
MEETING OF THE FULL COUNCIL 11/07/24

Present: Councillor Beca Roberts (Chair)
Councillor Ioan Thomas (Vice-chair).

Councillors:- Menna Baines, Beca Brown, Stephen Churchman, R. Glyn Daniels, Anwen J. Davies, Dafydd Owen Davies, Elwyn Edwards, Elfed Wyn ap Elwyn, Alan Jones Evans, Dylan Fernley, Delyth Lloyd Griffiths, Jina Gwyrfaï, John Brynmor Hughes, R. Medwyn Hughes, Iwan Huws, Elin Hywel, Nia Wyn Jeffreys, Anne Lloyd Jones, Berwyn Parry Jones, Dawn Lynne Jones, Elin Walker Jones, Gwilym Jones, Gareth Tudor Jones, Linda Ann Jones, Eryl Jones-Williams, Cai Larsen, Beth Lawton, Dafydd Meurig, Dilwyn Morgan, Linda Morgan, Dewi Owen, Edgar Wyn Owen, Gwynfor Owen, Llio Elenid Owen, Gareth Coj Parry, Rheinallt Puw, Arwyn Herald Roberts, Elfed P Roberts, John Pughe Roberts, Meryl Roberts, Richard Glyn Roberts, Huw Llwyd Rowlands, Paul Rowlinson, Angela Russell, Dyfrig Siencyn, Peter Thomas, Menna Trenholme, Rob Triggs, Rhys Tudur, Hefin Underwood, Einir Wyn Williams, Elfed Williams, Gareth Williams, Gruffydd Williams, Sasha Williams and Siân Williams.

Officers: Dafydd Gibbard (Chief Executive), Geraint Owen (Corporate Director), Dylan Owen (Corporate Director and Statutory Director of Social Services), Dewi Morgan (Statutory Finance Officer), Iwan Evans (Monitoring Officer), Ian Jones (Head of Democracy Services), Ffion Madog (Assistant Head of Finance – Accountancy and Pensions), Carys Fôn Williams (Head of Housing and Property Department), Marian Parry Hughes (Head of Children and Supporting Families Department), Vera Jones (Democracy and Language Service Manager) and Lowri Haf Evans (Democracy Services Officer).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Craig ab Iago, Louise Hughes, Annwen Hughes, Dewi Jones, Elwyn Jones, June Jones, Huw Wyn Jones, Nigel Pickavance and Gareth A. Roberts

2. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting of the Council held on 9 May 2024 as a true record.

3. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were received.

4. THE CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

It was noted that the Council wished to express condolences to everyone within the county's communities who had lost loved ones recently.

The Council stood in silence as a mark of respect and remembrance.

It was noted that several Council members had been ill recently, and they were wished a full and speedy recovery.

Everyone from Gwynedd who had been successful at this year's Urdd Eisteddfod in Maldwyn recently was congratulated, and in particular, Lois Medi William of Penrhosgarnedd, the Eisteddfod Chief Bard. The Chair also congratulated Medi Harris from Borth-y-Gest who had been selected for the Paris 2024 Olympic Games swimming squad.

The Members of Parliament who had been elected at the recent General Election were congratulated and Council staff and others who had been involved in the Election were thanked for their work.

Best wishes were conveyed to Bala Football Club and Caernarfon Football Club who were competing in one of the European leagues – Caernarfon for the first time in its history.

5. URGENT ITEMS

None to note.

6. QUESTIONS

(The Cabinet Members' written responses to the questions had been published in advance.)

(1) Question from Councillor Jina Gwyrfai

What monitoring is done of the social housing stock that is managed by the Housing Agencies on behalf of Cyngor Gwynedd to ensure the most effective use for our residents and communities? In particular, what statistics are available to identify

- i) **Under-occupation** (one person in a 3 or 4 bedroom house)
- ii) **Over-occupation** (family (parent(s) and two or more children) in a two-bedroom property with the children of an age to have a bedroom of their own due to age/gender legal conditions)
- iii) **Tenant absence** (someone who pays rent but does not live in the property permanently)
- iv) **House swap** by advertising for a private house swap.

