

GWYNEDD COUNCIL CABINET



Report to the Cabinet

Date of Meeting:	18 January 2022
Title of Item:	Performance Report of the Cabinet Member for Education
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Cemlyn Rees Williams
Contact Officer:	Garem Jackson, Head of Education

THE DECISION SOUGHT

To receive and note the information contained in the report.

REASONS FOR THE NEED FOR A DECISION

To ensure effective performance management.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update my fellow members on what has been achieved in the areas for which I have responsibility as Cabinet Member for Education. This will include outlining what has happened so far in 2021-22 against the promises of the Council Plan 2018-23; issues and where are the performance measures on it; and the latest on savings plans and cuts.
- 1.2 I would like to note that the issues have already been the subject of discussion and scrutinised at Departmental Performance Challenge meetings, which also included representation from the Scrutiny Committee.
- 1.3 The projects that are prioritised in the Council Plan are moving forward and on course to deliver against our promises and purpose despite some construction market challenges. Some other issues have been brought to our attention through challenging our performance, as well as some national developments that are likely to influence our future work. I am particularly pleased with the Department's performance, and will elaborate on the progress of the report.

2. THE COUNCIL'S PROJECTS PLAN 2018-2023

2.1 The progress made to date against the Department's priority projects is set out below. These priorities address the Department's main risks, as well as investing in adapting schools, or building new schools so that Gwynedd's children and young people can be educated in the best possible learning environment. Overall, I feel that all projects are currently going in the right direction against the promises we have made in the Council Plan.

2.2 21st Century Schools Program - Every pupil has the opportunity to fulfil their potential Bangor's Catchment Area

Despite the pandemic I am delighted that the new Ysgol y Garnedd building for up to 420 learners opened in October 2020. The project has won two Excellence in Construction in Wales 2021 awards.

Ysgol y Faenol is also in the process of a major extension to house up to 315 learners. The timetable has been affected by the pandemic, but significant parts of the extension have now been built, and work will be completed by the end of the Spring 2022 Term.

A new classroom has been added to Ysgol Glancegin and completed for use by the school at the beginning of this educational year.

Initial feasibility work has been completed to identify the needs of Ysgol Ein Harglwyddes, and there is agreement to locate the new school on the site of Ysgol Glanadda (now closed) and this location is in line with the aspirations of the community.

The condition of the existing building and learning environment at Ysgol Tryfan in Bangor is poor, and as a result we are about to begin the process of considering the potential opportunities for a first class learning environment, ensuring appropriate progression to the investment that has already been made in the primary schools in the Penrhosgarnedd area of the city.

2.3 Cricieth's Catchment Area

I am delighted that the Cabinet has supported the proposal to increase the capacity of Ysgol Treferthyr to 150 learners, and build a new school due to the poor condition of the existing building. As part of the planning application process to relocate the school to the A497 site, two technical issues have arisen regarding the site, and work has been commissioned in response, which is affecting somewhat on the original schedule.

2.4 Post 16 Education in Arfon

Although this project has been delayed by the pandemic following a series of virtual meetings with stakeholders in the Autumn of 2020, we hope to be able to restart the project in early 2022.

2.5 Condition and Suitability

The impact of the prices of building materials due to Covid and Brexit has affected our ability to realise some of our plans to improve the condition and adapt some school buildings over recent months. The Department now co-operates with the Housing and Property Department in revisiting these plans and considering what can be practically achieved on a priority basis due to having to meet higher costs with the available budget.

2.6 Welfare Gap and Achievement

Support for children and young people's wellbeing over recent months has continued to focus on responding to the challenges and after-effects of the pandemic. Since I last reported to you, we have established cross-departmental project arrangements for the work streams we have prioritised as a Council. Some of those workstreams are progressing well, such as the ages of 0-5 and 16-24, along with support for learners with ALN. Since September 2020 all schools in Gwynedd are implementing the Accelerated Learning Program with funding from the Welsh Government to respond to the impact of the lockdown period on the wellbeing and attainment of certain groups of learners aged 5-16. Over the coming months, I am keen to receive evidence from the Department and the school improvement service (GwE) on what impact this program and funding has had on the wellbeing and attainment of children and young people.

2.7 Transform the ALN Provision

This project is currently focused on preparing for the Learning Needs and Education Tribunal for Wales Act (2018). This Act came into effect in September 2021, with some elements of the Act being delayed in the first year e.g. post-16 period.

As a result, the service has recently been focusing on offering training, workshops and drop-in sessions to assist the first few weeks of the new legislation coming into force. In addition, the ALN service has been constantly trying to convince the Welsh Government that there will be additional costs involved in implementing the new legislation. It is pleasing to note that the Welsh Government now recognises that implementing the legislation is not cost neutral, and is looking at the likely additional costs at present.

2.8 Digital Education Strategy

I am extremely proud of what we are trying to achieve through the digital education strategy and the way in which we are prioritising the education of our children here in Gwynedd. Just over £ 1.3m has been invested in the network over the last two years. In addition, a significant number of devices have been shared in accordance with the strategy. There are enough shared iPads to provide one in every four learners in the Foundation Phase, with enough Chromebooks shared so that all learners from years 3 to 6 have a device each. Windows 10 devices are also being prepared for all pupils in years 7, 10 and 11. All Gwynedd teachers will receive a standard device through the strategy over the coming months in the hope that this will spark imagination and further stimulate the innovation and effectiveness of the digital learning aspects across the sectors.

