

**EDUCATION AND ECONOMY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**  
**25/01/24**

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**Attendance:**

**Councillors:** Councillor Elwyn Jones (Chair)  
Councillor Paul Rowlinson (Vice-chair)

Councillors:- Jina Gwyrfai, Iwan Huws, Dawn Lynne Jones, Dewi Jones, Gareth Tudor Jones, Gwilym Jones, Cai Larsen, Beth Lawton, Dewi Owen, Gwynfor Owen, Llio Elenid Owen, John Pughe Roberts, Richard Glyn Roberts and Huw Llwyd Rowlands.

**Co-opted Members:** Manon Williams (Parent/Governor Representative for Arfon) and Elise Poulter (NEU).

**Officers present:** Geraint Owen (Corporate Director), Bethan Adams (Scrutiny Advisor) and Eirian Roberts (Democracy Services Officer).

**Present for item 5:-** Councillor Dyfrig Siencyn (Council Leader), Sioned Williams (Head of Economy and Community Department) and Dylan Griffiths (Economic Development Manager / North Wales Shared Prosperity Fund Manager).

**Present for item 6:-** Councillor Menna Trenholme (Cabinet Member for Corporate Support), Eurig Huw Williams (Human Resources Advisory Services Manager) and Delyth Gadlys Williams (Equality Advisor).

**Present for item 7A:-** Gwern ap Rhisiart (Head of Education Department), Gwyn Tudur (Assistant Head: Secondary), Rhys Glyn (Head of Gwynedd Immersion Education System), Debbie Anne Jones (Assistant Head: Corporate Services) and Ffion Edwards Ellis (Assistant Head: Additional Learning Needs and Inclusion).

**Present for item 7B: -** Arwyn Thomas (Managing Director, GwE), Euros Davies (Senior Regional Leader - Primary and Special Schools) and Ellen Williams (Core Lead - Secondary).

**Present for item 8:-** Gwern ap Rhisiart (Head of Education Department), Gwyn Tudur (Assistant Head: Secondary), Rhys Glyn (Head of Gwynedd Immersion Education System) and Debbie Anne Jones (Assistant Head: Corporate Services).

**1. APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Councillor Rhys Tudur, Colette Owen (The Catholic Church), Gwilym Jones (NASUWT), Councillor Nia Jeffreys (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Operational Economy Matters) and Councillor Beca Brown (Cabinet Member for Education).

**2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST**

No declarations of personal interest were received.

**3. URGENT ITEMS**

None to note.

#### 4. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee held on 9 November 2023 as a true record.

#### 5. GWYNEDD ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

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

Submitted - the report of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economy Operational Matters invited the committee to scrutinise:-

- The contents of the project under the '*Prosperous Gwynedd*' priority area in the Council Plan, which aimed to create the best possible circumstances for businesses and community enterprises to thrive, and support the people of Gwynedd into work; and
- The progress of the Economy and Community Department in implementing the project to trigger growth in Gwynedd's economy.

The Leader set the context and the Head of Economy and Community Department outlined the content of the report and the Economic Development Manager / North Wales Shared Prosperity Fund Manager elaborated on the specific steps in terms of support for businesses.

Since the time of writing the report, it was noted:-

- That the process of selecting projects that would receive funding from the Shared Prosperity Fund had ended, and that over £3m would be distributed to businesses.
- This was far below the 185 applications worth £10m that had been received, and should the Council have more time and resources, then many more could certainly have been supported.
- That the £1m available through the Arfor programme had been distributed to 20 businesses and, once again, the demand was much higher than the resources available.

Members were then given an opportunity to ask questions and submit observations.

It was noted that the UK Government's method of distributing funding from the Shared Prosperity Fund was very defective. Specific reference was made to the lack of regional and national projects, the lack of strategy on a level higher than county level, the urgency to spend substantial funding in a short period of time which meant prioritising projects that could be realised quickly and the great uncertainty regarding what would happen after April 2025. In response, it was noted that some things were better provided on a national level, some on a regional level, some on a county level and some on an even more local level, but that no model was ideal. There was a need to plan on which level allocations and decisions should be made, but there had been no opportunity to do so in this case due to the timetable.

It was enquired whether some proposals were funded in their entirety and the rest were being refused, or whether there was an element of partially funding some schemes. In response, it was noted that it had been decided not to fund some proposals in their entirety to be able to support more businesses, and that all of the partially funded businesses had confirmed that it was possible for them to deliver their project within the timetable with less funding.

It was asked whether the cost to the fund of employing additional officers to administrate the scheme included redundancy costs? A request was also made for information about the background of those officers and what would they be likely to do after the scheme ended as it would be beneficial to keep the expertise within the Council or within the region. In response, it was noted:-

- That the cost of additional staff to administrate the scheme was an eligible cost of the grant, therefore, Cyngor Gwynedd did not pay for those staff.
- That the small number of staff employed to run the projects in Gwynedd was a combination of people with previous background in the field and new young people in the field, and that the larger team across North Wales included a number of secondments from among senior officers from Gwynedd and other counties, along with former officers with a background of managing large funds, and European funding specifically.
- The team, from a grant administrating aspect, had to be grown due to the need to process so many projects in a relatively short period and once again in this case, it was managed to give young people an opportunity to obtain experience in the field.

It was enquired how confident the officers were that it was possible for funded projects to be spent against the timetable. In response, it was noted that it could be confident that it would be possible to spend the funding as a project maturity and implementation ability assessment criteria had been built into the process. Nevertheless, should there be concern that a project was not delivering, there would be an opportunity to recycle the funding.

It was noted that the Department was to be congratulated for coordinating all grants across North and West Wales, but as no strategic direction had been provided by the UK or Welsh Governments, it was important to prioritise the preparation of a strategy for the benefit of Gwynedd. In response, it was noted:-

- It was fully agreed with the observation, but it had not been possible to complete the work of preparing a Gwynedd Economy Plan due to the additional requirements on the Service to manage and administrate the funding programmes.
- Now that the decision-making work in terms of allocating the funding had been completed, the work of preparing the plan would soon begin and it was important that lessons from the experience of current arrangements were learnt and that the priorities for Gwynedd were clear for the future.

