
EDUCATION AND ECONOMY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 8/02/22

Present: Councillor Beth Lawton (Chair)
Councillor Cai Larsen (Vice-chair)

Councillors: Alwyn Gruffydd, Selwyn Griffiths, Judith Humphreys, Elin Walker Jones, Elwyn Jones, Gareth Tudor Morris Jones, Dewi Owen, Mair Rowlands, Paul Rowlinson and Mike Stevens.

Co-opted Members: Colette Owen (The Catholic Church) and Manon Williams (Arfon Parent/Governor Representative).

Officers present: Vera Jones (Democracy and Language Services Manager), Bethan Adams (Scrutiny Adviser) and Eirian Roberts (Democracy Services Officer).

Present for item 5: Councillor Gareth Thomas (Cabinet Member – Economy and Community), Sioned Williams (Head of Economy and Community Department), Llyr B. Jones (Assistant Head of Economy and Community Department) and Rhian George (Supporting Communities Services Manager).

Present for item 6: Councillor Cemlyn Williams (Cabinet Member for Education), Garem Jackson (Head of Education Department) and Debbie Anne Jones (Education Corporate Services Manager).

Present for item 7: Councillor Cemlyn Williams (Cabinet Member for Education), Garem Jackson (Head of Education Department), Owen Owens (Senior Schools Manager) and Debbie Anne Jones (Education Corporate Services Manager).

The Chair thanked the former members of this committee, Councillors Rheinallt Puw and Dewi Roberts, for their contribution over the years, and Councillor Elin Walker Jones was welcomed back to the committee.

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Aled Evans and Elfed P.Roberts and Ruth Roe (Meirionnydd Parent Governors Representative).

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

Councillor Cai Larsen declared an interest in item 5 on the agenda - Developing a Regeneration Framework for Gwynedd, as he was the Chair of the Cwmni Dre Board, namely an arms-length company set up by Caernarfon Town Council, and which dealt with some Gwynedd Council officers in relation to the Regeneration Framework. He was of the opinion that it was a prejudicial interest, and he withdrew from the meeting during the discussion on the item.

3. URGENT ITEMS

None to note.

4. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee held on 9 December, 2021 as a true record.

5. DEVELOPING A REGENERATION FRAMEWORK FOR GWYNEDD

The Cabinet Member and officers from the Economy and Community Department were welcomed to the meeting.

Submitted - the report of the Cabinet Member for Economy and Community inviting the committee to scrutinise the direction of the proposed Framework, and the steps taken thus far during Phase 1 (Setting the Foundations). An on-screen presentation was also shared outlining the main aspects of the report.

Members were given an opportunity to ask questions and offer observations.

Individual members made the following observations:-

- The Service was thanked for all of its work, and it was noted that there had been a positive and heartening start to the process.
- The direction of the work was supported and it was noted that the Service had identified that not all areas were the same and that different schemes were needed tailored to the different needs of those areas and that they also viewed the Council as a partner with local communities.
- The fact that the Service viewed the process as continuous rather than a one-off event was welcomed.
- It was noted that the area statements were clear, concise and educational and although the validity of some figures was doubted, they were a starting point for further dialogue.
- That a regular and effective dialogue between the Council and communities and collaborative enterprises had to be secured with an aim of regenerating areas.
- There was some concern that this again was one of those reports that was on the cards for a while and which then ended up gathering dust.
- It was welcomed that there were 48 stakeholders in Llŷn, but it was suggested that the RNLI should also be included, as it was very active there and had a contribution to make and a voice in relation to area regeneration.
- There was no reference in the report to primary / secondary schools and listening to the voice of the young.
- There was no reference to major employers in the Porthmadog / Penrhyndeudraeth area, such as Portmeirion and Ffestiniog Railway neither was there reference to the Welsh Slate World Heritage Site, which would also be working to regenerate our areas.
- That the town and community councils were key to the discussion and the Council needed to collaborate with them and not consider itself above doing this, and they should also be able to raise money to spend within their own communities.
- Using the RACI matrix was to be welcomed as it was a means of facilitating a consultation where there were many stakeholders, by identifying the key stakeholders for every aspect.
- That one of the advantages of the Framework was that it was possible for the communities to refer to the evidence to assist them in attracting funding and grants.

