
THE CABINET, TUESDAY, 11 MARCH 2024

Present-

Councillors: Nia Jeffreys, Menna Trenholme, Craig ab Iago, R. Medwyn Hughes, Dewi Jones, Huw Wyn Jones, June Jones, Dilwyn Morgan, Llio Elenid Owen and Paul 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) and Sioned Mai Jones (Democracy Team Leader).

- Item 6: Ffion Madog Evans (Assistant Head - Finance Department)
- Item 7: Dewi Wyn Jones (The Council's Business Support Service Manager)
- Item 8: Lowri Cadwaladr Roberts (Assistant Head - Housing and Property
- Item 9: Department)
- Item 10: Gerwyn Jones (Assistant Head - Environment Department)
- Item 11: Gareth Jones (Assistant Head - Environment Department)
- Item 14: Steffan Jones (Head of Highways, Engineering and YGC Department)
- Marian Parry Hughes (Head of Children and Supporting Families Department)

1. APOLOGIES

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

Attention was drawn to International Women's Day that had occurred over the weekend recognising the importance of the day. It was noted that the Council encouraged women's development in the form of important programmes such as the Women in Leadership Programme. Pride was expressed in women in politics highlighting female Cabinet Members, the Council Chair, Beca Roberts and the Leader of the Opposition Party, Angela Russell. The opportunity was taken to state that everyone's thoughts were with the Leader of the opposition. The work of each leading woman in a variety of different fields was recognised.

No apologies were received.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

Item 9: Guidance had been received from the Monitoring Officer that the North Wales Corporate Joint Committee was a public body, therefore, those who were members of the Joint Committee were asked to state that but nothing obstructed them from participating in the discussion. Councillors Nia Jeffreys and Craig ab Iago declared that they were members of the Corporate Joint Committee.

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 meetings held on 11 February 2025 were accepted as a true record. Gratitude was expressed for the minutes and the work of the Democracy team that took minutes, recognising the accuracy of the minutes.

6. ONE-OFF BIDS 2025/26

The report was submitted by Cllr Nia Jeffreys.

DECISION

After setting the Budget at the Full Council meeting on 6 March 2025, it had been agreed that the Cabinet approved the one-off bids of £2,057,260 for 2025/26 to be funded from the:

- £1,557,260 of additional funding in the final settlement announced by the Welsh Government on 20 February 2025.
- £500,000 from the Council Tax Premium for the purpose of temporary accommodation for the Homeless.

Following the Welsh Government's recent announcement that there would be additional funding for the field of care, subject to the details and conditions of this grant, it had been agreed to use the source to fund the bids in the care field.

DISCUSSION

It was noted that the bids were inevitable but unfortunately the Council was currently unable to support developmental or transformational bids. The report was submitted stating that the Council's transformation fund was normally used to fund the one-off bids but there was no money left in this fund to fund any bids this year. It was reported that the Welsh Government had recently allocated additional funding which was available to contribute towards the costs of the one-off bids. It was acknowledged that this funding would be useful but it was expressed that the Welsh Government had not adequately funded Cyngor Gwynedd in the first place.

It was noted that the bids were requests for revenue funding but it was temporary revenue funding, and it was hoped that the temporary demand during the year would either disappear or decrease.

Reference was made to the table in part 4.2 of the report which listed the bids, totalling just over £2 million. Attention was drawn to the costliest bids, namely Education Transport, explaining that this was mainly due to the increase in fuel and vehicle maintenance costs and the increase in the numbers requiring transport to the schools. It was hoped that the cost would be reduced next year following a review in the field.

It was explained that the bid for homelessness emergency accommodation costs was half a million and that there was also a bid for £115,000 for additional workers as a

result of the admission of Asylum Seekers without parents as part of the National Transfer Scheme, which was a sad but very worthy case.

It was reported that options to fund the bids had been considered but there was insufficient revenue funding and that the Council's corporate reserves had been significantly reduced and that they needed to be protected. Although a Departmental fund had been appropriate for the Housing and Property Department's bid, it was noted that appropriate Departmental funds did not exist for the other bids. As a result of this, it was suggested that $\frac{3}{4}$ of the bids should be funded through the additional funding from the Government and the other $\frac{1}{4}$ to be funded from the only appropriate Departmental fund left which was the Council Tax Premium fund.

