

EDUCATION AND ECONOMY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
18/07/24

Attendance:

Councillors: Councillor Cai Larsen (Chair)

Councillors:- Jina Gwyrfai, Dawn Lynne Jones, Dewi Jones, Elwyn Jones, Gareth Tudor Jones, Gwilym Jones, Dewi Owen, Gwynfor Owen, John Pughe Roberts, Richard Glyn Roberts, Huw Llwyd Rowlands and Rhys Tudur.

Co-opted Members: Colette Owen (The Catholic Church), Sharon Roberts (Arfon Parent/Governor Representative) and Elise Poulter (NEU).

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

Present for item 7:- Arwyn Thomas (GwE Managing Director) and Alwyn Jones (GwE Assistant Director (Standards)).

Present for item 8:- Councillor Beca Brown (Cabinet Member for Education) and Gwern ap Rhisiart (Head of Education).

Present for item 9:- Councillor Beca Brown (Cabinet Member for Education), Dylan Owen (Statutory Director of Social Services), Gwern ap Rhisiart (Head of Education) and Llion Williams (Assistant Head: Well-being and Equality).

Present for item 10:- Councillor Nia Jeffreys (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Operational Economy Matters), Roland Evans (Assistant Head – Culture) and Angela Jones (Head of Eryri Partnerships – Eryri National Park).

1. ELECTION OF CHAIR

RESOLVED to elect Councillor Cai Larsen as Chair of this committee for 2024/25.

The Chair thanked his predecessor in the chair, Councillor Elwyn Jones, and also Councillor Paul Rowlinson, the former Vice-chair.

Two new members were welcomed on the committee, Councillors John Pughe and Sian Williams, and Councillors Paul Rowlinson and Sasha Williams were thanked for their service.

Sharon Roberts, the new Arfon Parent/Governor representative was welcomed on the committee, and her predecessor, Manon Williams, was thanked for her service.

The committee's best wishes were sent to Councillor Beth Lawton following a recent operation.

2. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

As there was no nomination for the Vice-chair, the item was deferred until the next meeting.

RESOLVED to defer this item until the next meeting.

3. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Iwan Huws, Beth Lawton, Llio Elenid Owen and Sian Williams; Karen Vaughan Jones (Dwyfor Parent/Governor Representative) and Gwilym Jones (NASUWT).

4. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

The Chair declared a personal interest in item 9 (Safeguarding Arrangements in Schools) on behalf of every member who were school governors. It was not a prejudicial interest, and those members did not leave the meeting during the discussion on the item.

5. URGENT ITEMS

None to note.

6. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee held on 21 March 2024, as a true record.

7. GWE ANNUAL REPORT 2023-24

Arwyn Thomas (GwE Managing Director) and Alwyn Jones (GwE Assistant Director (Standards)) were welcomed to the meeting.

The Managing Director of GwE delivered a few introductory words, thanking Cyngor Gwynedd and also this committee, for the support given to GwE and its staff over the years.

GwE's Assistant Director (Standards) provided a summary of the content of the Annual Report and members were given the opportunity to ask questions and submit observations.

GwE was thanked for preparing a concise report this year.

It was suggested that the national trends contradicted what was noted in this report. I.e. although Key Area 2 (Improving Teaching and Learning) noted that the quality of the teaching was generally robust across the sectors, another report on this meeting's agenda declared that recent publications, including Estyn and PISA reports and the personal national report on the assessments, had noted that the quality of learning and outcomes within schools and across schools etc. required improvement. In response, it was noted that levels of contradictory evidence were inevitable until the Government's direction in relation to the Accountability Framework in Wales had emerged.

It was noted that it seemed that Key Area 5 (Support and Challenge for Schools Causing Concern) focused on academic results almost without exception, and it was asked what would happen if there were concerns regarding other matters, e.g. Additional Learning Needs or the school leadership in general. In response, it was noted that the quality of leadership was at the core of all this and that its repercussions then filtered through to the quality of teaching and the provision that the children received, ultimately affecting the children's standards.

