

PARTNERSHIP AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the hybrid meeting held on 12 February 2025

PRESENT:

Councillor Dylan Rees (Chair)
Councillor Gwilym O Jones (Vice-Chair)

Councillors Non Dafydd, Euryrn Morris, Pip O'Neill, Derek Owen,
Margaret Murley Roberts, Ken Taylor and Sonia Williams

Mr John Tierney – The Roman Catholic Church

Councillor Dafydd Roberts – Portfolio Member for Education and
the Welsh Language (for items 4 & 5)

IN ATTENDANCE:

Chief Executive,
Director of Education, Skills and Young People (for items 5 & 6),
Head of Democracy,
Policy and Welsh Language Manager (FO) (for item 5 only),
Scrutiny Officer (EA),
Committee Officer (MEH),
Webcasting Committee Services Officer (FT).

APOLOGIES:

Councillor John Ifan Jones

Councillor Dafydd Rhys Thomas – Portfolio Member for Highways,
Property & Waste

Deputy Chief Executive,
Director of Function (Council Business)/Monitoring Officer,
Scrutiny Manager (AGD).

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillor Neville Evans – Portfolio Member for Leisure, Tourism &
Maritime;

Councillor Dyfed W Jones – Portfolio Member for Children, Young
People & Families;

Councillor Gary Pritchard – Leader of the Council and Portfolio
Member for Economic Development;

Councillor Alun Roberts – Portfolio Member for Adults' Services &
Community Safety;

Councillor Nicola Roberts – Portfolio Member for Planning, Public
Protection & Climate Change.

Senior Manager – Additional Learning Needs & Inclusion
(Gwynedd & Ynys Môn) (FEE)

The Chair and Members of the Committee extended their best wishes to Mr Marc Berw Hughes, the Director of Education, Skills and Young People who will be leaving his post at the end of the month.

1 APOLOGIES

As noted above.

2 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor Euryrn Morris declared a personal interest in respect of Item 5 – Additional Learning Needs & Inclusion Report as he is employed by Gwynedd Council.

3 MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 14 January, 2025 were confirmed as correct.

Arising thereon:-

Item 5 – Corporate Safeguarding

Action 1 – The Chairs/Vice-Chairs Scrutiny Forum to be invited to consider the contribution of the Education Panel and the Social Services Scrutiny Panel to the work of scrutinising Corporate Safeguarding reports before they are presented to the Partnership and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee.

An item has been included on the agenda of the next meeting of the Chairs/Vice-Chairs Scrutiny Forum to be held on 25 March, 2025.

Action 2 – To ensure that both Elected Members and staff prioritise attendance at mandatory training on cyber security.

The action is a priority for all Directors and Heads of Service. Attendance Data : Staff : 69%/Elected Members : 97%

Action 3 – That arrangements be made for a presentation to a Member's Briefing Session on the contribution of schools to the Authority's Corporate Safeguarding arrangements.

An item has been included on the agenda for the Elected Member's Briefing Session to be held on 3 July, 2025.

Action 4 – To consider the structure of future Corporate Safeguarding reports, in the future, and specifically the priority of including separate information on safeguarding arrangements in schools.

The action has been considered and progress will be undertaken.

4 WELSH LANGUAGE POLICY REVIEW

The report of the Director of Function (Council Business)/Monitoring Officer was presented for consideration by the Committee.

The Portfolio Member for Education and the Welsh Language said that the Council's current Welsh language policy was adopted in 2016 when statutory Welsh language standards came into force, since then, the understanding of the standards has matured, and the Authority's practices in relation to the language have developed significantly. The Welsh language policy affects all those who deal with the Council and the draft policy is designed to meet the statutory requirements of the Welsh language standards. He further said that the draft policy contributes to the aims of the Council Plan and the Welsh language promotion strategy.

