
EDUCATION AND ECONOMY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 20/10/22

Present: Councillor Beth Lawton (Chair)
Councillor Cai Larsen (Vice-chair)

Councillors: Jina Gwyrfai, Louise Hughes, Iwan Huws, Dawn Lynne Jones, Dewi Jones, Gareth Tudor Jones, Gwilym Jones, Dewi Owen, Gwynfor Owen, Richard Glyn Roberts, Huw Llwyd Rowlands, Paul Rowlinson, Rhys Tudur, Gruffydd Williams and Sasha Williams.

Officers present: Vera Jones (Democracy and Language Services Manager), Bethan Adams (Scrutiny Adviser) and Eirian Roberts (Democracy Services Officer).

Co-opted Members: Colette Owen (The Catholic Church), Manon Williams (Arfon Parent/Governor Representative) and Roger Vaughan (UCAC).

Present for item 5: Councillor Beca Brown (Cabinet Member for Education), Garem Jackson (Head of Education Department), Arwyn Thomas (Managing Director, GwE), Iwan Evans (Monitoring Officer), Debbie Anne Jones (Education Corporate Services Manager) and Gwyn Tudur (Gwynedd Secondary Education Officer).

Present for item 6: Councillor Beca Brown (Cabinet Member for Education), Garem Jackson (Head of Education Department), Arwyn Thomas (Managing Director, GwE), Geraint Evans (Core Leader - Primary - GwE) and Ellen Williams (Core Leader - Secondary - GwE) and Gwyn Tudur (Gwynedd Secondary Education Officer).

Present for item 7: Geraint Owen (Corporate Director) and Sian Myrddin Gwent (Ffordd Gwynedd Adviser).

The Chair thanked two former members of this Committee, Councillors Elwyn Jones and John Pughe Roberts, for their contribution, and welcomed two new members onto the Committee, Councillors Louise Hughes and Gruffydd Williams. She also thanked Dilwyn Elis Hughes for his service as a co-opted member of the Committee, and welcomed Roger Vaughan, as the new UCAC representative.

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Elin Hywel, Ruth Roe (Meirionnydd Parent/Governor Representative), Karen Vaughan Jones (Dwyfor Parent/Governor Representative), and Councillor Menna Jones (Cabinet Member for Corporate Support).

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 14 July 2022 as a true record.

5. RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY EDUCATION

The Cabinet Member and officers from the Education Department and GwE were welcomed to the meeting.

The report of the Cabinet Member for Education was presented in response to a request from the Committee members for an opportunity to examine in more detail relationships and sexuality education, which was a mandatory element of the Curriculum for Wales Framework from September 2022. It was explained that this element had been mandatory in all primary schools in the county since September 2022, and in six of the secondary schools that had chosen to introduce the curriculum to Year 7 in September 2022.

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

- That it was early days on the journey of the Relationships and Sexuality Education Code, but that the feedback from the schools had been good and that positive communication had been taking place between schools and parents.
- That she had every faith in the profession to deliver this pluralistic and inclusive education that was appropriate for the child's development, as well as the child's age.
- That she was extremely proud that children were going to receive an education that would keep them safe and happy as they went through life.
- That the Code had received a great deal of attention, and that she had received a lot of correspondence from victims of sexual abuse who were now adults, from parents of victims and from people who worked with victims, all of whom said that they were so glad to see this education being formalised.
- That she very much hoped that this education went a long way towards ensuring that no child would be bullied and insulted for being different from what was regarded as the norm, and that was why it was so important that this education was implemented effectively across the county.

The Head of Education reiterated the Cabinet Member's comments, and noted:

- That school headteachers reported that they had received a positive response to the Code from the majority of parents and carers, and that he also had every faith that school leaders and staff dealt with the matter wisely.
- Because the field was presented in a pluralistic way, there are different views presented so that children and young people had the opportunity to come to their own independent opinion based on facts.
- That it was important to note that the Welsh Government had recognised that development or maturity or developmental relevance was at the heart of the curriculum. Therefore, the schools would deliver the education according to their knowledge of their learners in terms of their maturity and their ability to understand and deal with the matter.

