

# Complete Agenda

## Item 6 - Questions

# Agenda Item 6

## **ITEM 6 - QUESTIONS**

### **(1) Question from Councillor Richard Glyn Roberts**

"What arrangements have been made by the Education Department to establish the exact number of Gwynedd children being educated through the medium of English?"

#### **Response – Cabinet Member for Education, Councillor Beca Brown**

"Gwynedd's schools exist within the context of an education language policy with the aim of ensuring bilingualism for all. This is initially done by immersing learners in Welsh in the early years up to 7 years of age, and subsequently, the learners' skills in Welsh and English are developed by using both languages as a teaching medium to various degrees. Considering that, all children in Gwynedd receive education through the medium of Welsh and English which is unique and a credit to Gwynedd's vision for decades."

### **(2) Question from Councillor Gruffydd Williams**

"To what extent is it possible to delve further into the Council's housing register statistics and establish the numbers who originate from Dwyfor, from Meirionnydd, from Arfon, from counties adjoining Gwynedd, the numbers who speak Welsh and the numbers who attended a school in Gwynedd?"

#### **Response – Cabinet Member for Housing, Councillor Craig ab Iago**

"As part of the application process for social housing in Gwynedd, applicants are required to complete a social housing application form. Questions are asked for the purpose of assessing housing needs only.

While we ask applicants to supply basic information such as current address, we do not collect information regarding where applicants come from, their ability to speak Welsh nor if they attended a school in Gwynedd or not, as this information would not be relevant to establish their need for social housing.

It's important to note that the information we collect must be "adequate, relevant and limited to what is necessary in relation to the purposes for which they are processed", in accordance with article 5.1c of the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR). The Housing Act 1996 also sets out a legal framework for social housing allocation in Wales. Linguistic ability is not part of these statutory criteria therefore we cannot legally include them.

The emphasis placed on a local connection in the Gwynedd Housing Allocation Policy is one of the most stringent in Wales and goes to the extreme of what is allowed to be included. Since the beginning of the new Housing Allocation Policy, 97% of social housing allocations has been to a person with a connection to Gwynedd. In some cases, statutory requirements are placed upon us as a Local Authority to accommodate people with urgent housing needs, such as those fleeing violence."

### **(3) Question from Councillor Gwynfor Owen**

"I'm sure the Leader of the Council feels so frustrated as I am in the response of the UK Government as well as the Welsh Government to provide solutions to the residents of Llanbedr and the area regarding the bypass and a new road to the Airfield.

Can I ask what Cyngor Gwynedd plans to do now to try and mitigate the impact of traffic on the lives of the residents of Llanbedr as well as ensuring that the Council continues to attract quality jobs to the area?"

**Response – Council Leader, Councillor Dyfrig Siencyn**

“As the Councillor will know, this Council has been working incredibly hard to ensure that Llanbedr and the wider area can benefit from high value jobs that would come with developments at the nearby airfield site.

That of course includes securing a suitable access road to facilitate development, and attached to that developing a new way to solve the problems of significant traffic congestion that the villagers of Llanbedr have endured for decades.

The Ardudwy Green Corridor bid offered a real opportunity to bring significant benefit to a wide area of Meirionnydd. It included new access to the airfield site which would also have addressed traffic congestion issues in Llanbedr.

It would also have been an opportunity to promote active travel and green travel, making it possible for people to walk and cycle safely, improving access to transport and installing an electric car charging service along the A496.

Therefore, the recent decision by the United Kingdom Government not to support the Council's request for funding from the Levelling Up fund was extremely disappointing. I fear it underlines a lack of the government's understanding of the seriousness of the situation.

This of course follows the decision by Wales' Deputy Climate Change Minister to make a U-turn on a previous Welsh Government commitment on a scheme that would have ensured access to the airfield and a new road for Llanbedr.

Although we have not yet been successful in securing the funding needed, we continue to seek a positive solution that will unlock the economic potential of Llanbedr airfield, solve local traffic congestion problems, and encourage sustainable travel options.

We will be in discussion with the Welsh Government and Transport for Wales to consider how we can work together in the short term to try to improve safety and the provision of active travel along the A496 between Llandecwyn and Barmouth.

Indeed, despite the Deputy Climate Change Minister's disappointing announcement in 2021 not to support the original scheme, Council officers have been continuing to discuss solutions that will facilitate access to Llanbedr airfield.

