

GWYNEDD COUNCIL CABINET



Report to a meeting of the Gwynedd Council Cabinet

Date of meeting: 15 February 2022

Cabinet Member: Councillor Nia Jeffreys

Contact Officer: Geraint Owen/Iwan Evans

Contact Number: 01286 679072

Subject: CHALLENGE PERFORMANCE REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CORPORATE SUPPORT DEPARTMENT AND LEGAL SERVICE

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 what has been happening in the fields within my remit as Cabinet Member for the Corporate Support and Legal Department. This includes 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 plans.
- 1.2 I wish to remind you that all matters have already been the subject of discussions and have been scrutinised by me at a meeting of the Corporate Support Department's Management Team on 19 January, 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. Those difficult circumstances and the continuing additional demands on some services mean that progress on some projects has not been as anticipated, but I fully accept that this is inevitable. I wish again to note my appreciation of the work of all the officers of the Department and to recognise the key contribution they make to supporting the work of the Council.

CORPORATE SUPPORT

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

The Corporate Support Department is leading on nine 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 You will already be aware that we are trialling a new methodology to assess tenders based on social value and that we have completed the procurement process in order to award the Adults Service Direct Payments contract using that methodology. It has previously been reported that additional benefits have derived from using the new methodology including commitments from the winning company to provide jobs for local people, work experience, training, support local charities and develop the Welsh language skills of its workforce.

2.1.2 Trialling the new methodology is continuing, with the second pilot tender completed in the field of building maintenance. The response from the market has not been as good as the first pilot and this has highlighted the need to undertake further work to encourage and support the market. As the final part of trialling the methodology, we will be undertaking one other pilot in relation to the contract to provide machinery for Highways and Municipal work with a view to then reaching a final conclusion regarding introducing the new methodology to the Council's fixed procurement arrangements.

2.1.3 Details of the pilot and new methodology were recently presented to the Third Sector Group and a very positive response was received to the development.

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. Registration for the first phase of women to take up the programme is now open, with the programme itself launching with the first cohort on 8 March, this year's International Women's Day. A mentoring programme has also been set up in order for Council leaders to become mentors and the work of training 15 individuals to act as mentors has recently been completed.

2.2.2 The Project Group, which has been established to drive this work forward, has, from the outset, placed considerable emphasis on raising the awareness and understanding of men who are managers and leaders within the Council. Workshops for that purpose were held at the outset of the project but a further event is planned (the date to be set in spring) where men in particular will have the opportunity to hear and question



female and male leaders who will be able to share experiences and highlight the barriers faced by women in the workplace on the one hand and possible solutions to those barriers on the other.

- 2.2.3 As previously reported, the “teatime talks” for female Elected Members and officers within the Council continue, with facilitators and in-house and guest speakers scheduled for the next phase.
- 2.2.4 The communication programme has been reviewed in recent months with the revamped information pages on the Council's intranet re-launched in January, to accompany the invitation to register for the Developing Potential Programme.

2.3 ENSURING FAIRNESS FOR EVERYONE

- 2.3.1 This work has five workstreams, namely training, engagement, impact assessments, pay gap and increasing diversity within the workforce. Progress is set out in the context of the five workstreams as follows:
 - 2.3.2 Distance or virtual Learning Environment training for frontline staff has been provided and presented to some cohorts of staff. Good feedback on the training has been received and work on adapting the e-module is underway with a view to rolling it out as part of the formal training programme in March.
 - 2.3.3 The first phase of a public engagement exercise was completed in order to gather information about any barriers that face the people of Gwynedd when dealing with the Council. Unfortunately, analysing the information has taken longer than expected and this has impacted on the ability to move forward with phase two of the engagement exercise.

We have also been working to improve the representation of people with different characteristics on the Equality Core Group and it was good to see new representatives attending the Equality Core Group at the last meeting.

- 2.3.4 The main initial work in the context of equality impact assessments was the creation of a new impact assessment form for the Council. The assessment will expand on existing equality characteristics and duties including additional questions on the Socio-economic Duty, the Welsh Language, Human Rights and the Well-being of Future Generations Act.

This work has been developed by a group of officers from across the region, including the councils, the Health Board, the National Park and the Police. Work is continuing to install it in a user-friendly electronic format and a pilot will begin in February to ensure the form is suitable before expanding its use.

