
EDUCATION AND ECONOMY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2/02/23

Present:

Councillors: Beth Lawton (Chair)
Cai Larsen (Vice-chair)

Councillors: Jina Gwyrfai, Iwan Huws, Dawn Lynne Jones, Dewi Jones, Elwyn Jones, Gareth Tudor Jones, Dewi Owen, Gwynfor Owen, John Pughe Roberts, Richard Glyn Roberts, Huw Llwyd Rowlands, Paul Rowlinson and Rhys Tudur.

Co-opted Member: Manon Williams (Parent / Governor Representative for Arfon).

Officers in attendance: Bethan Adams (Scrutiny Advisor) and Eirian Roberts (Democracy Services Officer).

Present for item 5: Councillor Nia Jeffreys (Deputy Leader), Roland Evans (Assistant Head of Culture), Sian Jones (Tourism, Marketing and Events Manager) and Angela Jones (Partnerships Manager, Eryri National Park Authority).

The Chair thanked the former members of the Committee, Councillors Elin Hywel, Louise Hughes and Gruffydd Williams, Ruth Roe (Parent / Governor Representative for Meirionnydd) and Roger Vaughan (UCAC representative) for their contribution, and she welcomed Councillors Elwyn Jones and John Pughe Roberts back on the committee.

Condolences were extended to the family of Dilwyn Elis Hughes, who had represented UCAC on this committee for many years, and the members stood in silence as mark of respect and remembrance.

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Gwilym Jones and Sasha Williams; Colette Owen (The Catholic Church) and Karen Vaughan Jones (Parent / Governor Representative for Dwyfor) and Councillor Dyfrig Siencyn (Leader) (Item 5).

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 committee meeting held on 8 December, 2022, as a true record.

5. GWYNEDD AND ERYRI 2035: GWYNEDD AND ERYRI SUSTAINABLE VISITOR ECONOMY STRATEGIC PLAN

The Deputy Leader and officers from the Economy and Community Department were welcomed to the meeting.

Submitted – the report of the Leader and Deputy Leader inviting the committee to scrutinise:-

- Whether the Strategic Plan for a Gwynedd and Eryri Sustainable Visitor Economy corresponded with the Council's ambition and priorities for a Sustainable Visitor Economy in the future (Appendix 1 to the report submitted to the committee);
- Whether the joint operating structure with the National Park Authority was suitable (Appendix 2); and
- The arrangements for establishing the New Sustainable Visitor Economy Partnership to steer the implementation of the Action Plan (Appendix 3).

The Cabinet Member set out the context. The Assistant Head of Culture gave an overview of the contents of the report and the plan, and the Partnerships Manager – Eryri National Park Authority expanded on the partnership's structure and actions.

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

Individual members made the following observations:-

- It was suggested that since tourism in Gwynedd and Eryri was largely based on the landscape, landowners should be represented on the partnership.
- A member noted that elements that were relevant to the discussion were missing from the report and the appendices. There was a tendency to avoid possible disagreement and conflict over resources. There was mention of the potential effect on the Welsh language, but that effect was certain. There was no reference either to the effect on the health service and the police during the visitor season.
- A member expressed dissatisfaction that we, as a Council, relied on the National Park, a body that had no democratic accountability attached to it, to be a part of the partnership with us.
- It was noted that none of the plans that formed part of the Overnight Stay Scheme were within the Park area, which therefore did not solve the problem where most of the tourism was. The case study also referred to plans for the mountains and footpaths, but since the main thing for us was the people living in the park, where were the plans for the towns and villages in the Park? Also, the plans for the seaside were missing from the plan. *(As the Partnerships Manager – Eryri National Park Authority had had to leave the meeting for a while, the Scrutiny Advisor was asked to forward the member's comments to her.)*
- It was noted that this was a very commendable strategic plan. It was good to see both authorities working together closely, and the Deputy Leader and the officers were thanked for their collaboration.
- A member expressed disappointment that the officer from the Park had had to leave the meeting, and noted that a senior officer from the Park should have been part of this discussion.
- It was noted that the work carried out by the Assistant Head of Culture on the UNESCO World Heritage Site Management Plan had forced the joint-working between the two authorities to a degree, as most of the slate areas were outside the Park's boundaries, but they were where the communities of Gwynedd lay. As such, sometimes we had to put boundaries aside, and tourism was a sector that did not respect boundaries.
- The new tourism objectives were praised, and a member suggested that this report led the way in terms of beginning to consider the impact of tourism on community, language and culture – something that became very evident to people during the lockdowns when there were no tourists in Gwynedd.
- It was noted that it was very ambitious to try to have the three levels of the partnership to collaborate, as everyone would want to be involved in the partnership on the political side.
- It was suggested that should the Tourism Tax come into force, the partnership and the operational group would be an excellent way of determining the grants to be allocated from any fund that would be available for that purpose.

