
EDUCATION AND ECONOMY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
10/04/25

Attendance:

Councillors: Councillor Cai Larsen (Chair)
Councillor Rhys Tudur (Vice-chair)

Councillors:- Beca Brown, Jina Gwyrfai, Dawn Lynne Jones, Elwyn Jones, Gareth Tudor Jones, Gwilym Jones, Beth Lawton, Dewi Owen, John Pughe Roberts, Richard Glyn Roberts, Huw Llwyd Rowlands, Dyfrig Siencyn, Gwynfor Owen and Sian Williams.

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

Officers present: Bethan Adams (Scrutiny Advisor), Llywela Haf Owain (Senior Language and Scrutiny Advisor) and Jasmine Jones (Democracy Services Officer).

Present for item 5 - Councillor Dewi Jones (Cabinet Member for Education), Gwern ap Rhisiart (Head of Education), Llion Williams (Safeguarding and Well-being Quality Leader) and Steffan Williams (Youth Service Manager).

Present for item 6 - Councillor Dewi Jones (Cabinet Member for Education), Gwern ap Rhisiart (Head of Education) and Ffion Edwards Ellis (Assistant Head: Special Education Needs and Inclusion).

Present for item 7 - Councillor Dewi Jones (Cabinet Member for Education), Gwern ap Rhisiart (Head of Education), Rhys Meredydd Glyn (Head of Gwynedd Immersion Education Scheme), Iwan Gwilym Evans (Monitoring Officer/Head of Legal Service), Gwyn Tudur (Assistant Head: Secondary), Meirion Prys Jones (Consultant) and Councillors:- Anne Lloyd Jones, Elfed Williams (Language Committee Members).

Apologies: Councillor Gwilym Iwan Huws; Gwilym Jones (NASUWT).

The following were welcomed to the meeting:-

- A new committee member - Gweno Glyn Williams (Dwyfor Parents / Governors Representative).
- Members of the Language Committee invited as observers for item 7.

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Gwilym Iwan Huws and Gwilym Jones (NASUWT).

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

Item 5

- Councillor Dawn Lynne Jones declared a personal interest as she was involved with Porthi Dre Youth Club.

The member was not of the opinion that it was a prejudicial interest, and did not leave the meeting during the discussion.

Item 6

- Councillor Gwynfor Owen declared a personal interest because he was a governor at Ysgol Hafod Lon.
- Councillor Dawn Lynne Jones declared a personal interest because she had grandchildren who attended Ysgol Pendalar, and because of the nature of her job supporting young people with IDPs.

Members did not consider them to be prejudicial interests, and they did not leave the meeting during the discussion.

- Bethan Adams (Scrutiny Advisor) declared a personal interest because she had a nephew who attended a mainstream school in Gwynedd and who received additional learning needs provision.

The officer was of the opinion that it was a prejudicial interest and left the meeting during the discussion on the item.

Item 7

- Gweno Glyn Williams (Dwyfor Parents/Governors Representative) declared a personal interest because she was closely related to the co-author of the draft policy.
- Colette Owen (Catholic Church) declared a personal interest because she was an education advisor to the Diocese of Wrexham.

Members did not consider them to be prejudicial interests, and they did not leave the meeting during the discussion.

3. URGENT ITEMS

None to note.

4. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee held on 13 February 2025, as a true record.

5. YOUTH SERVICE

The Cabinet Member for Education presented the report, stating that the Youth Service had been on a significant journey over the last few years, with the

provision being significantly remodelled in 2018. It was explained that the COVID crisis had had a significant impact on the needs of young people and a prominent influence on the service, like every other service. Pride was expressed that the service received appropriate attention from this Committee. The Youth Service's key role in the work of supporting Gwynedd's young people was emphasised.

Views were expressed that they did not take enough advantage of the work undertaken by the youth service, or on the effect and the positive impact that the youth service could have on the lives of young people. Reference was made to the Youth Work Wales Conference in Cardiff, where the Gwynedd Youth Service had a prominent presence, and there was an opportunity to share good practices. It was noted that awards evenings had been held by the service in Bangor to acknowledge the successes of young people across the county.

It was expressed that the young people of Gwynedd were excellent, despite the blame often put on them. It was emphasised that the challenges that some young people faced was not a reflection of failure, but it showed the need for support, and this was the priority for the Education Department.

Attention was drawn to the importance of hearing young people's voices, and it was explained that the Youth Service consulted with them often. It was noted that establishing the Gwynedd Youth Forum was a positive step, with a particular officer leading on the work of ensuring that young people's voices were part of the Council's wider work.

Reference was made to Appendix 2 in the 'Young People's Questionnaire Findings 2025' report. It was noted that 25% of young people were unfamiliar with the service, highlighting the need to do more work to raise awareness. It was highlighted that the main reasons for taking part in the youth services included enjoying and spending time with friends. It was noted that only 17% had stated a lack of interest as a reason for not taking part, which highlighted a clear desire from young people to engage.

It was explained that 75% of the young people asked felt that the service had an important role in the community, and a similar proportion saw the role of the service in schools. It was noted that it was not clear whether the service should only be for the community or also part of the school provision, but the data showed a desire to have it at both places.

During the discussion, the following observations were made:-

It was enquired how it could be ensured that the Youth Service was visible in the community as well as at school, asking how they could reach out more effectively to young people in the community to ensure that everyone's voice was heard. Concern was expressed that only a comparatively small percentage of young people had responded to the questionnaire, raising the question regarding how to reach the rest of them. In response, the following was noted:

- There was a desire to see a higher proportion of young people responding to the questionnaire, to reflect the representational view across the county.
- The specific work currently being undertaken in terms of engaging with young people, including through the Youth Forum, was likely to lead to a much more comprehensive and reliable report within the next year.
- The service operated across Gwynedd's communities, but specific challenges faced the county due to its vast geography.
- Recruiting staff remained to be challenging, and this could exacerbate the situation in more scattered areas where it was more difficult to ensure consistent provision.
- Everything must be done within the service's ability to get to grips with the challenge, although it was a complex one.

