
EDUCATION AND ECONOMY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 8/12/22

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

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

Co-opted Members: Colette Owen (The Catholic Church)

Officers in attendance: Vera Jones (Democracy and Language Services Manager), Bethan Adams (Scrutiny Advisor) and Eirian Roberts (Democracy Services Officer).

Present for item 5: Councillor Menna Jones (Cabinet Member for Corporate Support), Ian Jones (Head of Corporate Support Department), Arwel Evans (Procurement Manager) and Huw Griffith (Procurement Advisor – Business Support).

Present for item 6: Councillor Beca Brown (Cabinet Member for Education), Garem Jackson (Head of Education Department), Owen Owens (Senior Schools Manager) and Debbie Anne Jones (Education Corporate Services Manager).

Present for item 7(A): Councillor Beca Brown (Cabinet Member for Education), Garem Jackson (Head of Education Department), Ffion Edwards Ellis (Assistant Head of Additional Learning Needs and Inclusion), Gwern ap Rhisiart (Dwyfor/Meirionnydd Area Education Officer), Diane Pritchard-Jones (Arfon Area Education Officer), Gwyn Tudur (Gwynedd Secondary Education Officer), Rhys Meredydd Glyn (Head of the Gwynedd Language Immersion Education System) and Debbie Anne Jones (Education Corporate Services Manager).

Present for item 7(B): Arwyn Thomas (Managing Director, GwE), Geraint Evans (Core Lead – Primary GwE) and Ellen Williams (Core Lead – Secondary GwE).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Louise Hughes and Sasha Williams; Manon Williams (Parent / Governor Representative Arfon), Karen Vaughan Jones (Parent / Governor Representative Dwyfor), Ruth Roe (Parent / Governor Representative Meirionnydd) and Roger Vaughan (UCAC).

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were received.

3. URGENT ITEMS

The Chair noted that a request had been received to discuss an urgent matter, and she had scheduled the matter to be discussed during the informal meeting at the end of this meeting.

4. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee held on 20 October, 2022 as a true record.

5. PROGRESS REPORT – KEEPING THE BENEFIT LOCAL

The Cabinet Member and officers from the Corporate Support Department were welcomed to the meeting.

The report of the Cabinet Member – Corporate Support was presented, following the members' request to receive an update on the progress of the Keeping the Benefit Local project, which was one of the priority projects within the Council Plan.

The Cabinet Member set out the context and the officers provided an outline of the contents of the report.

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

Individual members submitted the following observations:-

- Although the summary at the end of the report stated that good progress had been made over the past five years in terms of increasing the percentage of the Council's expenditure that stays local, It was noticed that the percentage had only increased 3% over this period, and that the figure was down compared with four years ago, and with last year. The member understood the difficulties, but questioned the degree of self-appraisal behind this.
- It would be useful if data could be gathered regarding the number of local companies who had submitted a tender but were unsuccessful, and what feedback had been given to those companies, and then report back to the committee within around a year.
- It was important that major organisations in the area, such as Cyngor Gwynedd purchased locally in order to help the economy.
- The Preston Model was vital, but would not work effectively in Gwynedd since it was an urban model.
- One of the most important things we can do as a Council is explore how we can enable local companies to join forces and work together, and any investment committed to this would be seen not as a cost, but as a social benefit in itself.
- It was often said that Wales as a whole had very small businesses, and very big businesses, but not many medium-sizes businesses – it was those medium businesses that would create the largest benefit for our communities.
- We were all disappointed with the results to date, and want to see ways forward.

On a technical note, and referring to the graph titled 'Annual Local Expenditure' on page 19 of the agenda, a member questioned the accuracy of the £43m figure (capital and revenue) for 2017/18 as it was lower than the £56m figure (revenue only). An officer confirmed that the figure was wrong.

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

- In terms of the degree of self-appraisal, Gwynedd was just one of the few Councils that measured this type of activity in terms of keeping the benefit local. In the presentation at the beginning of the item, there was mention of introducing other measures, and this was in reference to the Well-being of Future Generations Act more than just the local percentage of expenditure. This figure had stayed quite constant over a number of years, and although a 1% change meant £1.5m of expenditure, it was fairly static. It was further noted that we had now reached a threshold and that it was difficult to increase the figure beyond this level because of the fairly strict legal restrictions and barriers we were subject to at present. If this was the case, we were now looking at a slightly different methodology to measure the other benefits of the agreement to Gwynedd, rather than the financial benefits only, and it was a

fairly innovative project to look at the other benefits, in terms of employment etc. that could emerge as a result of the agreement.

