

ITEM 8 - QUESTIONS

Questions by Elected Members

1. Question by Councillor Jina Gwyrfaï

Something which is a matter of concern to many of us is the marked increase in the number of learners in our schools who are being excluded due to unacceptable, dangerous or threatening behaviour. Nevertheless, it is a statutory duty for all children to receive education up to the age of 16. Exclusion is therefore meant to be temporary, and the Education Department – in conjunction with other Agencies – has a range of strategies to deal with these learners, with the aim of enabling the learners to return to school and continue to receive an education that will equip them into the future.

Could you outline all the strategies available in Gwynedd to deal with these young people; and also provide data to show a) what the size of the problem is, and b) how effective the current provision is?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Education, Councillor Dewi Jones

Thank you for the question.

The increase in challenging and unacceptable behaviour in schools is a cause for genuine concern for us all and it is important to state at the start that Gwynedd schools are facing the same complex challenges as those seen across Wales and the United Kingdom.

Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind that a relatively small number of pupils are responsible for the most serious incidents, and schools, Council services and partners are working very hard to try and support these young people, whilst also safeguarding staff and other learners.

As mentioned in the question, an exclusion should not be a permanent solution. Every child has a statutory right to an education up to the age of 16 and therefore we must ensure that an appropriate provision is available, even when a learner is unable to cope in a mainstream school setting or when a mainstream school cannot meet the needs of the individual.

In terms of the data, the latest picture shows a reduction in the number of exclusions, compared with the same period last year.

The number of permanent exclusions has reduced from 37 in 2024/25 to 19 to date in 2025/26.

Fixed-term exclusions have also dropped from 749 to 664.

Although this is encouraging, the nature of the cases we see are much more complex than they were a few years ago. More learners are facing mental health problems, emotional regulation difficulties, trauma, anxiety and lack of engagement with traditional education.

In order to respond to this, the Education Department, jointly with schools and partner agencies, have developed a range of strategies and provisions.

We have an alternative provision and outreach work which works directly with learners who are at risk of being excluded from education. Currently, 220 cases are open to the behaviour support service, with 38 new cases opening this year, and 42 closed as a result of positive progress.

The 12-week provision is held at Canolfan Nantlle (*Llechen Lân* - which is a provision for year 5 - 7 children) and offers an intensive period of support and rehabilitation for learners who are at risk of complete disengagement from education. 17 pupils have benefited from this provision during the year.

The *Camu i'r Copa* programme at Llanwnda supports older pupils by providing a smaller, more structured and practical environment, with a focus on re-engaging with learning. Nine learners are a part of this provision at present. These pupils are older and usually in their last two years of secondary education.

In addition, we are working with partners to provide occupational courses, practical activities, therapeutic sessions and accredited courses which help some learners to re-engage with education in a way that is more suitable for them.

In some cases, part-time timetables are used as a temporary step to re-establish attendance and reduce the risk of dangerous behaviour or anxiety.

Family support and community officers also work directly with some of the most vulnerable families to strengthen relationships, improve attendance and support stability.

At the same time, we are strengthening the multi-agency work between education, health, children's services, mental health, youth services and youth justice, because it is clear that this is not a matter for education alone.

Several of our most serious behaviour problems are linked to broader social factors, such as poverty, trauma, mental health problems and families that are under pressure. In terms of the effectiveness of the provision, we are seeing some positive signs. Exclusion levels have reduced, a substantial number of cases have been closed because of the progress seen, and more learners are continuing in education or a provision, instead of complete disengagement.

However, we also must be realistic. These challenges are substantial and a small number of pupils continue to display behaviour that poses a serious risk to staff, other learners and to themselves.

Therefore, the Education Department will continue to invest in early interventions, specialist provision and multi-agency work, in order to do our best to ensure that

schools, learners and their families receive appropriate support and that no learner is left without an education.

2. Question by Councillor Rhys Tudur

Housing Associations have recently obtained or are seeking permission for the erection of an unprecedented number of houses in individual applications in the villages of Dwyfor, Botwnnog (18), Trefor (20), Nefyn (20), Chwilog (25), y Ffôr (27), Abererch (24), in the face of local opposition of developments that are beyond a scale suitable for the size of the villages and which double the number of social housing there overnight and challenge the viability of the Welsh language. Is there any evidence to show that the Council is now listening and that it is not completely deaf to those local voices, particularly when the community councils have opposed the applications and when petitions with over 150 names have been collected?

Response from the Cabinet Member for the Environment, Councillor Craig ab Iago

The planning committee is required to make decisions within a legal framework. This means determining applications in accordance with the development plan unless material planning considerations indicate otherwise. It must also be ensured that these findings are reasonable and have a clear evidence base.

The number or origin of support or opposition is not in itself a relevant planning consideration.

However, full consideration will be given to relevant planning considerations that emerge from comments received in response to consultations on planning applications, including comments from the public, the Community Council and other consultees.

Affordable housing developments are a key part of the Council's Housing Action Plan 2020/21-2028/29 approved by the Cabinet, aiming to develop 700 affordable homes by the end of the Scheme's lifespan. Gwynedd is in a housing crisis, and affordable developments respond to the substantial need which has been identified across the county, with 4,107 individuals currently on the housing register.

The Council secures approximately £13m in grant funding annually, which allows the Council to provide housing options to those who need a home, collaborating closely with the Housing Associations as part of the Council's successful Housing Partnership.

3. Question by Councillor Gruffydd Williams

Following the fact that article 4 was quashed by a court as a result of what has been ruled as misleading details by this Council, I previously asked if this Council would apologise to campaigners who fought so hard to get Article 4 in force, and there was no apology.

The Council's right of appeal has now been refused. Therefore, is the Council finally going to apologise to the campaigners for article 4, patriots, linguists and taxpayers, following the fact that it is now clear that a shortcoming in the key paperwork caused Article 4 to be quashed and that a sum of money of over half a million has been wasted?"

Response from the Cabinet Member for the Environment, Councillor Craig ab Iago

As I noted when answering a very similar question from the Member at the Council meeting in December, we remain determined to ensure that the people of Gwynedd have access to suitable housing in their communities.

That's why the Council introduced an Article 4 Direction – as part of a package of measures to manage the significant impact of second homes and short-term holiday accommodation on the housing market.

This decision was based on significant effort, including in-depth research, extensive consultation and expert advice.

Despite our disappointment with the legal outcome and our request to appeal the High Court's decision, I am confident that our decision to introduce Article 4 has been sound and appropriate. The Council acted responsibly and in good faith in addressing issues that are hugely important to the future of our communities.

This experience, including the 12-month period during which Article 4 was in place in the Gwynedd Planning Authority Area, will be key as we decide on the best way forward.