- Concern was expressed that the committee had not had an opportunity to respond to the Welsh Government's consultation on a Statutory Licensing Scheme for Visitor Accommodation Providers in Wales, which would end on 17 March, and the member asked what the Council's response to this was.
- It was suggested that although there were commendable principles and aspirations in the strategic plan, there was no direction on how they would be implemented or how to measure them in future.
- A member noted that there was nothing in the strategy at present that addressed tourism over-development, and that attracting tourism was the ongoing message. A member acknowledged that there were benefits, e.g. more toilets, seasonal work, etc., but we were not managing the market in any way, and the member did not believe that we could do that with the strategy in its current form.
- It was suggested that there was a tendency to express what we wished to see, rather than what we did not wish to see. It was believed that some developments were unsustainable to communities. We should model based on what we were attempting to avoid, and the plan should refer to that.
- It was noted that tourism was to be welcomed, and was part of the economy, but the challenge was to make it sustainable so that the people of Gwynedd experienced economic benefits from it, and not just seasonal jobs. Also, that our language, culture and heritage were protected, that there were homes for people to live in them, and that the county did not turn into a large holiday park.
- It was suggested that if they were to develop bus networks, larger car parks should be created in towns such as Caernarfon and Porthmadog on the outskirts of the Park, so that visitors did not visit only one location in Gwynedd or within the Park. To the contrary, it was noted that running buses from the towns would take employment away from the Eryri area, as it would encourage people to return straight to the towns, rather than staying and spending their money locally within the Park.
- A member noted that they welcomed the proposal to establish five overnight sites across Gwynedd. It was suggested, for example, that land close to the Foryd in Caernarfon could be used for this kind of development, with the Town Council managing the site and the profits going to the community. There might also be community groups throughout the county that could undertake this type of work, with the profits being transferred to those communities. The enforcement element was also emphasised, to ensure that the sites were kept clean and tidy.
- A member praised the excellent work of the Timau Tacluso Ardal Ni (tidying teams) and emphasised the importance of protecting this investment during these challenging financial times, as it was making a real difference to communities across Gwynedd.
- It was suggested that there was no purpose in using public money to market Gwynedd and Eryri during a period of cuts, as plenty of people already knew about the area, and it would be better to focus on improving the infrastructure of Gwynedd and the Park, and to leave the marketing to Visit Wales.
- It was noted that one feature of inward migration was people moving into the area, buying houses and then converting them to have an income – it was not believed that such tourism should be supported. Rather, we should be supporting tourism where the assets being used, whether land or buildings, were in the hands of local people, and tourism that provided employment for the local people, albeit not too many jobs so as not to encourage a further population influx.
- It was noted that the general feeling was that wages were too low for those employed in the tourism sector, and it would be useful to know the average salary figures in the field. Considering that it was difficult to fill jobs in tourism, and that unemployment was not a major problem locally, we must ask whether these jobs were needed at all? Also, the visitors sector was very dependent on employing children, suggesting that the pay was very low, but the report did not refer to this.
- It was noted that companies could not get enough people to work for them, even companies that sustained tourism all year round – such opportunities must be promoted to the local people, and the businesses themselves also supported.

