

EDUCATION AND ECONOMY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

NOTES

TASK AND FINISH GROUP - DRAFT EDUCATION LANGUAGE POLICY

2 June 2025

Virtual Meeting

**Present**

**Councillors:** Rhys Tudur (Chair), Jina Gwyrfai, Richard Glyn Roberts and Huw Rowlands

**Officers:** Bethan Adams (Scrutiny Advisor), Iwan Evans (Monitoring Officer / Head of Legal Service), Gwern ap Rhisiart (Head of Education), Debbie Anne Jones (Assistant Head of Education Department: Corporate Services), Siwan Llwyd Roberts (Head of Gwynedd's Immersion Education System) and Jennifer Rao (Education Executive Officer).

**1. ELECTION OF CHAIR**

Councillor Rhys Tudur was elected Chair of the Task and Finish Group.

**2. APOLOGIES**

No apologies were received.

**3. HOLDING A TASK AND FINISH GROUP**

The Scrutiny Advisor referred to the guidance on holding task and finish groups that had been included in the agenda. In accordance with procedure, she noted that the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group would be considered by the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee on 19 June 2025. She highlighted the need for the Task and Finish Group to make actionable recommendations.

**4. DRAFT EDUCATION LANGUAGE POLICY**

The most effective way of holding a discussion on the item was discussed. The Chair sought members' views on considering the document he had jointly produced with Councillor Richard Glyn Roberts which was referred to during the discussion on the draft policy at the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee meeting on 10 April 2025. A member stated that he was satisfied with the suggestions in the document and that he agreed with them in principle.

The Scrutiny Advisor suggested that the wording of the Draft Education Language Policy submitted to the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee on 10 April 2025 should be considered. She noted that it would be possible to receive guidance from the officers present as to what could be implemented.

The Monitoring Officer noted that the document with the potential amendments had been shared with the Task and Finish Group, and that it was not put to the Committee as a proposal. He explained that in terms of the decision-making process, that the Task and Finish Group would make recommendations to the Committee which would make a recommendation to the Cabinet Member for Education and the Education Department to take them forward to Cabinet. He noted that the document with potential amendments omitted and added words to the original wording of the draft policy. He explained that since the field was so technical and there

were many amendments that it would be difficult to address and de-construct sentences and check them against policy matters, statutory guidelines and requirements of the field with complexities in terms of the governance structure. He noted that a higher level of understanding was needed in terms of direction and desire than just drafting the wording alone as it was a matter that would go before the Cabinet. He elaborated that he did not believe that it would be possible to adopt the document with the amendments in its present form and that it was necessary to evaluate against the other requirements.

Members concluded that considering the document with the possible amendments would be the most effective way of holding the discussion with an opportunity for the Chair to set out the rationale behind the amendments and an opportunity for officers to comment.

The Monitoring Officer highlighted that if no objection was noted by officers when considering the recommendations in terms of the wording of the draft policy, it did not mean acceptance of them as there was a need for reflection.

During the ensuing discussion, the Chair set out the rationale behind the possible amendments and members and officers were given the opportunity to make observations:

**1. Cyngor Gwynedd Language Strategy 2023-33**

- That the word "Aim" had been removed because it was confusing and implied that the main aim of the policy was included in the box rather than the aim of the Language Strategy.

**2. Cyngor Gwynedd's Revised Education Language Policy**

- That the policy needed a clear aim in terms of strengthening Welsh language provision and providing guidance.
- The aim of the policy should not be to inform governors of what is supposed to happen. It should provide guidance on how to maintain and empower the Welsh language.
- The reference to the categorisation of schools according to their Welsh-medium provision had been removed as the guidance was being replaced by the Welsh Language and Education Bill which had been passed by the Welsh Senedd and would proceed to the next stage of receiving Royal Assent. That it was fairer to state what the provision should be in the policy - rather than the guidance that is to be replaced speaking for the policy.
- Change the wording in terms of objectives – complying with the guidance in the policy rather than referring to the guidelines.
- That "and English" had been removed from the first bullet point on page 2 as it is a Welsh language policy.
- That the reference to bilingual proficiency had been removed from the second bullet point on page 2 as the policy brings bilingual education to an end and this should not be referred back to. As it may mean that the policy possibly created a requirement on teachers to ensure that the pupils had bilingual proficiency and perhaps receive a balanced Welsh and English education, although that was not the definition of a Welsh-medium school. They did not want to create a policy that created a right to English-medium education when Welsh-medium schools were being encouraged.
- Third bullet point – that “encouraged” was a very weak word in a policy that sought to ensure that pupils attended and made use of immersion centres. Although acknowledging that it was not a mandatory system.

The Monitoring Officer noted that the bill had not received Royal Assent so it was not in force as an Act. He explained that schools were required to publish their category of Welsh-medium provision under the guidance which was still in force at the moment. He elaborated that not referring to categories would create a vacuum until the other provisions that would create a different system from the current system were in place.

In response, the Chair stated that the Welsh Language and Education Bill would come into force in the next year and a half. He elaborated that there should not be an over-reliance on categorisation under the existing non-statutory guidelines in the policy as a new policy would be required.