The Head then referred to paragraph 4(iii) of the report which stated, *"when developing the Curriculum for Wales, Gwynedd schools will be supported by GwE"*, noting, in terms of correction, and to make the situation clearer, that the six authorities across the north had commissioned an individual to collaborate with the Healthy Schools movement in order to support schools in this field, and that GwE's Supporting Improvement Advisers were in the process of supporting all the schools to follow the Code.

Members were given an opportunity to ask questions and offer observations. The following matters were raised by individual members:

- It was asked whether it would be possible, in due course, to have input from headteachers and teachers, and possibly parents, by means of a questionnaire, in order to see how

satisfied they were with the new arrangements. In response, the Head of Education noted that a short report could be brought to the members conveying this, after a fairly considerable period of implementing the new curriculum.

- In response to a comment that it was not believed that the new framework was fundamentally different to the way personal education had been taught in the past, the Head of Education stated that this was exactly the comment that came from the profession. What is different, probably, is that the framework is presented cross-curricularly across the areas of learning and experience, and that it is a move that further strengthens children's ability to understand what a healthy relationship is, to understand the boundaries and to understand what was acceptable to them personally, so that this enabled them to make choices in terms of relationships and to safeguard themselves. It was also noted that the Children's Commissioner's Office and the NSPCC had welcomed this move and the advent of the new curriculum.
- It was noted that this matter polarised people. On the one hand, the Department reported that the response had been positive, but there was a group of parents who were dissatisfied. It was also understood that there were teachers who were extremely nervous about the new arrangements, and were asking for more training, and it was asked whether there was an intention to discover their views on the matter too. The importance of gathering negative evidence, as well as positive evidence, was emphasised in order to maintain a balance, and it was also suggested that the implementation of the Code in the schools needed to be scrutinised before, rather than after, the academic year ended. In response, the Head of Education noted that the Department had been finding out the opinion of headteachers on the matter, and that those headteachers represented and voiced the opinions of the staff in their schools. While fully accepting that this field had been the focus of attention, it was noted that some of it was based on a lack of knowledge, and that the reaction the schools got was that parents and staff in general welcomed the new curriculum. It was also confirmed that arrangements were underway to conduct training sessions in this field as in any other curriculum area.
- In response to a question, the Head of Education confirmed that consideration could be given to how the Department and the Council would be able to disseminate some of the positive evidence to the outside world.
- In response to a question, the Head of Education confirmed that no concerns had become evident since starting to implement the new curriculum, and that what had appeared on social media did not in any way reflect the general opinion.

A member expressed her concern about the Code, and noted:

- That the parents were the main legal guardians of their children, and that this right was being blurred here.
- That the law states that no one under the age of 13 could ever give legal consent to any kind of sexual activity.
- Were parents entitled to withdraw their children from Relationships and Sexuality Education lessons?
- Was it appropriate to discuss sexuality with very young children?
- Why change from sex education to sexuality education?
- That the authors of the document were Professor E. J. Renold from Cardiff University and her colleague, Ester McGeeney, and that the development of the document was entirely based on the research work of only the two of them, using fewer than 10 of their own articles and books to justify the document Relationships and Sexuality Education. Was this, then, ethical evidence?
- That the report stated that there was firm evidence - but where was that evidence?
- That the committee could not scrutinise something that was yet to be presented, and we had the right to question the Welsh Government on this.
- That every parent of every child in Gwynedd schools was a stakeholder, and that the Authority was being arrogant in dismissing parents' real concerns as misinformation on the basis that they did not agree with what the Government said was the truth.

- That all of us had the right to protect our children from inappropriate sexual material, and that parents knew their children best.
- That it was difficult to understand why people were so willing to accept this.
- That we could not ignore the protestations coming from Scotland and England.
- Our teachers were not qualified to teach sexuality education.
- That this challenged all the western family culture that was inherent to us, and we had a duty to scrutinise this thoroughly and extensively before it was too late.
- That the objectors could not be dismissed as extremists - they were parents who were very concerned about the welfare of their children.

In response to the comments, the Head of Education noted:

- That the comments were not representative of what was happening in the schools according to his interpretation of the Code.
- That it was correct to say that Senedd Cymru had legislated to remove the right for parents and carers to exclude their children from the curriculum, and Gwynedd, as an Authority, was subject to a mandatory code or statutory curriculum as presented by the Government.
- That the Welsh Government had consulted widely before introducing the curriculum to our schools, and our role as an Authority and the school support service was to ensure that our schools were ready to implement it.

