

GWYNEDD COUNCIL CABINET



Report to the Cabinet

Date of meeting: 13 September 2022
Cabinet Member: Councillor Beca Brown
Contact Officer: Garem Jackson
Contact Telephone Number: 32089
Title of Item: Performance Report of the Cabinet Member for Education

1 THE DECISION SOUGHT

1.1 To accept and note the information in the report.

2 THE REASON FOR THE NEED FOR A DECISION

2.1 In order to ensure effective performance management.

3 INTRODUCTION

3.1 The purpose of this report is to update you on what has been achieved in the field for which I, as Cabinet Member for Education, have responsibility. This includes outlining the latest with the pledges in the Council Plan; the Department's day-to-day work; and the latest in terms of savings and cuts schemes.

3.2 We are implementing the Council Plan for 2018-23, and I herein report on progress to the end of August 2022. I wish to remind you that all matters have already been the subject of discussions and have been scrutinised by me in Performance Challenging meetings. I am particularly happy with the Department's performance, and I will elaborate on the progress made in the report.

4. THE RATIONALE AND JUSTIFICATION FOR RECOMMENDING THE DECISION

Performance of Projects in the Council Plan

4.1 Sustainable Learning Communities Programme

4.1.1 The Sustainable Learning Communities Programme plans and realises innovative projects to adapt schools, or build new schools so that the children and young people of Gwynedd are educated in the best possible learning environment.

4.1.2 Despite the pandemic, the new Ysgol y Garnedd building opened its doors in October 2020 and became the new educational home for up to 420 learners in the city of Bangor. The school site also offers a nursery education and wrap-around

childcare provision in a bespoke environment with the best possible resources. Also, there is a carefully-designed space for specialist units to support child development on the site. Excellent team work and clear communication was a feature of this successful project, that managed to keep within the budget allocated to it.

The project has won two Construction Excellence in Wales 2021 awards, namely:

Digital Construction Award

Client of the Year Award

<https://www.cewales.org.uk/cew-awards/awards-2021/>

We will arrange an official opening with the school when it will be safe to do so.

- 4.1.3 Ysgol y Faenol is also in the process of having a major extension. Although the timetable slipped as a result of the pandemic, the extension has now been completed. Nevertheless, discussions continue in relation to land transfers and consequently, it is not possible to complete work on the school's car park at present. When the work on the car park will be completed, the school will be able to accommodate 315 learners as a result of the extension, which is an increase of 129 learners. The building has also been planned to be a hub for the local area, with a new community centre built as a part of the development. We anticipate that the work will be completed by the end of the Autumn Term 2022.
- 4.1.4 To respond to the increasing demand for places at Ysgol Glancegin in Maesgeirchen, we have secured funding to add an extra classroom to the school building. The work has already been completed, and the classroom was ready for use by the school at the beginning of the last educational year.
- 4.1.5 Arrangements for the project management of Our Lady's School have been agreed with the Diocese, which means that Gwynedd Council will be responsible for facilitating the project arrangements and submitting the business case to Welsh Government. Initial feasibility work has been completed to identify the needs, and there is agreement to locate the new school on the site of Ysgol Glanadda (which is now closed) and this location is in accordance with the aspirations of the community. Conceptual plans have been created to establish Our Lady's School on that site.
- 4.1.6 As a result of the poor condition of the building and existing learning environment at Ysgol Treferythyr, we will build a new school in Cricieth to improve the learning environment and ensure the best resources in order for learners to thrive. The Cabinet has already supported the proposal to increase the capacity of Ysgol Treferythyr to 150 learners, and relocate the school to an alternative site that is referred to as the A497 site, in line with the statutory procedure. A planning application has been submitted to relocate the school to the A497 site, but two matters have arisen regarding the site as a part of the planning process, and in response to that, archaeological work has been completed, and a safe routes to school survey has now been completed and a report has been submitted to the Planning Department. I look forward to see the building work progressing soon and to see the children benefiting from the best possible facilities.
- 4.1.7 As a result of the varying quality of education and learner experiences across the Post-16 Education System in Arfon, the Cabinet gave permission to the Department to contact stakeholders to discuss the vision for Post-16 education in Arfon. A series

of virtual meetings were held with headteachers, Governors, staff, parents, learners and the broader community to present the new vision for post-16 education, as well as gather views and ideas on the best way to realise the vision. We reported on the initial messages from this engagement to the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee in February last year, and we are now in a position to press on with this project following the delay seen over the past year.