In response to the observations and questions from members, it was noted:-

- As part of the arrangements for the engagement work, that paper versions of all material would be available in different offices. The service was also eager to see links with libraries in terms of provision and support if members of the public wanted to contribute to the work, but were uncertain of the arrangements on the digital platform. There would be a need to gather data also in terms of the details of individuals and groups that submitted observations to carry out an equality impact assessment on the work.

- It was agreed that the quite challenging timetable that had originally been set for the work had slipped somewhat due to the pandemic. It was intended to carry out the engagement work between now and March, with a break during the pre-election period, before recommencing the engagement from May till June. The work would not be stalled over the pre-election period, and there was some information already available, as a means to begin shaping the action plan. The aim was to complete the draft action plans for the 13 areas before the end of the summer.
- That projects often reflected the requirements of regeneration programme guidelines, but unlike these, there was an effort here to ask what the local needs and priorities were, and to use that to target grants. There were a number of grant sources available, and if it could be proved that there was need locally, and support locally to develop the plans, this would set the foundation for such schemes. It was likely that some of the priorities would be relevant to Council departments also.
- It was fully agreed that there was no wish to see the work gather dust over the years, and that is why there was a need for this to be a continuous process of collaboration with the organisations and the people in the areas to jointly-produce solutions, rather than it being a one-off event, with a report at the end.
- That not all of the town and community councils had responded to the questionnaire, and more work was to be done again about that, recognising that the response period had been short.
- That sessions had been arranged through the Youth Service and the schools to ask for the pupils' opinion e.g. through the school councils, and it was hoped that they could build on this during Phase 2.
- In light of launching the digital platform and the paper packs, it was intended to contact local organisations to highlight the work and to invite comments and discussion on the local priorities. Phase 2 would follow a relatively similar pattern to Phase 1, by concentrating on 3-4 questions on what was good about the area, what was not as good and what the priority areas were. They would seek to contact all the organisations identified in the hope that the programme between now and May/June would give everyone an opportunity to feed their comments into the work.
- In terms of balancing local priorities with the need for fairness across the whole of Gwynedd, it was anticipated there would be two parts to the Framework, namely the county-wide aspect and the series of action plans/area plans. In the past, they would have developed a document for the county and then try to convert it to local plans, but there was an attempt here to do things slightly differently so that the local needs fed into the county-wide picture also. In terms of the balance, it was believed that some aspects would remain local, but a county-wide slant would be needed for other aspects, such as Transport, as the transport framework was likely to connect more than one area. It was very difficult to know how to achieve the balance, and we would have to wait to see the outcome of the work in terms of what should be specific and local to a specific area and could possibly be of a more county-wide nature. It was not anticipated that resources would be allocated, but we would have to wait to see what would come back.
- In terms of the responses, it was anticipated that forming local priorities would be a process that would require consensus. Obviously, statutory organisations, such as town and community councils, had an important role to play, and we would need to consider the attitudes and opinion of the main organisations alongside this. It was difficult to plan for situations where small vocal groups could seek to overinfluence feedback, but there was a need to also consider the evidence in this context. Although not perfect, the data could also assist at times to see if an issue was one that was defined in that area. Consequently, it was likely to be a mixture of things, rather than one answer.
- That scrutiny had a very important role to play in the development of the Regeneration Framework as it would be a continuous process in future.

RESOLVED to accept the report, noting the observations submitted during the meeting, with a request to see the action plans later in the year.

6. HARRASSMENT IN SCHOOLS

The Cabinet Member and officers from the Education Department were welcomed to the meeting.

6. HARASSMENT IN SCHOOLS

6a. HARASSMENT OF HEADTEACHERS, TEACHERS AND SCHOOL STAFF THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

Submitted - the report of the Cabinet Member for Education responding to a request from committee members for a presentation on the harassment of teachers and school staff over social media. The report also shared information about what had been done and achieved by the Education Department to help schools deal with situations where this was happening.

The Head of Education Department noted that since the report had been prepared, that the Secondary Headteachers Strategic Group had further discussed the situation at their meeting on 2 February, and that it was apparent that the actions taken to address the matter had worked as the situation had now calmed down and no one had reported a case of harassment after the letter had been sent out to parents / carers. The Department would continue to monitor and support should a case be brought to their attention.

