

CYNGOR GWYNEDD CABINET



Report to the Cabinet

Date of meeting: 24 January 2023
Cabinet Member: Councillor Beca Brown
Contact Officer: Garem Jackson
Contact Telephone Number: 32089
Title of Item: Performance Report of the Cabinet Member for Education

1 THE DECISION SOUGHT

1.1 To accept and note the information in the report.

2 THE REASON FOR THE NEED FOR A DECISION

2.1 In order to ensure effective performance management.

3 INTRODUCTION

3.1 The purpose of this report is to update you on what has been achieved in the field for which I, as Cabinet Member for Education, have responsibility. This includes outlining the latest regarding the pledges in the Council Plan; the Department's day-to-day work; and the latest in terms of savings and cuts schemes.

3.2 We are implementing the Council Plan for 2018-23, and I herein report on progress to the end of December 2022. I wish to remind you that all matters have already been the subject of discussions and have been scrutinised by me in Performance Challenging meetings during the year. I am particularly happy with the performance of the Department and our schools, and I will elaborate on the progress made in the report.

4. THE RATIONALE AND JUSTIFICATION FOR RECOMMENDING THE DECISION

4.1 Performance of Projects in the Council Plan

4.1.1 Sustainable Learning Communities Programme

The Sustainable Learning Communities Programme plans and realises innovative projects to adapt schools, or build new schools so that the children and young people of Gwynedd are educated in the best possible learning environment.

- 4.1.2 Recently, Ysgol y Faenol has received a substantial extension, which has enabled the school's capacity to increase to 315 learners. Although the timetable slipped as a result of the pandemic, the extension was completed during the year and the learners can now take advantage of the new learning environment. Nevertheless, discussions continue in relation to land transfers and consequently, it is not possible to complete work on the school's car park at present. The building has also been planned to be a hub for the local area, with a new community centre built as a part of the development.
- 4.1.3 Arrangements for the project management of Our Lady's School have been agreed with the Diocese, which means that Cyngor Gwynedd will be responsible for facilitating the project arrangements and submitting the business case to the Welsh Government. Initial feasibility work has been completed to identify the needs, and there is agreement to locate the new school on the site of Ysgol Glanadda (which is now closed) and this location is in accordance with the aspirations of the community. Conceptual plans have been created to establish Our Lady's School on that site.
- 4.1.4 In light of the recent investment in Ysgol y Garnedd and Ysgol y Faenol, myself and the Department also recognise the need to invest further and to improve resources and the learning environment at Ysgol Hirael . This will be a means to improve the learner's experience and enable the school to provide education and the curriculum in the 21st century. I look forward to seeing our intentions for Ysgol Hirael moving forward over the next few months.
- 4.1.5 The Department and I are also fully aware that Ysgol Tryfan has not got the resources we wish they had and that it affects the learner's experience. As a result, we have commenced the process to consider potential opportunities to ensure a first-class learning environment there, ensuring appropriate progression for the investment already made in primary schools in the Penrhosgarnedd area of the city.
- 4.1.6 As a result of the poor condition of the building and existing learning environment at Ysgol Treferythyr, we will build a new school in Cricieth to improve the learning environment and ensure the best resources in order for learners to thrive. The Cabinet has already supported the proposal to increase the capacity of Ysgol Treferythyr to 150 learners, and relocate the school to an alternative site that is referred to as the A497 site, in line with the statutory procedure. As part of the process of submitting a planning application for the relocation of the school, two technical issues have arisen regarding the site, but the archaeological work has now been completed along with a safe routes to school survey, and reports have been submitted to the Planning Department. As a result of cost increases in building materials due to Covid, Brexit, along with inflation, I am delighted that the Cabinet has approved to increase the budget to realise the new school to £8.1m. I look forward to see the building work progressing soon and to see the children benefiting from

the best possible facilities.

4.1.7 As a result of the variety in the quality of education and learner experiences across the Post-16 Education System in Arfon, the Cabinet gave permission to the Department to contact stakeholders to discuss the vision for Post-16 education in Arfon. A series of virtual meetings were held with headteachers, Governors, staff, parents, learners and the broader community to present the new vision for post-16 education, as well as to gather views and ideas on the best way to realise the vision. We have reported on the initial messages from this engagement to the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee in February last year, and we are now in a position to press on with this project following the delay seen over the past year.