It was asked whether there was a risk that the Holyhead Freeport could have a negative influence on the Gwynedd economy. In response, it was noted:-

- That this question had been asked and that assurance had been given by officers that the Holyhead Freeport would not lead to any '*displacement*'. Nevertheless, no evidence had been seen so far of how this could be managed and it was greatly hoped that there would be a discussion on a regional level soon.
- It was understood that the process of preparing the business plan for the Freeport was still ongoing and it was not yet clear what impact it would have on the region.
- Details were not available either regarding which benefits or which detrimental impact the new Economic Investment Zone in the East would have on the rest of the region, and the situation would have to be monitored.
- There was concern about any potential impact the Freeport would have on some specific areas such as Bangor, due to the tax advantages offered to businesses being set-up in the Freeport area. It had been promised that guidelines would be in place which meant that this would not happen, but Gwynedd had not been part of any discussions about this or had not seen a plan. Once plans would be available, the officers would be eager to scrutinise them and to see how collaboration could take place.

It was enquired what plans would there be to try to attract major employers to Gwynedd as a result of drawing up a Gwynedd Economy Plan as there was concern that any major businesses that imported / exported goods would select Anglesey and businesses transporting goods within British borders would select Flint / Wrexham. Whilst accepting that Gwynedd could not offer tax advantages etc. to such businesses, it was asked what other support Gwynedd could offer those companies. In response, it was noted:-

- That major companies were unwilling to locate in marginal areas such as Gwynedd, which was far from the market with less workforce and higher transport costs, without an incentive for them to do so.
- That there was an incentive for companies to locate in the Freeport area, e.g. funding to construct units and taxation relief, but this would not happen in Gwynedd.
- That these were the type of questions to raise when preparing the Economy Plan as it was not anticipated that Cyngor Gwynedd resources could help.

Concern was expressed that the Parc Bryn Cegin site in Bangor had been empty for over two decades and, although the local member of parliament was doing a lot of work on this, it was noted that things were not progressing. It was also asked where the new businesses units would be located. In response, it was noted:-

- That the new units would be located in Minffordd and provide for the whole county centrally.
- That there was also demand in other areas and it was awaited to see what the private sector market would provide itself in some areas.
- That there was a shortage of industrial sites in Gwynedd and sites would need to be purchased despite the fact that Parc Bryn Cegin, which was in Welsh Government ownership, was empty.
- That the joint Local Development Plan with Anglesey showed that there was sufficient industrial land within the plan area, but those lands were on Anglesey, and it was hoped that it would be possible to examine this as part of the Plan review with the aim of having more land and property provision in Gwynedd.

It was noted that Gwynedd was one of the poorest counties in Britain and was very reliant on the Levelling Up and Shared Prosperity Funds. In response, it was noted:-

- It was believed that Gwynedd's economy was overdependent on the tourism industry and there was a need to generate more local benefit from it.
- That rural Wales had a serious depopulation problem and an economic plan was needed for the rural areas of Wales.
- That there was a need to create a much easier environment to construct small or smaller units as there was demand for them. It was believed that there were opportunities for substantial investment across the countryside and we needed to look much more carefully at our development plans to facilitate this.
- It was not believed that the current Government understood the rural situation and that it was easier to see economic progress in urban areas with economic enthusiasm.
- That very good and extremely successful businesses existed in Gwynedd that offered good employment to workers and that companies chose Gwynedd as the staff were stable and loyal.
- There was a need to recognise that there was a thriving economic foundation across Gwynedd and that this foundation meant that we were not open to substantial economic changes.

- That opportunities for extension needed to be created for the small businesses we had in Gwynedd and that investment on a regional and national level was needed, along with a national plan for rural Wales.

It was emphasised that it was important that Gwynedd electors understood that the Council had not created all of the uncertainty regarding the future of resources to support the local economy, and that the UK Government was responsible for the situation, and this in order to gain electoral advantage.

It was noted that it was important that people understood that Cyngor Gwynedd had not caused the financial crisis, and that the Westminster Government was to blame for providing less money to us every year.

It was noted that some applicants who had been unsuccessful for grants felt that all their work on the applications had been in vain and it was enquired how it could be explained to those people that Cyngor Gwynedd was not to blame for this, and that the work completed by them would be important for other projects in future. In response, it was noted:-

- It was hoped, in every case, with the exception of completing the form, that the work would not be in vain.
- It was hoped that the officers would see everyone who had been unsuccessful with their grant applications to see if there were different ways of funding the schemes. Also, the Service would refer an officer from Business Wales to the applicants, certainly therefore in terms of the larger grant applications to see if there was a different way of supporting the business to deliver the project.
- That more grants would certainly come along in future although the details were not yet known, and everyone was advised to continue working on the details of their projects so that they were as mature as possible when another opportunity would arise for a grant.
- Members were asked to pass on information to the Service about any projects that were concerned about their situation so that officers could contact them.

It was asked whether it was understood why Gwynedd's economic inactivity and unemployment rates fluctuated more than in several other places. In response, it was noted:-

- That much of the data generated was based on surveys and samples, and the smaller the size of the geographical area, then the less certain the size of the sample.
- That there was a need to exercise caution with this type of data and it was important to look at the usual trend.

Looking at the additional value indicators and average wages etc., it was noted that the usual pattern was that the UK was doing better than Wales and Gwynedd. It was enquired, whilst accepting that we did not have economic stimuli to make a huge difference, whether it was fully understood why that gap remained for so much time. In response, it was noted:-

- Although the information, specifically in terms of economy performance, showed a slight pattern of back and forth movement, the trend remained very similar.
- That Gwynedd's economy was more marginal and also a traditional economy in many ways, with sectors based on smaller than average units, and that this underlined the scale of the challenge.
- That a long-term, consistent effort was necessary over many generations to close some of the gap, and although Gwynedd wages were never going to be on the same level as wages in London, there were several other advantages of working in Gwynedd.

- That the gap was currently too vast, but what mattered was that we were moving towards improvement.