- Although the percentage of local expenditure was fairly constant, the total spend on procurement had increased from £97m in 2017/18 to £140m in 2021/22 as a result of inflation and the increasing demand for the Council's services, especially in the social services field.
- With regard to assisting local suppliers to be able to compete and win contracts, it was acknowledged that capital expenditure was more of a problem than revenue expenditure, but since capital projects were larger projects on the whole, the companies who competed and won those contracts tended to be out-of-county companies. In those instances, the service tried to work with the main contractor to see what sub-contracting opportunities were available, and made every effort to advertise those opportunities, so that local businesses could apply to be part of the supply chain. Even so, some of the barriers, such as lack of desire, expertise and the resource to apply, were true for sub-contracting opportunities as well, and the number of local businesses competing and winning some of those sub-contracts was fewer than we would wish.
- Contrary to the historical arrangements for social benefits, a social value procurement methodology introduced a scoring element, and companies were presented with a series of measures so they could select what benefits they would deliver, although the Council could also highlight what its priorities were. It was further noted that the measures were based on the objectives of the Well-being Act, and included a spectrum of options such as job creation, the environment, the Welsh language etc.
- It was believed that this flexibility helped local companies, because a locally-based company was more likely to be able to offer benefits, as those benefits had to be realised within the county, rather than within Wales or Britain. A tender would be evaluated, obviously based on price and the service offered, but between 10% and 20% of the total tender evaluation could also be applied to the local effect the company has.
- Social enterprises were generally well-placed to compete for tenders and to offer local benefits, not only in terms of their nature and way of working, but also in terms of how we procure and procurement regulations.
- The Council continued to follow the same procurement regulations since Brexit. New contracting rules were expected to be introduced at the end of 2023, but it was not believed that these would be substantially different to the current ones, with the exception of some technical changes, and we would still be expected to conduct an open competition within Britain perhaps, rather than across Europe as before.
- Community Councils were expected to follow the same procurement regulations as this Council, but they might not have the required expertise or resources to conduct the same processes as the county councils.
- Although the Social Value Procurement Model pilot had commenced over a year ago now, there had only been three opportunities to apply this new methodology, and the service was keen to also include a framework measure as part of this. As such, officers felt it was premature to make a full assessment of the methodology at present. Also, the service was working within a national policy void in this regard, and was keen for the Government to catch up and overtake us, so they could lay out a new policy system for us to work within. The service would like the committee to have the opportunity to explore the methodology in detail and scrutinise the results of the pilot before approving any policy change in Gwynedd. We could not specify a clear timetable for this at present. Three pilot studies were not believed to be a sound basis for policy-setting. We needed a much bigger number, but could not confirm exactly how many at present, as this depended on the workloads of the procurement teams and what contracts were suitable to be used for the methodology.
- Officers were unaware of a scheme by the Council to bulk-buy fuel on behalf of residents to assist them with the costs of heating their homes, but they would enquire with the Energy Manager to see if such a scheme existed, or was proposed.
- The service was looking closely at the Preston Model, and the social benefits model being developed in Gwynedd was partly based on that model. Evidently, Preston had the advantage of operating within a slightly different legal system to Wales, and it was probable that a higher number of suppliers in that area had the capacity to supply.

- Where possible, contracts should be split up into different lots to make it easier for local suppliers to compete on a more even playing field than if it were a single large contract.
- Although we believed that managing to remain static constituted some degree of success in the current circumstances, we did not wish to limit our local expenditure ambition to 60%, and we must continue to explore all sorts of ways of facilitating small companies all over the county.
- The report in question talked about procurement arrangements specifically, but there was an effort by the whole Council to support local businesses, particularly so in the field of economy, and that the means by which small companies collaborate and form a system where they could compete jointly for tenders was something that the Economy Department was studying specifically.
- The service needed to work with other Council departments to identify opportunities to buy locally, and also engage with companies to notify them of the opportunities available.
- The analysis of the types of businesses that exist within the county, referred to under 'Next Steps' in the report, had been completed and was available for the members.
- The service had looked at forming consortia as part of Meet the Buyer events - guidelines had been drawn up on how to do this, and what the considerations were. However, we saw that businesses were not that keen overall to form consortia, due to the element of competition between them.

