

CYNGOR GWYNEDD – Report to Cyngor Gwynedd Cabinet

Title of Item:	Annual Report - Employment
Cabinet Member:	Cllr. Menna Trenholme
Relevant Officer:	Eurig Williams (Manager – Human Resources Service)
Date of Meeting:	15 October 2024

1. Decision Sought:

Approval of the annual report for 2023/24.

2. What is the reason the Cabinet needs to take a decision:

To reflect on the corporate strategy for the future in this key area.

3. Introduction and rationale

3.1 Background / Introduction

This report is a summary of the main activities relating to employment within the Council during 2023/24. The information also provides a general overview of the workforce's profile and provides comment on how these guides aspects of the staffing strategy. It also outlines some of the key employment issues over 2024/25.

The Councils workforce

The table below provides the numbers employed on a full-time and part-time basis within the Council for the last four years. These numbers include staff who work in our schools and seasonal workers, but not those staff employed on a casual basis during holiday/sickness periods of the permanent workforce.

	31/3/21	31/3/22	31/3/23	31/3/24
Full time	3,073	3,258	3,306	3,354
Part time	2,776	2,650	2,689	2,648
Total	5,849	5,908	5,995	6,002

Workforce split by gender.

A further analysis is seen here of the number of people employed on a full-time and part-time basis during the same period. The key message is the fact that there is a

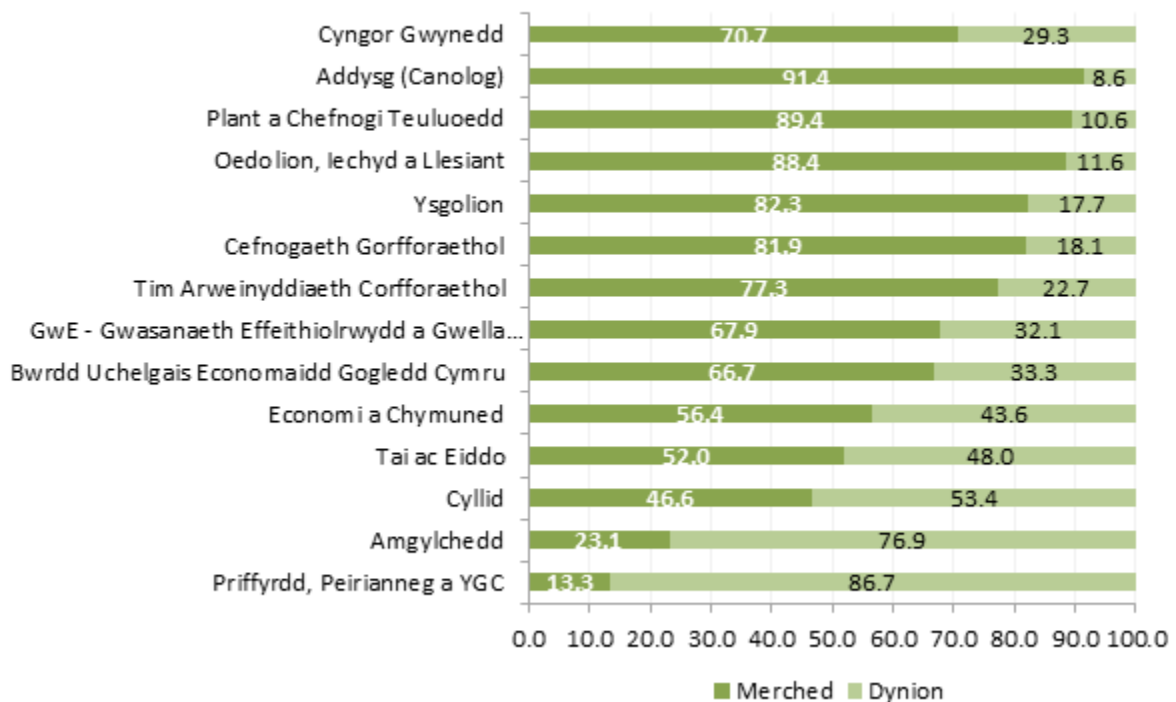
significant higher number of females working for the Council, with a significant higher number of those individuals working on a part-time basis. This has been a constant theme for many years, not only here in Gwynedd but also generally within the local government sector.

		31/3/21	31/3/22	31/3/23	31/3/24
Full time	Men	1,336	1,434	1,462	1,501
	Women	1,737	1,824	1,844	1,853
Part time	Men	314	280	264	259
	Women	2,462	2,370	2,425	2,389
Total	Men	1,650	1,714	1,726	1,760
	Women	4,199	4,194	4,269	4,242
Total %	Men	28.2%	29.0%	28.8%	29.3%
	Women	71.8%	71.0%	71.2%	70.7%

Further, the following provides an analysis of the split between men and women within the Council's departments on the 31st of March 2024.

