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## EDUCATION AND ECONOMY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 21/11/19

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**Present:** Councillor Paul Rowlinson (Chair)  
Councillor Elwyn Jones (Vice-chair)

**Councillors:** Freya Bentham, Aled Evans, Selwyn Griffiths, Alwyn Gruffydd, Judith Humphreys, Elin Walker Jones, Gareth Jones, Huw Wyn Jones, Cai Larsen, Dewi Roberts and Elfed Roberts.

**Co-opted Members:** Dylan Davies (Meirionnydd Parent / Governors Representative) and Dilwyn Elis Hughes (UCAC).

**Ex-officio Member:** Councillor Edgar Owen.

**Officers present:** Vera Jones (Democratic and Language Services Manager) and Eirian Roberts (Democratic Services Officer).

**Present for item 5 below:**

Sioned Williams (Head of Economy and Community Department)  
Llyr B. Jones (Senior Manager Economy and Community)

**Present for item 6 below:**

Sioned Williams (Head of Economy and Community Department)  
Colin Morris (Business Support Manager)

**Present for item 7 below:**

Councillor Cemlyn Williams (Cabinet Member for Education)  
Dilwyn Williams (Chief Executive)  
Dafydd L. Edwards (Head of Finance Department)  
Sioned Williams (Head of Economy and Community Department)  
Garem Jackson (Head of Education)  
Hefin Owen (Group Accountant)

**Present for item 8 below:**

Councillor Cemlyn Williams (Cabinet Member for Education)  
Garem Jackson (Head of Education)  
Ellen Rowlands (TRAC Scheme Manager)

**Present for item 8 below:**

Councillor Cemlyn Williams (Cabinet Member for Education)  
Garem Jackson (Head of Education)  
Ffion Edwards Ellis (Senior Additional Learning Needs and Inclusion Manager)

### 1. APOLOGIES

Councillors: Beth Lawton, Dewi Owen, Mair Rowlands and Gareth Williams.  
Anest Gray Frazer (Church in Wales) and David Healey (ATL)  
Councillor Gareth Thomas (Cabinet Member for Economy)

### 2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

Councillor Selwyn Griffiths declared a personal interest in the following items for the reasons noted -

- Item 6 - Supporting Gwynedd businesses to respond to Brexit - as his son was a co-author of the report. The member was of the opinion that it was not a prejudicial interest, and he did not withdraw from the meeting during the discussion on the item.
- Item 8 - An outline of the TRAC Scheme in Gwynedd - as his daughter-in-law worked for the Service. The member was of the opinion that it was a prejudicial interest and he withdrew from the meeting during the discussion on the item.

### **3 URGENT ITEMS**

None to note.

### **4. MINUTES**

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee held on 20 June 2019, as a true record.

### **5. REVIEW OF PWLLHELI HAFAN AND HARBOUR**

Presented - the report of the Cabinet Member for Economy, detailing the work that had been carried out thus far on the development of management options for the Pwllheli Hafan and Harbour.

The officers elaborated on the content of the report, and also responded to questions / observations from members.

The Chair summarised the main observations of the members arising from the discussion as follows:

- Responses were provided to a number of questions during the discussion, and this had deepened our understanding of the situation in Pwllheli.
- The Members had emphasised that ensuring a resolution for the dredging situation and removing the sediment to keep the channel clear was essential for the whole situation.
- This work had been in progress for some time now, and the business case now needed to be prepared. More clarity was required with regard to the potential investment costs, the possible opportunities, the relationship with Plas Heli, etc. in order to raise the standard and attract more customers to the Hafan.
- There was a need to continue to engage with local companies, etc.

**RESOLVED to accept the report, and request an early update on the Hafan and Harbour Management Plan (including the business cases) for this Scrutiny Committee.**

### **6. SUPPORTING GWYNEDD BUSINESSES TO RESPOND TO BREXIT**

The Cabinet Member for the Economy submitted a report outlining how the Council and other organisations were raising awareness amongst businesses of the implications of the UK's decision to leave the European Union (Brexit) and supporting them to overcome any resulting obstacles.

The officers elaborated on the content of the report, and also responded to questions / observations from members.