Answer – Leader of the Council, Councillor Dyfrig Siencyn, on behalf of the Cabinet Member for Housing

As a result of the social housing stock transfer in 2010, Cyngor Gwynedd has no role or resources to monitor the performance of the Housing Associations operating in the county. The role of monitoring housing associations is a responsibility for Welsh Government through the Regulatory Framework for Housing Associations registered in Wales.

Although the Council has a responsibility for operating the Common Housing Allocation Policy and is responsible for the Housing Register on behalf of the Housing Partnership, the matters raised by the Member are operational matters entirely within the control of the individual housing associations. However, the Council has robust arrangements in place through the Housing Partnership to facilitate collaboration in order to increase the opportunities for Gwynedd residents to have access to affordable housing, and the Housing and Property Department has already written formally to the housing associations to request the information.

Supplementary Question from Councillor Jina Gwyrfai

Do you accept that these issues are the cause of cruel hurt and frustration for our people, and are having a negative impact on our communities and in the case of the 'houseswaps', they are also damaging to the Welsh language? If so, how can the Council, having received the appropriate data, influence/work with the Housing Partnership and improve the current unsatisfactory situation, to ensure the effective use of our limited housing stock?

Answer – Leader of the Council, Councillor Dyfrig Siencyn, on behalf of the Cabinet Member for Housing

Although he did not agree with the first statement as there was no specific evidence at the moment according to the Housing Service that aligned with the basis of these concerns, the Leader noted that he was aware that there was frustration because the Council had a lengthy waiting list and it was a significant problem for Cyngor Gwynedd and for several other Councils. However, he noted that a request had been made to the Partners, not only asking them to submit the information included in the original question, but also to investigate the situation to respond in the most appropriate way based on the evidence. In terms of under-occupancy and overcrowding, it was noted that the Council's Common Housing Allocation Policy set out priorities for allocating social properties in the county and that under-occupancy/overcrowding had already been included as priority areas. After receiving the information from the Housing Associations, he would be happy for the officers to report back and provide an update on the situation and contact Councillor Jina Gwyrfaï directly to discuss the matter further.

(2) Question by Councillor Angela Russell

As Leader of Gwynedd's Independent Group, I would like an update on the investigations into how the former headteacher of Ysgol Friars, who has been found guilty and sentenced, was able to continue his predatory behaviour over many years in this county. Due to the seriousness of the case, the Independent Group is currently in contact with the Welsh Government to request a Statutory Public Inquiry into this distressing matter.

Reply – Cabinet Member for Education, Councillor Beca Brown

As the Cabinet Member for Education in Cyngor Gwynedd, she expressed that the first of July, the day the former head teacher Neil Foden was imprisoned for abusing girls, had been a culmination of some kind. Like many of the Members, her thoughts had been with the girls who were harmed and she was full of admiration for their courage in stepping into the court and presenting their statements. She welcomed the sentence in the hope that the outcome brought some peace to the victims and their families and that they could see a way forward to begin rebuilding their lives. She noted that such crimes would cast a long shadow over the victims' lives and when they might become mothers/grandmothers themselves, and when their children/grandchildren reach school age the experience of saying goodbye to them at the school gate would be one of painful emotion. All the girls did was to go to school – they went there to be safe.

She highlighted, in such a situation, that 'lessons to be learnt' was a loose and inadequate term, but by learning, to the best of our ability, we could ensure that something like this would never happen again in the County. She reported that an independent review by the North Wales Safeguarding Board had commenced, chaired by Jan Pickles – a very, very experienced person who had led on a number of high profile and complex reviews. The Cabinet Member noted that she had every confidence in Jan Pickles and her team and that she welcomed the work, even though there were limitations to the process. She noted that it would not be possible to compel witnesses or to give evidence under oath, and the review would only invite people expecting that everyone who was invited by the Chair would accept it. Despite highlighting concerns that it was not possible to force everyone who was invited to accept, that any matter which fell outside the scope of the review would be addressed by the Chair who in due course would recommend how to address those issues. Although accepting the possibility of further investigations and should the Children's Commissioner or Welsh Government feel the need for it, she would welcome this – the Gwynedd Plaid Cymru Group had already called for a public inquiry.