- It was noted that the tourism sector in Gwynedd contained a very large range of businesses, and many of these were small businesses, and if the principles were to be implemented fully and effectively, we must ensure that the entire sector buys in to this.

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

- Officers agreed that landowners should be represented on the partnership, and the draft terms of reference would be revised to include representatives from the farming unions or representatives from amongst the landowners.
- It was important to have representation from the emergency services on the partnership because of the additional pressure during the holiday season. With regard to the reference to possible conflict over resources, the partnership would be a medium for an open and honest discussion between everyone, and all parties wished to work together and address the problems. It was further noted that we needed to convey this message to people wishing to visit the area, regarding the need to respect the environment, etc., and it was hoped to work on these kinds of messages through the plan. Also, there was close collaboration taking place with Bangor University that had managed to secure grants for the purpose of conducting research to identify the effect of the visitor economy on the Welsh language, and this work would hopefully lead to updated and current evidence which would steer the future priorities of the visitor economy plan.
- In terms of targeting funding for financing the priorities, it was noted that the service was looking at several funding streams. Some bids had already been submitted to fund some of the projects highlighted in the strategic report – they might be lottery funds, Welsh Government funds or UK Government funds. There was also a dedicated fund available through Visit Wales to support destination management work, and we had been quite successful in targeting this funding in the past. Funding had been secured for parking and toilet facilities, and this was the same fund that financed the 'aires' scheme. Investment from this fund had also been made in Parc Glynllifon and Parc Padarn, and the service was currently looking at the opportunities arising from the Shared Prosperity Fund for supporting businesses, for the cultural issues that had arisen from the plan, the World Heritage Site designation and the activity stemming from the Visitor Economy Plan. The coastal offer would be given consideration there. In the feedback received from the groups, the immense pressure on the infrastructure and the need to invest in it was a recurring factor by members and community and business representatives. As a result, the Council had carried out a review of the coastal infrastructure, and there was work underway across departments to look at possible funds to target.
- The Council would respond to the consultation on the Statutory Licensing Scheme for Visitor Accommodation Providers in Wales, and the members were welcome to present any comments so they could be incorporated in the response.
- The service had been studying good practice internationally to measure activity in terms of destination management and sustainable tourism, and they used the figures and statistics for reporting on economic matters. By now, they looked at a wider family of statistics and indicators to set the direction and assist in terms of demonstrating progress on specific projects. A research group had been established to look at the exact matters that the member had raised, in order to ensure that we had targets and indicators that would inform the process, and also as a means of reporting back to members, businesses and communities on any progress or lack thereof. It was also noted that work was being done on the assets for communicating and maintaining contact with businesses. The member enquired further whether this could be incorporated as an appendix to the strategic plan, so that everyone was clear that these indicators were a part of it. In response, the officer noted that it was essential that this work was integrated and influenced the main aims and objectives. They further explained that the indicators had been removed from the initial draft of the plan, so that the new partnership could take ownership of their action plan, and there would be an annual review of our milestones prior to the partnership agreeing on the indicators. We had focused on around 50-60 indicators to measure the effect of each one of the principles, with the aim of presenting them to the partnership, asking them to identify our priorities and the indicators tracked by us during the year, as well as the expected outcome

from the actions. This would be an annual process which would be reviewed and updated in response to the priorities of the visitor economy and those of our communities, and it was hoped that this would come out clearly in the process of establishing the partnership and as it matured.

