
EDUCATION AND ECONOMY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
13/02/25

Attendance:

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

Councillors:- Beca Brown, Jina Gwyrfai, Iwan Huws, 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 and Sian Williams.

Co-opted Members: Colette Owen (The Catholic Church), Sharon Roberts (Arfon Parent/Governor Representative) and Gwilym Jones (NASUWT).

Officers present: Bethan Adams (Scrutiny Advisor) and Eirian Roberts and Jasmine Jones (Democracy Services Officers).

Present for item 5 – Councillor Medwyn Hughes (Cabinet Member for Economy and Community), Sioned Williams (Head of Economy and Community Department), Dylan Griffiths (Economic Development Service Manager) and Osian Elis (Gwynedd Business Development Team Leader).

Present for item 6 – Councillor Dewi Jones (Cabinet Member for Education), Gwern ap Rhisiart (Head of Education), Rhys Glyn (Head of Gwynedd's Immersion Education System) and Meirion Prys Jones (Adviser). Also, observers from the Language Committee – Councillors Anne Lloyd Jones and Elfed Williams.

Present for item 7 – Councillor Dewi Jones (Cabinet Member for Education), Gwern ap Rhisiart (Head of Education) and Rhys Glyn (Head of Gwynedd's Immersion Education System).

Present for item 8 – Dylan Owen (Corporate Director and Statutory Director of Social Services).

The following were welcomed to the meeting:-

- New members of the committee, Councillors Beca Brown and Dyfrig Siencyn.
- Members of the Language Committee invited as observers for item 6.

Before making a start on the discussions, the Chair expressed his disappointment that none of the three main items on the agenda contained the information that had been expected when scheduling the items for this meeting. He added that although it was understandable that the workflow was sometimes slower than originally intended, it would have been much easier for the committee if a timely notice had been given of this.

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Gwynfor Owen.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were received.

3. URGENT ITEMS

None to note.

4. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee held on 12 December, 2024 as a true record.

5. THE GWYNEDD ECONOMY PLAN

The Cabinet Member for Economy and Community was welcomed to his first meeting of the scrutiny committee and was congratulated on his appointment. The Head of the Economy and Community Department and the officers were also welcomed to the meeting.

Submitted – a report by the Cabinet Member inviting input from the members on the contents and on further issues they believed should be considered in compiling the Gwynedd Economy Plan.

The Cabinet Member noted at the outset that this item followed on from the discussion at the scrutiny committee meeting on 25 January 2024 regarding the implementation of the Gwynedd Economy Development Project.

In response to the Chair's comments at the start of the meeting, the Head of Economy and Community Department explained:-

- That it was fair to say, when the report was presented last year, that they had expected to be in a considerably different position by now.
- The hope last autumn, when there had been a discussion in the Leadership Team, was that there would now be a completed document ready to be printed. This had not happened, although much work had taken place.
- They needed to go back to the Leadership Team, and she believed that it was beneficial to have this committee's input today to the principles and direction so that the document that would be submitted to the Leadership Team incorporated the scrutineers' observations.
- A draft of the finished document was not ready today since the Department had re-scheduled the work since the autumn. That had happened for several reasons, which included starting again on setting a new direction in the wake of appointing a new Cabinet Member, and re-planning work priorities to take account of an additional year's worth of

work in light of the UK Government's decision to extend the Levelling Up Fund for an extra year.

The Cabinet Member set out the context for the report, noting the following:-

- The UK Government's confirmation that the Levelling Up Fund would continue for a further year to 2025/26 was to be welcomed, but we could be certain that the financial landscape would change once again after April 2026. Consequently, the requirement for this Council to consider its economic priorities remained.
- Securing a document that clearly stated our aspirations would also be an important tool in influencing discussions by the two governments within the North Wales region.
- The purpose of the report to hand was to summarise the messages received and to obtain comments and feedback from the scrutineers before proceeding to finish compiling the Economic Development Strategic Plan and adopting it in the new financial year.

The members were given an opportunity to ask questions and offer observations.