She reiterated that an e-mail address would be set-up for the review and would be shared with every Member. If anyone had any information or relevant comments on the matter they were encouraged to share the information/comments with the review.

No stone would be left unturned – every parent and child in the County deserved this.

Supplementary Observation by Councillor Angela Russell

There was a need to ensure that Councillors and all Council staff received training on the Whistleblowing Policy and how to implement it effectively.

Answer – Dafydd Gibbard, Chief Executive

A clear Whistle-blowing Policy existed within the Council and staff were aware of it, and it would certainly be possible to raise awareness of the Policy amongst Councillors. Should further training be required, it would be possible to hold discussions to arrange this.

(3) Question by Councillor Elin Hywel

Considering the inseparable bond of economy, community, language and heritage; what steps is this Council undertaking to ensure the protection and sustainability of the heritage economy sectors and related traditional skills of the communities of Gwynedd?

Answer – The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for the Economy, Councillor Nia Jeffreys.

Traditional economic sectors continue to be an important component of Gwynedd's economy. In 2023 (UK Business Counts ONS survey 2023 – NOMIS) 1,188 (22.5%) businesses in Gwynedd were registered in the agricultural sector, 30 forestry businesses (0.6%), 30 fishing businesses (0.6%) and 10 quarrying businesses (0.2%). While the percentages of these businesses continue to exceed the national average, the number of businesses and employees within the sectors has declined significantly over the years. In 2022 (Business Register and Employment ONS survey 2022 – NOMIS), 4,500 (7.5%) workers were recorded in the agriculture sector, 75 (0.1%) in forestry, 35 (0.1%) workers fishing and 250 (0.4%) working in the quarrying sector.

The evolution of these sectors over the centuries has shaped our communities, forged identities and left a rich cultural legacy.

The Council's Plan recognises the value of heritage and the relationship with the economy and language. Prosperous Gwynedd priority projects show that action is being taken by Cyngor Gwynedd in this area, including:

- Arfor Programme – Cyngor Gwynedd, through its ARFOR partnership, has been researching the relationship between language and economy and trialling different economic development interventions to gather evidence about the impact of different economic policies on the Welsh language. We will continue to monitor the impact and evaluate the investment over the next year.
- Slate Programme – creating prosperity from the Northwest Wales Slate Landscape World Heritage Site designation is one of the priority areas within our Plan. The relationship between heritage and the Welsh language is at the core of this scheme along with the collaboration between a range of community, private and public sector partners to own the benefits. There is an £18.6M investment from the UK Government's Levelling-Up Fund in the Llewyrch o'r Llechi scheme to create more local benefits from the heritage and the successful Heritage Lottery bid will in addition focus on developing traditional construction skills.
- Business and Enterprise Support Programme – businesses face constant challenges when having to face changing market demand, production costs and technology development. Cyngor Gwynedd has taken steps to support businesses to adapt and innovate to protect and create new employment in our communities. Over £2M has been committed to support various businesses between 2023 and 2024. It is conditional for all enterprises to promote the use of the Welsh language and invest in a living wage for their employees, and a number of traditional businesses and enterprises promoting heritage have received funding. Examples from 2023 include

a £250,000 investment from Cyngor Gwynedd, through the UK Government's Shared Prosperity Fund for EcoMuseum and £400,000 in the Môr Ni project to support the marine and fishing sector.

- Rural Innovation Centre Glynllifon – Cyngor Gwynedd is working with Grŵp Llandrillo Menai and its partners on the Ambition North Wales Board, to develop a centre to further develop skills for the agri-food sector. The work couples traditional skills with contemporary skills and technology to ensure the viability of future enterprises.
- Diwyllesiant Project – £1.6M has been invested through the UK Government's Shared Prosperity Fund to support local communities and organisations between 2023 and 2024 to develop cultural and heritage projects across the county.

Cyngor Gwynedd will be preparing a new Economic Plan this year to set the direction for the 2025-2028 investment programmes. I anticipate that there will be a lot more scrutiny of economic priorities over the coming months to make the best use of the resources available to maintain and create quality employment in Gwynedd into the future.

