
THE CABINET, TUESDAY 8 APRIL 2025

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 Rhodri Jones (Democracy Team Leader).

- Item 6: Gwern ap Rhisiart (Head of Education) and Ffion Edwards Ellis (Assistant Head of Special Educational Needs and Inclusion).
- Item 7: Sioned Eirian Williams (Head of Economy and Community Department) and Dylan Rhys Griffiths (Manager of the North Wales Shared Prosperity Fund).
- Items 8 and 9: Aled Gibbard (Assistant Head of Resources, Children and Supporting Families Department).
- Item 10: Sioned Eirian Williams (Head of Economy and Community Department)
- Item 11: Carys Fôn Williams (Head of Housing and Property Department)
- Item 13: Gareth Jones (Assistant Head of Environment Department) and Heledd Fflur Jones (Planning Policy Team Leader)

1. APOLOGIES

The Leader welcomed the Cabinet Members and Officers to the meeting.

It was pointed out that April was World Autism Awareness Month. Pride was expressed that excellent work was being done in this field within the Council, as had been evidenced in a meeting of the Care Scrutiny Committee recently.

No apologies were received.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

Item 8: A declaration of personal interest was received from Councillor Nia Jeffreys (Council Leader) because she had applied to become a foster parent with Foster Wales Gwynedd. It was noted that it was a prejudicial interest, and she withdrew from the meeting during the discussion.

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 meeting held on 11 March 2025 were accepted as a true record.

6. GWYNEDD INCLUSION PROVISION

The report was presented by Cllr Dewi Jones

DECISION

1. **To adopt the option of creating a Portfolio Pupil Referral Unit Model (multi-site).**
2. **To accept the financial plan presented in the report, delegating the timetable for implementation and realising the plan to the Head of Education Department in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Education.**

DISCUSSION

It was reported that ensuring the best support and provision for children with behavioural problems was one of the Education Department's priorities.

It was explained that the Report detailed the existing arrangements for inclusion provision in Gwynedd. It was noted that an ambitious inclusion strategy was introduced for restructuring the provision in 2012 but that it was now timely to reform the provision once again to ensure that it was suitable for responding effectively to pupils' needs in today's world.

The members were reminded that the Inclusion service had been set up to address the recommendation of an external evaluation in 2017. It was confirmed that the service had constantly evolved to ensure that it met relevant needs and developed good practice.

The proposal was presented to establish a Portfolio Pupil Referral Unit (multi-site) to provide support for children with significant behavioural and engagement problems. It was reported that they wished for the Unit to be suitable to support children of all ages with a diverse range of needs, as it would be suitable for any pupil who finds the experience of being in a mainstream school challenging and unsuited to their needs. It was elaborated that a plan for the Unit had been developed to outline a robust governance structure, and specific objectives and roles that need to be achieved.

It was pointed out that the need for this Unit had been highlighted within the work of the Gwynedd headteachers' project board which researched provisions in other Local Authorities, after receiving a report from Estyn recently. It was confirmed that the development of this Unit had been made in collaboration with the headteachers of Gwynedd, ensuring that there was a demand for this particular provision.

Observations arising from the discussion:

- In response to concerns that the number of pupils being excluded from schools in Gwynedd was increasing, it was confirmed that work was being carried out across the department to try and ensure that pupils were not excluded. It was explained that there were plans to fund budgets for schools to provide support to learners

before the need to attend the Referral Unit was considered. It was emphasised that providing this support to the schools was a key part of the success of this scheme.

- It was explained that the length of time children spent in the Referral Unit would vary, depending on their needs and age, confirming that they would have the freedom to return to the mainstream school at any time they wished to do so. It was explained that specific consideration would be given to any Year 10 or 11 pupils in the Referral Unit to ensure that they were placed in the most suitable setting to reach their full potential in their educational qualifications. It was confirmed that there would be regular discussions with the relevant schools to implement appropriate adjustments while the individuals are in the Referral Unit so that those children could return to school.
- Reference was made to several recommendations made in the Review of the Inclusion Provision in Gwynedd 2023 report (Appendix 2), and the members were assured that the Council was acting on them.