A member expressed their opinion that it was difficult to scrutinise a progress report – the members had hoped to scrutinise a draft version of the Gwynedd Economy Plan at this meeting. They noted that there could be no certainty whether there would be another opportunity for this committee to scrutinise the plan before it went to the Cabinet in April. It was emphasised that it was incredibly important that Gwynedd had a high-level strategy given the likely changes in the funding programmes. Nevertheless, it was acknowledged that some very good work had been done in some areas. In response, it was noted:-

- That they agreed it was important to have a document that clearly identified Gwynedd's priorities as a county, so that it could be used to influence and target funding in the future.
- Everyone had expected the funding to end completely on 1 April, and that the document was needed this year. However, the extension of the funding for an additional year meant that staff had to cope with planning the preparation of the document alongside running a new funding programme for 2025/26.
- They hoped to be able to bring a draft document to the committee to be scrutinised in the coming months. They were aiming to have a document agreed during 2025/26 so that it was in place to influence the 2026/27 programmes.

A member enquired whether there would be an opportunity for this committee to scrutinise the draft Economy Plan before it was submitted to the Cabinet. In response, it was noted that this was considered essential. However, as it was intended to submit the draft document to the Cabinet on 8 April, and that this committee did not meet again until 10 April, it was suggested that the Cabinet item might have to be re-scheduled.

It was noted that the Plan would consider the implications of all the changes that were happening in agriculture at the moment and the importance of agriculture

to Gwynedd. The need for the Department to be in contact with the farming unions in Wales was expressed. It was emphasised that the implications of the changes were enormous for the Gwynedd countryside and were also far-reaching for rural businesses that relied on agriculture. In response, it was noted:-

- That the analysis of the economy showed the value and importance of agriculture and that the Economy Plan would need to address the changes and threats the sector were facing.
- There had been no discussions with the farming unions to date, but with regard to the wider agri-food sector, the Economy Plan would address priority projects that were being planned, such as the Glynllifon Rural Economy Hub.
- The initial document examined the economic profile and which parts of the economy were important, to be able to identify where were the risks in the economy and where economic growth was needed.
- In terms of wider engagement, discussions had been held with the Council's strategic partners, such as Bangor University and Grŵp Llandrillo Menai, and bodies representing businesses such as the Federation of Small Businesses, with regard to providing support to businesses in the county.
- The Business Survey referenced in part 5.1 of the report was an exercise that had been conducted last year to engage with businesses in the county, and 130 responses had been received to the survey.
- The purpose of the exercise had been to identify what were the businesses' aims and objectives over the period ahead, the challenges they faced and the opportunities they wished to take advantage of, in order to find whether they intended to grow, or whether they anticipated that the business would shrink.
- Recruitment challenges were one of the main challenges facing the businesses. This reflected wider trends in terms of the county's demography, and the Department was very alert to those in the report.
- Messages were also being conveyed not only about the businesses' viability and how we would be able to respond to that, but also about how we can support those businesses to increase the use of the Welsh language and its visibility.
- Officers intended to respond to the messages from the businesses in the Economy Plan in order to have a plan that suited the conditions that businesses faced in the county.

Concern was expressed regarding the timetable. In response, it was noted:-

- That it was not intended to take the final Plan to the Cabinet to be adopted at the beginning of April, and that the members would have an opportunity to scrutinise the draft document during the coming year.
- They wished to have the scrutineers' input to the discussions that would be happening during the year between the two Governments, and that the Department was also working closely with the Welsh Local Government Association to ensure that local authorities' voice formed part of that discussion.

A member emphasised the need to place particular focus in the Economy Plan on the construction industry, specifically in Dwyfor a Meirionnydd, given the effect of other Council policies, such as the Council Tax Premium, on the industry. It was also noted that it would be useful to know to what degree businesses in the different parts of Gwynedd relied on child labour (i.e. younger than 16), post-16 students and students aged 18-21, especially so in the hospitality and retail sectors, compared with other authorities - both nationally and at a state level. It was explained that this was part of a wider question, namely the shortage of workers in particular industries, as the situation would worsen over the next decades as birth rates reduced. The member questioned how viable some of these businesses were, and questioned how many more such businesses did we wish to have, given that the aim was to ensure fit-for-purpose growth, and not growth for the sake of growth. In response, the following was noted:-

- It was not believed that the data available distinguished between the ages of the workers.
- The situation reflected how tight the labour market was in Gwynedd, and that considerable effort was being made through the Gwaith Gwynedd scheme to ensure that everyone who was able to work did work, and also to encourage people to remain productive.