Observations arising from the discussion:

- Regarding the Education Transport bid, an observation was made that if the Council was unwilling to pay and support the bid then this meant that children did not have access to education. It was acknowledged that there was overspending here but that it may be a matter of underfunding the service. It was believed that spending this money was not an option. It was hoped that the Department would not be in this position next year and that other options were currently being considered in order to make things more efficient and get the best value for money.
- Support for all the bids was expressed by a Member but he expressed that he did not support the use of the Housing Action Plan to fund the Homelessness emergency accommodation costs. There was a concern that taking this money out of the Housing Action Plan was going to mean that the Housing Action Plan could not deliver as well and it was questioned what would then be cut out of the Housing Action Plan. It was added that it was not a financial fund for the purpose of underfunding, noting that homelessness prevention was a statutory service. It was believed that the Housing Department was being treated differently expressing that the Department had succeeded in reducing the costs of Homelessness through preventive work. For the above reasons, the Member decided to abstain his vote.
- There was a concern there would be additional costs in the field of Homelessness in the near future as a result of the Government's publication of the white paper. The Cabinet Member noted that he would be writing to the minister and that Heads of Housing Departments in Wales had written to the Government to express their concerns about the content of the white paper.
 - It was agreed with the comments on the white paper stating that the Council was not aware of the current financial implications of the white paper.
 - Sympathy was expressed with the Member's viewpoint recognising that this was not the ideal solution but that the situation was a difficult one and the Government's additional funds were insufficient to fund all the one-off bids.
 - It was added that when the Housing Action Plan would be reviewed, consideration could then be given to what to take out. It was also suggested that there may be options in the future to repay this money back to the Housing Action Plan fund.

7. LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND ELECTIONS (WALES) ACT 2021 - PANEL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

The report was submitted by Cllr Dewi Jones

DECISION

A timetable was agreed to undertake a Panel Performance Assessment during the week of 9 March 2026.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted explaining that the panel performance assessment planned for November 2024 had been postponed and, as a result, the Cabinet needed to agree a new timetable for carrying out the assessment. It was explained that the report went on to discuss the scope of the assessment and the membership of the Panel.

The Council's Business Support Manager added that this was a statutory requirement under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. It was explained that the panel assessment would examine the extent to which the Council effectively implemented its functions and used its resources prudently and efficiently.

It was explained that the scoping document had been created during the Summer of 2024 but that the document would now be out of date as the assessment had been postponed. A second visit to the scope document was suggested at the end of the 2025 calendar year. Attention was drawn to page 22 of the report highlighting the areas suggested for the panel to focus on previously. In addition, the Cabinet was reminded that the panel's membership had been agreed back in September 2024 and it was believed that it would be wise to wait until the end of the calendar year to confirm the membership in order to ensure the suitability of the panel members.

It was explained that the panel would visit for a one-week period and conduct workshops and interviews; it was noted that Cabinet Members would be required to be involved in the discussions. It was confirmed that there would be a presentation to Cabinet Members at the end of the week on the main findings of the survey before reporting the findings to the Governance and Audit Committee before submission to the Full Council.

Observations arising from the discussion:

- It was questioned whether there was value to this assessment and whether it appeared to be an additional layer of supervision. It was enquired where the recommendations would be submitted.
 - In response, it was noted that there was little choice to reject the assessment hoping that it would have value. It was suggested that there may be an opportunity in the future for Gwynedd to examine other Councils and receive opportunities to learn.

8. LEASING OF THE FORMER ABERSOCH SCHOOL SITE TO MENTER RABAR

The report was submitted by Cllr Paul Rowlinson

DECISION

It was agreed to use powers under the General Disposal Consent (Wales) 2003 to lease the Abersoch School site directly to Menter Rabar for less than market rent, to realise social, economic and environmental benefits.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted stating that it stemmed from the sad situation of having to close Ysgol Abersoch back in 2021. It was explained that when a school closed the Council had a policy of offering the site to the local community at a discounted price. It was noted that the community of Abersoch had set up Menter Rabar, a multi-purpose hub which would include a community café, heritage exhibition, business units to let, a community garden and a multi-use room to host activities and courses.

