

ITEM 6 - QUESTIONS

(1) Question by Councillor Gruff Williams

How did this Council's Cabinet reach a joint-agreement with Anglesey Council not to make the Welsh language an objective in the new Joint Well-being Plan?

Reply – Leader of the Council – Councillor Dyfrig Siencyn

Firstly, it should be noted that the Welsh language has been a **permanent priority** for the Board since its establishment back in 2015. As noted in the Board's terms of reference...'*The main administrative language of the Public Services Board, orally and in writing, will be Welsh. Every member will prepare bilingual reports.*'

There is a statutory requirement for the Board to publish a Well-being Plan and establish well-being objectives every 5 years. This means that the new Well-being Plan (2023-28) for Gwynedd and Ynys Môn sets objectives for the next 5 years only. You will recall that this Plan was approved by this Council on 4 May last year. Three objectives were identified for the period in question, based on the outcomes of the well-being assessments completed in 2022. Whilst Well-being Objectives change over time, the Board's commitment to the prioritisation of the Welsh language is unwavering.

The objectives were developed jointly with all members of the Board, and the Well-being Plan has been formally approved by all statutory members, namely Cyngor Gwynedd, Cyngor Sir Ynys Môn, Betsi Cadwaladr Health Board, Natural Resources Wales and the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority.

Here is a quote from the Board's 2023/24 Delivery Plan which sets out the priority for the Welsh language and the objectives for the five years in question:

Here is our permanent priority:

*The **Welsh Language** is a permanent priority for the Board and we will promote it in all aspects of our work*

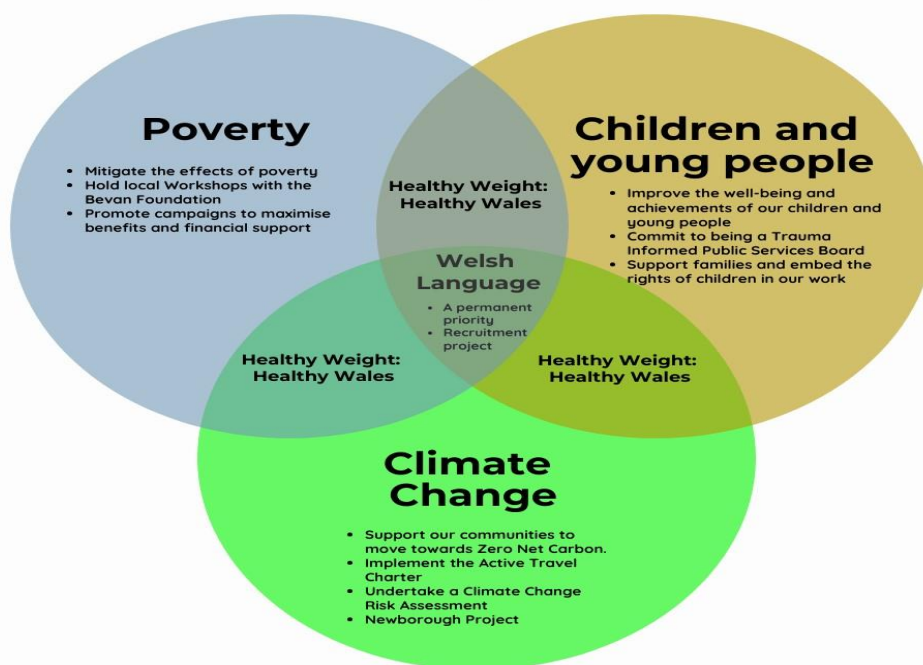
Here are our Well-being Objectives for the 2023-28 period:

- *We want to work together to mitigate the impact of **poverty** on the well-being of our communities*
- *We want to work together to safeguard and improve the well-being and success of our **children and young people** to enable them to realise their full potential.*
- *We want to work together to support our services and communities to shift towards **Zero Net Carbon**.*

We as a Board have agreed to follow the Whole System and Healthy Weight/Healthy Wales methodology as a golden thread throughout this work.

This provides an image of the above with the Welsh language in the centre and flowing through all of the Board's work.

Delivering the Well-being Plan 2024/25



(2) Question by Councillor Angela Russell

The late-night bus service from Pwllheli to rural areas of Llŷn has been a blessing for many people here in Dwyfor over the decades and a way for lonely people to go and socialise in town once a week. Since lockdown, this service has not been re-started.

I would like to ask the cabinet member what steps have been taken by the Transport Department to persuade the bus companies to re-start the late-night service from Pwllheli to Aberdaron / from Pwllheli to Nefyn?

