



The Leader's Annual Report for 23/24

Foreword

Another year has gone by with its challenges and opportunities. I will try and summarise some of the Authority's activities over the past year, but it's important that the Council continues to work hard for the benefit of Anglesey's residents. I'm proud to lead a Council that abides by principles such as Respect, Collaboration, Honesty and Promoting the Council and the Island.

Adopting the 2023 / 2028 Council Plan

Following a significant consultation period with residents, businesses, and stakeholders across Anglesey, it was great to approve the Council Plan, that outlines the Council's key vision and aims for the next five years.

The Council Plan's vision is to 'Create an Anglesey that is healthy and prosperous where people can thrive'. The six strategic aims reflect the key areas which the Council should focus its effort, according to the opinion of residents.

The six strategic aims within the Plan are as follows:

- The Welsh Language: offering more opportunities to learn and to use the language.
- Social Care and Wellbeing: to offer the right support at the right time.
- Education: ensure effective provision today, tomorrow and for future generations.
- Housing: ensure that everyone has the right to call somewhere home.
- Economy: promote opportunities to develop the island's economy.
- Climate Change: respond to the crisis, manage change and work toward becoming a net zero organisation by 2030.

Setting a Challenging Budget

During March, Anglesey Council approved one of its most challenging budgets after overcoming an initial funding gap of £14 million. This is the biggest funding gap I have ever faced as Leader, and this is the result of the cuts made to budgets over the last 11 years.

As in previous years, we've tried to reach a balance between cuts to services, increasing the Council Tax and using reserves to balance the Revenue Budget. We used additional consequential funding by Welsh Government as well as a better financial situation than expected during 2023/24 to try and alleviate the effect and residents.

The consultation on the budget provided information regarding Anglesey resident's priorities, including support for the Council's Budget strategy to protect services for the most vulnerable people in our communities and to protect school budgets. I'm grateful to those residents that took part in our latest consultation on the Budget. It was great to see the feedback provided

supporting the Council Plan's strategic aims, with education, supporting vulnerable people and recycling amongst some of the main priorities.

We've already spent over a decade trying to protect residents and local communities from devastating budgetary cuts. Every local authority in Wales faces significant financial challenges when trying to balance the budget, and we don't foresee that things will get any easier in the years to come.

Anglesey's Council Tax rate remains the lowest in north Wales, and amongst the lowest in Wales. Despite this, we recognise that people are struggling, and we encourage anyone that is faced with financial problems to find out if they're eligible for support through the Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

Unfortunately, we expect an even more challenging budget for 2025/26 and beyond, as costs increase due to inflation, the demand for services increases and funding from Welsh Government decreases.

Education

New Developments

The new Corn Hir School was opened in April 2023, and pupils, staff and visitors are extremely happy with the new building. We had an opportunity to visit the school before the pupils began the term. It was a pleasure seeing children from the island being offered educational opportunities in a modern building.

Work has begun on an extension at Ysgol y Graig, and the new building will be open to Foundation Phase children from September 2024.

RAAC

Two secondary schools on Anglesey faced a challenging time. As a result of a change in legislation regarding RAAC, Holyhead Secondary School and David Hughes Secondary School could not open their door to pupils following the summer holidays. Urgent repair work had to be done in many different buildings on both sites. Many of the Council's services worked together and efficiently to ensure that the schools continued to provide education whilst the premises were closed, and that both schools could safely reopen their doors as soon as possible. We'd like to thank the Heads, the staff, pupils, and families for working closely with us as an Authority during a very difficult period. We'd also like to thank the communities, internal teams, local businesses and Welsh Government for supporting us to respond so quickly.

Estyn

During 2023, Anglesey's Estyn profile was exceptional, with only one school on Anglesey having to be placed in a category. The Additional Learning Needs and Inclusion Service was also used as an example of good practice within the ADN National Thematic Review, in the wider context of the work to transform legislation, the quality of provision and the provision through the medium of Welsh. We'd like to thank all staff members in our schools and the education department for achieving this.

Trauma Informed Island

Schools, and the Council, continue to work toward becoming a Trauma Informed Island. Many staff within our schools have completed a diploma course, and during 2023, many officers in the Council also completed the course.

