

GWYNEDD COUNCIL CABINET



A Report to a meeting of the Gwynedd Council Cabinet

Date of meeting: 19 July 2022

Cabinet Member: Councillor Dafydd Meurig

Contact Officer: Dafydd Wyn Williams - Head of Environment Department

Subject: Performance Report of the Cabinet Member for the Environment

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 AND RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

- 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 the Environment. This includes outlining the latest developments to date against the pledges within the 2018-2023 Gwynedd Council Plan; and the position regarding the performance measures.
- 1.2 I would like to remind you that all matters have already been discussed between me, the Chief Executive, Head and Deputy Head of the Department.
- 1.3 Since the report submitted to the Cabinet in December, the Department has reviewed the performance measures that were in place for 2021/22, this has been done in order to ensure that they measure what matters to the people of Gwynedd. This was outlined in Department's [Annual Report](#) and the previous performance can be viewed for the period from December 2021 until March 2022.
- 1.4 On the whole, I am satisfied with the department's performance and I acknowledge the challenges that have faced the services and the work in dealing with the backlog of work since the pandemic period. Wherever services have a backlog, I have asked them to highlight this so that it can be ensured that detailed plans are in place to address the work. In general, I am confident that the department is putting suitable plans in place to recover the situation, and I will elaborate on the progress made in the report.

2. GWYNEDD COUNCIL PLAN PRIORITIES 2018-2023

2.1 Climate and Nature Emergency Plan

2.1.2 Since the Cabinet adopted the Climate and Nature Emergency Plan in March this year, contacts have been developed with external partners (DEG/GwyrddNi, Partneriaeth Ogwen, Youth Senedd), in order to share information about the Plan and to develop joint engagement arrangements. We have also been contributing to the Welsh Local Government Association's Transition and Recovery Support Programme, by sharing information about our work under 4 main themes - buildings, land use, mobility and transport, procurement.

2.1.3 We are continuing to develop the work programme for the Plan projects, jointly with officers in various departments and we are pressing on with the work of preparing a plan to fund the Climate and Nature Emergency Plan.

2.1.4 In terms of the next steps, arrangements are in place for the Climate Change Board to reconvene in order to give direction to the work programme. Subject to reaching an agreement on expenditure, the work of commissioning programmes, e.g. training for staff and members, fleet strategy, will be able to proceed.

2.2 Public Protection Capacity

Following a review in 2021/22, successful funding bids were submitted to increase capacity and plan for future succession in this important field. Funding is in place to introduce Team Leader posts within the current structure. In addition, as a part of plans to ensure the resilience of the Public Protection Service, a 'one-off' bid has been secured to fund 3 trainee posts for a period of three years in the field, and it is intended to advertise these opportunities shortly.

2.3 Second homes

The Environment Department contributes towards the 'Access to suitable homes' Improvement Priority.

The Department has led on the Council's response to specific consultations in the planning field and we continue to hold discussions with Welsh Government on the next steps. The Department is coordinating and contributing to the cross-departmental Group, which includes the relevant Cabinet Members and Senior Officers, and this has been established to facilitate the Council's efforts in this key field.

2.4 Control of Motorhomes

The Department is also contributing to a priority in the Sustainable Tourism field by collaborating with the Economy and Community Department on the 'Aros-fan' project, which will pilot the development of up to 6 bespoke sites for motorhomes to park overnight. A grant has been secured from the Welsh Government's Brilliant Basics fund to help fund the project to trial the plots, with the intention of submitting planning applications in order to put the relevant infrastructure in place by the end of 2022/23.

3. PERFORMANCE

Below, I outline the main matters that have derived from the department's performance since the beginning of April 2022. The information does not refer to every service in the department, only towards those we feel that need to be brought to your attention.

Planning Service

- 3.1 It is encouraging to be able to report that positive progress has been made in **the average time taken to determine a planning application**. A total of 215 applications were received in April and May and it was seen that the time taken to determine an application dropped to 78 days, compared to an average of 103 days last year, with 71% of decisions made within the statutory timescale. It is acknowledged that the process of clearing the backlog of applications continues to be a challenge, and temporary changes have been introduced to the structure of the planning officers' team to create an additional team leader post. This means that the team leaders can provide enough support to the officers and help with capacity in order to deal with major cases.
- 3.2 The number of enquiries and requests for pre-application advice received by the Planning Service continues to be high and is having an impact on the capacity of officers to deal with planning applications and the service's day-to-day work. An effort is being made to clear the backlog and this will continue over the coming months.
- 3.3 During the period from 01/04/22 to 31/05/22, the **Planning Enforcement** Unit received 45 new complaints relating to planning regulation breaches, with 11 cases closed. The number of open cases now stands at 726, which shows an increase and an annual backlog and highlights the challenges of dealing with the current workload. The contract of an officer who was appointed for a temporary period last year has been extended for another year and it is expected that this will assist the team's performance, and work will be undertaken over the coming months to look in detail on this in order to deal with the backlog of cases.