RESOLVED to accept the report and ask the Service to report back on the result of the 'Innovative Procurement – Social Value Procurement Model' pilot, and also collect the data as raised during the meeting, and to report back to the committee in a year's time (or when timely).

6. FREE SCHOOL MEALS PROJECT

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

Submitted – the progress report of the Cabinet Member for Education on the free school meals project.

The Cabinet Member set out the context and the Senior Schools Manager provided an outline of the contents of the report.

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

Individual members submitted the following observations:-

- Members were surprised that the percentage of pupils choosing free school meals under the schemes UPFSM (*Universal Primary Free School Meals*) and EFSM (*Entitlement to Free School Meals*) was so low (70% in September and 66% in October), and expressed concern that schools might miss out on other grants because parents who were eligible to claim free school meals under the EFSM scheme would no longer be doing so, as their children would receive free school meals regardless.
- The free school meals project in schools was to be welcomed, and the member emphasised the importance of applying political pressure to ensure that the amount per meal received from the Welsh Government was protected, or even increased as we approached a period of cuts.
- We should celebrate the fact that 1305 UPFSM children who would not otherwise have received free school meals, had chosen school meals in September, which meant that the parents had extra money in their pockets to hopefully spend locally, thus giving a boost to the local economy.

- Towards the future (accepting that the Department was currently very busy rolling out the project throughout the schools), it could be useful to conduct an annual consultation with parents and children in an attempt to increase the percentage that receive the meals.
- The meals provided in the schools were balanced and nutritious, but that more flexibility in terms of the choice of food available could be a way of increasing the numbers that have school meals.
- It was important that the quality of the meals did not suffer as a result of higher costs of producing the meal.
- Members welcomed the proposal to extend the offer to Year 2 pupils by January 2023.

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

- The 70% and 66% were average figures across all the county's schools, and the percentage was almost 100% in some schools, with other schools proving to be a much bigger challenge. It was noted further that funding was available to appoint an officer to look into the reasons why children refused school meals, and that this work would focus on those schools where there was a pattern of children who were eligible for free school meals not taking it up.
- The Welsh Government had identified an amount of £2.90 per pupil for the first phase, based on the average number of pupils who eat school meals in the county. They planned to re-examine this figure for the second phase, which would happen after Easter. As the cost of producing meals in schools had risen significantly since the scheme was first discussed, there was a review underway of the amount per meal that authorities would receive, but those discussions had not concluded yet.
- The question of whether local government would need to fund any part of the scheme or not depended on whether the amount per meal set by the Welsh Government for every authority would be adequate. It was far easier and cheaper to produce a meal in a city than in rural counties, where there were a high number of smaller schools scattered over a large area, therefore we had to wait and see whether the amount per meal which would be set by the Welsh Government was enough to cover the costs in Gwynedd.
- There was no capacity or funding available to extend the scheme to the secondary sector, but should the Welsh Government announce that it planned to do this and fund it, then the Service would certainly welcome this. Nevertheless, the situation would not be as easy in secondary schools, since secondary pupils were given a choice of different foods, and fewer of them opted for school meals too. Also, the work of identifying schools' needs in terms of their space for preparing food and the dining space available would be very challenging in some secondary schools.
- There was a need to look at the bigger picture to try and understand why children chose not to take school meals, and see whether we could implement simple changes to improve the situation e.g. it was understood that children eating school dinners, and children who took in lunch-boxes, were made to sit separately in one school, therefore some children insisted on a lunch-box so they could sit with their friends. It was further noted that the Department planned on carrying out a major and important piece of work on the real cost of sending children to school, and this work, it was believed, would cast a light on all the hidden background costs.
- At times recently, suppliers of school meals had failed to supply some of the foods that were listed in the contract with the Council, and had supplied slightly different foods in their place. Certainly, those foods should be of the same standard as the usual foods, and meet the regulations in terms of nutrition etc.
- With regard to staffing, the Department was learning from experience this term regarding the number of children who were taking up the free school meals. The percentage might vary in different schools, which then affected how much extra staffing was needed. However, introducing the scheme gradually gave the Department the opportunity to better understand the trends in the different schools. The extra staffing would be a combination of adding to current staff hours where possible, together with some new appointments, and training would be provided within the service in the majority of cases. As with many other services, recruiting to the posts was proving challenging, but rather than depending on advertisements