Distribution of female / male Gwynedd Council staff per Department, 31 March 2024

Rhaniaid merched / dynion staff Cyngor Gwynedd fesul Adran, 31 Mawrth 2024



Age profile of Council staff

A detailed profile of the Council's age profile is in **Attachment 1**. This information is important as it is a good basis for the Council's workforce planning activities. So as to enable us to ensure that the required information, skills and experience is available within the Council's workforce, it's important that we have an understanding of colleagues' long term plans; who is considering retiring over the course of the next few months and years and what risks could there be in terms of service delivery as a result? This type of information and discussions within teams enables departments to proactively plan and develop their workforce to address such risks.

The following is the average age for staff during the three years leading to the 31st of March 2024:

Year	Average age
2023/24	44.92
2022/23	44.78
2021/22	44.49

We have reported for a number of years that much of our workforce is over 40 years old, and that this poses a long-term risk of losing crucial information, skills, and experiences from the workforce. In the face of this risk, workforce planning is a corporate priority for us, which over time is seeking to ensure that we have plans to cope with such situations. This is long-term work, but it is crucial to the robustness and effectiveness of services in the future. There are indications that we are successful in recruiting younger people into the workforce in some areas; for instance, our apprenticeship scheme for the current year attracted 300 applications, which is nearly double the amount received during the previous year. We cannot rely on those schemes alone to address the issues, and our project in this key area is seeking to change and modernise other aspects of the Council's recruitment processes.

Staff turnover

For several years, this report has overall indicated that levels of staff turnover within Cyngor Gwynedd are stable. In fact, during the first year of the pandemic there was a reduction in

the number of people who were leaving the Council's employment, with this trend continuing during 2022/23. However, there was a stark increase in staff turnover during 2023/24:



There was some variation in departmental levels of turnover. The turnover was at its lowest in the Housing and Property (5.7%), Children and Supporting Families (6.2%) and Highways, Engineering and YGC (11.4%) departments. Turnover was at its highest within the Economy and Community (26.9%), Corporate Support (16.3%) and the Leadership Team and Legal Services (11.4%).

Numerous reasons are possible as explanations for staff turnover. We have arrangements in place that enable staff to share with us why they decide to leave the Council; from those who choose to share that information with us there are no clear links and consistent patterns amongst the reasons. The reasons are numerous and overall are related to personal decisions linked to career development, financial reasons, and retirements. There are no clear and concerning indicators thus far about there being dissatisfaction with employment with the organisation, and neither are there clear indicators that people are concerned about long term employment prospects within local government. It is however plausible that the prominent levels within the Economy and Community department is linked to contracts that are financed through grants, which is an issue that tends to be outside the direct influence of employers. There is an opportunity for us to understand more about this issue this year and to better understand whether there are other factors at play that we as an employer could influence.

To highlight the fact that the reasons for staff turnover can be varied and that rates can fluctuate, last year it was highlighted that turnover levels within the Corporate Support department were amongst the lowest within the organisation. This report highlights that

rates are amongst the highest, but the Head of Department is clear, from discussions with the department's teams, that there are no worrying reasons for the increase, and that in fact it reflects the natural decision that people have decided to move on and develop their careers elsewhere.

To close, in discussing staff turnover we need to be aware of the risk that exists that general messages about financial challenges within local government can have a detrimental impact on our ability to retain people, and indeed to recruit new staff. We will be working to persuade more individuals to complete an exit interview or survey during the forthcoming year, so that we are able to have a clearer understanding of the situation, especially if staff turnover continues to increase.

Sickness Absence

The following is a simple table that shows the rate of sickness absence amongst the workforce over the past four years, which is shown as the number of days lost to sickness per head during the year in question.

2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
9.78	6.35	10.07	10.22	10.29

There was a slight increase again in the number of days lost to sickness during 2023/24, to 10.29 days per head. To provide some context, numerous authorities within Wales recorded levels that were higher than 10.29, but for us here in Gwynedd the rate has been slowly climbing for a number of years, from a period when we saw levels of around 8 days prior to 2019/20. Sickness absence levels can create problems on more than one level of course, directly for staff, but also in terms of impact on services and costs. The reasons for sickness absence can be complicated and numerous, but our policies and systems within the Council concentrates on improving our understanding of the reasons and ensuring that staff receive the support and care that they need to return to work.