The member enquired further about how consistency could be ensured in the provision across the entire county, specifically referring to south Meirionnydd as an area which faced difficulties with public transport and recruitment. In response, the following was noted:

- A new staff member had been recruited in Tywyn and was starting the following week, with the hope that this would address the local needs in that area.
- There were plans to establish a youth club at the train station to provide for young people leaving school.
- The Youth Forum was now operational in Meirionnydd, Dwyfor and Arfon, and work was being done to ensure feedback from as broad a representation of young people as possible. The hope that this work would develop further over the next few months was expressed.
- The forum only focused on the youth service, but it looked at the wider picture by including feedback from schools, the third sector, and the voices of the young people themselves, especially those that would not usually express views through formal channels.

The need to remodel the youth service in 2018 was questioned, raising various questions about the current role that approximately 70 workers had in the service. In response, the following was noted regarding the structure of the workforce:

- Full-time workers worked between schools and the community, with a focus on targeted work (low attendance or behavioural difficulties) in schools and well-being and socialising in the community.
- Project 16-25 staff supported young people through one-to-one work, providing one-to-one support to young people who were further from the labour market and needed to develop life skills, socialising and resilience.
- Part-time workers, who worked between three and six hours a week, supported the provision of community youth clubs through town and community councils and supported full-time workers.

- The number of workers noted referred to different individuals, without duplicating.
- There was a target of three part-time workers on average at every club.
- Some workers were also involved with Clwb Cyfeillgar Derwen under separate funding arrangements, but they were all employed by Cyngor Gwynedd.

It was enquired regarding the nine areas where the provision was funded by community councils, with the majority of them in Arfon. In response, it was noted that communities in Meirionnydd and Dwyfor had not taken advantage of this method to the same extent, but there were discussions underway to encourage more community councils to take part. It was elaborated that this was a priority for the service. It was explained that one of the biggest challenge was recruiting local staff, because several town councils had expressed an interest in the past but had not succeeded to ensure a workforce.

A question was asked about the best way of connecting with young people with behavioural problems, especially in locations where there were no specific places for youth provision. In response, it was noted that work was underway to transition between schools and the community, and although some young people could decide not to engage with a formal club, there was an attempt to reach them through the 'Roaming' plan which tried to create community hubs in as many areas as possible.

It was emphasised that close collaboration took place with the police, with monthly meetings to identify and address anti-social problems. It was explained that methods had been adapted locally in accordance with the needs of communities, as shown already in Cricieth.

Concern was expressed regarding the service's current method of measuring engagement, as it counted the number of connected events instead of the number of individuals who engaged. In response, it was explained that work was underway to improve the Council's data systems to identify the number of individual young people who benefited from the service in detail. It was noted that it would be possible to share the individual data by the end of the year.

Reference was made to a clear message by young people, which was the need for safe spaces to reconvene, socialise and relax without enforcement to gain qualifications. In response, it was noted that qualifications were still available to those who wished, but the focus was now on socialising and well-being, including activities such as trips through the Taith project, including a plan to visit Croatia.

In response to a question about the future of the three-year strategy after the grant came to an end, it was explained that the service worked with partners to develop a wider strategy which would continue beyond the current funding period. It was noted that the Welsh Government was expecting a long-term plan with input from partners, including young people, health, education and the third sector. Hope was expressed that this method would maintain the long-

term provision, and work continued to strengthen the statutory element to ensure its continuation in the future.

There was a question regarding whether the youth officer in Tywyn would also operate in Corris. In response, it was noted that the Tywyn or Dolgellau officer would visit Corris. It was explained that part of the officers' work was working within the catchment areas and extending their provision to those communities. In response to this, the hope was expressed that a new youth club would be established in the village as there was a strong local demand.

Reference was made to the Young Farmers situation, noting that the Council's continuous financial contribution had come to an end several years ago, and the organisation had faced difficulties since then. Attention was drawn to the number of activities and skills that the young people had fostered through the Young Farmers, such as Eisteddfod activities, charring committees and a sports festival. Concern was expressed that no structure had been put in place to replace the support lost, and there was a call to reconsider the provision of an officer in Meirionnydd to support wider youth activity.

In response, it was explained that collaboration continued with the Young Farmers, and they had been given funding over the last two years to support projects. It was also noted that the 'Llais Ni' forum included organisations such as the Young Farmers as part of the feedback process for the youth service and wider services. It was expressed that the relationship was positive, and the importance of community organisations, such as the Young Farmers, was considered excellent in rural areas.

Appreciation was expressed for the work achieved in Llanrug over the decades, paying tribute to Donna Taylor for her exceptional contribution over 30 years. It was explained that her work had been invaluable to a generation of children and young people in the community. The new successor was welcomed, and best wishes were expressed for the future.

Attention was drawn to the positive experiences for young people who regularly attended the Llanrug youth club, and the positive impact seen in thank you cards from children who attended a farewell evening. The importance of providing safe and supportive spaces for young people experiencing a complicated period and full of social challenges was highlighted.

A question was raised regarding how much training and support the youth service staff received to foster healthy respect between boys and girls. In response, it was noted that workshops on healthy relationships were already being held in schools, and further training was provided on this subject to all staff members, responding to specific matters raised in a recent television programme.

Concern was expressed about inequality in the provision between Gwynedd areas, noting that there were eight community clubs in Arfon but only one in Meirionnydd and one in Dwyfor. It was highlighted that most of the time of staff being paid by the Council focused on Arfon, and views were expressed that this

was unfair. It was acknowledged that it was easier for large town councils to contribute to youth clubs, compared with smaller community councils which have less resources.

