

Committee	Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report	Gwynedd Education Strategy towards 2032
Date of meeting	14 September 2023
Author	Garem Jackson, Head of Education
Relevant Cabinet Member	Councillor Beca Brown

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 This report is presented at the request of members of the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee.
- 1.2 By means of this report, background information is presented, along with a response to the questions of the scrutinisers received in advance about the draft Gwynedd Education Strategy.
- 1.3 This item is considered a means of early engagement with member of the Scrutiny Committee on an initial version of a draft Education Strategy for Gwynedd. An initial version of an Equality Impact Assessment and a Well-being Impact Assessment is also presented.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The original strategy, *Strategic Programme "Towards 2025": Future of Education and Training for Children and Young People in Gwynedd* was published in 2010 to set a direction for the field of education and training in Gwynedd up to 2025. The new draft Education Strategy before us builds on the foundations of this Strategic Programme for the next decade up to 2032.
- 2.2 It must be acknowledged that far-reaching changes have been seen in the field of education in Wales since the publication of the *Strategic Programme "Towards 2025": Future of Education and Training for Children and Young People in Gwynedd* in 2010, which include but are not restricted to the following:
- Equality Act 2010 - The Public Sector Equality Duty: Guidelines for Schools in Wales
 - Establishing a national model for regional working (2015)
 - The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015
 - Cymraeg 2050 (2017)
 - Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018
 - Establishment of the National Academy for Educational Leadership Wales (2018)
 - Curriculum for Wales Framework (2020)
 - Welsh in Education Strategic Plan Regulations (2021)
 - Announcement of Free School Meals for all primary-aged children in Wales (2021)
 - Framework on embedding a whole-school approach for emotional and mental well-being (2021)
 - The Relationships and Sexuality Education Code (2022)

- Welsh Education Bill: White Paper (2023)
- Sustainable Learning Communities Rolling Programme (2023)
- Establishing the Tertiary Education and Research Commission (2023)

2.3 It must also be recognised that local considerations and drivers also influence the education system, the vision and objectives of the Education Strategy for the future, and we need to ensure that we maintain and support what is good and unique about the education system in Gwynedd, as well as identify opportunities to respond to some challenges that are likely to face the system now and in the future, such as:

- Maintaining and strengthening our education and training provision to enable children and young people in Gwynedd to reach their full potential and to nurture the qualifications and skills that enable them to live and thrive.
- Maintaining and strengthening the Welsh language in all aspects of the school's life and communities served in light of the 2021 Census results.
- Ensuring excellent well-being support services for children and young people in Gwynedd to assist them to overcome barriers and reach their full potential.
- Strengthening leadership on all levels and respond to the challenge of recruiting teachers and assistants in our schools.
- Ensuring the viability and resilience of our schools when there is a reduction in the number of learners as a result of low birth rates, an ageing population and rural depopulation.
- Improving our school estate to ensure the best possible learning environment for our children and young people when we have so many buildings to maintain, and an expectation for the school estate to be zero carbon over the next period.
- Responding to the challenge of maintaining the education system in an unprecedented period of cuts to the budgets of Local Authorities.

2.4 The 5 objectives seen in the draft Education Strategy align and reiterate the national direction and developments in the field of education in recent years and respond to the local drivers noted above. These are the 5 objectives noted in the Strategy:

Objective 1	The Right to Education and Training: Every child and young person can get access to education and training of the highest possible quality that enables them to thrive and achieve their potential.
Objective 2	Extend and strengthen our Welsh-medium and bilingual provision: Every child and young person benefits from first-class Welsh-medium and bilingual education provision, as well as access to specialist support and services through the medium of Welsh that enables them to succeed, thrive and realise their aspirations for the future.
Objective 3	Learners' Health and Well-being: Every child and young person in Gwynedd is ready to learn and is able to fully benefit from the education and training available and can gain easy access to support to improve their emotional, mental and physical well-being.
Objective 4	Excellent education workforce supported by excellent staff: Every child and young person in Gwynedd are educated by teachers and excellent support teams.

Objective 5	A Sustainable Learning Environment of High Standard: Gwynedd schools offer a first-class safe, inspirational and sustainable learning environment for learners and teachers in the county and are organisations that have a strong link with their communities. Learning beyond the classroom is extended by using quality digital technologies by also taking advantage of the natural and outdoor environment.
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2.5 It is inevitable that we will see regular and continuous changes over the coming years as we leave the post-pandemic period behind and re-establish the 'normal' that existed back in 2019 in our schools. As a result of this, along with local drivers, the Strategy is deemed to be a live document that will be possible to revisit regularly over the next ten years to ensure that the vision and objectives remain up-to-date, addresses the latest developments, continues to reflect our aspirations locally for education in Gwynedd, by also ensuring that the education system in future meets the needs of the county's children and young people.

3. SCRUTINISERS' QUESTIONS

Below, we address the questions received in advance from the scrutinisers:

3.1 Is it realistic to achieve the Strategy's vision?

The Education Department is of the opinion that the vision noted in the Strategy is realistic as it reflects and reiterates the local and national vision, direction and priorities for education. It is recognised that setting a long-term (10 years) vision is challenging, but given that the Strategy is a live document, which will be reviewed continuously, it will be possible to revisit the vision and objectives at any time to ensure that the vision and objectives remain up-to-date, and continue to reflect our aspirations locally for education in Gwynedd.