The following provides the split in terms of short-term and long-term sickness. Long-term sickness is defined as twenty-eight continuous days of sickness.

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Long-term	62%	71%	57%	53%	51%
Short-term	38%	29%	43%	47%	49%

You will notice the gradual decrease in levels of long-term absence. This reflects the effort and emphasis that departments have made in working with staff members to decrease levels. At the same time, we are aware that short-term absence presents an increasing challenge for us, as it requires constant monitoring and managing of situations from managers.

The following table shows the average number of days lost per head within individual departments.

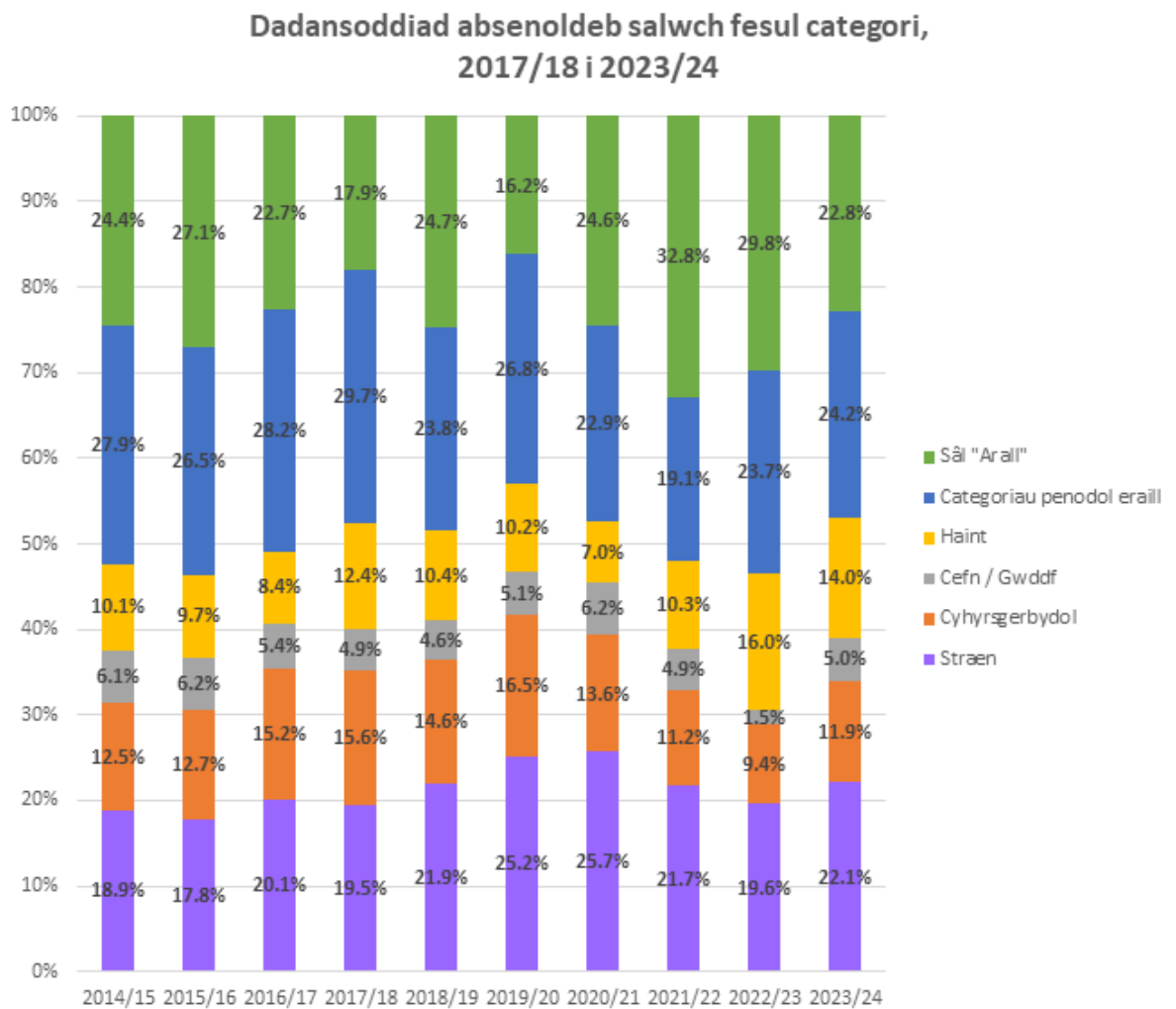
Department	Days
Education – Central	8.10
Education – Schools	9.46
Environment	14.73
Corporate Support	9.62
Finance	10.08
Economy and Community	8.78
Adult, Health, and Well-being	15.75
Children and Supporting Children	9.38
Highways and Engineering	8.09
Housing and Property	8.21
Leadership Team	4.45
Others	5.00
Total for the Council	10.29

'Others' = NMWTRA, Ambition Board, GwE

It is important to note that from all the staff employed within Cyngor Gwynedd during 2023/24, 40.2% of the workforce did not report that they had been sick at all.