The situation of the provision with the Barnett formula and the national argument about funding based on population instead of deprivation level was compared. Disappointment was expressed that Cyngor Gwynedd did not do enough to address the inequalities within the county itself, and more investment into provision in areas such as Meirionnydd was called. More information was requested about the current provision in coastal areas, and Aberdaron was specifically mentioned as an example of somewhere to learn lessons from its successes. In response, the following was noted:

- The statutory provision was consistent across the county, with every school receiving support from a part-time community worker who worked three nights a week in the community.
- Town and community councils were essential to be able to conduct a stable provision in other areas, and this would be a priority to be developed as a result of this meeting.
- Many projects in the third sector received financial support, including 'Forest Schools' in the Corris area and the cinema in Tywyn, which was evidence that work was underway to respond to local needs.
- The provision did not only happen through the Council, but through working with private organisations and the third sector that was proactive in the community.

A positive example from Llanddeiniolen Community Council was highlighted, which funded three youth clubs in Rhiwlas, Deiniolen and Bethel, showing that it was possible for community councils to practically support youth services.

Attention was drawn to the contribution of community councils to maintaining playgrounds, and the question was raised about how much cross-departmental collaborative work happened in these fields, such as well-being and maintenance. In response, it was noted that:

- The 'Summer of Fun' project had used playgrounds during the summer holidays.
- Much of the provision over the summer were held outdoors.
- Community grants had led to significant improvements in playgrounds, including new equipment and resources to be used by children outside school hours.
- This had been enabled by the Community Schools Grant, and continuous work would be done with the schools to see how these benefits could be extended.
- The Play Forum, which was supported jointly by the Education Department and another department, undertook work to provide and improve playgrounds and play provisions across the county.

Satisfaction was expressed that the youth club had evolved, and it was possible to reach children in different cohorts, praising the fact that a new priority had been given to mental health and well-being matters. It was noted that this reflected the responses from young people, showing a change in their needs. It was acknowledged that it was not only the responsibility of the youth service to provide mental health services, but the duties often fell on them. It was asked what type of mental health provision the service would offer when moving forward. In response, it was noted that:

- The youth service was a preventative service and it operated most effectively at an early stage of a young person's journey.
- Close work was being undertaken with schools where young people with low-level mental health problems had been identified.
- Well-being workshops, 'Friends for Resilience' sessions, sessions relating to anxiety and exam stress, school transition and community transition work were amongst the activities offered.
- Work was ongoing with the older age groups, noting that the youth service was part of a 'Social Prescribing' forum in Gwynedd.
- Feedback had been received by general practitioners that many young people were presenting with mental health problems, but they were not complex enough to be referred to CAMHS (Children and Young People Mental Health Services). As a result, the youth service provided well-being activities such as socialising and volunteering.
- Good preventative work was being done, and it needed to be expanded in the future for every age group.

Concern was expressed regarding the provision of a mobile youth club, noting that temporary provision worked well, but when it withdrew, no safe spaces continued for young people. Reference was made to the village of Trefor, it was noted that a successful Christmas party had been held, but by January and onwards, nothing was happening. It was asked why there were no more opportunities in Llithfaen, Llangwnnadr, Tudweiliog and it was suggested that a method was required to continue with the good work that temporarily began. Furthermore, it was asked why there was only one support officer for Dwyfor.

In response, it was noted that one full-time staff member and three part-time colleagues worked in the catchment area. It was explained that the basis for the provision map was working within school clusters, and it had been designed in accordance with the resources available. Although it was not perfect, it was noted that this was the best model to provide some type of service across as many areas as possible.

It was confirmed that a static youth club normally operated between September and April, providing service in the relevant area for half a year. It was noted that plans were underway for the coming September, with the hope of restoring provision for specific villages.

A previous observation was supported, noting that good practice was seen in areas such as Aberdaron and Llanddeiniolen, and it was possible to learn from them to improve provision in other areas.

Appreciation was expressed for the work of the Youth Service Manager and the team, noting that the work was prominent and positive in several parts of the county, including Caernarfon. Reference was made to the Porthi Dre club, which was run by volunteers and provided a safe space for young people in the town. It was explained that over 40 young people attended on Wednesday evenings, and free warm meals was a key attraction.

More resource sharing was called, and the view that it was possible to make better use of what schools, adults services and the wider community had. The need to think creatively was emphasised, as well as not solely depending on the youth service to resolve problems. It was emphasised that providing services to young people was not only the responsibility of the Council and the youth service.

Concern was expressed about children who followed alternative timetables, and the need to sustain them within the education system and to collaborate with communities to raise awareness of the challenges. It was noted that the collaboration with the police was a positive step, as well as the flexibility within the service to get to grips with community problems. The importance of looking outside the box when searching for answers was underlined.

Concern was expressed regarding the difficulty to recruit staff, despite the fact that desire and funding was available. Advice was asked on how to attract volunteers or employed staff to join the youth provision. Reference was also made to the possibility of working in partnership with organisations such as the Young Farmers and the Urdd. It was suggested that the county's leisure centres should be used, noting the excellent resources available in them.

In response, it was explained that there had already been some collaboration with Byw'n Iach centres, for example, a club in Abermaw and a joint project with a community officer under the Urdd, including six community groups.

To conclude, the Cabinet Member for Education drew attention to the key role of town and community councils, noting that what normally happened in successful urban areas was that one village or town started, and then nearby areas followed. The hope that more promotion work would take place in Meirionnydd and Dwyfor was expressed. The importance of collaborating between different sectors was also emphasised, including third sector organisations and groups such as the Young Farmers and the Urdd.