4.1.8 The purpose of the Condition and Suitability project is to improve the condition of our schools' existing buildings, and make alterations to the buildings in order to ensure that they are fit for purpose and make the best use of the space available. During the year, like the previous year, the impact of building material prices due to Covid and Brexit affected our ability to realise some of our schemes to improve the condition and adapt the buildings of some schools. Consequently, during the year the Education Department jointly with the Housing and Property Department re-examined the schemes and considered what could be delivered in practice based on priority, in light of the need to have to meet higher costs with the available budget. Nevertheless, I am pleased to report that it was possible to complete the investment in the condition and adaptation of Ysgol Bethel, Ysgol Glan y Môr and Ysgol Cymerau during the year, with work continuing on the sites of Ysgol Llanrug and Ysgol Botwnnog, and work is about to commence at Ysgol Eifionydd and Ysgol Syr Hugh Owen.

4.2 The Well-being and Attainment Gap

4.2.1 As a result of the pandemic and lock-downs, the Education Department and the Council have identified the well-being and attainment gap as one of the main priorities in light of concern that some children and young people may be left behind in terms of their educational attainment, and that some would need additional support to close that gap, as well as the need for support with their well-being.

4.2.2 Beyond school, two stages in a child and young person's life have been identified as being a priority in terms of responding to the well-being and attainment gap, namely 0-5 year olds, and young people post-16. Indeed, the lockdown period has highlighted the vulnerability of the early years sector, with inconsistency across the county in terms of the range and availability of services. The range of partners who are involved in the provision along with the strategic direction of the field nationally makes it difficult to structure our services here in Gwynedd. The project group has agreed upon specific work streams and has prioritised conducting a care and education provision adequacy assessment across the authority. At the same time, work is being done on different

funding models, as well as the implications of leaseholds between providers and Cyngor Gwynedd.

4.2.3 Also, the 16-24 age group has been disproportionately affected by the pandemic as there are more referrals for well-being, mental health and homelessness assistance among this age group. It is intended to give specific attention to this field in order to mitigate any knock-on effects, ensuring that young people receive appropriate support and provision to enable them to thrive. In relation to this age group, I am delighted to note that we abolished the fee for the post-16 travel pass for all our learners from September 2022 onwards. This will be a medium to encourage learners who are not in education, training or employment (NEETS) back into education. This is particularly important to ensure that we as a Council do not set any barriers that prevent our young people to continue with their education post 16 years, and even more important these days given the huge increase in the cost of living. Also in this context, I have asked the Department to examine the cost of the school day, and I have contacted schools asking them not to change school uniform and to be mindful of school uniform costs to parents and families.

4.2.4 To support the well-being of our children and young people, the Department also administrates the period poverty grant it receives annually from the Government. By collaborating cross-departmentally with other services across the Council and with community enterprises, we reach residents across the county, providing them with eco-friendly and reusable goods for anyone who needs them and for free. In addition, supplies are available in every school throughout the county and in a discrete manner that avoids embarrassment to our children and young people.

4.3 Free school meals at primary schools

4.3.1 In December 2021, the Welsh Government announced its plan to provide free school meals to all primary pupils across Wales. Since the announcement, substantial work has been achieved jointly between the Education Department and the Property Development Team, which means that we are ahead of the national schedule to provide free school meals for all Gwynedd primary school pupils.

4.3.2 From the beginning of September onwards, every learner in Reception and Year One in Gwynedd is offered free school meals, since the beginning of January, all Year 2 learners can receive free school meals, and by September 2023, we are aiming to ensure that all Gwynedd primary school learners will receive free school meals. I am eager for as many families as possible to take advantage of free school meals, especially in the current financial climate and, therefore, I will ask the Department to make everything possible to encourage as many families as possible to take advantage of this plan.