in the press and on social media alone, the Department was also working with a company that specialised in getting people back into the workplace.

- The schools would be ready to offer free school meals to all Year 2 children in January 2023, and to all primary age children in September 2023. The work of building extensions to some schools continued, and others were awaiting the installation of equipment. In terms of schools that did not have food-production space, there was no intention to create new kitchens, and the food would continue to be delivered to those schools.

At the end of the discussion, the Head of Education Department noted that this project had been a good example of cross-departmental working, led by the Cabinet Member for Education and the Cabinet Member for Housing (who leads on Property matters), and he thanked the Property Team who had worked closely with the Senior Schools Manager and the Team. He further noted:-

- Referring to a member's comment that they should continue to apply political pressure with regard to funding the scheme appropriately, the chief education officers were also pressing this issue regularly in their national meetings.
- He agreed with the comment by a member that more flexibility was needed in terms of the choice of food available in order to increase the numbers that take up free school meals, and although the Welsh Government had established the commendable principle of providing a good standard of nutritious hot meals, he also believed that it would be possible to produce snacks that were just as nutritious and of the same standard.

To close, he wished the Senior Schools Manager well on his retirement in the new year, and thanked him for all his hard work over the years.

RESOLVED to accept the report and submit an update to the committee when the scheme has been extended across the primary sector, with specific attention to the work undertaken to increase the numbers and investigate the reasons why some pupils do not take school meals, and ensure that consideration is given to the quality of the food, whilst also seeking to keep the benefit local.

7. EDUCATION ANNUAL REPORTS 2021-22

(A) EDUCATION ANNUAL REPORT 2021-22

The Cabinet Member set out the context and the Annual Report of the Education Department for 2021-22 was presented.

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

Individual members submitted the following observations: -

- Referring to page 46 of the agenda, a member noted that although there was reference to "*carrying out follow-up work over the next year to ensure that the system [Schools' Categorisation according to the Welsh-medium provision] develops and is embedded in order to achieve Gwynedd's ambition in this area*", that Gwynedd's ambition was not defined in the context of the categorisation, and that clarity was needed on this.
- Again, referring to page 46 of the agenda, it was noted that some of the priorities for the next period were superficial, as they referred to '*ensuring*' various steps, but did not explain how those steps would be implemented. The member expressed concern that we would see a further slippage in the number studying Welsh subjects in the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP), and suggested that we were in a weaker position today than we were in 2016.