This will be a joint process that will assess options to secure access to the airfield, and our officers will continue to try to work out a solution with Welsh Government and Transport for Wales civil servants.

I am fully aware of the aspirations of residents in the area, and in developing any solutions, I will ensure contact with the local community to ensure that residents in the area are aware of the ongoing efforts.

I can assure you that these efforts will continue until an acceptable solution is found for Llanbedr and the wider Arudwy area.”

**(4) Question from Councillor Gareth Tudor Jones**

"As you are aware, the Welsh Government has published guidance on school categorisation according to the Welsh medium provision. In its document, the Welsh Government states as follows: 'One intention with the new categorisation system is to encourage schools to increase their Welsh medium provision...and facilitate the process for schools to move to the next category...so that schools grow their Welsh medium provision.'

Does the Council believe that pupils in Gwynedd secondary schools should receive less Welsh medium education than pupils at designated Welsh schools in other counties?"

**Response – Cabinet Member for Education, Councillor Beca Brown**

“All Gwynedd children receive Welsh and bilingual education in accordance with the requirements of our Language Policy, which has the aim of ensuring bilingualism for all. This is initially done by immersing learners in Welsh in the early years up to 7 years of age, and subsequently, the learners' skills in Welsh and English are developed by using both languages as a teaching medium to various degrees.

Designated Welsh medium schools exist in a policy context that is completely different to that of Gwynedd, where parents are given a choice in terms of the teaching medium of their children, and this choice means either a Welsh medium education or English medium education only. In Cardiff, for example, the progress made in Welsh medium education there is acknowledged, and yet, 82% of the education provision in Cardiff continues to be English medium, which excludes a substantial percentage of learners from the opportunity to be bilingual.

In Gwynedd, it is a source of great pride to us that the Welsh language and bilingual education is available for every learner indiscriminately, and that we as a county are aiming to provide an inclusive education for all across the county.”

**(5) Question from Councillor Dewi Jones**

“There are approximately 3,000 people on the housing register in Gwynedd, what is the Council doing to try to improve this situation?”

**Response – Cabinet Member for Housing, Councillor Craig ab Iago**

“The Council has several schemes in response to the current housing emergency in Gwynedd.

**Housing Action Plan**

Cyngor Gwynedd's innovative Housing Action Plan sets out the clear aim of 'Ensuring the people of Gwynedd have access to a suitable home which is of a high standard, affordable and improves their quality of life.' In this Plan, several schemes aim to increase the number of homes available for local people to live, whether by letting to Gwynedd residents, or by helping them own their own properties. For example:

- **Tŷ Gwynedd:** for the first time in 30 years, the Council will be building its own housing, starting with 10 intermediate properties on the former Ysgol Babanod Coed Mawr site in Bangor. Planning permission was granted at the end of 2022 and building work will commence later this year. This development will be a home for up to 46 people when completed. Other sites, such as Maes Twnti, Morfa Nefyn, is moving along well, with the potential for 9 houses helping approximately 40 people.
- **The main social housing programme (the "PDP"):** Since the Housing Action Plan began, 173 social housing has been built across Gwynedd, with a budget of £9.4m (2021/22), £12.3m (2022/23) and £13.5m (2023/24). 88 units are currently being built (since April 2021) with another 113 earmarked for commencing in the next year. Owing to the Council's success in this field, £1.1m of additional funding was secured by Welsh Government for 2021/22 through other authorities' underspending. This scheme aims to build 500 social housing.
- **Purchasing private homes on the open market:** Recently, it was announced that the Council has purchased 8 properties on the open market, with the intention to let them to local people in need of housing. The Housing and Property Department will begin the process of bringing these houses up to the required standards before letting them to local people. With the homes that have been purchased to date, up to 36 people can be helped, and another 5 properties are currently going through legal proceedings.
- **Leasing Scheme Wales: Gwynedd:** Leasing Scheme Wales aims to encourage private landlords to let their properties to local authorities in order to address the need for long term accommodation for Gwynedd residents. The Housing and Property Department was able to secure over £2.7m in funding for this scheme, and such is the interest shown, the original target of 4 units will be far surpassed by the end of this year. Therefore, we now aim to for 19 units by the end of 2022/23. This in turn will ease the pressure on the social housing register.
- **Gwynedd Homebuy Scheme:** This scheme offers financial support for eligible individuals and families by loaning them the difference between a property's value and what they are able to offer as a deposit and mortgage. The aim is to make properties affordable to residents who find it challenging to secure an adequate mortgage to buy a house on the open market in their local area. Since launching the scheme on 13 September 2022, 15 units have been approved across Gwynedd and 6 others are at various steps of the process. The applicants come from all over the county including Llanystumdwy, Edern, Porthmadog, y Felinheli, Harlech and Llanrug.
- **Notable developments:** Substantial projects such as the redevelopment of the Polish Care Home site in Penrhos, and creating the Penygroes Health Hub, are ongoing, and will take some pressure of the housing register in the long term.
- **Empty homes:** 104 empty homes have been brought back into use since the Housing Action Plan came into force, with over £323,000 spend to date. This will not only improve the quality and the look of villages and towns but will also provide