- With regard to over-development of tourism and management of the market, although it was a possibility that some parts of the county could develop / offer a visitor economy and draw people out of the busiest areas, it was not believed that the plan sought to attract more visitors to Gwynedd, particularly during the summer. The intention would be to encourage visitors to come at different times, and to visit different areas, and also target the overseas markets, also ensuring that there were more and better employment opportunities locally. It was also aimed to create more career opportunities within the visitor economy locally. The Council also wished to develop community tourism so that the benefits would be returned to the local community. This was all a challenge, but it was hoped that by working in partnership, we could respond to the challenge.
- In terms of highlighting the type of tourism we would wish to avoid; the balance was difficult. We want visitors to come here, but also want them to respect our language, our culture and our environment, so that tourism brought the greatest benefit to the local people.
- With regard to parking in Eryri, the Park had its sustainable transport plan which looked at developing more hubs around the Park in order to transport people in, and there were regular discussions taking place between the Park, Gwynedd Council, Conwy Council and Transport Wales about implementing that strategy.
- The overnight stay scheme will be developed with funding from Visit Wales's *Pethau Bychain* fund. This was a project led by the Environment Department, with support from the Economy Department, and planning applications had recently been submitted for five sites based in the Council's car parks – the Shell car park in Caernarfon, Parc Padarn, Cricieth, Pwllheli and Barmouth. We had also planned to have a scheme in Tywyn but had failed to identify a location. It was explained that this was a pilot scheme, and the research that had been conducted to explore the interest, the regulatory work and the communities' feedback was available for any businesses or communities that were keen to develop their own schemes. In terms of the management aspects, the Public Protection Service would implement an enforcement package over the next few months in order to target specific locations that had been truly problematic over the past two to three years. There would be communication needed in terms of the good practice and the expectations on those people who would be using the overnight stays.
- The Council had not marketed Gwynedd at all during Covid, or afterwards, and the budget for marketing had been cut significantly over the years. It was explained that Visit Wales tended to focus on Wales as a brand, rather than marketing different areas of Wales, and that there was room for the Council to market or create a campaign to target specific audiences, or encourage people to visit the area at specific periods, or indeed not to visit the area at particular times as well. In terms of funding the infrastructure, an opportunity would emerge soon through the new *Pethau Pwysig* fund by Visit Wales, as well as opportunities through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to invest in our communities, infrastructure, marketing and events. It was further noted that in light of the cuts to the marketing budget, it had been agreed that a large sum from this investment would be used to maintain the Snowdonia Mountains and Coast website, which now displayed the details of over 800 businesses, with over 1m views to the website annually. We had also seen a 30% increase in the numbers following Snowdonia Mountains and Coast on Instagram. As such, it was important that, on a local level, we highlighted what was important to the area and our distinctive features, our environment, our culture and language.
- With regard to marketing the buses network to people from afar who were used to driving directly from their home to Eryri, the officer noted that a working group had been established to discuss the transport and parking plan and the Sherpa service, and they intended to complete studies on how best to engage and explain what the new offer was. Once the schemes would be agreed, the Service would notify their availability to communities and share information through the Business Bulletin. The schemes would also be highlighted on the social media and on the Council's website, and the work was being led by the Public Transport Team in cooperation with the Economy Department.

- In terms of the need for the entire sector to buy into the principles, it was evident from the consultation with British and international experts that the tourism destination management plans that worked best were those that had more ownership on a local level. It also became clear from the consultation that providing support to enable the sector to buy in to this and become involved in the process must be focal in order for any partnership to progress. This would therefore be considered as we looked at the support pack for businesses. Work had already been completed to identify and secure communication assets to highlight good practice. These would be highlighted further when the plan would be launched. The Service was building on the work that had been achieved previously with destination management, but there was more detailed work to be carried out in terms of explaining, encouraging and demonstrating good practice, and highlighting the direction in which we would wish to move in future. This would not be accepted by everyone, but several of those who had been part of the discussions to date looked forward to working together, and the local partnerships would be essential in this respect. It was further noted that one of the priorities in implementing the plan was the aim to establish local ambassadors or leaders, so that there was local ownership. From experience in other areas, these people might not necessarily be involved with the visitor economy sector, but people who were buying in to the vision of a sustainable visitor economy and local ownership of the visitor economy. This would be one of the first action steps between spring and summer this year, to develop a network of ambassadors/leaders.
- The officers expected that progress on actions would be reported to the committee and the Cabinet. Clearly, they would also report to the partnership, and the normal arrangements of reporting up would then happen, which would include reporting through the performance-challenge procedure. They also explained that since this activity had been part of the Gwynedd Plan previously, namely the Benefiting from Tourism Plan, that senior reporting took place in this field.