The following were points of discussion by the committee :-

- Questions were raised as to the main challenges of implementing a Welsh language policy. The Portfolio Member for Education and the Welsh Language responded that whilst 55.8% of the Island population can speak Welsh, the Authority is fortunate that recruitment to posts broadly attracts local people with the ability to meet the Welsh language criteria. Whilst acknowledging that some posts are difficult to fill with Welsh first language speakers, the Authority affords training to improve levels of language ability. He further said there is strong enthusiasm within the Authority staff towards the Welsh language and numerous staff are also enrolling to improve their language skills. The Head of Democracy said that this is a review of the Welsh Language Policy and staff are familiar with the Welsh language standards of the Authority. During the induction sessions of new staff, they are made aware of the Welsh language standards and information is also included within the Authority's internal website for staff.
- Questions were raised as to how has the Council's practices changed since the Welsh language standards came into force in 2016? The Portfolio Member for Education and the Welsh Language responded that the Welsh language skills has been incorporated within posts available within the Council. He further said that the culture of the Authority has changed with meetings conducted through the medium of Welsh with translation facilities available for non-Welsh speakers. Reference was made that during the recent meeting of the Democratic Services Committee members raised concerns about the language medium of some training sessions and a general culture that risks alienating non-Welsh speakers. The Head of Democracy responded that discussion have been undertaken internally as regards to the matter and will be reported to the next meeting of the Democratic Services Committee. The training sessions will be afforded to Elected Members in both Welsh and English languages as is currently afforded to staff. He further said that contact has been made with the Equality and Human Rights Commission regarding the issue raised and to date no response has been received.
- Questions were raised as to what are the main differences between the draft and the current Welsh language policy? The Policy and Welsh Language Manager responded that the revised Welsh Language Policy has been streamlined with the inclusion of general principles to confirm how the Authority conducts its business in different context. She further said that although draft policy offered

little change to the way in which Council services are offered, efforts have been made to promote the use of the Welsh language, i.e., the promotion of the use of the translation service within meetings has been undertaken following the suggestion within the Welsh Language Promotion Group. She referred also to a desire to strengthen policy commitments to promote and protect Welsh place-names. Reference was also made to changes within the revised policy to reflect current recruitment and selection practices to make the Welsh language a skill at different level for different roles available.

- Reference was made that each Town/Community Council has a Welsh Language Champion. Questions were raised as to the role of a Welsh Language Champion within the Town Community Councils and whether there is an expectation for the Welsh Language Champion within the community. The Policy and Welsh Language Manager responded that discussions were undertaken firstly within the Welsh Language Forum to identify Welsh Language Champions in Town/Community Councils on the Island. She noted that as the Council is a prominent member of the Welsh Language Forum to identify a Welsh Language Champion is seen as essential in the promotion of the Welsh language, but it is recognised that there is still a need for additional support for the Welsh Language Champion and an invitation will be afforded for them to attend the Town and Community Councils Forum.
- Questions were raised as to what extent does the Welsh language policy negatively impact on local businesses on the Island? Reference was made to the article in The Times recently that the reason the new nuclear power station on Anglesey was blocked due to officials raising concerns over the impact it would have on the Welsh language. The Chief Executive assured that the impact on the Welsh language was not the reason that the developer withdrew from the development at Wylfa. The Development Consent Order highlighted mitigation measures within the project to protect the Welsh language but it was the environmental issues that was a hurdle as regards to the development at Wylfa at the time. He further said that businesses on the Anglesey consider the protection of the Welsh language is a strength for the business.
- Questions were raised as to what extent is grant funding for businesses from the Welsh Government based on criteria related to their use of the Welsh language? The Chief Executive responded that it is depended on specific grant programme as regards to the criteria from grant funding from Welsh Government. He referred to the ARFOR project which has received grant funding from Welsh Government and is able to promote the Welsh language through other business-related projects within the scheme. He noted that details as regards to grant funding towards projects with the requirements of the Welsh language criteria would need to be forwarded to Members.
- Reference was made to certain posts within the Authority that are difficult to recruit. Questions were raised as to whether it would be advantageous to specify within the job specification that the prospective candidates for the posts could be required to commit to learning the Welsh language rather than having to re-advertise the posts on numerous occasions. The Head of Democracy responded that whilst it is accepted that some posts are difficult to recruit, such circumstances are exceptional, and the commitment to learning the Welsh language can be specified but it must be considered that it will take a while for a person to learn the language. He accepted that some roles within the Council

could require less Welsh language proficiency, such as non-customer facing posts.