more options for individuals and families when looking to rent or purchase a home in Gwynedd.

- **Homelessness prevention:** The Homelessness Service undertakes key prevention work to prevent a situation where an individual or family finds themselves without a place to live. This work in turn eases the pressure on the housing register by helping people keep their current home. The latest data shows that the service has successfully prevented an increased number of homelessness cases recently.

### **Reregistration process**

A social housing reregistration process is currently underway where residents who are on the common housing register are asked to check that their application is up to date. The purpose of this exercise is to ensure that all applications on the register are as accurate and as up to date as possible, which will help us ensure that individuals who are really in need of housing receive the support they need in a timely manner. This is a continuous process and will continue over the next months. It is anticipated that this exercise will give us a better picture of the housing need and the number of individuals who really need to be on the register.

### **New opportunities and collaborating with partners**

The Housing Action Plan Department are constantly searching for new opportunities to take advantage of any possibilities to increase the housing stock available to the Council and to Gwynedd residents. The department is in the process of planning how to increase the available supported housing units for homeless individuals in the county (which is in addition to those units developed as part of the Housing Action Plan). Indeed, by discussing with Welsh Government, the department has been able to bring two schemes forward sooner. Regular discussions are held with Housing Partners to identify any new opportunities that can be developed.”

### **(6) Question from Councillor Rhys Tudur**

"We know that every secondary school in Gwynedd, except two, fall into category 3 in terms of their Welsh medium provision, a category defined by a baseline of a minimum of 60% of the children undertaking at least 70% of their education through the medium of Welsh.

Last year, under the old categorisation system, the majority of the schools were in a category with a higher baseline, with the children undertaking at least 80% of their education through the medium of Welsh.

To avoid a marked slippage in the Welsh medium provision, are the Education Department and Cabinet prepared to create a 'Category 3-Gwynedd' policy in order to raise the baseline?"

### **Response – Cabinet Member for Education, Councillor Beca Brown**

“The new national categorisation system does not mean any change from the point of view of the Gwynedd Education Language Policy, and it certainly does not lead to lowering our expectations. The expectation on our schools to provide Welsh and bilingual education is the same, and the expectation is as always on our schools to take advantage of every

opportunity to increase their provision through the medium of Welsh, together with the opportunities for children and young people to use Welsh socially.

Gwynedd is working closely with the Welsh Government in relation to the new categorisation system and on the basic principle that there is no slippage in the Welsh provision. This expectation has been expressed clearly to all Gwynedd schools to ensure that we take advantage of the new categorisation system to ensure further progress in the Welsh medium provision of our schools.”

**(7) Question from Councillor John Pughe Roberts**

“We understand that the Trading Standards and Environmental Health Management Department (Environment Department / Public Protection) note savings to reduce costs for the Department and are cutting the out of hours service from April 2023. The out of hours service, has been provided by the Trading Standards and Environmental Health Sub-Department every week, for over 10 years.

I would like to know, under the conditions of the Employment Act, whether this can be done without making any ‘disturbance’ payments for the staff concerned and if there were any cases, i.e. food poisoning, health and safety / accidents, animal health diseases (bird flu / foot and mouth disease) and any animal welfare issue or a similar ‘Covid’ situation, there would be no one to provide cover overnight and on weekends. I can only assume that the Directors would need to be available to do this?

What is the legal position?”

**Response – Cabinet Member for Environment, Councillor Dafydd Meurig**

“The Environment Department like every other Department in the Council has had to identify proposals to contribute towards the Council’s savings and cuts schemes.