A member enquired how the 13 improvement priorities in the Annual Report 2022/23 had now reduced to 5. In response, it was noted that all aspects had been summarised into the 5 priorities in this report.

The honesty of the report was welcomed, such as the comment '*The quality of senior leadership is generally robust, but a few challenges remain in some specific areas*' and '*Inconsistency remains in the quality of implementation across the authority ...*'.

The fact that eight teachers from Gwynedd had gained a National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) this year was welcomed, but it was suggested that it would have been beneficial to state how the figure compared with the three previous years. In response, it was noted that the figure was fairly consistent in Gwynedd, and that it would be interesting to see in the next period how many would choose to use this qualification to lead in their local area.

RESOLVED to accept the report and to note the observations.

8. MIDDLE TIER REVIEW

Councillor Beca Brown (Cabinet Member for Education) and Gwern ap Rhisiart (Head of Education) were welcomed to the meeting.

Submitted – the report of the Cabinet Member for Education inviting the committee's input on the proposed changes to the way that the school improvement service would be delivered in the future.

The Cabinet Member set out the context. She thanked GwE staff for all their work and support over the years, noting that their input and expert advice had been greatly appreciated by the schools.

The Head of Education expanded on the content of the report and members were then given an opportunity to ask questions and offer observations.

It was noted that the Welsh Government's draft guidance '*Collaborative model between schools, LAs and national government*' noted that governing bodies should '*Consider their own arrangements for working with other governing bodies to support collective responsibility and collaborative improvement*', and a member asked whether there was an intention to re-establish the Gwynedd Governing Body, which was in operation before Covid. In response, it was noted:

- That they did intend to restore the Forum for governors, in hybrid form, while also looking at opportunities to make the body more collective.
- That a Children and Young People's Forum was currently being established and that it was also natural to address school governance, to have everyone's voice in moving these aspects forward.

Concern was expressed that extending the collaboration between schools could mean that the lessons provided jointly would become increasingly English, given that two secondary schools in the county mostly operated as English schools. It was questioned whether the Council had guidance for joint-working to ensure that there was no slippage in the Welsh-medium provision. In response, it was explained that the new model did not suggest moving children from one school to another to get lessons, instead it referred to school leaders working and supporting each other.

It was suggested that the proposed arrangements seemed to be extremely challenging. It was noted that there were all sorts of individual problems in every school and that it was important to have similar schools helping each other, instead of acting based on geographical clusters. It was also noted that headteachers were already overwhelmed, and that the expectation of taking on an additional role of helping other schools (although

already doing so unofficially) would place a lot of extra pressure on them, especially in small schools. In response, it was noted that:-

- Putting all of this into practice in Gwynedd schools would be very challenging for a number of reasons, including the fact that Gwynedd had so many school units, and many of those school units were small schools, and a very small number of non-contact headteachers.
- The challenges highlighted what GwE had managed to do over the years, which was to go into the schools and tailor the leadership to individual schools, regardless of size.
- They repeatedly emphasised in the discussions with the Welsh Government that our context in Gwynedd made all of this very challenging and that the capacity of the schools, rather than their ability to do the work, was the challenge.
- The geographical point was also important as the clusters in Gwynedd were very different and also schools within the same geographical cluster competed for children from the catchment area.
- It would require planning a service with people in the centre who had the ability to draw these aspects together and ensure that everyone gets their share in school improvement support as well. It was premature to say what that would look like until the details awaited from the Government were obtained, and inappropriate to mention that at this stage in the context of employment issues etc.

It was noted that the scrutineers wished to add their support to the Head of Service's efforts to secure a voice to Gwynedd's unique position.