4.4 Meirionnydd Collaboration

- 4.4.1 The purpose of this project is to look specifically at ensuring that the quality of the education is consistently good and sustainable for the future in Meirionnydd secondary schools. Progress on this project has been slow and has been affected as a result of the obvious challenges of the pandemic and the busy nature of secondary schools.
- 4.4.2 Nevertheless, we have sought the opinion of headteachers and representatives of the governing body of every secondary school on the potential challenges they face in terms of providing quality secondary education in the area, such as recruiting teachers, middle managers and leaders. Further discussions are to be held with the schools in order to work together to find possible solutions to capacity challenges, and to recruit and retain staff in Meirionnydd. .

4.5 Promoting Use of the Welsh language by Children and Young People

- 4.5.1 Following an extended period of home learning, and the national concern expressed about the adverse impact of Covid on the Welsh language standards, during the year the Department gathered data via various questionnaires in order to obtain a better overview of the Welsh language skills of our children and young people. The evidence from the questionnaires showed that literacy skills was the greatest concern across the county.

4.6 The Department's day-to-day work

- 4.6.1 Safeguarding the welfare of Gwynedd children and young people is a key priority for the Department and the Council, and is even more key of course as a result of the pandemic. The Department has created a new training package in Welsh for Child Protection Designated Persons in schools and education centres, in conjunction with the Welsh Government's Safeguarding in Education Group. The Education Department and the Council's Learning and Development services have collaborated to develop a training package in the field of domestic violence. The Ask and Act package has been jointly developed and continues to be presented to Education Department staff.
- 4.6.2 The purpose of the Additional Learning Needs and Inclusion service is to ensure suitable provision and support for our most vulnerable learners. I am delighted to be able to report that the work of transferring from the former SEN legislation to the new ALN legislation continues to maintain momentum and is on track, and use of new Criteria has been extended further in order to enable reporting on children's progress on a wider level, as holistic methods are required to show the progress of children and young people with ALN. Work to adapt the inclusion provision model has been undertaken and is now operational. Nevertheless, we are aware that the behaviours of children and young people are causing concern in the post-pandemic period, and the service will address this in the near future in order to support our schools.
- 4.6.3 I am very proud of our schools' preparedness to take on the

requirements of the new curriculum, namely Curriculum for Wales. I would like to note my appreciation to GwE here, namely the schools' improvement service commissioned by the Education Department to support our schools in the curriculum field. As you know, some aspects of the curriculum have received public attention during the past few months, such as the Relationships and Sexuality Education curriculum which has been challenging, but I am very proud of the professionalism of our schools in responding to this requirement, and as they continue as always to support our learners in this very important field.

- 4.6.4 On 6 July 2021, the Cabinet approved a new vision for a modern Immersion Education System in Gwynedd, which places the learner at the centre when supporting them to acquire the Welsh language. This new vision also includes a capital investment of £1.1 million from the Welsh Government for the purpose of establishing new immersion education sites in Bangor and Tywyn, as well as improving existing facilities at the Eifionydd site, Porthmadog. The work has already been completed on the Ysgol Eifionydd site and Ysgol Tryfan in Bangor, but a delay with the planning process has meant that the Tywyn site timetable has slipped and, therefore, a temporary immersion education site has been established in Ysgol Bro Idris for the beginning of January 2023 onwards.
- 4.6.5 I am also very proud of the Cabinet's unanimous support on 19 July 2022 to proceed to submit a full business case before the Welsh Government in order to secure an additional £1.1m funding from the Welsh Medium Education Capital Grant to reconcile capacity and improve the learning environment of the remaining primary Language Centres, namely Maesincla, Llangybi and Dolgellau.
- 4.6.6 In addition, a great deal of exciting work has been undertaken in the context of the Welsh Government's revenue grant funding. Organisation staff and the author, Anni Llŷn has written a new immersion plan based on the imaginary village of Aberwla. It is a plan that incorporates appropriate language patterns within the language continuum in the Curriculum for Wales. To support the plan, in collaboration with the 'Animated Technologies' company, we have developed a virtual element to the village. This is an innovative project that enables our latecomers to step into Aberwla on a virtual platform to practise language patterns in the supermarket. They will receive an opportunity there to play games together as they fill their baskets by reading instructions and following a shopping list.
- 4.6.7 I am very pleased that Welsh Government officers are very eager to share this innovative resource created in Gwynedd on a national scale and discussions are ongoing to do so in the near future. This is recognition of our innovative vision, and as an organisation we are proud

of this innovative virtual resource and of the opportunity to share it for the benefit of learners and to support the Government's aim in *Cymraeg 2050* across Wales.