It was enquired whether the Department would listen to the scrutineers' wishes, and noted that the Economy Plan should address the following:-

- The over-reliance on tourism which could be very volatile.
- The need to encourage more people to take the leap to become self-employed.
- Plans to develop renewable energy.
- Promotion of high value industries. It was enquired, should the report to the committee not have referred to a report on this topic that was prepared around five years ago?
- The entire digital field, a field where people could be attracted to work from home self-employed.

It was further noted:-

- That it was felt we were losing opportunities and that we need an all-encompassing strategy, rather than a fragmented one.
- The attention given to the language in the report was welcomed, but members wished to know where tourism stood in terms of the effect on the Welsh language as it was not believed that the very low-value jobs in the tourism industry added to preserving our language and culture, and instead contributed to poverty and more Anglicisation.

In response to some of the observations, the following was noted:-

- Regarding the point about Welsh speakers within the industries, the findings of the Commission for Welsh-speaking Communities identified the three industries in Gwynedd that had the highest percentage of Welsh speakers where the percentage of speakers was higher than the overall Welsh-speaking percentage for Gwynedd. As such, it was suggested that there was still scope to increase the use and visibility of the Welsh language in the other industries, such as tourism.

- In terms of the observation regarding the range of different industries and which industries had a growth potential in Gwynedd, the report described the economy's situation as it was today. That included tourism and agriculture, and there was certainly scope to add further value from those.
- The report also recognised that there was still room for growth in new industries, such as the creative and digital industries, and to bring some diversity to the economy and create more opportunities for people to work and discover new jobs if they wished etc.

It was suggested that planning barriers may be a problem in trying to establish new businesses, and a member asked that consideration be given to this in the Economy Plan. It was also noted that we should look again at bringing high-value jobs to Llanbedr, together with Trawsfynydd, in light of the policy change by the UK Government. In response, the following was noted:-

- The aim was to secure prosperity and jobs in the county that would create opportunities for the next generation to be able to stay in their communities, and that it was essential to have a variety of jobs in the county that required a variety of different skills, so that we did not depend on any one sector.
- The planning issue was the subject of a discussion going back a while, and the Department would certainly work with officers in the Environment Department to discuss the details before returning.

It was noted that most young farmers in the rural parts of the county were involved with tourism, and without tourism, there would be no control of agriculture either. It was further noted that the Planning and Economy departments should work together more closely, and the member referred to the situation of a company that had decided to set up in Powys rather than South Meirionnydd because they received more support there. In response, it was noted:-

- That the company in question's decision to establish in Powys had been due to a shortage of suitable sites on the Gwynedd side of the boundary.
- The officers acknowledged that there were barriers, but the Plan would look at the spatial distribution across the county in order to ensure there were fair opportunities across Gwynedd, rather than the opportunities being concentrated in some areas only.

The member further noted that, although acknowledging that a shortage of land had been a factor in the case in question, the Planning Service needed to be more flexible, or otherwise more jobs would be lost to Powys.

It was noted that it would be useful if the Economy Plan provided some illustration of the more hidden contributions that people made in their communities who contribute to the economy in alternative ways to be productive in the labour market. In response, it was noted:-

- That this Plan had not addressed people's wider contribution to society, but we could look at how to incorporate this in terms of the bigger picture.
- This also raised the question of whether this was a plan for developing the economy, or a prosperous communities plan, and that we possibly needed to reconsider the purpose of the Plan.

It was noted that the economy field was crucial to the communities of Gwynedd, but as a non-statutory field, the Cabinet Member would have to fight hard for it in the Cabinet against other important areas of Council work.

Members welcomed the aim to place a focus on retaining the good jobs we already have in the county in making recruitment efforts because those jobs were often seen as more of a footnote in a report or economic strategy, rather than the main strategy of the economic plan.

RESOLVED

- 1. To accept the report and note the observations.**
- 2. That the Committee scrutinises the Draft Gwynedd Economy Plan when timely during 2025/26.**

6. EDUCATION LANGUAGE POLICY – THE ENGAGEMENT PROCEDURE

The Cabinet Member for Education reported that this report was being presented in response to a request by the members of the Committee to receive a report on the engagement process in the context of the new Education Language Policy. It was noted that the report summarised the engagement procedure in relation to the Education Language Policy.