It was questioned whether it would be possible to continue using the expertise of GwE officers during the transitional period. In response, it was noted that:-

- Care must be taken in terms of the information that could be shared due to HR issues.
- A number of GwE staff were on permanent contracts and some had been on secondments that were terminating, and the decision had been made through the GwE Joint Committee regarding the staffing structure for this year.
- As GwE was a regional service, the 6 authorities served by GwE would have to follow the same procedure in terms of responding to restructuring and alternative employment opportunities for staff, and discussions about that were currently taking place.
- In terms of funding, the grants, which had already been passed on to GwE this year, in line with the Welsh Government's desire, had exceeded the core allocation to GwE. In the meetings with the Government, assurance was sought in regard to these grants, but as the grants did not come from the settlement, there were employment implications even then in the sense that there could be no permanent employment with a grant because of the possibility that the grant would not be there in 12 months' time.
- The HR considerations were being addressed by experts from Gwynedd which alleviated concerns in terms of the process being followed correctly.

In light of the explanation regarding the funding, it was suggested that this model had the potential to be significantly cheaper in the long term, and it was asked, since a large proportion of the support was dependent on grant money rather than allocation, whether it would be fair to say that this could be perceived as a way of closing the tap. In response, it was noted that there was truth to that, and although Welsh Government officers stated that they were working hard to try and ensure that the total amount of money provided to this field would remain the same, there was no guarantee on what basis this would be allocated and there was concern regarding the schools' capacity to be able to release individuals to attend another school to do the work.

It was suggested, if the collaboration between schools was a matter of informal arrangement and headteacher discretion, etc., it could be very difficult to make a financial case for it. In response, it was noted although there was currently no assurance about the exact model, it was likely that a general offer would be made to the majority of schools based on the catchment area work, with the Authority elevating the work into more of a commission for targeting particular aspects in schools where there were more specific challenges.

A member expressed the desire to see less autonomy and more uniformity within the education system across the UK, except for the language difference and the cultural aspects of the curriculum relating to local history, etc., in the case of areas such as Gwynedd. It was believed that such uniformity would militate against the element of competition that can exist between schools, facilitate the sharing of good practice with the rest of the organisation and make it easier to set standards and measure against those standards. In response, it was noted that the point was accepted, but we did not have uniformity within the education system, nor were we likely to have it going forward.

In response to the observation, the member noted that the observations of GwE officers on item 7 noted that we did not, in effect, know what we were measuring, and that it would be nice to be able to start some sort of uniformity at almost a local level.

It was enquired whether the Education Department had the capacity to absorb all these additional responsibilities, given that it was a small department and faced many challenges over the next year and beyond. In response, it was noted that the capacity was not there at present, but that the Department would have to be re-structured to be able to incorporate the jobs and responsibilities that came with this.

It was enquired whether they could be confident that the resources released would be sufficient to meet the requirements. In response, it was noted that it was premature to give a definitive answer one way or another, but that it would be challenging due to the school numbers in Gwynedd and the dispersed nature of the county.

It was enquired whether the new system was expected to be ready by September. In response, it was noted that:-

- The Authority was obliged to introduce the new model in September/October.
- There would then be implications for the transfer of staff. They could not currently confirm whether it was possible to realise these changes by the end of March 2025, and the Authority would receive advice on this.
- It was believed that it would be best if the situation continued as it was until the end of the summer term anyway, as there was no desire to change things in the middle of a school year.
- A decision had not finally been made on this yet as so many things were uncertain at the moment.

It was enquired whether that meant they could be in a situation where there was nothing in place. In response, it was noted that this would not be allowed to happen, and that there would have to be a service in place, even if that was a continuation of what currently existed, or a different or transitional version of it.

RESOLVED to accept the report and to note the observations.

9. SAFEGUARDING ARRANGEMENTS IN SCHOOLS

Dylan Owen (Statutory Director of Social Services) and Llion Williams (Assistant Head: Well-being and Equality) were welcomed to the meeting.

Submitted – the report of the Cabinet Member for Education in response to a request by the members to receive information on safeguarding arrangements in schools, and on the guidance and support provided in this field by the Education Department so as to give assurance to committee members of the appropriateness of the arrangements.

The Cabinet Member for Education set out the context and the Head of Education also delivered a few words at the beginning.