Reply - Cabinet Member for the Environment, Councillor Dafydd Meurig

On a national basis, it is a very challenging time for the bus industry for many reasons. The costs of providing services have risen significantly, there is a premium on resources and it is difficult to generate sufficient and continuous use to make some services viable. Unfortunately, but inevitably, this means that providing services, especially outside of core times, including at night, has become increasingly difficult which in some cases, is due to a lack of drivers to undertake the work.

The Transport Unit works closely with providers, together with other key stakeholders such as Transport for Wales and the Welsh Government, with the intention of maximizing travel opportunities and providing services that are financially and environmentally sustainable. An extended review of the local bus services provided on behalf of the Council has been carried out. Following this work and despite the challenges and significant increase in costs, services in their new form have been commissioned and are now operating in the

Caernarfon, Dyffryn Nantlle and Meirionnydd areas. A procurement process for services in the Dwyfor area is ongoing and the focus, in the first place, is to maintain a level of provision for core purposes and at core times.

Unfortunately, in some areas of Wales, there has been a significant and general reduction and rationalisation of bus services with more likely to come. The hope is that we will be able to continue to withstand this from happening in Gwynedd.

The Council has no direct influence on the operation of services that bus companies choose to provide on a commercial basis. The timetables of the services that the Council commissions are based on optimising resources in order to meet core needs, in the first place, whilst taking into account the constraints and budgetary challenges.

Bus networks are dynamic and subject to change. Officers will continue in their efforts to maximise travel opportunities for Gwynedd residents with the budgets and resources available. Although very unlikely in the current climate, if there was an opportunity to restore an evening service between Pwllheli and areas in Pen Llŷn then we would look positively at this. The reasons for maintaining as many travel opportunities for as many different reasons as possible are numerous and strong but unfortunately, despite the best efforts and endeavours, it will not be possible to meet every need, want and desire.

(3) Question by Councillor Rhys Tudur

I have recently come to understand that a Cemetery Committee has received notice from the Council setting out regulations for commercial waste to divide waste within the bins. Given that members of such committees operate on an unpaid basis and with elderly members/trustees and that there is a big difference between the nature of a cemetery committee activity and high street business, I wonder if this Council has a plan in place to facilitate or mitigate these requirements for them?

Reply - Cabinet Member for the Environment, Councillor Dafydd Meurig

From April 2024, the Welsh Government's new Workplace Recycling Regulations will come into force. All non-domestic properties will need to separate recyclables from other waste. These new rules apply to all businesses and both the public and charitable sectors. We have received confirmation that cemeteries fall under these Regulations as well.

The purpose of the Regulations is to improve the quality and quantity of commercial recyclable waste collected and separated across Wales. The property owner will be responsible for all waste on site; this includes waste produced by visitors.

The Council will have the right to refuse to collect the general waste if it contains recyclable waste. The new legislation is being enforced by Natural Resources Wales, and we as a Council could be fined £500 if we are caught collecting waste containing recyclable materials.

We have raised this issue with Natural Resources Wales, but they did not anticipate that the different types of the items that are mandatory for recycling would end up in these bins. However, there is an expectation for the bin owner to make an effort to ensure that recyclable items, such as paper, plastics and metal cans are not disposed of in the general

bin. It would be sufficient and reasonable to place a sign on the bin stating that only general waste from the cemetery should be disposed of in the bin.

(4) Question by Councillor Jina Gwyrfai

How many posts are currently vacant in Cyngor Gwynedd Departments, and what measures are in place to ensure

- i) That the public does not receive a poorer service due to a shortage of staff;
- ii) That current staff do not have to bear an additional burden to meet Department staffing shortfalls, creating personal stress and low morale;
- iii) That a strategy is in place to reduce staff turnover (including possibly looking at employment scales and job descriptions)?

Reply – Cabinet Member for Corporate Support, Councillor Menna Trenholme

Overall, the level of staff turnover in this Council has been stable and relatively low for many years, and lower than other sectors of the economy. For example, the level was 8.5% in 2021/22 and then 8.1% in 2022/23. That said, there are variations within departments, which means that some parts of the Council are experiencing retention issues.

It is no easy task to reach a conclusion on the number of vacancies in such a large and complex organisation as the Council, but we do know about the main areas of work that have been experiencing problems over the past year. For example, there have been challenges in social work and caring more broadly, administration, finance and engineering. It is a matter of fact that other local authorities across Wales are experiencing the same kind of problems, and in addition to that we of course want all our staff to be able to carry out their work through the medium of Welsh. All of this poses a major challenge for the local government sector at the moment.