Supplementary Question from Councillor Elin Hywel

Thank you for the comprehensive information received in the response. I wish to note that I look forward to the development of the new economic plan. Our economy here in Gwynedd is a living economy that is developing consistently. Our understanding of the economy's potential to enable resilient, independent and sustainable communities is also developing. Recognising the role of the economy in serving our communities it is important to protect our traditional, heritage sectors beyond merely a share of the market or the number of jobs. Gwynedd's heritage economy and traditional skills sectors represent a unique language, culture and skills.

For coastal locations – such as Pwllheli, the traditional and hereditary maritime sectors are important to the continuation and development of our community, to the protection of our heritage and identity.

What specific strategies or plans does Cyngor Gwynedd have to work with maritime and coastal heritage sectors in Gwynedd to protect and develop these sectors?

Answer – The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for the Economy, Councillor Nia Jeffreys.

Gwynedd's coast is vast, extending from Abergwyngregyn to Aberdyfi, and therefore the heritage, the stories and the history is very important for all communities to treasure, but also to bring economic benefit to the County. I am therefore pleased that the Council is collaborating by supporting and funding projects such as Eco Amgueddfa which celebrates Llŷn's Maritime Heritage and projects such as Môr Ni, which supports fishermen, businesses and enterprises that make use of sea produce, over the last two years – happy to share more information with the Councillors and others. The project succeeds in combining the traditional with the innovative, the arts with science, introducing children and young people to exciting activities that highlight local opportunities deriving from the sea and heritage. The Councillor reiterated that it was possible to do more, and understood Councillor Elin Hywel's comment on the need for an appropriate plan; welcomed the opportunity to work with Councillor Elin Hywel and representatives of other coastal wards to celebrate the maritime heritage of our communities.

(4) Question by Councillor Richard Glyn Roberts

The Environment Department has been kind enough to provide a list, ward by ward, of the schemes worth more than £100,000 undertaken to improve the infrastructure of the county's roads, paths and pavements in the last five years. Of the 22 schemes, there is one that applies to the county as a whole (the 20mph scheme) and another that is split quite evenly

between the main towns (Gwynedd charging points). Of the remaining twenty schemes, 5 are in Meirionnydd and 12 in Arfon and the Lôn Las Eifion scheme could be added to the latter, as, despite its name, it is in the Arfon area, apart from the extreme western end of the path which is in the Clynog ward. That leaves two schemes in Dwyfor. Two out of twenty. What explains this disproportionality?

Response – Cabinet Member for the Environment, Councillor Dafydd Meurig

The Member's analysis is correct in the context of the information provided in response to a fairly specific question and criteria.

Other/wider transport projects have been realised in Gwynedd which are not included in the response to the Member. For example, there is a depot and charging infrastructure for the innovative electric buses operating on the T22 route located in Porthmadog. We are also working on other schemes in Dwyfor including working with Aldi for the introduction of walking and cycling paths on the road outside the new supermarket in Pwllheli.

The profile of what is possible to achieve and where will also change over time and the value of projects can vary significantly which means that the number of projects is only one measure. It was reported that £350k has been secured this year to improve safe routes outside the new Ysgol Trefferthyr in Cricieth.

The information provided refers to projects where applications for grant funding have been successful. Other applications have been submitted, including in the Dwyfor area, which have been unsuccessful for more than one reason. This is because the Welsh Government sets annual budgets for various grants and the number and value of applications significantly exceeds the funds available to develop and realise them across Wales. There are specific criteria associated with some grants not conducive to rural areas that make the case challenging, if not impossible. Developing quality applications takes considerable resource in itself, and capacity is therefore also a factor in the number and quality of applications that can be developed and presented each year.

Taking the above into account it would be very difficult to make an objective assessment of whether there is a disparity because there are so many factors influencing this.

The Transport Service will continue in its efforts to develop projects that benefit communities across Gwynedd. This is done recognising there will be different stakeholders with different views and priorities in terms of what and where projects should be undertaken. Unfortunately, it will not be possible to satisfy or meet everyone's aspirations and expectations. The Service's approach is to maximise the resources available and to continue to realise and deliver transport projects on a year-by-year basis. This will include developing and strengthening applications that have been unsuccessful in the past.