Grants

The grants from Sports Wales, that are worth £400,000, have supported us to realise the work of modernising two multipurpose fields in Bodedern Secondary School. In 2024, a small sized 2G field and a small sized 3G field, with floodlights, will open.

Community Focused Schools

We've used grants by Community Focused Schools to invest £700,000 in 3 schools to ensure better community use. The team of family engagement officers has grown from 2 to 3, and as a result, more support is available to families across the island.

Free School Meals

Every primary child in every school on Anglesey will receive free school meals through the new National scheme. Work continues to monitor the service to increase the number of children that take up the offer.

The Welsh Language

We are in our second year of the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan 2022-32. A clear structure has been established to support seven outcomes within the Plan. The Language Centres (Moelfre and Cybi) have welcomed and immersed 120 pupils over the past year, and 50 secondary pupils were immersed in Syr Thomas Jones School. We look forward to launching our App, 'Cynllun y Llan' to share resources and guidance with pupils, parents, schools, centres, and authorities across Wales.

Archives and the Oriel

The Archives have been successful with their bid for accreditation, and the service continues to monitor and ensure that they manage to keep that accredited status. The number of visitors in the Oriel has increased, and many of the exhibitions that have been arranged have been very popular and have also been included in programmes, newspaper articles and magazines.

Libraries: Increase in use

The figure regarding the number of people using our libraries has increased this year, and this shows the importance of libraries within our communities. We have continued to work with partners to develop more learning opportunities for adults within their communities. We've held over 600 events and activities for children, school pupils and adults to improve literacy, health and wellbeing and new learning skills.

Social Care and Wellbeing**Membership with the Global Network of Age-friendly Communities**

During June 2023, Anglesey Council was awarded membership, and this showed a commitment to creating an Age-friendly Anglesey, where there are no barriers stopping people from ageing well. We're grateful for the support of Wales' Older People's Commissioner that

joined us to celebrate this success. During the last year, Age-friendly Anglesey has held many local Older People's Forums in communities and has led over 50 Open Days with Môn Actif.

Learning Disabilities Services

Making better use of community resources to encourage integration within communities is a priority for the Learning Disabilities Services. The Service has been using Community Hubs and has completed engagement activities in the Holyhead area. The feedback received by everyone present has been positive. People appreciate being offered a variety of activities, and this has led to better experiences, better choices, and more control within their lives. In order to realise this vision for Day Activities, the authority has approved a transformation process regarding provision within communities, moving resources from the Morswyn Centre to facilitate the work of further developing community resources. Additionally, we have invested in improving the current provision, including outdoor facilities in Gors Felen. This included developing areas that would welcome wheelchair users and a sensory garden.

Fragility Project

The Fragility Project is a joint initiative with Betsi Cadwaladr Health Board, and the work has been in place for 6 months. This operational project aims to alleviate the need for people to go to hospital and support them to stay at home and receive rapid response support by agencies. Following the positive response and praise for the project, arrangements are in place to emulate the model in the Amlwch CRT, and this will be available by spring 2024.

Additional Care Properties, South of the Island

We have prepared a strategic outlined case for another Additional Care Property, and we're awaiting approval by Welsh Government, before presenting a full business case by October 2024.

Dementia Actif Môn

This project has made significant progress in the last 12 months and has created more opportunities to socialise as well as a light physical exercise programme. This is supported by recruiting more full-time staff to offer activities and support across the island.

Supported Housing

The service has ambitious plans to transform and upgrade accommodation options for people with learning disabilities with a programme of new developments. Working alongside the Housing Department and local housing associations we have a pipeline of schemes over the next year. The first scheme on the Mill / Safle y Mart site in Valley is expected to come into use in June 2024 and we have also purchased an additional property with grant funding which will be managed by our Housing Department.

Trauma Informed

Anglesey is leading the way in terms of becoming a Trauma Informed Island, as we've worked tirelessly to operate and promote our Trauma Informed Island Strategy in the council, with partners and in the community. Over 1,000 people from the authority, and a variety of partners, have attended various training during the year.

Providing Youth Services

Our youth service framework has been revised, modernised and realigned to meet the needs of our young people with a clear support and provision offer. An average of 700 young people attend our youth offer over 39 weeks over the year.

