

CYNGOR GWYNEDD – Report to Cyngor Gwynedd's Cabinet

Item title:	Corporate Services Cabinet Member Performance Report
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Menna Trenholme
Relevant officer:	Ian Jones, Head of Corporate Services Department
Date of meeting:	26 November 2024

1. Decision Sought

To accept and note the information in the report.

2. The reason why the Cabinet needs to make the decision

In order to ensure effective performance management.

3. Introduction and Rationale

3.1 The purpose of this report is to update my fellow members on what has happened in the areas for which I am responsible as Cabinet Member for the Corporate Services Department. The report will outline what has happened to date against pledges within the Cyngor Gwynedd Plan for 2023-2028; the progress of performance measures; and the latest on the savings and cuts schemes.

3.2 I wish to remind you that all the matters have already been the subject of a discussion and have been scrutinised by myself at a meeting of the Corporate Services Department's Management Team on 16 September, 2024, which also included representatives from the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee.

3.3 I am satisfied that the projects being led by the Department, together with the day-to-day performance, are being undertaken within the budget. I wish to note my appreciation of the work of all the officers of the Department and recognise the key contribution they make to supporting the work of the Council.

4. Projects in the Cyngor Gwynedd Plan 2023-2028 (Priority Areas)

The Corporate Services Department is leading on 6 projects within the various priority areas of the Council Plan for 2023-2028. I summarise what has been achieved thus far as follows:

4.1 Keeping the Benefit Local

4.1.1 The Council is responsible for procuring, or purchasing, a number of goods and services and is keen to try to ensure that local businesses can compete and win these contracts in order to ensure that as much of the Council's expenditure as possible stays local.

4.1.2 Following a joint decision with all category management and procurement teams it was agreed to hold additional performance challenge meetings for reporting on the results of

reviewing contracts. It was agreed to hold two meetings a year with the first held in May 2024 and the second arranged for November 2024.

4.1.3 New procurement regulations will come into force during February 2025. Work is being done to identify if there are opportunities in the new regulations to buy local or to support the local market in any way.

4.1.4 Work continues on developing a communication plan regarding the aim of Keeping the Benefit Local with information updated for the external website and the intranet. In addition, work is ongoing to create new learning materials for Council officers.

4.2 Women in Leadership

4.2.1 The aim of this project is to increase the number of women who apply for and receive senior positions within the Council by reviewing the employment conditions and the working environment to attract more women to undertake the work in future.

4.2.2 A Summer series of the popular medium "Teatime Chats" was held with Catrin Love, Assistant Head of the Corporate Support Department and Petra Irvine, Chief Engineer, Highways, Engineering and YGC Department contributing and was attended by a number of women from many different levels within the Council. The next series will take place during the Winter, with internal speakers confirmed, but it was agreed in the latest Project Board to be targeting a greater range in job levels in speakers to also include a Manager and Team Leaders with a view to target young women to take the first step.

4.2.3 The fifth series of the Developmental Programme has commenced with 12 exemplary women chosen to be part of the next series. There has been interest in the programme across Departments.

4.2.4 The anonymous application forms pilot has been running since 1 January this year, with work taking place to gather feedback from all relevant Managers who have been through the process of short-listing anonymously. The data was submitted in early September, and on the basis of an acknowledgement that the pilot did not appear to have presented any barrier to the appointment process, it was agreed that the pilot should be adopted as the standard way of appointing to positions at Team Leader level or above when proceeding with this arrangement to be reviewed every 6 months over the first years. Work is ongoing to take practical action on this decision.

4.2.5 'Unconscious Bias' training sessions are held over the Winter months by the Learning and Organisational Development Service.

4.2.6 Arrangements are underway to attend November's 'Managers' Network' series to raise awareness of the project's work. In addition, it is intended to produce a video that will raise awareness of the project's work with a view to using it in one of the 'Live Sessions with the Chief Executive' during the new year.

4.2.7 Council guidance has been updated by the Human Resources Service to meet the need to try and ensure an equal split of men and women on employment panels whether that be appointment panels / employment appeal / capability etc. which means that this milestone has been met.