Supplementary Question from Councillor Richard Glyn Roberts

How does the department guarantee fairness in the process of developing projects and financial bids so that the actions of the department itself (independent to the Government's grant criteria) do not lead to some sort of *managed decline* in the case of the Dwyfor area, where Gwynedd disregards Dwyfor just as Cardiff disregards Gwynedd?

Reply – Cabinet Member for the Environment, Councillor Dafydd Meurig

I do understand the sentiment, however, Government criteria mean that Gwynedd, in relation to such projects, is often worse off compared to more populated counties and unfortunately this is the procedure, although we do not agree with it. Nevertheless, I am pleased that there is some resource available to develop the projects in the first place, and although there are some currently on the shelf, they are ready to be delivered and unlike some other counties,

Gwynedd will not give up on capacity. Although the Council faces a series of savings and cuts in the coming years, Gwynedd will do well to hold on to the resource we have.

7. ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN 2024/2034

Before submitting the report, the Leader of the Council took the opportunity to congratulate the Member of Parliament, Liz Saville Roberts, on a substantial win in the general election; the wonderful success of Llinos Medi on her election as the Member of Parliament for Môn, and to Catrin Wager (former Cabinet member) on her excellent performance in the Aberconwy election.

The report was submitted by the Leader of the Council asking the Council to adopt the Assets Plan 2024-34 in accordance with the recommendation of the Cabinet at its meeting on 11 June 2024. It was explained that the Council received a capital grant from Welsh Government every year to be used for asset management priorities, such as buildings, roads, vehicles, information technology and equipment that was needed to provide the best possible services to the people of Gwynedd. The report was therefore a forewarning of the financial situation – highlighting the significant gap between what was needed and what was available to spend with inadequate resources available for capital purposes, very similar to the Council's revenue position (discussions on the revenue budget had already commenced among Heads of Departments and Cabinet Members to consider how to operate within the budget). Nevertheless, they had managed to address some basic elements and earmark money for projects that had been prioritised. The Chief Executive and his team were thanked for leading the work and conducting a process that had included consulting with Members.

It was announced that the Welsh Government had confirmed funding for the Penrhos project – the news was to be welcomed which enabled continuing with the excellent scheme that responded to the real needs of people who needed care in the Pwllheli area.

He referred to some of the schemes that had been identified and some of the schemes that currently did not have a resource, but the situation would be reviewed continuously.

The Chief Executive reiterated, despite the lack of capital, there was not a lack of effort to provide services despite the high demands and the low level of resource. He highlighted that the core capital grant would remain at the same level – £6.6 million a year, and it would not be possible to deliver as much with the core resource given inflation levels over the last five years, £6.6 million's worth in 2009 was equivalent to £4.3 million today, which was a 34% reduction.

The members expressed their gratitude for the report. Members were given an opportunity to make observations and ask questions. The following matters were raised:-

In response to an observation about the need to look into the population figures for Gwynedd (published in the last Census) given that the amount funded by Welsh Government was calculated according to the County's total population, the Leader noted that he was concerned about the population figure and there was a need to look at obtaining more robust statistics in the future.

In response to an observation regarding upgrading water pipes for housing estates and why this was the Council's responsibility, the Chief Executive confirmed that due to changes in responsibility, the Council would not be responsible for the maintenance of the pipes from now on, and therefore there would be no further spending by the Council in this area and the money could be made available to other services.

Pride was expressed at the confirmation of the Penrhos investment – it would make a significant difference to the area of Pwllheli where there was a real need for the service.

Despite the financial challenges, the investments contributed to existing schemes across the County.

It was hoped that discussions with the Health Board and Welsh Government on creating a Health Hub for the city of Bangor would come to fruition.