The youth service's staff members were praised, noting their excellent work across the county. It was repeated that the youth service's preventative work was essential, especially in light of the intense challenges that young people faced today. It was noted that there was a need to continue to work towards creating safe, static spaces more consistently, by working with local councils. Attention was drawn to work already underway regarding this, and the hope that there would be more implementation in the future was expressed, especially in Meirionnydd and Dwyfor.

RESOLVED

1. To accept the report and note the observations.
2. To recommend to the Cabinet Member / Education Department:
 - Consistency in the provision needed to be ensured across the County.
 - To identify ways of engaging more broadly with young people and in particular specific groups of young people.
 - Consultation should take place with Town and Community Councils with a view to increasing the number of community clubs.
 - Work should continue with partners to ensure the best provision, for example the Urdd, Young Farmers.
3. To ask the Youth Service Manager to share data on the number of unique individuals participating in the provision, and good practice in relation to community clubs, with committee members.

6. ADDITIONAL LEARNING NEEDS IN MAINSTREAM AND SPECIAL SCHOOLS

The report was submitted by the Cabinet Member for Education, noting that he had written it following a request from the Education and Economy Committee to receive an update on matters relating to Additional Learning Needs (ALN) in mainstream schools and special schools. It was explained that the report outlined the difficulties facing schools in Gwynedd as a result of a change in the demand for service, the current financial climate and the impacts of cuts.

It was emphasised that the situation was difficult, but there were opportunities for the department to improve, and a clear desire to do the best for the children and young people in the county. It was emphasised that this field caused concern to some members and was a complicated field which deserved attention.

Attention was drawn to the impact of years of austerity and financial savings on the Council's ability to provide effective services, emphasising that that impact reached every corner of the community. The willingness to listen, discuss and consider what could be done differently in the future to support children, young people and their families better was expressed.

During the discussion, the following observations were made:-

It was asked who was responsible for determining a criteria for access to special schools. In response, it was explained that it was the authority's responsibility for ensuring a child's placement in a special school, noting that descriptions of the needs expected in special schools has been defined, and that applications were being assessed against those. It was emphasised that the authority always had the final decision.

It was asked further what guidelines and criteria were used when determining these expectations. In response, it was explained that the criteria were associated with the curriculum and the provision that the child required. It was noted that the ALN Act emphasised the need to consider mainstream education

first, before turning to provision in a special school if the child's needs were not being met in the mainstream. In response to a question regarding reviewing the criteria, it was noted:

- That reviews had been held in 2017 and then in 2020.
- Work was continuing on a document which summarised the criteria in a simpler way, with an intention to share it with the special schools soon.
- Needs' categories in the form of 'bands' had been established, from band one (the most intensive needs) to band four, and the assessments were conducted in accordance with these bands.
- The evidence now focused on explaining the criteria to parents and schools and defining the evidence used to assess the bands.

It was asked who was responsible for creating the criteria. In response, it was noted that the panel included the authority's ALN services, educational psychologists, specialist teachers from various teams and the Headteachers of the special schools. It was confirmed that no external agency was currently part of the process, but there were discussions with the regional board, and it was hoped that the Headteachers of mainstream schools were part of the panel moving forward. It was noted that the health board was not a member of the moderation panel, but discussions with the health board had commenced as it was a practice seen in other counties.

Reference was made to the increase in the demand for spaces in special schools and the need for additional resources in the mainstream, especially for children with physical needs, and children with intensive needs had to remain in the mainstream because of lack of capacity in special schools. It was asked who was responsible for providing specialist equipment to support these people. In response, it was explained:

- If the equipment related to medical physical needs, it would derive from an assessment by an occupational therapist or a physiotherapist and would be provided by the health board.
- If the equipment was associated with educational needs, such as visual impairment, the authority would provide those resources.
- It was noted that provision for early years posed more of a challenge, as the locations were not statutory. It was elaborated that a discussion was being held with the Health Board regarding this.

It was asked whether the department had any statistics about children and young people with an Individual Development Plan (IDP) who had been de-registered from education since Covid. In response, it was noted that the department had a record of those children and they received support through a homeschooling grant. It was confirmed that teachers were being employed to keep in contact with the families and coordinate reviews of the IDP. A member asked for specific statistics and it was confirmed that that information would be shared.

Concern was expressed about the funding level for Gwynedd's special schools compared with the rest of Wales, asking what was being done to get to grips

with the situation. It was further noted that children who were on the same level of needs as previously seen were not being accepted into special schools now, and the lack of provision for those children in the mainstream caused a concern. It was asked what was being done to get to grips with the situation of these children who had intensive needs but did not meet the criteria for access to special schools. In response, the following was explained:

- Gwynedd was not amongst the authorities which funded the least, according to the 2023-24 Estyn report, and no cuts had been implemented in the special sector.
- There was increasing pressure on the service as a result of the higher number of children with intensive needs being referred to special schools.
- Children with ALN received good support in mainstream schools and many succeeded fully through that provision.
- The provision continued to develop, with emphasis on inclusion, but there was a need to find the right balance between inclusion and meeting the specific needs of children.
- Mapping work was currently being done to assess the needs of learners across the age groups, including the early years, to proactively plan for the future.
- Changes in the post-16 funding meant that there would be a need to consider the provision for 16–19-year-old learners, including options outside school, namely colleges.
- The service also reviewed the profile of centres where children spent part of the week, to ensure that they still met the changing demand.
- The biggest change in the profile of needs was the needs in terms of language, communication and therapy, especially amongst young learners with IDP.
- Data showed a peak in the number of learners in special schools during the end of the primary period and the beginning of the secondary period, with the number stabilising following that.

