

## **ITEM 8 - QUESTIONS**

### **(1) Question from Councillor Beca Roberts**

"In 2019 as a Council we declared a Climate and Nature Emergency accepting that the extreme changes in the climate are having a negative impact on our communities, and across the world. Climate change risks are very real risks for many Gwynedd residents - from flooding to landslides and extreme hot and cold weather - the cost of ignoring climate change is increasing. Since starting our work to reduce carbon emissions under Cyngor Gwynedd's Carbon Management Plan, how much carbon has been reduced, can you elaborate on how much money these changes have saved for the Council?"

### **Response - Council Leader, Councillor Dyfrig Siencyn**

"It is true that as a Council we were committed to reducing the environmental impact of our activities long before we declared a Climate and Nature Emergency in 2019. Back in 2010, we adopted a Carbon Management Plan in order to manage and reduce our carbon footprint. Since its introduction, we have saved 103,757 tonnes of carbon from the emissions created through energy use in our buildings (schools, leisure centres, residential homes, libraries, offices and more), our streetlights, our fleet and use of vehicles, and our waste.

After a decade of taking action and succeeding in the energy conservation field, the annual carbon footprint of our direct activities were 43% less than before we began on this journey.

Since 2010, we have worked tirelessly to try and take advantage of any possible opportunity to reduce our carbon footprint, including investing £7.4M in projects such as 613kWp of solar panels on 55 of our sites to generate our own electricity, upgrading lighting and lamps to the most current technology, insulating our buildings to retain the heat, covering swimming pools overnight, and much more. Our dedicated energy team also regularly monitor the energy consumption patterns of our buildings in order to identify waste and to ensure efficiency and use software which enables them to manage energy use in various buildings across the county from the team's office in Caernarfon.

In fact, Cyngor Gwynedd's Energy Team has received national recognition for their work as they won the 'Public Sector Energy Management Team' award at the UK's Energy Managers Association Awards in 2020.

This work has led to a financial saving of £14.75M for the Council since 2010.

I would also like to draw attention to the astonishing financial benefit that we are gaining from today, due to our success over the last decade. If we had continued to use the same amount of energy as we did in 2010, our energy bills would have been £4.3M higher last year. If we had had to pay this additional cost, it would have resulted in £4.3M more cuts in frontline services, or increased Council Tax by 5.4% in addition to this year's increase.

To conclude, it's worth emphasising that we as a Council have prioritised this agenda long before declaring a Climate and Nature Emergency back in 2019, and that over the years we have succeeded in making a difference by managing our direct carbon

footprint as a contribution to protecting our environment for generations to come. This work continues and evolves so that we try to reach the Welsh Government's goal of being net zero carbon by 2030. We will need to be aware of the fact that the next period will be even more challenging, as we tackle carbon emissions arising from our procurement activity, commuting to work etc.”

**(2) Question by Councillor Rhys Tudur**

"Other than forming a taskforce at the request of the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee, what proactive steps has the Education Department taken to update the Gwynedd Schools Language Policy so that it is more compatible with the new categorisation procedure for Welsh medium education provision, in place since September 2022?"

**Response - Cabinet Member for Education - Councillor Beca Brown**

“Cyngor Gwynedd is proud of its long tradition of supporting and promoting the Welsh language. This is a county, by far, with the highest number of children and young people who can speak Welsh. Achieving that is no small feat, and I’m sure that we are all proud of the success of our Education Language Policy over the years in achieving that. This is the county that pioneered the primary school’s Language Charter, leading to its expansion nationally. Gwynedd is the only county with a secondary language strategy, and we continue to innovate today with the development of VR technology and Aberwla as part of the provision of our immersion education system, which will again be expanded nationally in due course. These are the things that ensure that Welsh is a daily language for our children and young people, and that we are an inclusive county that supports and embraces newcomers to acquire the language and become Welsh speakers. As a county we contribute greatly to achieving the vision and targets of the Welsh Government as outlined in Cymraeg 2050.