RESOLVED

To adopt the Assets Plan 2024-2034 in accordance with the Cabinet's recommendation on 11 June 2024 and to include:

- **The financial sums recommended in Appendix 1 of the report.**
- **Uncommitting the financial sums in the current Asset Management Plan.**
- **The Cabinet to prioritise and determine the financial allocation for a) planned maintenance of buildings and b) the next phase of schools' modernisation projects, should an additional capital resource be identified in future.**

8. THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE'S ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24

Mr Eifion Jones, Chair of the Standards Committee, was welcomed to the meeting to submit the committee's annual report for 2023/24.

The Chair noted that it was a pleasure to submit a positive report with standards remaining high. He reiterated that the Committee had succeeded to strengthen arrangements for responding to the political group leaders' duty by agreeing upon and adopting criteria to measure the success of the system. He thanked the three leaders and the Monitoring Officer for the positive collaboration when undertaking the work and he also thanked the Committee Members for their support throughout the year.

The Monitoring Officer reiterated that the response to the new duty was the result of good collaboration. He emphasised the need to ensure understanding of the Code of Conduct and that this could be done by holding further training that would ensure that Members were familiar with the basics of the Code. He also highlighted that there was a vacant seat on the Committee and he encouraged Council Members to refer individuals on to apply.

The Chair of the Standards Committee was thanked for his work during the year.

RESOLVED to accept the report.

9. THE ANNUAL REPORT OF THE GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE 2023/24

Mr Eifion Jones, Vice-chair of the Committee, was welcomed to the meeting to submit the committee's annual report for 2023/24 in the absence of the former Chair of the Committee for the period, Mrs Sharon Warnes.

He noted that it was a pleasure to submit the Chair's report, based on Welsh Government's statutory requirements, outlining how the Committee had considered the difficult factors the Council had faced over the period along with the Committee's observations on how the Council had responded firmly to those risks. He highlighted that the Committee had conducted its first Self-assessment in April 2024 and drew attention to the very satisfactory results of that self-assessment.

The Committee Members were thanked for their cooperation and their key contribution to the Committee's work. The officers who had been supporting the Committee's work in a thorough and professional manner were also thanked. Councillor Ioan Thomas was welcomed as a new member of the Committee and Councillor Paul Rowlinson, former member of the Committee, was congratulated for his appointment as Cabinet Member for Finance.

Best wishes were expressed to Carys Edwards in her role as the Chair of the Committee for 2024/25 and to Rhys Parry as the Vice-chair of the Committee for 2024/25.

The members expressed their thanks for the report.

In response to an observation by Councillor Eryl Jones Williams that he was disappointed that the Committee has supported a risk to the Council with DoLS and that the Care Scrutiny Committee had been against this along the years, Mr Eifion Jones noted that he accepted the observation, but highlighted that the Committee's work was to make recommendations, and not to make decisions.

RESOLVED

TO ACCEPT THE REPORT AND NOTE THE INFORMATION

10. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE STATUTORY DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL SERVICES 2023/24

The Statutory Director of Social Services submitted his annual report regarding the performance of the Social Services in Gwynedd during 2023/24. The elements that were important to the individual were discussed, things that people could not live without and he referred to research carried out by the PAL (Canada) organisation where the five most important things that were common to all had been identified. He had used these five areas as a basis for his report and discussed how Social Services in Gwynedd responded to those elements – friends and family, my own home, freedom to make decisions, a role that is appreciated in society and feeling safe.

During his presentation, a short film was shared highlighting the extraordinary work of the learning disability team that was responsible for arranging and developing work opportunities. The film contained interviews with support workers and individuals who had received opportunities along with examples of the good work being achieved.

The Director thanked Marian Parry Hughes (Head of the Children's Services) and Aled Davies (Head of Adult Services) for their work. The staff of the services were also thanked with a special thank you to Catrin Thomas for her work with Supporting People and he wished her good luck in her new role. He also thanked Lois Owens (Senior Executive Officer) for assisting with the work of preparing the report.

The Chair thanked the Director for the presentation which highlighted the good work.