4.2.8 The data on the progress and impact of the project is regularly updated, and the figure of women in managerial positions is currently 41% which is an increase of 11% since the project's establishment. There are differences between Departments and also differences between job tiers.

4.3 Ensuring Fairness for All

4.3.1 In order to put the people of Gwynedd at the centre of everything we do, we must identify any barriers that some people face when seeking employment or obtaining services from the Council. It is a statutory requirement for Cyngor Gwynedd, as a public body, to create a plan of what we intend to do over a 4 year period to promote equality. In light of a period of approximately 9 months gathering opinion, the Strategic Equality Plan 2024-28 was adopted by the Cabinet in March 2024. The Plan consists of 5 Objectives and work has been earmarked under these Objectives over the four-year period.

4.3.3 A combination of services from the Council's departments are responsible for delivering the different aspects of the Plan. Work has been undertaken to develop detailed milestones for all areas for 2024/25. Currently, all of the milestones are on track to be completed within the year.

4.3.4 The technical problems experienced on the introduction of an electronic impact assessment system have now been resolved. There will be a transitional period where the two systems will run jointly, and there will also be a period to raise awareness of the tool.

4.3.5 Training on the duties of managers in the field of equality area is in the process of being created, including carrying out equality impact assessments. Headteachers now have access to information that gives them a live picture on how many staff complete the mandatory training on equality. There have been discussions between the equality officers and the Learning and Development Team about the content of the Equality Training Framework.

4.3.6 Monthly meetings are held between the Website and Engagement Team and the Information Technology Service to identify new accessibility issues that arise and to update the action plan for improving corporate website accessibility. Work on redesigning the home page is underway.

4.3.7 Workforce Planning

4.4.1 To ensure that the Council is in a position to provide and develop services for the people of Gwynedd, we must ensure that we have the right staff in the right place with the right skills.

4.4.2 Work was commenced in September on carrying out the jobs 'matrix' exercise with Council departments. The intention is to create a 'matrix' of key jobs, assessed on a risk basis to the continuity of key Council services (to include jobs in the caring and education fields), with action plans set out for responding to key areas. It is anticipated that this work will be completed by March 2025.

4.4.3 New resources and arrangements have been developed for proposing and assessing work experience. This includes an on-line system to apply and receive feedback, welcome packs for individuals and managers and e-modules for individuals to complete before starting their work experience. It is intended to further develop the scheme over the coming years.

- 4.4.4** The dashboard providing information on mandatory training has been completed. Work to develop a specific workforce training plan for the general staff category is underway.
- 4.4.5** Initial discussions are taking place between the Council and Bangor University, with a view to collaborate with the University on reviewing our recruitment documents, including the Person Specification document, to make them more coherent and useful for job applicants. It is anticipated that these discussions will feed into the workforce planning project.
- 4.4.6** A successful period of recruitment and appointment of new apprentices and trainees was completed for 2024. Over **300** applications were received this year, almost double the number from last year. **15** new apprentices have been appointed in the fields of childcare, civil engineering, human resources, para-legal, data science, care workforce support and primary education, mechanics and street lighting.
- 4.4.7** **5** new professional trainees have been appointed in the fields of leadership and management, climate change, health and safety and risk management (*on our roads*). It was not possible to fill some posts which included two in the fields of digital transformation and software engineering. This means that the Council currently employs **51** apprentices and professional trainees on full-time contracts.
- 4.4.8** In addition to the above appointments, the Council has appointed **4** additional people through the Talent Pool. The Talent Pool is a pool of individuals who have shown particular potential in recruitment centres but not been successful for a particular job. **8** apprentices and **2** professional trainees have completed their qualifications and have recently accepted full-time positions with the Council.
- 4.4.9** A number of engagement events were held during 2024 in secondary schools and universities to ensure that young people are aware of the careers and opportunities available here. This includes events at Ysgol Brynrefail, the Graduates' Network at Aberystwyth University and the Law School at Bangor University and the University of Liverpool. Current professional apprentices and trainees were part of the engagement team.