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

It was noted that a DBS check did not prove that someone was a safe person, but rather stated that a person had not yet been found guilty of a crime. In response, it was noted that:-

- They agreed with the observation, and as well as the DBS, this Council asked for two references before appointing to any post.
- There were only 0.07% of staff without a DBS at the moment, and there were specific reasons for that, e.g. long-term illness, a person suspended from work or people on supply lists who no longer wished to work for Gwynedd.
- Efforts were underway almost daily to meet the 100% target.
- The Safeguarding Operational Group monitored how many people have had a DBS, and if the percentages were lower than expected, it asked what was the explanation and justification for that.

It was enquired how much monitoring took place to ensure that the designated safeguarding person in a school completed all the necessary training. In response, it was noted:-

- That training was provided by the Authority in the form of small groups, so that people had the opportunity to ask questions that they might not ask in larger groups.
- That the nature of the training was now more fun and interactive, and that the feedback from these annual sessions was very positive.
- In terms of monitoring, governing bodies had a responsibility to have a person overseeing child protection on the body, and that person would be expected to meet with the designated safeguarding person to discuss the situation in the school in terms of safeguarding children.
- That training was also provided for governors on their monitoring role and supporting the designated safeguarding person within the school.
- That Gwynedd was one of the few authorities in Wales that undertook quality assurance checks, where the designated officer in the county goes to a school and carries out a detailed investigation which then feeds into an authority overview. By doing so, they could see if there were things that were not being done properly, what they were and whether the training needed to be refined to improve the guidance given to designated persons.
- That the Safeguarding Operational Group monitored the number of people who had received safeguarding training, etc., and reported regularly to the Safeguarding Strategic Panel.

It was noted that it was hoped that a staff member could not be the designated governor. In response, it was noted that there was no desire for this to happen, and if it was seen to happen, the impropriety of the situation would have to be brought to the attention of the governing body.

It was noted that level 2 training was extremely valuable and important and should be mandated for designated governors. A member enquired what monitoring took place to ensure governors had received level 1 training and that designated governors had received level 2 training. In response, it was noted that the Authority monitored that designated persons on the governing body had received level 1 and 2 training.

It was noted that the report gave a picture of a fairly robust system, but for a system to work the entry point must work, i.e., that a case of potential abuse must enter the system in the first place. A member asked for an explanation of the procedure from the point where e.g. an assistant in a class noticed marks on a child's body. In response, it was noted that this was explained in the policy, but the procedure was as follows:-

- Staff were encouraged and trained to listen to the child, to ask questions that were not closed questions, to record what was being said in the child's words and to refer this to the attention of the designated person within the school (most often the headteacher or a member of the management team).
- The designated person had a responsibility to contact the Reception Team in Pwllheli to receive appropriate advice.
- The safeguarding process becomes active from this point on. A social worker might visit the school to look at the marks on the child, or possibly the police could be called.
- The school was required to submit an accurately completed referral form as soon as possible, but there was no obligation to complete it before bringing the matter to the attention of the Reception Team.
- That staff would look after the child in the meantime and continue with the care surrounding safeguarding after the child had been seen by the social worker.

It was further noted:-

- That a safeguarding question was asked in every teacher job interview, and although the Head of Service had interviewed tens, if not hundreds of teachers over the years, he had never come across any candidate who was unsure of the safeguarding procedures.
- In a case of concern about a potential safeguarding issue, schools were advised to leave everything and contact the Reception Team immediately, no matter how busy the school day.

A member enquired who was responsible if a situation emerged which was not necessarily a complaint or concern, but there was information that suggested there was a risk to children. In response, it was noted:-

- That safeguarding children was everyone's responsibility, but within a school and school context, the responsibility rested with the headteacher and the designated person within that school.
- That there were arrangements and models in place for schools to record low-level concerns about children, e.g. holes in shoes etc, and recording the same concerns for days or weeks at a time might merit referral.
- If a school had genuine concerns about children, e.g. marks on their bodies, they had no choice but to refer the matter to the Reception Team.
- That schools had to make decisions on a daily basis to either refer a case or record a concern. The Authority could not intervene in the process because, with so many schools in the county, the Authority was not required to do so, nor was it practicable or reasonable for the Authority to do so.
- That the training provided guidance on identifying the threshold between low level concern and genuine concern and that the number of referrals received by the

Children's Referrals Team was testament to the fact that Gwynedd schools knew how to identify and act on risks.