It was noted that there was a trend for economic policy formulated by the UK Government to favour London, and that the same was true on a Cardiff level, and that other countries made more of an effort to ensure that regional parts thrived.

Referring to the table in the report, it was enquired in which fields and in which parts of the county the 101 Gwynedd residents who had received support so far in 2023/24 had secured a job. It was also asked how many of the 364 local individuals who had attended the job fairs had now secured employment. In response, it was noted:-

- That the report specifically referred to activities involved with the Gwaith Gwynedd programme which targeted those people who were farthest from the labour market, people who had been unemployed for a prolonged period or people with health conditions which had often prevented them from working in the past.
- That the Gwaith Gwynedd team mentored the individuals over an extended period and what happened in the long-term was also monitored to ensure that the individuals did not drop out of employment and to assist them to move on to better jobs within their sector.
- That job fairs were used as an opportunity to identify people who needed additional support to gain access to employment.

It was asked if it was anticipated how the shrinking of public sector funding over the next few years would affect businesses in the county, considering that businesses received indirect funding from the public sector by means of contracts and employee spending. In response, it was noted that it was hoped that this would be part of the brief for a Gwynedd Economy Plan as there was a need to understand what the indirect impact as a result of the shrinking of the public sector budget in general was on partners in Gwynedd.

It was noted that the quality of jobs, not unemployment, was the main problem in Gwynedd and, by creating more jobs, it was asked how it could be ensured that the local population took advantage of this, rather than the immigrant population, and whether it was possible to avoid this at all as low quality jobs would be necessary anyway. In response, it was noted that conditions had been introduced attached to grant proposals, including a condition that the business, if it did not already do so, would pay the Real Living Wage to all their employees by the end of the year.

It was asked whether it would be possible to provide a full list at the end of the grant allocation period of the businesses that had received support, along with how many jobs had been created, as it would be beneficial to know more about the geographical distribution of the funding. After a period of time, it was also asked whether the Department would look back to see if those businesses had been a success or a failure, and what would the timetable be for this. In response, it was noted:-

- That the names of successful businesses and the proposals made by them would be published.
- The applications received had to be considered, therefore, if no applications had been received from specific areas, there was a need to address this in the new plan.
- Although consideration would be needed on how to evaluate the plan beyond the programme period, the Department would continue to monitor it to see how the company had developed over the years, and also maintain the relationship with the person who has received support so that it would be possible for them to receive further support or benefit from further opportunities by the Council and others.

Concern was expressed about the reduction in the Gwynedd population and it was noted that this would mean that more businesses which employed local people would have to close. Also, as Gwynedd was a county that was very dependent on agriculture, and that farmers were facing substantial cuts in payments, concern was expressed about what would happen to Gwynedd's rural economy in future. In response, it was noted:-

- Concerns regarding the latest agriculture plans were understood and that messages were being conveyed from the Welsh Local Government Association Rural Forum to the Government.
- It was believed that we were overdependent on agriculture and tourism in Gwynedd and a much more diverse economy was needed.
- That risks had to be taken when creating employment in the rural areas and be ready to attract people from outside the county if they were willing to establish a business and create employment for local people.
- That our ability as a Council to change the situation was very sparse, but we would do our best and consider all of these matters in the discussions when developing the Economy Plan, and return to the scrutineers with the details of the plan.

**RESOLVED to accept the report and to note the observations.**

## **6. EQUALITY OBJECTIVES CONSULTATION DOCUMENT 2024-28**

The Cabinet Member for Corporate Support and officers from the Corporate Support Department were welcomed to the meeting.

Submitted - the report of the Cabinet Member for Corporate Support explaining that the Council had a specific duty, as part of the Equality Act 2010, to review its Equality Objectives by the end of March 2024, and she invited the input of the scrutineers to the draft objectives.

The Cabinet Member set out the context and thanked the officers for all their work in this field.

Members were then given an opportunity to ask questions and submit observations.

It was noted that the most important thing to remember in terms of equality was that the starting point was not the same for everyone and that sometimes the starting point needed to be moved so that people with barriers which prevented them from being equal in society could move forward. With that, it was asked which steps the Council were taking, for example, to give jobs to people with those inequalities and to give them an opportunity to step forward. In response, it was noted:-

- That the intention of the objectives of the Strategic Equality Plan was to try to move things forward for those people who experienced inequality and that four objectives were working towards action points on this.
- That the first objective was involved with employment and that this was in accordance with the guidance.
- Consideration had also been given to what else that needed to be done. The staff had been asked to complete a questionnaire noting their characteristics, but many did not do so for various reasons, but without this information, it was not possible to know what the situation was within the Council and who needed the most encouragement. As a result, it was decided that actions points were required which would move this forward.
- That the Council had a legal duty to be a welcoming employer to all, and the right attitudes were needed within the organisation operating in a manner that was welcoming to all and encouraged everyone to come and work for us, e.g. it was

possible to undertake reasonable adaptations to the workplace for people who felt that they needed support to come and work for the Council.

- That there was room to improve this again and that part of the Plan on employment set an ambition to undertake specific steps towards ensuring that Gwynedd was the chosen employer for all.

It was enquired how more women could be attracted to senior managers' posts. In response, it was noted:-

- That the Women in Leadership field was a priority field within the Council and that a project working on changing the culture had been in place for many years and making great progress.
- That a pilot scheme was underway examining how job application forms were being screened to ensure that there was no type of unnecessary bias.
- In terms of other characteristics, that an equality core group met on a quarterly basis and included representatives from groups representing people with different characteristics, to obtain specialist opinion from them on different matters.
- As part of the engagement, that officers had visited several groups, including young carers and Pride, to obtain their opinion before drawing up the draft, and it was intended to undertake further engagement work mainly with different groups for this part of the consultation.

General concern was expressed that identity politics focusing on relatively small groups in society evaded the basic inequality, namely the socio-economic inequality, and the fact that the report provided more detail on reducing this to close the pay gap was welcomed, as that was where our focus should be.

Concern was expressed that women were being over-represented in low salary jobs, e.g. in the care field.