It was explained that Menter Rabar had already secured planning permission and had received grant funding and secured additional funding through various sources. It was reported that the Local Member was very supportive of Menter Rabar, as stated in the Member's comments on page 46 of the Agenda.

It was explained why a lease for a period of 99 years needed to be offered, explaining that Welsh Government conditions stated that Menter Rabar needed to receive a long-term lease from the Council before releasing the grant money. The decision not to put the property on the open market and to waive approximately £150,000 was highlighted; it was believed that Menter Rabar would bring significant economic, social and environmental benefits to the community of Abersoch.

Observations arising from the discussion:

- Support was expressed for Menter Rabar stating that projects like this were good for Gwynedd. It was believed that Gwynedd was leading the way in the community sector and that there was potential to attract visitors and income here as well as raise awareness of the culture and heritage of the area.
- Support for the proposal was stated believing that there would be clear benefits to the area and community as a result of this initiative and it was thought that it was great that Abersoch was given this opportunity.
- Such initiatives were believed to work well and draw communities together and provide social opportunities for the residents of the area.
- The above comments were reiterated by expressing congratulations and thanks to Menter Rabar for their work.

9. REGIONAL TRANSPORT PLAN - UPDATE

The report was submitted by Cllr Craig ab Iago

DECISION

Recognition was given of the development of the draft Regional Transport Plan (RTP) and the processes associated with this.

The response (Appendix 5) to the consultation was approved.

DISCUSSION

A political view was expressed that the North Wales Corporate Joint Committee was creating another layer of bureaucracy and there was concern that not much Welsh would be spoken at the Corporate Joint Committee's Transport Sub-Committees. It was questioned whether the Regional Transport Plan offered anything new.

The Assistant Head of the Environment Department added that this Regional Transport Plan would be the first product of the North Wales Corporate Joint Committee. It was explained that the likelihood that the 4 Regional Transport Plans by the Corporate Joint Committees in Wales would be very similar as they needed to meet the same type of criteria from the Government.

Attention was drawn to appendix 1 which listed the Gwynedd Plans stating that Gwynedd had 64 schemes in the Delivery Plan and it was explained that the plans had been prioritised as higher, medium or lower.

Observations arising from the discussion:

- It was enquired whether there was anything Cabinet Members could do to assist the engagement process and highlight its importance.
 - It was confirmed that the consultation was open until 14 April but that it was a very technical and detailed consultation and included a lot of strategic information. It was reported that a press release had already been issued and Gwynedd residents were urged to take the opportunity to share their opinions. It was added that further and more specific consultations would follow.
- Observations were made about the frustration with the area's public transport particularly rural areas of the County. It was noted that not enough buses were running and that they could be expensive to use. It was highlighted that funding had to be received from the Government to correspond with the plans to fund and realise them.
- It was enquired whether this Plan was likely to raise the hopes of residents and it was asked how many of the plans were likely to be realised within the county.
 - It was explained that it was not currently possible to know how many of the plans were likely to be realised. It was emphasised that if the schemes were not set out in this Plan there was no hope of receiving funds to realise them. It was reiterated that it was positive that the plans had been included in this Plan and the Council would have to try to maximise the opportunities.
 - It was noted that the North Wales Corporate Joint Committee and Transport for Wales had a healthy relationship and worked well together.
- The officers of the Department were thanked for their work.

10.PERFORMANCE REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

The report was submitted by Cllr Craig ab Iago

DECISION

To accept and note the information in the report.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted stating that the attitude and performance of the Department was encouraging. Attention was drawn to the Department's five priorities in the Council Plan noting that the Department was leading throughout Britain on some of the

priorities, for example the work on the management of second homes and short-term holiday accommodation.