- Concern was expressed that the Census indicated a decrease in the numbers that acquire the Welsh language from a young age, and it was suggested that the Council should be immersing all the children who are not fluent enough in the Welsh language, rather than latecomers only.
- It was noted that de-registration was a big problem, especially since Covid, and the member asked whether it was possible for the committee to receive data on this, and have the opportunity to scrutinise why young people and families chose to de-register.
- It was noted that there were many taxi firms from Dwyfor transporting children around schools in Arfon. It was understood that there was a shortage of taxi firms in Gwynedd, but there might possibly be smaller firms who would be keen to tender, but required support to understand the process. It was suggested that this could be examined cross-departmentally by the Economy Department, as a means of supporting small businesses and reducing costs and carbon footprint simultaneously.
- Concern was expressed that the special schools were already oversubscribed, with Hafod Lon already 10% above its capacity, and the member requested a discussion on this very soon, as the demand would continue to increase. They also suggested looking into the reasons for the increased demand.
- It was noted that annual reports talked about the good things and did not discuss the problematic and challenging things - it was difficult to scrutinise a document that tended to only praise.
- It was noted that the post-16 travel pass was an excellent idea, but it was important that the discussions took place with the train and bus companies to ensure that the services reached the educational establishments on time.
- Referring to the comment in the report regarding children losing their oral abilities to all intents and purposes as a result of the pandemic, a member noted that they were worried about the long-term effect on these children, and emphasised that someone should be looking at what these children have lost overall due to Covid.
- A member noted that it was heart-breaking to see Welsh-speaking parents speaking English with their children, as this was completely unfair on the children and limited their opportunities for employment in this area - they greatly hoped that the schools were working very closely with parents to emphasise the importance of transferring the language to the next generation.
- It was noted (*on behalf of Manon Williams, Parent/Governor Representative for Arfon, who could not be present in this meeting*), that although the decisions of the Panel that discusses applications for an individual development plan should be shared with the parent and the school within a fortnight of the panel date, this did not happen in a number of cases, and that parents waited months for a decision which caused a lot of anguish for them and difficulties for the schools.
- It was noted that there was no reference in the report to the shortage of assistants, or to their importance to the education system as a whole.
- It was noted that it was a pleasure to be able to state that teachers commended the support and the advice received from the Education Department, and it was hoped that this was the general feeling across all the county's schools.
- With regard to language immersion, it was noted that the Aber Rwlá project by Anni Llŷn was an example of Gwynedd pioneering and leading on learning the language.
- A member welcomed the fact that mental health and well-being was being duly addressed.
- It was suggested, after receiving initial messages in February, that it was now time for the committee to receive an update on the Post-16 Education project in Arfon.
- A member expressed a wish for the committee to receive a copy of the findings from the survey that gathered the views of headteachers and governor representatives of every secondary school in Meirionnydd on the potential challenges they faced in terms of providing quality secondary education in the area, and also the survey to find the views of learners, staff, parents and headteachers which would steer the future direction of the Meirionnydd Collaboration project.
- It was noted that the Language Charter and the Language Strategy were very lengthy and aspiring documents, and that the Council no longer had ownership of them. As

such, a member questioned whether it was possible to provide a clearer brief for the schools, as some sort of fire-exit guide, explicitly stating their requirements.

- Concern was expressed that children's behaviour had deteriorated badly since the pandemic, and that the stress of having to cope with incredibly challenging situations was leading to staff sickness absences, which in turn increased the demand for supply teachers, costing more.
- A member expressed concern that problems with recruiting teachers would lead to class sizes doubling which in turn would make it more difficult to hold Welsh-only lessons.

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

- Safeguarding had been a priority for the Department during the lockdown periods when children were not attending schools, and that all the schools had undertaken very commendable work making contact almost, if not, daily with the most vulnerable children. It was confirmed that the numbers of children not attending school for whatever reasons was increasing, and that these children fell into two cohorts – the ones who were enrolled in schools and their attendance was lower than desired for various reasons, and also the ones whom their parents had elected for them to be home educated. It was noted that the Additional Learning Needs and Inclusion Service had empowered the teams who supported those children not attending school regularly enough through the Welfare Team, and that grants had been received to strengthen the welfare service, with a robust procedure for responding to the needs. Obviously, this team responded to safeguarding needs, which were greater, as they dealt with a higher number of cases and those cases tended to be more intensive. In terms of the de-registered children, officers visited the home, with the parents' consent, to ensure the child's safety. There were examples of wonderful work by teachers to ensure children's safety. In general, with more children at home, the risk in terms of safeguarding was higher, but the team coped because of the changes to the methods of responding to the situation. Obviously, we would wish to see more children in the schools, but it was challenging for the schools to increase attendance at present, with various factors feeding into this challenge. It was further noted that the Service would be willing to submit more information to this committee about the team that supports families who home-educate their children, the scheme of work, the effect of this to date, and the relationship that has been forged with the families. It was also noted that the service had begun looking at the reasons why children de-registered, in order to try and present and identify areas and categories of young people who were more likely to de-register.
- In terms of children's behaviour since the lock-downs, the data showed a slight increase in the number of exclusions, which was a national trend following Covid. It was seen that the children who had become most disillusioned with the school experience were those who had difficulty complying with the school routine, and schools were working very hard to regain children and young people's confidence to capitalise on their education. The situation did put pressure on the Inclusion Service, but the team was coping well, jointly with schools, to address that.
- The Department was continuously looking at the Welsh language. The Census figures showed that the percentage of Welsh speakers across Wales was lower than 10 years ago, but the reduction in Gwynedd appeared lower than in other counties. Nevertheless, social use of the language must be encouraged and normalised. Gwynedd was doing good work in the field, but should the data findings indicate that a particular age group required more attention, the Department would look again at the procedures.
- With regard to Gwynedd's ambition in the context of categorising schools according to the Welsh-medium provision, this was believed to be captured in the WESP, and in terms of any future slippage, or establishing some kind of action plan to supplement the statement or aspiration, much of this was also in the WESP which was behind our