It was noted that the cohort that had responded to the questionnaire was not representational of the county's population linguistically (33% compared to approximately 64%) and it was suggested that this could explain the anti-Welsh undertones felt here and there in the observations. It was noted that officers had responded quite firmly to this in the observations, but some discriminatory observations in other fields had been omitted, and it was asked whether the hostile and disparaging observations towards the Welsh language should also be omitted and not addressed either. In response, it was noted:-

- As so much of this was being said, not only in this questionnaire, but in other questionnaires as well, it was felt that this needed to be addressed as it was important to teach people about our way of looking at things, and our way of operating in Gwynedd.
- Therefore, there was an intention to have an action point stating that we would sell our vision of the Welsh language and our logic for asking people for the skill of being able to speak Welsh.

Reference was made to the following sentence in the report "*Equality officers also met with various groups of people with protected characteristics, including young carers, disabled people, LGBTQ+ people, etc.*" and it was noted that it was astounding that there was no report relating to equality and equal opportunity recognising all of those groups.

It was noticed that the response to the questionnaire from the Bala / Penllyn area was low compared to other areas and it was asked why so few young people had responded to the questionnaire. In response, it was noted that young carers and young people in Gisda were visited in an attempt to ensure that we got a representation of young voices. It was also intended to question the Young Farmers and Coleg Meirion-Dwyfor.



It was enquired how it was intended to stimulate the interest of young people who had left school in the Gwynedd Youth Forum. In response, it was noted that the most important thing, as with every characteristic, was to ask the young people themselves what was the best way of doing so, and to act accordingly.

It was asked how Gwynedd compared with other councils in terms of equality in the workplace and what steps were being taken to ensure that the entire workforce placed an emphasis on this. In response, it was noted:-

- That other councils experienced the same obstacles as Gwynedd in reality and that there was work to be done on why we were emphasising this field.
- As there were gaps in our systems in terms of including people with characteristics in our employment arrangements, it was intended to establish a staff forum that would be a way of having a two-way dialogue and gather ideas to set-up schemes based on clear evidence.

The fact that the education field had been included in the objectives was welcomed, but it was noted that the action points were matters that related to the world of education, and that the equality link was not clear in all of them. The reason why the action points related to equality was explained. It was stated that every school was required to have its own equality plan and these action points would establish a framework as a starting point for the schools to develop their own plans.

The Equality Advisor was thanked for her work and commitment to the field and everyone was urged to attend one of the equality training sessions that she organised.

**RESOLVED to accept the report and to note the observations.**

## **7. EDUCATION ANNUAL REPORTS**

Officers of the Education Department and GwE were welcomed to the meeting.

### **7A EDUCATION ANNUAL REPORT 2022-23**

Submitted - Education Annual Report 2022-23.

The Head of Education Department set out the context noting his desire to facilitate the scrutiny work by moving towards producing reports that would give more to scrutineers in terms of what we faced, but less in terms of the bulk of reports, which would also give more prominence to the challenge facing the schools, the staff and supporting services.

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

Disappointment was expressed that there was no reference to special schools in the report. It was noted that the report referred to the problem of recruiting classroom assistants in the mainstream, but there was no mention of the special schools where the problem was much worse. Although the work of assistants at the special schools was very intense, it was also noted that they received the same salary as mainstream assistants. In response, it was noted:-

- That no specific part of the report dealt with special schools, but that services referred to encompassed the primary, secondary, all-through and special sectors. Possibly, this could be re-examined and the special sector could be explained at the next annual report.
- The problem of recruiting assistants was not unique to Gwynedd. Should individuals work full-time hours all-year round, it could be argued that they were on a fair salary,

but as they worked less than a usual working week, and during term time only, it was difficult to attract people to the role.

- There was work to be done to promote the jobs and profession including a campaign on social media sites and discussions with Coleg Meirion-Dwyfor with the aim of holding an event with the schools.
- In terms of the special schools, there was a piece of work to be undertaken in terms of evaluating jobs within those schools and structures within the school which would, possibly, reflect the intensity of the work faced compared to the mainstream.
- There was also room to examine the duties carried out by assistants on levels 1-4 in the schools to see if there were higher roles, but below a teacher, that those individuals could undertake, such as covering lessons and undertaking supply work as required.

It was enquired whether every school had now been informed of its linguistic category and what exactly was intended to ensure that the new categorisation system developed and embedded to deliver Gwynedd's ambition in this field. In response, it was noted:-

- That work was already being undertaken in the background in terms of commissioning an external consultant to work with the Department in respect of the Language Policy, and that a timetable was in place to get everything ready by the end of the current financial year.
- That there would be an opportunity for members to be part of the process of formulating the Language Policy, and it was intended to report back to this committee in March on progress against the recommendations of the Gwynedd Category 3 Secondary Schools Scrutiny Investigation.
- What was being said regarding the pressures in terms of the language, the language categorisation etc. was understood and the Head of Department would work with the team to put this together.
- That the schools were aware of their category.
- That the categorisation was currently non-statutory guidance, but it would be statutory in the Welsh Language Education Bill.
- That the categorisation was not necessarily going to drive our ambition in Gwynedd, but rather the policy and provision within the schools. With that, it was believed that the work being carried out in terms of policy and working with schools and stakeholders was more important than the national categorisation system which, in essence, was a comparatively administrative system.
- That the Department collected data on the current provision that schools had and also asked every school to share priorities in terms of developing, maintaining and increasing the Welsh language provision.
- That the Department also scrutinised the Welsh language priorities with the GwE Supporting Improvement Advisor, who was responsible for the Welsh language, and also worked with GwE to provide guidance and support for specific schools on the priorities of their school development plan.
- With regards to the Welsh Language Education Bill, that the Department also examined the financial implications of transferring to the new system and how much the provision and support would mean to us financially as an Authority when it would come into force.

The importance of seeing the linguistic data was emphasised. In response, it was noted that the data was being collected annually and shared with several stakeholders.