- Questions were raised as to how the Council can influence the promotion of the Welsh language and heritage of the Island. The Portfolio Member for Education and the Welsh Language responded that as there is no specific legislation to safeguard Welsh place-names, the Council is only able to encourage developers to use a Welsh place name on new development. The Chief Executive said that the Authority is trying to protect Welsh historic place names, but new owners of properties have the right to follow the process of changing the historic names of the property. The Committee considered that a letter should be sent to Welsh Government to request and emphasise the need for new legislation to protect Welsh historic place names and to request the Leader to raise the issue with the WLGA.
- Questions were raised as to whether there is additional Welsh language requirements have been imposed by the Welsh Language Commissioner? The Policy and Welsh Language Manager responded that there are already 160 Welsh language standards imposed on the Authority since 2016. Whilst there is a possibility to revisit some standards, imposing additional standards would require a statutory process. She noted that the Welsh Language Commissioner has recognized the effective practice in promoting the Welsh language by the Council, sharing good practice with other public bodies has also been recognized.
- Questions were raised as to the number of staff of the Council who taking advantage of the offer to learn the Welsh language? The Policy and Welsh Language Manager responded that 43 learners are taking advantage of the foundation to advance level at present which is a substantial increase over the last few years. It was noted that Welsh language courses are also available for Elected Members and Co-opted Members.
- Questions were raised as to what extent has the group of Officers and cross party Elected Members, as outlined in the report, been established to oversee the Council's use of the Welsh language to implement this policy and make recommendations for promoting the language. The Portfolio Member for Education and the Welsh Language responded that the Welsh Language Promotion Group meets regularly and includes representatives from both scrutiny committees. He agreed to share further information about the group with committee member, Councillor Pip O'Neill.
- Questions were raised as to what support can the Council offer to local businesses to help promote the Welsh language in their tendering processes? The Policy and Welsh Language Manager responded that during tendering processes the contractors can fill the documentation in their preferred language. She noted that grant funding was used by the Welsh Language Forum to produce a guidance document for business. She noted that as the Policy and Welsh Language Manager she has been working closely with the ARFOR representatives to promote the benefits of using the Welsh language to businesses in the private sector.

It was RESOLVED :-

- **to accept the draft Welsh Language Policy and to recommend its submission to the Executive and the full Council for approval;**

- that a letter be sent to Welsh Government to request and emphasise the need for new legislation to protect Welsh historic place names;
- that the Leader of the Council be requested to raise the issue with the WLGA.

5 ADDITIONAL LEARNING NEEDS & INCLUSION REPORT - A SUMMARY OF THE CURRENT ALN & I SITUATION

The report of the Director of Education, Skills and Young People was presented for consideration by the Committee.

The Portfolio Member for Education and the Welsh Language said that the Additional Learning Needs & Inclusion (ALN & I) Service was established in September 2017 as a joint service between the Isle of Anglesey County Council and Gwynedd Council. The service has evolved over the years to respond to changes in demand and the wider context. The service was reviewed externally in 2020 and again in December 2023. All schools receive funding to accommodate learners with an Individual Development Plan.

