

MEETING	Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee
DATE	19th of June, 2025
TITLE	Corporate and Legal Cabinet Member Performance Report
REASON FOR SCRUTINY	To present the performance of the Legal Services over the past year ensuring that Gwynedd receives the best possible services.
AUTHOR	Iwan G D Evans – Head of Legal Services
CABINET MEMBER	Councillor Llio Elenid Owen

LEGAL SERVICE

Nia Grisdale – Legal Services Manager

Purpose: To provide the Council with a legal service that enables it to work effectively for the benefit of the people of Gwynedd

% scoring 5/5 or Very Satisfied with the Service 2024 / 2025 96%	% scoring 5/5 or Very Satisfied with the Service 2023 / 2024 81%	% scoring 5/5 or Very Satisfied with the Service 2022/2023 100%
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Score	Percentage	Apr	May	June	July	August	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	
Very Satisfied 5	96%	6	1	*	*	*	6	6	7		9	17	14	64
Satisfied 4	4%										1	1	1	3
Reasonably Satisfied 3														
Dissatisfied 2														
Very Dissatisfied 1														
Total questionnaires returned	27%	6	1				6	6	7	0	10	18	15	69
Number sent out		7	2				13	21	63	35	40	56	15	252

The Service's performance is monitored by seeking feedback from the Departments who receive a service. Opinions are balanced against a scale of 1-5 in the form of a simple e-mail and the monitoring process has improved. (5 = Very Satisfied, down to 1 = Very Dissatisfied). Departments can also add comments about

a score. During the 2024 – 2025 year to date, the score is very high with 100% being very satisfied or satisfied with the service. We see that the percentage for complete satisfaction has risen over recent months from the previous year, which is very positive feedback. We must note that there is no data for three months of the year because we moved to a new case management system provider, and the questionnaires were not sent out during this time.

We introduced a new system of asking for feedback by completing a questionnaire on e-mail, since March 2024. Technical problems affected this work during certain periods of the year, which has impaired data collection. We can see that only around 14% of the questionnaires were returned which is obviously very low, but over the year work has been carried out on promoting and encouraging clients to complete responses.

Regarding the response received, it is encouraging that a number of additional comments have been provided on the questionnaire, stating:

"Very happy with the standard and timing of the service"

"Very satisfactory – thank you very much.

"quick work with no problems to report" Very happy."

"Excellent service once again"

"Great service as usual"

"Very good experience of working with the service to charge against the grant. Nice to be able to close one specific link within the service"

"Great experience, the advice I received before the release of the agreement was brilliant, and acted on sealing the document very quickly. work hard and on time."

"Work was thorough and guided me through the process as it was the first time I had dealt with such an issue. A result that I and the public had reached, that allowed us to act."

"Responded to the application for a Licence very quickly in the middle of the Christmas period with holidays etc planned. The customers on the other side were not easy to deal with but dealt with them brilliantly and managed to get them to sign the agreement."

As well as the questionnaire at the end of each case, an annual questionnaire has been sent to the heads and regular officers of the department asking for their views on the overall service. The questionnaire was sent out in mid-February and the response rate was about 1/3. We received very positive responses, with all the responses saying that the service currently being offered is either good or very good.

- We obtain legal advice and assistance in matters of education modernisation and education premises, leases etc.
- I think the contact has improved recently and responded to our questions sooner. The interaction is friendly and they are easy to talk to. The guidance is high-standard and thorough.
- I feel that we receive an excellent service – a timely response and always supportive of the service.
- Excellent, extremely supportive and valuable
- Over the past year I have had quite a bit of support from the legal department and the process has been very straightforward. It has been a big help being able to have contact with one solicitor for all the support and this has made things easier
- Excellent support. A prompt and thorough response.

In terms of suggestions of how to improve the service for the future and what the challenges are, we received responses to consider as well as a positive one

- The greatest challenge is their capacity and sometimes there is quite some time between responses which creates delays, and as it happens we had several questions that came up at the same time recently.
- no need for improvement
- More resources will be needed to deal with the department's upcoming workload in the coming months.

DEPARTMENTAL PLANS

We will continue to develop the Legal Team to create resilience within the Team.

What has been achieved?

The department has been a part of the Cynllun Yfory scheme for some years and has benefited from employing a trainee, who then moved on to qualify and is working within the department as a solicitor. It is a pleasure to note that the newly qualified trainee who qualified this August has also received a job within the department, filling a vacant post. (A position previously filled by a locum)

Furthermore, the department has also taken advantage of the apprenticeship scheme and has hired the department's first paralegal apprentice. This is working well, and the apprentice has commenced her Paralegal qualification and is of great assistance to the solicitors in the department.

