
THE CABINET TUESDAY, 21 JANUARY 2025

Present-

Councillors: Nia Jeffreys, Menna Trenholme, Craig ab Iago, R. Medwyn Hughes, Huw Wyn Jones, June Jones, Dewi Jones, Dilwyn Morgan, Llio Elenid Owen and Paul John Rowlinson.

Also present-

Dafydd Gibbard (Chief Executive), Geraint Owen (Corporate Director), Dylan Owen (Statutory Director of Social Services), Iwan Evans (Monitoring Officer), Dewi Morgan (Head of Finance Department) and Vera Jones (taking the minutes).

Item 6: Aled Davies (Head of Adults, Health and Well-being Department) and Sandra Jones-Parry (Eifionydd and North Meirionnydd Area Leader - Adults, Health and Well-being Department).

Item 7-9: Ffion Madog Evans (Assistant Head - Finance Department)

Item 11- 12: Gwern ap Rhisiart (Head of Education Department).

1. APOLOGIES

The Cabinet Members and the Officers were welcomed to the meeting by the Leader of the Council.

Gratitude was expressed to all the Council staff who had been working over the Christmas period to ensure that services were provided to Gwynedd residents.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

There were no declarations of personal interest.

3. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

There were no matters arising from overview and scrutiny.

5. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 December 2024 were accepted as a true record.

6. DAY CARE ARRANGEMENTS IN THE BLAENAU FFESTINIOG AND CRICIETH AREAS

The report was submitted by Cllr. Dilwyn Morgan.

DECISION

- **That the Adults, Health and Well-being Department winds-up the use of Y Ganolfan, Blaenau Ffestiniog and Encil y Coed, Cricieth, to provide their services as day care services have not been offered in Y Ganolfan, Blaenau Ffestiniog or at Encil y Coed, Cricieth, since before the Covid period.**
- **Support the Department's proposal to continue to collaborate with community groups and the third sector to support individuals in these areas in their homes and by using and supporting the development of alternative services within the communities.**

DISCUSSION

Members were reminded that the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 had changed the way that people's needs were assessed and the way that services were provided, promoting the need to provide support to residents in the community, without being attached to a building only. It was noted that the two centres were already closed and the recommendation complied with the requirements of the Act.

It was noted that a hub had already been established in Blaenau Ffestiniog by the Dref Werdd Company, with the hub developing continuously. An apology was given that the report needed to be corrected regarding the Porthmadog area, noting that discussions had commenced to establish a hub there in the future instead of the fact that a hub already existed there. In addition, it was noted that a Well-being Coordinator had been appointed who was progressing with the work of establishing different activities to what was provided in the past at Encil y Coed.

It was noted that the Scrutiny Committee had already had input to the change in the provision.

Observations arising from the discussion:

- Assurance was requested that the third sector would be able to continue to support the work in the community and what implications were on other Council services in closing Encil y Coed.
 - In response, it was noted that the strength of the third sector was clear in some areas, that there were gaps in other areas but work was happening under the guidance of the Economy and Community Department to develop the hubs. It was noted that it was not possible to guarantee their success, but the Council would do everything possible to continue with the collaboration.
 - It was also noted that every other service provided from Encil y Coed was aware that the care service provision was on a temporary basis from the location and they were aware of the upcoming change, were planning towards that and unlikely to disrupt other services in the building.
- Assurance was also requested that no individual who required support would fall through the net and that people were aware of the service available.
 - It was noted that many of the enquiries received were enquiring regarding the support available in the community, and that provision for individuals with profound needs was provided for them in their homes.

7. REVENUE BUDGET 2024/25 - END OF NOVEMBER 2024 REVIEW

The report was submitted by Cllr. Huw Wyn Jones.