4.5 Promoting Use of the Welsh Language by the Residents of Gwynedd

- 4.5.1** Specific projects will be held that will promote the use of the Welsh language and increase the opportunities to use Welsh in the community. This will include increasing the use of the Welsh language when engaging with public and community services.
- 4.5.2** Meetings were held with each headteacher or representative to obtain their input into the Language Strategy Work Programme 2023-2033 and the work to develop the work programme continues following their input. As a result, work on a few projects has commenced such as updating new language awareness training for councillors and members of staff, and work on other established projects such as the Gwynedd and Anglesey Public Services Board's Bilingual Workforce Recruitment Project has continued.
- 4.5.3** Good progress has been made with the 'place names' project with attention given to all areas of work identified in the original work programme, which includes the names of the Council, houses, streets / housing estates, villages/towns and destinations/attractions, geographical features and influencing external partners. There has been some delay in implementing some

elements of the original programme as a result of the request to focus on using Cyngor Gwynedd names and addressing changing street names and due to illness and staff turnover.

- 4.5.4** Although it sounds simple, it was found that changing street names/signs was a challenging task that would involve a great deal of human and financial resources so it was decided to undertake a pilot and install signs in some places that would initially increase the visibility of Welsh names on a small scale. The workshops on place names in schools were a huge success as was the Gwynedd local place names map created to preserve local names.
- 4.5.6** A new work programme has been created and elements of it have been implemented. A place names app and corporate place names register have been developed to guide staff on which names to use and a place names training session was also held for staff. It was agreed to install 6 new signs in places across the county and install new Welsh-only street signs in Trefor. We are awaiting the design of the signs and the installation date from the Highways, Engineering and YGC Department. Each sign is expected to cost between £2000 and £3000. A meeting was also held with Menter Iaith Gwynedd that intends to submit a grant application to the National Lottery on increasing the use of Welsh names by the public to see whether it is possible to collaborate in future.
- 4.5.7** As a result of a lack of resources, it has not been possible to prioritise sufficient time for Prosiect 15 and that is unlikely to change in the future. However, a grant application was submitted to the lottery to continue with the project but it was unsuccessful. In the meantime, we continue to release some items on social media to keep the work alive.
- 4.5.8** Following the seal of approval from Cabinet to proceed with Menter Iaith Gwynedd's outsourcing arrangements, the work to support the initiative continues and arrangements will be made for the transfer of staff on 1 April 2025. It is pleasing to note that the initiative has appointed their first officer, i.e., the Meirionnydd language development officer, who commenced in post in August.
- 4.5.9** Members of the Gwynedd Language Forum decided that a sub-group needed to be established to look at the attitudes of young people and their parents towards the Welsh language when pursuing further and higher education. A Gwynedd Language Forum Young People sub-group has now met twice with 18 representatives invited from various relevant organisations. It was agreed that Grŵp Llandrillo Menai will lead the work in collaboration with Menter Iaith Gwynedd. It was discussed at the first meeting that young people between the ages of 14 and 18 would be the target age for the sub-group as much of the relevant work is already aimed at this age. Going forward, the sub-group is keen to consult with young people as well as their parents to understand perspectives and the impact it has on language transfer. It was agreed that members of the sub-group would identify potential groups to include in the consultation to achieve a fair cross-section.
- 4.5.10** The first on-line survey carried out in collaboration with a Bangor University student examining residents' attitude towards Welsh and their preferred language use when using various services across the county has been completed. We are awaiting the initial results of the research.
- 4.5.11** During July, we commenced the work of observing our customers' language use when using our front-line services at a leisure centre, library and Siop Gwynedd in Caernarfon, Dolgellau and Pwllheli, as well as the on-line self-service.