Concern was expressed that the Authority had little supervision of the implementation of the Welsh Language Charter and the Secondary Sector Language Strategy and, by speaking

to some schools, it appeared that they did not have a charter scheme, and that they only completed an annual questionnaire. In light of this, it was recommended that a priority be added to the report that the Authority would have more supervision of the implementation of the Welsh Language Charter and the Secondary Sector Language Strategy in our schools, and also produced a report for each school. In response, it was noted:-

- That the Welsh Language Charter would be relaunched in its new form at the Urdd Eisteddfod this year, and there were plans to promote it on a national scale.
- Following the relaunch, it was intended to recommence the accreditation process so that schools could apply for a gold, silver or bronze award to recognise their efforts.
- That a Welsh Language Charter Coordinator and Secondary Sector Language Strategy Coordinator were providing support to the schools and also worked very closely with GwE to ensure that grant funding of the Language Charter was being spent specifically to meet the linguistic needs of the different catchment areas. Very good work was being undertaken in the catchment areas in terms of providing experiences, and also developing staff training regarding the values of using the Welsh language socially.
- That the Catchment Language Coordinators coordinated the feeding of information to the Welsh Language Charter Coordinator and that the work was being monitored and ongoing.
- That children in every school responded to questionnaires about their social use of the Welsh language and that this then presented a Language Web to the school so that it was possible to identify strengths and areas for development in the context of the Welsh language socially.
- That the School Council, alongside teachers, was drawing up an action plan to develop the specific areas that needed to be addressed and that the Authority monitored this work, and also worked on a national level to ensure that this occurred across Wales.
- That the Language Web and actions within the schools would be scrutinised even further as a result of reintroducing the accreditation process.

It was noted that there was no foreword to the annual report recognising the support and contribution of governors, or the learners either, when implementing educational strategies. In response, it was noted that this was something of an omission and that children, young people, governors and the entire community that supported the education sector should have been thanked.

It was suggested that the report was lacking in evidence, e.g. figures / percentages, to support and justify what had been noted. In response, it was noted that it was intended to move away from the idea that reports did not always highlight a weakness, by providing reports that also underlined the challenges to strike a balance. Along with the intention to provide a timeline on targets when setting future priorities, this meant that it would be much easier to report to scrutineers next years in the annual report.

A request was made for an update on the situation in terms of recruiting educational psychologists as this was a matter of priority. In response, it was noted:-

- That the situation had not improved and it was intended to send a joint letter to the Government between Gwynedd, Anglesey and Conwy Councils drawing attention once again to the concern regarding the training method and the difficulty in recruiting bilingual psychologists.
- It may be possible for the Department to recruit individuals who were finishing their training for the next academic year.

Concern was expressed that the increase in the number of children with profound needs and very challenging behaviour attending the ABC centres could put more pressure on the two special schools in the county which were nearing, or had reached, full capacity. In response, it was noted:-

- That the Early Years Additional Learning Needs Team included teachers who supported the *cylchoedd meithrin* as well as a small team that supported children with additional learning needs in the early years.
- That children were now identified early and that comprehensive individual development plans were being prepared for them before they started school.
- That considerable increase had been seen in recent years in the number of children with additional needs as the Service had intentionally proceeded to look for children, or to provide for children with needs in the early years, but the numbers had now reconciled.
- Although the numbers were fairly consistent in terms of early years referrals, that the density was higher and the Service responded to this.
- That the purpose of the ABC centres, if they worked effectively, was to prevent children from reaching special schools by equipping them with the social skills etc. they needed to be able to cope with mainstream education.
- This did not always work and it was true to say that there was a pathway from the ABC centres to the special schools.
- That the Service also examined how to up-skill the mainstream schools in terms of young children being admitted with more complex difficulties, and to develop the collaboration between the special schools and the mainstream, by sharing good practice.
- That the capacity of the special schools was a problem and that the Authority was looking into this. There was no short-term solution but a discussion needed to be held with the special schools regarding the best way to release space in the classrooms.

Concern was expressed regarding the waiting times for neuro-developmental assessments and a request was made for further information about the collaboration with the Neuro-developmental Team to try to address the issue. In response, it was noted:

- That considerable investment had been made by the Government, not as much in the education sector, but in other services in terms of supporting learners with neuro-developmental difficulties.
- That a lot of children were referred but that not all of them would ultimately get a diagnosis.
- In terms of the education system, the diagnosis was not examined, but rather the needs being reported.
- That the work undertaken jointly with other teams in the field included mapping out what everyone provided as support, ensuring that no efforts were duplicated and making the best of the resources that everyone had, and also perhaps examining what training was required and the input to families.
- That everything needed to be simplified across the children, health and education services to make things easier for families so that they received key input.

It was asked what the Department was doing to try to get more teachers and assistants to apply for the vacant posts in some schools. It was noted that children's behaviour towards teachers had substantially worsened as a result of the Covid period and this was why the presence of an assistant in the class was so important. It was also noted that it was difficult to recruit Welsh speakers to schools in the Tywyn area, and it was asked how it was intended to find the people with the best qualifications to come to work at the new Language Centre that would open in Tywyn. In response, it was noted:-

- That we had a real challenge in Gwynedd in terms of inclusion and behaviour in the schools and that this had been highlighted in Estyn's report.
- That the Department was currently giving priority to Estyn recommendations and examining plans that would ensure better provision across the primary and secondary sectors for children with increasing challenging behaviours.
- That these challenging behaviours, as well as the increased workload, were certainly having an impact on recruiting staff to the profession. It was also noted that it was becoming increasingly difficult to recruit headteachers and that several current headteachers were teaching for 3-4 days a week on top of the responsibility of being a headteacher.
- There was possibly a need to look at creating some sort of campaign to recruit teachers and assistants for Gwynedd, and the best people to sell the profession were the teachers and headteachers themselves. Although there were challenging behaviours, there were much more positive than negative experiences in the classroom, and this needed to be promoted.