4.1.8 Linked to the post-16 education field, I am extremely proud to note that we have abolished the fee for the post-16 travel ticket for all our learners from this September onwards. This is particularly important to ensure that as a Council we do not place any obstacles to enable our young people to continue their education after the age of 16, and even more important these days considering the tremendous increase in living costs.

4.1.9 One project within the Sustainable Learning Communities Programme, namely Condition and Suitability has faced some barriers and challenges, which have disrupted our ability to move on to implement some aspects of the project with specific schools for a period. The purpose of this project is to improve the condition of our schools' existing buildings, and make alterations to the buildings in order to ensure that they are fit for purpose and make the best use of the space available. Consequently, during 2021, we had to delay the work on a number of alterations that were programmed to take place within our schools during the summer 2021, in the hope that the construction market would stabilise and that prices would drop somewhat. I am pleased to say that the situation has improved since the beginning of the pandemic and Brexit and that we have managed to proceed to implement a number of alterations and improvements to the condition of our school buildings this year, particularly over the summer holidays.

4.2 **The Well-being and Attainment Gap**

4.2.1 As a result of the pandemic and lock-downs, the Education Department and the Council have identified the well-being and attainment gap as one of the main priorities in light of concern that some children and young people may be left behind in terms of their educational attainment, and that some will need additional support to close that gap, as well as the need for support with their well-being.

4.2.2 In response to this concern, since September 2020, all schools in Gwynedd have implemented an *Accelerated Learning Programme* with funding from the Welsh Government, to respond to the impact of the lockdown on the well-being and attainment of some specific groups of 5-16 year old learners.

4.2.3 Beyond school, we have identified two stages in a child and young person's life as being a priority in terms of responding to the well-being and attainment gap, namely 0-5 year olds, and young people post-16. Indeed, the lockdown period has highlighted the vulnerability of the early years sector, with inconsistency across the county in terms of the range and availability of services. The range of partners who are involved in the provision along with the strategic direction of the field nationally makes it difficult to structure our services here in Gwynedd. The project group has agreed upon specific work streams and has prioritised conducting a care and education provision adequacy assessment across the authority. At the same time, work is being done on different funding models, as well as the implications of

leaseholds between providers and Gwynedd Council.

- 4.2.4 Also, recognising that the 16-24 age group has been disproportionately affected by the pandemic. There are more referrals for well-being, mental health and homelessness assistance among this age group. It is therefore intended to give specific attention to this field in order to mitigate any knock-on effects, ensuring that young people receive appropriate support and provision to enable them to thrive.

4.3 **Transforming the ALN&I provision**

- 4.3.1 The purpose of this project was to transform the additional learning needs and inclusion service, so as to ensure that the children and young people who need the service receive the most appropriate support to enable them to achieve their potential. The project also focused on preparing for the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018. This Act came into force in September 2021, but there is a period of three years to transform, up to September 2024.
- 4.3.2 A Welsh Government ALN Act Readiness Review shows very strong progress in terms of the Authority's preparations for the Legislation. The requisite statutory posts are in place since January 2021 and are operating effectively. Collaboration with the Health Board has developed well by collaborating with the Designated Education Clinical Lead Officer (DECLO). A number of stakeholder training events have been held in order to specify particular aspects of the Final Code. We have completed work on the dispute resolution routes to ensure that they are operational. In the early years sector the necessary systems for early identification, and establishing clear processes have been completed. Preparatory work in the post-16 sector is continuing. Also the work of developing a work, curriculum and assessment link between the mainstream and Special Schools has developed and continues to develop.
- 4.3.3 Innovative work is continuing to be done in terms of the use and continuous development of the on-line Individual Development Plan system, with the system driving the entire process for the schools, parents, external agencies and other education provisions (e.g. the early years).
- 4.3.4 Considering that the new legislation has come into force since September 2021, and that Gwynedd is in a firm position in terms of implementing the new requirements, I am of the opinion that this project in the Council Plan has now been achieved, and I am confident that the requirements associated with the legislation have now transferred into Department's day-to-day work.