The member asked whether children had the ability to make moral decisions about their sexual behaviour, and whether the Head would agree that this completely undermined the safeguarding of children. The member also noted that it was essential to introduce age-related regulations in order to safeguard children from potential sexual abuse.

In an attempt to alleviate the concerns, the Managing Director of GwE gave a detailed explanation of the support given to schools, putting this part of the curriculum within its wider context.

The Chair asked what resources were available to schools. In response, the Managing Director of GwE noted that the Cross-regional Group looking at this had emphasised the need to make sure that the resources were appropriate. They were not looking for the extreme poles in the discussion, instead they were drawing together a list of resources which, in their professional opinion, were suitable for our pupils across the north. That list could then be shared at school level, and it was then a matter for the school to decide whether those resources were relevant to the school's context. He further noted that he had asked the Group to consider whether they could see gaps in resources in some fields, and if so, how best to meet that. He also noted that thorough information about the resources would be included on the Group's list in due course, and that it could be arranged for that information to be available to members of the scrutiny committee too.

A member noted that he too was completely unhappy with the direction in which the Council was taking the schools with this, stating:

- Were the training courses funded through Stonewall the only training received in this field?
- That the expertise of the person primarily responsible for drawing up the Code, namely Professor E. J. Renold, was '*Posthumanism*' and '*Queer Theory*', and that it was terrible to think that we were considering getting rid of Christian ideology, which had been attached to these areas for almost 2000 years, and replacing it by introducing this baseless ideology, which was being pushed forward by Stonewall and by the Welsh Government.
- That this ideology was highly dangerous for our children, and that when a small child told a teacher that he/she was being abused, using the type of terminology presented as part of this education would not manifest anything. Training was needed so that the teachers could pick up on this, instead of pushing the agenda of transgenderism and gender neutrality, and consequently changing the face of our society through the schools.

- What we would end up discharging from schools would be people who do not owe anything to their parents, or to the state, and that was the ideology that was being pushed forward here.
- It was said that development or maturity or developmental relevance was at the heart of the curriculum, but by misinterpreting that, there were horrendous implications that could affect children for the rest of their lives, and we only had to look at what happened in Tavistock to see the impact of that, with thousands of children butchered in the name of the very ideology that was being driven forward here by our officers and some of the members.
- That the Welsh Government was undermining Article 9 of the Human Rights Act by removing parents' right to withdraw their children from sex education if it was going to impact on their religion or beliefs.
- That 16 was the age of consent, but not according to what was being pushed onto the schools, and the sources that teachers were expected to use were going to lead to the sexualisation of young children.

The Monitoring Officer noted, on a point of propriety, that comparatively serious allegations had been made regarding the nature of the curriculum, along with an implication that comparatively serious and inappropriate elements arose from the implementation of the curriculum, and he reminded the members of their responsibility under the Code of Conduct not to bring the Authority and schools into disrepute without foundation. In response, the member stated that all the evidence was available regarding the nature and background of the research work behind the education curriculum, and that the members did not have the opportunity to discuss the evidence base as the Chair had told him that it was not appropriate to speak about that at this meeting. He further noted that he had not accused any headteacher, and that all he had said was that they needed the necessary education and training to deal with the extremely complex issues that they would be encountering.

The Monitoring Officer again reminded the members of their responsibility under the Code. In response, the member noted that following the introduction of the Code in Scotland, an increase of 1,600% had been witnessed in the cases of children going for treatment relating to transgenderism, and that therefore it resulted directly from the education system.

In response to the member's observations, the Head of Education noted:

- That it would be ensured that the training was appropriate for the staff, as with any other field.
- That this was part of the Curriculum for Wales, not part of the curriculum for Scotland or England.
- That the curriculum stood alone on the basis of research in Wales, and had received the seal of approval of several organisations.
- That what was at the heart of the curriculum was that children received information and made their own choices, based on pluralistic opinions.
- That the schools knew that it was appropriate for them to teach and discuss with children in accordance with their level of maturity.