Our education language policy is a local matter for us in Gwynedd, and it is a matter for the Cabinet to consider to what extent we believe it is necessary to take steps to update the policy or not. The national system for categorising schools according to the Welsh medium provision is currently a non-statutory guide, and schools are not expected to record their category in accordance with the guide until PLASC January 2024. The school categorisation system according to the Welsh medium provision is a national administrative framework, rather than a tool to change policy locally, and a national administrative framework has existed since 2007.

Nevertheless, I am extremely proud to be able to confirm the intention to update the Language Policy to reflect the changes that have been taking place in education recently e.g Curriculum for Wales will be implemented in all schools in Gwynedd and across Wales from September 2023 onwards. The Department has also been collecting information on the Welsh and bilingual provision in our schools and this information as well as the findings of the scrutiny investigation which looks at the Welsh language in 3 secondary schools in the county (which will be known in September 2023), will be of assistance as we proceed to update the Language Policy over the coming months.

The Authority's statutory responsibility for the Welsh language is through the Welsh Education Strategic Plan, and the 10-year WESP is based on our current Language Policy and our vision here in Gwynedd of ensuring the best opportunity for all children

and young people in the county to become Welsh speakers and proficient bilingual. We will continue to consider the far-reaching impact of the contents of our current Language Policy within this statutory framework as we consider updating the policy for the future.”

**(3) Question by Councillor Richard Glyn Roberts**

"A new provision in the field of care is to be welcomed, but is it appropriate to express unconditional approval and support, in advance, to plans that bind that said provision to a housing development of a scale that is not necessarily commensurate with the local need for housing and which clouds and obscures these matters, care and housing, until efforts to balance the potential social impact of these plans are undermined beforehand?"

**Response - Cabinet Member for Adults, Health and Well-being - Councillor Dilwyn Morgan**

“We are encouraged that the councillor welcomes the efforts to develop new care provision at the Penyberth site. This involves re-establishing and building on provision that has been offered on site for over 70 years and is an opportunity to fill a significant gap in dementia care and nursing provision that exists in the County and specifically in the Llŷn area.

Research was published at a national level by Housing Learning & Improvement Network (LIN) back in 2020. It looked at the provision at the time and housing and placement needs for care across all Welsh local authorities by 2035. For Gwynedd the research showed a likely need to provide :-

- An additional 640 homes for older people – (66% increase)
- 162 homes with care e.g. extra care housing – (69% increase)
- 276 additional nursing beds – (45% increase)

In the next 9 months the Adults, Health and Well-being Department, the Children and Families Department and the Housing and Property Department will undertake work which will update this data as part of wider work to look at housing and care needs across Gwynedd.

Alongside this, I am sure that members will have noticed the data being presented as part of the Population Needs Assessment before the Full Council today. That also shows a significant increase in the older population over the next few years and consequently an increase in the need to have suitable and proper provision of homes for our residents.

I am therefore sure that the member will understand why I and my fellow Cabinet members and members across political groups support the proposal to establish a nursing home and care provision on the Penyberth site. It is intended to meet a clear and evidenced need for provision of care for the benefit of Gwynedd residents. While fully understanding that success depends on securing financial sources, I can assure you that I and Councillor Craig ap Iago will do all we can to achieve this by ensuring that the focus of the work of the relevant departments places a high priority on this issue.

If all the pieces fall into place, the nursing home and dementia provision will be on part of the wider Penyberth site and will consequently have close links with the rest of the site. However, it is seen as a separate development with the Council and Health Board taking

the lead on the nursing home while Clwyd Alyn Housing Association is leading on the proposed housing provision scheme. The nursing home is not part of the planning application for the redevelopment of housing on the site. It will be subject to a separate planning application in time.

While supporting the proposed plans to develop new care provision at the Penyberth site, unqualified support has not been given to proposals to re-develop the wider site. Naturally, we will continue to work with Clwyd Alyn to ensure that proposals submitted are suitable. It will be for the Planning Committee to consider the merits of each planning application for the redevelopment of the site. I am sure they will pay due attention to ensuring that the developments will meet local needs.”

**(4) Question from Councillor Gwynfor Owen**

Following a meeting with Lee Waters in Cardiff on Wednesday, 26 April 2023 to discuss concerns about the safety of Llanbedr roads, may I ask the Leader to report to the Council on the outcome of those discussions?