4.4 **Digital Education Strategy**

- 4.4.1 What we are trying to achieve through the digital strategy is highly ambitious and is an indication of the way we prioritise our children's education here in Gwynedd. Put simply, the strategy, when implemented fully, will provide all children from year 3 to year 11 with a suitable device each to enable digital learning. Gwynedd will be one of the first authorities in Wales to do this, and it is something we can take pride in.
- 4.4.2 Considerable work has already been achieved, which included upgrading the schools' network in accordance with the education digital standards, and also

transforming web-filtering methods. A little over £1.3m has been invested in the network. Subsequently, a substantial number of devices have been distributed in accordance with the strategy. Enough *ipads* have been distributed to provide one to every four learners in the Foundation Phase, and enough *Chromebooks* have been distributed so that all learners in years 3 to 6 have one device each. Windows 10 devices are also being prepared for all pupils in years 7, 10 and 11, and every teacher in Gwynedd has received a standard device via the strategy before the end of the Summer Term this year. As a result of the decision to internalise support for all devices, and as a result of a recruitment process, the Schools Digital Services team has now been established and is operational. The hope is that these devices will further spark imagination, ingenuity and effectiveness in aspects of digital learning across the sectors.

- 4.4.3 Considering that the devices have now been shared with the learners and teachers at our schools, and that the Schools Digital Service has been established, I am of the opinion that this project in the Council Plan has now been completed, and that the work has transferred into the day-to-day work of the Education Department and ICT.

4.5 Free school meals at primary schools

- 4.5.1 In December 2021, Welsh Government announced its plan to provide free school meals to all primary pupils across Wales. Since the announcement, substantial work has been achieved jointly between the Education Department and the Property Development Team, which means that we are ahead of the national schedule to provide free school meals for all Gwynedd primary school pupils.
- 4.5.2 From the beginning of September onwards, every learner in Reception and Year One in Gwynedd will receive free school meals, by January, we are aiming for all Year 2 learners to receive free school meals also, and by September 2023, we are aiming to ensure that all Gwynedd primary school learners will receive free school meals.

4.6 Meirionnydd Collaboration

- 4.6.1 The purpose of this project is to look specifically at ensuring that the quality of the education is consistently good and sustainable for the future in Meirionnydd secondary schools. Progress on this project has been slow and has been affected as a result of the obvious challenges of the pandemic and the busy nature of secondary schools.
- 4.6.2 Nevertheless, we have sought the opinion of headteachers and representatives of the governing body of every secondary school on the potential challenges they face in terms of providing quality secondary education in the area, such as recruiting teachers, middle managers and leaders. We have also circulated a questionnaire to seek the views of learners, staff, parents and headteachers, that will inform the future direction of the project, and we are currently in the process of analysing messages from those questionnaires.

4.7 Promoting Use of the Welsh language by Children and Young People

- 4.7.1 In response to the concerns identified as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and the requirements of the WESP outcomes, effective use was ensured of the Welsh

Language Grant to target the workforce's language skills and informal use of the Welsh language amongst pupils. During 2021/22, 13 Welsh Language Cluster Schemes were planned and completed under the guidance of the Language Charter Coordinator and Secondary Language Strategy Coordinator, which included all primary and secondary schools in the county. It was pleasing to see a film that had been produced of some of the examples of good practice with the work of these clusters across the county, being shown as a part of the celebrations of the Llŷn and Eifionydd National Eisteddfod Proclamation Ceremony in Porthmadog in June this year.

- 4.7.2 Advantage was taken of the opportunity to receive Welsh lessons from Bangor University's Dysgu Cymraeg Gogledd Orllewin in 2021/22 by 12 teachers as a part of plans to respond to the Education Workforce's Language Skills Self-assessment data. The teachers and assistants of Our Lady's School, Bangor, were supported to improve and refresh their Welsh language skills in collaboration with Canolfan Bedwyr, Bangor University. I am very proud that a Welsh Language Development teacher has been appointed at Ysgol Friars for September 2022 with the Authority's support, in order to support the school's workforce to build their confidence and foster their skills in Welsh, with the aim that more curricular provision will be available through the medium of Welsh for learners over the next years.
- 4.7.3 Recently, focus groups were held with a cross-section of learners in the secondary sector in order to gather their views and ideas for establishing Language Forums at every secondary school in Gwynedd from September 2022 onwards. This is an exciting development, and I look forward to hear about the ideas and activities that learners will be eager to develop in order to promote the use of Welsh amongst their peers.