Concern was expressed that the Authority's processes were not clear enough to allow people who were not part of the educational establishment, but who came into contact with children, such as parents, catering staff, etc. to make a complaint. A member asked whether they could ensure that the safeguarding guidance was clear in the safeguarding policy. In response, it was noted:-

- That every staff member who worked in a school in Gwynedd, from the catering staff to the management team, received appropriate training for safeguarding children.
- That it was a requirement for every school to display the name of the designated person at authority level on posters in the school.
- That every school had their own version of the safeguarding policy and that the version on the website was an example of a policy shared with schools, and based on national practice.

It was noted that it would be beneficial if a concise guide on how to file a complaint was readily available from any safeguarding policy.

An enquiry was made as to how, e.g. an assistant at a school submitting a complaint, could ensure that the process had been followed. It was noted that a training system could be put in place for everyone who was part of the system, but the chain would only be as strong as the weakest link in it. In response, it was noted:-

- As with any procedure, 100% certainty could not be given, but that the system was as perfect as it could be.
- DBS was a check of a staff member's situation at a point in time and was updated in accordance with national guidance.
- That it was good practice for staff who had raised a concern about a child to check if the referral had been made.

It was suggested that the one important thing missing amongst the burden of the training material for governors was the small number of simple things governors really needed to know, namely that an average governor should refer concern about school staff or a parent to the headteacher, or refer a concern about the headteacher to the authority. In response, it was noted that this was covered in the policy, but possibly needed to be simplified and highlighted a little better.

It was noted that the recent case was likely in the back of the minds of all members when discussing this field. It was likely that the headteacher in question had a DBS and that everyone around him had done the training, etc., but there was a failure nevertheless. The Head of Education was being honest in saying that no system could be perfect, and it was important to have a self-critical attitude towards the system. It was further noted that this committee had received a report from Estyn on the Education Department which stated that the system was, by and large, sound, when it was not. A member enquired to what extent the Department was discussing this with Estyn, and to what extent the discussion with the independent inspection body would be used to strengthen the Department's arrangements. In response, it was noted that the Authority had responded completely sincerely and honestly to the Estyn questions as part of the inspection, and the report highlighted that we followed the safeguarding guidelines appropriately at that time.

It was suggested that there was a place to further discuss the report with Estyn since this committee, and also the Governance and Audit Committee, relied on external regulating body reports to form an opinion on the arrangements of the Authority. It was noted that such reports could be defective as the questions asked were insufficient questions in terms

of the information they captured, therefore leading to a deficiency in the process. It was believed that this was a matter to go after to try and prevent a systematic failure.

It was suggested, specifically in relation to a complaint about a headteacher, that the matter should be referred more than once to more than one party so as to ensure that nothing was missed. In response, it was noted:-

- That there was an agreed arrangement in terms of dealing with allegations against people in a position of trust, and that the Authority followed that arrangement.
- That the Headteacher and the Education Department would be committed to any lessons and changes that may emerge from the practice review.

A member sought assurance that there was a robust training programme for the next level of people, i.e. education officers, and possibly GwE advisors, as they also received concerns about safeguarding matters. In response, assurance was given that the training was being provided to officers of the Education Department and all the other services.

It was noted that, from a parent's perspective, it would be extremely beneficial if there was a fairly simple interactive infographic available to help parents / governors to know what to refer, when to refer and where to refer. Each school could be asked to place the infographic on their website and perhaps refer to it every term, to highlight that there was now a robust process in place. It was noted that parental confidence in the system had been dented and there was work to be done to raise awareness of the inspection and the new way of doing things to ensure children were safe in schools. In response, it was noted that the point was fair and that the Head of Education would ask the officers to construct a model infographic for the individual schools to refine and place on their website.