**Response - Council Leader, Councillor Dyfrig Siencyn**

“I had the pleasure of attending a meeting with Lee Waters and Llanbedr Pobl Group in Cardiff, where the Deputy Minister for Climate Change announced verbally that he would support plans for a low speed bypass for Llanbedr, as part of the Green Corridor plan.

This is very encouraging and the local residents are delighted to hear the announcement, but despite this, there is no confirmation of financing the scheme and so to date, we have not received funding assurance. We are also not aware of a timetable that the Government has in mind and therefore look forward to any further discussions with the Deputy Minister in order to move the project forward.

I would like to pay tribute to the people of Llanbedr for their persistence regarding this matter for working so hard to secure the Government's ear on the matter for many years - I am very grateful for their efforts.”

**(5) Question from Councillor Huw Rowlands**

"The demographic for Gwynedd school pupil numbers shows a decline for the coming years.

In light of this, what strategy does Cyngor Gwynedd have to cope with this challenge, especially in the context of small and rural schools?"

**Response - Cabinet Member for Education - Councillor Beca Brown**

“The number of learners in Gwynedd has been decreasing for some time. Since 1975, the number of primary and secondary learners in the County has fallen by 24%. This means that there are over 4,500 fewer children (aged 3-19) in the County's schools today than there were in 1975. Between 2016 and 2022 there are 850 fewer learners in our primary schools, a reduction of almost 9% in a period of 6 years. In addition, the

number of pupils in the county's primary schools is expected to decrease further over the next 3 years, by approximately 500 in number, which corresponds to 5%.

In terms of the number of primary schools we have, Gwynedd is the fourth highest of all Welsh authorities, with only Cardiff, Carmarthen and Rhondda Cynon Taf having a higher number of primary schools than us. In terms of the number of secondary schools, Gwynedd is the third highest (together with Swansea) of all Welsh authorities, with only Cardiff and Rhondda Cynon Taf having more secondary schools than us. However, there are approximately 20,000 more primary learners, and 20,000 more secondary learners in Cardiff compared to Gwynedd. This suggests that our current school system in Gwynedd is not sustainable.

In addition, there are many small schools in the county. The September 2022 census shows that 42 out of the 79 primary schools in Gwynedd meet the Welsh Government's definition of a small school, namely a school with less than 91 pupils. Out of the 42 primary schools defined as a small school, 29 of those primary schools have less than 60 learners, and 10 of those primary schools have less than 30 learners. In three years' time, it is predicted that the number of primary schools with less than 30 learners will have increased to 16. It should also be noted that the learners in our smallest schools receive a higher proportion of learner funding than the average across the county. On average, the cost per learner in our schools with less than 30 learners is £9,040 - significantly higher than the county average of £4,509.

With birth rates falling across Wales as well, and Welsh Government predictions suggesting a further reduction of approximately 16% in the numbers of learners aged 3-19 by 2038, situations are now foreseen where some of the county's schools are not sustainable based on the number of learners, and other schools across the sectors facing significant financial challenges due to reduction in the number of learners.

In the context of small and rural schools, we as a county implement a protection policy which ensures the funding of a minimum number of teaching staff when learner numbers are low. 21 primary schools and 1 secondary school receive financial support through this policy, and between them in 2022-23 they received a protection amount of £787,338. The school funding allocation formula funds teaching staff according to learner numbers. However, in Gwynedd we implement a protection policy in situations where the number of learners is not sufficient to fund 2 full-time members of teaching staff. The policy funds the difference between what is naturally funded and the cost of securing 2 full-time teaching staff members. If the number of full-time learners falls below 15, then the protection policy funds a minimum of 1.5 teaching staff. In the context of secondary schools, the protection policy ensures a minimum number of teaching staff of 18. Certainly, this protection policy has supported and enabled the county's smallest schools to cope with low learner numbers over the years.

In response to the effects of demographic change on our school system, the Department is in the process of formulating a new education strategy which will set out the department's vision, aims and objectives for modernising the school system in Gwynedd. The strategy will set out how we will develop the system into the future, responding to the demographic challenges we face as the number of learners in the county continue to

fall over the next period. A draft of the Education Strategy will go before the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee in September 2023.”