



CYNGOR GWYNEDD – Report to Cyngor Gwynedd Cabinet

Item title:	Cabinet Member for Corporate Support and Legal Services Performance Report
Cabinet Member	Councillor Menna Trenholme
Relevant officer:	Iwan Evans – Head of Legal Services
Meeting date:	20 February 2024

1. Decision Sought

Accept and note the information in the report.

2. The reason why Cabinet needs to make the decision

To ensure effective performance management.

3. Introduction and Rationale

3.1 The purpose of this report is to update members on what has been occurring in the areas for which I am responsible as Cabinet Member for Corporate Support and Legal Departments. The report will include outlining what has happened on the Legal Services projects and performance measures.

3.2 I would like to remind you that all issues have already been discussed and scrutinised by me at a meeting with the Management Team on 17 January.

3.3 I am satisfied with the projects led by the Legal Service together with the day-to-day performance of the Services and recognise the key contribution they make to support the work of the Council.

4. LEGAL SERVICE

4.1 Service performance is monitored by seeking the feedback of from Service Departments who are provided with services . This is assessed against a 1-5 scale in the form of a simple email questionnaire and the monitoring routine has improved. (5 = Very Satisfied down to 1 = Completely Dissatisfied). It is also possible for respondents to add a comment along with a rating. Since the beginning of the financial year, the score is generally very high with 84% being very satisfied with the service and only 14% responding that they were reasonably satisfied with the response on a service provided. This reflects a period of staff turnover and locums that has fed into the response . As noted below we have moved from this situation in a positive manner.

Score	Percentage	April	May	June	July	August	Septi	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jann	Feb	March
Very Satisfied 5	84 %	10	1	4	15	3	10	2	3				
Satisfied 4	2%						1						
Reasonably Satisfied 3	14%						6		1	1			
Dissatisfied 2													
Very Dissatisfied 1													
Response percentage	43%												

4.2 We will continue to prioritise the recruitment of the Legal Team.

What has been achieved?

The Legal Team's recruitment position has changed positively and is now on a sustainable basis for the future. All relevant posts have now been filled except for the Housing and Projects Solicitor post which continues with 2 part-time locums specialising in their areas (1 on Land and Property work and 1 on commercial work) in order to maintain stability. This reflects a very specific requirements attached to this post which kept under review. The department successfully recruited a full-time post for maternity leave which is to started in February following a successful advertising and interview exercise, attracting a number of valid applications.

Next steps

The situation is to be kept under regular review.

Risks

Recruitment risk is now showing green but it is accepted that the use of locums although facilitating work, does not fully meet all requirements and historical evidence shows that it has created additional problems (see comments on satisfaction with the department) . The Service has identified the deficiencies on difficulties created and there are adjustments in the arrangements to overshoot arrangements. This is achieved by the Service Manager and the Head of Service .

Timetable

By the end of quarter 3

4.3 We will jointly procure new case management software for the Legal Service and partners in North Wales

What has been achieved?

In collaboration with 3 other Councils in the North we have procured a company to be the new system provider. This is a system that is central to the services ability to operate. This system while more expensive in terms of costs will be a significant step forward in terms of online accessibility, agility with systems such as iGwynedd, and Microsoft Office and maintain a paperless office . It will also open the door to opportunities such as e.g for departments to log in for information about cases and progress on them. The system became live in the week before the 2023 Christmas holidays, and despite the some of technical elements the outlook for its use is positive.

Next steps

The main system is in place but work is now at it's peak to create a system that is tailored for Gwynedd's needs. A number of training sessions have already taken place and more are being prepared. The team has regular weekly sessions to handle the system and to support each other to develop better use of the system and to review the department's historical systems.

Risks

The main risk was previously about termination of the support for the previous system. The residual risk involved the correct transfer of all department data to the new system. This has happened and although there were some technical problems at first, these have been resolved. Obviously a date has been given for the finished work but this will need to be ensured before the current system is discontinued. .

Timetable

The 6 months of internal practical period has been appointed for support and training on the system.

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

What has been achieved?

Resolving our recruitment situation means that it is now possible to move forward to plan how the regional requirements can be met. As the North Wales Corporate Joint Committee becomes operational there is an increase in the resource ask. This remains a challenge but an issue that is recognised within the project .

Next steps

Working as part of the Joint Committee's no management to identify resources necessary to maintain the new authority. An additional resource is now in place to support the Monitoring Officer

Risks

Failing to ensure adequate resources and create the appropriate capacity to maintain the establishment of the Joint Committee.

Timetable

It is proposed that the functions of the Ambition Board transfer to the Joint Committee Incorporated by during 2024. The resource will be identified and developed throughout this period.

PROPRIETY

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

What has been achieved?

This work is on going but specifically a series of "Good Decisions" seminars are planned for staff. Seminars will be about the legal foundation of for good decision making . Although the timetable has slipped they are scheduled to be established in Summer 2024. . The objective of the courses is to explain the basics of decision making in public bodies together with the

constitutional and regulatory framework regarding this area. A pilot has been carried out and response has been positive .

Next steps

Establishing a programme of seminars

Risks

This work is part of the Council's governance arrangements which are overseen by the Governance Arrangements Group

Timetable

The work is ongoing . Due to other requirements date for holding the these seminars has slipped.

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

What has been achieved?

We will actively focus on collaborative work and support with the new duties on member behaviour with group leaders. In addition, reflecting a requirement highlighted in induction sessions Code of Conduct courses are planned for Council members in the last quarter of 23/24 and earlier if resources allow.