aspirations, or ambition. Evidently, we needed to be ambitious here, and many of the comments that were received during the consultation on the plan had been incorporated. It was also highlighted that the Minister for Education and the Welsh language had noted recently how happy he was with the plan and Gwynedd's ambition. It was further noted that this report also looked at past practices, rather than only highlighting what actions would be taken now, and the officer emphasised the need for the ambition to be owned and supported by everyone. It was believed that the ambition was there, albeit agreeing that the actions required as a result of the categorisation should be specified (although not necessarily in the Annual Report). The officer emphasised the need for all schools to move forward, and regardless of how robust the Welsh-medium provision was in those schools, they had to plan for improving this through the curriculum and formal and informal aspects. It was noted that the Census highlighted the need to examine the whole age range that came under the education system, and although Gwynedd placed a great deal of focus on the secondary sector at present, there was a need to ensure progress across the entire sector.

- The officer fully agreed with the comment regarding immersion, and that the Council had a duty to immerse children whether they were latecomers or not. In Gwynedd, this happened naturally since the provision was entirely through the medium of Welsh in the foundation phase in every school bar one. It was noted that the work of the language centres had been invaluable for decades, but the restructuring of the system had led to greater flexibility and an increase in capacity, which meant that more immersion would be happening earlier on. They were seeing numerous applications arriving from schools for children who had been receiving their education in Gwynedd but had gaps in their education for various reasons, including the Covid period. The officer further noted that training on the principles of successful early immersion in the foundation phase had been provided for teachers, staff and assistants, and that they planned to continue with the provision in order to train and work alongside schools in the context of both early and late immersion. They also referred to the scheme in Bangor, where the authority was working in partnership with three schools to extend the provision. They noted that as a result of being awarded a three-year grant from the Welsh Government, a full-time teacher would be employed to support staff in the schools in the Bangor catchment area to apply the principles of early immersion in the foundation phase. This would contribute to outcomes within the WESP, and would strengthen plans, support and resources within these schools to promote the Welsh language as a medium, and its social use too of course.
- The tendering process for school transport was an open process that must be followed, and could not be restricted to a certain area. There was a shortage of taxi firms in some areas, the taxis were all needed at the same time for the work, and not all firms chose to tender. They could possibly study the pattern, but it was sometimes inevitable that contracts were placed with a firm based some distance away.
- The Department was fully aware of the capacity problems in the special schools, and was working on short-term and longer-term solutions which would require considerable planning. The needs had also intensified, and there was a need to strengthen the provision for the children with more severe needs in the mainstream, as well as looking at how the mainstream and special schools worked together in the case of some children. Historically, because of the condition of the former Ysgol Hafod Lon, parents had tended to choose mainstream for their children, although one might have argued by virtue of the statement that those children should have been placed in a special school. Now, however, because of the excellent resources offered in the new Ysgol Hafod Lon, they did not need as much convincing and working through the stigma of a parent not wanting to place their child in a special school. In these modern times as well, there were children living who would not have lived with their conditions previously, and although this was something to be extremely grateful for, it did also add to the pressure on the system.
- There was a great deal of work going on through the Primary Language Charter and the Secondary Language Strategy to convince parents to speak Welsh with their

children, by specifically highlighting the economic advantages to the child later on in life.