The Chair summarised the main observations of the members arising from the discussion as follows:

- As the Brexit situation was constantly changing, and nobody knew what was going to happen, it was very difficult to provide definitive observations.
- However, it was clear from the report and the responses given that the Council was providing support to the business sector to face the challenges of Brexit, and that we needed to continue with this support, by giving particular focus to the agriculture, tourism and countryside sector, as well as the fishing sector.

**RESOLVED to accept the report.**

## **7. THE EDUCATION AND ECONOMY AND COMMUNITY DEPARTMENTS' SAVINGS PROPOSALS**

The report of the Cabinet Member for Education and the Cabinet Member for the Economy was submitted, inviting the committee to scrutinise the proposals of the Education Department and Schools and the Economy and Community Department to deal with their share of the potential £2m deficit in the 2020/21 budget, along with proposing alternative plans to meet the lack of current savings schemes for the Education Department.

The Cabinet Member for Education, both Heads of Services and officers expanded on the content of the report, and also responded to questions / observations from the members.

### The Savings Proposals by the Economy and Community Department

During the discussion, it was noted that, although it was accepted that the savings proposals would have some impact on the residents of Gwynedd, the Department had managed to mitigate the impact as far as possible.

### The Savings Proposals by the Education Department and Schools

During the discussion, considerable concern was expressed by members regarding two specific savings proposals, namely 'Integration - Individual Development Plans (IDP)/Statements' (£112,530) and increasing the pupil / teacher ratio in the allocation formula (£463,900). Having received some further explanation on what either scheme would mean for the county's schools, it was noted that one scheme would involve less support for pupils with additional learning needs who were not the subject of an IDP / Statement, and the other scheme would lead to a reduction in the number of teachers and / or a reduction in the number of ancillary staff, thus impacting the educational standards.

Members further noted:

- That the schools had already had to cut back to the bare bone.
- That the Council should send a letter to Welsh Government to state their complete dissatisfaction with regard to the insufficiency of the grant, which had led to a financial situation where the Council had had to make substantial savings.
- That the proposals should be revisited in more detail in order to see what exactly was being recommended.
- That the schools would not be able to do their work without the funding, and that the changes impacted the morale of teachers and children.
- That savings should be sought from elsewhere.

In response to the observations, the Chief Executive noted:

- This year for the first time, the expenditure per head on education in Gwynedd was the highest amongst all Welsh rural authorities, and even by making these cuts, Gwynedd would still be at the top.
- That they had managed to protect the entire schools' budget last year.
- That this Council had been corresponding and meeting with the Government regularly, and that the Government was very aware of the concerns.
- As a frugal Council, that they needed to plan for the possibility of having to discover the potential £2m deficit in the 2020/21 budget.
- That every Council department was now under pressure, and that the scrutiny committee's role was to decide, should it be required that the Department submit savings proposals, whether the proposals listed in the report or other proposals would have the least impact on the county's children.

The Head of Education Department confirmed that serious consideration had been given to all options. He could not make recommendations anywhere else, and the proposals submitted were the ones that would have the least impact on children. He also noted that the reduction in the primary sector's demography and the increase in the secondary sector's demography would have a much greater impact than these proposals. There was also substantial pressure on the transport budget.

The Cabinet Member referred to the schools' balances of over £4m and noted that there was an intention for this committee to look at the surplus / balances of the schools. The Head of Education Department explained that the Authority had responsibilities in terms of monitoring the balances and expenditure patterns of schools and that primary schools could be directed with balances over £50,000 and secondary schools with balances over £100,000 to spend. However, the balances of many of the schools were below these thresholds.

In response to more observations against the savings proposals of Integration and the Allocation Formula, the Chief Executive noted:

- That every Department had been instructed to find their share to meet the £2m sum should there be a need to find such a sum. It was the Scrutiny Committee's responsibility to consider whether these proposals would have the least impact, or if it would be something else. If the committee had thought that the proposals submitted would have an excessive impact, then its role was to find the proposals within the Education field with less impact. As the Head of Education had explained, any other proposals would have even more of an impact on the county's children.
- That the Council needed to set up a balanced budget, and when agreeing to increase the Council Tax in March, there would be an opportunity for members to weigh-up the increase in the Council Tax in order to avoid having to implement some elements of the savings.