7. 2025/26 SHARED PROSPERITY FUND IN GWYNEDD

The report was presented by Cllr R. Medwyn Hughes

DECISION

- 1. To agree to the continuation of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund's regional governance procedure for the 2025/26 transitional year, and authorise the Head of Economy and Community Department – in consultation with the Head of Finance, Head of Legal Service and the Chief Executive – to confirm the arrangements.**
- 2. To agree to continue with the UK Shared Prosperity Fund's local governance arrangements in Gwynedd for the 2025/26 transitional year.**
- 3. To agree that it is required for every scheme in Gwynedd that receives funding from the Shared Prosperity Fund to realise two principles, namely:**
 - 3.a. That targeted efforts are made to ensure that SPF money and the resulting benefits are beneficial to communities and residents in all parts of Gwynedd**
 - 3.b. That targeted efforts are made to encourage activities (and organisations) that have not previously received funding, to obtain access to support.**
- 4. To agree to evolve and adapt activities from existing projects and extend them for the transitional year, in accordance with the principle of the UK Government that the 2025/26 funding of the Shared Prosperity Fund is an extension of the 2022/24 to 2024/25 period, which transitions to a new funding procedure.**
- 5. To ask the Shared Prosperity Fund Panel to give detailed consideration to the individual schemes being considered for the Gwynedd allocation of the Shared Prosperity Fund, and present a recommendation back to the Cabinet on the individual allocations.**

- 6. Within the £7,900,000 budget, to agree to the continuation of four funds (with a total budget of approximately £2.29 million) to distribute smaller sums of Shared Prosperity Fund money to the county's enterprises and communities, authorising the continuation of three funds under Cyngor Gwynedd's control.**

DISCUSSION

The members were reminded that the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) was money provided by the UK Government since 2022, to promote schemes for the benefit of the economy and communities. It was elaborated that Cyngor Gwynedd was the Lead Authority for North Wales and led on several projects. It was reported that £23.6 million had been allocated to fund 40 schemes under the budget of this Fund in Gwynedd.

It was explained that, originally, the end of March 2025 marked when this Fund would end when the UK Government had drawn up the initial plan. However, in October 2024 the Government had announced their intention to extend the Fund for a transition year (2025/26) to allow time to revise the funding system from April 2026. It was noted that the funding provided within the Fund was less than in previous years, with pressure on Local Authorities to ensure that it was spent by the end of the current financial year.

It was confirmed that evaluation of the projects that had been funded to date was currently underway, as the Fund's budget would expire at the end of the current financial year.

It was pointed out that the timetable for using the money provided from the Fund was very tight and the Department was developing plans to endeavour to ensure that plans were delivered in a timely manner. It was emphasised that every effort was being made to ensure that the best use of the money was made for the benefit of the communities of Gwynedd, and to also encourage activities and organisations that had not previously received funding to access support. It was reported that the Council was working with partners to ensure that these deadlines were met, and it was hoped to invite applications for allocations from the Fund shortly.

Observations arising from the discussion:

- It was highlighted that proposing a package of projects to receive funds from the fund during the current financial year was appropriate. It was reported that the adoption of the following principles was a prerequisite for funding any application for funding:
 - That targeted efforts are made to ensure that SPF money and the resulting benefits were beneficial to communities and residents in all parts of Gwynedd.
 - That targeted efforts are made to encourage activities and organisations that have not previously received funding, to obtain access to support.
- A member talked about a Voluntary Sector Fund project which would be used to strengthen the third sector by supporting organisations. It was explained that third sector services were essential for the communities of Gwynedd. It was noted that criteria would be drawn up to identify companies in the third sector that required support to provide their services. They thanked Mantell Gwynedd for leading on this fund and for their close co-operation as a partner to the Council.

8. FOSTERING OFFER FOR MAETHU CYMRU GWYNEDD FOSTER CARERS

The report was presented by Cllr Menna Trenholme

DECISION

1. **To allow a reduction of 50% (25% for short-break Foster Carers) in the Council Tax bills of the main residence of foster carers who are registered with the Council, before considering any discounts, exemptions and/or Council Tax Reductions they are already eligible for.**
2. **To offer a free annual parking permit.**
3. **Unlimited use of leisure centres.**
4. **To adopt a Fostering Friendly policy for Maethu Cymru Gwynedd foster carers who are employed by the Council.**

DISCUSSION

It was reported that the support provided by foster parents was key for the Council as they also eased the burden on other services. It was hoped that offering the benefits discussed within the Report will attract new foster carers and provide support and show appreciation to the Council's current foster parents.

It was stated that 190 children were currently placed in foster care provision in Gwynedd. It was explained that 30 of those children were in a foster placement provided by the independent sector and all the other children were looked after by Maethu Cymru Gwynedd foster carers. She explained that this meant that 85% of children receiving foster care received that support through Maethu Cymru Gwynedd foster carers.

It was noted that some of the benefits proposed for foster carers within the support package presented in the report, led to financial implications for the Council. However, these implications were considered to be significantly less than the foster placement costs of the independent sector, which could cost up to £989 per week, for one child. The need to provide a competitive support package to attract new foster carers was noted, due to the benefits offered through the independent sector.

It was confirmed that the proposed Fostering Offer for Maethu Cymru Gwynedd foster carers included:

- A Council Tax Reduction
- Annual Parking Permit
- Unlimited use of leisure centres
- Fostering Support Policy

She pointed out that research carried out by the Association of Directors of Social Services in January 2022 highlighted that children living with Foster Carers in their own area were more likely to thrive and maintain important connections. She emphasised that it was essential that local authorities made every effort to secure local fostering placements for children, confirming that foster parents were a key part of that provision.