DECISION

- **Noting that there are projections of £8.3 million of overspend by Council departments, with 83% of it relating to adult and child care, to accept the report on the end of November 2024 review of the revenue budget and support the steps the Chief Executive has introduced to address the significant overspend by the Adults, Health and Well-being Department, the Children and Families Department, the Highways, Engineering and YGC Department and the Environment Department.**
- **Delegate the right to the Head of Adults, Health and Well-being in consultation with the Head of Finance and the relevant Cabinet Members to make a number of necessary budget transfers, without limitation on the value, within services budgets in the Adults, Health and Well-being Department to reflect the current pressures, including in the field of Learning Disability, Older People, Physical Disability and Mental Health.**
- **Approve additional financial support above the £201k contractual payment to Cwmni Byw'n Iach to be funded from the transformation fund, and to delegate the right to the Cabinet Member for Economy in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance, Chief Executive and Head of Finance to agree the amount of final financial support above the contractual payment to Cwmni Byw'n Iach at the end of the financial year.**
- **To approve the transfer of £4,409k of underspend on corporate budgets to the Council's Financial Strategy Reserve.**
- **Exclude clause 16.3.1.(C) of the Financial Regulations and not allow departments to carry any underspend into the next financial year.**

DISCUSSION

Submitted - a report detailing the latest review of the Council's revenue budget for 2024/25, and the projections towards the end of the financial year with details from all departments included in Appendix 1 of the report.

It was noted that there were projections of an overspend of £8.3 million from Council departments following the end of November review, with 83% of it in the adults and children care field. In addition, it was noted that current projections suggested that five of the departments would overspend by the end of the year, with substantial overspend for the Adults, Health and Well-being Department, the Children and Families Department, Highways, Engineering and YGC Department and the Environment Department.

The overspend per Department was elaborated upon, noting that the Adults Department was likely to overspend £3.3 million by the end of the year, as a result of a combination of many factors, including an increase in the demand for domiciliary care provision, high staffing costs, sickness levels and high rates of non-contact hours within the internal provision. It was noted that work had already been commissioned by the Chief Executive to look at the department's financial situation with the work being addressed.

It was reported that the Children Department was likely to overspend by £3.7 million, with the situation having worsened since the November report. It was noted that this was mainly as a result of out-of-county placement costs, the complexity of packages and the use of unregistered placements. It was noted that the Chief Executive had commissioned work, to be led by the Statutory Director of Social Services to look at the situation in detail.

The Cabinet was asked for a payment above the agreed payments for Byw'n Iach Company for a sum of £201,000.

It was noted that a situation of £699,000 overspend was anticipated in the Highways, Engineering and YGC Department as a result of a reduction in the work commissioned by external agencies having an impact on the income of the service and there would be a likely overspend of £667,000 from the Environment Department.

The Head of Finance reiterated that the report had been challenged by the Governance and Audit Committee, noting that they had accepted the report, noted the financial situation and the risks, asking the Cabinet to give specific attention to the following:

- the work being commissioned by the Chief Executive, asking for a timetable to achieve the work.
- a clear programme is established to respond to the work regarding the Children Department and for the analysis to be submitted to the committee to be challenged.
- information was requested about how Gwynedd compared with other authorities in terms of overspending.

Observations arising from the discussion:

- The individual Cabinet Members elaborated upon the overspend, noting that attention was given to the overspend and the income deficit in some of the Departments, and that different steps had been taken to improve the situation.
- It was noted that recent storms had impacted the financial situation, because additional service had to be provided in such cases.
- Attention was also drawn to the fact that there was overspend in the departments as a result of historical budget deficit for different fields, noting that the Llechen Lân work in the Care field had already identified an increase of 18% in future spending.
- Substantial concern was noted about the financial picture in Gwynedd and it was enquired what the impact of the system of early warnings was and whether the current projections of overspending or budget deficit were being used to draw up the 2025/26 budgets.
 - In response, it was noted that there were very difficult decisions to make when establishing the 2025/26 budget, and the demand that the services

faced was a much bigger challenge than the steps taken through the 'early warning' system to freeze posts etc.

- It was also noted that the 'overspend' term was technically correct but that it reflected the historical budget deficit which had led to two possible choices namely, to not provide necessary services or respond to requirements with associated costs. The Chief Executive noted that it was not an option to not provide the services, and that there were no cases of underspend left now to help other departments who had been overspending. It was noted that this would lead to very difficult challenges when setting the 2025/26 budget.
- It was reiterated that preventative services such as Byw'n Iach were very important in preventing demand for more profound needs from other services such as Care and the Health Board.
- The Leader noted a specific message to the Welsh Government that Cyngor Gwynedd's funding source was low compared with other authorities, urging them to listen and respond to the current budget deficit, especially when providing services to vulnerable people.