Next steps

A meeting was held between members of the Standards Committee and Group Leaders to promote and support the implementation of the new duties. As a result agreement was reached on the proposed criteria and an arrangement for regular meetings between the Monitoring Officer and the Conductors to support the work.

Risks

Council reputational risks if the duty is not implemented .

Timetable

Prepare for the the annual report of the Standards Committee and in particular the relationship with the role of Group Leaders. The initial Monitoring Officer meeting with the Group Leaders has now taken place.

4.7 We will complete the implementation project for the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 and in particular consideration on the local election voting system options.

What has been achieved?

The main elements of this project have now been addressed and are becoming operational. The progress was reported to a Governance and Audit Committee. The element of the project that needs to be completed is to address the choice of voting systems for council elections. A report was presented to the Full Council December 2023 at which it was resolved to move forward with a process.

[Item 11 - Selection on the Adoption of a Single Transferable Vote System for Gwyn.pdf Council Elections \(gov.wales\)](#)

Next steps

With the Council's decision in December to move forward with initiating an STV consideration process a team has been established to manage the project and it is intended to report to the March Council with a programme and consultation process for approval

Risks

A statutory timetable means a decision would have to be reached by November 2024 if the move to an alternative system is to be made.

Timetable

Report to the March Council.

4.8 We will undertake and review the Constitution during the year to ensure that it remains current and fit for purpose.

What has been achieved?

There are two elements to this, updates resulting from statutory changes and modifications that address the current needs of the Council and potential improvements. The route to a decision will vary according to the context.. A review of the Officers section will require further work and consultation along with updates to the Delegation Plan elements

Next steps

Contribute to the review Scrutiny and complete the updating processes.

Risks

An up to date Constitution is key to the conduct of Council business and shortcomings can lead to uncertainty and delays in key decisions along with a risk of challenge

Timetable

It is anticipated that completion of this work will slip to May Council due to the pressure of other issues.

5. ELECTIONS AND ELECTORAL REGISTRATION

5.1 We will work supporting the Returning Officer and the Electoral Registration Office specifically address:

1. **Responding to the new constituency boundaries of UK elections**
2. **Elections Act 2022**
3. **Preparing for Welsh Parliament Electoral changes**

What has been achieved?

We have put in place arrangements for UK elections with Conwy and Denbigh Councils where constituency boundaries cross county boundaries. The arrangements for ID cards are in effect and the new postal voting (UK) regime became effective on 31/10/23. We have responded to the Government's White paper on the Welsh Parliament's electoral arrangements and are waiting on next steps. A comprehensive programme of work has been produced across these areas along with risk assessment arrangements which are subject to

constant monitoring. We have appointed an additional full-time officer using grant resources to support this work

Next steps

Implementing the programme of work

Risks

Failure to fulfil the requirements for elections but the risk assessment shows that there is an acceptable status to fulfil these requirements.

Timetable

In accordance with the schedule in the work programme.

5.2 We will begin the process of undertaking a statutory Community Survey collecting data, conducting initial discussions

What has been achieved?

Initial information gathering and engagement has begun

Next steps

Having received the information we will evaluate what has been received with a view to reporting to the full Council in March with Terms of reference for the review. It is also planned to undertake an electoral review in parallel and the process which will extend into the next financial year. The scope of the review will be defined as part of this process

Risks

Failure to conduct a review in accordance with the statutory requirement but the risk assessment shows that there is an acceptable status to fulfil these requirements.

Timetable

Report the first part of the project to Full Council in March 2024.

5.3 We will conduct a Polling Place Review.

What has been achieved?

Initial work of information gathering, and engagement has begun, including sending out questionnaires to assess the suitability of each polling station.

Next steps

Evaluate the information and seek expert advice through the Equality Officer on accessibility. Looking for alternative stations as needed

Risks

Stations no longer available or unsuitable, but we will find an appropriate solution for any election held. This is work which happens on an ongoing basis.

Timetable

The statutory consultation process begins in June 2024 with a report to Full Council in December 2024 to approve the outcome of the review.

6. Coroner's Support

6.1 Establish the Senior Coroner post on a permanent basis and ensure a sustainable basis.

What has been achieved?

We are currently in discussions with the Senior Coroner to identify the requirements and possible responses for the medium term. This will include a review of the budget arrangements and in particular also the costs of a lengthy inquest which can be significant.

Next steps

Agree the support arrangements for the service and how the other teams can contribute.

Risks

The Council has a statutory duty to provide staff and office resources along with locations for this service. Consensus needs to be reached on a level of resources that sustains the service.

Timetable

31 December 2023

6.2 Response to a request from North Wales Police for local authorities to finance Coroners

Officers administrative posts

What has been achieved?

Held an initial discussion with Denbighshire County Council (the other relevant authority for the area) and the Senior Coroners.

Next steps

Contact North Wales Police for further details and consider them in terms of Senior Coroners' requirements.

Risks

The arrangement would see a move away from the current arrangement of funding the Coroner's service. It could open the door to fundamental changes in the regime with significant financial implications.

Risk/Service Situation

- Contribute to regional work recognising that this risk situation is subject to further review,
- Respond and incorporate changes in electoral arrangements at UK level and now with the publication of a prospective changes in devolved elections white paper .
- Police have asked to review the funding of a coroner's officer service.

8. Statutory Officers Observations

8.1 Chief Finance Officer

"I note the reference to funding the Coroner's Service, and the Finance Department will collaborate with the Legal Service to keep the matter under review. Other than that I have no comments to add from the perspective of financial propriety."

8.2 Monitoring Officer

Report Author