It was noted that the recruitment issues were not unique to Gwynedd and that pressure should be placed on the Welsh Government for more funding for teachers' pay, or otherwise, we would potentially be looking at the closure of rural schools due to a teacher shortage. In response, it was noted:-

- That the financial situation in our schools was difficult with 38 schools in a situation of over-staffing, and this with a 3% cut over three years.
- That there was a reduction in the number of children across the county which further contributed towards the deficit and made headteachers' situation difficult as they would have to make difficult decisions over the next few weeks and months in terms of staffing structure and how to proceed in the future.
- That this was the most challenging period ever seen in the world of education and it appeared that several people who had the ability to step into a headteacher's post had decided to wait until the wave had passed before taking that step.

It was noted that the pay and work conditions made it difficult to recruit teachers and that the actual hours teachers worked made the pay per hour relatively small.

It was enquired how it was intended to cope with the lack of headteachers over the next few years. In response, it was noted:-

- That the new Education Strategy would be an opportunity to discuss this with the schools.
- That the potential solutions included working with headteachers in other schools and encouraging people who hold back from applying for a headteacher's post to step forward to fill the gap, even if this was only on a temporary basis, accepting that maintaining this type of administration, which was not resilient, would place additional pressure on the Education Department and GwE.

Reference was made to the difficulties of recruiting technicians in schools and it was asked what different ways were available to support schools in terms of IT provision. In response, it was noted:-

- That there was a problem in recruiting science technicians, as well as IT technicians.
- As well as sharing technicians with other schools, that the Council's central technicians had been providing an outreach service to support technical work in schools that could not appoint a technician, but that a technician was required there and then for the majority of tasks.

- That the Department had been working with Bangor University to see if there were students who would be interested in undertaking this type of work, but unfortunately, the salaries did not attract these type of individuals.
- That the Department had also been working with Coleg Meirion Dwyfor and schools, e.g. to see if anyone would be interested in taking a gap year after A Levels to do this type of work, and although it was managed to get a few names, those individuals had not followed on with the offer.
- That the Digital Strategy was aiming to increase the skills of learners so that they left school with digital skills that would enable them to deliver these posts in due course.
- There was a need to try to reduce the demand for technicians initially by upgrading the devices currently in schools, although, it must be borne in mind of course that the increase in the number of devices across the county would lead to more demand for technical support.

It was suggested that the result of cuts in school budgets would be larger classes and it was asked to what extent it was anticipated that the curriculum would need to be limited to do right by the core subjects by assigning more hours for them as classes would be larger, and to what extent this would then militate against the type of developments that were part of the new curriculum. In response, it was noted:-

- When drawing up lesson timetables, that schools always started with the core subjects and built on this.
- As the new curriculum comes into force, it was anticipated that it could become more difficult for smaller schools to strike the balance across the five areas of learning and experience due to the need for all of the expertise and staffing variety, but in terms of class size, schools should have viable classes that can learn.
- That the inclusion system and all of the available support should ensure that a school never reaches a point of having to assign more hours for the core subjects.
- That it was not anticipated that the new curriculum would be limited, but schools would certainly face challenges in moving forward.

It was noticed that there was no reference in the report to the system of returning children who attended the language centres to the mother school on the fifth day of the week. In response, as the immersion system in Gwynedd in its new form had now completed a whole year cycle, it was noted that the Service had proceeded to consult and engage with stakeholders about an evaluation of that system. Once the observations would be collated and the process completed, the matter would be brought before this committee for scrutiny.

It was noted that there was great concern in one area of the county in particular that returning children from the language centres to the mother school for 1 day a week was affecting the language used on the school playground. It was noted that a member had intended to submit a question about this to the last Full Council meeting, but it had been refused. In response, should an evaluation of the system prove that the system needed to change, it was noted that the Serious would examine this seriously.

In response to a question, it was explained that there would be a review of the immersion system in an internal review, but it would include all voices.

It was asked how many children with English as an Additional Language were there in Gwynedd, especially in the primary sector. In response, it was noted that the exact figure could be provided for the member.

It was asked about the Language Policy situation in terms of children who did not speak English or Welsh, and it was asked why they were not, at least in the primary sector, proceeding to learn Welsh immediately. It was also asked which lessons could be learnt by

examining the English learning system, which was also a specialist linguistic field. In response, it was noted:-

- That children who did not speak English or Welsh were being admitted immediately to the language centres, and that they also learnt English as an additional language. There was no policy stating that children had to learn English first.
- That 4% of the children in the language centres last term were children who had arrived without any Welsh or English.
- That the Service and the English as an Additional Language Team shared immersion values and principles, and also held training with schools that had seen a substantial influx of children who did not speak English or Welsh.
- It was attempted to ensure that children did not receive input from both teams at the same time and that they initially attended the language centres and then received support from the English as an Additional Language Team.

It was noted that:-

- The Youth Service had been located in three different Council departments over the past two years, and it had also been through quite a substantial restructuring process.
- The report mentioned looking at new budgetary opportunities, and it was enquired what was meant by this.
- That a questionnaire shared with young people before Christmas was very complicated and that this raised concern regarding the reliability of the consultation.
- Would a review of the Service involve undertaking a full consultation or only providing a questionnaire?

In response, it was noted:-

- The Youth Service would be welcomed to the Education Department and it was believed that this was its natural home within the Council given the special work the Service carried out with schools.
- Good work was also being undertaken with young people leaving schools, and who possibly, needed support to move on in terms of their working life and training etc., and this fitted in well within the education system.
- The community youth work was being funded by different financial sources and grants etc., and it was wished to examine the consistency of provision across the areas.
- The youth support in terms of schools was consistent and available for all schools and that the work, which was undertaken on a multi-agency basis, was praised.
- The exceptionally good work in terms of post-16 learners was being undertaken in accordance with the framework to support learners who left education and training.
- In terms of the observation regarding the complexity of the questionnaires, that the Service would examine this and ensure that the content was clear and coherent for all.
- In terms of financial implications, although there was a cut to the Youth Service in terms of the cuts highlighted, that the Service had been fortunate to some extent that empty posts etc. meant that it was possible to cut without losing key individuals from the service.

It was noted that:-

- It was disagreed that the Education Department was the perfect place for the Youth Service and that it should be a separate service that bridged several departments given that the Council Plan for the next five years referred to the importance of

providing leisure and socialising opportunities beyond an education establishment for children and young people.