Members were given an opportunity to ask questions and offer observations.

Individual members submitted the following observations:-

- The Head of Education Department was thanked for the letter to parents / carers, noting that it was short, precise and created the right tone. The reference to 'some' pupils and 'some' cases was welcomed, and the strong encouragement for parents to check their children's mobile phones.
- It was noted that it was a shame that such a report had to be prepared at all, and it was suggested that the use of mobile phones compounded any issues that already existed.
- Concern was expressed that schools could lose staff as a result of these incidents, and although there were rules at schools in term of using phones, etc, there was a small cohort who did not comply at all, whose parents were not concerned about the matter either.

In response to the observations and questions from members, it was noted:-

- The Department had policies in terms of the use of mobile phones in schools, and that the schools were likely to look at this again in light of these incidents. It was noted that pupils were very reliant on mobile phones nowadays, and rather than prohibiting them, they were encouraged to make appropriate, mature and responsible use of them. They did not wish to punish everyone due to the behaviour of a very small minority, but it was confirmed that the schools prohibited any inappropriate use of phones.
- It was too early to make any comments on a recent report in the press regarding a harassment case at one of the county's schools, and an update would be provided in due course in light of considering the situation in general and reviewing the arrangements.

6b. SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN SCHOOLS

Submitted - the report of the Cabinet Member for Education, at the request of the committee, due to the publication of a report by Estyn in December 2021, "*We do not tell our teachers*" which responded to information that emerged in 2021 when information on pupil sexual harassment was seen on the "*Everybody's Invited*" website. The Head of Education Department had hoped to share a screen presentation also to outline the main aspects of the Estyn report, but due to technical problems, they could only present the

information orally, and it was agreed to send the slides to the members following the meeting.

Members were given an opportunity to ask questions and offer observations.

Individual members submitted the following observations:-

- It was noted that the Estyn report noted that school staff were working hard to respond to these matters, but staff had also said that they needed more resources, training, support and time.
- It was emphasised that it was of crucial importance for this matter to be a priority for schools in Gwynedd, and for the Government also, and that this should be taught as part of the new curriculum also.
- It was welcomed that sex education and relationships education was now being addressed, and it was emphasised that it was important that support was available for the staff on how to deal with such matters.
- It was noted that there was a need to be creative on how best to provide the resources, given that time was scarce for staff and teachers. It was possible to provide on-line training, and possibly, there should be a champion across schools to develop some expertise, and to be able to advise as needed.
- It was suggested that teachers / schools were expected to be everything for everyone nowadays, rather than providing education alone.
- It was noted that it was clear from the report that the Department recognised the magnitude and severity of the problem and intended to act.
- As the new curriculum was being introduced in phases, beginning with Year 7 upwards, there was a need to act immediately across the whole school, rather than waiting for the curriculum changes to bear fruit.
- The Cabinet Member was asked to convey a message to teachers and all staff at the schools to express this committee's appreciation of their heroic work, not only during the pandemic, but also with the loss of resources of the last decade.

In response to the observations and questions from members, it was noted:-

- That expanding the existing well-being work was exactly what was needed to promote healthy relationships, and that the Healthy Schools Scheme was an excellent scheme to do this.
- That school inspections profile had demonstrated that 'well-being' had been good or excellent in every inspection across the schools sector. Therefore, it was believed that our profile in Gwynedd in terms of elevating and placing an appropriate emphasis on well-being, including this field, was appropriate.
- Resources would be needed to free up staff to complete the training. This was all in the pipeline and was being taken seriously by school staff. It was acknowledged that any new change like this could be difficult, but the Government had provided a number of grants for schools in the well-being field, in light of the pandemic, and those grants could be prioritised to fund this. Doubtless, more resources would be needed, and the Department and the Council would follow the relevant procedures to ensure this, however, the Department and the schools' priority at the moment was to ensure that the relevant training was provided, and the cost was secondary to this.
- That school teachers / staff were increasingly expected to be everything for everyone and had coped marvellously with this, and the Headteacher was entirely confident that the staff would raise to the challenge alongside the Department, and would act appropriately to ensure that no individuals in the county's schools felt exposed to this type of harassment.
- That healthy relationships and healthy lives were a core part of the new curriculum (areas of learning and experience) and GwE would have a role in introducing this within the curriculum. In terms of the resources, this was mainly the authority's role, with GwE providing support through curriculum development to train teachers and secure appropriate materials for them.