The Leader's gratitude was echoed by many other members, and the following matters were raised by individual members:-

- The letter included in the report which thanked carers for their work was inspiring – the service were thanked for their work.
- Despite the good work being achieved, there was no reference to complaints in the report.
- There was a wish to see learning disability work opportunity schemes extended to Meirionnydd (not just Arfon).
- The report was full of useful information, was honest and easy to read.
- That an 'Age Friendly Gwynedd' was needed for all ages – needed to promote this
- There was a need to raise awareness and encourage the use of the *boardmaker* software.
- The report was positive despite increasing pressures on the services.
- There was a need for more collaboration between departments, schools and workplaces to address and respond to the increasing demand for autism diagnosis (two-year waiting list). Cost implications for this service and there was a need to cooperate across the services to have a better understanding of the situation and to share ideas.

- Extended thanks for the third sector's work, for those residents in Gwynedd who were unpaid carers – needed to do more to support them.
- There was a need to raise awareness of direct payments as a means of receiving care and support services – good examples across the County where this had been successful.

In response, the Statutory Director noted :-

- That every effort was being made to emulate the work of the learning disability service team in the south of the County in response to the increase in the number of people with learning disabilities (from 44 to 99).
- The complaints were referred to in the Further Information page at the end of the report which also included a link to the Annual Report on Complaints.
- Although he accepted there was a two-year waiting list for autism diagnosis, the children's services dealt with the symptoms and not conditions ensuring that the appropriate support was being provided. It was highlighted that a new Autism Service had launched during 2023/24 which provided information and training to improve the understanding of autism.
- That the work of unpaid carers was crucial to the service with a substantially high percentage of unpaid carers not being recognised – there was certainly room to thank and appreciate them for their work. Although accepting the need to do more, it was reported there were specific officers who worked with unpaid carers, introducing innovative ideas to support children and invest resources in adult hubs to support carers.
- That the work of raising awareness of direct payments was being implemented and was certainly a way forward.

RESOLVED

TO ACCEPT THE REPORT AND NOTE THE INFORMATION

11. STRATEGIC SAFEGUARDING PANEL'S ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24

The Cabinet Member for Corporate Support, Councillor Menna Trenholme, submitted the annual report of the Strategic Safeguarding Panel 2023/24 noting that the report provided an overview of the work that had taken place by the Strategic Safeguarding Panel. She highlighted that a new policy had been approved by the Cabinet in February 2024 following a review of the previous policy formed in 2013.

Attention was drawn to concerns about the increase in looked after children referrals along with concerns about the DoLS services which had a substantial number waiting for assessments.

It was reported, although the panel focussed on corporate responsibilities relating to safeguarding matters within Gwynedd, they were working well with agencies and partners.

RESOLVED

TO ACCEPT THE REPORT AND NOTE THE INFORMATION

12. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES 2023/24

The Head of Democratic Services submitted his annual report which highlighted the support that was available to Gwynedd Councillors along with the main activities during 2023/24. The Head thanked the Chair of the Democratic Services Committee, Councillor Dewi Owen and the members of the committee and the officers within the service who provided day-to-day support.

He drew attention to the weekly bulletin which shared information along with the intention of increasing the percentage of members attending training. It was reiterated that the training programme concentrated on the Council's areas of priority, which would include safety and scrutiny improvements. It was also noted that the members' intranet was continuously developed and he would work closely with the current Chair of the Democratic Services Committee, Councillor Anne Lloyd Jones, to develop the Democratic Services Newsletter.

RESOLVED

TO ACCEPT THE REPORT AND NOTE THE INFORMATION

13. SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24

Submitted – the Annual Report of the Scrutiny Forum for 2023/24 by Councillor Elin Hywel on behalf of the Chair of the Scrutiny Forum, Councillor Beth Lawton. Best wishes were sent to Councillor Beth Lawton and she was thanked for her unwavering fair and strong leadership on scrutiny.

Attention was drawn to the scrutiny work achieved during 2023/24 providing independent assurance on different fields. There was reference to examples where differences had been seen due to good scrutiny along with additional work such as holding a scrutiny investigation and task and finish groups that were achieved in light of Members' requests. Additionally, a review had been held of the scrutiny arrangements and actions had been identified. Following recent training, the need to create clear and measurable recommendations had been recognised that would in turn establish more formal arrangements to keep an eye on the impact of scrutiny.