A member noted:

- That he completely agreed with the Cabinet Member's comments in a recent magazine, which stated *"If we as schools do not give our children appropriate sex education, the pornography industry will step into the gap and what they will learn through that will not be suitable for their age, nor will it be presented within the context of a healthy, equal and happy relationship. Appropriate sex education is an important step towards creating empathetic, respectful, fair, resilient and inclusive and kind citizens."*
- That the key stakeholders in relation to this matter, namely the Welsh Government, Healthy Schools, the NSPCC and the Children's Commissioner's Office, were all supportive of the Code. The vast majority of teachers were also supportive, and it was assumed that the

pupil councils in the schools had also voiced their opinions, and that they were also firmly in favour of the Code.

- That it was recognised that the topic was a complex one, which polarised people, and that parents' fears needed to be allayed, instead of people relying on sweeping statements on social media. Therefore, it was suggested that the Education Department should send a general letter, on behalf of the headteachers, to all parents in an attempt to allay the real fears and nervousness that many parents had. In response, the Head of Education indicated that this was certainly something that could be discussed with the headteachers. The Managing Director of GwE corroborated the comment, stating that the Cross-regional Group had drawn up a leaflet to that effect to be adapted locally, and that the Department and GwE had the information to be shared.

A member noted:

- Until recently, that all the child protection organisations, including the NSPCC and the police, accepted that it was not appropriate for unfamiliar adults to have conversations with children about sexuality, but that this research had changed their opinion.
- Did the Head of Education believe that it was appropriate to talk to young children about sex and sexuality, bearing in mind that the author of the document challenged the concept of childhood innocence?
- That this was consistently recognised as a grooming technique that placed children at risk of being exploited by adults.

The Chair asked the member to quieten down, and the Monitoring Officer noted that he was not sure where this point was going in terms of context, as it referred to child abuse techniques within a criminal context.

For the sake of clarity, the Managing Director of GwE noted that there was a need to separate two things here, namely the curriculum, which offered age-appropriate education for children, and abuse, which had a completely clear and specific path.

A member noted:

- That they did not agree with the comment in the report that it was premature to scrutinise our schools' provision in this field, because, if the provision was to be presented, then there were schemes of work available, together with resources and teacher training, and perhaps it should be noted in the general letter to parents that there would be a task group scrutinising the matter.
- Why ask for the opinion of this meeting, when the members could not see the resources that were already being presented?

The Chair suggested that a request could be made to establish a task group to look at what was actually happening in our schools.

The UCAC representative was asked for his opinion regarding a defence for teachers should some parents complain that the education was inappropriate for their children. In response, it was noted that it was important that the content of any lesson was carefully discussed, and that it was expected that a discussion would take place between teacher and headteacher on the basis of their knowledge of the children, and therefore that it was hoped that this situation would not arise.

A member noted that he would be more comfortable seeing sex education taught in personal and social education lessons on the one hand, and in biology lessons on the other.

In response to a member's request for comments regarding teaching the field cross-curricularly, the Head of Education stated that the essence of the curriculum was that the content was taught across the areas of learning and experience, but in reality, our school leaders and the teachers would know in which area it would be most appropriate to present this type of curriculum. However, the 'relationships' element, for example, could arise in History lessons in order to explain how attitudes have changed over the last decades and centuries. The Managing Director of GwE added that, in terms of provision, it was possible to bring in external people to support specific themes and that the way to meet the requirements of the Code depended on the availability of the expertise within the school, and also the learning model the school wanted to adopt for the local curriculum. Therefore, it would not be one model of presentation, but a model that would be suitable for each school as they saw best.

The member further noted:

- That the tendency of new elements, when presented in a new way, was that they had the ability to take over, and that it would not be desirable to see this field arising in every lesson.
- Although it was fair to refer to ideologies, the essence of the education should be rooted in the basic undeniable biological facts.

In response, the Head of Education noted:

- That a healthy relationship took priority.
- That what was at the heart of the curriculum was the pluralistic element, i.e. that one view/tendency did not dominate another, and that different views were presented so that children and young people had the opportunity to reach their own independent opinion based on facts.

The member suggested that that could be explained clearly, with examples, in the general letter to parents.