The context was provided, noting that the Gwynedd local authority had the largest number of Welsh speakers in Wales, and also had the highest percentage of young people receiving their education through the medium of Welsh and bilingually. The officer stated that linguistic changes in the county, as well as the Welsh Government's influence on education in Wales, made it timely to review Cyngor Gwynedd's Education Language Policy and discuss which elements worked well and where any reforms or changes needed to be made.

It was explained that the Education Department had set out the procedure and the process in the report. It was noted that a number of engagement sessions had been held with primary, secondary and special schools in all parts of the county, and in areas with varying percentages of Welsh speakers. An engagement meeting had been held for representatives such as Cylch yr Iaith, Cymdeithas yr Iaith, Dyfodol i'r Iaith and RHAG (Parents for Welsh Medium Education). It was further noted that several members of this Committee, the Language Committee and the Gwynedd Governors Forum had also been involved in the process.

The aim was to create a robust Language Policy that was suitable to circumstances in Gwynedd, ensuring that it could be built upon and developed in the future. It was noted that the true situation showed a slippage in the use of the Welsh language by the county's young people. It was further noted that we needed to prevent this and increase the use of the Welsh language.

Meirion Prys Jones (Adviser) reported that 29 conversations had taken place during the engagement process in October, 2024 with a broad range of representatives from the education field and with parents. He noted that, essentially, they had asked 10

questions during the discussions, but participants had been free to express an opinion on any matter relating to the Gwynedd Education Language Policy and present recommendations for the future. He expressed that constructive and positive feedback had been received from all participants, especially from the pupils themselves.

It was noted that the main conclusions of the engagement were that the Language Policy was working well and led to success. He noted that everyone supported the Language Policy, although no-one had read it recently, leading to more of an ethos and a feeling that a good Language Policy existed, but without complete certainty of what it contained.

He highlighted that this led to the Language Policy being interpreted and implemented differently between schools, especially among the secondary schools. He noted that there was a clear difference between the primary and secondary sectors, with the Policy being applied firmly in the primary but varying more in the secondary sector. He elaborated that there was a feeling within the primary sector that the secondary sector disappointed them in terms of sustaining children's Welsh-speaking, as it did not carry on adequately when they reached secondary school.

It was reported that the main conclusion was that we needed a concise, clear and firm Language Policy which stated clearly what needs to be achieved, which must be monitored as it progressed.

A presentation was received from the Head of the Gwynedd Immersion Education System detailing the engagement sessions held by Siân Eurig (Secondary Language Strategy Coordinator) and Meirion Prys Jones. It was noted that the following feedback had been received from the engagement sessions regarding the current Language Policy:

- There was support for the Language Policy and a desire to reform it across the county.
- There was no specific feedback on how to amend the Policy.
- There was a feeling of pride towards the Immersion Education System.
- There was a strong desire for change, as there was a feeling that the Policy belonged to a time when the Welsh language was stronger in the county, and was therefore outdated.
- That the Policy needs to be evolved, not completely overhauled.

The main messages raised were underlined:

- There was praise for the primary sector for sustaining the Welsh language.
- There was a general feeling of slippage when pupils moved from primary to secondary.
- The question around expanding the capacity of Immersion Education Units had arisen.
- Learners' voice was in favour of the Policy.
- There was inconsistency between secondary schools in how they implemented the Policy, and a desire to reconcile it.
- Ysgol Friars and Ysgol Tywyn had been mentioned several times, which underlined the need for strategic planning over time to ensure an effective policy that increased the Welsh-medium provision.

- There was a need for better ownership by the schools and greater accountability by the Council, as there were strong calls for strengthening the Education Department's power to monitor this.

The main themes of the engagement sessions were highlighted in terms of the Policy itself, the need for training, the challenge of being able to recruit in order to implement the Policy, and the need to look carefully at the social use of Welsh and the role of the wider community in supporting that.

Members were given the opportunity to ask questions and offer comments.

The elected members from the Language Committee and the Scrutiny Committee expressed their feeling that the current Policy did not afford adequate protection to the Welsh language in the county. They highlighted that the main weakness was that the policy did not sustain language use, let alone increased it, in light of the demographic changes. The member noted that he was quite certain in his views about the weakness in terms of progression from one educational stage to the next, and mentioned the need for accountability for implementing the Policy and monitoring its implementation. They referred to a lack of vision in respect of the county's targets to increase the number of pupils who studied GCSE subjects and higher in Welsh, as noted in the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP), noting that careful monitoring of the Plan could lead to progress over time.