4.6 Strategic Review of Health and Safety Management

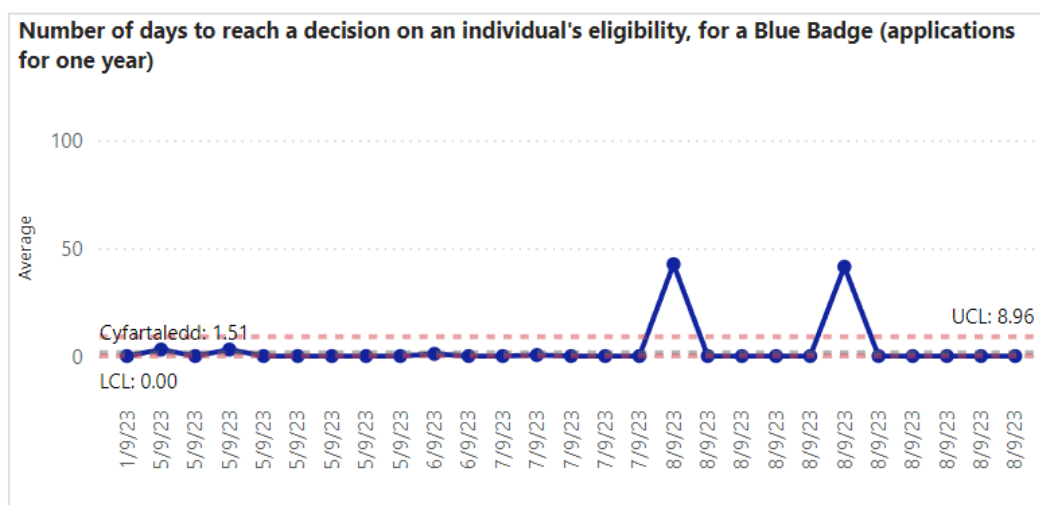
- 4.6.1** The project examines the strategic management of health and safety within the Council and how it ties into overall governance and performance systems. It entails undertaking a full review of the management system in its entirety.
- 4.6.2** Regular progress meetings are held with the Information Technology Service to monitor development work on the introduction of a new health and safety software system across the Council. Significant work is being carried out in the background to enable the historical information to be transferred to the new system format. Significant mapping has taken place on the second phase of the system, which will see developments in relation to risk register, risk assessments, audits and other functions.
- 4.6.3** Work continues on the integrated model of health and safety management. An annual meeting was held with the Corporate Management Team in March where it was decided that a gap analysis was required on the first two models. A questionnaire was produced outlining the key steps of both models so that managers have a clear and comprehensive format to follow and that will be shared in October.
- 4.6.4** As part of work to review the communication and resources system to assist Managers and Assistant Heads across the Council, a review of the information available is on the intranet to ensure that health, safety and well-being are communicated clearly, concisely and easily for staff to find relevant information.

5. Performance

5.1. The Department's services are performing well and I confirm that I am pleased with their current performance. See below for some of the highlights.

5.2 In recent years, the **Customer Contact and Registration Service** has coped very well under difficult circumstances and steps are being taken to strengthen the capacity of the service.

5.3 The **Customer Contact and Registration Service** is responsible for administrating and reaching a decision on an individual's eligibility for a Blue Badge. Over the past year (September '23 to August '24) on average, it takes around 1.5 days to reach a decision on an individual's application after receiving a complete form, but at times, they may have to wait f8.96+ days, when the application must be referred on to an independent assessment company.

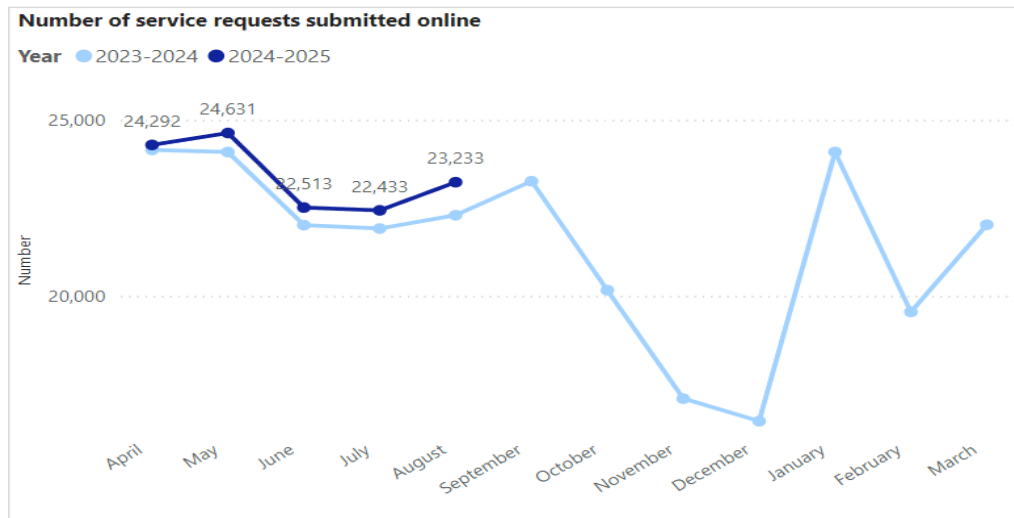


5.4 The **Communications and Engagement Service** enables the Council to share information and engage in a two-way conversation with the people of Gwynedd, staff and elected Members of the Council. The service also enables the public to self-serve on Cyngor Gwynedd's website 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and offers a more cost effective way to contact the Council for a service.