There have been some staffing changes in the department, but those jobs have had a positive response to job advertisements which is a very positive development. Previously, there was some reliance on a locum because there had not been a positive response to jobs. Hiring a locum is not the first choice because of the inconsistency for clients, and also their high costs. Some induction will now be taking place over the coming months, in the hope that there will be a stable workforce providing the service to the Authority's departments in the future.

We will look to complete work having relinquished the Lexel accreditation for maintaining systems of propriety and professional standards

What has been achieved?

The department has now incorporated a new case management system and has been looking at addressing features of the Lexcel qualification that would be beneficial for the department. We are looking specifically at a way of supporting each other through colleagues' feedback on cases by conducting file reviews (the accreditation was relinquished as a saving). There is no intention to apply for the Lexcel qualification, but rather to use some of the principles to develop the way of working and to strengthen systems.

What have we been doing, examples:

2024 – 2025

- Supporting the Work of the Article 4, planning department, risks of a challenge
- Child protection cases – a large number relating to injuries and applications for secure care.
- Dealing with and advising on employment issues, including at Employment Tribunals.
- Supported several Housing Strategy projects – a purchase of around 15 new houses over a 12-month period and also a busy time with the Grants Scheme for First Time Buyers and renovating empty dwellings

- Supporting the work involved in the development of commercial sites and commercial space in collaboration with other partnerships
- Have implemented a grant to help companies and organisations to purchase several buildings and upgrade others in Caernarfon
- Renewed leases across the County
- Currently working on the Eryri Business Park Joint venture alongside the Welsh Government
- Dealing with DoLS applications before the Court of Protection
- Collecting Social Services debts (£800k has come in over 18 months)
- Several prosecutions, including environmental and planning issues, health and safety matters, and also those who have failed to ensure their children's attendance at school;
- Traffic Orders
- Education Appeal Panels
- Orders for changing the public rights of way network within the county.
- Advising on new Legislations – Procurement Act 2023; Special Processes under the Public Health Act;
- Memorandum of Understanding with the Trustees of the Lloyd George Museum

PROPRIETY

Iwan Evans – Head of Legal Services – Monitoring Officer.

Purpose: Maintaining the confidence of the people of Gwynedd in the Council by ensuring and promoting propriety in its activities and the highest standard of conduct amongst councillors.

DEPARTMENTAL PLANS

We will continue to support and advise on the Council's functions in terms of ensuring constitutional, legal and administrative propriety.

What has been achieved?

This work is ongoing, but specifically, we intend to conduct a series of "Good Decisions" seminars from October onwards. The objective of the courses is to explain the basics of decisions in public bodies together with the constitutional and regulatory framework applying to this area. A pilot has been carried out and the response was positive, and it is now on the training framework.

We provide comments and opinions on every Cabinet and Full Council report to ensure legal and constitutional propriety, and we also generally advise on matters such as the proper decision-making body, and policy and strategic matters.

We will work with the Standards Committee, Political Group Leaders and Members together with relevant officers to maintain and uphold high standards of conduct among councillors.

What has been achieved?

Arrangements are in place for implementing the duty applying to political group leaders, but the need to re-establish a focus on the work has been highlighted.

A meeting was held between the Chair of the Standards Committee, the Monitoring Officer and the new Leader of the Council in January. The aim of the meeting was to present the arrangements and to have a discussion on the requirements and support.

Group Leaders were invited to the February meeting of the Standards Committee to contribute to a discussion regarding the duty to promote and support the implementation of the new duties. There was an opportunity to re-share the arrangements, the criteria and reporting arrangements. This allows us to move forward to the process of reporting on the delivery for the Annual Report.

We will complete the training of Cyngor Gwynedd members in Code of Conduct issues by offering in-depth training sessions on the Code to members who have not attended.

What has been achieved?

Courses were held in December and January and a recording was also provided for members' use which is available on-line with a test to be completed. It is one of the core courses but there are still members who have not taken up the course and this is being discussed with the Leaders of individual political groups in order to highlight the issue and encourage the members to complete the training.

We are supporting the Standards Committee to develop arrangements to implement its responsibilities towards Town and Community Councils by offering training sessions.

What has been achieved?