It was noted that some believed that a Education Language Policy should be a policy referring to Welsh only. They elaborated that this could support headteachers, particularly when facing requests from parents to change the medium of subjects at the end of Year 9. It was enquired whether we should consider including a reference to how we can secure an adequate workforce within the Policy, and the need to introduce the benefits and importance of bilingualism, as this would contribute towards securing an adequate workforce within the County in the future.

Regarding Ysgol Friars and Ysgol Tywyn, it was noted that there had been agreement that the Gwynedd Education Language Policy should be a comprehensive policy, to include these schools, but with clear plans to successfully lead any change. They elaborated that there was an awareness of Tywyn's geographical challenges in terms of recruitment and the need to plan towards change more strategically.

It was highlighted that there was no suggestion or definitive answer as to what a revised policy should look like, should reform happen. It was expressed that the clear message was that change was needed, and that we needed a Policy that ensures language acquisition and protects the spoken language within it.

It was questioned how we could manage to keep communities as Welsh as possible throughout the county, and members had noted the need for a strategy to try to positively influence parents to promote and encourage the children's use of the Welsh language in the school and beyond. It was noted, in terms of school categorisation, that there had been comments about the need to ensure an understanding of the definitions in order to have a firm foundation to any policy, and for the Council to consider what else could be achieved within those definitions.

Thanks were expressed for the presentation. Representatives from the Committee and the Language Committee expressed pride in having the opportunity to provide input. It was noted that members' initial impression had been that they would be involved in creating the new Policy, but during the meeting, it became clear that this was not the intention. Satisfaction was expressed that a summary had been made of the comments made during the consultation meeting, and it was asked whether it would be possible to publish these notes publicly and attach them to the report for the next Committee meeting so that the comments could be seen.

A member expressed their view that the consultation carried out with some primary schools did not adequately represent the schools in the most Welsh areas, in Arfon, Meirionnydd and Dwyfor.

It was noted that there is a need for different strategies for the schools in the Tywyn catchment area and the Meirionnydd area in general, as those schools wish to be more ambitious, having been seriously identified as category one under the current categories. It was expressed that in drawing up one strategy for all schools, it was impossible to enable some schools to be as ambitious as they could be.

They referred to the report which concluded that the policy "needs to be evolved" rather than overhauled. The member emphasised that this supported the point that people were not aware of the existing policy and felt that it was not clear enough. It was expressed that this was a sign that the Language Policy needed to be completely reformed, not evolved gradually. It was noted that during the consultation session with Meirion Prys Jones, strong observations had been presented regarding the wording of the policy.

In response to the previous observations, it was noted:

- That officers were happy to append the minutes to the next Scrutiny Committee.
- The sessions being referred to were engagement sessions, with the aim of compiling as much information as possible.
- The information from the engagement sessions was being used to draw up the Language Policy, which would then be the subject of consultation.
- The schools had been selected to ensure a cross-section of the schools in Gwynedd.
- It had been a challenge to get headteachers to attend the engagement meetings. Therefore, a request was made to the federation to ask them to bring their catchment areas together to decide who would represent them.
- All headteachers had had the opportunity to express their opinions within their own catchment area, then a representative had presented those opinions in the engagement meetings.

A member referred to the Golwg 360 article in the pack, which suggested that there was less room for education and more room for other things, but reading the article, it appeared to refer to Wales generally, and not areas that were language strongholds such as Gwynedd. A member expressed that including the Golwg 360 article in the pack for this committee suggested that a decision had already been made. They felt that the article should not be part of the pack.

Reference was made to a comment in the presentation regarding society's wider role in sustaining the Welsh language, which was consistent with the decision to include the Golwg 360 article in the pack. It was understood that there were several elements involved in sustaining the Welsh language, not only education, but since we were currently discussing the Education Policy, we needed to focus on what we could influence the most. It was noted that they now had absolute power over the Language Policy, but did not have the same power over other elements that were mentioned. Concern was expressed regarding the overuse of words such as "pride" and "attitudes", noting that we needed to focus on what people did, and not on their attitudes alone. The member stated that more courage was needed in this field.