In response to a question from a member regarding the response of the governing bodies, the Head of Education stated that there had not been a general audit at this point with the governing bodies, but that it was clear from the discussions with the headteachers that those discussions were ongoing. Also, in cases where schools had received a request, or decided with members of the governing bodies, to explain the new curriculum in its entirety to parents, that had been welcomed.

A member asked how we could protect our children if the curriculum was being changed significantly by the Minister. In response, the Managing Director of GwE noted:

- That all of us, as members, governors and officers, had a responsibility to protect that, and where there was real concern, that there were forums to have those discussions, regardless of the Minister's rights.
- Although the curriculum framework was set centrally by the Government, the difference between a national curriculum and this curriculum was that this curriculum was delivered locally, and therefore there was a responsibility on the school's leadership and the governors to make sure that the content was age-appropriate and appropriate to the maturity of the pupils.

After the Chair stated that she would bring the discussion to a close, the Head of Education noted:

- That following the discussion at this meeting, he wished to have a definition of what exactly the members wished to have scrutinised again, and that this was appropriate as we looked at what was happening in the schools.

- That the schools and governing bodies looked at how to present the new curriculum in accordance with the conditions and circumstances that were local to them, and it was also crucial for the members to consider that.
- As there were differences in how the work was done from one place to another, in relation to the context of children's maturity, etc., it was important to have the definition in order to be able to prepare appropriately for the scrutinisers.

A member noted that the committee had discussed this matter blindly, and as concern had been expressed about resources, it was suggested that the members should receive a very extensive selection of resources the next time the matter was scrutinised, as this was bound to be reassuring.

A member asked whether it was intended to use individual learning plans for the relationships and sexuality education. In response, the Head of Education noted:

- That if there were children open to the special education service, and that the requirements needed to be tailored to them, he was confident that the schools would act accordingly.
- That what was at the heart of this was a strong recognition in our schools of where the children were in terms of their ability and maturity to deal with issues like this maturely, sensitively and intelligently, and that he was confident that the staff knew their children well enough to get this right.

The member noted that it was important to include that too in the general letter to parents.

In her closing comments, the Cabinet Member noted:

- That it was asked why it was necessary to mention sexuality to young children, and that she wished to remind people that there were children in Gwynedd with two mothers, two fathers, a transgender parent, or brothers/sisters who were gay, or transgender.
- That all children were entitled to have themselves and their family reflected in education and educational materials, so that they grew up knowing that they themselves and their family were completely normal.

A registered vote was called for on a motion to accept the report and to note the observations, and to re-scrutinise the matter when appropriate.

According to Procedural Rules, the following vote on the motion was recorded:

In favour	15	Councillors Iwan Huws, Dawn Lynne Jones, Dewi Jones, Gareth Tudor Jones, Gwilym Jones, Cai Larsen, Beth Lawton, Dewi Owen, Gwynfor Owen, Richard Glyn Roberts, Huw Llwyd Rowlands, Paul Rowlinson and Sasha Williams. Co-opted Members: Colette Owen and Manon Williams
Against	3	Councillors Jina Gwyrfai, Louise Hughes and Gruffydd Williams.
Abstentions	1	Councillor Rhys Tudur

RESOLVED to accept the report and note the observations, and to re-scrutinise the matter when appropriate.

6. PROGRESS REPORT ON THE REFORM JOURNEY IN GWYNEDD SCHOOLS

The progress report of the Cabinet Member for Education was submitted at the request of this Committee, on the preparations of Gwynedd schools for Curriculum for Wales work.

Representatives from GwE were welcomed to the meeting.

Members were given an opportunity to ask questions and offer observations.

Individual members submitted the following observations:

- That it was encouraging to see that all Gwynedd schools ensured that the promotion of the Welsh language and the culture and heritage of Wales was clearly woven into the design of the curriculum.
- That it was essential that we did not lose sight of the importance of the traditional academic disciplines, which were essential in order to ensure fairness in society.
- That it was essential to ensure consistency in standards from school to school in order to ensure fairness, not only between communities, but also at the level of the individual pupil.
- That one page of the report, in particular, was full of references to 'a few', 'many' or 'some' schools, which was completely meaningless without the table, and that the relevant percentages should be included in each case.
- That the new curriculum was welcomed, but that the shortage of staff, especially assistants, was a huge problem.