RESOLVED

- 1. To accept the report and note the observations.**
- 2. To recommend that the Education Department provides a simple guide on referring any concerns for use by everyone who is involved with the system, such as governors and parents.**

At the end of the discussion, the Chair noted that the report gave comfort to the committee that there was a robust system in place. However, it was also true to say that public faith in the system had been undermined. He suggested, possibly, that the committee might wish to look further into this field in the near future which could be discussed further at the informal meeting of the committee following this meeting.

10. GWYNEDD AND ERYRI SUSTAINABLE VISITOR ECONOMY PLAN 2035

Councillor Nia Jeffreys (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Operational Economy Matters), Roland Evans (Assistant Head – Culture) and Angela Jones (Head of Partnerships – Eryri National Park) were welcomed to the meeting.

Submitted – the report of the Leader and the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Operational Economy Matters providing an update on the Gwynedd and Eryri Sustainable Visitor Economy Plan 2035, and they invited the committee to scrutinise the progress, the Action Plan and the Measures.

The Cabinet Member set out the context and the members were then given an opportunity to ask questions and offer observations.

The Cabinet Member was thanked for showing a genuine interest in the field and attending local meetings related to the subject, which highlighted the ease of connection within the Council to be able to make such a scheme a reality.

It was noted that the report stated that extensive consultation had taken place when developing the Plan, but with the exception of the workshops held at the beginning, it was not believed that another consultation had taken place with county councillors, at least. An enquiry was made about what consultation had taken place in the National Park area, and with whom? In response, it was noted:-

- That the consultation took place widely between everyone. Several sessions were held between the Council and the Park with all councillors across the area, including the rural area of Conwy which was in the Park.
- That the partnership that had been created replaced the former Destination Management Group which previously existed and was maintained by the Council, with the Park feeding into that as well.
- The Group that had now been established, representing businesses and communities, was an innovative group and truly represented the whole area. As such, for the first time, there was a full picture of all the projects and activities taking place across the whole area.
- In addition to the formal consultation, four briefing notes had also been sent to all community councils and councillors across the area, and a further briefing note was planned to be sent to everyone shortly providing an update on everything that had happened over the last few months.
- That there was also an intention to hold an annual conference that brought together everyone who was interested in the subject, and this was again quite a new and wide-ranging way of getting input from the whole area.

In response, it was noted that it was accepted that there had been consultation at the beginning, but it was believed that such a scheme required ongoing consultation. The member also noted that this was the first time that he had heard about the briefing note, and that he was unaware that he had received it. He also noted, as there was no statutory requirement for the Park to consult with county councillors, they were usually left out, and he called on the Park to consult much better with county councillors on matters that were happening within the Park.

The officers were asked to elaborate on the role of the Ardal Ni local consultation groups. In response, it was noted:-

- That the Ardal Ni groups was a fairly new Council forum for engaging with communities to see what their priorities were at a local level.
- That some of the main issues within the 13 areas were how to get sustainable tourism within the area, with many of the issues also relating to the infrastructure of the visitor economy.
- That the responses at community level were quite high-level and they had gone through all of the action plans that had been identified and prioritised to try to incorporate them into the action plan.
- That consultation was currently taking place to agree the operating structures within the 13 Ardal Ni, and it was intended to continue this engagement in implementing the plan with the 13 areas through the community support officers.

Concern was expressed that the Measures Dashboard suggested that this was not a sustainable tourism plan, but a sustainable tourism growth plan, with all plans appearing to be leaning towards tourism growth. It was also noted that the data regarding the number of jobs, e.g. did not identify whether those jobs were held by local people or not and whether the wages were sufficient, etc. A desire was expressed to see this type of evidence being gathered to see whether tourism, which was likely to grow anyway, was sustainable and beneficial locally. In response, it was noted:-