The Standards Committee undertook a review of the relationship with Town and Community Councils and identified that we needed to move ahead to strengthen this partnership. To address this, a virtual training course has been prepared for them and two initial courses were held by the end of the year, with an on-line offer also available. This provision will be a standing offer to the Town and Community Councils moving forward.

We will review and ensure adequate resources for supporting demands on the Service arising from regional work

What has been achieved?

As the North Wales Corporate Joint Committee moves to become operational, there has been an increase across the board in the demand for resources. This period in time is particularly challenging because many elements of the CJC's work becomes operational during the current quarter. In addition, the UK and Welsh Governments collectively have imposed the regional accountable body responsibility for the Flintshire and Wrexham Investment Zone on the CJC. The Service had a leading role in ensuring the transfer of the North Wales Growth Deal to the CJC. This has created a platform to move to a long-term SLA system and freed up resources for recruitment. The financial resources are in place in the CJC's budget, and we plan to proceed to recruit to the posts of Solicitor and Deputy Monitoring Officer of the CJC.

We will complete the project on reviewing the Council's voting arrangements by 15 November 2024. In the event of a decision to move to a STV system, we will support subsequent steps.

What has been achieved?

A report was presented to the Full Council in December 2023 where it was resolved to move to a consultation process. In cooperation with the Corporate Services, a consultation process was organised and conducted in accordance with the Legislation. An Extraordinary meeting of the Council was held on 25 October 2024 to make a decision on the system. The proposal did not succeed in reaching the statutory

threshold of a minimum of 46 votes in favour of moving to a STV system. Nevertheless, we managed to establish and conduct a process that addresses the statutory and legal requirements.

We will complete a review of the Constitution by 31 December 2024 to ensure that it remains up-to-date and fit for purpose.

What has been achieved?

The Constitution was reviewed during the year through decision notices and the decisions of the Full Council.

The Legal Team carried out the work on reviewing delegation arrangements within the Environment Department. This involved reviewing a substantial list of acts, updating them, and a Leader's decision notice will be prepared.

The delegated regulations around Licensing Sub-committees were reviewed in order to reconcile the arrangements and number of hearings.

Draft Contract Procedure Rules were prepared in response to new requirements arising from the Procurement Act 2023.

The new Contract Rules were presented to the Governance and Audit Committee for their observations and opinion following changes in the statutory procedure arising from the Procurement Act 2023. The changes were adopted by the Council in March 2024.

It must be recognised that this work is semi-permanent and responds to requirements that are also changing.

What have we been doing, examples:

- Advising on all Cabinet and Council reports
- Supporting and advising on constitutional matters that arise as required
- Provide propriety guidance on Leadership Team matters
- Reviewed the Constitution, specifically the functions of the Full Council and a Panel Performance Assessment
- Contributed to the governance work of the Shared Prosperity Fund and Levelling Up Fund
- Advised on matters relating to a particular Secondary School
- Ambition Board – advised on bringing projects' OBC and FBC to a decision
- Responded to an increased pace for bringing projects forward because of a review of the Portfolio Office's work
- Arranged contractual work around the transfer from the CJC
- Led on the work of establishing a regional Joint Scrutiny Committee for the CJC
- CJC – advised on the governance of establishing a new Constitution for the body – Started work on preparing for the transfer of the EAB to the CJC
- GwE – Deputy Monitoring Officer representing SM at GwE
- Modernising Education – advising on the various projects

ELECTIONS AND ELECTORAL REGISTRATION

Sion Huws, Propriety and Elections Manager

Purpose: To ensure that the people of Gwynedd have the opportunity to vote easily, and that their vote is counted as they intended.

DEPARTMENTAL PLANS

We will work to support the Returning Officer and the Electoral Registration Officer, specifically addressing:

Holding Elections

What has been achieved?

Two elections were held during the year:

The Police and Crime Commissioner Election – 2 May 2024

The changes introduced by the Elections Act 2022 were implemented for the first time. These included the need to present a photographic identification document when voting at a polling station, new requirements and a new on-line process for applying for a postal ballot and rules to limit how postal ballots can be submitted by hand.

UK General Election – 4 July 2024

The election was called at short notice (22-05-24). The changes to the 2022 Act applied to this election but there was also a need to establish new cross-border arrangements with Conwy and Denbigh councils because of the new constituencies.