Views were expressed that there was success in the mainstream, but cases of failure were also prominent and caused concern. Reference was made to the change in the IDP funding formula in mainstream schools, asking how it could be ensured that the funding was spent appropriately on additional learning needs. Concern was expressed that the funding could be used for other fields, such as improving academic results, leading to lack of provision for pupils with ALN. In response, the following was noted:

- Schools had a legal duty to provide what was noted in an IDP.
- ALN officers monitored the use of funding as part of the monitoring process.
- A guidance document would be shared with the schools by Easter, noting the expectations in terms of appropriate use of the funding, and what was acceptable and unacceptable.
- The information would be included in the quality assurance process in schools.

Appreciation was expressed for ALN units in Dolgellau schools in the past, and it was suggested that it should be considered whether it was possible to re-establish satellite centres in mainstream schools. It was further asked whether the Welsh Government was being lobbied regarding the lack of Welsh-speaking educational psychologists. In response, it was explained:

- The mapping work included consideration of small groups of learners in secondary mainstream schools, who needed a different curriculum but was unsuitable for a special school.
- Bangor University had received a sign of investment for three training spaces in September 2027, but at least six were required to sustainably maintain the course.
- Discussions continued with the Government on an official and political level.

Attention was drawn to the change in the nature of pupils' needs, including communication and behavioural problems, and it was asked whether there was sufficient support for staff who worked with these learners. Concern was raised regarding schools' difficulty to recruit assistants, and it was asked whether a training package was available to make the job more attractive. In response, the following was noted:

- The best provision was when the team modelled working methods in schools.
- The demand had increased but resources did not increase proportionately, putting strain on the flexibility of staff in schools.
- The number of IDP had increased as well as the complexity of needs, meaning that collaboration between teams was now essential.
- Schools faced the challenge of maintaining the provision with the same level of funding, creating tensions that needed to be resolved.
- Changing the funding formula had allowed schools to plan better by getting assurance of the pots for a whole year. It was hoped that this would lead to longer contracts for assistants and less staff rotation.

It was asked about the rationale behind the change to the funding formula, noting that some specific schools had lost funding, without clear evidence of others gaining funding in its place. In response, it was explained that:

- The previous arrangement was based on requests to a panel, which was unstable and unfair in some areas.
- The new formula was fairer as it was based on the complexity of needs instead of numbers only.
- A safety net had been established to ensure that no school would lose more than 50% of its funding in the first year.
- The Welsh Government grant had been used to bridge the gap in the first year, with the hope of renewing it.
- The formula had been planned across a primary and secondary sector basis, correcting historical imbalance.
- Discussions had taken place on an individual level with some schools who had seen a reduction, and they had received a fair explanation.

It was asked whether the funding followed the pupil should they transfer schools or be excluded. In response, it was explained that exceptions to the formula were being considered on a case-by-case basis, and transfers led to re-distributing the funding as appropriate.

It was suggested that providing provision at Ysgol Bro Idris should be reconsidered, considering the high travel costs to Ysgol Hafod Lon. In response, it was noted that the profiling and mapping work included consideration of that possibility, but there was a need to ensure suitable expertise and an appropriate environment.

The importance of inclusion in mainstream schools where possible was emphasised, but there was a need to ensure appropriate support for staff and learners. In response, it was agreed that there was a lot of pressure on coordinating the IDP process and work was underway to ease the administrative load, including working in catchment area bands and providing ALN training in the mainstream to primary and secondary schools from April onwards. The importance of expanding the curriculum to avoid unintended exclusions of pupils with ALN was highlighted. It was noted that grants were available for ALN coordinators to support, free up time and fund training.

RESOLVED

- 1. To accept the report and note the observations.**
- 2. To ask the Cabinet Member for Education:**
 - To consider examining whether the membership of the guidance group for admissions to special schools should be amended.**
 - To look at ways to identify, improve provision and facilitate arrangements for the specific cohort of children who are in the mainstream, who have profound needs but do not meet the threshold for receiving support.**
 - To look at ways to continue to protect the budget for special schools and monitor that money is being spent appropriately and in line with the guidelines.**
 - To encourage practitioners to take advantage of training, and to ascertain whether it is possible to ensure funding received for training is only spent on training.**
 - To investigate the possibility of providing satellite provision in some schools.**
 - To correspond with Welsh Government to express concern about the lack of funding and resources available for additional learning needs and the challenges facing schools.**

7. EDUCATION LANGUAGE POLICY

The report was submitted by the Cabinet Member for Education, emphasising that this document was a draft policy and this stated the start of its development journey. It was noted that the current policy had been in place since 1984, and the reason that it had survived for such a long period of time was because of

the evidence of its success. It was explained that the new document represented the evolution of the current policy, building on the successes of the past to create a policy that was suitable for Gwynedd's needs today. It was noted that it was now time to review the policy and offer changes, with the intention of further strengthening the Welsh language.

Views were expressed that the new model would strengthen the Welsh language and make it more prominent within our schools. It was noted that that also placed a challenge for the schools but the education department was ready to support the schools to fulfil this ambition. It was explained that there was no intention to depreciate the importance of English, but to ensure that the pupils had robust skills in both languages instead, and that they left school completely bilingual. Attention was drawn to the fact that this was what was needed for the future: individuals who could live and work through the medium of Welsh and English.

During the discussion, the following observations were made:-

The view that the draft language policy was the most important document for the future of the Welsh language in Gwynedd was expressed, describing the impact that this policy could have as an unprecedented one for the children of the county and the wider community. The policy was praised for its clarity and for being concise, stating that the previous version was too long and open for misinterpretation. However, concerns were expressed about a number of elements:

1. The lack of measurable ambition in the policy, without specific targets for percentage increase in the Welsh language provision over time.
2. Excessive dependency on the Welsh Government Category 3, noting that most Gwynedd schools had already provided over 70% of its education provision through the medium of Welsh, and therefore they should aim higher.
3. Lack of clarity in the wording of the policy, with terms such as "Every pupil is taught and assessed through the medium of Welsh until the end of Year 2" and "Welsh will be the pupils' main educational medium" being too open for interpretation. Stronger wording was suggested, such as "Welsh will be the pupils' medium of education, assessment and extra-curricular activities until the end of Year 2" and "Welsh will be the pupils' educational medium".