Joint Planning Policy Service

- 3.4 The staff of this Service provide policy guidance on planning applications and pre-application requests. This new measure shows that **91% of the responses of the Planning Policy service** on the planning application consultations and pre-application advice requests **were submitted within 10 days on average** for the period. It is worth noting that the details required in order to respond to the consultations vary substantially, subject to the application, and this means that preparing a response can take more time for an officer, or that input is required from more than one officer.
- 3.5 It is a statutory requirement to prepare an Annual Monitoring Report (AMR), which reports on the performance of the Local Development Plan, and submit it to Welsh Government by 31 October every year. Work has commenced on the 2021/22 report by gathering and analysing information. The Service will also commence work on preparing the amended Local Development Plan in due course, which is of course a high priority for the Council.

Building Control Service

- 3.6 The **percentage of Building Control applications determined within the statutory timescales** (5 and 8 weeks, subject to the nature of the application) **was 91%** for April and May 2022.
- 3.7 Further changes are needed to the work flow of the computer system used as well as staff training in order to be able to gather all information in terms of the number of service requests on enforcement matters. We can report though, that the Service dealt with 14 cases during April and May - 8 in terms of dangerous structures and 6 in the enforcement field (unauthorised work).

- 3.8 It is pleasing to be able to report that **100% of general service requests (request for advice/enquiry) have been closed** during the two months in question, with an average of 4 days taken to process requests.

Public Protection Services

- 3.9 After focusing their efforts on stopping the spread of Covid-19 during the pandemic, the work of ensuring that food businesses meet the **food hygiene standards** has intensified over the past months. 2,189 Gwynedd food businesses were subject to the food hygiene scoring system on 31/5/22. Of these, 2,176 (99.41%) met satisfactory or higher standards and 13 (0.59%) did not meet the standards. Every one of these 13 businesses will be re-visited, but a new score cannot be given unless they request a re-score or win an appeal against the original hygiene score.
- 3.10 In accordance with the Food Standards Agency's Recovery Plan, every A risk (Hygiene and Standards) category premises has been inspected, as has every B hygiene risk premises, except for one. Officers will now focus on inspecting seasonal premises (open during the summer only), which are in the C and D hygiene risk categories. Nevertheless, there is a backlog from previous years from when staff were focusing on Covid-19 work and these inspections are included in the service's work programme.
- 3.11 The **Trading Standards Service** deals with matters relating to Animal Health and Welfare as well as Consumer Protection. There is an annual aim of inspecting 49 high-risk establishments in 2022/23, and although only 3 inspections (6.12%) have been completed to date, I am confident that the service will complete the work since the majority of the inspections are carried out during the autumn and winter months.
- It is testament to the expertise of the staff that the Service is leading on and coordinating the animal feed hygiene standards inspection programme on behalf of the Food Standards Agency across the north Wales area, and this work is progressing.
- 3.12 **Trading Standards received 171 service requests** during April and May - a combination of requests for the animal welfare and consumer protection fields. This new measure shows that **137 (80%) of the applications received have been closed** in the period in question.
- 3.13 As reported in the Council's Performance Report for 2021/22, the **Licensing** team has experienced a long-term period of sickness, as well as an increase in applications, which both affecting the time taken to determine applications. In order to address this, the Department has strengthened the administrative support provided by the support team and has started to use the corporate procedure for submitting DBS applications on-line. This has meant that the time it takes to process taxi applications has reduced by the end of May. 88 taxi licence applications were received in the period in question, **with the time taken on average to determine applications for a taxi licence at 10 days.**
- Since mid-April, a self-service system has been established in order to submit taxi licence applications electronically via the Council's website. Although it will take time for the industry to get accustomed to the change, the Service is confident that increased use of the new system will improve the time it takes to process licences in the future. It is worth noting that **77% of taxi applications in May** were processed in **less than 3 days.**
- 3.14 An increase has been seen in the number of **service requests** submitted to the **Public Protection (Pollution and Licensing) team**. Of the 689 requests submitted, 65% have been closed. It is worth noting that 36% of all service requests received relating to environmental protection matters are noise complaints. Such complaints take time to

investigate as evidence needs to be gathered over a period of time, in order to determine how to act on powers to deal with statutory nuisance.

Tracing Service

- 3.15 This service has made a key contribution to safeguarding the people of Gwynedd since it became operational in June 2020, and I wish to acknowledge my appreciation of the staff's work. Over the past months, the service has continued to operate with lower levels as the tracing work reduced as a result of the changes to Covid-19 regulations. Since the beginning of July, responsibility for the field is delivered on a regional basis under the guidance of Flintshire County Council. Nevertheless, it is important to note that any substantial increase in Covid-19 cases in Gwynedd in the future will require the input of Public Protection staff and this is a matter that will be escalated on the Department's Risk Register.