Pilot Virtual School (Wales)

A pilot scheme took place in 2023, with the support of Welsh Government to look at improving results for Looked After Children. Our Virtual School is led by the Integrated Services Manager that's part of the Children and Families Services, and who also sits on the leadership group for Learning Services.

Tackling Poverty Strategic Plan

This plan was announced earlier this year, and it notes our priorities to support the challenges that people on Anglesey face. It is a Council wide plan where internal joint-working and with external partners is essential.

Cartrefi Clyd

Since the First Cartref Clyd was opened, we have added three additional units that provide a home for up to six of our Looked After Children. The units are managed by a small team of staff that ensures the best quality of care is given to the children that live there. We are now looking for our next Cartref Clyd on Anglesey.

Môn Actif

Môn Actif has invested £1,175,000 in our leisure facilities during the year. This has included renovation work in our leisure centres in Amlwch, Holyhead, Llangefni and Menai Bridge.

Economy

Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF)

The Council has assessed applications and allocated £16m of UK Government SPF funding to projects that will make a real difference to local communities.

In collaboration with local partners, 25 projects were selected from across Anglesey. Approximately £3m was also earmarked to improve adult numeracy, as part of the UK Government's Multiply programme.

Levelling Up Fund (LUF), Holyhead

Work is ongoing in Holyhead to spend the £22.5m investment to transform the town centre's key cultural and heritage assets, and bring properties back into use, within a very challenging timescale.

There are currently three projects ongoing, namely:

- The extension to the Ucheldre Arts Centre to provide greater capacity and offer a greater programme of events.
- Develop 9 Stanley Street in collaboration with Môn CF to encourage businesses to venture into the town centre and thrive.
- Work with the Town Council to transform the kiosks at Newry Beach to sell food and drink and provide information to visitors.

Further developments are expected over the coming year, and we look forward to continuing to work with our partners on those schemes.

Town Centres

The Anglesey Town Centres Improvement Strategy 2023-28 has been developed and agreed following a public consultation process. SPF Creating Places funding has been secured to implement elements of the strategy and employ two project officers. Welsh Government regeneration funding has also been secured to improve urban properties.

North Anglesey

In Amlwch, four commercial properties have benefited from the new support grant currently being piloted to improve commercial properties.

New Signage Highlighting Amlwch's Heritage

New signage and interpretation boards have been erected around the town to highlight Amlwch's rich industrial heritage. The modern welcome signage, interpretation boards and way-finders will also help to link the town centre with Amlwch Port, Anglesey Coastal Path and nearby Mynydd Parys. The project was developed in partnership between Anglesey County Council and Magnox NDA, with support from Amlwch Town Council.

Arfor Programme

The second phase of the Arfor venture has been established with a £1m fund to support initiatives to support the Welsh language and improve the economy. Anglesey will also benefit from regional schemes such as Llwyddo'n Lleol 2050, Cronfa Her, and Bwrlwm Arfor.

Supporting Rural Communities

SPF funding has been allocated to several projects to support community development schemes across Anglesey. We have lobbied for rural needs through the WLGA's Rural Forum. A strong response has been sent to Welsh Government regarding its 'Sustainable Farming' scheme.

Free Port

The Welsh Government and the UK Government have approved Anglesey's application to be one of Wales's first free ports, with the potential to deliver real change for communities across Anglesey and the wider north Wales region.

The Anglesey Free Port will be developed as a public/private partnership between the County Council and Stena Line - the owners of Holyhead Port and the old Anglesey Aluminium site, and an important local employer in the area for 27 years. The iconic chimney on the site was demolished in March 2024, with a crowd gathering to witness the historic occasion. This is the second step in redeveloping the site for the future, to offer an ideal location for new investments.

We are currently in the process of developing comprehensive business cases for the project, and we look forward to working closely with partners during this next exciting stage.

Penrhos industrial estate expansion completed

The third and final phase of a project to transform a former derelict site into a business park has now been completed. Thirteen new business units have recently been completed and are now available for let following the expansion of Holyhead's Penrhos Industrial Estate. Transformed over the past two years, the site now provides a total of 23 business units.

Wylfa Site Acquisition Welcomed

Confirmation that the UK Government has reached a £160m deal with Hitachi to acquire two sites, including the Wylfa site and that it has a 'vital role' to play in the delivery of the UK's nuclear ambitions has been welcomed.