It was emphasised that there was a need to explain how English was taught cross-curricular and who decided on that, expressing concern that this could undermine the consistent use of the Welsh language. It was expressed that the policy should explain specifically who was deciding on the content of that provision. It was also noted that the policy did not clearly state how learning time was split between Welsh and English.

Disappointment was expressed that the policy did not aim towards the Welsh Government Category 3P, as several schools in the county already met the requirements of this category. It was asked whether the fact that the policy only aimed towards Category 3 conveyed a message regarding schools which reached Category 3P, such as suggesting that they were unprecedented

because of their wider use of the Welsh language. In response, the following was noted:

- To accept the observations regarding the need to strengthen the wording slightly to ensure that there was no misinterpretation.
- This policy established a baseline, and the schools were expected to increase the Welsh-medium provision over a period of time.
- Every school would have a specific improvement plan for the Welsh language, and these plans would be monitored over time with clear targets.
- Percentages were not part of category 3 as such, and the policy was not based on percentages of 60% or 40%.
- Exemptions were acknowledged within the policy, such as additional learning needs and latecomers, with suitable provision being planned for them.
- The policy did not refer to specific subjects such as cross-curricular work; instead, the policy stated that every area of learning and experience must be taught through the medium of Welsh as the main language.
- The reference to cross-curricular work was that pupils had opportunities within the areas of learning and experience to develop their English language competency, meaning that the percentage of the cross-curricular learning would be presented through the medium of English.
- It was not possible to exempt one subject specifically to be taught through the medium of English.
- English as a subject would count towards approximately 14-15% of learning time, with the additional use of English being included across every area of learning as part of cross-curricular experiences.
- Category 3P no longer existed under the new Language Measure which went through the Senedd, and the categories in the future would only include Categories 1, 2 and 3.
- 70% was the minimum Welsh-language provision determined in the policy, not the maximum.
- The policy specifically referred to 70% curricular, with an expectation for the extra-curricular work and the experience through the Secondary Language Charter, which was part of this measure and statutory, to increase the use of the Welsh language additionally.

Concern was expressed that the policy continued to specifically refer to the Welsh Government guidelines by including a link to the current categories. In response, it was acknowledged that the draft policy included a link to the Welsh Language framework and the current categories, reflecting the current situation. It was elaborated that category 3 had been noted as it was a blanket policy on behalf of the authority, and only three categories would exist, therefore category 3 was the most suitable category.

It was asked for clarity regarding how the cross-curricular learning would be implemented, emphasising the danger, if pupils chose which elements would be taught through the medium of English, that would undermine the use of the

Welsh language in lessons. In response, it was confirmed that it was not intended for pupils to individually choose which subjects would be taught through the medium of English. It was elaborated that Headteachers had been part of the engagement for them to take ownership of the policy, to ensure that it was implemented more effectively. It was confirmed that every school would plan in detail, and the use of the Welsh language and English would be incorporated systematically based on the Areas of Learning and Experience.

It was repeated that it was a draft document, and the purpose of presenting to the committee was to receive observations before going on to a full public consultation over the summer. It was emphasised that the consultation process would be very thorough. It was noted that officers and the Cabinet Member for Education had been proactive in ensuring that the public was aware of the process.

It was emphasised that the current policy, established in 1984, was still in force today, and therefore there was a need to implement a new robust policy which would influence over the next few decades. It was noted that this policy was not a step back, but a way to open new doors for the children of Gwynedd by providing more linguistic and professional opportunities for them.

A member welcomed the draft policy and thanked the officers and the Cabinet Member for Education for presenting the policy to the committee. The continuous work and the collaboration between the Education Department, the officers and Cabinet members to bring the document into the current stage was praised.

Reference was made to the strengths of the policy as it was presented, but also to some observations considered less constructive by some politicians, noting that this outlined the lack of understanding of the true value of bilingualism and bilingual education.

It was emphasised that bilingualism and the ability to be multi-lingual was an integral part of the modern world and offered unique benefits to the children of Gwynedd, not only in terms of work opportunities but also in terms of culture, media and social life.

A personal story was shared about the significant change that resulted from having access to education through the medium of Welsh, and how that experience was now being transferred to the member's children through their upbringing and their education. Concern was expressed that not every child in the county currently had equal access to that gift of bilingualism. Reference was made to the experiences of learners who regretted losing the opportunity to learn Welsh younger. It was emphasised that the Council had a duty to ensure equal opportunities for every child in the county, and the gift of bilingualism had to be offered fully to everyone.

The ambition expressed for the three transitional schools was welcomed, but attention was drawn to the fact that not one ambition had been clearly outlined for those schools already categorised as part of Category 3. It was noted that

many of those schools already implemented beyond the baseline of the category, and a robust framework had to be included within the policy to ensure measurable progress over a specific period of time.

The fact that the language of education was becoming more important in trying to maintain the Welsh language as a community level was emphasised. The Council was called to continue to innovate and provide a clear and robust path for every school to increase the use of the Welsh language by Gwynedd children today and in the future.

Some elements of the draft policy were welcomed, especially the intention to move schools forward along the continuum, although a more certain timetable was possibly required. It was accepted that the policy had been presented in a clearer and simpler way, and some aspects of the wording needed further consideration.

Disappointment was expressed that there was no intention to include schools in category 3P, alleging that there was no clear basis for the decision in the documentation. Reference was made to the strong history of Welsh-medium education in the county since the 1980s, noting that this had weakened over time. Concern was expressed that some schools in Welsh areas now offered less Welsh-language provision, which was contrary to the Welsh Government's policy which demanded maintaining or increasing Welsh-language provision.