- 2.3.5 The Council requires all staff to complete an equality data questionnaire so that we can better understand the equality characteristics of our staff and improve the support they are given and promote diversity within the workforce. This information



is voluntary and as a result, the numbers filling it in don't tend to be high. We have therefore been running campaigns to encourage staff to complete the equality data questionnaire and it appears that there has been a small but significant increase in numbers as a result of that work. This promotion work will need to continue.

A voluntary audit is undertaken on the gender pay gap every three years and we should have undertaken the previous audit in 2020. By now, however, the latest review has been carried out by an independent expert and it is expected that we will receive the conclusions of the work soon.

- 2.3.6** The North Wales Public Sector Equality Network had plans to look to deliver presentations to assist people with equality characteristics to apply for public sector jobs. This work has been delayed due to the restrictions that have been in place over the period of the pandemic but the Network has now re-established the work as one of their priorities with a view to holding events soon.

2.4 NATIVE WELSH PLACE NAMES

- 2.4.1** As you are aware, 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.
- 2.4.3** Initially, the work has been focusing on the field of house names and on establishing a list of standard names for the Council. Several definite steps have already been taken, specifically collaborating with the Planning and Building Control Services. The computer system has been adapted which will lead to an automated standard request for a Welsh name for a new property, change our ways of gathering data about requests to change house names as well as improve the sharing of information between the two services.
- 2.4.4** As a result of discussions with Council officers, a gap has been identified between the public perception of changing house names from Welsh to English, and the data gathered by the Council to change house names. Work is in the pipeline to map changes at a local level in order to measure the actual extent of the problem. To coincide with all of this, new clauses have been drafted for the Language Policy, which shows the Council's commitment to using and recognising Welsh names.

2.4.5 In order to generate public interest and enthusiasm for the subject, a programme of promotional activities has been developed for the year. Two public Zoom sessions entitled 'Neb ond Ffylliaid' were held for the public with many attending and more watching the recording afterwards. The project has received considerable press coverage, and we are also trying to raise staff awareness of the origins of place names in the county. In addition, work is underway on the development of an interactive map that will allow members of the public to identify names that are of historical and local importance but which are not recognised on "official" maps.

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 designation for every post in the Council and has gone a considerable way 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:

- **2658** central staff have submitted a self-assessment
- **69%** of central staff have submitted a self-assessment
- **92%** reach (or exceed) the Language Designations of their posts

2.5.2 There is close collaboration with the Assistant Head of Highways and Municipal Department in order to gather assessments from more of the Department's field staff whilst over 50% of the staff of the Adults, Health and Well-being Department have also now completed the language self-assessment questionnaire. 100% of YGC staff have completed the language self-assessment questionnaire and there has been a 12% increase in the number of Housing and Property staff who have completed the language self-assessment questionnaire since I reported earlier in the year.

2.5.3 Significant progress has been made in relation to community care staff attending Welsh lessons, with 15 members of staff having shown an interest in the Work Welsh courses, Nant Gwrtheyrn and 13 having signed up for in-house courses held between November and February. Ten members of staff have started weekly lessons with Learn Welsh North West between September and November 2021 and support is being offered to the Test, Trace, Protect Service to develop the language skills of staff appointed to undertake that work.

2.5.5 The Language Designations Forum has been established with representatives from every Council Department attending the meetings. The existence of the Forum is seen as one way of maintaining the momentum with this work and to ensure that the progress achieved does not slip.

2.6 THE WELSH LANGUAGE AND PUBLIC SERVICES

2.6.1 The Welsh Language Sub-group, led by the Public Services Board, has agreed to commission a study of traditional receptions, namely the First Contact Services Project. The study will investigate and consider how more people can be encouraged to engage with public organisations through the medium of Welsh.



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 Resources have been committed by the Council and other partners to fund this work with a brief placed on the Sell 2 Wales framework in December 2021 to invite quotations to undertake the work that is to be commissioned.

2.7 ENSURING THAT MANAGERS PRACTISE THEIR HEALTH AND SAFETY ROLE EFFECTIVELY

2.7.1 It was explained earlier in the year that this work had been identified as a corporate priority for the first time in this year's Council Plan. It was noted then that the project would look specifically at the following elements:

- 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 and innovation 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.

2.7.2 It was intended to proceed with these objectives in the autumn but due to the fact that members of the Health, Safety and Well-being Team had to spend most of their time interpreting and advising services on the changing regulations in relation to pandemic management, there has been no progress on this project in recent months. I fully understand and accept that the work relating to the crisis has had to take precedence but look forward to the wider project work being addressed later this year.