It was recognised that it was a challenge to attract individuals to become foster carers, and she elaborated that there were not enough foster carers in Gwynedd to match the

demand for support, as was confirmed within the Gwynedd Placement Commissioning Strategy (2024 update). It was noted that Fostering Network figures estimated that 550 more foster care households need to be attracted annually in Wales to meet the demand for support.

It was explained that the Council intended to offer the benefits introduced in the support package from 1 April 2025, ensuring that revised Council Tax invoices will be sent to the relevant individuals.

Observations arising from the discussion:

- Support was expressed for the support package, highlighting how important it was to attract new foster carers as well as show appreciation and support to the existing foster carers of Maethu Cymru Gwynedd, as the Welsh Government campaigned to ensure that no profit can be made from the provision of support for looked after children by 2030.
- It was noted that the Children and Supporting Families Department would be supportive of any prospective foster carers receiving support to find a suitable home, and that they were working with the Housing and Property Department and external partners when appropriate. However, it was recognised that this could lead to additional challenges within the housing field, therefore it was noted that this was not currently being given consideration. Similarly, it was noted that it was not possible to consider applying for grants for extensions to housing, similar to the current disability support scheme, due to the need to ensure that a foster child was looked after to be able to meet the requirements of those grants.
- The adoption of a Cyngor Gwynedd Fostering Support Policy was supported to provide support to paid staff who were foster carers. It was elaborated that this provided an opportunity for the Council to encourage other organisations to adopt a similar policy, for the benefit of their staff and the foster children being looked after by them.

9. CORPORATE PARENTING CHARTER

The report was presented by Cllr Menna Trenholme

DECISION

To approve the adoption of the Corporate Parenting Charter published by the Welsh Government.

DISCUSSION

She explained that the Welsh Government had introduced the 'Corporate Parenting Charter – A Promise from Wales' in September 2023. She added that local authorities were required to adopt the Charter to demonstrate their commitment to promoting the rights and life opportunities of children and young people who have experience of being in care.

She highlighted that the Charter contained principles and promises that aligned with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, noting the need to adhere to those in providing services to children and young people who are being, or have been looked after by the Authority.

She confirmed that the principles introduced in the Charter were:

- Equality
- Removing Stigma
- Togetherness
- Support
- Ambition
- Nurture
- Good Health
- A Stable Home
- Good Education
- Thrive

She elaborated that 9 promises were being introduced within the Charter, to ensure that these principles were achieved.

It was noted that adopting the Charter would strengthen the Council's arrangements, and she expressed pride that the priorities of the Council's Corporate Parenting Charter integrated well with these principles and promises.

It was reported that the Charter's implementation would be reviewed by the Council's Corporate Parenting Panel.

Observations arising from the discussion:

- Members supported the adoption of the Charter as it was a way of formalising those principles that were already in practice within Gwynedd and gave a commitment to the continuation of those principles in the future.

10. PERFORMANCE REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR ECONOMY AND COMMUNITY

The report was presented by Cllr R. Medwyn Hughes

DECISION

To accept and note the information in the report.

DISCUSSION

It was reported that the Department has succeeded in achieving progress in many Cyngor Gwynedd Plan 2023-28 priority projects for which the Department was responsible for, namely:

- Promoting our Culture and a Sustainable Visitor Economy
- Regenerating Communities and Town Centres
- Creating the best possible circumstances in Gwynedd for businesses and community enterprises to thrive, and support the people of Gwynedd into work
- Supporting the residents of Gwynedd to live full and safe lives in our communities

Some of the Department's main risks were highlighted, with uncertainty about the future of the budgets of the ARFOR Programme, the Levelling Up Fund and SPF. It was noted that this may have an impact on the Department's ability to deliver these four priority projects in a timely manner.

Particular attention was drawn to the ARFOR programme, since an evaluation of the programme showed clear benefits for businesses and communities, that it promoted the use and visibility of the Welsh language and highlighted employment opportunities for young people within the region. Disappointment was expressed that the future of the programme remained uncertain, as there was no commitment from the Welsh Government to fund it in 2025/26.

The members were updated that a contract to build 10 business units was underway at Minffordd, with the intention of commencing construction in the second quarter of 2025.

A member expressed concern that the number of Gwynedd pupils receiving swimming lessons at Byw'n lach centres continued to decline. The member recalled that 85% of Key Stage 2 children were receiving swimming lessons there before the Pandemic, noting that this figure had dropped to 54% by the end of Summer 2024. Concern was expressed that the schools with the highest levels of deprivation in the County had the lowest levels of swimming skills. It was confirmed that this concern had been shared with the schools, following discussions with the Cabinet Member for Education.