5.5 In terms of the number of service requests being submitted on-line, there have been 2,638 more requests between April and August this year than the corresponding period last year. There has been an increase in many of the forms, e.g. Recycling Centre Booking Slot (4,841 more requests for the period than 2023), Report a pothole (78 more requests for the period than 2023). At the same time, Missed Waste Collection requests are 2,714 lower than last year's corresponding period, and Waste and Recycling Equipment Order requests in July and August were 1,414 lower than 2023, as the Service prevented new orders over the summer period, in order to distribute a backlog of requests.

5.6 During this period, the following forms went live: Application for Annual Parking Permits in Morfa Bychan (133 applications since April); Self-referral form to the Mental Health Team (30 requests since May); Requests for a Tele-care Service (17 requests since the end of July). A Housing Enquiry form has also been prepared for use by the Housing One-stop-shop over the phone and to on-line self-service customers. The One-stop-shop currently uses it to record phone calls only, with a view to offer the form on-line in the coming months.

5.7 Also in this period, the login element of My Account on the Council's website has been re-developed, using more recent technology. This was done to make it easier to merge My Cyngor Gwynedd Account, with self-service accounts of external systems purchased by Services, so that only one login is required to access all Council services. Work will take place over the next few months to merge My Cyngor Gwynedd Account with a new Education system self-service account that enables parents to apply for school admission etc.



5.8 The **Research and Information Service** assists all staff in managing information and adhering to information acts and develops the capacity of the Council and its partners to use information and evidence to make the best decisions for the people of Gwynedd.

5.9 The work of developing dashboards to analyse data and information (in line with one of the Council's Digital Plan priorities) continues. Over the past few months, dashboards have been released for information events, Corporate Services Department performance, corporate complaints, mandatory training and elected member training and the Neighbourhood Profile dashboard has been further developed. This agenda will continue to be developed over the coming months while also addressing how this product can be shared more effectively with more people.

5.10 The **Research and Information Service** contributed extensively to the review of older people's future care services in Gwynedd (Llechen Lân), modelling future demographic changes, the impact of it on care and staffing needs, and estimating the potential impact of changing ways of working. A series of Information Workshops for all managers and system owners across the Council has just concluded, which received very good response and feedback. There was good response and comments, e.g. "Very helpful to understand that I am an information manager and think about what is expected of this role", "A useful session that makes you think about the topic and the steps that need to be taken to improve the situation in our day-to-day work".

6. Financial Position / Savings

6.1 At the end of the 2023/24 financial year, an underspend position of (£10k) was reported mainly due to vacant posts and staff turnover, but the underspend was being reduced as a result of higher costs on the counselling and physiotherapy budget along with a lack of income in some fields. A permanent revenue bid was received for the 2024/25 Budget for the higher expenditure on the counselling and physiotherapy budget.

6.2 The 2024/25 financial projections were submitted to the Cabinet meeting on 15 October 2024, where an underspend position of (£23k) is anticipated for the Department. Again, staff turnover contributes toward the underspend.

6.3 When preparing the 2024/25 Budget, savings schemes worth £242,540 were identified to be taken out of the budget. Of those, £148,500 have already been realised, £52,430 (3 schemes) are on track to be achieved on time. With one savings scheme equivalent to £41,160, where there is a risk to realise the saving. The Department has the priority to undertake a review to identify the amount that can be cut without creating an unacceptable risk to the Council.

7. Views of the Statutory Officers

7.1 Chief Finance Officer

I am satisfied that the report is a fair reflection of the financial position of the Corporate Services Department.

7.2 Monitoring Officer

No comments to add regarding propriety.