- 4.6.8 In September, staff of the Immersion System also provided training on immersion principles to all Foundation Phase workforce of our schools, teachers and assistants. The training was held per catchment area, with the hope of supporting schools to be able to immerse the youngest learners of our school system in Welsh as soon as possible.
- 4.6.9 At the same time, the Language Centres (Cefn Coch specifically) have a long tradition of providing Language Improvement sessions to mainstream learners who need additional support with their skills and confidence in the Welsh language. As the new Immersion System has been implemented since the beginning of the year, I am eager to see a continuation of this practice of being able to offer language improvement sessions to children and young people in our schools, in order to further reinforce their skills and confidence in the Welsh language.
- 4.6.10 The Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) is a statutory document for every local authority in order for us to strategically plan over a ten-year period for growth and progress in Welsh-medium education. A full consultation on Gwynedd's new draft WESP was held in the autumn term of 2021, and following this, the WESP was submitted to the Cabinet for approval in March 2022, and to the Language Committee at the beginning of the summer. I am very pleased that it received the approval of the Minister for Education and Welsh Language on 24 June 2022 and, as a result, the new WESP came into force on 1 September 2022. The Department, the schools and entire education workforce has now started to act in accordance with the commitments noted in the document, and the Department has established an Education Language Forum in order to ensure appropriate progress against each of the outcomes. I will look forward to providing you with a further update on the WESP in my next report for you.
- 4.6.11 Alongside the WESP, on 1 September 2022 the categorising schools according to Welsh-medium provision system also came into force. In light of the Gwynedd Education Language Policy, each of Gwynedd's primary schools (except one) fall into category 3, while every secondary school (except two) also fall into category 3 in accordance with the definition. The Department will now work with all category 3 schools to ensure appropriate progress, and that no school takes a step back in terms of its Welsh-medium provision. The Department will also ensure more intensive support for the three schools that are in category 3T (transitional) to ensure they make appropriate progress along the language continuum, and I look forward to report on the progress of this work in my next performance report.
- 4.6.12 The purpose of the Catering and Cleaning service is to provide nutritious

and healthy food for the learners of Gwynedd schools and to keep educational establishments clean and safe to assist learners to reach their potential. Recently, this service has been planning and taking action to be able to provide free school meals for every child in Reception and Year 1 by September 2022, and every Year 2 child by January 2023.

4.6.13 Since its establishment in September 2019, the Schools Business Centre has offered a number of key services to our schools including financial management, administration of appointments, organizing supply teachers, and ensuring that the pupil information system is up-to-date. The service has continued to develop additional administrative services including the telephone call answering scheme, a scheme which has received very positive feedback. Order from schools for the purchase of goods and services via the Education Business Centre credit card continue to benefit the schools. This year the service has developed a comprehensive intranet which contains useful resources in one convenient location, this will be shared with all schools in the new year. The centre is continuously evolving to be able to offer more services to schools in the future, looking for every opportunity to reduce the workload of headteachers.

4.6.14 It must be acknowledged that the report is only a summary of all of the Department and the schools' work over the past months, and consequently I would like to acknowledge and note my appreciation for the heroic work that has been happening in the Department and in our schools to ensure the best education for our children, as well as the health, safety and welfare of all of our learners and staff.

5. THE SAVINGS POSITION

5.1 The Department has achieved all of its historical savings schemes. The Department has no savings targets in 2022/23.

6. THE STATUTORY OFFICERS' OBSERVATIONS

The Monitoring Officer:

No observations to add in relation to propriety.

Head of Finance Department:

I am satisfied that the report is a fair reflection of the financial situation of the Education Department.