Attention was drawn to the expectation of the Welsh Government for category 3 schools to reflect the linguistic context of its area and work towards increasing Welsh-language provision over time, and views were expressed that the draft policy did not achieve this, especially in schools such as Ysgol Dyffryn Nantlle and Ysgol Brynrefail. The lack of ambition in the secondary sector was judged, noting the concern for potential deterioration. Cyngor Gwynedd was called to protect the current provision and show more ambition, referring to the Catalonia model. Concerns were also raised about the lack of consistent monitoring of the policy. In response, it was noted:

- Every school would be categorised as a category 3 school in accordance with the national system; category 3P would no longer exist.
- The threshold of 70% was not its highest limit, but a minimum.
- No school would receive less Welsh-language provision than what was in the past, there was no danger of deterioration.
- Schools would be expected to increase the provision continuously over time, with a clear ambition to improve from the 70% minimum where possible.
- The authority worked closely with the schools to support this process.
- New officers had been appointed to the Education Department to strengthen monitoring arrangements.
- These officers would be responsible for monitoring the implementation of the policy and the development plans.

- The monitoring arrangements would include tight collaboration between schools and the authority, as well as the responsibility to report progress to the Welsh Government.
- The policy included measures to ensure linguistic continuation between Key Stage 2 and the secondary, with transition children being noted and followed to ensure that they kept to their appropriate linguistic path.

The certainty that monitoring arrangements were now underway was welcomed. However, disappointment was expressed that there was no consideration to restore or define category 3P. Restoring 100% Welsh-language provision in schools where appropriate was called, as it used to be in the 1980s and the 1990s.

A member expressed support for the draft policy. A view was expressed that a category 3P definition was not required as the schools in question had already moved on significantly, and complied with the Welsh Government's expectations in terms of language provision. It was asked what training would be available for staff members to help them reach the required Welsh-language level to teach every area within the curriculum. It was further asked, what funding would be available to strengthen the immersion units, especially for pupils who arrived late, such as year 8 or 9, as there was a need to enable these pupils to be able to follow qualifications through the medium of Welsh. In response, it was noted:

- The Welsh Government had established Canolfan Dysgu Cymraeg Cenedlaethol and Gwynedd already worked with this centre.
- The centre offered courses tailored for individual teachers in specific schools, including access and higher-level courses.
- The courses were tailored to teachers' timetables and could be face-to-face, partially virtual or self-study.
- Tutors were assigned to clusters of schools, and courses were available which were subject-specific, e.g. mathematics or physics.
- Sabbatical courses were available with a teacher from a transitional school already registered.
- In terms of funding, the immersion scheme was under increasing pressure. A grant was received by the Welsh Government with the Authority adding to it with corresponding funding.
- A national immersion network had been established and grants were provided over a three-year cycle. The current year started a new cycle.
- The schemes and the need for additional funding had been shared with the Welsh Government, and they were aware of the arrangements and the pressure.

It was asked whether the training would be available internally, or whether individuals would have to arrange and pay for them themselves, considering workload. Concerns were also raised about the need for specific provision for teachers in schools which moved from the 3T category. In response, it was noted:

- There was a very vast variety of courses available.
- All the courses were free.

- The government did not fund non-contact time, but despite this, they worked with schools to tailor the courses around teachers' timetables.
- Schools received professional development grants which could be used to release staff to attend the courses.

It was asked whether there was an intention to consult with the Diocese regarding the change in the category of Ysgol Ein Harglwyddes. Concern was expressed about the varied nature of pupils in that school and it was asked for assurance that an equality impact assessment would be undertaken.

In response, it was explained that a period of engagement and consultation would be undertaken as part of the process of developing the draft policy. It was noted that this work would include stakeholders from Ysgol Ein Harglwyddes and meetings would be arranged. It was also confirmed that an equality impact assessment would be undertaken to ensure that the needs of every pupil would be met.

There were concerns regarding the clarity of the draft policy, noting that it was difficult for schools to understand what exactly was expected. Views were expressed that the policy was too easy to misinterpret. It was called for a strengthened version, making it more concise, clear and robust, emphasising that regular monitoring from governors and the Education Department was essential for its success. In response, it was noted:

- The draft policy set an initial direction.
- The aim was clear, namely, to increase the language standards in the education system, and every school would be expected to develop a specific plan for its individual circumstances to increase the use of the Welsh language as an education language.
- Clear examples of cross-curricular learning would be expected and progress would be monitored by school support officers.

It was asked about the contribution and specific recommendations of Meirion Prys Jones, as a national language expert, when creating the draft policy. In response, Meirion Prys Jones noted:

- He was the document's co-author, as well as education officers and with the agreement of secondary school Headteachers, and vast discussions had been held over a two-day period.
- The document was innovative and he had no doubt about that.
- The document presented a challenge, especially for secondary school Headteachers, and detailed discussions had been held with them on two occasions, including the previous week.
- The policy tried to move schools from bilingual education (whatever that meant) to Welsh-medium learning, with the aim of ensuring that a high percentage of pupils followed subjects through the medium of Welsh up to 16 years old.
- This aim was in accordance with the Welsh Government's policy on category 3 schools, considering that not many pupils currently sat their exams or studied subjects through the medium of Welsh at 14 years old.

- External stakeholders had also been part of the process and they stated that the document was clear enough.
- Further discussion was welcomed, emphasising that there was a need for the policy to be clear, robust and concise, and this had been a priority in creating it.

A member emphasised the importance of ensuring that every child was able to remain in the area and in their community by having the necessary linguistic skills, especially when applying for local jobs asking for the Welsh language. It was called for a policy which would ensure that the Welsh language was a live language in the community and that pupils left school completely bilingual. The need for positive steps was emphasised, strongly objecting to any political attempt to undermine the Welsh language.