8. 2024/25 CAPITAL PROGRAMME - END OF NOVEMBER 2024 REVIEW

The report was submitted by Cllr. Huw Wyn Jones.

DECISION

- **To accept the report on the end of November review (30 November 2024 position) of the capital programme.**
- **Approve the revision to the Capital Budget approved on 7 March 2024 and revised on 15 October 2024 from the programme's financing perspective (as shown in part 3.2.3 of the report), that is:**
 - **an increase of £166,000 in the use of borrowing**
 - **an increase of £4,112,000 in the use of grants and contributions**
 - **an increase of £420,000 in the use of the revenue**
 - **an increase of £697,000 in the use of renewal and other reserves.**

DISCUSSION

A report was presented about the Council's revised capital programme and the amendments to the relevant funding sources. It was noted that the main conclusions were that firm plans were in place to invest £102.7 million in 2024/25 on capital plans with £51.1 million, or 50% of it funded through specific grants. It was further reported that an additional £19.7 million had been re-profiled from 2024/25 to 2025/26 and 2026/27 and it was highlighted that the Council had managed to attract additional grants since the last review, including £1.626 million from the Levelling Up Fund Grant, £725 million grant from the Welsh Government towards the North Promenade Scheme, Abermaw, amongst others.

Observations arising from the discussion:

- The Chief Executive noted the good news that the Council had managed to attract further grants of £4.1 million since the last meeting, noting that more good news would likely be on its way.

9. SAVINGS OVERVIEW: PROGRESS REPORT ON REALISING SAVINGS SCHEMES

The report was submitted by Cllr. Huw Wyn Jones.

DECISION

- **To accept the information in the report and to note the progress towards realising the savings schemes for 2024/25 and previous years.**
- **To approve the deletion of one savings scheme worth £146,910 relevant to 2025/26 in the waste area in the Environment Department, using the provision set aside in the budget in order to do so.**

DISCUSSION

A report was submitted summarising the Council's savings situation, noting that £5.6 million of savings had to be implemented in 2024/25. It was explained that 98%, namely £33.8 million of the £34.3 million of savings identified from the 2015/16 period until 2024/25, had now been achieved. In addition, it was noted that 67% of the new savings schemes worth £12 million had already been realised, with a further 6% on track to be delivered on time. The risks to realise savings in some field such as the Adults, Health and Well-being Department and the Environment Department were noted.

In addition, the intention to combine three savings schemes in the commercial waste field, remove one nappy collection scheme worth £147,000 and offer £300,000 worth of alternative plans from a £400,000 waste scheme.

To summarise, it was noted that £42 million of savings had been realised, which was 90% of the required £46.6 million over the period. It was anticipated that a further 2% would be realised by the end of the financial year but there was delay and some risks to delivering the remaining plans.

Observations arising from the discussion:

- It was noted that the savings situation was alarming.
- Tribute was paid and gratitude was expressed to all the staff who continue to deliver daily under pressure and have a high workload as a result of cuts that had already been delivered.
- In addition, it was noted that the cuts were the context of setting the 2025/26 budget, remembering that £74 million had been cut from the Council's budgets over the last 14 years, which had led to the situation of overspending or underfunding.

10. RESPONSE TO OFFENDING PLAN

The report was submitted by Cllr. Nia Jeffreys, Council Leader and the Chief Executive.

DECISION

- **Approval and adoption of the Response Plan in Appendix 1.**
- **Call on the Welsh Government to establish a Public Inquiry into all the circumstances surrounding this serious offending.**
- **Commission the Chief Executive to make arrangements to implement the contents of this Response Plan including establishing a specific Programme Board and to regularly report progress to the Cabinet.**
- **Authorise the Chief Executive to establish and organise temporary resources and necessary staffing capacity to realise the contents of this Plan to be funded from reserves.**
- **Note that the Response Plan is a working plan that will need to be reviewed regularly and in that context ask the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee to scrutinise the Plan as part of their work programme.**
- **Delegate the right to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader, the Cabinet Member for Education and the Cabinet Member for Children, to make minor editorial adjustments as required.**