- That the aim of the Scheme was not growth, it sought to ensure a visitor economy that balanced the needs of communities, supports the Welsh language and supports the culture and people of the county.
- That the councillor had focused on the third principle within the Plan which looked at the economic measures. Traditionally, these were the only measures that would have been available to measure the visitor economy in Gwynedd, and the concern was that we were measuring based on growth and value, rather than based on the outcomes for the environment, the economy and our communities and culture.
- This was why there was a dashboard attached to the report including not only the governing elements, but also how we looked at the impact of tourism on the Welsh language and on the environment.
- That a questionnaire would be sent out to communities for the first time asking if they felt tourism was having a positive or negative impact on them as a community and on their language and culture and environment.
- That there was also an intention to look at how many were employed, as this was an important indicator, but as part of that, it was also intended to look at average pay within the sector as we would wish to see the sector being one that offered good pay, all year round.
- It also looked at how many businesses used local produce and how much of the local supply chain was boosted through the visitor economy sector.
- They also looked at growth, not in terms of the number of visitors coming to the area, but how many came at different times of the year, as the aim of the Scheme was to extend the season.
- That one of the aims of the Academi Croeso Cymru Tourism Talent Network project was to collaborate with schools locally to develop their interest in tourism and the visitor economy and develop a career path for local people within the visitor economy so that the sector was seen as a career opportunity, rather than a casual opportunity or temporary work.

A desire was expressed to see more refinement of the measures. In particular, there was a desire to see detail in the number of local people working in the area. Otherwise, there was a danger of having a tourism industry that visited from other areas and did not take root in the community. Concern was also expressed after understanding that one of the aims of a sustainable tourism plan was to extend the tourism season, and the member questioned whether there had been widespread consultation on this objective, as many local people disliked the hustle and bustle of the main holiday season. In response, it was noted:-

- That a clear message had come out of the consultation about the importance of extending the tourism season to have less impact on the county's communities.
- That it was also important to extend the season so that workers in the tourism sector could be permanently employed throughout the year, and also for businesses to be able to retain their staff.
- There was a desire to see a decrease in visitor numbers during the months of July and August, with numbers spread over the whole year in order to gain more sustainable jobs within the visitor economy.

A member expressed doubt about the aim of reducing visitor numbers during July and August as people wanted to continue coming to Gwynedd during school holidays regardless.

It was noted that there were several references in the documents to research that had been or would be commissioned, which was something to welcome.

It was noted that the Office of National Statistics' website noted that 59% of the labour force in Gwynedd who operated in the restaurants and hotels sector (which tended to be lower paid seasonal work) could speak Welsh, compared with 74% in the construction field (which tended to be full-time work on higher pay). This possibly suggested that holiday homes brought more benefit to the true local population, through alterations and renovations etc., than e.g. hotels or caravan parks not in local ownership. In response, it was noted:-

- That it was believed that having people temporarily staying in a hotel or camping brought greater benefit to the visitor economy and meant that a house that could be used as a home for a family was not taken out of the housing market.
- There may be evidence to the contrary, as the holiday homes issue was complex, and the Cabinet Member would be happy to look into that.

Hope was expressed that the research in the field would cover these aspects.

It was suggested that no economic sector was as dependent on child labour as the tourism sector, and that this suggested a lack of workforce locally, or that local people did not see these as good jobs. It was noted that it was desired to see a small tourism sector locally owned and offering high salaries, but it was not thought that we were decisive enough in our discussions about this area in terms of what we would like to see. In response, it was noted:-

- That the work was only just the beginning on a plan and the implementation of an entirely new partnership which would focus on trying to achieve the sustainable visitor economy that the partners wanted.
- This was not going to happen overnight and we had to communicate to communities, members and businesses that this would be a process.
- There was little research in relation to the impact of tourism on the Welsh language or how many Welsh people were employed within the tourism sector, and through this partnership, interesting and exciting discussions were opening with Bangor University in terms of the research and collaboration opportunities that could be offered.
- That it was believed that employment for young people over the summer was thought to be quite a healthy thing within the sector, as long as those young people were not exploited, and it was in line with employment legislation. It created opportunities for young people to gain paid work experience.
- Working with Grŵp Llandrillo Menai e.g. it could be shown that employment in tourism could be seen as a career, rather than just seasonal work.
- There were companies in Gwynedd that employed very well within the visitor economy sector and there was also growing interest and activity within the community tourism sector within the county that were keen to see the visitor economy owned by local communities, provide good employment for people locally, and providing a place for the Welsh language and culture locally as well.