- There was work to be done at the start to ensure that this field was duly prioritised, but in due course, it should be brought in to schools' normal provision, so that it was embedded in the curriculum.
- In terms of racial harassment, it was agreed that harassment of any kind was harassment, and the message that needed to be conveyed was 'education', 'respect', 'generosity' and 'tolerance'. It was intended to create an inclusive package around this to ensure that harassment did not take place, and that pupils understood how to establish relationships with each other in friendships etc, and to do so appropriately.
- That counselling at the schools could be a difficult field. There was a lack of resources (although the Government had allocated additional funding for this) and demand for the service was increasing. It was also a difficult field in terms of recruitment, especially in a county such as Gwynedd where the service was needed through the medium of Welsh. Some of the secondary schools had been in contact recently to ask for more resource, and they sought to prioritise this, where possible. It was further noted that there had been contact very recently with an external company that was able to provide a service bilingually, and it was intended to look in the long term at using apprenticeship schemes, work experience etc. in fields where there was a shortage of expertise.
- That personal and social education sessions at the schools provided a clear focus on this field. A relatively good baseline had been set in terms of the staff's understanding of the problem, but there was a need to strengthen, secure appropriate resources and training and ensure consistency across the schools.

RESOLVED to accept the report and welcome the work, with a request for an update in due course.

7. SCHOOLS' ACCESSIBILITY

Submitted - the report of the Cabinet Member for Education noting the current position regarding school accessibility outlining how this situation had been reached and then looking at the way forward.

Members were given an opportunity to ask questions and offer observations.

Individual members submitted the following observations:-

- It was suggested that parents were choosing to send their disabled children to the local community school, rather than the designated school, if at all possible, and therefore the progress in the field since 2017 was welcomed.
- It was noted that the report referred to ramps and lifts, however disability was very varied, and it was asked what provision the Council had for different disabilities or conditions such as autism, learning disability, sensory impairment etc.
- The use of contrasting colours on the stairs in Ysgol Botwnnog was welcomed.
- It was noted that assurances were needed, before sending a child to a designated school, that no stone would be left unturned to see whether it could be affordable to allow the child to receive education on his/her own doorstep.
- That the accessibility adaptations had a positive influence on the entire school, in addition to the children with learning needs or disabilities.

In response to the observations and questions from members, it was noted:-

- The main obstacle for many schools was the expensive physical work, and that some things were more within reach of the reasonable adaptations schools would be expected to carry out.
- There were adaptations other than the physical ones and it was noted in the report that was part of the accessibility strategy e.g. the collaboration between parents and pupils and

schools in terms of making amendments to the curriculum / timetable and changing the use of rooms so that every pupil had access to as full a curriculum as possible.

- In terms of determining the type of physical adaptations required, the Additional Learning Needs and Inclusion (ALN&I) officers had been asked to consider situations and individual pupils' needs and to make recommendations on this basis.
- The Department did not have the right to refer any child to a designated school, and it was the parents' choice as to which school they wished to send their children. The vast majority wished to send their children to their local school and it would be possible to look at providing parents with more information in terms of what facilities were available at different schools.
- That parents were part of the conversation on the possibility of carrying out adaptations in a general school. The ALN&I Service Team dealt with pre-school age pupils, and knew of pupils who would be moving in, and conversations were taking place between parents and the central services. Therefore, parents had a free choice, all the better if that choice was based on information about the nature of the school(s) they were interested in sending their children to.
- It was easy to forget the positive impact of the changes on the whole school, and it was important that children, no matter what their needs, were able to attend school without feeling any different to their peers, and were included in everything.

RESOLVED to accept the report, noting the observations made during the meeting.

8. REVISED SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair noted that there were no changes to the work programme at present, and therefore there was no need to discuss or vote on the matter.

The meeting commenced at 1.30 pm and concluded at 3.50 pm

CHAIR