

CYNGOR GWYNEDD CABINET



Report to a meeting of the Cyngor Gwynedd Cabinet

Title of item: Performance Report of the Cabinet Member for Environment
Cabinet Member: Councillor Dafydd Meurig
Contact Officer: Dafydd Wyn Williams, Head of Environment Department
Date of meeting: 19 December 2023

1. THE DECISION SOUGHT

To accept and note the information in the report.

2. THE REASONS WHY A DECISION IS NEEDED

In order to ensure effective performance management.

3. INTRODUCTION

3.1 The purpose of this report is to update my fellow members on developments in the fields within my remit as Cabinet Member for Environment. This includes outlining the latest developments to date against the pledges within the 2023-2028 Cyngor Gwynedd Plan; and the position regarding the performance measures.

3.2 I would like to remind you that all matters have already been discussed between me, the Chief Executive and a representation of senior officers from the Environment Department in November, and that representatives from the Communities Scrutiny Committee also attended a performance meeting in September.

3.3 I am satisfied with the progress to date on the Council plan projects being led by the Department and the work of the Department's officers in the day-to-day work of the Environment Department's Services.

4. PRIORITIES WITHIN THE CYNGOR GWYNEDD PLAN 2023-2028

The Department leads on five priorities in the Council Plan 2023-2028. Two relate transport matters and an Assistant Head will start with the Department in January who will be key to assisting with the work of continuing to drive these specific priorities forward. Progress in the Council Plan Priorities is summarised below:

4.1 Management of second homes and short-term holiday accommodation

- 4.1.1 As part of efforts to gain better control of second homes and short-term holiday lets, the Environment Department is leading on the work of preparing the Article 4 Direction for the Gwynedd Planning Authority Area.
- 4.1.2 Implementing the Article 4 Direction would enable the Council to require that property owners in the Gwynedd Planning Authority Area obtain planning permission before changing the use of their properties into second homes or short-term holiday lets.
- 4.1.3 A six-week public consultation period was held, which came to an end on 13 September. There was a significant response to the consultation, and work continues to analyse all the comments and give due consideration to the responses received.
- 4.1.4 Following the analysis process, a report will be submitted to the Cabinet for a decision in the early months of 2024.
- 4.1.5 This work is unprecedented and is receiving Welsh Government support for the Dwyfor area of the county.

4.2 New Local Development Plan

- 4.2.1 The aim of presenting a new Local Development Plan for the Gwynedd Planning Authority Area will be to address the housing, employment, social and environmental needs of the county's residents over the next 15 years.
- 4.2.2 A Planning Policy Working Group has been established to support the process of creating and maintaining the Local Development Plan.
- 4.2.3 The draft Delivery Agreement for the Local Development Plan was considered by the Working Group. Following Cabinet consent, a six-week public consultation period was held on the Delivery Agreement, which ended on 7 December. Work is underway to consider the responses.
- 4.2.4 It is expected that a report on the consultation will be considered by the Planning Policy Working Group in January, before being considered by the Cabinet and then the full Council in March 2024.

4.3 Waste and Recycling

- 4.3.1 Significant transformation work is taking place in the waste and recycling services, to lay a foundation and future resilience as we work towards the Welsh Government's challenging target of recycling 70% of our waste by 2025.
- 4.3.2 The work has focused on ensuring the competence of team leaders, in particular ensuring more effective return-to-work arrangements as part of the efforts to improve sickness levels and dependence on overtime. Back-office structures have improved in the north of the county over recent months, with the intention of extending similar arrangements to the south of the county in

the new year which will improve the ability to deal with enquiries in a timely way.

- 4.3.3 With the Workplace Recycling Regulations coming into force from April, work is underway to ensure that the Commercial Waste Service's arrangements are ready for the change which will affect all collectors of waste and recycling from businesses, charities and public organisations.
- 4.3.4 Discussions have begun with Wrap Cymru and the Welsh Government to review waste treatment and processing arrangements and ensure that Gwynedd will have facilities that will meet future needs and that we can treat our recycling materials to a high standard. This work will continue over the next few months.