In response, the officers disagreed with terms such as "absolute power", as the Education Department did not force children to speak any language. It was noted that the fostering of positive attitudes amongst children and parents towards the Welsh language was important to encourage them to choose a Welsh-medium education. They elaborated that there were schemes underway in the Bro Dysynni and Bangor area to foster a positive attitude towards Welsh amongst children and parents. It was accepted that we needed to combine a positive attitude with a strong and firm policy. It was noted that the Education Department had a role in fostering conscientious citizens of Wales and the world. They noted that there was no intention to shape anyone's views by including the Golwg 360 article, and that it had been included merely to show context.

A member referred to an ESTYN report which indicated a shortage of teachers in several fields, including Welsh. They noted that schools such as Tywyn had difficulties finding teachers to teach subjects through the medium of Welsh, and therefore relied on English-speaking teachers to fill the roles. The member questioned what this report would do about this. They questioned whether this situation would cause some children to not speak Welsh at all.

In response, it was noted:

- That recruitment problems was an ever-increasing and national challenge.
- Work was happening with transitional schools to ensure that the workforce had access to Welsh lessons, and supporting them to introduce subjects through the medium of Welsh.
- The team were looking at an analysis of the workforce's language level in the transitional schools, and were collaborating with the National Institute to tailor and provide refresher courses, courses for raising confidence, and Welsh courses for beginners.
- Teachers from the transitional schools had applied for sabbatical courses for learning Welsh.

In response to a comment that Ysgol Friars had been excluded, it was confirmed that Ysgol Friars had not been excluded from implementing the Language Policy. They elaborated that there would be a Language Policy for the whole county, recognising the different situations of some schools such as Friars and Tywyn within the Policy, with a different plan for the Welsh language being created for these two schools and one other. It was noted that some participants in the engagement meetings had made suggestions that reflected that opinion.

A member expressed disappointment that this report only provided a taster of the information. They agreed that the inclusion of the Golwg 360 article had put an unfortunate skew to the discussion. They expressed uncertainty about having an individual strategy for different schools. It was noted that there was a genuine need to monitor the Language Policy in the future. The expressed concern regarding the phrase 'protect the spoken language', as it only signified one part of the picture. It was emphasised that this was an Education Language Policy, and that children only got one chance to gain proper acquisition of the Welsh language, therefore, high-quality language must be introduced to develop relevance and pride. It was expressed that none of this came through from the taster of the new Language Policy. It was noted that there was no time to have a gradual evolution. They hoped that the draft report would be more promising than what had been presented in the meeting.

In response, it was noted:

- That the new Language Policy would be one County Policy, with individual plans and specifications for every school.
- The policy did not differentiate, and the desire and ambition were the same for the County, but there would be individual plans for the schools so that they could demonstrate over time how they were achieving the Policy.
- Monitoring would be key to implementing the Policy, and a lack of monitoring had been identified as a weakness during the engagement.
- It was an elected member who had made the comment regarding 'protecting the spoken language'.

It was asked whether specific attention is intended to be given to monitoring methods. It was questioned whether schools would have the right to set their own improvement targets within individual plans and to develop their own individual Language Policy.

In response, it was noted:

- That the Language Policy in its current form was not one the Department could insist that schools followed, but the new Language Policy would be mandatory.
- Individual plans were required in order to help the schools reach targets and monitor them against those targets.
- We needed to set out the ambition within the Policy, specify clearly what the plans were, have plans to support schools to reach the goal and monitor that schools adhered to the strategic plans.
- This matter had been brought to the Committee to report where we had reached in the process, and to be transparent as possible.

The point made about having access to records from the engagements was reiterated.

Support was expressed towards strengthening this Policy. It was emphasised that social use of the Welsh language was paramount. It was noted that the Council had a responsibility to strengthen opportunities to use Welsh socially. It was noted that everyone had a responsibility regarding the social use of Welsh, including individuals and elected members, to support Welsh learners in communities and foster a positive attitude. It was further noted that people bringing up children, or who were involved

with children, had a responsibility to invite children from non-Welsh speaking backgrounds to take part in recreational activities with Welsh-speaking children.

A member questioned if lessons had been learned from the pilot in Bangor that focused on the transition between Primary and Secondary that could help us make the transition more successful.

In response, the following was noted:

- We had identified schools in the Bangor and Tywyn catchment areas specifically where the children's language fell to level C1, meaning that their English was stronger than their Welsh.
- We were working with Cwmni'r Frân Wen to provide opportunities for children to use their Welsh and gain confidence in their spoken Welsh within the project in Bangor and Tywyn.
- This project had gone from strength to strength over the third year.
- Schools were reporting that the children were developing confidence in the Welsh language and that they also saw the Frân Wen in Bangor as a hub outside school hours to use their Welsh.
- That feedback from the pilot had been very positive.
- They hoped to continue and extend these opportunities in order to ensure progression and maintain the language continuum, so that there was no slippage.

