

MEETING	Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee
DATE	19 June 2025
TITLE	Performance Report - Cabinet Member for Economy and Community
REASON TO SCRUTINISE	An Opportunity to Scrutinise the Performance of the Department's Services 2024/25
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CABINET MEMBER	Cllr R. Medwyn Hughes

1. Why it needs scrutiny?

- 1.1 To ensure that Committee Members are satisfied that I, as the Cabinet Member for Economy and Community, have a grasp of performance matters within the Department.

2. Background and Context

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to update you on what has been achieved in the field that I am responsible for as Cabinet Member for Economy and Community. This includes outlining the latest with the pledges in the Council Plan 2023-28; as well as the Department's day-to-day work for the period up to the end of March 2025.
- 2.2 All matters have been subject to discussion and have been scrutinised by myself at a performance challenge meeting, and I am satisfied with the Department's performance.

3. Performance of Projects in the Council Plan

- 3.1 The table in Appendix 1 gives an update on the progress of the four priority projects in the Cyngor Gwynedd Plan 2023-28 that the Economy and Community Department is responsible for implementing. Three of these projects are in the Prosperous Gwynedd section of the Plan, which aims to strengthen the economy and support Gwynedd residents to earn a worthy wage. However, the responsibility to lead a workstream within the 'Supporting the residents of Gwynedd to live full and safe lives in our communities' project in the Caring Gwynedd programme has been transferred to the Department since the beginning of January 2025.
- 3.2 From the information, you will note that the Department has made good progress against the main milestones of these projects over recent months. The main risk that is common to these four schemes is that there is uncertainty regarding the future of the budgets that have funded the work since 2023. This refers mainly to the budget of the ARFOR Programme, the Levelling-Up Fund and the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF).

- 3.3 I would like to draw specific attention to the following matters:

Priority Project: Promoting our Culture and a Sustainable Visitor Economy

- 3.4 A Sustainable Visitor Economy Summit was held on 14 February 2025 where over 100 attendees from various businesses, organisations and communities across Gwynedd and Eryri came together to discuss the next steps to implement our Gwynedd and Eryri Visitor Economy Plan 2035. It was a successful event and there was very positive feedback from the attendees. The Visitor Economy Partnership will reflect on the contributions and enthusiasm of partners to ensure there is a clear benefit for communities in developing the action plan for 2025/26.
- 3.5 When reflecting on the fact that 109 Gwynedd cultural organisations have received support through the Diwylliesiant Project over the past year and with uncertainty about funding beyond 2025/26 to support the sector, a Gwynedd Culture event was held on 18 February 2025 to celebrate the important contribution of the sector to the well-being of Gwynedd residents. Over 70 partners attended, and it was agreed that a vision and principles needed to be developed for the investment sector in future.
- 3.6 I would also like to draw your attention to the fact that the UK Government's Levelling Up Fund (LUF) investment timetable has changed, with an opportunity to make a case to extend the fund's expenditure until the end of 2027 and achieve some outcomes by the end of 2029. This will affect partners' investment timetable in the Llewyrch o'r Llechi project and we will be reviewing some agreements with partners in the communities in the coming week. I am pleased to say that some aspects of the scheme have now been completed, and it was a pleasure to visit Neuadd Ogwen recently, which has received a grant of £648,972.65 through the Cyngor Gwynedd Llewyrch o'r Llechi project to upgrade facilities, and to hear about the direct benefits to the community from the investment.

Priority Project: Regenerating Communities and Town Centres

- 3.7 The project has achieved all the agreed milestones for the last quarter, but there is considerable effort by the service at present to complete expenditure on various grants and to support partners to overcome obstacles to achieve outcomes and submit full claims.

Priority Project: Creating the best possible circumstances in Gwynedd for businesses and community enterprises to thrive, and support the people of Gwynedd into work

- 3.8 Over the last quarter, significant work has been undertaken by the Service to complete expenditure on projects under the Welsh Government's ARFOR programme and the UK Government's Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF). These programmes have included funds to support businesses and community enterprises to thrive and support the people of Gwynedd into work. To date, 573 enterprises have received support through SPF and ARFOR and 184 have been supported to return to work.

- 3.9 While the ARFOR programme evaluation report shows clear benefits for businesses and communities; promotes the use and visibility of the Welsh language and highlights job opportunities for young people within the ARFOR region, the future of the programme remains uncertain with no commitment from the Welsh Government to fund it again in 2025/26.
- 3.10 I would like to draw your attention to the fact that the UK Government has now confirmed arrangements to extend SPF for another year, but that there is 49% less funding available for Gwynedd and the counties of North Wales. An event was held on 12 March in Porthmadog to celebrate what has been achieved with SPF funding to date. At the end of the programme, we will produce a booklet to share and to highlight the value of the different projects across Gwynedd, but this video <https://youtu.be/IP1wKeMwnIE> may give you a taste of what has been achieved. Although we are continuing to evaluate the impact of projects in the 2022/25 programme, the work of identifying priorities for 2025/26 has already commenced.
- 3.11 You will note from the appendix that contractual works for the development of 10 new business units in Minffordd are nearing completion, with an intention to commence the construction work in the second quarter of 2025/26. In addition, you will note that the timetable for the preparation of the new Economic Strategy has slipped because of the UK Government's decision to offer SPF funding for an additional year to Local Authorities.