2.9 Meirionnydd Collaboration

Progress on this project has been slow and affected by the obvious challenges of the pandemic and the bustle of secondary schools. However, we have gathered the views of headteachers and governor representation from each secondary school on the potential challenges they face in providing quality secondary education in the area, such as the recruitment of teachers, middle managers and leaders. It is now planned to circulate a questionnaire in the new year in order to seek the views of learners, staff, parents and headteachers that will inform the future direction of the project.

2.10 Promoting the use of Welsh among Children and Young People

Following an extended period of home tuition, and the national concern expressed about the detrimental impact of Covid on Welsh language standards, we have collected data through various questionnaires in order to gain a better overview of the Welsh language skills of our children and young people.

The evidence from the questionnaires shows that oracy skills are the biggest concern across the county, and each school has set out an action plan in response to the situation. It is intended to re-submit the questionnaire at the end of the educational year in order to measure the impact of any action.

3. PERFORMANCE AND MEASURES

3.1 I would like to draw your attention to the following issues, which are not related to the Priority Projects, but are being addressed by the department because they affect the well-being of children and young people, or the performance of services.

3.2 Safeguarding - Safeguarding the welfare of Gwynedd's children and young people is a key priority for the Department and the Council, and increasingly as a result of the pandemic with many learners staying home due to self-isolation requirements. The Department has recently created a new Welsh language training pack for Designated Child Protection Persons in schools and education centres in conjunction with the Welsh Government Safeguarding in Education Group. Gwynedd schools have also received information about the Welsh Child Protection Procedures introduced by the Welsh Government in April 2020 and key staff in the Department and Gwynedd schools have received basic training on those procedures.

3.3 Catering and Cleaning - This service has been instrumental throughout the pandemic in ensuring a safe environment for learners and staff in our schools, as well as ensuring the provision of school lunches. Staffing challenges in the context of long-term illness, the effects of Covid and recruitment difficulties are affecting this service on a daily basis. In response, the service has taken advantage of the Welsh Government's Kickstart scheme to offer work placements from January onwards for 16-24 year olds in receipt of Universal Credit and at risk of long-term unemployment.

I also very much welcome the recent announcement by the Welsh Government that they want to ensure free school meals for all primary pupils across Wales. In light of this announcement, I will be asking the Department to begin work on considering the needs of the service so that this Welsh Government commitment can be realised in a timely manner.

3.4 Language Centres - I am delighted that the Cabinet has approved a new vision for putting the learner at the centre of supporting them and the county's newcomers to acquire the Welsh language. The £1.1million capital investment from the Welsh Government is moving ahead, and following a tender process, work on the Bangor, Towyn and Porthmadog sites is about to begin. We have also recently received confirmation that the Department has been successful in its grant application of £154,000 to realise two projects to update immersion provision to reflect the requirements of the Curriculum for Wales and the Digital Education Strategy, as well as equipping Gwynedd school practitioners the principles and practices of language immersion.

- 3.5 In terms of the Department's measures, our service units have received the 'Ffordd Gwynedd' session from the Chief Executive on 13 December 2021, to ensure that the purpose and measures of each service unit are appropriate and meaningful, and so I will report in more detail on the Departments measures next time.
- 3.6 It must be acknowledged that the report only summarises all the work of the Department and schools over the last few months, and as a result I would like to acknowledge and note my appreciation for the heroic work that has been going on in the Department and in our schools in response to the pandemic with the focus always on the education of our children as well as the safety, health and well-being of all our learners and staff.

4. FINANCIAL POSITION / SAVINGS

- 4.1 The Education Department underspent by £100k at the end of the financial year 2020/21. Based on a review at the end of November 2021 it is anticipated that the Department will have underspent by £54,036 by the end of this financial year, which is a combination of a one-off underspend on a number of budget headings which is being reduced by an overspend on headings such as Transport and services School Catering and Cleaning.
- 4.2 Although this year's position appears favourable with a number of one-off factors helping the financial position, there is a chance that a significant overspend under some headings is expected in 2022-23, but that there will be no one-off underspend to mitigate the impact. The main heading is the Pupil Transport budget. The Department is already reviewing expenditure in the hope of reducing costs in the long term. A bid for additional resources has been submitted for the 2022-23 budget round, as it is unlikely that the costs will be reduced in the short term.
- 4.3 The Education Department has £65k of savings for 2021-22 that have already been realised.

5. STATUTORY OFFICERS 'COMMENTS

i.) The Monitoring Officer:

"No observations to add in relation to propriety."

ii.) Head of Finance:

"I am satisfied that the report conveys a fair picture of the Education Department's financial situation, including the significant developments that are outlined in part 2 of the report. The Council has received an Accelerated Learning Program grant in 2020/21 and 2021/22 for the purposes outlined in 2.6. I am happy to confirm that all the savings projects for 2021/22 have already been realised."

I note that paragraph 4.2 of the report refers to presenting a financial bid. All bids that have been presented will receive due attention in accordance with the appropriate procedure."