- That an increase had been seen in the number of young people finding it difficult to be part of normal education since the pandemic period, and that the Youth Service was very important, almost as a preventative service, so that young people did not get into a difficult situation.
- That the work currently carried out by the Youth Service with scarce resources was unbelievable.
- That the excellent provision offered by the Porthi Dre charity in Caernarfon did a massive different to the well-being of young people.
- That the report mentioned that 1,300 accreditations had been completed by young people and, although this was a success to the young people, a serious question should be asked in terms of the ultimate value of these accreditations. It was asked whether the Service contacted those young people who had completed accreditations in the past to enquire if those accreditations had helped them to find work or training. Although the priority was for young people to get the opportunity to interact and socialise, it was also noted that the need to complete accreditations could also be a stumbling block for young people to engage with the Youth Service.
- That the report noted that the Youth Service had engaged with 65% of young people from Tier 1 and 2 (Number of Gwynedd's most vulnerable young people), which meant that it had not been managed to engage with the other 35%. While recognising that it was not possible to reach everyone, and that there had been a great increase in demand, it was asked what advance planning was being undertaken to ensure that the demand could be better reached.

In response, it was noted:-

- That the answer in terms of how to get more to engage with the Youth Service could be seen in the fact that the Service worked with children within the schools, and work with them in a different way to teachers and assistants.
- It was agreed that the need to complete accreditations could be a stumbling block for young people to engage with the Youth Service, and this needed to be examined. However, some young people, such as individuals who did not engage as well in school, received real value from the accreditations as they allowed them to have better access to further education etc. that they would not have had through the school curriculum alone.
- In terms of encouraging more young people to be part of the Youth Service, a strategy on promoting the Service was underway and, possibly, visiting Porthi Dre would be one way of getting young people to better engage with the Youth Service.

The teachers' unions representative noted that she had questions for the Head of Education and GwE Managing Director but, unfortunately, she had to leave the meeting. GwE's Managing Director asked her to e-mail him the questions so that he could respond directly.

It was noticed that the report noted that 99.16% of school staff had an up-to-date DBS, which was a very high percentage, but it should be 100%, and it was asked whether the fact applications were being processed etc. was the reason for this. In response, it was noted:

- That the percentage should clearly be 100% and that the Department was working towards this. Despite this, reaching 100% was nearly impossible, especially if individuals had been suspended from work and, therefore, failing to process their DBS, but still on the payroll until the investigation was ongoing. Also, there were supply teachers, who did not teach any more but had remained on the Authority's list, and one or two individuals awaiting their results etc. in terms of the DBS.



- That the Authority had a list noting in which schools and services the individuals without a DBS were based and that a Safeguarding Officer would contact each one of them on a monthly basis to ensure that the number was as low as it could be.
- That the number of staff without an up-to-date DBS had reduced from 96 to 26 in 3 months.

It was asked whether or not it could be clear if the number of children receiving school meals was on the rise, and whether campaigns to get children to eat healthily affected this. In response, it was noted:-

- That the offer of free lunch for primary sector learners from Reception to Year 6 had been operational in Gwynedd since the beginning of last September, and although the provision was available for children, that work still needed to be undertaken in terms of completing the installation of kitchen equipment etc.
- An increase had been seen in the number of children receiving school meals since September, although, possibly, that this increase had not been as much as expected in some schools, and there was room to promote the offer a bit more.
- Some still thought possibly that the offer was not open to all and that the sense of stigma surrounding free school meals remained.
- That it was intended to submit a report to this committee in March on the Free School Meal Project and, by then, the Department would have gathered headteachers' opinions about what increase they felt they had seen in their schools, whether it had improved the healthy eating element by children and whether or not it had positively affected the behaviours or education of the children during periods after lunch.
- That the Department also worked with two schools on a pilot scheme to find out to what extent more intensive work could be carried out with some families to try to encourage them to take advantage of the offer.

It was noted that the school day could be expensive for parents, and it was asked whether work was underway to assess if there were children missing school as their parents could not afford everything that was required. In response, it was noted:-

- That work was currently being undertaken to specifically examine the cost of sending a child to school in Gwynedd.
- That parents' response so far to the questionnaires sent to stakeholders had been good, explaining the frustration, not only in terms of the fact that there were costs, but that those costs tended to occur at the same time. The Department would also examine whether there were comments about attendance in particular when responses would come in.

It was enquired what was the reason for the gap between what was in the budget and the actual cost of school transport. In response, it was noted:-

- That the transport budget in Gwynedd had been overspending for many years and that this had to be examined over the next few weeks and months.
- That the situation was complex and the transport budget was difficult to manage for several reasons, including children moving schools, children moving in and out of care, some children with special needs that were being met outside the local area, the need to transport children to a range of different establishments, including ABC centres, language centres and special schools, the fact that contractors were a combination of bus and taxi companies and that some contractors gave up the contract and re-tendered for the contract for a higher price.

- That it was intended to appoint a Transport Manager for the Education Department in the next few days so that one person within the Department took responsibility for transport.
- That the demand and provision had to be examined to see if there was a more cost-effective way of transporting a child from A to B, but this was a task in itself given that, maybe, there was only one company in the market for the contract in some rural areas.

It was enquired whether the Authority had provision to ensure that equality plans were put into place in the schools. In response, in light of updating the model policies and schemes as a result of the new guidance, it was noted that the Department would provide the best tools for schools to develop their own individual equality plans.

It was asked if there was a process in place to ensure that looked-after children attended school as much as possible and whether the Department had the capacity to meet every statutory requirement in terms of looked-after children. In response, it was noted:-

- That we had the capacity but there was an issue in terms of accessing data so that looked-after children could be targeted in a timely manner as children went in and out of care before it was possible to provide anything for them in terms of the schools.
- That the Department was specifically looking at this and that the data extended further than attendance alone, and was also involved with the attainment of looked-after children.
- It was very difficult to obtain data that indicated where a looked-after child should be in terms of educational attainment and to reach an opinion regarding the effectiveness of the provision.
- That the Data Team examined the attendance of looked-after children compared to other children and found very imaginative methods to solve several barriers in terms of collecting information within the schools.