- Although accepting the comment regarding the importance of ensuring that transport services reach the educational establishments on time, this related to the transport infrastructure of the train and bus companies, much of which was out of the authority's hands. Despite this, discussions were taking place with Transport for Wales.
- It was accepted that the annual report read as though the Department was praising itself, but it was merely a taste of what had been done throughout the year, and all areas of work were being addressed through the performance-challenging procedure, which fed into the Cabinet Member's annual report.
- Interventions had been put in place for the cohort of children who had lost out due to Covid, and these children would be mapped throughout their school life in order to ensure there was no slippage and that they reached their full potential.
- With regard to the Panel that discusses applications for an individual development plan, one of the indicators by the ALN&I Service was to ensure that the school and parent received an appropriate reply within a fortnight of applying for a referral. It was noted that this indicator showed a performance of 100%, and that the only exceptions to this had been in May and June, where the Whitsun week had meant an additional week. The only instances where a referral would take more time would be in a more complex case e.g. an application for a different setting or a parent requesting something different to be provided for the school, or where the Moderation Panel needed to return to the school to request more information to support the application. It was also noted that the schools maintained frequent contact with the Quality Officer regarding applications that had come in, or awaiting further information. It was confirmed that this response would be sent in writing to Manon Williams in her absence from this meeting.
- The shortage of assistants was an increasing problem throughout Wales, but Gwynedd were leading the way in the field. The Head of Education sat on two national bodies that were looking into this, and he had aired the matter on behalf of Wales's education directors in a recent meeting where the Government was in attendance. It was acknowledged that the pay scale was not the highest, but this was subject to discussions at a national level etc. The contracts were often term-time only, and the posts themselves perhaps 15-20 hours a week, with everyone pooling in the same resource pool for the same people with the same skills. With this in mind, the Cabinet Member had asked the Department to examine the possibility of introducing additional elements to the job e.g. duties in the adult care sector, summer play schemes etc., so that the job bore a greater resemblance to a full-time 37-hour post with financial credibility. As a result of discussions between the national bodies, it was now understood that the Government were willing to look into this, and perhaps fund a pilot.
- Because of how busy everyone had been politically with the Elections and establishing the new Council etc., there had not been many discussions around the Post-16 Education project in Arfon since February, but now they had resumed the Agenda, the Department would be more than willing to share the observations regarding the findings with the committee members.
- The Department would be happy to share the results of the Meirionnydd Collaboration questionnaires. Recruitment was a challenge at all levels, and perhaps there was a need to think less traditionally, and consider whether we can share resources and collaborate, rather than everyone trying to reinvent the wheel.
- A brief could be provided for the schools highlighting the requirements of the Language Charter and the Language Strategy clearly and concisely. The headteachers felt in general that the questions in the Language Charter should be revised to make them more relevant to today, and in order to have ownership of them – Gwenan Ellis Jones, Welsh Language Charter Co-ordinator, was already consulting with the Government on this. In terms of the secondary sector, it was noted that an e-mail had already been sent to the schools to try to provide guidance but without

overwhelming them, and that Siân Eirug, Language Strategy Coordinator (Secondary Sector) was working directly with the schools on this.

- In terms of recruitment and sickness problems in different parts of the county such as south Meirionnydd, the Department was supporting the schools as far as it could to cope.
- Although the Department had hoped that the Tywyn Language Centre would be ready by January 2023, the centre had not been built unfortunately, because of a delay with planning. They had looked at the possibility of locating the centre temporarily in Ysgol Tywyn, but there was not enough space there, as pupil numbers in the school had increased. Tywyn Hall was a particularly good option in terms of the facilities, but the Department was looking for a location on school grounds, as the school headteacher was the site manager in the context of safety. As a compromise, the proposal by the Headteacher of Ysgol Bro Idris, Dolgellau to temporarily locate the centre for a term or two in that school had been accepted. It was noted that many had already registered to attend the Language Centre, and it was greatly hoped that the new Centre in Tywyn would be ready for the next academic year, if not sooner.
- With regard to the Catering and Cleaning Service's priority for the next period to work with the schools to become completely cashless, it was confirmed that they would consider the situation of parents who did not have a bank account.
- At the Chief Executive's request, one of the Corporate Directors had agreed to work with the Head of Education Department and the Area Education Officer for Arfon to look across the Council at how best to meet the overspend in the education transport budget.

(B) ANNUAL REPORT OF GWE 2021-22

Officers from GwE were welcomed to the meeting and the GwE Annual Report for 2021-22 was presented.