2.8 PLANNING THE WORKFORCE

- 2.8.1 The work of identifying gaps and acting pro-actively is a priority that has emerged more than ever over the past year and a significant resource investment will be required to support manager development in planning and responding to the staffing challenges facing many services across the Council. A specific work programme and milestones are currently being formulated in the context of using the most up-to-date techniques to identify short, medium and long-term gaps and then plan for them.
- 2.8.2 While that work programme is in its early days, other workstreams that are key to future workforce planning continue to flourish. Thirty apprentices have been employed since the start of the Apprenticeship Scheme with 15 currently employed, three having left the Scheme over the last two years and 12 having taken up employment with the Council. Promotion and advertising for the next cohort of 20 apprentices will begin in March with the recruitment process for the employment of an additional Talent and Apprenticeships Officer currently underway to ensure the best possible support for the apprentices for the future.
- 2.8.3 During 2022, we will develop the Apprenticeship Scheme to work in partnership with small companies and local contractors as well as community enterprises, with opportunities to offer work placements with those partners.
- 2.8.4 In terms of the existing workforce, the Talent Development Plan continues to be rolled out across services with more and more officers expected to take advantage of these opportunities and realise their potential within the Council for the future.

2.9 IMPLEMENTING Ffordd GWYNEDD

- 2.9.1 You are reminded that a report was submitted to the Audit and Governance Committee on 16 July 2021 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.
- 2.9.2 The preparatory work for conducting that review is nearing completion with members of the Task and Finish Group having received training in the culture and procedures of Ffordd Gwynedd whilst the self-assessment questionnaire for each Department has also been drawn up and agreed.
- 2.9.3 The new performance challenge procedure has been introduced with monthly performance reports being published, whilst 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.



2.9.4 Audit Wales has undertaken an audit of our revised performance challenge arrangements during the autumn and submitted a report containing recommendations for the future. The Chief Executive will later present his own report to Cabinet which will consider the recommendations of Audit Wales alongside the in-house reflection carried out, in consultation with heads of department and Cabinet members, over recent weeks.

3. PERFORMANCE

3.1 An overview of the Department's performance during the financial year to date 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 not referred to here.

3.2 Health, Safety and Well-being

3.2.1 Mental health and well-being has been identified as a priority on the health and well-being programme again this year and all sorts of activities have been organised to raise awareness. The importance of maintaining and further building on the support that can be offered in relation to this has been highlighted over the last year and a half and remains one of the most essential priorities in the work of the Service.

3.2.2 The Occupational Health Unit has contributed extensively to the package of support currently offered. Videos have been created to try to raise awareness in fresher ways, e.g. the video 'Dwi'n barod i siarad, wyt ti?' ('I'm ready to talk, are you?') and the video on the subject of suicide. In addition, support cards, specifically for men, have been created. Further sessions with Andrew Tamplin on mental well-being have taken place and an Occupational Health Adviser has attended several team meetings across the Council to discuss mechanisms for coping with stress. More recently, the focus has shifted towards arranging more formal training for Managers and Team Leaders and a corporate bid has been submitted for a specialist training officer in this field. Developmental work is also taking place to investigate trends in individual Departments. This is a piece of work that will be developed further over the next three months with the establishment of regular reports to Heads of Department.

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, as I have already referred to in this report, that some of the other responsibilities usually undertaken, such as conducting health and safety monitoring exercises, have slipped. However, by implementing the 'Ensuring that Managers Practise their Health and Safety Role' project, I am quietly confident that we will be able to restart these aspects of daily work later this year.

3.3 Customer Contact and Registration

- 3.3.1 I noted in the performance report in the autumn that 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 been taken in the meantime to strengthen managerial and specialist capacity within the Unit but with so many staffing changes over the last few months and the fact that some positions are yet to be filled, more work is needed to allow the Service to be at its very best. As a result, resources from other services within the Department have been redirected to maintain the situation for a while. Due to the introduction of these interim measures, performance in relation to the number of deaths and births registered within five days continues to compare favourably with equivalent services across the authorities.
- 3.3.3 The average time taken to respond to telephone enquiries remains higher than performance during previous years. This is mainly because an increasing number of calls 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 the Chief Executive along with officers of the Corporate Support Department are currently addressing this in particular in an effort to ensure a better response to enquiries and complaints across Council services.

