

# CABINET CYNGOR GWYNEDD

## A report for a meeting of the Cyngor Gwynedd Cabinet

<b>Date:</b>	11 June 2024
<b>Title of Item:</b>	Performance Report of the Cabinet Member for Children and Supporting Families
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Councillor Elin Walker-Jones
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Marian Parry Hughes, Head of Children and Supporting Families Department

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### THE DECISION SOUGHT

To accept and note the information in the report.

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### THE REASONS WHY A DECISION IS NEEDED

To ensure effective performance management

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update my fellow members on developments in the fields within my remit as Cabinet Member for Children and Supporting Families. This will involve outlining what has happened at the end of the 23/24 year, and the work to date during 2024-25 against the pledges within the Cyngor Gwynedd Plan; and outlining where the department has reached in terms of performance measures; and the latest on the savings and cuts schemes.
- 1.2 The purpose of the Children and Supporting Families Department is to ensure that we do the best we can to put the people of Gwynedd central to our services. This will be measured through Performance Challenge and Support. It is important for the Department to secure the voices and experiences of individuals from Gwynedd who use our services, to ensure that the best experiences are given to the people of Gwynedd.
- 1.3 The priority projects featured in the Council Plan are progressing, namely the Autism Plan and the Small Group Homes Scheme.

## 2 CYNGOR GWYNEDD PLAN PROJECTS

- 2.1 Below, we note the progress that has been made to date against the Department's priority projects. These priorities address the department's main risks. Overall, I feel that all projects are making progress against the pledges we have made in the Council Plan.

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## 2.2 Small Group Homes Scheme

We wish to improve the experiences of children who have intensive and complex needs, who currently have to leave the county or Wales in order to get suitable provision. We will develop registered residential homes for small groups of up to two children, which will allow them to be looked after in Gwynedd, attend local schools, and participate fully in the lives of their communities. We have now purchased a property in the Dwyfor area in Morfa Bychan at the end of March. A project group has been established and is meeting monthly. The process of recruiting to posts for the scheme has begun. A manager's post is already being advertised and the posts of deputy and residential workers will follow soon. To aid recruitment we will be holding a recruitment afternoon in Porthmadog on 26 June for the posts of deputy manager and residential workers. We are currently working towards registration with Care Inspectorate Wales, in the hope of opening the doors to children / young people around September time. We are also still seeking a second and third property in Gwynedd to enable us to open the doors to another two homes in the future within the scheme.

## 2.3 Autism Plan

Children, young people and adults with autism find it difficult to obtain the specialist support they require. Therefore, we will improve our provision and make it easier for individuals and their families to transfer between different services. The team is developing parent/carer support programmes to be undertaken at the same time as the workshops that are offered to young people and those who are offered 1-1 support, in order to achieve any change that the autistic individual and the parent/carer requires to be able to access information/develop knowledge. The team is continuing to work on the Llwybrau Ni project, which will provide social opportunities to young people, breaks for parent and carers of individuals who have an autism diagnosis, who are awaiting an assessment/diagnosis and individuals who will not reach the criteria for specialist services when they transition to adult age. These sessions will focus on socialising and developing independent living skills and will offer a short break to parents and carers. The groups are proving to be successful, we have run three sessions and the numbers have increased every week. There were a higher number of referrals for individuals aged 14-25. After completing assessments of what matters, the themes identified were separation, not understanding their autism diagnosis, emotional regulation, burnout and independent living skills. As a result, the team has started 'explore my autism' (14-18 year olds) which offers information, advice, support and education whilst also offering individuals the opportunity to socialise and meet other autistic young people. The team has held an information day in Porthmadog (a central location) where a host of services from all parts of the county attended to offer advice and guidance and show individuals and families what their service could offer. The autism bus was also available on the day for parents/carers to experience it. Over 100 people attended on the day, with 62 people experiencing the Autism Virtual Experience.