Observations arising from the discussion:

- It was agreed that a reduction in the number of pupils receiving swimming lessons was worrying. The member was assured that the Council would work with Byw'n lach and schools in Gwynedd to ensure that the challenges preventing children from receiving these lessons would be resolved. The Corporate Director of Social Services (Co-Chair of the Cross-Departmental Supporting People Board) shared his wish for that Board to consider how it can help to find a solution to this issue.
- Another member echoed the dissatisfaction regarding the Welsh Government's lack of commitment to date to fund the ARFOR programme in 2025/26. They were concerned that there would be significant challenges to delivering projects within this scheme in a timely manner if a formal decision on funding was not announced soon.

11. PERFORMANCE REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING AND PROPERTY

The report was presented by Cllr Paul Rowlinson

DECISION

To accept and note the information in the report.

DISCUSSION

An update was provided on Council Plan projects that the Department was responsible for. The Member expressed pride that there had been significant progress with these projects, with satisfactory performance challenge measures, since previously reporting to the Cabinet.

He noted concern about the workload of the Homelessness Team, explaining that around 1,000 households registered themselves as homeless every year. It was emphasised that the Council had schemes underway to address this challenging situation, which included three new developments that were available for people presenting as homeless.

He expressed pride that the latest data indicated a reduced reliance on emergency independent accommodation (such as B&Bs) within the 2024/25 year. He hoped that these figures would continue to reduce in the future as the Mona building, Caernarfon and 137 High Street Bangor were being developed.

He highlighted that there was a huge demand for housing in Gwynedd and not enough houses to cope with the demand. However, he noted that the Department was trying to address the needs raised within the Housing Action Plan. He provided details of projects for supporting Social Housing Construction, Tŷ Gwynedd, the Buy to Let Scheme and the Empty Homes scheme. He shared an example by providing details of the Tŷ Gwynedd development in Maes Twnti, Morfa Nefyn that had received planning permission to erect 9 dwellings. It was elaborated that the work of appointing a contractor to undertake the work was already underway, and a tender would hopefully be published soon.

Pride was expressed in the fact that the Council had recently managed to receive a £13 million grant for a Social Housing Construction programme - the Council's work ensured that it could attract these types of grants. However, objections to planning applications posed a risk to the programme's implementation.

It was stated that 97% of social housing were let to people who had a connection to Gwynedd, with a high percentage being let to people who had a connection to the community in which the houses were located.

The members were updated that there were two Tŷ Gwynedd developments underway in Bangor and Llandygai, and it was hoped that more projects under the scheme would be developed in other areas of the County in the future.

It was reported that dealing with the energy cost crisis and fuel poverty was one of the Department's main priorities. It was elaborated that the Energy Service had been set up within the Housing Action Plan to collaborate with partners to promote and facilitate energy saving schemes, grants and benefits and to ensure that as many people as possible took advantage of the support available. It was confirmed that the Service was very busy, with 661 people receiving advice over the phone, face to face or in events, during November and December 2024.

It was confirmed that matters around challenging performance received consideration regularly.

It was stated that the Department's latest reviews predicted that there would be £303,000 of underspend during this financial year. It was elaborated that the Department was aiming to realise savings of around £260,000 in 2024/25, but acknowledging that two of those relevant schemes were currently delayed.

Observations arising from the discussion:

- In response to considerations that housing organisations would be able to deliver the Tŷ Gwynedd project faster than the Council, the Cabinet Member confirmed that there was no evidence to prove this as those housing organisations were bound by the same procurement, planning and contractor systems as the Council. He noted that the Council worked with the housing organisations where this was possible.

12. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED to exclude the press and public from the meeting during the discussion on Item 12 due to the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 16 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 – Information in respect of which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained in legal proceedings.

There is a recognised public interest in being open about matters of public interest such as the Article 4 Direction. Legal privilege, however, represents a fundamental right that has a strong public interest around it. When faced with a legal challenge to a decision the Cabinet is required to have access to unfettered and open legal advice on conducting and responding to a case in the same way as any other party. This cannot be achieved within a public forum. This would be contrary to the public interest involved in securing the best outcome for the Council.

13. UPDATE FOLLOWING THE HIGH COURT JUDGEMENT RELATING TO CONFIRMATION OF THE ARTICLE 4 DIRECTION

The report was presented by Cllr Craig ab Iago.

DECISION

- 1. To note the High Court's leave decision relating to the Article 4 Direction and further information provided.**
- 2. Having regard to the contents of the report and the appendices, confirm its support for Option 3 to continue to defend the case.**

DISCUSSION

The report was discussed.

The meeting commenced at 1.00pm and concluded at 2.30pm.

CHAIR