4.4 Active Travel

- 4.4.1 As previously reported, the Council has secured £1.2 million of Active Travel funding from the Welsh Government this year for the first phase of the Ffordd Penrhos path, near Bangor. Preparatory work has been carried out over the last few months, with work on the ground starting from Coed Mawr junction to Coed y Maes junction.
- 4.4.2 It is important to underline that delivering active travel schemes is very dependent on securing financial support from the Welsh Government. That means complying with specific requirements when submitting applications, and Council officers are discussing with Transport for Wales how schemes can be strengthened to try to secure future funding.
- 4.4.3 The main schemes under consideration for development and submission as part of a bid for funding during the next phase are paths from Afonwen to Chwilog, Tywyn to Aberdyfi, and the second phase of the Ffordd Penrhos scheme in Bangor. There is further work to be done on potential schemes to connect Caernarfon and Bethel and Caernarfon and Llanrug.
- 4.4.4 Having secured £280,000 from the Safe Routes in Communities fund, design work has been completed on a scheme to improve walking and cycling provision near Ysgol Godre'r Berwyn in Bala, and the work is expected to go out to tender soon. Work is also currently looking at Safe Routes in Communities schemes in several other areas with the aim of submitting a bid for financial support for the next financial year.
- 4.4.5 Preparatory work has been carried out on improvements to Lôn Las Ogwen, with £1.8 million secured from the Levelling Up fund. Designs to install new bridges near Porth Penrhyn have been made, with work now having started on the site in Bangor. Officers are also looking at work to upgrade Pont Sarnau near Bethesda and ensure a better link for cyclists to other paths in the area.

4.5 Public Transport

- 4.5.1 Work to review the public transport provision in the county has been completed, and new timetables have been presented based on that work in the Dyffryn Nantlle and Caernarfon area. The timetables for the rest of the county will go out to tender soon, with the intention that new services in Meirionnydd will start early in 2024, and in Dwyfor by April.
- 4.5.2 As part of the new timetables that are already in place, efforts have been made to ensure connections between buses and trains in order to create wider travel possibilities.
- 4.5.3 The timetables have been tailored to be more sustainable to increase travel possibilities to rural areas, trying to offer services to meet the needs of more communities than in the past.
- 4.5.4 It is also a pleasure to be able to note that the Sherpa bus services continue to attract external recognition. The new-look service has been shortlisted for several transport awards over the past few months winning a silver prize for 'Buses for Leisure' at the UK Bus Awards and is noted as an example of good practice by independent transport experts.
- 4.5.5 Another exciting development is the T22 electric buses, which will offer an important service along the Blaenau Ffestiniog - Porthmadog - Caernarfon route. After resolving some practical issues, work is progressing and every effort will be made to ensure that the buses will be operational as soon as possible in the new year. In the meantime, a temporary service is operating between Porthmadog and Caernarfon.
- 4.5.6 Following unprecedented support for the transport sector during the pandemic, Council officers continue to work with Transport for Wales on a regional level, to attempt to influence the financial package that will be available from April 2024. Uncertainty continues at present about the level of funding that will be available to Welsh councils, making it very challenging to plan ahead with confidence for the next period.

5. PERFORMANCE

Below, I outline the main matters that have derived from the department's performance during the latest period. The information does not refer to each service in the department, only to those I feel that need to be brought to your attention.

Waste and Recycling

- 5.1 At the moment, we are exceeding the national target to recycle 64% of the waste collected in Gwynedd, but with the target increasing to 70% by March 2025, there is work to be done to attain that challenging figure.
- 5.2 The Council sorts the recycling material that is collected, and receives an income for materials such as plastic bottles, etc. It is worth noting that we are completely dependent on the market and that the price of materials can vary significantly. The quality of the material also has an effect but it is worth

noting that figures for plastic bottles, for example, have dropped from £400 per tonne at their peak, to £200 per tonne in May of this year and £20 per tonne according to the latest figures.