### **3. PERFORMANCE AND MEASURES**

- 3.1 I wish to draw your attention to the following matters, which are unrelated to the Priority Projects, but are being addressed by the department because they are affecting the performance of services and/or causing us concern.
- 3.2 Workforce Capacity – The workforce situation remains a matter of concern. Through the Workforce Planning Project and WeCare Wales, we have started to put targeted recruitment campaigns in place. As the concerns are far reaching, work is underway to try to stabilise the situation for the future. We took part in a focus group in Bangor University with the Childhood and Youth Studies course. We are keen to collaborate more on offering work placements and also explore what more can the course do to prepare individuals for the world of work. Since November, more work experience placements have been arranged with an extra 80 placements to date which brings the total to 150. Various services have benefited from these, and some individuals were employed following the work experiences. The young people were a mix of Health and Care college students, students from local Universities and sixth form groups who were looking for more experience. There are long-running campaigns on social media to encourage individuals to apply for posts in the field of Social Services. 80 people have got in touch through the campaign since November. We have also used social media to promote good news stories e.g. Derwen on the 'Prosiect Pum Mil' TV programme, and Lleisau Llawen on the 'Cais Quinnell' programme. As already noted, we are organising a recruitment event in Porthmadog on 26 June for the posts of residential workers for Small Group Homes that are being developed as a residential provision for looked after children as part of the Council's Plan and to return children back to their local areas.
- 3.3 The demand and the type of support – The department is still seeing that the nature of the cases being supported shows that children and families' needs are complex and are intensifying, and therefore require broad, comprehensive and very specialist support packages and care packages. This is the case for all the services within the Children's Department. The numbers that are open to teams have increased. The numbers that are open to the Post-16 Team remain at their highest ever. The problem of homelessness is still continuing, and problems persist in finding suitable accommodation for individuals. We are already in discussions with the third sector to see if it is possible to plan for the future in respect of young people who see themselves leaving care and potentially being homeless. The demand especially for the support element of the Derwen service as well as the social workers support has also increased recently.
- 3.4 The numbers who contact the department for Information, Advice or Support continue to be significantly higher than before the pandemic. Over a six-month period from October 2023 to March 2024, 3,598 individuals made contact. The requests and calls that the Admission Team received during the second and third quarters of 23/24 have been at their highest ever. We believe that the effects of the pandemic continue to drive the demand, as well as the cost-of-living crisis and the resulting strain on families which subsequently contributes to the need for support.
- 3.5 We have been a part of the Foster Wales national fostering campaign to attract more people to consider fostering. These campaigns are one way in which we try to address the need to ensure enough care placements locally for children should they need to come into

care. Since the last report, Gwynedd have appointed a second recruitment officer for the south of the County. There is also a part 2 regional digital campaign to build up digital presence and brand awareness for Foster Wales North Wales. During January/February a national campaign titled 'Everyone can Bring Something to the Table' was launched. These conversations highlighted three key things that prevent potential carers from making an enquiry, which include:

- Lack of confidence in their skills and their ability to support a looked after child.
- The belief that fostering is not suited to some lifestyles.
- Misconceptions about the criteria to become a carer.

With this information, Foster Wales have created real-life stories of carers in Wales to show that fostering with the local authority is flexible, inclusive and offers extensive opportunities for training and professional development.

During March and April, a campaign was run to promote for fostering teenagers. There are more than 280 children looked after by the local authority in Gwynedd, with 13 children waiting for a foster home, and eight of these are 11 years old or older. As a focal point of the campaign, a local young woman spoke about how a foster family changed her life when she was a teen and after she became an adult, and she encouraged others to consider putting their names forward as prospective foster carers.

During May the Foster Wales fortnight is held during which the new Foster Wales cookbook, 'Everyone can Bring Something to the Table' will be launched, supported by famous people, with the aim of sharing realistic experiences of foster care and showing every-day experiences – such as cooking supper every night. There will be representation from the region with Meinir Bebb on the stall in the Urdd Eisteddfod in Montgomery where she will be discussing the 'Everyone can Bring Something to the Table' campaign and the new cookbook. Also, a team from Foster Wales Gwynedd, alongside colleagues from Foster Wales Anglesey and Cwm Taf Morgannwg, climbed the 15 summits to raise awareness of the incredible difference that foster care makes and to raise money for Voices from Care Cymru, a charity that supports care experienced young people in Wales. A special day for foster carers and staff was held in Porthmadog Football Club to celebrate the theme of the Foster Care Fortnight this year.

- 3.6 In terms of the department's measures, I am generally happy with their performance. There are no measures that currently cause me any concern, but I will be working with the Head of Department through the usual performance challenge arrangements.

#### **4. FINANCIAL SITUATION / SAVINGS**

- 4.1 The total Savings Schemes 2023-24 for the department is £44,010, but by taking out-of-county expenditure and four unregulated placements into account, overspend within the Children's Department at the end of the 23-24 financial year is £2.611m. This situation will improve once the small group homes scheme is operational. This is because expenditure on out-of-county / unregulated placements will be funded through the small group homes scheme, therefore the service will be internal rather than through external providers.
- 4.2 For 2023/24, as part of the bids process, the Department has received £130,000 as a one-off bid towards continuing to employ 3 social care practitioners. The jobs have been evaluated and appointments made, and the officers are in post. A bid to make the posts

permanent was submitted for 24/25, however it was unsuccessful. Another five bids were submitted for 24/25. Out of these bids only one permanent bid was successful which was the "Social Workers Career Pathway" bid for £86,250. 2 one-time bids were successful which were the "Social Workers Career Path One-off Costs" bid for £99,520 over 3 years, and the bid "Additional Workers for Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers" for £115k.

## **5. Views of the Statutory Officers:**

### **i. Monitoring Officer:**

No observations to add in relation to propriety.

### **ii. Head of Finance Department:**

I am satisfied that the report is a fair reflection of the financial situation of the Children and Supporting Families Department.

#### **a. Views of the Local Member:**

- i. Not a local matter.

#### **b. Results of Any Consultation:**

- i. None to note.
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