4.8 The Department's day-to-day work

- 4.8.1 Safeguarding the welfare of Gwynedd children and young people is a key priority for the Department and the Council, and is even more key of course as a result of the pandemic and various lockdowns when the majority of our learners (apart from vulnerable learners and the children of key workers) had to stay at home. The Department has recently created a new training package in Welsh for Child Protection Designated Persons in schools and education centres, in conjunction with the Welsh Government's Safeguarding in Education Group. It is pleasing to say that 100% of designated Child Protection persons at our school have completed level 2 training within 3 years, as well as 100% of designated persons on our schools' governing bodies.
- 4.8.2 The purpose of the Catering and Cleaning service is to provide nutritious and healthy food for the pupils of Gwynedd Schools and to keep educational establishments clean and safe to assist pupils to reach their potential. This service has been essential and of key importance during the pandemic to ensure a regular cleaning service during the day, in order to provide a safe environment for learners and staff in our schools, and also ensure a school meals provision. The catering service also offers 13 Kickstart placements in the kitchens of secondary schools across the County that receive a catering service from the Council. The Government's Kickstart scheme provides funding to create work placements for

young people aged between 16 and 24 years who receive Universal Credit and who are at risk of long-term unemployment.

- 4.8.3 On 6 July 2021, the Cabinet approved a new vision for a modern Immersion Education System in Gwynedd, which places the learner at the centre when supporting them to acquire the Welsh language. This new vision also includes a capital investment of £1.1 million from Welsh Government for the purpose of establishing new immersion education sites in Bangor and Tywyn, as well as improving existing facilities at the Eifionydd site, Porthmadog. The work has already been completed on the Eifionydd site, and the building has also arrived the Ysgol Tryfan, Bangor site. Conceptual work for the designs of the new Tywyn immersion education site is currently underway.

Recently, the Department was fortunate to receive further capital investment from Welsh Government, and on 19 July 2022, the Cabinet approved the investment, which will involve ensuring that the resources at the primary immersion sites in Maesincla are suitable for the 21st Century, with the Llangybi immersion education site moving to Ysgol Cymerau, Pwllheli, and the Dolgellau site becoming a part of the Bro Idris site.

To this end, the Department has also been very fortunate to receive Welsh Government's Late Immersion revenue funding, and over the past months, work has been underway to draw up and record a series of webinars that will be available for the Gwynedd schools' workforce, in order to empower them with language immersion practices. The revenue funding has also enabled us to modernise the provision by commissioning *Animated Technologies* to develop a virtual town called Aber Rwla, with Anni Llŷn commissioned to create the new-look immersion plan.

- 4.8.4 The Schools Business Centre was established in September 2019 in order to offer services to the county's schools. The centre offers many services including financial management, administrating appointments, arranging supply teachers and ensuring that the SIMS system is up-to-date. The centre has identified three priorities for the year, and is currently on target to deliver in accordance with the Business Plan. It is very positive that all Gwynedd primary schools are buying into the service, and see the value of it for ensuring that processes are followed correctly. The centre is evolving continuously to be able to offer more services to schools in the future.
- 4.8.5 It must be acknowledged that the report is only a summary of all of the Department and the schools' work over the past months, and consequently I would like to acknowledge and note my appreciation for the heroic work that has been happening in the Department and in our schools to ensure the best education for our children, as well as the health, safety and welfare of all of our learners and staff.

To close, I would also like to congratulate our schools and our learners for excellent results in this summer's GCSE and A Level examination.

5. **SAVINGS POSITION**

The Department has achieved all historical savings plan. The Department has no savings targets in 2022-23.

THE STATUTORY OFFICERS' OBSERVATIONS

The Monitoring Officer:

No observations to add in relation to propriety.

Head of Finance:

I am satisfied that the report is a fair reflection of the financial situation of the Education Department.