

ITEM 6 - QUESTIONS

(A) Question by a Member of the Public

(1) Question by Mr Ieuan Wyn (*address provided in accordance with the requirements of the Constitution*)

It is completely unacceptable that Gwynedd pupils from Welsh-speaking households and non-Welsh-speaking households receive less Welsh-medium provision than Welsh school pupils in less-Welsh communities in other parts of our nation. Children and young people, parents and communities in Gwynedd deserve schools where the most comprehensive Welsh-medium provision is being offered. This is what would be educationally, culturally and socially appropriate. As a result of the fact that the Welsh Government has published an education bill and that a language shift is intensifying considerably in the county, will Cyngor Gwynedd take this golden and crucial opportunity to replace a dated education language policy and introduce an ambitious, clear and completely new education language policy for their schools?

Response – Cabinet Member for Education, Councillor Dewi Jones

Yes, Cyngor Gwynedd wants to take this golden and crucial opportunity to present an ambitious, clear, and completely new education language policy to our schools. Substantial work has already been done, led by Meirion Prys Jones to formulate the policy and it will be presented to the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee on the 10th of April.

(B) Questions by Elected Members

(1) Question by Councillor Richard Glyn Roberts

Given that there is a strong sense locally that council tax policy in the field of empty houses and second homes, in some circumstances, imposes a disproportionate and unfair taxation burden on Gwynedd residents and given that Welsh Government guidance on council tax on empty houses and second homes states:

It is a matter for a local authority as to whether it uses the discretionary powers in sections 12A, 12B or 13A to reduce council tax liability in respect of a premium or to reduce the standard council tax liability, or both, as appropriate. This policy should encompass a range of situations where a local authority would consider using its discretionary powers, including properties that do not meet the criteria to be classified as non-domestic. To ensure fairness and transparency, a local authority should have a clear policy on whether and how these powers are used. However, the authority should consider each case individually after weighing-up the circumstances of the case.

Does Gwynedd have such a clear policy with a view to using discretionary powers to reduce the rate of basic council tax (e.g. in the case of self-catering holiday units, without planning permission to become permanent households, which fail to meet the 182-day letting threshold) and how the authority evaluates the circumstances of each case individually with a view on this matter and the associated matter of the premium?

Response - Cabinet Member for Finance, Councillor Huw Wyn Jones

Cyngor Gwynedd does not implement discretionary exemptions beyond the statutory exemptions outlined in The Council Tax (Exceptions to Higher Amounts) (Wales) Regulations 2015. It is for each individual local authority to reach a decision on adopting a policy on further exceptions, but that is not mandatory. Gwynedd Council's preference to date is to act in accordance with the statutory exemptions and that is set out annually in the reports to the Full Council each December where the decision on the Premium is made. In the case of holiday units that fail to meet the threshold of 182 days, but where a planning condition means that the property is not allowed to be used as a permanent outlet, the statutory exemptions state that we cannot charge a Premium.

(2) Question by Councillor Rhys Tudur

Given that an individual can be identified as someone in need of housing for several areas at once on the Housing Associations' list or the Common Housing Register adding and multiplying the 'demand for housing' figure for all those areas they have shown an interest to live in;

And given that the 'demand for housing' data is based on an interest in an area rather than the need of its population and therefore misleading to the extent that it justifies all developments everywhere as incompatible as they are and despite the absence of population growth in our County;

What willingness does this Council have to identify data of the actual need of the population of the area where a planning application is located rather than consider all the county 'interest' that has been identified for the area?

Response – Cabinet Member for Housing and Property, Councillor Paul Rowlinson

I am confident that the data we publish on housing need accurately reflects the true need. The figures on the Open Data section of the Council's website notes the "Housing Need" in every area, defining housing need according to the number of applications for a social house. The true need may be even higher than that as some don't apply as they think they are unlikely to get a house, but it's not currently possible to measure this. The county is split into 144 areas, approximately two areas in each ward on average therefore they are typically very small. When someone is in search of a home, as a rule they are willing to consider several areas. Applicants are encouraged to note on their application form all the areas they would be willing to live in order to maximise their chance of being offered a home e.g. if someone is in search of a house in Bangor, they can apply for nine areas within the city. Within the Llanystumdwy ward, there are five areas. These areas are very small, some are just one village.

Should someone add together the figures for all areas, the total would be misleading as it would count the same applicants multiple times. Perhaps this is where the confusion has originated. However, the published data does not do this; the published figures for the number of applicants on the register, over 2,000, and the number of individuals on the register, over 4,000, are correct, and it's important to build more social housing to meet the need and reduce these numbers.

When a planning application is submitted to develop social housing, the Strategic Housing Unit provides comments, including the number of applications for a house in the area and

the types of houses needed. This method of measuring the need is a nationally recognised method and this information is used to prove whether the need exists to justify the application.

If we would only count those living in the village, this would not reflect the true need.