DISCUSSION

When submitting the report, it was emphasised that the victims were at the heart of this plan and tribute was paid to the victims' bravery and resilience, as well as everyone who had been impacted by the horrific offences committed. There was a quote from the report *"we cannot for a second forget about the most important people in all of this, the girls who should have been safe in their school. The whole purpose of this Response Plan and every step that we take is to do everything possible to ensure that no one suffers in the same way ever again and this should be our main consideration at all times."*

The Leader noted that she had apologised to the victims, and she was determined to turn every stone to establish what had gone wrong. It was noted that the purpose of the plan was to set out all the work that was happening to get to grips with the situation in a live document, with external bodies giving input and guidance, and to put further input as the plan would be developed for the future. It was emphasised that this was a live document and would be adapted as lessons became clear and as the situation became clearer. The six main current objectives were emphasised as noted in the report, outlining the next steps of establishing a Programme Board under the guidance of an independent person to measure the progress and identify any gaps. It was noted that the plan would not turn back the clock or undo what had happened to the victims.

The Chief Executive emphasised the shocking impact on the victims mainly, as well as the school, the wider community and the Council. It was noted that this was a unique situation that was developing daily, with the first step having been established through statutory arrangements from the Child Practice Review by the North Wales Safeguarding Board.

The Plan's six aims and four work streams were elaborated upon. It was emphasised that no stone would be left unturned and the work would be open and transparent.

Observations arising from the discussion:

- It was declared that there was support for the safeguarding monitoring visits in schools and the desire to adapt them to become annual visits.
- The fact that the Scrutiny Committee intended to conduct an investigation as part of the plan was welcomed, as well as the important work by the committee to scrutinise the progress on the plan for the future.
- The detail of the programme was welcomed, as well as the external specialists' input and the fact that it was a live programme. It was emphasised that the Programme Board would be chaired by an independent person.
- There was an enquiry for assurance that support would continue to be given to the victims when attention was given to the plan and as every investigation reported
 - In response, it was noted that support had been given to the victims, with more support to be given in the future. It was noted that there was a need to ensure that this would happen in a sensitive and appropriate manner, under the guidance of the victims.
- Tribute was paid to Ysgol Friars' pupils and staff, and there was a question regarding support to maintain them
 - In response, it was noted that support would be provided to the school's management team and Governors with the need to develop support for all school staff, reminding them that counselling service was available for the pupils. It was noted that consistent support was available from the Authority through the school support board.
- The plan's emphasis to implement and the commitment to implement as information would be received was welcomed.
- The Chief Executive, all the Education Department's staff and all relevant departments were thanked for the work that they were doing associated with the above.

11. TERMINATING THE GWE PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

The report was submitted by Cllr. Dewi Jones.

DECISION

- **To terminate the current collaboration agreement and thereby confirm that GwE, including the GwE Joint-Committee, will cease on 31 May 2025.**

DISCUSSION

A report was submitted regarding terminating the partnership between the six authorities in north Wales to provide a school effectiveness and improvement service in north Wales through GwE established in 2013. It was reported that the Welsh Government had noted their intention to move from the regional model of supporting and improving schools with the support to be provided by local authorities. It was confirmed that the support would come to an end on 31 May 2025.

The need to formalise terminating the agreement was noted.

Observations arising from the discussion:

- It was enquired why regional collaboration was coming to an end when this was usually considered as good practice
 - In response, it was noted that the decision had been made by the Minister for Education, as a result of conclusions from detailed review work. It was stated that the collaboration with Anglesey would continue, with Gwynedd's needs being highlighted.
- It was noted that more work would fall on Gwynedd officers and the assurance of managing to recruit successfully in the field was questioned
 - In response, it was noted that a plan for restructuring was in place and arrangements were underway to implement this, considering appropriate support for our schools. It was acknowledged that recruitment would be a challenge, but every effort had been made by the Education Department.

12. PERFORMANCE REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR EDUCATION

The report was submitted by Cllr. Dewi Jones.