Priority Project: Supporting the residents of Gwynedd to live full and safe lives in our communities

- 3.12 While the main milestones of this project have been achieved, I am keen to review our arrangements to support the hubs to create a model that would be more sustainable in the future. We will discuss opportunities with partners over the next year.

4. The Department's day-to-day work

- 4.1 The Department's Performance Dashboard can be seen in Appendix 2, and it is scrutinised regularly. I wish to draw the Cabinet Members' attention to the following matters:

Leisure Resources Service - Byw'n lach, Padarn and Glynllifon Country Parks

- 4.2 The grant investment work at Parc Padarn and Glynllifon is ongoing. There are obvious challenges to gathering customer satisfaction data because of the investment work on the site, but it is positive to see that customer satisfaction improves as a result of the work.
- 4.3 The number of visits to leisure centres has been 16,230 higher over the past year, compared with 2023/24. Nevertheless, you will note that this is 176,611 fewer visits than in 2019/20. Byw'n lach have done quite a bit of work to analyse why it has not reached the same level as pre-COVID times, and although the quality of the facilities are a factor affecting customer experience, the main reason for the difference in the

number of visits is the substantial reduction in the number of school visits to the centres.

- 4.4 However, I am concerned that the number of pupils in Gwynedd who receive swimming lessons at our centres continues to fall. Pre-Covid, 85% of KS2 children receiving swimming lessons in Byw'n Iach pools this met the national curriculum standard for basic swimming skills. By the end of Summer 2024, we can be certain that only 54% of all KS2 children can swim. 30% of those assessed had failed as they had not had enough sessions, and 16% had not received an assessment as schools had not brought pupils to lessons.
- 4.5 The concern is that some of the schools with the highest levels of deprivation in the county have the lowest levels of swimming skills. The National Curriculum does not specifically include swimming, so there is a complete reliance on individual schools to prioritise within the area of health and well-being. The financial situation has led to many schools cutting back on the provision with transport costs often reported as a particular barrier.
- 4.6 In response, I have agreed with the Cabinet Member for Education to share details of school swimming rates with the governing bodies of Gwynedd schools and ask them to further consider the risks and inequality across the county.

Maritime Services, Hafan Pwllheli and Doc Fictoria, Caernarfon.

- 4.7 You will note from the Appendix that 71% of the responders of the customer satisfaction survey believed their experience was 'very good' or 'good'. The feedback received from these surveys very useful to enable this service to respond with other Council Departments.
- 4.8 The number of customers with a mooring contract increased by 6.5% in our harbours in 2024/25, an increase from 250 to 266 (not including Hafan Pwllheli and Doc Caernarfon). You will also note that the moorings of Hafan Pwllheli were 95% full in 2024/25, with 77% of moorings in the outer harbour full over the same period. It is very encouraging that most of the customers of our harbours in Hafan Pwllheli and Doc Caernarfon are eager to continue with the contract in 2025/26. But of those who have expressed their intention to cancel their contract, the main reasons they note is the increase in sailing costs; the weather; or the boat owner's age. However, reference is also made to the environment in Hafan and in Pwllheli, including the dredging challenges. Although a dredging plan is in place and is being implemented, the powerful winter storms have created new challenges in terms of the frequency of the dredging and the ability to dispose of the deposits within the environmental regulations.

Archives, Museums, Arts and Libraries Services

- 4.9 On average, 91% of users were very satisfied with the service, 3% were satisfied, 2% of users indicated that they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, and 4% were not satisfied. Most of the comments received were very positive, but of those who were not satisfied, comments were received about the opening hours. Opening hours

were reduced to the minimum allowed by the National Archives because of cuts in 2016.

- 4.10 95% of the users of the Museums and Arts Service had enjoyed their experiences, with very positive comments received following the work to re-interpret the Lloyd George Museum. Nevertheless, the demand for the café in Storiol continues. Various provision options have been considered over the past months, including partnering with Bangor University, Grŵp Llandrillo Menai and Cyngor Gwynedd's Adults Service. Although these options are no longer possible, the service is in the process of going out to invite expressions of interest from local enterprises to work with the Council to provide the café.
- 4.11 You will note that the Libraries Service's customer service survey had shown high levels of satisfaction. Several correspondences have come to my attention depicting the impact that the Library service has on the residents of Gwynedd, which is much broader than borrowing a book. The past year has been busy but successful for the team at Neuadd Dwyfor also. The satisfaction rate remains quite high, with 95% of customers on average praising the facilities, staff and customer care. After presenting a programme full of events, the number of visits has increased. There has been some experimentation over the year to increase the sales of food and drink.

Economy and Regeneration Services

- 4.12 The Economic Development, Tourism, Regeneration and Community Support services have focused their efforts over the past year on the implementation of the priority projects outlined in Appendix 1. The performance of these services is subject to grant funding and every support package provided to partners, communities and initiatives are monitored and evaluated in line with the financiers' terms.

5. Consultation

The report has been created based on the information and content of the latest meeting challenging and supporting the performance of the Department on 14 May 2025, with the Chief Executive, Head of Department, Service Managers and myself attending this meeting.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Progress reports for project milestones in the Council Plan

Appendix 2: The Department's Performance Measures