The following table analyses the type of sickness that was recorded over the past few years. This information is used to inform the discussion about the contents of the health and well-being programme for instance.

Analysis based on reason recorded for sickness absence, 2014/15 to 2023/24.



One positive development in the figures for 2023/24 is the reduction seen in the number of sickness absences recorded as ‘Other’ sickness. This is significant as there have been concerns for several years that the real reason for sickness absence was hidden within this heading. Over the past twelve months there has been an ongoing effort to ask managers to record the sickness absence under one of the other headings and avoid the ‘Other’ category. The change in percentage over the past twelve months is therefore to be

welcomed. On the other hand, there was a slight increase in the rate recorded as 'stress;' one of the concerns over the past few years has been that staff had been reluctant to share that they were suffering from stress, and that the absence was therefore being categorised as 'Other' sickness. It is therefore possible that staff are increasingly comfortable in sharing their concerns with managers, and that the Council's emphasis on highlighting the importance of mental health and encouraging openness about the subject are leading to a positive outcome.

During 2023/24 a new absence management Policy was adopted, and earlier this year a computerised module was introduced to all managers that enables them to implement the new policy effectively. A training course on the new Policy and system was also provided to managers. The work of embedding the new arrangements is continuing, and we foresee that it will take some time for new working practices to become the norm for all managers. To assist them with this, we have a work programme that focuses on supporting managers, not only in operating the new system but also on adopting the new Policy effectively and consistently. Primarily and keeping in mind the ultimate importance of these procedures, this work will ensure that our staff received the required support and care to return to work when healthy.

During the forthcoming year, all departments will be required to contribute to the efforts to reduce sickness absence levels, and realise the benefits to staff, services, and Gwynedd's residents in doing so.

Pay Structure and Pay Awards

The Pay Policy for 2023/24 was approved by the Council in its meeting on the 2nd of March 2023. During the following months and following some industrial action on behalf of some of the trade unions, the National Joint Council for Local Government Workforce agreed on a pay increase for the 12 months to 31st of March 2024. The increase was £1925 on every pay point up to incremental point 43, with a 3.88% increase on each subsequent increment. This meant that the lowest pay point was increased to £11.78 per hour, an increase of £9.42% with the percentage increase then lowering with each increment up to point 43.

Workforce Planning

As previously mentioned in this report, the Council's ability to plan its staffing requirements in the mid to long term is one of its corporate priorities over the next four years. Cyngor Gwynedd is not on its own in this respect; it is a priority for employers across the country. There was a reference earlier to the high-level statistics that feed into this work. This information is a good starting point for identifying our long-term workforce requirements. This is the core purpose of the project, and the long-term aim is to further develop the Council's proactively plan its staffing requirements the robustness of services.

This area of work is a challenge across the north and in west Wales. As a result, the project leading on this work has begun looking for opportunities to work with the Arfor project and is also establishing links with other organisations linked with Arfor to look for opportunities. We look forward to strengthening our ability to recruit people who can undertake their roles through the medium of the Welsh language; discussions are already under way with Bangor University about one opportunity.

The current focus is on encouraging managers and teams to use the type of statistical information shared in this report to proactively think about future workforce requirements. This means changing a way of working that tends to be focused solely on dealing with current recruitment problems.

For a number of years, a specific effort has been undertaken to attract younger workers to the workforce, through the apprenticeship scheme and Cynllun Yfory (graduate trainee scheme). Since the scheme was introduced in 2017 109 individuals have received support to develop their careers as apprentices or trainees within the council. An application for finance for a period of three years at the end of 2023/24, with £1.65 invested as a result. The following provides further information on these schemes:

Apprentice Scheme:

- The Scheme has provided an opportunity for 72 apprenticeships since its commencement:
 - **15** apprentices have been appointed earlier this year, in childcare, civil engineering, human resources, para-legal, data science,

supporting the care workforce and primary education, mechanic, and street lighting.

- **Over 65%** of the appointments are women, with many in technical fields.
- **Over 80%** of apprentices were aged 16-19 years old when they commenced their roles.

Graduate trainees:

- Since 2017, the Council has appointed 37 professional trainees, with 95% of the trainees being offered a job at the end of the scheme.
 - **5 graduates** having been appointed in leadership and management, climate change, health and safety and road risk management.