Some applicants on the waiting list live in the village itself, some in nearby areas, some may come from the area originally but now live far away and wish to move back home. Some may have had to move from the area previously due to the lack of affordable housing and they are keen to return home and we should help them do that. Perhaps others are homeless, temporarily staying at a hostel or a bed and breakfast far from the village and keen to return home. Others must move to another community because of a need for a particular type of accommodation e.g. a property for older people, flats etc., which is not available in every community. People also move regularly out of necessity rather than desire (e.g. moving to be closer to family to provide or receive support, moving due to employment, education or training reasons, moving to flee violence or threats of violence – and these are far more common than someone would think). These reasons are recognised in law and therefore the Council must reflect them in its allocation arrangements.

Gwynedd's Common Housing Allocations Policy prioritises individuals and families that have resided for five years or more in the Community Council area for each allocation made through the register in order to ensure that priority is given to individuals with a connection to the specific area, however, as I have explained, trying to limit the definition of local need for housing to those currently living there is misleading.

No-one is trying to confine property purchasers to the villages where they currently live only; attempts should not be made to place similar limitations on those needing social housing.

(3) Question by Councillor Gwynfor Owen

Three years ago I asked a question in the Full Council "What is the Council going to do about the problem of speeding in our communities?"

I received a reply at the time from the Cabinet portfolio holder, former Councillor Gareth Griffiths, stating that the 20mph limit would soon be enforced and that this would hopefully improve the situation.

The reality is that the situation has not improved at all. I receive complaints everywhere in my ward starting in Llandecwyn, on to Talsarnau, Glan y Wern, Ynys, Harlech, Llanfair and Llanbedr. Would the Council be willing to examine alternative ways to prevent the speeding that is creating genuine concern to so many of my electors?

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

I would like to thank you very much for presenting the question. We fully understand your concerns, and recognise the dangers that can come with inconsiderate, irresponsible and illegal driving.

There is general national guidance, based on a specific criteria, which sets the framework for speed limits across Wales. As a Highways Authority we rely on and use these as well as the views of our local communities as the basis for the restrictions in place on the highway network we are responsible for across the County.

While the Council is responsible for introducing the restrictions, having followed the required processes which include consultation, the Police and Go Safe (a Road Injury Reduction Partnership involving the Police and Local Authorities) are responsible for monitoring and enforcing compliance with the restrictions.

A Written Statement: 20mph Early Speed Data was published on the 20 February 2024 and this can be found via the following link [Written Statement: 20mph Early Speed Data \(20 February 2024\) | GOV.WALES](#)

There are 83 locations in Gwynedd where exceptions to the national restrictions, based on local factors, have been introduced which include within the Cllr. Owen's ward. The exceptions are intended to distinguish between the locations where the 20mph is appropriate as well as where they are not. The thinking underpinning the approach is that the majority of drivers are more likely to respect and obey the restrictions where they are obvious, relevant and reasonable.

A review of the 20mph scheme has been underway across Wales. It is anticipated in Gwynedd there will be a very small, if any, number of locations that the 20mph limit introduced will revert to being 30mph.

Based on what has been raised by Cyng. Owen officers from the Traffic Unit will share this with Go Safe and the Police so that they are aware of the local concern and can take this into account when managing and prioritising resource use.

The opportunities to introduce local alternative interventions on the highways that would have a positive influence are quite limited. Despite this, officers from the Traffic Unit would be very pleased of the opportunity to discuss ideas and options with Cyng. Owen.

(4) Question by Councillor Jina Gwyrfai

What consideration is given to the 'conservation area' designation when considering planning applications, particularly applications to install solar panels and heat pumps?

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

A Conservation Area is an area of special historical, social or architectural interest. Cyngor Gwynedd is responsible for designating an area as a Conservation Area within the county (with the exception of the Eryri National Park area).

There is a duty on a Local Planning Authority when exercising its planning function, to give special consideration to the desirability of protecting and enhancing the character and appearance of conservation areas, and this is mentioned in the local and national planning policy framework.

In terms of local planning policies, Strategic Policy PS 20 of the Joint Local Development Plan reiterates national planning policy and guidance, and reflects the importance of protecting and enhancing the integrity of the heritage of the Plan area. It also recognises, where appropriate, the importance of protecting the setting of a heritage asset. Significant damage can be done to the architectural or historical interest of an asset if a development is not sensitive in its design, scale or location. The setting of an asset is often an essential feature of its character. The setting may be restricted to neighbouring areas, but may extend for a considerable distance. Strategic Policy PS17 requires development proposals to fully consider the setting of any heritage asset, and that developers can demonstrate that the setting will not be damaged. Policy AT 1 also applies to conservation areas and aims to ensure that the findings of documents carrying out detailed assessments of conservation areas, are fully considered when considering development proposals.

With applications for renewable energy developments, there is a need to weigh-up the benefit of renewable energy against any potential impact on the setting of a conservation area.

It is therefore confirmed that conservation area designation is a material consideration when dealing with planning applications, and all planning applications need to be considered on their own merits depending on the nature, scale and location of the development.