In response to the observations and questions from members, it was noted:

- That in terms of the training arrangements, a programme was being created, cross-regionally and across Wales, in order to set the framework in terms of curriculum design, taking into account the vision, values and type of local behaviour a school or a local community aspires to, around the four purposes. GwE had been working closely with Professor Graham Donaldson and had created a regional network and local and specific networks in Gwynedd looking at areas of learning and experience individually, and then age-appropriately in relation to the areas of learning and experience. Then, a series of clusters had been created and a series of leagues, and the training permeated down to the level of the clusters. It was also important to note, as the menu progressed, that schools learned from each other and shared experiences.
- That assessment and progression were the greatest challenges for the profession. There was now a much more holistic picture of the child, as well as the academic aspect. Models and systems were created to share with the schools, especially in terms of formative assessment, and work was also underway in terms of the primary/secondary transition in the context of the local curriculum. It was further noted that one of our most important weapons in the wake of the development of the new curriculum would be the clear focus on a local/area curriculum, and it was believed that this was a means of strengthening the transition in a way that was relevant to a curriculum that truly reflected local requirements. It was also believed that it could help remove the perception by some that a period of education ended at the end of year 6, and another period started in year 7.
- That in relation to promoting Welsh culture across the schools, the Curriculum for Wales was a Welsh curriculum, and a curriculum that increasingly upheld and developed the Welsh language. Therefore, those elements were included in the training offer in different ways, and it was noted that GwE would be happy to report back on that to the committee.
- Regarding the intention of most schools to assess and track children's well-being as well as their attitude towards their work, and the fact that there was no single approach/resource available for that, and also the need to further develop the whole school well-being priority, including the development and evaluation of the health and well-being area of learning and experience, it was noted that we were in an unprecedented period for several reasons. Significant changes had been witnessed in the field of education, and it was believed that no one fully realised the impact of the last two years, not only on the children and young people, but also on the adults who teach in the schools. The pupil's voice was important in the midst of all this, but the profession and those supporting the profession had a role to play to mature and gather information as to what exactly was meant by well-being, and making things too generic could mean that it was possible to miss the focus and heart of well-being in a school. It was noted that the attitude of children and young people towards education and schools, especially in the more deprived areas, had become more challenging and needy in nature in the last two years. GwE was working and receiving advice from university leaders on

determining exactly what the needs were locally, and how to meet those needs. We didn't have the answers at the moment, but it was believed that we would have to look back on this period in due course in order to be able to see exactly what the impact had been on children and young people.

- Although there was one brief reference in the report to numeracy and literacy, that the basic skills - literacy, numeracy and digital competence, as well as the well-being of children and young people, were at the core of the curriculum from primary age to 16 years of age. It was noted that GwE would be happy to report back in full to the committee on the provision and support that schools receive in these fields.
- That the classroom assistants had not been included in the areas that needed further development, but it was emphasised that they were key people in our schools who supported front-line teaching in the classrooms. They also had to understand the framework, content and purpose of the curriculum, and be part of any professional development in their local school and local cluster.
- In terms of fairness for individual pupils with regard to academic attainment, especially those from less privileged backgrounds who were less likely to have private lessons, etc., it was noted that there had been an attempt for several years now to move away from categorising and labelling schools. Schools used to be measured very crudely according to the percentage of pupils who gained grades A* to C in their GCSEs, but a large percentage of the children did not reach this threshold. It was suggested that some schools had narrowed their curriculum far too early, in order to reach the threshold, at the expense of wider experience for the range of children, and it was believed that maintaining the breadth of the curriculum would be a challenge in the secondary sector. As it was not yet clear what the qualifications would look like by 2025, when the new curriculum would reach Year 10, this hampered the schools' plans a little, but it was possible to be quite clear that the GCSE brand and subject disciplines would remain.
- In relation to consistency of standards between schools, it was noted that collaboration between the schools was encouraged, as this was a means of eliminating the competitive element, as well as sharing workload and expertise. In the new Accountability Framework, each school had a responsibility to report to its governors and parents annually on the effectiveness of the curriculum, and how good it was for the experiences of individual pupils. As part of that process, there would be peer moderation on the type of report as envisaged in the proposed document and the guidance that would be in place. It was noted that Professor Donaldson had stated at a recent conference that a child who was happy and learning was a good indicator of the success of the curriculum, but it was probably necessary then to consider what contributed to this happiness and learning, how to capture those two things and how the schools contributed to whatever were the corporate aims, which were much more holistic in nature. This was probably a discussion for the Cabinet Member for Education and the Head of Education, in terms of what constituted a successful education system in Gwynedd.
- With regard to the local aspects of the curriculum, it was explained that there was no complete flexibility in relation to this, and that there were clear mandatory elements in the curriculum. It was also suggested that it might be beneficial to hold a workshop with a few schools in order to show how they implemented the proposed curriculum, thereby alleviating some of the concerns that some schools were disregarding the core elements by focusing on everything else.
- In terms of equality for all and access to the same experiences, it was noted that the curriculum was being presented during an unprecedented period in terms of the current cost of living crisis, etc., and that poverty and equality were never as simple as looking at financial poverty. There was also rural poverty and poverty in the experiences that children and young people received, and it was noted that the Cabinet Member for Education was keen to lead on work with the schools in terms of defining education and well-being and balanced experiences, so that children and young people and families were not excluded on the basis of poverty or any other social aspect. The Cabinet Member corroborated this comment by stating that extensive discussions had been held within the Department regarding the true cost of sending children to school, not just the financial cost, but also the cost in terms of well-being, both emotionally and psychologically. She explained that children would not