Preparing for the 2026 Senedd Election

The election will be conducted on the basis of new constituencies and using a new voting system. The new 'Gwynedd Maldwyn' constituency will be an amalgamation of the UK parliamentary constituencies of Dwyfor Meirionnydd and Montgomeryshire and Glyndŵr and will include parts of four local authority areas. We expect that the Chief Executive of Gwynedd will be appointed as the Returning Officer and there will be significant implications for the service given the geographical size of the constituency, the number of voters and the necessary cross-border arrangements. The planning work has begun as well as an audit of our resources. Further cross-border arrangements will need to be established in relation to that part of Gwynedd which will be in the 'Bangor Conwy Môn' constituency.

Conducting a Review of Polling Places.

What has been achieved?

While the review of polling places is an ongoing process and each election provides the opportunity to assess the suitability of stations, a statutory review is required to be carried out every five years. The latest review took place between September and November 2024 and a report was submitted to the Full Council in December 2024, which approved the outcome of the review.

Conduct a Statutory Community Review

We will undertake a Statutory Community Review process, looking at the boundaries of certain communities and the electoral arrangements (wards and councillors) within communities across the county.

What has been achieved?

Following the initial work of gathering and collating information and engaging, the proposal and terms of reference for holding a community review and a review of electoral arrangements in parallel, was approved. Since then, the following statutory steps have been undertaken:

- November/December 2024 – First consultation period on the Terms of Reference
- March 2025 – Draft proposals approved
- March – May 2025 – Consultation period on the draft proposals

The next steps

It is intended to present the final proposals to the Full Council in July 2025. Any changes to community boundaries will need to be approved by the Democracy and Boundary Commission Cymru that has the power to make the necessary order. The changes will come into force in 2027 in time for the next local elections.

The Welsh Government's Automatic Registration pilot scheme

We have volunteered to be one of the four authorities across Wales that are participating in the scheme. The Elections and Elected Bodies (Wales) Act 2024 has introduced a system of electoral registration without an application ('automatic registration') for local government and Welsh Senedd elections, but the system must be piloted before it can come into force for the whole of Wales in order to assess the practical implications.

The Act imposes a duty on Electoral Registration Officers to register electors without receipt of an application, where they have sufficient particulars. An eligible individual will receive a notice and have the opportunity to object to the registration within 60 days.

What has been achieved?

There are two main streams to the work.

1. The core process of collecting and matching data to identify individuals and register them.
2. Identify and engage with individuals who are unlikely to be identified by the data matching process and encourage and help them to register. **Small Axe is leading on this work on our behalf.** They identify areas and groups where the 'registration gap' is greatest and work with the relevant groups and organisations in the community to develop resources and methods to reach these people. They will also contact the individuals directly and assist them to register. Only Gwynedd does this aspect.

Timetable

The pilot period is from January to December 2025 with the registration and engagement activities taking place between June and September. The Welsh Government will then proceed to weigh up the pilot's outcomes.

CORONER

Sion Huws, Propriety and Elections Manager

Background

The North West Wales Coroner's Area includes Gwynedd and Anglesey. The service is jointly funded by the two authorities, but Gwynedd takes the lead role as the statutory 'relevant authority'. This places a duty on Cyngor Gwynedd to ensure adequate resources for the service. The Council appoints and pays the Senior Coroner and Assistant Coroners. The Senior Coroner is responsible for the service itself. North Wales police provide 'Coroner Officers' who liaise with families, the police, witnesses, doctors, hospital staff etc. on its behalf.

Kate Robertson is the Senior Coroner, and the Assistant Coroner is Sarah Riley. We employ one full-time member of staff as a personal assistant to the Coroner with additional support coming from the Administrative Unit and the Elections Unit.

We will continue to provide and improve the support available to the Coroner

What has been achieved?

We have continued to work to strengthen the administrative support, by looking at specific processes and developing experience and skills within the Administrative Unit. We have also been reviewing the arrangements with the funeral directors who work on behalf of the Coroner, this has included holding meetings to give them the opportunity to raise any issues with the Coroner, the Police (who are responsible for calling the undertakers out to deaths) and the authority.

Although the agreement of remuneration is a matter for every Senior Coroner and their respective authority, in practice this has been happening through the Joint Negotiating Committee for Coroners, where the local authorities' side and the coroners' side are represented, which has led to agreeing a pay model and scale for Wales and England and the annual pay increase. In March this year it was announced that the coroners' side had withdrawn from the Joint Committee because they no longer considered it an appropriate method of setting their salaries. It will therefore be necessary to work to determine the way forward to establish new arrangements.