3.2 Are the Education Department's priorities which are noted in the Strategy suitable and timely?

The Education Department is of the opinion that the vision and objectives noted in the Strategy are suitable and timely as they reflect national and local priorities, and reiterate the objectives identified in the document *Strategic Programme "Towards 2025": Future of Education and Training for Children and Young People in Gwynedd*. The Strategy is deemed to be a live document that will be possible to revisit regularly over the next ten years to ensure that the vision and objectives remain up-to-date and continue to reflect our aspirations locally for education in Gwynedd.

3.3 To what extent do the priorities of the Education Strategy align with the direction and other corporate priorities of the Council?

A clear thread can be seen between the following priority areas in the Cyngor Gwynedd Plan 2023-28 and the objectives of the draft Education Strategy:

Priority Area: Gwynedd Yfory	Objectives of the draft Education Strategy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transform education for children in their early years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Right to Education and Training
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Free school meals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners' Health and Well-being
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Modernise buildings and the learning environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A Sustainable Learning Environment of High Standard

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote the well-being of children and young people and reduce the cost of sending children to school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners' Health and Well-being
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extend opportunities for play and socialising for the county's children and young people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners' Health and Well-being

Priority Area: Gwynedd Gymraeg	Objectives of the draft Education Strategy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Modernise and extend the immersion provision to teach Welsh to children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extend and strengthen our Welsh-medium and bilingual provision
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote the use of the Welsh Language by the residents of Gwynedd 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extend and strengthen our Welsh-medium and bilingual provision

Further information can be found in the draft Education Strategy.

3.4 To what extent do the priorities of the Education Strategy align with national direction and priorities?

The draft Education Strategy before you also aligns with national direction and priorities, and some of those national priorities that are reiterated by the Gwynedd draft Education Strategy are named below:

- Equality Act 2010 - The Public Sector Equality Duty: Guidelines for Schools in Wales
- Curriculum for Wales
- Cymraeg 2050
- Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018
- National Academy for Educational Leadership Wales
- Sustainable Learning Communities Programme
- The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

Further information can be found in the draft Education Strategy.

3.5 To what extent are additional resources required to realise the aspirations of the Education Strategy?

It would be great to be able to state that additional resources will be available to realise the aspirations of the Education Strategy, but due to the fact that it is a very challenging time for public services in Wales as a result of the economic downturn, the impact of inflation and the increase in living costs, it is recognised that the best use will need to be made of the resources we have available to achieve the vision and objectives outlined in the Strategy over the next ten years.

As a Department and Council, we have always made prudent use of finance, making the best use of budgets and capital and revenue grants to support our vision, priorities and objectives locally, and we will continue to do so over the next decade to realise the vision and objectives of this draft Education Strategy.

Of course, should new additional financial sources come forward during the Strategy period, we will certainly prioritise any additional resources to contribute towards realising the vision and objectives.

3.6 What input have key stakeholders had into the Strategy's vision and priorities?

During the 2023 Summer Term, the Education Department held an informal discussion with Cabinet members about the draft vision and objectives for the Education Strategy. At this meeting, it was agreed with Cabinet members to forward-scrutinise the draft version of the Education Strategy and receive observations from the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee for consideration by the Department and the Cabinet Member for Education before taking any further action.

The following table includes a draft outline of the steps the Department intend to take to ensure the input of key stakeholders on the Strategy's vision and objectives:

Step	Purpose	Timetable
GwE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seek GwE input on the content of the draft Education Strategy 	4 September 2023
Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Submit draft Education Strategy Submit outline timetable for the public consultation 	14 September 2023
Secondary Strategic Planning Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage with Gwynedd secondary school headteachers on the content of the Draft Education Strategy 	September/October 2023
Primary and Special Catchment Areas Consultative Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage with Gwynedd secondary school headteachers on the content of the Draft Education Strategy 	September/October 2023
Youth Forum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage with children and young people 	September/October 2023
Cabinet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seek permission to consult on the draft Education Strategy 	7 November 2023
Public Consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A consultation seeking opinions on the content of the draft education strategy and sharing information about the challenges facing the current system. As part of the consultation, it is intended to hold a drop-in session in every secondary catchment area. 	20 November – 12 January 2023
Cabinet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Report back following the consultation. Depending on the outcome of the consultation, request that the Cabinet adopts the final Education Strategy and associated Prioritising Plan. 	20 February 2024
Welsh Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Submit a Strategic Outline Programme to the Welsh Government (based on the contents of the Prioritising Plan) 	31 March 2024

3.7 It is important to note the need for the above timetable to meet the need to submit a new strategic outline programme that will note our priorities for the Sustainable Learning Communities Rolling Programme for the next 9 years for the Welsh Government by March 2024.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Members are asked to:

- submit observations on the vision and objectives of the Education Department noted in the draft Education Strategy towards 2032 and beyond.
- submit any observations on the Equality and Well-being Impact Assessments.