The Officers were thanked for their support and for creating the report with care. The Members were also thanked for their perseverance in ensuring effective, detailed and purposeful scrutiny in Gwynedd.

Members were given an opportunity to make observations and ask questions. The following matters were raised by individual members:-

Councillor Beth Lawton and Councillor Elin Hywel were thanked – the work achieved over the year was appreciated.

In response to a question regarding the Chairperson-ship of the Education and Economy Committee and a request to consider the Vice-chair to Chair succession, the monitoring officer noted that the current arrangement was in accordance with the political balance.

In response to a proposal that the Chair and Vice-chair (Lay Members of the Governance and Audit Committee) should be invited to the Scrutiny Forum, the monitoring officer noted, in accordance with CIPFA guidance that the Governance and Audit Committee did not hold the statutory role of scrutiny but reiterated that it would be possible to refer the proposal for the Head of Democratic Services' consideration.

Concern was expressed by Councillor Richard Glyn Roberts that the Estyn report highlighted that the internal operations of the Education Department were acceptable, although obviously, following the court case of the former Headteacher of Ysgol Friars in Bangor, the situation was entirely different. It was noted there was a need to consider a procedure that challenges information rather than having to only accept the information in question.

DECISION

TO ACCEPT THE REPORT AND NOTE THE INFORMATION

14. **CONSULTATION ON A SINGLE TRANSFERABLE VOTE SYSTEM FOR CYNGOR GWYNEDD ELECTIONS**

Submitted – the report of the Cabinet Member for Corporate Support asking the Council to support an amended timetable for holding a consultation on the adoption of a Single Transferable Vote System for Cyngor Gwynedd elections from 2027 onwards. It was noted that the timetable was being amended in light of holding a general election in the UK at the beginning of July 2024. It was highlighted that it would have been inappropriate to hold a consultation during a general election and therefore the process had been postponed and an alternative timetable had been formulated to conduct the process.

A proposed timetable was submitted with the intention of beginning the consultation on 15 July 2024.

Members were given an opportunity to make observations and ask questions. The following matters were raised by individual members:-

In response to a question on how local residents would be notified of the campaign, the monitoring officer noted that information would be available on the Council website, in libraries and information would be shared with Community and Town and City Councils.

In response to a question whether an equality impact assessment had been undertaken, the monitoring officer noted that an initial equality assessment had been completed, but a detailed equality assessment would be completed before submitting the final report to a special meeting of the Full Council on 24 October 2024. In response to an ancillary question, it was noted that the assessment would include the impact on the Welsh language.

In response to a request for any presumptions of the possible geographical areas that would be necessary to ensure there was contact between the councillor and the area, the monitoring officer noted that the statute was to create a ward of between 3 and 6 members (accepting that 3 members was very low for rural areas), but that it was not intended to highlight boundaries / set a map due to concerns that this could lead to opinions being formed based on the boundaries. He reiterated that the commission had established a threshold of establishing wards by considering the number of electors in each electorate – any presumption of the size and form of the ward could be misleading.

Concern was expressed that merging urban wards to secure a population figure could lead to mismanagement with the surrounding rural areas losing out. Had consideration been given to creating new wards rather than merging wards? In response, the monitoring officer noted that it would be a general review of wards.

RESOLVED

TO SUPPORT THE REVISED TIMETABLE FOR CONDUCTING A CONSULTATION ON THE SINGLE TRANSFERABLE VOTE SYSTEM FOR ELECTIONS TO THE CYNGOR GWYNEDD COUNCIL FROM 2027 ONWARDS

15. **RESPONSES / UPDATES TO NOTICES OF MOTION**

Submitted for Information

1. A letter from the Welsh Government in response to Councillor Llio Elenid Owen's notice of motion to the Council meeting on 9 May, 2024, calling for intervention and a full inquiry by the Welsh Government on the decision to close the Wales Air Ambulance Centres in Dinas Dinlle and Welshpool.

2. A letter from Welsh Government in response to the notice of motion of Councillor Elfed Wyn ap Elwyn to the Council meeting on 9 May, 2024, calling on the Welsh Government to create a Property Act.

The meeting commenced at 2.00pm and ended at 4.35pm.

CHAIR