Attention was drawn to the waste and recycling service noting that the number of enquiries relating to missed waste collections had decreased over the current year as could be seen in Figure 1 in the report. It was highlighted that the Government's recycling target had been increased to 70% and that it was unlikely that the Department would meet the target this year. Nevertheless, it was noted that the new Waste Strategy for 2025-2030 was currently in draft form and the implementation of this Strategy would mean meeting the target. It was reiterated that the Waste Strategy would be submitted to the Cabinet in May or June.

Reference was made to the challenges in the Food and Safety service as identified in the report, highlighting that there were over 2,000 food businesses in the county. It was noted that many qualified and experienced staff had recently left or retired which had left a gap in the service. As a result of the staffing challenges and the importance of investing in officer training and shadowing experienced staff, it was expressed that the Department was looking for an Environmental Health professional trainee this year.

Observations arising from the discussion:

- It was stated that the recruitment problems were constant themes and the importance of schemes such as the Trainee Scheme was emphasised.
- It was enquired what was the result of not meeting the recycling target.
 - In response, it was stated that failure to meet the target would entail a risk of fines for the Council by the Welsh Government.
- It was believed that there was a need to invest in training and educating county residents on the importance of recycling.
 - It was agreed that this was key and had already been identified as an area in need of attention.
- It was asked what were the next steps in terms of the Waste Strategy.
 - It was explained that the Strategy would be submitted to Cabinet for approval to undertake a public consultation before reporting back on the results of the consultation and asking for the adoption of the Strategy. The Strategy would be implemented following approval.
- Attention was drawn to the 'test purchase' exercises outlined in part 5.2.5 of the report stating that it was encouraging that the team was trying to ensure that shops did not sell fireworks to under-age children. It was enquired whether there were similar regulations relating to the sale of 'vapes'.
 - It was noted that dealing with risks arising from the sale of 'vapes' had been part of a project which was one of the service's priorities and across Wales as well as the sale of illegal tobacco. It was reiterated that the team was trying to stop the sale of the materials to under-age persons as well as trying to prevent illegal material from being sold. It was noted that this involved a lot of day-to-day work for the team; it was also added that businesses as well as consumers needed to be protected.

11. PERFORMANCE REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR HIGHWAYS, ENGINEERING AND YGC

The report was submitted by Cllr June Jones

DECISION

To accept and note the information in the report.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted stating that it would outline what had been achieved within the Department as part of the priorities of Cyngor Gwynedd's 2023-28 Plan and provide an update on the financial position and savings plans. It was reported that significant progress had been made with the Council Plan projects and while the Department continued to face challenges, confidence was expressed that the Department had suitable plans in place to address the situation to the best of its ability.

An explanation was provided on the table in Appendix 1, which provided an update on the progress of the Department's three priority projects in the Council Plan, namely Clean and Tidy Communities, Acting on Flood Risks and Extending Opportunities for Play and Socialising for the Children and Young People of the County. An overview of the projects was provided stating what was in the pipeline and the update up to March 2025.

Cabinet Members were guided through the rest of the report detailing the performance of the Department's services. In conclusion, the Department's financial position was highlighted, noting that an overspend of around £700,000 was forecast this year, which was a combination of factors such as a reduction in income and additional pressure on street cleaning and public toilet cleaning budgets.

It was added that there was a great feeling within the Department where the staff were enthusiastic and genuinely interested in their work. The Department's staff were thanked for their commitment.

The Head of the Highways, Engineering and YGC Department stated that he would like to thank the Cabinet Member for visiting all the Department services in order to introduce herself and learn about the work of the Department. It was added that the Department was facing significant financial challenges but was doing its best to reduce overspend and savings plans and was confident that £278,500 worth of savings would be achieved this year.

Observations arising from the discussion:

- The good work of the Department was recognised and gratitude was expressed.
- With regards to street enforcement and the graph in the report, it was asked how the Council compared to other Councils and asked why there was a significant difference in the Summer figures compared to the Winter figures.
 - In response, it was explained that the team was under pressure in terms of staffing levels. It was explained that the graph on page 102 was specifically on dog fouling and not litter. It was elaborated that it was difficult to penalise dog fouling crimes because it was difficult to catch the person at the time. Attention was drawn to the significant improvement that had been made so far this year.
 - It was noted that the information was not currently available for comparison with other authorities but the Head of Department could obtain that information.