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

Individual members submitted the following observations: -

- It was noted that it was impossible to scrutinise a report of this size, and that this was not how the committee should be scrutinising the work of GwE.
- Concern was expressed about children's attitudes towards teachers, and it was noted that prospective teachers should be trained on how to deal with challenging behaviour, otherwise young people would be reluctant to join the profession.
- It was now very difficult for governors to know what was the baseline for measuring standards in light of Covid, and they believed that there was a role for GwE to play in supporting and assisting them to resume their roles.

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

- Whilst accepting that the report was lengthy, that more specific reports were presented to the committee during the year at the members' request, but the Annual Report combined everything together in one place. Should the members wish to focus on certain themes, or discuss more specific elements in workshops, GwE would be more than willing to facilitate that.
- In terms of addressing the risk in respect of recruitment difficulties and succession planning for securing senior leaders across the region, especially Welsh-medium ones, it was noted that there was much talk about the effect of Covid on pupils, but perhaps the effect on adults had not been fully realised. Senior leaders across the region were very tired, and a quarter of the secondary headteachers had retired during the last academic year. Also, as a headteacher left, a deputy or another person would step into the role, which would then leave that role vacant for some time. It was also

noted that during lockdown, headteachers had had to put aside some more 'leadership' elements of the work and focus on managing, safeguarding and ensuring that everyone was safe, but they were now required to step back into the leadership role, or step into that role for the first time in the cases of newer headteachers. Also, in terms of recruitment, the Welsh-speaking pool was smaller, the world of education was facing the biggest changes in 40 years, and it was a very trying time financially. In light of all of this, the officer questioned whether these leadership posts were now as attractive to so many people. In terms of the bilingual ability or Welsh-speaking ability of staff across the region, it was believed that there was balance, but by ensuring that the provision was completely bilingual, perhaps the Service was drawing extensively on the North West pool. Short-term secondments were one way around this, or buying people's time to fill gaps if specific medium requirements arose.

- The risk in terms of the consistency and range of the Reform Journey referred to regularity at many levels. The Department had been working with Professor Donaldson regularly to understand the requirements and convey the messages across the region. It was believed, however, that the Government tended to work on two tiers, namely policy, and the field that implements the policy, and at times more than one person contributed to this interpretation. As such, there was a question of whether the messages were always consistent and were applied enough, and in respect of the Welsh language, were they applied enough for practitioners in our schools? They must praise how well the primary sector and around six secondary schools had embraced the new curriculum, and were offering local, well-planned experiences to their pupils, and the Service was working with the schools to share the practices amongst each other so that they could see the range of experiences they were able to offer, and the Service was also supporting them with the systems that captured impact, and captured learners' progress.
- The Service was working closely with Bangor University on teachers' initial training. There had been a shortage of teachers in some specific subjects such as mathematics and physics for years, and more discussion was needed around this and to possibly identify the cohorts of prospective teachers that were needed, rather than turning out too many who have specialised in one subject. It was further noted that dealing with challenging behaviour formed part of teachers' training, but they could convey the message to the University regarding the importance of being able to ensure firm discipline in the classroom.
- Changing the role of the Challenge Advisor to Improvement Support Advisor had strengthened the relationship between the schools and the service, and the service was now meeting the needs of individual schools much better than in the past.
- With regard to the Accelerated Learning schemes and as a result of work with the University to identify the elements that had the greatest impact, the Service had been supporting schools to re-establish what the pupils' baseline was. It was noted that the Service would be happy to bring a report or give a presentation to the committee in response to a specific question. It was further noted that basic skills had been affected during the past 18 months, and that this had affected the Welsh language where Welsh was not the language at home, and also in some more deprived pockets. It was also noted that there were some cohorts coming together in the schools, more in some classes than others, but again, practitioners must be very specific in terms of the type of support required by pupils and the teachers in putting the next steps in the children's learning in place.
- If there was anything in particular that governors needed in order to resume their role following the pandemic, the Service would ensure that a workshop or guidance was provided to them.

RESOLVED to accept the reports and ask the Education Department and GwE to take note of any observations raised during this meeting.

The meeting commenced at 10.30 am and concluded at 2.35 pm

CHAIR