- 5.3 As referred to when reporting on the Waste and Recycling Improvement Priority, we monitor the number of enquiries relating to missed waste collections and it is good to be able to report that there is a general trend towards an improvement in the situation. However, there is an intention to adjust the measure so that we can monitor the true impact on residents and ensure that the service meets the needs of the people of Gwynedd.

Public Protection - Pollution and Licensing

- 5.4 This Service ensures that licensed activities relating to taxis, alcohol, gambling and entertainment are provided in a way that protects the public and supports businesses.
- 5.5 Many more taxi vehicle licensing applications are now submitted through the online system on the Council's website. But as the procedure is new for many applicants, there is a delay with some applications as incomplete information is submitted or more information is needed.
- 5.6 When measuring the time taken to process an application, officers now note the time when the complete application has been submitted. This gives a fairer reflection of the time the service takes to deal with applications, which was eight days in October.

Public Protection - Food and Safety

- 5.5 The Food and Safety Service ensures that food and drink that is sold is safe for public consumption and that it complies with national requirements.
- 5.8 The latest reported figures show that the vast majority of food businesses in Gwynedd continue to meet the expected food hygiene standards. Of the 2,064 food businesses that are subject to the scoring procedure, 99% met the satisfactory or higher food hygiene standard (a score of 3 or above), with 26 not meeting the standard (1%). It is important to note that the Service revisits every premises that receives a score of 2 or lower within three months of the original inspection to ensure that standards have improved.
- 5.9 Despite this, officers continue to deal with a backlog of food standards inspections because their work changed to focus entirely on preventing the spread of Covid-19 during the pandemic. In addition, experienced officers have retired which has resulted in a gap in the number of qualified staff to carry out all aspects of the work.
- 5.10 It is pleasing to report that new officers have been appointed and are beginning to qualify so that they will be able to undertake official food safety duties. This will take time to complete, but it is encouraging that the Service has been able to appoint officers to the field in a challenging period in terms of staffing.

Planning

- 5.11 The Service has succeeded in recruiting two new trainees who have started their work over recent months.
- 5.12 The latest figures for the time it takes to decide on a planning application shows that the performance is continuing to improve compared to the previous period.
- 5.13 The performance since April this year shows that it has taken an average of 84 days to determine planning applications, compared to an average of 92 days in 2022/23, and 103 days in 2021/22.
- 5.14 The additional capacity has also helped with the Planning Service's enforcement work. An experienced officer has been moved to focus on enforcement work for a period, and although there is work to familiarise with the field, there are early signs of improvement.

Land Charges

- 5.15 The Land Charges team provides searches information to anyone who wishes to purchase property or land within Gwynedd, with the intention of giving potential buyers as much information as possible.
- 5.16 You will remember that I mentioned in the last report that most of the work related to transferring data to a new national system to deal with searches has been completed, which has enabled the release of greater capacity for the searches and a prompt response to enquiries.
- 5.17 As a result, it is pleasing to be able to report that the time to process charges applications has stabilised compared to the challenging period last year. To date, the average processing time for 2023/24 is 31 days, compared to 38 days last year.

6. FINANCIAL POSITION/SAVINGS

- 6.1 The 2023/24 Revenue Budget report - End of August 2023 Review considered by the Cabinet on 7 November predicted that the Department will overspend by £511,000 by the end of the year.
- 6.2 There is a combination of reasons for the likely overspend, including the annual trend of overspending in waste collection and recycling. However, it is fair to say that the figure predicted for 2023/24 compares to an overspend of £1.4 million in 2022/23 in waste collection and recycling.
- 6.3 As has been reported, a comprehensive review has identified improvements to be implemented which help to bring the expenditure under control. This is a long-term project, however, and it is unlikely that it will be possible to reach a financially neutral position within 12 months.

6.4 The savings plans target for the Department for 2023/24 is £319,188. Work is ongoing on these schemes, which have either been realised or are 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 Department:

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