The following were points of discussion by the committee :-

- Questions were raised as to what extent does the ALN & I service provide value for money, and what plans are in place to utilise AI to reduce bureaucracy and improve efficiency and value for money? The Director of Education, Skills and Young People responded that the use of AI is not currently used within the ALN & I service as there are safety and legal implications but there is research undertaken that will help the introduction of AI in the future. The Senior Manager – Additional Learning Needs & Inclusion said that the focus is undertaken with the regard to the pupil's individual development plans and the Co-ordinators needs to keep the plans up to date. She noted that the Head Teachers are requesting targets that the school may use for pupils with specific needs which will reduce bureaucracy, and it is hoped that moving the new formula-base funding method in March 2024 will also reduce bureaucracy.
- Questions were raised as to what, if any, are the potential negative impacts of the new formula-based funding method set to take effect in March 2025 and whether the formula approach encourages discord amongst schools. The Director of Education, Skills and Young People responded that a Briefing Session on the new formula-based funding method and the ALN & I Action Plan details can be arranged. He noted that the new formula-based funding method is only relevant to the primary sector at present. The Senior Manager – Additional Learning Needs & Inclusion said that new formula will provide more financial stability to maintain staffing levels and will have a more consistent regime across schools. She noted that the formula is based on the number of learners with Individual Development Plans, in addition to the severity of learners' need areas. The new formula will be based on individuals and the complexities of the pupil. Further questions were raised as to when the new formula will be escalated into the secondary school's provision. The Senior Manager – Additional Learning Needs & Inclusion responded that it is hoped that discussion will be undertaken next year as to a similar system been afforded within the secondary schools.

- Questions were raised whether more parents of children with Additional Learning Needs choose to educate their children at home. The Director of Education, Skills and Young People responded that the education service creates individual plans for children with Additional Learning Needs but if parents decide to educate their children at home, they are responsible for their child needs and support. The Education Service must ensure that the safeguarding element is robust with a visit to the home within six weeks of the decision to educate the child at home and thereafter an annual visit. He noted that the numbers of children that are educated at home on Anglesey has slightly decreased recently with children wishing to re-enter the educational system.
- Questions were raised as to how effectively the service delivers the needs of schools and putting the learners at the centre of the process and whether the demand for the service has increased. The Portfolio Member for Education and the Welsh Language responded that each pupil has an individual learning plan as part of the new legislation which ensures the child is central to the educational provision afforded. He noted that the intention of the new legislation was to be cost neutral, but there has been an increased costs which could have resulted from people being aware of the needs of individual children. The Director of Education, Skills and Young People said that the demand for the service has increased nationally but the capacity and resource has not increased. He noted that the service must be flexibly to respond to the different challenges and the pandemic has had an immense impact as has recently been reported by Estyn. Working in partnership with children services, health service and the family of a child is crucial due to social aspects of the complexity of some children.
- Reference was made to the lack of funding toward the ALN & I service nationally and locally to be able to sustain the service and that a letter be sent to Welsh Government requesting additional funding for the service and the support of the WLGA is also required to put pressure on Welsh Government. It was noted that every child needs to receive adequate education, and it is unacceptable that some children are having to wait a considerable period to be reviewed, and some children are leaving education before they are assessed. The Portfolio Member for Education and the Welsh Language agreed that there needs to be additional resource to the ALN & I service.
- Reference was made that some children with additional learning needs are located with the mainstream education, but these facilities are sometimes not the adequate provision as they need to be within a special school provision with the facilities that they require. The Leader of the Council referred to the innovative work undertaken within this Authority with 'hubs' located within the five secondary schools which have been established between the Education and Social Services Departments. Welfare Officers, Youth Officers and Teachers with expertise are located within these hubs to support children. He further referred that some pupils with special needs are located within mainstream education and there are also examples that some pupils would not benefit from being within a special school environment. As the Council is a small Authority it can work across different departments and the creation of the 'hubs' has proved that the Council can be innovative and be more effective despite the lack of funding received towards additional learning needs. The Chief Executive noted expertise within the ALN & I service is also crucial within

the service to enable the children to receive the support they require. He further said that the new legislation has been established and the Authority must be committed to afford the service to the children but there is a need to increase the resource towards the ALN & I service.

- Reference was made to the national shortage of Educational Psychologists and especially bilingual psychologists. Questions were raised whether discussion are undertaken with Welsh Universities and especially Bangor University to enable training for Educational Psychologists. The Leader of the Council responded that the matter has been raised with the First Minister, Welsh Government and with the Vice-Chancellor of Bangor University to allow a training pathway for bilingual Educational Psychologists to be trained at the University.