It was noted that we would look forward to seeing research that addressed some of the issues raised.

It was pointed out that the people serving in the hotels and restaurants could not afford to go out to eat as their wages were so low, and unless there was other work except for tourism, etc., the locals would always be poor. In response, it was noted:-

- The observation that we were always going to keep local people poor was not accepted and this scheme was part of a process of having a better economy, a more sustainable economy, better jobs and better training.
- Not all the answers were available here, but the vision was here and we were trying to move in the right direction.

Meirion / Dwyfor had been identified as the poorest income area in the UK, but an attraction such as Dyfi Cycle Park was an example of sustainable tourism, as it brought a lot of visitors and money to the area, with people staying in B&Bs on farms, etc. It had been suggested that Gwynedd was doing very little to help the economy in South Meirionnydd. They referred to a company that had moved from the area to Powys and questioned the extent of collaboration between the Planning and Economy Departments. In response, it was noted:-

- In terms of planning policy in general, the Planning Service had been involved in the development of the Strategic Plan, and the action plan had also been shared with the Department.
- That there was currently a planning policy in place and that the Local Development Plan was in the process of being reviewed. As such, it was hoped that the principles and the Strategic Plan would influence planning policy in the future.
- That the aim of the different bodies, in coming together, was to have an influence on the planning policies as they were developed.
- That the Park Authority was also about to review the Eryri Development Plan and it was hoped that the principles would also influence the review of that plan.

A member questioned how in practice the crowds could be deterred from visiting the area during the summer holidays and persuaded to come, e.g. in November. It was suggested that instead of developing and promoting tourism, we needed to talk about even reducing tourism. It was thought that Wales could sell itself on a much smaller scale, but to higher standards. It was not believed that there was enough emphasis on training in the Action Plan and we were required to upgrade ourselves to be sustainable and look after our own people, while also securing the linguistic elements.

Concern was raised that funding had not been secured for the good research that was underway. Particular reference was made to the research into the impact of tourism on the Welsh language, which was due to report back in March 2025, and questioned the feasibility of this in the face of uncertainty over the financial situation.

There was some scepticism about the measures which highlighted that local people felt positive about tourism, and questioned exactly what that meant. It had been suggested that we need to come up with something much slicker to see real benefit emerge from tourism.

The view was expressed that there was an overemphasis on North Eryri and slate in the Plan and that Merionnydd and the Llŷn Peninsula must also be remembered. In response, it was noted that the point was an important one and that the importance of spreading the benefit across the whole county was emphasised.

Concern was raised that the report had gone in all but the right direction. It was highlighted that the purpose of the report was to optimise the benefit to Gwynedd from the tourism industry, and that the beauty of Gwynedd meant that the tourism industry would stay here no matter what. It was noted that the tourism industry brought tremendous benefit to the area, but that was not to say it could be the solution to the economic crisis facing Gwynedd.

Appreciation was expressed for the plan, and a member stated they looked forward to seeing more research in the field. In response, it was noted that the points raised were appreciated, and that the Department would be sure to pursue them.

RESOLVED

- 1. To accept the report and note the observations.**
- 2. To request that the Eryri National Park Authority makes every effort to consult with the county councillors where appropriate.**

3. **That the Economy and Community Department when undertaking research, looks at the specific matters raised by the committee regarding data etc.**

11. 2024-25 FORWARD-PROGRAMME OF THE EDUCATION AND ECONOMY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Submitted – the committee's forward programme for 2024/25.

RESOLVED to adopt the work programme for 2024-25.

12. FINANCE PERFORMANCE CHALLENGE MEETING

Submitted – the Scrutiny Advisor's report inviting the committee to nominate a member to represent the committee at the Finance Department's Performance Challenge meetings to replace Councillor Paul Rowlinson who had now resigned from the committee following his appointment as Cabinet Member for Finance.

RESOLVED to nominate Councillor Cai Larsen to represent the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee at the Finance Department's Performance Challenge Meetings.

The meeting started at 10.30am and ended at 2.40pm.

Chair