In addition to the above appointments, the Council has appointed 4 individuals from the Talent Pool. This Pool is a database of individuals who have shown high potential in the assessment centres but were unsuccessful in their application for either an apprenticeship or a traineeship.

Resources and new arrangements have been developed for offering and assessing work experience. This includes an on-line system for applying and taking feedback, welcome packs for individuals and managers and e-modules for individuals to complete before starting any period of work experience. The intention is to further develop the scheme over the course of the next few years, including an internship scheme.

Hybrid Working Scheme

The hybrid working scheme, part of the Council's wider flexible working offer, is now establishing itself, after a transitional period during the year until March 2023 of introducing staff to the requirements. Staff eligible to work under the scheme are expected to attend and work from an office at least two days a week. The scheme is an effective tool to ensure staff can benefit from virtual arrangements, thereby reducing

travel to offices, but also promoting collaboration and face-to-face meeting. There are also developments in working arrangements within the offices, with increased use of technology and some room modifications. The purpose of all of this is to further promote and strengthen healthy collaboration within teams, following the pandemic period.

Recruiting and appointing

See below statistical details about the number of jobs advertised by the Council over the last few years together with the number of applications received and the number of vacancies which needed to be advertised again. Analysing these details again contributes to our ability to identify areas in which the Council needs to focus its attention in relation to developing expertise and planning the workforce for the future.

Year	Number of jobs advertised	Number of applications	Number of jobs re-advertised	Number of applications following re-advertisement
2017 / 2018	472	2312	47	179
2018 / 2019	555	3281	57	240
2019 / 2020	586	2726	101	249
2020 / 2021	486	2112	77	227
2021 / 2022	515	2394	114	369
2022/2023*	1054	3402	259	315
2023/2024*	848	3608	195	471

***Note that the figures since 2022/23 includes roles within our schools, thus explaining the sharp increase in numbers when comparing with previous years.**

You will note that there was a significant decrease in the number of jobs advertised more than once, and that the number of applications were higher than previous years. This is a sign that the employment market is more difficult (consistent with local government and the economy in general), as employers think again about whether to

recruit to a role when considering the current financial landscape. The areas where there is a challenge to recruit are numerous, but as a summary they include those roles areas that have been facing challenges for years, including roles within the education sector, support workers and care in adult services, cooks and kitchen workers, carers, and workers in childcare.

Significant work was undertaken over the past 12 months to facilitate recruitment processes for managers, specific their ability to manage many aspects of the process through technology, and this work will be extended over the forthcoming 12 months to simplify processes and improve candidate experience.

3.2 Conclusions

The high-level information in this report enables managers and those officers advising them to plan services and identify in a timely manner those issues that require further investigation and implementation. The report also provides an overview of some of the steps that are being taken in certain key areas of employment. It is emphasised that this report contains a high-level analysis of the situation; we can analyse this information to a departmental and individual team level. We also can break down the data on sickness absence, and again, in collaboration with services and departments, we will be working with this information in our efforts to reduce sickness absence.

The key messages are consistent with the long-term challenges that are facing the Council as an employer, those being:

- a) Workforce planning.
- b) Continue to promote and support the health and well-being of our workforce, to include responding to the sickness absence challenge.
- c) Embed our hybrid working scheme.

In closing, there is also an opportunity here to bring to your attention other developments in key areas of employment, in addition to the above. The following will be receiving attention during 2024/25:

- a) **Proposed changes in employment law** – following the recent general election, the UK government announced plans to amend employment laws and rules. We will need to analyse the potential impact of those plans when they are announced and address any issues as required.

- b) **Equality plan 2024 / 28** – the Council earlier this year adopted a new statutory equality plan, and one of the aims focuses on employment issues, with many of the themes overlapping with some of the matters referred to in this report.

- c) **Pay** – there is again some industrial unrest concerning the national negotiations on pay for local government workers. Two unions are currently consulting with their members on the possibility of undertaking industrial action. This could of course be of some concern in relation to the effect on services, but it is also unsettling for staff in terms of when they could expect to receive a pay increase, in addition to creating uncertainty around financing the increase.

4. View of the statutory officers.

4.1 Chief Finance Officer

I am satisfied that the report is a fair reflection of Gwynedd Council's employment situation in 2023/24. The Employment Annual Report contains useful and important information that will assist the Council in planning for future challenges, but adopting the decision sought would not create an additional spending commitment.

4.2 Monitoring Officer

The report provides an important overview of the staffing and employment situation in the Council. I have no further observations to add in relation to propriety.