3.4 Research and Information

- 3.4.1 This Service has been at the forefront in ensuring that information is presented to officers and Members of the Council in an intelligible way during the pandemic period. The Emergency Dashboard that brings together the relevant information has been an important development and one that can be considered for many purposes in future.
- 3.4.2 Despite all the pressures of work on the Service's officers, good progress has been made in relation to the objectives of the Information Plan, with the information packs and local data provided in a timely manner for the Well-being Assessment in Gwynedd and in Anglesey.
- 3.4.3 That said, incidents of personal information being disclosed in error, or inadvertently, continue to occur in places within the Council, with two incidents occurring in November and a further three in December. The incidents mainly arise due to carelessness in sending e-mails and also allowing access (in error) to officers who are not entitled to see certain sensitive details. The ongoing training provided makes specific reference to these types of examples and emphasises the need to keep information safeguarding matters at the forefront of the mind at all times. Any similar incidents over the coming months will need to be closely monitored and consideration given to what further steps can be taken if the situation fails to improve.

3.5 Democracy and Language

3.5.1 The release of £203,880 from the Transformation Fund was approved at the Cabinet meeting on 30 November 2021 in order to fund an additional post for a period of four years to manage the Hunaniaith unit currently located within the Department. The Cabinet, in conjunction with the Hunaniaith Strategic Group chaired by Dafydd Iwan, has been considering establishing Hunaniaith as an independent entity for the past twelve months. As a result of considering the implications of the various options for establishing Hunaniaith in its new form, it was agreed that it would be advisable to continue to keep Hunaniaith as a unit within the Council for the time being but with a view to establishing it as an independent entity after a period of attempting to attract new grants and raising an income, improve community contact and attract more community members to the Strategic Group. It is considered that recruiting and appointing a Principal Officer to undertake this work for the next four years will provide the best possible opportunity to achieve the goal.

4. FINANCIAL POSITION/SAVINGS

4.1 The Corporate Support Department underspent by £100,000 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 the current projection for the current financial year is that it will underspend by up to £83,000 with the reasons for this closely aligned with those identified for 2020/21.

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. £57,750 has already been realised and the remaining £60,000 is to be achieved by the Human Resources Service through a combination of reducing the staffing establishment and increasing income.

LEGAL SERVICES

Legal Service

Update

A series of vacant posts have meant a challenging period. However, services have been maintained by utilising specialist locums and external providers. Our arrangements for attracting and retaining staff have been reviewed and specific steps these are being implemented to strengthen our position. The recruitment processes are underway.

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. We concede that the level of responses is very low compared to the number of cases we have open and we are planning to look at alternative mechanisms.



A benchmark is set against a satisfaction level that gives a mark out of 10/10.

Performance

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

For the period up until 31 December the percentage of responses received rating the service was 10/10 was 79%

Monitoring Officer -Propriety

Council Plan Matters

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.

Update

We have led and supported a work programme to respond to the introduction of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. The 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.

We have also been providing legal and governance support in the establishment of the North Wales Corporate Joint Committee leading to it's first meeting on the 14th of January 2022 as well as establishing new governance arrangements as new Regulations come into force.

Elections

Council Plan Matters

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.

Update



We support the Electoral Registration Officer in the promotion of registration and 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. We have run direct engagement exercises with schools, colleges and youth groups as well as commissioning promotional videos.

We are now working to support the Returning Officer to hold the Local Elections on the 5th of May 2022. Covid – 19 continues to be a factor in the planning but is kept under constant review.

Coroner

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

Update

A discussion was commenced with the Ministry of Justice regarding these processes. With an acting Senior Coroner in post in the North West Wales Coroner Area the Service is seamlessly maintained. We have now received confirmation from the Chief Coroner that there is no expectation of a review of the Coroners Areas. As a result, arrangements to establish the North West Wales Coroners on a permanent basis and initiate the process of appointing a permanent Senior Coroner have been started. A saving of £13,000 predicated on a review has been in place for some time and this commitment will need to be reviewed.

FINANCIAL POSITION/SAVINGS

The Legal Department 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.

OBSERVATIONS OF THE STATUTORY OFFICERS

OBSERVATIONS - MONITORING OFFICER

Co-author of the report

OBSERVATIONS - HEAD OF FINANCE

I am satisfied that the report conveys a fair picture of the Corporate Support Department's financial situation.