It was RESOLVED:-

- **to accept the report;**
- **that a letter be sent to Welsh Government that additional funding needs to be made available for the Additional Learning Needs & Inclusion service;**
- **that the support of the WLGA needs to be undertaken, to put pressure on Welsh Government, on behalf of the 22 local authorities, that additional funding is needed towards Additional Learning Needs & Inclusion.**

6 EDUCATION SCRUTINY PANEL PROGRESS REPORT

The Chair of the Education Scrutiny Panel, Councillor Gwilym O Jones said that this is the fifth progress report which covers the period October 2024 to January 2025. He noted that the Panel has met on four occasions during this period and considered the following matters :-

- The Welsh Language;
- Improve Teaching and Learning;
- Mental Health and Wellbeing Framework;
- Additional Learning Needs and Inclusion;
- Scrutiny Panel work programme for the period October 2024 – January 2025.

The following were points of discussion by the committee :-

- Questions were raised as to what suggestions can be made to further strengthen the work of the Panel? The Chair of the Education Scrutiny Panel responded that following the two tragic incidents in two schools recently, the Director of Education, Skills and Young People has been requested to prepare a report to the Panel regarding security and safety within schools on the Island.
- The Chair questioned whether it was more appropriate for the Education Scrutiny Panel to scrutinise the school's expenditure rather than the Finance Scrutiny Panel. The Chair of the Education Scrutiny Panel responded that the Panel does consider wide ranging topics within its role as a Scrutiny Panel and funding of schools is considered by the Panel. Members of the Committee considered that it is a matter for the professional Officers to discuss the funding of schools and to report to the Finance Scrutiny Panel. It was further raised that minutes of the 3

Scrutiny Panels should be made available to all Members of the Scrutiny Committee to allow them to be informed and understand the discussions undertaken within these Panels. The Portfolio Member for Education & the Welsh Language said that he considered that the Education Scrutiny Panel does strengthen the Education Service. He noted that the Executive Committee has decided not to reduce the funding towards education within the 2025/2026 budget proposals and one of the main reasons for the decision was due to the pressure on the Additional Learning Needs & Inclusion service. He noted that pressure is put on the WLGA to source funding for education and the additional learning and inclusion service. The Head of Democracy said that a Scrutiny Working Group was undertaken recently and the roles and the relationships between the Scrutiny Panels were discussed. He noted that as part of phase 2 of the Scrutiny Review implementation, a discussion will be undertaken as to how the three Scrutiny Panels reports to the parent Scrutiny Committees. He further said that the role of the Finance Scrutiny Panel is to monitor the budget, and their role should not be weakened. The Chief Executive said that the comments made as regards to the work of the three Scrutiny Panel can be discussed further between the relevant Officers and thereafter report to the Chair/Vice-Chairs Panel in due course.

- Reference was made to the pressures on schools in respect of vulnerable pupils, additional learning needs and inclusion. Questions were raised as to the support and provision for the teaching staff following difficult situations that may arise within the school's environment. The Director of Education, Skills and Young People responded that the Education Service provides Welfare Officers to support the teaching staff together with the Medra Counselling Service. He further said that following the half-term a 'Well-being' Day will be afforded to staff with several external agencies providing support to the teaching staff.

It was RESOLVED to note the progress made during the last period in terms of the work of the Education Scrutiny Panel.

7 NOMINATION OF A MEMBER OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE FINANCE SCRUTINY PANEL

The report of the Scrutiny Manager was presented regarding the nomination of a member of the Committee on the Finance Scrutiny Panel.

It was RESOLVED to defer the item to the next meeting of the Partnership and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee to be held on 12 March, 2025.

8 COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2024/2025

The report of the Scrutiny Manager setting out the Partnership and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee's indicative Forward Work Programme for 2024/2025 was presented for consideration.

It was RESOLVED to:-

- **agree the current version of the forward work programme for 2024/2025.**

- **note the progress made thus far in implementing the forward work programme.**

The meeting concluded at 4.10 pm

**COUNCILLOR DYLAN REES
CHAIR**