We as a Council are already taking steps to understand more about the situation and to respond. We have introduced a process of giving staff the opportunity to complete exit questionnaires and interviews when they resign from their post. A number of departments have also taken the opportunity to review structures and job descriptions. In some situations, this has led to pay scales being changed to ensure that what is being paid reflects the level of responsibilities. For example, last year this Council approved a financial package which led to increasing the salaries of those staff who work as carers in our residential homes and in the community. We must remember of course that we have pay systems that protect us in relation to equal pay legislation, but changes can be introduced within that system.

It is also important to remember of course that there are all sorts of possible reasons why staff choose the Council as their employer, or otherwise leave. Those factors include the salary, but also the wider benefits package; the number of leave days for example, the robust and attractive pension scheme that is available, and the flexible working arrangements that are potential options. The responsibilities of the job, workload and work pressures can also influence individuals' decisions. We also believe that the well-being of our staff is important and this is reflected in the emphasis we as an employer have placed on that for years now.

There are many factors at play within this picture, and in that regard, there has recently been a survey of the views of staff on the Council as their employer, titled 'Staff Voice Questionnaire'. The results have already been published among the departments, and overall, it is clear that the majority of our staff see the Council as a caring employer that provides opportunities for staff to develop and puts well-being at the forefront of the agenda. That said, there are in the results a number of important messages for us to consider going forward.

Any recruitment and retention problems can inevitably lead to disruption to service delivery for a period of time. The financial pressures, and the potential impact on jobs, contribute to this too, of course. We are also fully aware that the goodwill of staff who give their best to deliver services cannot be taken advantage of; that is why there is such an emphasis on supporting the well-being of our staff and why it is also more important than ever to strike the right balance between doing so but also delivering the essential services to the highest possible standard for the residents of the county.

(5) Question by Councillor Gareth Williams

The unannounced cuts to provision for apprenticeships are a concern for many year eleven pupils in Llŷn and Eifionydd. Given that this chipping away at the provision is far from consistent with the aspirations in the Cyngor Gwynedd Plan about giving our children and young people the best start, did Grŵp Llandrillo-Menai consult with the Council before making this change to the provision and what discussions are currently ongoing between the Council and Grŵp Llandrillo-Menai to rectify the situation?

Reply – Cabinet Member for Education, Councillor Beca Brown

Grŵp Llandrillo Menai did not consult with the Council regarding a change to the provision for apprenticeships, but talks have been held recently to enable the Council to understand the background and context behind the cuts.

In order to provide a complete answer to the question, I now refer to a response received from Aled Jones-Griffiths, Head of Coleg Meirion Dwyfor and Coleg Menai: *“Despite the significant cuts for 2024/25 Grŵp Llandrillo Menai will still offer over 1300 apprenticeship places next year, and within this figure, we will prioritize young people between 16-19 and will guarantee a place if they meet the entry requirements and have found suitable employers. It is important to note that in only one area is there any change, namely Construction.*

Following a decision by Qualifications Wales and the Welsh Government, there are no longer any Foundation Apprenticeships at level 2 available in Construction, only Level 3 Apprenticeships which have significantly higher entry requirements. The intention of this change is to encourage learners who are currently in school to come to college full time for the first year to complete the appropriate foundation qualification as well as the essential skills required for completion of the framework at Level 3 for their apprenticeship pathway. When they have successfully completed a year at college, we expect that they will then go on to do the Level 3 apprenticeship.

We recognize that the above model does not work for all learners, especially some from rural areas. To respond to this, we intend to offer a part-time route (one day a week) in the

Construction field using Further Education funding rather than apprenticeship funding for those who have already had a place with an employer. This means that a part-time route to Construction will be available in September alongside the full-time route and both routes lead towards the new level 3 apprenticeship.

The Welsh Government's final budget was announced on 27 February and therefore we did not want to make statements on our curriculum proposal until we were clear on our financial situation. It is unfortunate that a misinterpretation of changes has taken place in the meantime and incorrect information is being put on social media without understanding the full picture.

There is no requirement to consult the Council as the provision that is offered above reflects the provision that has historically been available to 16-year-old pupils. It would also be useful if we were members of the Gwynedd Secondary Heads' Group so that we could keep them up to date with changes in further education.

In all other areas that have an apprenticeship at level 2 as an entry point, those who leave school will be able to gain entry directly from school as has always been the case. Engineering is in this category.

I hope this allays the fears of the young people and parents of Llŷn. A number of parents have been discussing with us during this week and we have calmed their fears by fully explaining the situation to them. Anyone is welcome to contact Grŵp Llandrillo Menai if they want to discuss further."