The Head of Education noted that it was important to recognise the role of the governing body. He stressed that governors had so much of a role to play in many areas including language. He noted that the Education Authority had a responsibility in terms of language categorisation with the governing body having the responsibility of reaching the goal with a plan. He elaborated that governors and schools needed to be brought along the journey, noting expectations and not being too strict in terms of wording. He noted that schools were governed by governors and that the authority was at an arm's length with powers that could be used if necessary.

In response to the rationale in relation to the amendments under the objectives, the Monitoring Officer stated that any policy must recognise the categorisation system. He explained that it was likely that the bill would receive Royal Assent in the summer but that the provisions were subject to statutory orders coming into force and a timetable to be announced by the Welsh Government. He stressed that there was a difference between coming into effect and becoming operational. He stated that his legal opinion was that the policy was going to exist until the new system came in. He elaborated that the new system would be a different arrangement for the relationship between governors and the authority and he did not think that the current policy under the new act could remain unchanged. He noted that omitting reference to categorisation significantly weakened the policy as it meant ignoring one of the main methods of school language category designation thus creating uncertainty.

The Chair noted in response to the comments, that he did not completely object to referring to a category but that it was more practical to state that they were to comply with the Welsh Government's current definition of Welsh-medium schools as there would be a change.

A member noted that one policy was needed that would not have to be changed with the option possibly to refer to categories in the policy on the proviso that the definition was going to change.

#### **Pre-school education provision**

A member noted that the provision of pre-school education underpinned everything and that consideration should be given to amending the sentence to state "All pre-school education settings will provide through the medium of Welsh only."

They proposed an additional wording that should be considered to include under the heading. They elaborated that although this period was not statutory, that it was important that children had the Welsh language when entering the foundation phase.

### Primary

- Questioned whether the first three paragraphs under this subheading were necessary because it was confusing as to what the provision was in the foundation phase up to year 2 onwards.
- That the wording of "both languages" had been removed from the second paragraph in case they were used by those who are opposed to the intention of the policy.
- The wording in the third paragraph had been modified to indicate "Welsh will be the medium of education..." rather than "Welsh is the main medium of the education..." because the reference to main medium could be ambiguous and open to interpretation.
- That the wording "Every pupil is taught and assessed through the medium of Welsh until the end of Year 2." had been removed under the subheading 'Foundation Phase until the end of Year 2' because technically some education could be obtained in Welsh and none of the rest. It was believed that the possible new wording under the subheading was in line with the aim of the original wording.
- With regard to the sub-heading 'Year 3 – Year 6', questioned whether a percentage was required for Welsh education in primary as there was no requirement to have anything more than English as a subject. Considering the Siarter Iaith (Welsh Language Charter), were extra-curricular activities not meant to be carried out in Welsh?

The Chair enquired about the views of the Education Department on the above point. In response, the Head of Education noted that the Department's views could be seen in the draft policy. He elaborated that the Department considered it important to give both sides but that he understood the rationale of his viewpoint.

- It was important to note how English was presented so that it did not become the oral practice of teaching on a cross-curricular level. That English was used in specific units of work and most importantly determined by the school rather than the pupils. This was noted in order to have better control over the provision and to ensure that the rest of the learning was in Welsh.

### Secondary

- Wording had been amended because the Welsh Language and Education Bill was coming in, therefore, use terminology where there was no need to change.
- Gwynedd should have a more ambitious provision than what the Welsh Government provided for Welsh-medium schools in the bill. That the percentage increased from 70% to 80% but personally favoured everything through the medium of Welsh except English as a subject.
- Again, questioned whether extra-curricular activities should be conducted in English at all.
- To be clear and unambiguous, the second paragraph had been amended to note when English is introduced – as a subject, written tasks in specific units of work determined by the school.

A member noted in relation to extra-curricular activities that the only English-medium activities in the Secondary would be theatre and that English as a subject encompassed that.

The Chair pointed out that "expected" was often used in the document in relation to what was expected of schools. He noted that changing it to "will" should be considered as "expected" was a weak word when stating what should be done.

- That the third paragraph had been removed as it was a policy relating to the Welsh language and that those who were opposed could use it because it stated "...development of their skills in both languages".
- That the fourth paragraph stated, "Schools will have appropriate linguistic provision for any learner arriving at the school as a latecomer in years 10 and 11." Accepted that there was no immersion education for pupils in these years but noting this could create difficulty. It could mean a request for English education although the pupil was able to speak Welsh and could do some aspects and they should do so.
- That a minor amendment was proposed for the last paragraph to indicate "Welsh will be the internal communication language" rather than "the main language" as it should be Welsh. In terms of communicating with parents, questioned whether noting "English" was necessary given that it notes in Welsh or bilingually.

### **3. Additional Learning Needs in the Mainstream and Special Schools**

- That the amendment had been made in order to make it clear that pupils with additional learning needs had an equal opportunity to receive Welsh language education in accordance with the policy. That there were no disadvantages and a lack of encouragement and support for these pupils to receive Welsh-medium education and the opportunities to be fluent.
- If the Department deemed it necessary to add to the proposed sentence, it would be possible to do so.