## **7B GWE ANNUAL REPORT 2022-23**

Submitted - GwE Annual Report 2022-23.

The Senior Regional Leader - Primary and Special Schools gave an overview of the contents of the report.

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

It was noted that it was wished to recognise and thank the classroom assistants for giving their time to attend training and for giving their all when undertaking the role at work every day. In response, it was noted that it was agreed with the observation and that effective assistants added substantial value to a school.

It was noted that it was heartbreaking that experienced assistants with many years' experience and knowledge in the field were leaving to other jobs that paid a better salary.

It was noted that the report was full of complimentary adjectival language and that the first paragraph of the Executive Summary on the first page of the report was repeated word for word under the Introduction and Context heading. In response, it was noted that the initial paragraph that appeared in the Executive Summary and in the report, itself was a quote from Estyn's findings on the service, not only locally in Gwynedd, but consistently across the 6 authorities in north Wales authorities.

It was noted that there was no disagreement with the main improvement priorities, but it was asked for assurance that the list of priorities would appear in the next annual report and that any progress against those matters would be reported. In response, it was noted:-

- In terms of the reporting system, that the elements identified as ones that needed developing would be incorporated in the business plans.
- That these improvement priorities were included in the business plans that were currently operational, and when there would be an opportunity to report again within a year, these would be the grounds to show progress against the identified matters.

It was noted that there was no reference in the report to PISA tests and it was asked how GwE intended to respond to the test results. In response, it was noted:-

- Due to the nature and background of Wales, it appeared that Wales had been more adversely affected coming out of the Covid period than several countries that were similar to us.
- That PISA tests were one of the Government's national indicators as something that showed how effective the education system was, but there was a risk in making statements on international tests.
- If PISA tests would become a national indicator that was counted and measured against, that a clear national strategy needed to be in place which was supported from a government level for services such as GwE, and also to a school level to ensure that our most able pupils received the opportunities to show their ability.

It was asked how important good governors were for a school to progress and what were GwE's expectations of governors. In response, it was noted:-

- That the role of a governor was to be a critical friend who worked in partnership with schools.
- There was always an invitation for governors to join in some of the work undertaken by GwE in the schools, with the headteacher's cooperation, e.g. how we reached an opinion on different things, what evidence we examined, how well a school knows itself (which also included governors), what were the priorities and what was done about them.
- The natural order would then be to scrutinise these matters in the governing body to identify the priorities and how to improve.
- Should there be a wish to hold specific workshops for governors in that role specifically, this could certainly be arranged in cooperation with the Head of Education. An opportunity would also be needed to guide councillors through the information in the new School Improvement Framework in terms of what were the responsibilities and how to deliver the role in a way that slightly changes as we progress.

It was suggested that the annual report would be much clearer if it was much more concise and GwE was asked to take this into consideration for the future.

It was asked whether GwE would be part of the work of monitoring the new Welsh Language Charter. In response, it was noted:-

- That this was not yet known as Welsh language funding, which used to come to GwE, had now been entirely in the hands of the authorities for a year.
- In terms of the new Welsh Language Charter framework, the monitoring work would be carried out by the Gwynedd and Anglesey Welsh Language Charter Coordinator and the Welsh Language Team in the authority. However, this would be a considerable challenge given the number of primary and secondary schools across the whole of Gwynedd and the fact that the Coordinator divided her time between Gwynedd and Anglesey.

- That the Department was currently working with the Welsh Government to examine the financial implications in terms of the Welsh language entirely in terms of the Welsh Language Education Bill so that it was possible to calculate and propose expenditure projections of what impact introducing the Bill would have in the hope that the Government would earmark a sum of money to correspond with this.
- Should the Authority deem that there was a commission role for GwE in terms of undertaking the monitoring work alongside the Authority, or on behalf of the Authority, it would be possible to have a discussion about this.

The opinion was expressed that the report was very superficial, especially the important evaluation sections under the '*Getting to grips with further improvements*' heading, and that some of the improvements, such as '*continuing to identify how progress looks in order to wilfully plan the next steps over time*', was very vague. It was also asked to what extent GwE monitored slippage data and progress in the Welsh education provision, and how it supervised this. In response, it was noted:-

- That GwE did not monitor data and progress in the Welsh education provision as things currently stood.
- In terms of a previous observation during the meeting about seeing the recommendations in the next annual report, it was possible, once again, that the length and breadth of what GwE could offer would be much less as we moved forward, and this was a discussion to be held over the next few weeks and months.
- That an observation had been made more than once during the meeting regarding the ambiguity of the report's language, but in terms of the length of reports, providing a much more concise report would be a small matter. However, this would raise the question in terms of the value the Council received in having such a short document, bearing in mind that there was also an external audience, namely the inspectors.
- The right balance would have to be struck to be able to show the length and breadth of the span of service that GwE provided to the schools.

**RESOLVED to accept the report and to note the observations.**

## **8. POST-16 EDUCATION PROJECT IN ARFON**

Submitted – the report of the Cabinet Member for Education detailing the journey of the Post-16 Education Project in Arfon over the past five years and she invited observations from the scrutineers.

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

Disappointment was expressed about the report on the grounds:-

- That there was no mention of reconciling post-16 education across Gwynedd.
- Although the report referred to the academic side, there was no reference to the vocational side and it was believed that separating the two cohorts of children when they were 16 years old was a huge mistake.
- That the advantage of a tertiary college was that it kept learners together until they were 18 years old and it was sad that children in Arfon did not get the same opportunity as children in Dwyfor and Meirionnydd.

In response, it was noted that it was currently possible for pupils in Arfon to study academic and vocational subjects through the sixth form in schools.

Further information was requested regarding the laith Cyf company which had been commissioned to carry out research in the field on behalf of the Education Department. In response, it was noted that the laith Cyf company was an external company with several decades of experience in linguistic planning and also experience in the field of education and training.

**RESOLVED to accept the report and to note the observations.**

The meeting commenced at 10.30am and concluded at 4.00pm.

Chair