Now that the Wylfa site will be back in direct control of the UK Government, we hope that this will lead to a firm commitment as to when a development will take place. The Island's communities, particularly those in the North, need clarity and certainty.

Calls for a third Menai crossing

The Executive unanimously backed calls for a third Menai crossing. The Council presented its findings to the Welsh Government's North Wales Transport Commission (NWTC). In addition to resilience and economic prosperity, ensuring robust links with the mainland are crucial so that residents can live their day to day lives - gain access to work, education, health and emergency services. These links also have a key role to play in maintaining Anglesey's connectivity with the rest of the region (and vice versa) and promoting our profile and reputation.

We will continue to press and work with the new Transport Secretary to improve the resilience across the Menai and to resolve the current fragile situation.

The Isle of Anglesey Area of Outstanding Beauty Management Plan

The new AONB Management Plan (2023-2028) was prepared during the year. The Isle of Anglesey Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) encompasses large parts of Anglesey's dramatic coastline. It includes most of the island's cliffs and beaches, and much of the farmland and forests that form the backdrop to the island's coast with a varied and thriving rural and coastal economy.

Destination Management Plan

A new Destination Management Plan 2023 - 2028 was presented to support a collaborative approach to destination management. We need a sustainable visitor economy, that balances the needs of residents, communities, and visitors by maintaining and improving Anglesey's special characteristics, the main reason why people visit the island. We will set up a working group to respond in a collaborative and strategic manner and drive this work forward.

New Visitor Centre at Holyhead

A new, modern visitor centre has been opened at Holyhead's award-winning Breakwater Country Park as part of an all-Wales scheme to create and improve key visitor facilities.

Housing

Here is some data from the housing service for the year:

- 77 empty properties brought back into use
- 4 families resettled under the ARAP scheme
- 790 households contacted the Council as they were in danger of becoming homeless
- 101 households in emergency or temporary accommodation during one week in March

- A Condition Survey has been undertaken on all our properties
- £8m has been spent on upgrading our existing housing stock, including measures to make them energy efficient
- Restoration work has been undertaken at the O'Toole Centre, Holyhead and Financial Inclusion Team

Anglesey Homebuy Scheme

The Anglesey Homebuy Scheme is now utilising the £390,000 of income generated through the second homes premium to help local residents purchase their first home.

Local authorities were given powers to charge a Council Tax Premium on properties that are only occupied from time to time – second homes or long-term empty properties – on 1 April 2017.

The Council has made the best possible use of the premium and funding from Welsh Government. It has already committed nearly £1.5m towards schemes through the council tax premium fund to meet the local demand for housing and to help first time buyers. The Homebuy Scheme builds on this success by providing additional support to local residents in the form of equity loans to purchase a home.

The Council Tax Premium offers a unique opportunity to respond to the current housing crisis. We aim to support local people so that they can live in good quality affordable homes in their own community. We want to ensure that everyone has the right to call somewhere home.

New apartments at Beaumaris

This is the latest council housing development project on the island. It represents our continued commitment to provide affordable social housing to local tenants within the heart of their communities. Increasing our social housing stock is a strategic target that is highlighted in our Housing Strategy Plan (2022 to 2027) and responding to the local housing challenges is one of the Council Plan's strategic objectives in order to ensure that everyone has the right to call somewhere 'home'. The apartments have also been designed to be energy efficient, which compliments the Council's Towards Net Zero Plan (2022 to 2025).

Climate Change

Reducing the carbon footprint of Council assets

The Council's Property Service was successful in attracting low carbon heating grants worth £14M to upgrade and replace heating systems across 27 of our assets. It is envisaged that this work will lead to a substantial reduction in our carbon emissions by moving from fossil fuels to low carbon heating systems (air source heat pumps) for our heating and hot water needs. The Council's success in attracting this substantial investment signifies our commitment to reducing our carbon emissions and the progressive way in which we have taken advantage of opportunities for external funding.

Converting our fleet to electric vehicles in a net zero bid

During the year the Council has continued its journey to convert to electric vehicles.

The Council recently received delivery of two brand new electric skid-steer loaders. Seven vehicles were purchased during the year, bringing the total to 22 - 10% of our fleet is now electric.