- The lack of investment in playgrounds over the years was highlighted. There was a wish to raise awareness that community groups could apply for grants to improve playgrounds.
 - Members were reminded that there were 131 playgrounds across the County and it was recognised that facilities for wheelchair use in the playgrounds needed to be improved. It was noted that the service was re-examining the strategy but that funds were scarce for this provision. It was added that the service was happy to discuss with Community Councils and that there was an intention to liaise with Community Councils in the future as the work progressed.
- Thanks were expressed to the Ardal Ni tidying-up team, specifically David Charles Williams' team for their work.
- It was asked if there were any plans to extend the 'person and cart' scheme further to the Dwyfor and Meirionnydd areas.
 - It was confirmed that the scheme was currently in place in Bangor and Caernarfon and that it was intended to be extended to the Dwyfor area (Pwllheli and Porthmadog) shortly. It was noted that there were similar arrangements in some areas in Meirionnydd e.g. a traditional town cleaner with traditional early morning starting hours. It was confirmed that discussions were underway to change the hours so that the hours were more visible.
- In response to a question about Natural Resources Wales' financial challenges and whether this had affected collaboration with the Department, it was confirmed that no impact has been seen to date on any joint project nor to suggest any impact on plans moving forward.

12. PERFORMANCE REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN AND SUPPORTING FAMILIES

The report was submitted by Cllr Menna Trenholme

DECISION

To accept and note the information in the report.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted stating that the Children and Supporting Families Department was responsible for two projects within the Council Plan. An update was provided on these projects namely the Autism Scheme and the Small Group Homes Scheme. They progress that had been made was detailed and the work in progress was noted.

Challenges impacting service performance such as workforce capacity were detailed. Reference was made to the efforts being made to improve the situation noting that the Workforce Planning and WeCare Wales project was carrying out recruitment campaigns. It was also noted that there was an increase in demand and that the nature of cases showed that the needs of children and families were becoming more complex and intensifying. There was concern that the Department's staff workload was high and not sustainable or healthy in the long-term.

To conclude, the Department's financial position, which was now £3.7 million of overspend, as a result of the rising costs of out-of-county placements, was summarised and reference was made to the Department's savings plans. All Department staff were thanked for their work noting that the work was challenging and extensive.

The Head of Children and Supporting Families Department added that the situation of the workforce had improved somewhat over the years but was a persistent concern. It was noted that there were currently no permanent vacancies, only temporary posts as a result of maternity leave. It was added that the Department promoted staff development and was supportive of providing opportunities and experiences to staff within the Department's services.

It was noted that it was difficult to attract qualified Social Workers and that the numbers on the courses had decreased. It was believed that the Care Academy work would make a difference to the staffing problems of some of the services.

The benefits of the Small Group Homes schemes were recognised stating that they would be positive to the budget in meeting needs locally and they looked forward to seeing children returning to their area. The opportunity was taken to thank the community of Morfa Bychan for the welcome and for the special collaboration with Ysgol Eifionydd. It was hoped that this example would be repeated with the other homes.

Observations arising from the discussion:

- The Department was congratulated on the work on the Small Group Homes noting that it was great news. It was noted that the work was having a positive impact on children and they were proud that some had already returned to their area and pride was expressed that other schemes were in the pipeline.
- The excellent work of the Care Academy and the recruitment effort was recognised and Gwenno Williams, Marketing and Care Careers Development Officer was thanked for her work and she was congratulated on receiving an honorary award from Careers Wales.
- There was concern about the reduction in numbers who completed Social Work courses in Bangor and it was asked whether there was a risk of the course being cancelled if there were too many surplus spaces.
 - In response, it was stated that there were no discussions to end the course at Bangor but rather discussions on how to attract more to want to complete the Social Work qualification. It was also reiterated that the Department wanted to appoint three new Social Worker posts as a result of a successful financial bid; it was believed that these positions would benefit the workload and well-being of the Department's existing staff.

The meeting commenced at 1:00pm and concluded at 3:10pm

CHAIR