leave school with the desired outcomes without being happy in their own skin and having attended school on the same terms as everyone else.

- That there was some concern that the vocational element was not a full part of the Qualifications Wales consultation on new qualifications. That element lay excessively with external bodies outside Wales, and it was believed that political pressure would need to be applied if we wanted to see a menu that gave everyone Welsh-based qualifications. Otherwise, there was a risk of creating a two-tier system once again, and the career element should be part of the full experience so that the young person could have an uninterrupted path to the world of work or to further education.
- That there were two sides to the debate in terms of combining literature and language as one subject in Welsh and in English. When analysing GCSE results, it could be argued in some places that there was too much teaching of literature, and not enough teaching of the specific linguistic skills. The other side of the debate was that literature enriches the individual, not only in terms of language skills, but also as a person. Getting that balance in specification was going to be interesting, and it was believed that this should form part of the Qualifications Wales consultation. It was suggested that there had been a misconception regarding the changes or new trends in the curriculum, with some believing that placing more focus on skills had been at the expense of knowledge. However, skills and knowledge were combined in the new curriculum, with one enriching the other, and it was believed that this was also relevant in the context of literature and language.
- That it was intended to contribute to the Qualifications Wales consultation, either as a local authority, or jointly across the six regional authorities.
- That recruitment difficulties were a national problem, and not confined to the education field alone. In terms of the shortage of assistants, the schools were often fishing in the same pond for the same people with the same skills set as the children and adults sector and the care sector. It was necessary to consider what could be done to attract more people into the profession, and to retain them once they had been brought in. From talking to people, it seemed that the pay rate was not always responsible for that, but rather the number of hours offered, and the Council needed to be more proactive in this area, thinking outside the box, and perhaps combining jobs across sectors that would create a full-time job worth having that was attractive to people, and a means of keeping them in the profession. It was further noted that it was not believed that we fully realised the impact of the last two years on the profession, and that the pressure due to Covid had been more harrowing than we had realised. A lot of staff turnover was also seen, with 13 out of the 54 secondary schools across the region welcoming a new headteacher in September of this year, and the consequences of that trickling down through the system. It was noted that there were additional challenges in the Welsh-medium sector and that it was important to be able to attract people who were proficiently bilingual and were able to support pupils in both languages. Also, in terms of the special needs sector, we were very pleased in Gwynedd to be able to declare a situation where our special education provision was available to all our children across the continuum through the medium of Welsh, and therefore it was even more important that we were able to attract people who were natural Welsh speakers to support all the sectors.
- That some of the secondary schools that decided to postpone the introduction of the new curriculum until next year would have been in a position to introduce it this September, but they made a strategic and prudent decision to use the extra year to learn more about the curriculum.