Replacing our current diesel vehicles with electric alternatives is an essential step in reaching net zero status. This will help us in our overall aim to reduce CO₂ emissions and reduce running costs.

Expanding Anglesey's public charging network

To encourage citizens and visitors to opt for low carbon travel, the Council has expanded its network of charging points with new charging points at Rhosneigr and Cemaes Bay. It is also encouraging to see an increase in those using the charging network.

Thousands of trees planted to boost Anglesey's net zero aim

Isle of Anglesey County Council is spearheading an innovative project that will see thousands of trees grown on a new tree nursery on the island. The project, led by the Council's AONB team, will see approximately 10,000 native broadleaf trees grown at Gerddi Haulfre in Llangoed every year.

As part of the day to day running of the nursery, the Council will work proactively with a number of local community groups, education centres and clients at Blaen y Coed Resource Centre. 400 trees were also planted in Holyhead along with the creation of new allotments.

The Welsh Language

Status given to the Welsh Language

Including the Welsh language as a strategic aim in the Council Plan 2023-28 was an important step in confirming the Welsh language's status within the Council. Welsh is the natural language of the organisation; our services have been available in Welsh without question for some time, and we have taken great strides over the past few years to increase the use of Welsh in our administration.

Letter of congratulations from the Commissioner

We received a letter from the Welsh Language Commissioner in December congratulating us on meeting our duties in relation to the Welsh language. After carefully gathering detailed evidence, the Commissioner found that we had met with all the requirements assessed by officers during the year. We are proud that a regulator has recognised our commitment to the language giving us assurance that our Welsh language services are of a high quality.

Learning and development

More and more of our officers are interested in learning Welsh and developing their Welsh language skills. The number of Welsh courses doubled this year and thanks to support from the National Centre for Learning Welsh we now offer three classes a week. I would like to thank officers for the progress they have made during the year and wish them well as they take the next steps in their learning journey.

To support officers who are learning Welsh and to help them brush up on their Welsh language skills, the Learning and Development team have created a new dashboard. The aim is to collate all the resources available to assist officers in one convenient place. The dashboard includes information about courses, spelling aids, tips on using more Welsh and much more.

Welsh language promotion group

The group has met regularly during the year to discuss plans to improve our Welsh language services and to increase the use of Welsh in our administration. One of the successes during the year has been the new indicators that we developed to track our progress against our aims.

Working in partnership

It was nice to see Annwen Morgan, our former chief executive and a champion of the language, being appointed chair of Anglesey's Welsh Language Forum. It is important to recognise the exceptional work that is being undertaken by the members to ensure the language remains a living language in our communities. It has been an honour to be able to contribute to the forum's discussions and influential plans and I look forward to continuing the good work under Annwen's leadership.

Along with other public services in north Wales, we undertook innovative research to recruit Welsh speakers and we hope that other organisations will be able to learn from our practices here on Anglesey.

National recognition

Another measure of our success this year was the attention given to our work at national events, including the Llŷn and Eifionydd National Eisteddfodd. The Welsh Language Commissioner and the Wales Audit Office consider our plans to promote the Welsh language within the Council and our communities as an example of best practice that should be emulated by others. As Leader, this gives me great pride and confirms that the Council is leading in this field.

Closing remarks

The report mainly concentrates on the work undertaken locally, but it is important to note that I have also contributed to regional work through the Regional Leadership Board and the Ambition Board in my role as Leader. Also, on a national level I lead the Plaid Cymru Group within the WLGA and I am also the WLGA spokesperson for social services. This adds to our ability as a Council to influence and contribute on a regional and national level.

But it must be noted that Local Government across the country are facing an uncertain future following more than a decade of cuts. The services we are responsible for are vitally important to the fabric of our country, but the Government insists on cuts year after year. Despite this, we as an Authority are able to care for the older generation and educate the next on a daily basis, and we are fighting for a fair economy and equal society and for the Welsh language.

I am extremely fortunate to be writing my seventh report as leader. Each one has been different with several successes to be proud of. Despite all the challenges, once again this

year the Council's staff have proved able to do the best for the island. I would like to thank my Group and fellow members who have ensured our successes throughout the year. But above all, I would like to thank the Council's staff who serve on our behalf. It is a great privilege to be the Leader of the best Council in Wales!