DECISION

- **To accept and note the information in the report.**

DISCUSSION

A report was submitted detailing the performance of the Education Department, drawing attention to recent highlights, including the fact that Ysgol Treferythyr had opened its doors to 150 learners in September 2025 and that work had commenced on the old Ysgol Glanadda site. Pride was expressed that the Youth Service had managed to recruit an Engagement Coordinator, leading to re-establishing a Young People's Services Forum to provide better support to young people.

In addition, it was reported that £1.1 million of capital investment had been received from the Welsh Government to support establishing the new immersion provision in Bangor, Ysgol Eifionydd and Tywyn. The doors to the new unit in Ysgol Tywyn had been opened this week. It was also reported that an evaluation of the immersion system was underway to ensure setting a firm foundation to the provision of the Welsh language in the county.

It was reported that the Additional Learning Needs and Inclusion Service had managed to reduce the number of days to wait for counselling service from 51 days to 21 days since the beginning of the educational year. In addition, it was noted that there was an increase in the number of school meals being served, with an average of 4851 provided on any one day since September 2024, which was progress from the 2023/24 performance.

It was also noted that the savings schemes were on track to be realised, but an alternative scheme worth £41,000 had been presented in the Additional Learning Needs and Inclusion field.

Observations arising from the discussion:

- The excellent work achieved by the Early Years Unit was discussed regarding changing the way of thinking and discussing nappies through their podcast, which allowed an open discussion on the matter. It was also enquired whether there was a problem in Gwynedd regarding children starting at school still in nappies.
 - In response, it was noted that there was a need to deal with the situation sensitively and offer support to families, remembering that each child was different. At the same time, it was noted that more children in the schools were not dry and there was a need to allow the schools to focus on teaching pupils instead of changing children.
- The sustainable schools work was welcomed which would be raised to a very high standard, noting that there was a lot of emphasis on reusing many things, such as bricks and old furniture in other projects, reducing the Council's carbon footprint.
- The Young People's Voice Forum was welcomed, asking whether there was suitable provision for youth across the County, especially in rural areas,
 - In response, it was noted that work had been done to identify the support that existed and to review the provision available.
- It was enquired what were the next steps following engaging and reviewing Gwynedd's immersion policy
 - It was noted that a full report would be available for the Cabinet at the end of March, with an update report to be submitted to the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee prior to that.

13. PERFORMANCE REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE

The report was submitted by Cllr. Huw Wyn Jones.

DECISION

- **To accept and note the information in the report.**

DISCUSSION

The report was presented detailing the performance of the Finance Department, with pride that the Department's performance continued to be encouraging. Attention was drawn that priority projects in the Council Plan showed good progress on the two plans

under their care, namely realising the Savings scheme, and the Council's Digital Scheme.

The Digital Scheme was elaborated upon only, noting that there was a possibility of having to consider restricting the IT support desk hours as a result of losing one post recently, that every computer would be upgraded from Windows 10 to Windows 11, and the 'top desk' system and the Council's phone system would move to the cloud. It was confirmed that Cyber Security remained a priority, with the Council being a leader on Cyber Security work across Wales.

It was also noted that the Internal Audit Service had only completed 30% of the Audit plan because a priority had been set to achieve work on the Shared Prosperity Fund, which attracted income. It was also noted that prices to administrate Community Council accounts would slightly increase as the Council had done this at a loss.

It was reported that there was £2,117,000 of income due, with work underway to urgently track the situation. It was also noted that the Council's tax collection rate had slipped with the rate lower than the past, with the slippage being a result of increase in the Council tax and the number of people who were unable to pay, but the recovery cycle was underway. All the Department's hard work was acknowledged.

Observations arising from the discussion:

- Further information was requested for the Cabinet Members regarding the Council's use of artificial intelligence
 - In response, it was noted that there was a need to research further, to ensure that any developments worked with the Welsh language, and that people's input was required at times.
- It was noted that the Cabinet Member would be reporting on the reviews in the Council tax field and income for the future.
- The Benefits Department was also thanked for promoting the benefits available, especially for vulnerable people.

14. THE CABINET'S FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

It was noted that the item presented was for the Cabinet Members' information.

The meeting commenced at 1.00pm and concluded at 3.15pm.

CHAIR