RESOLVED to accept the report and to note the observations.

7. FFORDD GWYNEDD WORKING GROUP REVIEW

The Corporate Director and the Ffordd Gwynedd Adviser were welcomed to the meeting.

The report of the Cabinet Member for Corporate Support was submitted, presenting the conclusions of the Ffordd Gwynedd Working Group Review based on the responses received to a questionnaire which was circulated to the heads in order to:

- get an overview of how the Ffordd Gwynedd principles have embedded within the departments; and
- enable the development of a Ffordd Gwynedd plan that would ensure appropriate support for the coming three years.

Members were given an opportunity to ask questions and offer observations.

Individual members submitted the following observations:

- The new Tidying Teams were thanked for their commendable work.
- It was noted that there was a desire to see Ffordd Gwynedd working, but that the officers' enthusiasm about how things were going at the moment could not be shared.
- It was stated that understanding the true needs of the customer was central to the report, but if Ffordd Gwynedd was not concerned with that, it served no purpose.
- It was suggested that the report was too general, woolly and vague, e.g. there were several references to '*considerable progress*', '*room for improvement*', etc. but no accompanying definition. Similarly, there was a reference to, e.g. '*some departments/teams*', and it was suggested that the departments that succeeded or underachieved should be named, internally within the Council. The report also stated that teams were working innovatively, but it would be beneficial to know which teams were doing that, and what the good practice was.
- Despite accepting that there was a long way to go, it was suggested that Ffordd Gwynedd, as an ideal, was something to aim for, and the vision was congratulated.
- It was noted that the lack of response from some staff/departments to enquiries from elected members and members of the public was a major problem, and that this needed to be prioritised in the short term, Ffordd Gwynedd or not, naming and shaming those who transgressed.
- It was emphasised that if Ffordd Gwynedd was to work, everyone needed to buy into the culture, and disappointment was expressed that it had not been possible to bring the workforce on board with this, especially on the Highways side.
- It was noted that the principles of Ffordd Gwynedd should be shared with external companies that carried out contracts for the Council.

In response to the observations and questions from members, the Corporate Director noted:

- That he was very disappointed to hear some of the comments, but fully accepted that the members wanted more details, and was more than happy to share the information. He also accepted the point about highlighting where efforts needed to be focused.
- That he and the Chief Executive were working together on a piece of work regarding the lack of prompt response to enquiries from some services, and that steps had already been taken, with the situation now having improved in a number of services where there had been problems in the past. He asked members to get in touch if they had any examples of a lack of response. In response to a further comment regarding this matter, the Director noted that he suspected that the evidence suggested that there was a link between a lack of response to enquiries and a lack of commitment to the principles of Ffordd Gwynedd. In response to a further question regarding the need to monitor the performance of the departments, the Director explained that it was expected that members and the public received acknowledgement of any enquiry within seven days at the latest. The Director was asked to share that document with the members.
- In terms of getting everyone to buy into Ffordd Gwynedd, the Director noted that the Council had not seen the development it would have wished to see across the departments. However, the concept had taken root in some services, with much of that due to the guidance given by heads and managers. He emphasised that it was necessary to secure the commitment to embed the mindset and the culture, and it was necessary to invest time in

the recommended actions in order to identify the false steps that existed within some systems and ensure long-term benefit.

- That the concept rooted in the early days of Ffordd Gwynedd regarded any review of the system or service as something that looked at the service in its entirety. Although there was still room for departmental reviews, however, there had now been a shift towards undertaking an increasing number of less intensive reviews, which addressed individual systems in turn.
- That the role of the two Ffordd Gwynedd Advisers had been key in introducing the new techniques to managers in terms of reviewing services, focusing on workflow and providing advice on how to deal with obstacles. As time progressed, and as Ffordd Gwynedd became further embedded, it was expected that all of this would become a natural part of the managers' work.

RESOLVED to accept the report and to note the observations.

8. EDUCATION AND ECONOMY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD PROGRAMME 2022-23

Submitted - the Committee's draft forward work programme for 2022-23 for adoption.

RESOLVED to adopt the forward programme for 2022-23.

The meeting commenced at 10.30 am and concluded at 2.00 pm

CHAIR