A member noted that the Council was in this situation due to Welsh Government's unwillingness to provide sufficient funding. This was preparation work for potential cuts, and the Council could not move forward without carrying out this preparation work. Refusing these proposals, without proposing any better suggestions, would mean that the committee behaved irresponsibly. On this basis, he proposed the recommendation at the end of the report, namely:

- (a) To approve the departments' proposals to achieve their share of the relevant savings.

- (b) To approve the recommended alternative plan by the Education Authority to replace the two historic schemes that they had, which were impossible to achieve.

As the proposal was not seconded, another member proposed that the cuts should not be approved and that the Education Department should be asked to revisit the data in more detail.

This proposal was not seconded.

The Chief Executive explained that revisiting the data in order to see what else was possible would mean having to call an extraordinary meeting of the scrutiny committee, however as the Head of Education Department had explained, the other options would have an even greater impact.

A member proposed that an extraordinary meeting of the committee be called, and requested that the Education Department bring alternative plans forward. The proposal was seconded.

The Head of Education explained that any alternative plan would have to come from the schools in any case. The Chief Executive emphasised again that it was alright to have the discussion, but that the Cabinet Member had submitted the proposals that would have the least impact, and that all other options would be worse, e.g. school closures, abolishing post-16 transport, etc.

The proposal to accept the recommendations in the report was seconded with a very heavy heart, whilst accepting that the Department had attempted to seek the options that had the very least impact on the children of Gwynedd. It was very much hoped that these savings would not have to be made, however it was recognised that a procedure needed to be put in place in case.

A vote was taken on the proposal and it fell.

It was proposed and seconded that the committee noted the report and the strong observations made, and that this would be taken forward to the Cabinet. The proposal was carried.

#### **RESOLVED**

- (a) **To accept that the proposals of the Economy and Community Department to achieve their share of the relevant savings would have the least impact on the residents of Gwynedd.**
- (b) **To note the report on the proposals of the Education Department and Schools to achieve their share of the relevant savings, and the strong observations that had been made, and to convey this to the Cabinet.**

#### **8. AN OUTLINE OF THE TRAC SCHEME IN GWYNEDD**

The report of the Cabinet Member for Education was submitted, outlining the TRAC Scheme, which provided additional assistance to support vulnerable children in schools or to engage them back in education.

The Cabinet Member and officers expanded on the content of the report, and also responded to questions / observations from the members.

The Chair summarised the main observations of the members arising from the discussion as follows:

- The Committee would like to congratulate the Department on their work, and the members were proud that the lives of children, who would have otherwise fallen through the net, were being transformed.
- That the report highlighted what was possible to do when resources were available, and that this was a lesson for politicians on all levels.
- That the report also demonstrated the difference purposeful planning could make.

**RESOLVED to accept the report.**

**9. AN UPDATE ON THE GWYNEDD AND ANGLESEY LEARNING NEEDS AND INCLUSION SERVICE**

The report of the Cabinet Member for Education was submitted, which provided an update on the development of the new service structure along with the legislative changes that would become operational in September 2021.

The Cabinet Member and officers expanded on the content of the report, and also responded to questions / observations from the members.

A question was raised by a member on behalf of an individual who was unable to attend the meeting with regard to a specific school's budgetary situation. As it would be inappropriate to discuss this in an open forum, it was suggested that the author advised the school in question to contact the department.

The Chair summarised the main observations of the members arising from the discussion as follows:

- The members acknowledged the detailed work that took place within the Department.
- It was accepted that there were challenges, however major developments had taken place and the fact that this would continue was welcomed. Also, the committee took pride in hearing that Gwynedd was so much ahead of the other authorities in this field.
- The Committee would like to congratulate the Department on their work, and the members were very glad to hear that the service was available in Welsh to every child, whatever their difficulties.

**RESOLVED to accept the report.**

At the end of the meeting, the Head of Education Department noted that the TRAC Scheme Manager and the Senior Learning Needs and Inclusion Manager worked within the two most difficult fields within the education service, with scarce resources, and both of them and their teams were thanked for their work of transforming the lives of the most vulnerable and needy children.

The meeting commenced at 10.30 am and concluded at 3.15 pm

**CHAIRMAN**