A member gave thanks for the report and hoped to see the full records from the engagement sessions. They noted that nothing unexpected sprang out when seeing the main conclusions. They expressed hope that there would be a summary of Meirion Prys Jones's personal recommendations as a language acquisition expert regarding the best way of proceeding to create a Language Policy in Gwynedd.

It was expressed that the Gwynedd Education Language Policy was weak because Ysgol Friars and Ysgol Tywyn were in the Language Policy, as the situation in those schools was that no-one studied a subject through the medium of Welsh, apart from Welsh itself. The member noted that the fact that the Policy allowed this showed how weak it was. It was elaborated that the Policy dated back to the days of the old Cyngor Gwynedd, and that it had not changed much since, and its essence was that if someone did not feel capable to do things through the medium of Welsh, there was no obligation on them to do so.

It was expressed that, with all the consultation, there was a tendency to lose sight of the point in question, which was to strengthen the Gwynedd Education Language Policy in an area where the language was still alive and stronger than in other parts of Wales. The member elaborated that we needed to try and strengthen it as much as possible, and a complete change was required. It was noted that Gwynedd had the demography and staffing resources to deliver this change – we just needed courage.

RESOLVED

- 1. To accept the report and note the observations.**

- 2. That the Committee scrutinises the Draft Education Language Policy along with the Strategy to support the implementation of the policy at the 10 April 2025 meeting.**
- 3. To ask for a copy of the relevant minutes of the engagement meetings.**
- 4. To invite members of the Language Committee to attend the Committee meeting for the item**

7. IMMERSION EDUCATION SYSTEM

The Cabinet Member for Education provided the context. It was noted that the Cabinet had decided at its meeting on 16 July 2021 that it was timely to reorganise these centres and create a new Immersion Education System. It was explained that the Committee had expressed a wish to scrutinise the new system after it had been given time to become established. He explained that the Education Department had decided to appoint a research team from Bangor University to evaluate the Immersion Education System in Gwynedd. He elaborated that this team had conducted visits and had spoken with stakeholders, and would report back soon with its recommendations.

A member questioned how the three participants had been selected for the case study, and what had been the criteria. In response, it was noted that the three had been selected by the university. It was explained that this relied on parental consent and that they had been selected at random, which was a scientific method of selecting participants in case studies. It was elaborated that the participants came from different immersion centres.

A member expressed interest in getting a copy of the equality impact assessment. Concern was expressed regarding the slant and focus of the report and the initial decision to cut from five immersion days to four. It was noted that the focus, without exception, was on the individuals going through the immersion system, with no mention of consultation with parents, other learners in the school, or wider society or elected members. It was expressed that the decision, the report, and the proposed research were thoroughly neo-liberal in their ideology.

It was explained, in response, that this research specifically looked at the implications for children going through the immersion system, but the point regarding the impact on schools was accepted, and conversations had been conducted with headteachers regarding this matter. Attention was drawn to the fact that the Education Department was prepared to strengthen or change the arrangements in response to recommendations, but they were waiting to see what the report stated before drawing any conclusions. The officer underlined that no effort had been made to conceal anything, and in terms of considering reports that had been produced over time, they were more than prepared to see what the impact had been. They noted that the point regarding equality implications was accepted, and that its scope was possibly greater than expected in standard reports.

In response to what was said, a member expressed that research would be expected before making the decision to reduce the number of immersion education days. From a lay person's perspective, it was noted that this appeared to be a financial decision.

It was noted that, considering the decision to revamp the immersion centres had been made in order to provide high-quality provision, the number of teachers had been reduced from two per centre to one teacher and one assistant, and the number of centres had been decreased, with the immersion period changed from five days to four. It was expressed that this type of immersion was not intensive if it was not five days. There were difficulties for teachers in scheduling for children who attended the centre for four days of immersion and then returned to school for one day a week. The member highlighted a reference in the documents to holding sports activities on Fridays for these children, but after enquiring, they noted that this did not happen. It was noted that children sometimes got materials on their laptops from the centre, but the language unit very rarely visited to inspect if the children were alright. It was questioned whether this was truly beneficial to the child being immersed.