It is confirmed that the Department’s savings proposals include not continuing with the on-call service outside normal working hours, provided by Public Protection Services’ environmental health officers and animal health officers.

The on-call service for responding to urgent out-of-hours matters has operated for a number of years, but it must be stressed that this is a voluntary arrangement. Officers’ conditions of employment do not require them to participate in the provision of this service, and therefore it is optional to be part of the procedure.

Therefore, cutting the on-call service will not mean that the Council will have to follow the procedure for change of employment conditions, or meet any disruption costs for the members of staff who have been involved in this arrangement. The Council’s Salary Protection Policy only protects an employee’s salary when there has been a reduction in the salary level (this is under specific circumstances).

It is also noted that the majority of Welsh councils no longer offer a specific procedure for dealing with calls relating to Public Protection matters, outside normal working hours.

As part of identifying savings proposals, consideration needed to be given to what the risks were as well as if the Council was required to provide the service. To this end, we

looked at the number and type of calls over the past year and during 2022, 21 out-of-hours calls relating to animal health issues were received. Only one of the 21 calls was considered urgent. Similarly, environmental health officers received over 50 calls, only 2 of which were considered urgent. In most cases, while on-call the staff member under the current system, would not be expected to do more than provide initial guidance on an appropriate solution in the short term, dealing fully with the situation on the following working day.

Accepting that the service will not be able to respond to calls on Public Protection matters from April 2023, when it is expected that the 'on-call' system will end, the figures above highlight that the risk associated with not continuing with the arrangement is very low. Also, the arrangement in place is a voluntary one and the Council is not required to provide the service. Therefore, it is not thought that this will actually have an impact on the residents of Gwynedd.

From April 2023, the Public Protection Services will ensure that any matter arising outside working hours, are dealt with as soon as possible during the following working day.

It must also be remembered that if the matter was on an emergency scale such as foot and mouth disease, widespread food poisoning cases, a case of serious pollution or a case of a fatal accident, then the emergency planning corporate procedure would be implemented, as is already the case.”

**(8) Question from Councillor Llio Elenid Owen**

"What is in place in schools in terms of raising the awareness of children and young people of the dangers of on-line content, and teaching them to think critically about the content of social media and on-line spaces?

It is becoming increasingly apparent how dangerous and influential some on-line figures are (influencers), particularly those who spread racism and spread hatred towards women and the LGBTQ+ community.

How seriously is Cyngor Gwynedd taking this danger to our young people, and what is being done to help teachers tackle this?"

**Response – Cabinet Member for Education, Councillor Beca Brown**

“Every primary school and the majority of secondary schools in Gwynedd have started to introduce the new curriculum. There are six learning and experience fields in the new curriculum.

The Health and Well-being Learning and Experience field provides a holistic structure for understanding health and well-being. It involves developing the learner's ability to face life's challenges and opportunities. What matters in this Field has been expressed in five statements, which support and reinforce each other. The following is one of the five statements:

The way we engage with social influences shapes who we are and our health and well-being.



The curriculum itself notes:

This Field can assist learners to understand the important role of social influences on their lives. These influences include rules, social norms, attitudes and values that are created and reinforced by different social groups. By being involved with social groups, we experience these influences. They affect our identity, our values, our behaviour and our health and well-being, and often without us realising it.

Learners need to be critically engaged with these social influences within their own culture, as well as other cultures, in order to understand how norms and values develop. This will enable them to understand how their behaviour, their relationship with others and their experiences are steered.

To support the learning, a range of ready resources is available on Hwb, which are specifically tailored for children, education practitioners, parents, carers, families and Governors, such as: [On-line hate - Hwb \(gov.wales\)](#)

The Youth Service also offers support where appropriate and is aware of the field, and they have already provided support in schools and youth clubs here in Gwynedd to educate children and young people and make wise choices and challenge dangerous influences.

The police's school support programme is also running activities in this exact field. Every school has a schools liaison officer, and some of the resources used by the police with our schools can be viewed on the Schoolbeat Cymru website - [SchoolBeat: Home](#)

Here, there are dedicated sections for parents, teachers and pupils - and there is an emphasis on personal safety throughout this programme.

In addition to this, there are well-established personal and social education programmes at each of our schools, and they address these aspects. The principles of respect and wisdom also run through the work of the various learner forums at our schools.”