and the training programme to upskill the current workforce to support children with complex needs in health, education and social care teams is ongoing.

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. The Department has secured funding to appoint a Co-ordinator to progress the implementation for the plan, and the recruitment process will start shortly.

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. We continue to be part of the Covid Support Hubs pilot, and expect an evaluation of the project before the end of the year. Since my previous update we have now established Cross Departmental Task and Finish Groups for the work streams as prioritized by the Cabinet. Some of those work streams are moving forward well such as homelessness prevention, support for unpaid carers, children and young people's wellbeing. The other work streams need to be confirmed further, these are Community Resilience, Council Services' Front Doors and Tackling Poverty. The changes to Universal Credit, rising living costs such as food and fuel, over the last few months are a matter of concern to me and fellow members. We have already started working with our partners to increase our capacity to help residents with financial advice, dealing with debt, and food poverty.

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 - Since my previous update, the workforce situation remains a matter of great concern. The Department is implementing temporary arrangements in order to deal with a shortage in the required number of social workers and care support workers, by redeploying employees to the Social Work Teams. The department is also continuing to attempt to recruit social workers. 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 ability to deliver the priority projects and day-to-day work; as well as being detrimental to the health and well-being of the staff themselves.
- 3.3 In terms of the department's measures, I am generally happy with their performance. I wish to draw your attention to three in particular, which illustrate the department's story during the period in question in that report.
- 3.5 We continue to see an increase in the numbers of people contacting the Department for Information, Advice or Assistance, it increased to 585 in September. This is a 19% increase compared to the same period last year.
- 3.6 However, even with demand increasing, it is pleasing to note once again that our strategy to keep families together and not bring children into care unnecessarily is bearing fruit. With 872 children open to the department at the end of September, 83% of them are supported to continue to live with their families. We are again seeing a fall in the number of looked after children, from 281 in April to 268 in September. These measures show that our decisions are timely and accurate; and that we have a range of intensive and specialist support packages to keep children safe and with their families.

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 a proportion of the target was deleted. However, the department is continuing to look to achieve the amended savings target by improving the efficiency of its work arrangements. The department is currently working on an efficiency plan to achieve its 2022-23 targets.
- 4.2 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:

I confirm that the information presented in paragraph 4 of the report, on the financial position and savings, is a fair and accurate reflection of what happened in the budgeting

process for 2021-22 and what has already been reported to Cabinet following the financial review of the position at the end of August

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