### **4. Welsh Language Progress Plans (Individual Schools)**

- It was believed that the wording needed to be more robust to impose the expectations on schools.
- Meaningful and measurable progress should be realised over time.
- There was no objection for schools to note priorities but that measurable monitoring reports were needed to hold into account effectively.
- That the last sentence had been removed – not a bad thing to note that they are minimum percentages and that schools could be ambitious but need to remove "Category 3 Schools" as it would be replaced.

Members were given the opportunity to make further observations.

A member noted that the exercise had been interesting. They added that, when submitting the Task and Finish Group's report to the Committee, it should be noted that members thanked the officers for their work and for working openly with the members on this matter and that it was a good example of how things should work.

A member echoed the above comments. By removing the sentence in terms of appropriate language provision for latecomers in years 10 and 11, they questioned whether immersion provision for years 7 to 11 was requested. They noted that when it came to planning progression in the Welsh language, there was not much detail. They questioned whether there would be training for governors.

A member noted that he agreed with most of the comments and amendments and looked forward to hearing officers' views on what had been suggested and if there were any stumbling blocks.

The Chair noted observations on the direction of the Policy –

- Consideration should be given to changing "expected" to "will" throughout the document;
- Questioned whether extra-curricular activities should be in English at all given the Siarter Iaith (Welsh Language Charter);
- References to categorisation guidance - reference should not be made to the guidance but if there is a reluctance to refer to the Welsh Language and Education Bill, then consider specifying both terminologies creating less hassle as the bill becomes law;
- Progress Plans – set out what was expected which was a progress and measurable monitoring report;
- That it needed to be clear how English was presented if the Department insisted that it be taught in a cross-curricular manner. It needed to be clear that it was determined by the school rather than a parent/pupil.

A member noted that it was very important to note that all children would receive Welsh education under the new Act, therefore, categorisation needed to be removed and that all children received the Welsh language, which included the pre-school period. They expressed concern in relation to English lessons stating that English should be introduced in a cross-curricular manner only if it was a must. They noted that there was a need to cap the amount if progress was to be made and to monitor progress, and as a pupil acquired English the tasks should become more specific and the hours reduced. They echoed the comments about extra-curricular activities.

The Monitoring Officer stated that he appreciated the discussion which enabled him to understand the rationale, intention and objective behind the amendments. He explained that an opportunity to consider the amendments was required as there was a statutory framework related to these matters. He highlighted that Section 10 of the new act noted that the ministers would create the details of the new categories in regulations and then there would be the understanding of the percentages and various aspects. He noted that it would be beneficial for the Task and Finish Group to consider how the amendments would sit within the curriculum framework, the Welsh Language in Education and also the division of duties between governors and the local authority. He emphasised that if he had not responded to every comment from members it did not mean that he either agreed or disagreed and that this was indeed the case for the other officers.

In response, the Chair noted that guidance on a curricular framework was not available in a single document, guidance would be useful to the Task and Finish Group and the Scrutiny Committee. He noted that Welsh-medium education categories give a minimum with the Welsh Language and Education Bill under Section 10 stating that the minimum for a Welsh-medium primary school was 80%. He noted that there were not so many legal difficulties to strengthen the provision by more than 80%.

A member noted that the amendments were not stronger than what was already happening in other counties. He stressed that it was important not to introduce a policy that was not as strong as the current policy and that the amendments ensured that.

In response, the Monitoring Officer noted that the level of change in language provision in a school meant exceeding the threshold where it was necessary to go through the statutory change process, as had happened in Ceredigion recently in the establishment of Welsh-medium schools (Category 3P).

The Chair noted his understanding that the statutory change process would be replaced. He elaborated that the bill itself brought requirements to make annual delivery plans and for the governors to consult with a cross-section of people, pupils and parents etc. but schools would be able to increase Welsh-medium provision without having to go through a statutory procedure anymore.

The Chair noted that it would be beneficial to receive guidance with regards to what made it necessary for English to be taught in a cross-curricular manner.

The Scrutiny Advisor enquired in relation to the naming of specific schools in the amendments.

The Chair noted that reference should be made to the schools as it would not be possible for them to provide the provision outlined in the policy immediately. He noted that his view at the start of the consultation on the policy was that a separate policy should be created for the schools that are not currently category 3. He elaborated that since they are starting from a different place, they needed different targets, strategy and policy. He noted that if the intention was to create a single policy model for all schools, it was necessary to refer to the schools and they could modify the definition to indicate that they were progressing to the same provision as the other schools with the aim of achieving it within a specific timeframe.

Members confirmed that Ysgol Friars and Ysgol Uwchradd Tywyn needed to be named under Secondary in the same way Ysgol Ein Harglwyddes was named under Primary to make it clear that they started from a different place.

A member enquired if different progression planning conditions could be made for these schools with lower requirements but that there was a specific timetable to increase provision. In response, the Head of Education stated that each school would start from a different place and that the length of the journey to reach the aim was going to take more time for some of the schools.

The Chair thanked everyone for their contribution and that he welcomed the opportunity to discuss the wording of the draft policy.

The meeting commenced at 3.30pm and concluded at 5.00pm.