Network Management Services

- 3.16 Nine Parking Enforcement Officers operate across the county over 7 days a week now, which includes flexible hours beyond normal hours. A new measure has been introduced, namely the **time taken to respond to complaints about illegal parking**. During the period in question, **25 complaints** were received, with staff **visiting each site in question within three days** of receiving the request, with **a visit carried out within one day in 50% of cases**. **It was not possible to enforce in 8% of the cases** as the condition of the restrictions did not meet the required standard, and requests have been transferred to the Council's Highways Department in order to re-paint the road.
- 3.17 Another new measure for car parks relates to the **percentage of appeals submitted to the independent adjudicator which have been successful**. Fines are issued for vehicles that park in breach of the on-street and off-street restrictions (car parks). The service deals with everyone in a consistent, fair and transparent manner, and every motorist is entitled to appeal if they feel that any unfairness or error has occurred. **373 appeals were submitted during the specified period, with 73, namely 20% of them, being revoked**. Excluding extraordinary situations, the majority of successful appeals have been lodged by individuals who have not displayed a valid ticket for various reasons, e.g. the ticket has fallen from view. Every appeal is considered in full and if robust evidence reinforces the claim that a genuine mistake has occurred, the fine is revoked.
- 3.18 Since April, a new measure has also been introduced to the Streetworks field, to monitor the **percentage of works by statutory contractors that has taken longer than the original timetable**. The work carried out on our street or roads is a part of daily life, and although it causes disruption to members of the public from time to time, such work is vital in order to provide and maintain utility and transport services. The service's street inspectors are responsible for coordinating and monitoring all activities carried out by statutory contractors or contractors on the public roads network, and strive to avoid situations where areas are disrupted for long periods of time. The data for April and May shows that 574 works by contractors (electricity, gas, water companies, etc.) were carried out, and of these, **91% were being carried out within the original timetable**. Works can run beyond the original timetable for various reasons, e.g. unexpected discoveries after the road is dug up, delays due to staffing problems, reliance on other companies, inability to source the appropriate tools or equipment.
- 3.19 A new measure has been introduced to **monitor the number of service requests to the Traffic and Projects Service that have been closed within a specific time**. The intention is to have systems in place to facilitate the arrangements in order to be able to report on this information at the next performance challenging meeting.

Transport and Road Safety Service

- 3.20 A new measure has been introduced to the service, namely the **number of service requests being closed within a specific time**. Work is in progress to establish a system to enable the service to report on performance in this field, with an intention to report on performance at the next performance challenging meeting.

Currently, there are no specific monitoring officers in place to be able to report on **the percentage of bus services that are on time**.

The Department is working with Public Transport providers as well as other bodies to try to respond to any concern or obstruction arising, for example, by arranging an on-demand service or establishing a new service. Obviously, fuel costs have increased substantially and this is a major challenge for bus operators and taxi companies in order for them to be financially viable.

Countryside Service

- 3.21 Since April, the Service has been collaborating with the Information Technology Service to establish a specific system that will enable them to monitor the performance of the **service requests receiving appropriate attention within a specific time**. This is a new measure and staff are starting to familiarise themselves with using the new system, and it is intended to start using the system in full to record service requests in July.

As a part of planning the Service's work for the years to come, strategic documents are being completed, namely:

- Rights of Way Improvement Plan - a draft of the Plan has been prepared, a [consultation](#) is open until 12 September, and we are eager to hear the views of Gwynedd's people and organisations about its contents.
- Nature Recovery Plan - good progress has been made on preparing the Plan, and the next step will be to engage with stakeholders. The departure of a member of staff has caused some delay and it is anticipated that the Plan will be completed during 2022.

The availability of grants for the Service's fields of work has increased during 2022/23, and up to mid-June, the Service had attracted £1.6 million from various sources to improve access, projects in the Llŷn AONB, as well as around £700,000 towards Local Places for Nature projects. In order to ensure that we are able to take advantage of and make the best use of these grants, it was agreed to earmark funding to appoint a Projects Officer for a year through the Transformation Fund, and it is pleasing to report that an experienced officer was appointed in May who will be responsible for the development, administration and implementation of grant programmes.

The Department's Business Services

- 3.22 As a part of our commitment in the field of customer satisfaction, new measures have been introduced since April for the performance in relation to the response to service requests from the Department's back office teams. In the field of **land charges**, it took **35 days on average to process applications** in April and May, with a total of 495 applications submitted over the two months. It should be noted that the service's situation has been challenging with an increase in land searches applications and enquiries, which reflects the situation in the housing market.
- 3.23 Since April, we also have a system in place to measure the **percentage of phone calls to the Public Protection group that are answered**, with **51% answered within 30 seconds**, and the **percentage of calls answered improving to 78%**. As a part of the calls system, the phone numbers of Public Protection officers transfer to a central group of numbers

if the officer does not answer after 3 rings. We will continue to monitor this field, and if it will help to improve performance, it may be possible to introduce a similar procedure for the Planning Service in due course.

4. FINANCIAL SITUATION/ SAVINGS

- 4.1 The Environment Department underspent £191k at the end of the 2021/22 financial year. In accordance with the Financial Regulations it was recommended to stick to the normal procedure to allow the department to keep (£100k) of its underspend in a fund.
- 4.2 The department has an element of a savings plan for 2022/23 as well as some additional plans which continue from previous years due to delay, totalling £113,120. At present, these have either been realised or on track to be realised by the end of the financial year.

Views of the statutory officers

The Monitoring Officer:

No observations to add in relation to propriety.

Head of Finance:

I am satisfied that the report is a fair reflection of the financial situation of the Environment Department.