It was noted that some children, when returning to school for one day a week, felt nervous about their ability to follow things. It was confirmed that this fact, consequently, could lead to teachers speaking more through the medium of English, changing the language customs of the class completely. It was expressed that this had not been measured at all in the consultation. They elaborated that the current consultation questions did not allow people to express comments on the impact of the arrangements on the remaining children or on their language habits. It was expressed that this was a matter that caused concern.

In response, it was confirmed that the evaluation of the system placed a clear focus on integrating the transition day back into the mainstream. It was noted that the staff involved in the research had followed the children during the first week in the immersion units, and on the Friday, and had also observed the end of the children's time on the course to compare their confidence level. The team had also followed the children in the mainstream to assess the effect of the transition on them, how much language use they had, and what was the effect on the schools.

The members wished to see any relevant documents regarding how the decision to cut immersion days had been made.

Disappointment was expressed regarding the comments expressed about the changes to the immersion education system. It was noted that although financial considerations applied to every service, they had managed to attract much more funding than had been invested in this service. It was highlighted that the main reason for reviewing the system was that it had not changed since its inception in 1984, and that it was now outdated and inefficient. This review was welcomed, and it was hoped that it will show the way forward and address the negative comments. A member underlined their view that the new approach would be much more effective.

One member expressed their view that immersion 80% of the time was not sufficient, and they believed that we were taking a step back in allowing this. Reference was made to the survey for parents and the questions, noting that the Education Department was looking for answers to justify what the Council wanted to do, without being entirely objective. Disappointment was expressed that teachers had to cope with increased work pressure on Fridays.

It was noted, in response, that immersion was not entirely comprehensive anyway, as children are at home over the weekend. It was pointed out that a number of schools in Gwynedd had a high percentage of children who used English on the school yard, and these were not just the children who attended the immersion centres. The officers accepted the point that releasing children from the immersion centres on Fridays can be inconvenient for teachers, especially given the amount of work they had. They expressed appreciation towards teachers who were willing to adapt plans and work for different levels of children's ability. They expressed their desire for the report to be accepted so that the matter can be considered in a scientific manner. Concern was noted about the feeling expressed about the changes, emphasising the important role that assistants played within immersion centres.

RESOLVED

- 1. To accept the report and note the observations.**
- 2. That the Committee scrutinises the Immersion Education Programme Improvement Recommendations Action Plan at the 10 April 2025 meeting.**

8. SAFEGUARDING ARRANGEMENTS IN SCHOOLS SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION BRIEF

It was noted that safeguarding arrangements in schools had been scrutinised at the Committee's meeting on 18 July 2024. There was an informal discussion after the meeting regarding the possibility of holding a Task and Finish Group or a Scrutiny Investigation into the area. It was concluded that a further discussion should be held at the informal meeting of the Committee on 5 September 2024. Concern had been expressed by the members present about the implementation of the safeguarding arrangements within our schools. A draft brief for the scrutiny investigation was considered at the Committee's informal meeting on 9 January 2025.

It was noted that the main question that the investigation would address is: "Are safeguarding arrangements in county schools appropriate and implemented consistently?". It was noted that the investigation intended to consider the authority's current arrangements in relation to safeguarding in schools, as well as arrangements in a sample of schools.

At the informal meeting of the Committee on 9 January 2025, the members were invited to express an interest in becoming members of the investigation. It was concluded that an e-mail should be sent to all members of the Committee to ask them to state which school governing bodies they were members of. The email stressed that members would be required to ensure they had completed the "Child and Adult Safeguarding Training" to be part of the investigation.

It was noted that a maximum of five members may be involved in the investigation and, in accordance with the Council's Constitution, the membership was required to include representation of no less than two different political groups. It was discussed that, given that this was an education issue, it would be appropriate to include one co-opted member with a vote on education issues only.

RESOLVED

1. To adopt the brief.
2. To elect the following members to undertake the work of the investigation:
 - Councillors Dawn Lynne Jones, Cai Larsen, Gwynfor Owen, John Pughe Roberts and Dyfrig Siencyn
 - Co-opted Member – Sharon Roberts (Arfon Parent/Governor Representative)
 - Reserve member – Councillor Richard Glyn Roberts

The meeting began at 10:30am and ended at 1:00pm.

Chair