The Cabinet Member for Education emphasised his wish to provide equal opportunities for children and to maintain the good linguistic work being done in the primary sector as they moved into the secondary sector. Concern was expressed regarding the way that the Welsh language was being discussed in some political circles. Disappointment was expressed about hearing observations from Darren Millar MS, and it was expressed that the belief that the Welsh language, as the national language of Wales, was now something that everyone should strongly support.

Disappointment was expressed in terms of lack of vision in the draft policy. Reference was made to the reduction in the percentage of children who spoke Welsh according to the latest census, and the fact that 14% of Gwynedd's children were unable to speak Welsh despite years of the policy. It was suggested that there was a need for a much more robust and ambitious strategy.

It was asked for clarity regarding pre-school education, emphasising that there was a need to use words such as "only through the medium of Welsh" when referring to pre-school provision to set robust foundations. It was asked what "Welsh is the main education medium" in the primary truly meant. Concerns were expressed regarding the use of English across the curriculum without a clear definition. It was suggested that English should be taught as a second-language subject instead of a cross-curricular learning medium.

Reference was made to the definition of a category 3 school, which was that every subject except for English was taught through the medium of Welsh. It was asked whether this was being achieved at every school, and it was suggested that the 70% figure was insufficient given the standard Welsh education given to children in the primary period. It was asked for increasing targets and regular monitoring to ensure continuous progress.

The need to take decisive action for the Welsh language in a county with the highest percentage of Welsh speakers in the country was emphasised. It was noted that there was a need to draft a stronger and more ambitious policy, one which normalised the Welsh language as the everyday communication language in the life of the school, in the community and at home. It was asked to re-consult

and redraft the policy to protect the language nationally and locally, respecting the need to also learn English in detail and standard.

A member expressed concern that the discussion did not reflect a positive attitude towards the policy. Views were expressed that the policy was ambitious, positive and innovative. The risk that negative messages would contribute to the deterioration of the language was underlined. Everyone who contributed to creating the policy was thanked, and hope was expressed that the consultation process would include everyone, including those with more positive perspectives.

A member noted that the policy needed to reflect the significant demographic changes that had happened in the county over the last half a century. It was wished to see links being removed from the policy and to clearly note what was the expected provision for Gwynedd schools to present. It was also wished for further clarity in the policy regarding introducing English in a cross-curricular manner. It was emphasised that the basic question was the continuation of a Welsh community, and there was a need to discuss the policy in that spirit.

A member highlighted the reality of the situation within the current education profession, noting the crisis of recruiting and retaining teachers across Wales. There was a concern regarding the low number of applicants registering on PGCE (Post Graduate Certificate in Education) courses and a significant number of teachers left the profession. Views were expressed that any teacher would welcome the opportunity to learn Welsh fluently, but the county must enable this through appropriate provision. It was called for patience and understanding that the aim was high-standard education, and the change would take time. In response to several previous points, the Cabinet Member for Education noted:

- The general difficulty of recruiting teachers existed, emphasising that the process was long-term which asked for commitment and resources.
- This policy was not a quick attempt to create an impression, but a serious enterprise which required time and resources to appropriately implement it.
- Some schools would be able to reach the 70% minimum easier than others, and that is why we needed to take time to appropriately invest.
- The 70% noted in the policy was a minimum, not a maximum.
- There was a need for further clarity in some parts of the wording, and that was something that the officers would be willing to consider when refining the draft.

The Cabinet Member for Education noted regarding the cross-curricular element:

- Welsh, English, numeracy and digital competency were all being taught in a cross-curricular manner across every area of learning and experience and not as individual subjects only.
- Formal English lessons, including grammar, started in Year 3, with an opportunity afterwards to use that language in a cross-curricular manner.

To conclude, the Cabinet Member noted that the draft policy was ambitious, but he accepted that there was a need to make necessary changes. He emphasised

that this was the purpose of the meeting, namely, to create an open forum for discussion. It was explained that vast consultation with Gwynedd residents was essential, and that was the reason for the vast engagement work that had already been done with schools across the county.

It was noted that external experts had been included in the process to strengthen the document and ensure that the Welsh language continued to be a live language in Gwynedd, contributing directly to the national aim of reaching a million speakers by 2050 and onwards. He emphasised the importance of nurturing children and young people who, after leaving the education system, would be able to work bilingually. Reference was made to the discussion held about attracting teachers who are able to speak Welsh. It was noted, in order to reach this aim, there was a need to increase the use of the Welsh language in the field of education.

It was highlighted that support had been received from UCAC (Undeb Cenedlaethol Athrawon Cymru), confirming that the policy would not have a detrimental impact on the workforce. Furthermore, support was received from Cymdeithas yr Iaith, noting that this was a step in the right direction, and that they welcomed it, and wished to see other counties following Gwynedd's example.

In response to a question raised about whether Gwynedd continued to be at the forefront, it was expressed that Gwynedd continued to lead the way. The officers were thanked for their hard work and Councillor Beca Brown for her contribution from the start.

RESOLVED

- 1. To note the draft policy and note the observations.**
- 2. Welcome the fact that the draft policy was proceeding to consultation.**
- 3. That the Committee makes a request to the Scrutiny Forum to prioritise resources for the formation of a task and finish group, with the brief to examine the wording of the Draft Education Language Policy to consider whether suggestions need to be made to the Cabinet Member / Education Department, and report back to the committee at the 19 June 2025 meeting.**
- 4. Should the application to the Scrutiny Forum be successful, the Scrutiny Advisor to send an e-mail to Committee members giving them the opportunity to put their name forward to be a member of the Task and Finish Group.**

The meeting commenced at 10:30am and concluded at 3:10pm

Chair