A member expressed their desire for the vision to state clearly that we wished to have a visitor economy that preserved the language and culture of Gwynedd and Eryri for the benefit and well-being of the people, environment, language and culture of Gwynedd and Eryri. This would ensure that the vision for having any tourism development would respect the language and culture, and that we will not accept developments that are more foreign in their nature and that do not show respect. In response, it was noted that this was where the cross-departmental work happened, and that consideration of the principles would be an important feature of deciding on bids for financial support, supporting events or planning applications.

RESOLVED

- (1) To accept the report and recommend that consideration should be given to amending the Vision of the Gwynedd and Eryri Sustainable Visitor Economy Plan 2035 to read:-**

"A Visitor Economy that:-

(i) Preserves the language and culture of Gwynedd and Eryri;

(ii) For the benefit and well-being of the people, environment, language and culture of Gwynedd and Eryri".

- (2) To ask the Cabinet Member to convey the committee's observations to the Cabinet.**

6. GWYNEDD CATEGORY 3 SECONDARY SCHOOLS SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION BRIEF

Submitted – a brief for the Scrutiny Investigation of Category 3 Secondary Schools in Gwynedd. The committee was invited to adopt the brief and to elect a maximum of five members to be part of the investigation, with the membership to include no fewer than two different political groups.

It was noted that members had been invited to express an interest in being members of the investigation during the informal meeting of the committee on 8 December 2022. Expressions of interest had been received from Councillors Cai Larsen, Huw Rowlands, Paul Rowlinson and Rhys Tudur following the meeting.

It was noted that there was no representation from Meirionnydd amongst the names, or a female, or a representative from the Independent Group, and as such the Chair, Councillor Beth Lawton, was suggested.

The investigation brief was then discussed. The following was noted:-

- The report specified that the main question to be addressed by the investigation was: *'What is the Welsh medium provision in our secondary schools...'*. but this should be known to the Authority. It was not a matter for the investigation to determine what was the provision, but rather to scrutinise that provision.
- The brief reflected the reality, which was that the Education Department was unclear what the Welsh-language provision was at present, and the fact that this exercise was happening at all was the consequence of a disgraceful lack of monitoring in this field, and it cast doubt over all the statistics that had been gathered over the years. The teachers knew full-well who did assessments and essays in what language, and the member could not understand why the Education Department could not cast a light on what the current provision was. In response, the Chair stated that the investigation would hopefully cast a light on this.
- The three schools that had been selected to be part of this investigation were some of the most Welsh-speaking schools in Gwynedd, and the investigation would not find a representational picture of the situation across the county by only visiting those schools. On the contrary, it was suggested that there was no point going to the least Welsh schools, and the three schools selected were not believed to be an inappropriate mix. In response, it was explained that the Education Department had suggested the three schools (one in Arfon, one in Dwyfor and one in Meirionnydd) on the basis that post-16 considerations could be included in two out of the three schools. The matter had also been discussed at the Secondary Headteachers Forum in terms of which schools were willing to participate in the investigation.
- Certainty was needed that the brief contained a questionnaire for each secondary school in order to gain an approximate picture of the situation county-wide before the working group selected the three most representational schools to be scrutinised in detail.
- As well as the questions listed in Part B of the brief, we should also ask what the baseline was and what support did the Department provide to help the schools realise the aim.
- As well as the stakeholders listed in Part CH of the brief, it would also be useful to speak with the Head of Curriculum, the Head of Welsh, the School Council and representation from amongst the assistants.

RESOLVED to adopt the Scrutiny Investigation Brief for Gwynedd Category 3 Secondary Schools and to elect Councillors Cai Larsen, Beth Lawton, Huw Rowlands, Paul Rowlinson and Rhys Tudur to undertake the investigation work.

The meeting commenced at 10.30 am and concluded at 12.25 pm

CHAIRMAN